

# REPORTS TO GENERAL SYNOD BURLINGTON-EBENEZER 2010

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- JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE THEOLOGICAL  
EDUCATION COMMITTEES OF THE  
URCNA AND THE CANRC
- COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S VOTING  
MINORITY REPORT (REVISED)



**Reports to  
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer  
2010**

**Joint Committee of the  
Theological Education Committees  
of the United Reformed Churches  
in North America (URC)  
and the  
Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)  
November 2009**

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## Mandates and Background

At Synod 2001 Escondido of the URC and Synod 2001 Neerlandia of the CanRC the initial mandates for the respective theological education committees were approved. These mandates reflected the then current cultures in both federations respecting theological education. The URC mandate was short and in retrospect might be considered somewhat open and broad in nature. As stated in the Acts of Synod Escondido 2001 the Theological Education Committee was to “work together with the Canadian Reformed Committee to draft proposals for theological education to our respective synods in preparation for an eventual plan of union.” As a federation the URC did not specify a preference regarding federational or independent models of theological education. This lack of specificity in the mandate for the URC Committee allowed for a number of possible configurations of theological education in a united federation. As a result much of the URC committee’s early work was spent in discerning and defining the direction for theological education in the URCNA.

On the other hand, the Canadian Reformed Synod 2001 Neerlandia approved a far more detailed and directed mandate. According to the Acts of Synod 2001 Neerlandia the Committee for Theological Education was given the following mandate [Article 95 of the Acts of Synod 2001 Neerlandia]:

- 1.4.1 To work closely with the committee re: theological education appointed by the URCNA synod;
- 1.4.2 To evaluate the current situation as to theological education within the CanRC and URCNA;
- 1.4.3 To develop a proposal concerning theological education within the new federation keeping in mind that:
  - 1.4.3.1 The new federation should retain at least one federational theological school at which the board of governors, the professors and teaching staff are appointed by synod;
  - 1.4.3.2 Attention should be given as to what to do in the case of an aspiring candidate to the ministry who does not have adequate instruction in significant courses in Reformed Doctrine, in Reformed Church Polity, or in Reformed Church History.
- 1.4.4 To keep the CPEU updated on the progress;
- 1.4.5 To provide the CPEU with a report in sufficient time for them to produce the comprehensive report for Synod in a timely fashion.”

[Note: “CPEU” references the Committee for Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity in the CanRC]

This mandate provided significantly more direction and structure to the work of the CanRC committee than that given by Synod Escondido to the URC committee. Of special significance is that the CanRC committee's mandate required that the united federation retain "at least one federational theological school." The CanRC committee had a definite direction and preference at the very outset of our discussions. The URC operating without a federational seminary, were satisfied with the independent model as represented by Mid America Reformed Seminary and Westminster Seminary California and had very unsatisfactory experiences with a federational seminary in the denomination they had left. The differences in our mandates and our strongly held respective positions relating to the models for the structure and governance of theological education subsequently proved to be a serious and not insignificant impediment to establishing a joint recommendation, which each committee could wholeheartedly endorse to their respective church federations. This became a significant impediment in the discussions between our committees.

In November of 2005 a motion to adopt the model of one federational Seminary, with two officially approved independent seminaries (without presumption as to which of the present seminaries would be which) was proposed by the CanRC Committee. In its deliberations the URC Committee had come to the conclusion that the churches of the URC would probably not accept a federational seminary. Accordingly, their response to this proposal was as follows:

We as a committee are not prepared to entertain any proposal for theological education that mandates at least one federational seminary:

Grounds:

1. We are not convinced that it is Biblically mandated; and
2. We do not believe that this will serve the churches well.

Since the CanRC Committee was mandated to maintain at least one federational seminary, we found ourselves at an impasse. This clearly was an impasse which prevented the committees from working further until their respective synods directed further or otherwise.

In view of this impasse the CanRC Synod 2007 Smithers altered the mandate for the CanRC committee in the following manner [Article 103 of the Acts of Synod 2007 Smithers]:

4.4.1 To seek agreement with the URCNA committee about theological education for the new united federation:

4.4.1.1 On the principle of 2 Timothy 2.2

4.4.1.2 Taking into consideration the joint statements made by the theological education committees (see Consideration 3)

4.4.1.3 While expressing the strong preference for at least one federational seminary

4.4.2 To convey this decision, with the observations and considerations, to the theological education committee of the URCNA in time for the next URCNA synod.”

[Note: for a full appreciation of the discussion and rationale for the decision of Synod Smithers 2007 one must make reference to the full considerations, sections 3.1 – 3.8 inclusive of Article 103, which to some provided more perceived flexibility in the position of the CanRC committee]

The URC Synod 2007 Schererville made no changes to the mandate of the Theological Education Committee. However, the Synod did:

- a. affirm the 6 points of agreement which had been established by the committees in January of 2004 –see specific reference below;
- b. affirm the position of the URC Committee that a federationally controlled seminary was not Biblically mandated; and
- c. affirm that the churches continue to follow article 3 of the URC church order which requires a man’s consistory to assure that he receives a thoroughly Reformed theological education.

As a result of the decisions and directions of the synods of each federation held in 2007, the committees were of the view that further discussions and efforts were warranted to seek a common ground and work together. The CanRC’s willingness to reformulate the mandate for their committee made it possible for progress to be made in our discussions. Since a federational seminary was no longer a necessity (though much preferred by the CanRC), the two committees were able to work towards a common agreement on the question of theological education.

### **Points of Agreement:**

Significant progress was made in our pursuit of a common agreement at our meetings of January 7-8, 2008 on the Campus of WSC, Escondido and at our meetings of November 17-18, 2008, and April 13-14, 2009 on the campus of Mid-America Reformed Seminary (Dyer, Indiana). In order to understand the decisions that were made in these meetings it is worth drawing attention to our distinct perspectives on theological education. Much of our discussion and the decisions which arose from those discussions were made in an attempt to maintain our unique preferences in a unified federation.

In the Canadian Reformed context theological education is a federative matter, as required by Article 19 of their Church Order (cf. Appendix 1: Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches have their own Seminary?). This requirement of the Church Order is being accomplished by a federationally owned and operated Seminary (the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Hamilton, Ontario). The regular affairs of the College are overseen by a Board of Governors appointed by a General Synod held from time to time. The Board of Governors reports to each General Synod which approves its decisions respecting the budget, professor appointments and curriculum for the College. Reports are regularly sent to all the churches who have opportunity to address their concerns with the College at every General Synod. As is expected, the financial support for the College is assessed and approved by the Synod for all communicant members within the federation. The treasurers of each congregation ensure that the support for the Seminary is sent in a timely manner to the College. This method of training men for the ministry has provided a great deal of uniformity in the pulpits of the individual congregations, theological harmony among the churches, and future professors able to maintain the reformed faith within the Canadian Reformed context. This has taken place under the blessing of God for 40 years (the CanRC seminary was instituted in 1969). The churches maintain responsibility for students' training by means of classical examinations for eligibility to preach and ordination in the CanRC (CO Art. 4-5).

In the United Reformed context theological education is at first instance a consistorial matter as required by Article 3 of their Church Order (cf. Appendix 2, "Theological Education in the United Reformed Churches"). Since the matter is consistorial on a local level the federation does not own or operate any seminaries. The Church Order's requirements for admittance into the ministry of the Word and Sacraments simply require that a candidate for the minister obtain a Masters of Divinity degree and a thoroughly reformed theological education. As is to be expected the level and nature of this consistorial oversight varies widely within the federation. Some consistories take an active role in seminary training, others leave the training to the institutions that the URC supports and are only active once the student has graduated from seminary. The same can be said with respect to financial support. Some of the congregations within the URC provide a significant level of support for seminary education, while others support the seminaries on a more occasional basis. None of the institutions supported by the URCNA receives sufficient funds from our churches to maintain their budget. All the supported institutions require support from other quarters to address their financial needs. While there are a number of institutions supported by churches in the URC the two most represented institutions are Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, and Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California. Both of these institutions enjoy significant involvement from URC members on their boards of directors, faculty, and student bodies. This approach to theological

education reflects the URC emphasis on the authority of the local consistory, and on the importance of local consistories in governing the pulpits of the URC federation.

Despite the significant differences between our federations in the practice of training men for the ministry, there are also significant points of agreement. A highpoint during the meetings of the past number of years was the statements of agreements that both committees accepted and both federations received and endorsed respecting Theological Education. Those points agreed upon by both committees at their meeting of January 13, 2004, are as follows:

1. It is the task of the churches to train ministers;
2. Ministers of the churches must receive sound reformed theological training;
3. As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers;
4. Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education;
5. It is acknowledged that active involvement of the churches is required for the training of ministers and to protect the confessional integrity of such training; and
6. The churches, (i.e., the URCNA and the CanRC), should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches.

These six points of agreement show that both our federations are in agreement on the principles of theological education. In a context where differences are more obvious and highlighted it is worth recognizing the foundational unity we have with respect to theological education. Where our federations differ is in the application of these principles. Upon the foundation of these six points our committees began to work out a common application for theological education in a united federation.

### **Towards Agreement**

In our discussions we came to recognize that there were three significant areas which required agreement: curriculum, financing, and governance. At our January, 2008, meeting we established three sub-committees from amongst the members of both our committees with mandates to provide answers to these matters in a united federation [Curriculum, Financing and Governance]. These sub-committees met independently and submitted



proposals which were discussed by all members in November, 2008. At that meeting and subsequently much agreement and common ground was reached on each of these three areas.

**Curriculum**

The Curriculum committee was given the mandate of establishing the minimum requirements in a reformed theological curriculum. In both the federational model of theological education (CanRC) and in the independent model of theological education (URC), the churches must hold to a common standard by which such institutions can be judged and held accountable. For this reason a minimum theological curriculum was agreed upon. This curriculum is based on the current curricula of the three represented seminaries. All three represented seminaries currently meet the committees' standard for training in the united federation. The minimum requirement for theological education within institutions supported by the united federation was agreed to and is included as Appendix 3.

**Financing**

Equally important is the need for financial support for those institutions which train men for the gospel ministry among our churches. The finance committee faced significant challenges in coming up with a concrete proposal. There is significant disparity among our churches as to the financial support of theological education. In general it was agreed that the financial support of theological education ought to be formalized within the united federation. Such formalization would involve identifying the costs associated with training men for the ministry and assessing all communicant members a portion of that cost. These monies would be used to support all the institutions approved by the united federation. The way in which these monies would be dispersed would be determined by a Standing Committee for Theological Education to be established by the General Synod of our united federation. Among other responsibilities, this committee would establish a process for endorsing independent Seminaries for financial support within the united federation. This committee would also work to ensure that the federation's interests are being met by those institutions supported by the united federation. This would involve establishing some formal connection between all the institutions the united federation might support. Working out this relationship would also be the responsibility of this yet to be established committee. This committee would receive its first mandate from the first Synod of our united federation. Unless and until the governance model is finalized and adopted by both the URCNA and CanRC federations, admittedly the precise terms of a financing model cannot be established. What was agreed was that there should be an equitable formula by which the churches would fairly and evenly support the seminaries that have the endorsement of the joint federation, whether federational or independent.

## Governance

While there was general agreement on curriculum and finance, the Governance Committee, also called the “Model, Structure and Polity Sub Committee” faced significant challenges. The primary and contrasting models of federational and independent seminaries currently in practice are not easily reconciled. Two approaches of reconciling these differences were discussed. At our meetings in January, 2008 at WSC we adopted a proposal that retained a significant measure of federational involvement in the governance of at least one Seminary. More particularly we decided that the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton would be governed by one of the regional synods under consideration in the proposed church order (cf. PCO Art. 21), presumably the regional synod which would represent the Canadian churches of a united federation. At the same, the independent model for theological education would receive financial support and acceptance in the united federation. According to this approach churches could send their students to Mid-America, Westminster California, or the Theological College in Hamilton (cf. Appendix 4). Financial support for each institution from the churches would be entirely voluntary. What is more, there would be an acknowledgement of each seminary’s support structure and membership base. Only the governance of the Theological College in Hamilton would be officially administered by and subject to an assembly of the churches. This proposal was provisionally adopted at a November 17-18, 2008 meeting at Mid-America in Dyer.

It was deemed wise to submit this proposal to the principals of the various institutions involved. Dr. Gerhard Visscher of the Theological College, Dr. Cornelis Venema of Mid-America and Rev. Steve D. Oeverman, Executive Vice President of Westminster California, met with the both committees in April of 2009 and were presented the material and the concepts and models to which our discussion was directed. On the matters of curriculum and finances the representatives of the seminaries were in general agreement. However, the viability of the regional synod model was questioned extensively. There was a strongly held view that as it was likely that the regional synod component of the proposal of the joint church order committee would not find favour with the URC, the pursuit of a theological education model which hinged primarily on a Regional Synod of Canada meeting from time to time was neither profitable or useful. Further, a regional synod model was deemed too favourable towards the Theological College in Hamilton and would give greater place and priority to the Theological College in the united federation. In short, it was a federational seminary, even though it was only governed by a Regional Synod. It was in light of these comments from the principals that the committee revisited the issue further.

In response to the above mentioned concerns the governance committee proposed that consideration be given to a voluntary association of churches within the federation which would be given the opportunity to unite together for the purpose of governing and maintaining the Theological College in

Hamilton. This association of churches would not be an official organization of the united federation and would take upon itself all responsibilities for the Theological College. Essentially it would be a coalition of the willing churches which would agree voluntarily to support the “federational” seminary and further in their discretion (collective or otherwise), independent seminaries. All other elements of the proposal (regarding curriculum, financial support) remained the same.

This proposal faced opposition in CanRC circles. Through informal conversations with CanRC pastors it was deemed that the voluntary association model would not adequately address the conviction of many that Seminaries ought to be under the direct oversight of ecclesiastical assemblies. Simply put, this was the independent model in another guise and not likely to reach favour.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:**

The final meeting of the two committees was held on September 9, 2009 on the campus of the Theological College in Hamilton. At that meeting it was agreed to submit this report and material proposal to our churches with the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. We are thankful for the harmony and brotherly manner in which we could work together, even in the circumstances where polarized and strongly cherished and held positions did not allow for easy or readily compromised solutions.
2. We are thankful for the providential care of the Lord over our deliberations in the many times we took to traveling to undertake the work.
3. As a fully independent model is not acceptable to the CanRC and a fully federational model is not acceptable to the URCNA, the only real viable choice of governance for theological education in a united federation would be a model where the united federation would operate with a model of two independent seminaries endorsed and approved by the general synod of a united church (i.e., Mid-America and Westminster California), with one federationally governed seminary (the Theological College in Hamilton) by way of a Regional Synod of Canada, or if deemed appropriate, by the general synods of the united federation meeting from time to time.
4. For this model to gain approval or acceptance from the URNCA the members of the URCNA will need to adopt in part the federational model by way of a regional synod overseeing a federational seminary (not to mention actually adopting a church order model which includes the concept of regional synods),



## Appendix 1

### WHY DO THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES HAVE THEIR OWN SEMINARY?

In answering this question, the following will be considered.

- A. Exegetical Arguments for the Church's Responsibility to Train their Ministers
  1. "Entrust to Reliable Men who will also be Qualified to Teach Others"
  2. The Church is "the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth"
  3. The Task of the Church is to Preach the Gospel
  4. Conclusions
  
- B. Historical Notes on the Role of the Church in the Training for the Ministry
  1. The Medieval and Reformation Eras
  2. Nineteenth Century Holland
  3. North American Developments
  4. Conclusions

#### **A. Exegetical Arguments for the Church's Responsibility to Train their Ministers**

Whose responsibility is the training for ministers of the Word? The church's or an organization which is independent of the church it seeks to serve and over which the church has no direct supervision or responsibility?

In examining what the Bible has to say on the topic, we will need to start with 2 Timothy 2:2. In the history of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands, this has been a key passage for arguing that it is the church's task to take care of the training of ministers. This is also the only Scripture that is specifically mentioned in the official account of the discussions that led to the decision of the 1891 Synod of the churches of the Secession to maintain the principle that the church is called to maintain their own training for the ministry of the Word.<sup>1</sup>

As a historical note, it should also be mentioned that the Rev. J. Kok discussed many biblical passages on the topic at hand in his notable address delivered on a special day held for the Theologische Hogeschool in Kampen, The Netherlands, on July 4, 1909. This speech was subsequently published in expanded form as *De Opleiding tot den dienst des Woords: "voor de kerk,*

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<sup>1</sup> Handelingen van de Synoden der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederlands in de 19 Zittingen door haar gehouden te Leeuwarden, van 18-29 Augustus 1891 (Leiden: Donner, 1891) Art 172.

*door de kerk*" (*The Training for the Ministry of the Word: "By the Church and for the Church"*)<sup>2</sup>

For the present purpose, let us consider 2 Timothy 2:2 and 1 Timothy 3:15, followed by a brief look at the task of the church. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

### **"Entrust to Reliable Men who will also be Qualified to Teach Others"**

#### **2 Timothy 2:2**

*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.* (NIV)

The apostle Paul is addressing Timothy as his own spiritual son. Paul also called Timothy "my fellow worker" (Rom 16:21), "God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ" (1 Thess 3:2), and "servant (*diakonos*) of Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 4:6). Timothy had received the laying on of hands by the elders (1 Tim 4:14) and was exhorted to preach the Word (1 Tim 4:11-13). He did the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5). Clearly he had an important position of leadership in the church at Ephesus.<sup>3</sup> To him the apostle, for example, gave instructions about the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-19) and entrusted the general care of the congregation (cf. e.g., 1 Tim 4:11-14; 2 Tim 2:14-19).

A key concern for the apostle, who was facing certain death (2 Tim 4:6, 18), was that the gospel be safeguarded (2 Tim 1:13-14; cf. 3:14-17) and proclaimed in truth (2 Tim 4:1-5). In this general context, he mandates Timothy as a close associate of the apostle ("my son" - 2 Tim 2:1), to entrust to reliable men the gospel he has heard so that they may be qualified to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2).

It is notable when one considers 2 Timothy 2:2 that the apostle specifies that what needs to be entrusted to others is that which Timothy heard from Paul "in the presence of many witnesses." Although the witnesses may refer to those present at Timothy's ordination when the apostle exhorted Timothy to

<sup>2</sup> Published by J. H. Kok in Kampen in 1906.

<sup>3</sup> When he received the two letters addressed to him, he was labouring in the church at Ephesus. For 1 Timothy, see 1 Tim 1:3; for 2 Timothy the evidence is more indirect. When Paul suggests that Timothy come to him (2 Tim 4:9), he mentions that he is sending Tychius to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12), presumably as Timothy's replacement. Also, he notes that Timothy will know the services rendered in Ephesus by Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:18). See further, G.W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 10.

bring sound teaching (1 Tim 1:14), the reference to witnesses probably goes beyond that. It includes all those who have witnessed the public preaching and teaching ministry of the apostle Paul.<sup>4</sup> The phrase “in the presence of many witnesses” thus emphasizes that what is to be handed down is not secret or esoteric but can be testified as the gospel by the many who have heard the apostle preach and teach. The full gospel is to be passed on.

It is also to be noted that the task of entrusting the gospel to others is given to a man like Timothy who had received the laying on of hands and held office in the church. The principle appears to be that those holding office in the church must train office bearers for the church. Office bearers ordained by the church work on behalf of the church.<sup>5</sup>

Here we have a key apostolic mandate for the transmitting of the gospel from one generation to the other with the express purpose that the teaching of this gospel be continued in the future. Those who preach the Word must train others to do the same. “This, then, may be considered as the earliest trace of the formation of a *theological school*, – a school which has for its object not merely the instruction of the ignorant, but the protection and maintenance of a definite body of doctrine.”<sup>6</sup>

As further background to the above, it one can note that behind the relationship that the apostle Paul had with Timothy, there was ultimately the teaching relationship that the Lord Jesus had with his disciples. In the gospels, the Lord is often addressed as teacher (e.g. Matt 8:19; 12:38; 22:16, 24, 36) and he refers to himself as the one Teacher, (“you have one Teacher, the Christ” Matt 23:10). The response to one significant teaching event was that “the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Matt 7:28-29). His teaching relationship with his disciples also meant that they were always “with him” (Mk 3:14; Acts 1:21). It is also apparent that this teaching process did not stop with the ascension of our Lord; rather among the commands given to the disciples was that they, in turn, would need to teach those whom they disciplined and baptized (Matthew 28:20 “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”).

The apostle Paul took along on his missionary journeys several young men whom he left behind to work in congregations. This happened to Timothy

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<sup>4</sup> So, e.g., Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 390; W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 246-247.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Van Andel, *Paulus' beide brieven aan Timotheus toegelicht* (Leiden: Donner, 1904), 148-149.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Plummer, *The Pastoral Epistles* (The Expositor's Bible; 2nd ed.; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889) 336 (emphasis is Plummer's). More recently, Knight, e.g., concurs with Plummer's observation. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 392.

who was with Paul (1 Thess 1:1; Rom 16:21) but who also stayed behind in Ephesus to give further instruction for congregational life (1 Tim 1:4, 18), Titus (Titus 1:5) and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25). This was an early form of theological education, from minister to minister.

### The Church is “the Pillar and Foundation of the Truth”

#### 1 Timothy 3:15

*Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.* (1 Tim 3:14-15 NIV)

It is important to notice that the church is called “the pillar and foundation of the truth.” The immediate context of qualifications for overseers and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13), as well as behaving properly in God’s household, the church (1 Tim 3:14) suggests that certain kinds of behaviour can be expected by virtue of the fact that the church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Those who are members are to live up to the ideals of what the church stands for. They must live according to the truth of the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

However, the fact that the church is here called “the pillar and foundation of the truth” carries a major implication for our topic as well. While the precise meaning of the Greek terms translated by “the pillar and foundation of the truth” can be debated,<sup>8</sup> it is clear that this characterization indicates that central to the task of the church is to uphold, maintain and support the truth which is the gospel (1 Tim 2:4; 4:3; John 17:17).<sup>9</sup> “The church is fundamental to the gospel ministry.”<sup>10</sup> To the church the gospel has been entrusted (John 17:8, 14). Calvin put it thus: “By these words [of 1 Tim 3:15], Paul means that the church is the faithful keeper of God’s truth in order that it may not perish in the world. For by its ministry and labour God willed to have the preaching of his Word kept pure and to show himself the Father of a family while he feeds us with spiritual food and provides everything that makes for our

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., the discussion in I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 510-511.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase has also been rendered, e.g., “support and foundation of the truth” (F.W. Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature* [3rd ed., based on the 6th ed. of W. Bauer’s *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 949) and “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (RSV).

<sup>9</sup> See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 181; C. Bouma, *De Brieven van den Apostel Paulus aan Timotheus en Titus* (Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament XI; Amsterdam: Bottenburg, 1942), 145-146.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 512.



salvation.”<sup>11</sup> When Calvin comments on the meaning of the church as pillar of truth in his commentary, he notes “In consequence, this commendation applies to the ministry of the Word; for if it is removed, God’s truth will fall.”<sup>12</sup> If the above is the case, then training pastors and teachers belongs to the task of the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth and it is not properly the responsibility of an organization independent of the church.

### **The Task of the Church is to Preach the Gospel**

Christ to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt 28:18) gives offices to his church (Eph 4:11-13) and through his Spirit calls and equips them to serve (cf. Acts 20:28). The office of minister is therefore a gift of Christ to his church. Thus when a minister is ordained according to the classical Reformed ordination form, he needs to answer positively the question: “Do you feel in your heart that God himself, through his congregation, has called you to this holy ministry?”

There are two basic elements that need to be noticed here. First, the Lord calls to office and therefore determines how that service is to be executed. Second, the office is given to the church and functions within the context of the church.

The proclamation of the gospel belongs to the very heart and kernel of being church (cf. Matt 28:19-20; Rom 10:14). If the church has the task to proclaim the gospel through the office of preacher given to her (Eph 4:11), then it follows that the church has the first responsibility to see to it that the gospel can continue to be proclaimed by training future ministers of the Word. This is not a duty that can be readily given to another organization. The proclamation of the gospel belongs to the very reason why the church exists. Without preaching there is no church!

How can the church pray for more labourers in the harvest (cf. Matt 9:37-38) without at the same time taking responsibility that good labourers are available, in so far as she is able?

To ask the question is to answer it. As we see in 2 Timothy 2:2 “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin, Institutes IV.i.10 (Battle’s edition).

<sup>12</sup> Calvin on 1 Tim 3:15 in D. W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance, eds., *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (T.A. Smail, trans.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 232.

#### 4. Conclusions

On the basis of the above, three (somewhat overlapping) conclusions can be drawn.

1. The apostolic injunction to Timothy, "*the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*" (2 Tim 2:2), indicates that those ordained by the church should work to supply the church with future preachers. They will have to ensure that these ministers are able to preach and teach.
2. The church as "*the pillar and foundation of the truth*" (1 Tim 3:15) indicates that to her the gospel has been entrusted and therefore to her falls the responsibility to proclaim and maintain that gospel, also by training faithful pastors and teachers.
3. Since the office of preacher has been given to the church, it is the task of the church to preach the gospel. This responsibility also means that the church has to see to it that this proclamation can continue. Besides praying for future labourers, the church must therefore also provide training so that such labourers can be properly prepared and sent out.

#### B. Historical Notes on the Role of the Church in the Training for the Ministry

In order to put the whole issue of responsibility for theological education into our present day perspective, it may be useful to have a brief historical overview.<sup>13</sup>

##### The Medieval and Reformation Eras

The specific form which the training for the ministry assumed often depended to a great extent on the historical circumstances. At some time during the patristic period, local overseers became regional bishops. This led to these bishops establishing schools where future ministers could be educated. To give an example, the Council of Orange 529 determined that bishops and presbyters had to open their houses for young men to train them as fathers, to instruct them in the Holy Scriptures and to educate them so they could assume their office. According to this church decision, theological training of future ministers was entrusted to ministers with regional or local authority. Such seminaries were founded in several places in Italy, in England, Gaul and Spain.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> There has always been a general acceptance of the fact that future ministers need to be trained and educated before they can be ordained. To be sure, some sixteenth century spiritualist groups were of the opinion that leaders of the congregation did not need any education, but this approach was an exception.

<sup>14</sup> H. Bavinck, *Het doctorenambt* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1899), 20-21, 24-25.

During the later Middle Ages, universities came into existence and this changed the manner of education. Originally the universities consisted of groups of people devoted to study who were more or less self-sufficient. These students selected and supported teachers of their choice. Gradually, however, the universities organized themselves into formal schools, governed and funded by the cities. Rather than being supported by their students, the professors were in the employ of the city and paid by them. At the same time, these professors were subject to the jurisdiction of the church.<sup>15</sup>

When the Reformation of the church took place during the sixteenth century, the training for the ministry had to be reestablished. In agreement with the custom of that time when the government determined the public religion of their nations, this was done by the government. Calvin urged the city council of Geneva to establish a seminary, as it was the right of the church to have an institute for theological training. Similarly, in the Palatinate it was the Elector Frederick who had changed the *Collegium Sapientiae* into a theological school, and had placed it under the supervision of the church council. The city of Leiden in the Netherlands, as a reward for their faithfulness, received a university from Prince William of Orange, which was first of all intended for establishing a training for the ministry.<sup>16</sup>

From the major ecclesiastical assemblies held in seventeenth century Holland, it is clear that the churches always insisted that the professors of theology be subject to the teaching of the church, even though they were appointed by the government to the universities. The Synod of Dordrecht of 1618-1619 determined that from now on "the theological professors must appear at synod and there give an account of their teaching and submit themselves to the judgment of synod."<sup>17</sup>

These examples date from times different from our own. Then the established church was closely connected with the state and lived under its patronage. As a result, theological education was also seen as being the responsibility of the government. However, the church did what it could to exercise their responsibility over those who taught future ministers.

Two changes took place in the nineteenth century. We will focus on what happened in The Netherlands.

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<sup>15</sup> H. Bavinck, *Het doctorenambt*, 27-34.

<sup>16</sup> H. H. Kuyper, *De opleiding tot den dienst des woords bij de gereformeerden* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1891), 156, 431-432; E.K. Sturm, *Der junge Zacharias Ursinus* (Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche, 33; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1972), 237-238.

<sup>17</sup> See the decision of Dordrecht in F.L. Bos, *De Orde der Kerk* ('s-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Guido de Bres, 1950) 79. See also the decision of Gorinchem 1622 on the same page.

## Nineteenth Century Holland

The first change concerned the public universities. The Dutch Parliament adopted a law in 1876 which transformed the university departments of theology into those of religion, a shift in emphasis from revelation to piety. The theological professors were appointed by the university. However, the national church, the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk received the right to appoint one professor at each of the universities who would teach the doctrine of the church as an addition to the scholarly training given at the universities.<sup>18</sup> However, since that time, theological education in the Netherlands takes place in the context of the separation of church and state. As a result, many parts of theology were taught from a (usually liberal) scholarly perspective, without consideration of the life of the church.

The second change which impacted on theological education was the establishing of theological seminaries outside of the control of the government. The Secession, a reformation movement beginning in 1834 within the tolerant national church, prompted a basic reconsideration of the way in which the training for the ministry should be organized. There was a desperate shortage of ministers within these churches, for during the early years, there were only seven ministers working within the seceded churches. However, within a year after the Secession had begun, the number of congregations grew to about seventy. The few ministers did what they could, by, for instance, preaching three to four times on the Sundays. Worship services were also organized during the week, so that some ministers preached anywhere between 15 and 20 times in a week.<sup>19</sup> It was obvious to all that something needed to be done about the lack of ministers.

The churches decided that they should organize the training for the ministry. The provincial Synod of Groningen of 1839 appointed Hendrik De Cock to teach men who were suitable and willing to become ministers. In the province of Friesland, Rev. T.F. De Haan was appointed for the same task. When De Cock had passed away, De Haan accepted the request to teach the students from both provinces. The churches determined who would teach, and through these ministers they took care of the theological training, however primitive this may have been during those early years.<sup>20</sup>

It was soon felt that this way of training future ministers was insufficient, and that there should be one theological school for the whole church. Rev. De

<sup>18</sup> D. Nauta, "Opleiding van predikanten", in F.W. Grosheide and G. P. van Itterzon, *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (6 vols, 2nd ed.; Kampen: Kok, 1956-1961) 1.318.

<sup>19</sup> W. de Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding* (Kampen: Kok, 1955) 5-6; H. Bouma, 'De voorgeschiedenis der opleiding', in *Tot de prediking van het woord des geloofs* (Kampen: Comité van Uitgave, 1953), 15.

<sup>20</sup> H. Bouma, „De voorgeschiedenis’, 21-26.

Haan was charged to draw up a proposal for a theological school for all Secession churches. His proposal of appointing two ministers as full time teachers was bettered by the decision of Synod 1849 to appoint three ministers.<sup>21</sup> When the seminary was officially opened in 1854, four ministers were charged to be “teachers of the theological school.”<sup>22</sup> The seminary of the Secession churches can be characterized as a church school, for ministers appointed by the general synod of these churches took charge of the theological training of its ministers.

Within the State Church, another reformation movement, called *Doleantie*, took place in 1886. Prior to that, in 1880, Dr. A. Kuyper, one of the leaders of the *Doleantie*, had already established a university.<sup>23</sup> This university began with three departments, including a department of theology. When the churches from the Secession and from the *Doleantie* discussed unification, theological education was a major point of discussion.

The churches of the Secession emphasized that the churches themselves should maintain a Theological School for the training of future ministers. In 1891, one year before the union, the Synod of the Secession churches adopted the proposal of Friesland by which the Synod maintained the principle that the church is called to have its own institution for the education of its ministers, at least as far as their theological training is concerned.<sup>24</sup>

The General Synod of the *Doleantie* churches of 1891 was satisfied with the statement made by the Synod of the Secession churches concerning the training for the ministry. However, it decided to qualify it by declaring that the purpose of this statement is not: 1. to destroy the traditional reformed principle of free study; nor 2. to change the Reformed manner of ecclesiastical examination of future ministers; nor 3. to take anything away from the demand for scholarly study which had always been demanded by the Reformed churches; nor 4. to deny that the united churches at a later date have to judge the regulation of this issue.<sup>25</sup> In this decision, both the need for an church seminary and the need for scholarly study were emphasized within the Reformed churches in which Secession and *Doleantie* came together.

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<sup>21</sup> W. de Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding*, 15-18.

<sup>22</sup> H. Veltman, ‘Zo God voor ons is’, *Tot de prediking van het Woord des geloofs: Opstellen ter gelegenheid van de herdenking van de oprichting der Theologische School A.D. 1854 te Kampen* (Kampen: Comité van Uitgave, [1953]), 68; W. de Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding*, 35-41.

<sup>23</sup> F. Vanden Berg, *Abraham Kuyper* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1978), 97-99.

<sup>24</sup> *Handelingen van de Synode der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland in de 19 Zittingen door haar gehouden te Leeuwarden, van 18-29 Augustus 1891* (Leiden: Donner, 1891), Art. 172 (pp. 95-96); see also W. De Graaf, *Een monument der afscheiding*, 175.

<sup>25</sup> W. De Graaf, *Een monument der Afscheiding*, 177-178.

It took a while before the relationship between the united churches and the theological department at the Free University was official. A. Kuyper posited that a fundamental difference existed between a seminary and the theological department of a university. Even as late as 1912 he maintained a fundamental distinction between a seminary and a university. In his opinion, a seminary trains future ministers for the churches, but the Theological Department of the Free University should not demean itself to become a training institution for future ministers. It has to do that, too, but its first task is to present theology in a scholarly way.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the Reformed Churches did supervise the theological teaching at the Free University. The deputies appointed to maintain the contact between the Reformed Churches and the Theological Department of the Free University stated that it was their mandate to evaluate:

- the appropriateness of the education as training for the ministry
- to be on guard against deviation from the Reformed Confession
- to evaluate whether there were weaknesses in the education
- to provide the faculty with an evaluation concerning an upcoming appointments
- to make known to the faculty comments or wishes concerning the theological students and their conduct
- to make sure that no one receives a doctor's degree in theology without having subscribed to the Form agreed to for that purpose.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, the following can be noted. When the Reformed Church became independent from the state, it maintained the rule that the church itself should take care of the theological training of its ministers. When the churches of the Secession and the Doleantie came together, they acknowledged, in word and deed, the principle of the churches maintaining a theological training for preparing ministers of the Word. Kampen was maintained. Also, the important place of the churches in theological education was acknowledged by granting the Reformed Churches the authority to supervise the theological training at the Free University.

### North American Developments

The two related principles that ministers teach ministers, and that the church takes care of this training were applied by the Reformed churches on this continent. To limit ourselves to the sister church of the Secession churches,

<sup>26</sup> J.C. Rullmann, *De Vrije Universiteit: Haar ontstaan en haar bestaan*, (Amsterdam: De Standaard, 1930) 110-111.

<sup>27</sup> *Acta der Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland gehouden te Utrecht van 22 Augustus tot 7 September 1905*, (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, n.d.) 191.

the Christian Reformed Church maintained from the beginning the principle that the church is responsible for teaching its future ministers. At the February Classis of 1861, the question was discussed whether the churches should not open the way to training of young men to the ministry. The July Classis of 1863 entrusted that task to Rev. W.H. Van Leeuwen. Later, another minister, D.J. Van der Werp, trained students in addition to the work in his congregation. The first minister who was set aside for the training of the ministry was Rev. G. Boer, who was appointed in 1886 to teach students for the ministry.<sup>28</sup>

When after World War II, the Canadian Reformed Churches were established, the matter of the training for the ministry was on the agenda of the very first General Synod of Homewood-Carman (1954) which appointed deputies "to be diligent concerning the whole matter of the training" (Art 88). Every subsequent general synod dealt with this matter. General Synod Orangeville (1968) established the Theological College and appointed the first professors. Synod also decided that:

to be admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations candidates shall submit proof that they have completed their studies at our own Theological College. Candidates who took their theological training at other institutions shall present a Certificate issued by the Staff of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches stating that they have followed and/or complemented a course of studies conforming with the training provided by the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches. (Art 171)

It can be noted that although Synod clearly expected future ministers to be trained at the school of the churches, it nevertheless left the door open for the possibility that a student study elsewhere. In that case, it was up to the College to evaluate such education and possibly request additional training at the Theological College. In practice this has meant an extra year of study at the Theological College prior to being admitted to the Classical examination.

### Conclusions

On the basis of the above, the following can be concluded:

1. From the earliest records available, it is evident that the training of future ministers had an official ecclesiastical character. However, historical circumstances did not always allow the churches to assume their responsibility for this training since the civil government at times considered this training to be their task.

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<sup>28</sup> H. Beets, *De Chr. Geref. Kerk in N.A: Zestig jaren van strijd en zegen* (Grand Rapids MI: Grand Rapids Print-ing Company, 1918) 147-151; see for further history of the training for the ministry, 206-212; 293-300.

2. The churches of the Secession considered that the churches had the biblical duty to train future ministers themselves. This could not be left up to the civil authorities. This conviction led to the eventual establishment of the Theologische Hogeschool in Kampen. Even with the Union of 1892, the principle that the churches were responsible was maintained. Not only was the Theologische Hogeschool in Kampen maintained, but theological professors who were involved in training students for the ministry at the Free University were placed under the supervision of the Reformed Churches.
3. This heritage has had consequences for North America. It led to the establishing of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids in the nineteenth century and the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the twentieth century.

*The Theological Education Committee of the Deputies for  
Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches*

*April 2003*



## Appendix 2

### Theological Education in the United Reformed Churches

History, including recent history in Reformed denominations, has shown that denominational (i.e., synodical) supervision provides no guarantee that a seminary so controlled can remain firmly loyal to the Scriptures and to the Reformed confessions. In fact, seminaries so controlled may very well be subject to the “political” forces that can appear in the life of any denomination. Seminaries that are free of such control are “free” to remain loyal to the confessions. Of course, no institution is free of its own history, its own reasons for starting, its support base among God’s people (the church!), and the “political” forces that operate within and without, etc. This is to say that no official structure will be able to guarantee, in and of itself, sound training and, indirectly, sound leadership for the churches.

The URCNA Church Order articles that are relevant to theological education are Articles 3-7. Article 3 in particular speaks to this: “Competent men should be urged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man who is a member of a church of the federation and who aspires to the ministry must evidence godliness to his Consistory, which shall assume supervision of all aspects of his training, including his licensure to exhort, and assure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church should ensure that his financial needs are met.”

The URCNA approach assumes that a Reformed theological education can be obtained. Among existing Reformed seminaries, we note that several of them are staffed by men a) who are ordained office-bearers of the URCNA, and b) who are supervised by Boards of Trustees that maintain high academic standards and *ex animo* subscription to the Reformed Creeds of the URCNA. Such faculty members who are ordained ministers in the URCNA are subject not only to their institutions’ oversight through the Boards of Trustees, but also to the supervision (oversight and discipline) of their respective consistories. Thus some church oversight now exists in the theological education currently available.

Article 3 of the URCNA Church Order speaks of the consistories’ responsibility to urge students to seek a reformed theological education. Minimally this would entail directing a student to study at such institutions that are Reformed in character and have demonstrated that they can provide adequate training. Therefore, a great deal of responsibility lies with the local consistories to monitor and evaluate the education being received by such students. Indeed, it is entirely up to the consistory to see to it that a Reformed education is obtained. At the same time, the Classis plays an important role by providing concurrence to the declaration that a man is declared a candidate for the ministry, having been properly examined by the Classis.



## Appendix 3

### I. Old Testament Biblical Languages and Studies

- i. language competency as demonstrated by a working knowledge of Hebrew in all genres and literary categories of the Old Testament;
- ii. knowledge of Old Testament background and canonicity; hermeneutics/Textual Criticism
- iii. courses in the main sections of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, Historical Books, Poetry, Prophets

### II. New Testament Biblical Languages and Studies

- i. language competency as demonstrated by a working knowledge of Koine Greek in all genres and literary categories of the New Testament;
- ii. knowledge of New Testament background and canonicity; hermeneutics/textual criticism
- iii. courses in the main sections of the New Testament: Gospels, Acts, Pauline Epistles, General Epistles, and Revelation

### III. Church History

Courses which cover the Ancient, Medieval, Reformation and Modern Church, including without limitation, Federational/Denominational history

### IV. Systematics and Apologetics

- i. Courses in the 6 loci: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology, including theological education.
- ii. Courses in symbolics and the study of the Reformed confessions, including the Three Forms of Unity
- iv. At least one course in each of Ethics or Apologetics

### V. Practical Theology

- i. Four preaching courses, including catechism preaching
- ii. Courses in teaching, Catechetics, counseling, pastoral care, evangelism, polity, missions
- iii. Church polity/ecclesiology (both theory and application of the Church Order)
- iv. Successful completion of at least ten weeks duration pastoral internship

## Appendix 4

- a. In a merged federation both the federational and independent models of theological training should be accepted and given financial support.
- b. Currently this training is being done in the Canadian Reformed Churches by a federational seminary and in the United Reformed Churches of North America by independent seminaries.
- c. Seeing, however, that the governing structures for these institutions differ, it needs to be recognized that the governance of a federational seminary will be more directly connected to the churches than that of an independent seminary. The assemblies of the churches have no direct involvement in the governance of independent seminaries.
- d. With regard to the federational seminary in Hamilton, this needs be different and it is proposed that in view of the above, this seminary be governed by the merged churches in Canada through the Regional Synod(s) of Canada.
- e. This government would entail that each classis in Canada nominate to the Regional Synod(s) one person (and a substitute) to serve as governor. These governors would be responsible for overseeing the affairs of the seminary and would report directly to churches and to the Regional Synod(s) of Canada.
- f. The Regional Synod will be responsible for giving proper instructions to the governors as per the Acts (The Canadian Reformed Theological College Act, 1981) and informing the churches of the Regional Synod(s).
- g. While the federational seminary will be in Canada and governed by the Regional Synod of Canada, final appeals in matters of dispute shall be heard and decided upon by the General Synod of the merged church.
- h. With regard to financial support for the federational seminary, a commitment will be sought from each former Canadian Reformed Church to support the seminary on an assessment basis. In addition, all churches in Canada that were formerly United Reformed will be invited to support the seminary in Canada; however, it is understood that such support will be determined locally and rendered on a voluntary basis.
- i. In order to ensure that all of the churches in the merged federation do their fair and equitable share to support seminary education, those churches not supporting the federational seminary shall commit themselves to sending a comparable amount of financial support to one or both independent seminaries mentioned under 1.4. It will be up to

the General Synod of the merged church to determine what an appropriate policy will be towards independent seminaries.

- j. that the CanRC and URCNA encourage the three seminaries to be intentional in developing their relationship with one another for the benefit of all the churches. The three seminaries should organize mini conferences and consultations amongst themselves on a regular basis (with a rotation of responsibilities for organizing and hosting) to discuss common concerns in theology and/or pedagogy; to have dialogue on matters of theological difference; to share information regarding curricular innovations; to collaborate on publications; to stimulate professional development inside and outside the classroom; and to promote student awareness of the theological and curricular similarities and distinctives of the three seminaries. Faculty representation at annual convocations and/or graduations should be encouraged to ensure regular minimal contact among the three institutions.

**Reports to  
General Synod Burlington-Ebenezer  
2010**

**Minority Report on Women's Voting  
(Revised)**

**MINORITY Report,**  
**From a member of the**  
*Council Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton*  
**Committee on Women's Voting**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Mandate

General Synod 2007 Smithers, appointed the church at Hamilton (Acts of General Synod 2007, Art. 159, 8) as The Committee on Women Voting “to finish the mandate extended by Synod Smithville 1980” on the matter of women’s voting (Acts of General Synod 2007, Art. 136, 5.1). Specifically the committee was mandated to “Examine the biblical teaching on headship and voting and also study the following questions”:

- 5.2.1.1 With regard to headship: What is the position of widows and single female communicant members?
- 5.2.1.2 With regard to headship: What is the relationship between husband and wife when they discuss who to vote for - doesn’t the husband therefore show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?
- 5.2.1.3 With regard to voting: What do the Bible and our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?
- 5.2.1.4 With regard to voting: What is the relationship between congregational (a) nomination, (b) election process, (c) ratification/approbation, and (d) the final appointment by council?

These questions were raised at Synod Smithville (1980) and reiterated at Synod Cloverdale (1983), but have remained formally unanswered by the churches. From Synod Toronto (1974) to Synod Neerlandia (2001), the churches have struggled to provide a definitive conclusion to the requests from individuals and congregations alike in giving recommendations the churches on the role of women in the voting for office bearers. Broader assemblies have determined that the issue of women’s voting is a matter of the churches in common. Presently the churches adhere to a decision of General Synod Toronto 1974, article 84, which has denied women’s voting to be granted. It is clear that the mandate of Synod Smithers is an invitation for the churches to further study the matter on the basis of Scripture and Church Order because it continues to be raised by some in the churches within the federation.

This minority report is structured similarly to the majority report to facilitate the discussion.

### 1.2 Overview of findings

This minority report for reasons of convenience and clarity will track the majority report format and wording in fulfilling the GS appointed Hamilton Church committee mandate. However, an opposing biblically and church orderly faithful conclusion will be reached – to maintain previous general



synod decisions and existing regulations restricting voting to male communicant members [GS Toronto 1974, article 84; GS Burlington 1986, article 120]

The majority report spells out their response to the mandate in logical argumentation. In general, however, its findings to the persistent questions on headship, equality, submission, authority, and governance appears to reflect a modern, secular world-view, a sociologically driven responsive. Indeed, sociologically the spirit of the times is reflected in viewing election as a matter of participating and not as exercising some form of authority or equality.

The Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a historical practice few other churches maintain in a politically correct post-modern world – that of only allowing the male communicant members to vote for office-bearers. This practice is being maintained in a society where a feminist orientation towards equality between the genders and entitlement in all areas of life is evidenced.

In keeping with the Church Order (Art 3), the majority report understands the process of election to be the means by which God **calls** men to office in the church of Christ. The emphasis in the majority report is however deliberately upon *calling* rather than *election* in a desire to change the focus that characterizes this discussion in our churches. By changing the emphasis from “headship and voting” to “calling” the majority report subtly refocuses the election of office bearers away from the decision making germane to voting.

The majority report sees an undue emphasis on the element of voting in the process of calling men to office and considers that to arise from 20th-century ideas of political governance and gender roles. It is however, historically and sociologically observable, that as an expression of the spirit of the time among many church federations, even some with a reformed background, women voting for office bearers is part of a pattern of liberalism culminating in women functioning in some and then in all the ecclesiastical offices [e.g. United Church of Canada, the Christian Reformed Church of North America and potentially]. If a recent report can be indicative, even our sister churches in the Netherlands the Gereformeerde Kerken ‘Vrijgemaakt’ {Reformed Churches “Liberated”} are dealing with overtures encouraging the consideration of giving women increased responsibility, involvement and authority for i.e. deaconal work.

Specifically the majority report suggests,

“ ... such association with the secular democratic process (whether conscious or not) robs the election of office bearers of its spiritual significance and downplays the work of the Holy Spirit in the governance of the church of Christ. It also introduces into the process of selecting men for office the modern secular idea of the ‘right’ to vote. Instead, our emphasis and language ought to be on **calling**, as it is in the Forms for the Ordination of Ministers, Missionaries, Elders and Deacons. There the first question asked of men who are to be ordained is: “do you feel in your heart that God

Himself, through His congregation, has called you to this holy ministry [or these offices]? “Members of the congregation have the responsibility to participate in the calling of men to that office through the process outlined in Art. 3 of the Church Order.”

The majority report rationale thus deflects that report away from the given mandate to ‘examine the biblical teaching on headship and **voting**’. Voting and election is in fact redefined and equated with the term calling. **Calling** should rather be considered as the whole of a process and voting be recognized as one of the steps in what Art.3 C.O. calls “The Calling to office.” The “Form for the ordination of office-bearers” in its opening paragraphs highlights that it is a matter of election and appointment that culminates in ordination. It is in fact the aspect of voting in the process of calling to office that, according to the mandate of GS Smithers, needs to be examined and will be dealt with in this minority report.

The majority report, by redefining the issue of ‘headship and voting’ misuses Art 3 of the Church Order in reinterpreting the mandate by deflecting the examination away from the ‘the biblical teaching on headship and **voting**’.

The churches by way of the majority report are given, according to the following:

“... an opportunity to clarify the Biblical practice of calling men to office as it was restored by the Reformers and as it is outlined in the Church Order. Further, the churches have here an opportunity to assert a truly Biblical understanding of the roles of men and women in the church of Christ. Against both modernist and postmodernist conceptions of authority and gender, which continue to tempt the church to rely on *traditional* rather than *Biblical* views of election to office in the church, the churches now may demonstrate positively the place of women in the calling of men to office on the basis of Scripture. Against both modernist and postmodernist conceptions of authority and gender, this report stands by the biblical confession that all members and office bearers are in submission to the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ. Male and female communicant members alike act in submission to the governance of Christ’s church by men who are called, appointed and ordained to office.”

It is at least questionable to suggest that granting women to participate in the voting for office bearers is foregoing the influence of “modernist and postmodernist conceptions” it may very well be considered as promoting a post-modern or so-called “liberal” concept.

The above paragraphs highlight that the majority report has ornately redefined its mandate in their introductory “overview of findings”. Seemingly deliberately replacing a word or phrase with another term that better frames and strengthens a preconceived point of view – voting and electing has become participating in calling. More specifically it would appear that the ‘spirit of the time’ driven by a fervor to achieve full and equal participation, if not entitlement, has motivated the majority report in reinterpreting its

mandate. The mandate is and remains to “examine the biblical teaching on headship and voting and to study the following questions”. This minority report intends to steadfastly address this mandate.

## **2. Headship and Voting (5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2)**

*5.2.1.1 With regard to headship, what is the position of widows and single female communicant members?*

*5.2.1.2 With regard to headship, what is the relationship between husband and wife when they decide for whom to vote? Are they not to show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?*

### **2.1 Introduction**

The questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2, which pertain to headship and voting, demand an answer that is rooted in the overall biblical perspective concerning gender roles. A biblically formed world-view acknowledges both the equality of status as men and women before God as well as their different roles and responsibilities. We will see how this is taught both in the Old Covenant and the New and draw conclusions that seek to respect the overall biblical perspective on gender, equality, responsibility and headship. From this overall perspective, an answer will be provided to the specific issues raised in the questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2.

### **2.2 Biblical teaching on equality, responsibility and headship**

#### **2.2.1 Old Covenant: equality**

Gender was created by God in the beginning, as he created man “male and female” (Gen 1:27). Man and woman were created in the image of God and given the charge to increase in number on the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:28). Thus, Adam and Eve together were charged as God’s vice-regents to expand the kingdom of God, starting from the Garden of Eden and extending all over the face of the earth. Man and woman together share this position of responsibility over the earth and share in the calling to rule and subdue it. When Eve, however, was created she was given a unique responsibility. She was to be “help” (Gen 2:18) for Adam, one that would assist him in carrying out the divine mandate. This is a clear example of equality of status with different responsibilities.

Throughout the Old Covenant, there was indeed a high regard for the status of women, especially in comparison with the surrounding nations of the Ancient Near East. A few examples of exceptional women of high status having important responsibilities will suffice: the fifth commandment tells children to honor both their father and their mother; women like Rahab, a prostitute, and Ruth, a young Moabite widow, receive prominent places in the history of redemption; and the book of Proverbs extols the instruction of

both father and mother and concludes with a description of a noble woman (Prov 31).

### 2.2.2 Old Covenant: responsibility

One of the responsibilities God gives to Adam is to name his wife Eve – “... the man said ... she shall be called woman...” (Gen 2:23). From the beginning the man had specific decision-making responsibility towards the woman. To explain this concept further the following quote is instructive: “During the subsequent years leading up to the Flood of Noah’s day, and down through the days of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God continued His system of giving responsibility to the covenant head of the family who made decisions for the whole. When ‘Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord’, for example, that grace came upon his whole family. Again, the sons of Jacob called upon him to make the decision of whether to go down to Egypt or not.” [Rev. Robert Grossman, “Reformed Herald”, Dec 2005].

It is (see Numbers 1:45-46) 600,000 mature men in Israel who are asked by Moses to take part in decisions regarding the promised-land on behalf of the congregation (Num 23:26). A collective decision was made by the ‘mature men’ for which God held them responsible (Num 14:29). In Deut 17:15 Israel is empowered to set their own king over themselves. They do so in 1Kings 12:23-24 they choose their own king. In this instance the congregation, under the direction of an office bearer make a choice. Making selection, what we today would call voting, can be traced back to the church of the Old Testament as being the responsibility of men.

### 2.2.3 Old Covenant: headship

In the Old Covenant there were further divinely ordained differences between men and women. Even though headship can be shown in Adam giving his wife the name “Woman” the Fall into sin itself in part resulted from Adam’s neglect of his headship role. The overturning of the creation order is clear in Genesis 3: the serpent (an animal over which Adam and Eve were called to have dominion) deceived Eve, who in turn led her husband astray. Fallen Adam did not take responsibility for his actions but blamed his wife and implicitly blamed God Himself (Gen 3:12). However, it was he who abdicated his leadership role, as the LORD makes clear, saying, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree” (Gen 3:17). These words clearly show that part of Adam’s fault was not exercising his God-given leadership or headship.

In the Old Covenant, the special offices were as a general rule reserved for men. Priests, from the tribe of Levi, are without exception men in the Old Testament, and the legitimate Messianic king from the line of David was also always male. All but one of the judges was male, and Deborah was raised up by God at a low point in the history of Israel, in part as a condemnation of the lack of male leadership (cf Judges 4:9). All of the

writing prophets were male as well, though there were prophetesses such as Huldah (II Kings 22:14). Isaiah curses Israel by saying that “women shall lead them” (Isa 3:12). The general rule from the Old Covenant is clear: the special offices are reserved for men. Only in exceptional circumstances, at the LORD’s direction, did this general principle not apply. Equality of status before the Lord, then and now, in the office of all believers does not therefore mean equality of responsibilities towards headship.

#### **2.2.4 New Covenant: equality**

In Christ, we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and believers have been restored to the image of God (Col 3:10, Eph 4:24). There are greater blessings for women in the New Covenant as well. In the Old Covenant, only male children received the sign of circumcision, but now baptism is extended to all. This great covenant blessing is connected to the anointing promised in Joel 2:28: “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy.” This prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost, as the apostle Peter says (Acts 2:17). Clearly the New Covenant blessings are broader in scope than those of the Old Covenant, so that the apostle Paul declares, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Men and women are equal but not interchangeable.

The above verse has often been abused, as if the apostle Paul were seeking to abolish all distinctions between men and women. In context, we observe that the main argument of the epistle to the Galatians is that the covenant blessings are to be extended to Gentiles without the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Analogous to Jew and Gentile, man and woman are also equally recipients of the new covenant blessings, and the blessings of baptism and the promise of the Spirit are two examples of this. Thus Paul’s emphasis here is not revolutionary, but is in fact in line with the prophecy of Joel as fulfilled at Pentecost. Therefore, the Heidelberg Catechism also teaches that in the new covenant all those who are in Christ have been anointed as prophets, priests, and kings (LD 12, Q&A 32). Although it will be argued [in the majority report] that the task of voting belongs properly to the office of all believers, rather than to the special offices, one cannot from the above conclude that, in the office of all believers, both men and women have a similar responsibility towards voting for office bearers.

#### **2.2.5 New Covenant: responsibility**

In the New Testament we are instructed in the principle that “the head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor 11:3). It is clear that Paul teaches us here about responsibilities within the family. However this principle is rooted in the point that every woman does not have the same authority as every man – see verses 3,7,10. If we would give men and women the same authority and responsibility for voting in the congregation we are contradicting this understanding. The apostle Paul’s strict requirement simply adds weight

to this conclusion: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first; then Eve” [1 Tim 2:12ff]. The creation order mentioned as “...Adam was not the one deceived it was the woman...” gives a rationale for different responsibilities.

Male responsibilities are also highlighted elsewhere. In Acts 1:16, where Judas is replaced among the congregation it is the brothers not the women who are addressed as those who have the responsibility to choose one of the men (Acts 1:21).

## 2.2.6 New Covenant: headship

The New Covenant does not supersede the creation order; it restores believers to the image of God rather than over-riding it. For this reason there still are created and divinely ordained differences in the role of men and women. In the New Covenant, we see that there are two spheres in particular in which special roles of authority are limited to men: that of the family, and that of the church, which is the household of God.

### 2.2.6.1 New Covenant: Headship in the household

In the household, wives are called to submit to their husbands, and husbands are called to love their wives sacrificially (Col 3:18,19; Eph 5:22-30; 1 Pet 3:1-7). The headship of a husband over his wife is a picture of the relationship between Christ and his church. Submission thus occurs in the context of a relationship characterized by love and mutual service in the family context. This kind of “love and mutual service” unique to the family structure, does not simply extend to the relationship within the household of faith. Women are not called to submit to men in general; rather, it is first and foremost within the context of the relationship between husband and wife that a woman must be submissive.

### 2.2.6.2 New Covenant: Headship in the church

Analogously, in the church, which is the household of God, men are called to special leadership or headship responsibilities and women are not. This is maintained very clearly by Paul in 1 Tim 2:11-15:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.<sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.<sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve.<sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.<sup>15</sup> But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

In context, the focus of this chapter is the worship of the church. Paul is directing Timothy, a young pastor (cf 1 Tim 4:12) how the worship in the congregation at Ephesus should be conducted. There are to be prayers and

intercessions for all men (1 Tim 2:1-7). Men are to lead in prayer, and prayer needs to be done in a spirit of harmony, there is to be no quarreling (1 Tim 2:8). Women are to dress appropriately for worship, and are to learn “in quietness and full submission” (1 Tim 2:11). It should be noted that the prohibition Paul makes here is that of having women exercise the special teaching and ruling office in the church, the office of elder and minister (cf 1 Tim 5:17, which shows that this is one office with a two-fold aspect). The two verbs relate to this two-fold office are clear in v. 12: “I do not permit a woman to *teach* or to have *authority*.” The latter verb, *αυθεντειν*, “to have authority” makes it abundantly clear that this prohibition relates to the special offices. Paul bases this prohibition on the creation order (1 Tim 2:13,14). The present general prohibition of women voting in the congregation for office bearers needs to be considered within the context, a sentiment, related to the specific teaching prohibition. In the New Covenant the creation order is not superseded.

The other text to be discussed is 1 Cor 14:33b-35:

As in all the congregations of the saints, <sup>34</sup>women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. <sup>35</sup>If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Noted by some is: first, a general principle here may limit the application of this verse to the official public worship of the church (cf v.26, “When you come together...”). Second, the apostle’s main concern in this passage is *orderly* worship. This is based on the nature of God himself: God is not a God of disorder but of peace (v.33, cf also v.40). There are two assumed instructions based on this reasoning: the first is that one person should speak at a time (vv.27-33), and the second that women should not speak in the worship service (vv.34-35). Third, one needs to set these instructions against the broader background of the problems Paul was dealing with in Corinth. The Corinthians considered speaking in tongues to be the greatest gift, and this led to competition and rivalry precisely when the congregation should have been building each other up. They were “thinking like children” (1 Cor 14:20), immature in their faith and therefore their worship. Thus, the two instructions – that one person speak at a time, and that women are not permitted to speak – are clearly intended to promote order and decency.

One must therefore be very careful in how to apply this word of the apostle. When scripture is not carefully handled, it can promote false conclusions (cf 1 Tim 3:15). This instruction, which is against women unlawfully seizing honor for themselves by speaking in tongues and prophesying in the church, some may consider to be misused when applied to the issue of women’s voting today. They note [see majority report] the following differences: 1) The apostle is referring to speaking in worship, as the context clearly shows; 2) The apostle refers to public and vocal disorder, while our voting process is silent and orderly; 3) The apostle refers to individual women arrogating a function that is not theirs, while voting is,

according to the majority report, not a matter of the individual's rights but of the voice of the congregation.

However the difference in responsibility, in headship, for men and women "as the voice of the congregation" needs to be preserved especially in worship. As per our mandate, the differences in responsibility, in headship, of men and women needs to be considered in the decision making, the voting, for those who control the worship within the congregation – the office bearers.

### 2.2.6.3 Headship in the New Covenant: conclusion

In conclusion, the headship of men in the New Covenant is not absolute, but operates within relationships ordained by God: that of husband and wife, and that of office-bearer and the congregation, including all communicant members. A general principle can be applied to the responsibility of voting as practiced in the Old and New Testament. The New Testament emphasizes that *wives* must submit to *husbands*, and all communicant members (both men and women) must submit to male office-bearers. "Headship" does not teach the submission of women (in general) to men (in general), nor of office bearers to all those in the congregation (in general). Headship and submission to one another occurs within the framework of the loving *relationships* Christ has ordained, both in the household and in the household of faith. These specific points of emphasis should be considered in the context of the gender relationships as described throughout scripture.

According to Acts 14:23 voting within the congregation at that time, based on the Greek word *cheirotoneo*, literally involved an extending the hand [to vote] to one who is to serve as office-bearer with qualifications to lead the congregation as based on for example Acts 1:21-22, Acts 6:3, 1 Tim 3:1-12.

### 2.2.7 Biblical teaching: conclusions

The foregoing discussion leads to the following conclusions: 1) In the New Covenant, men and women are equal in status before God and receive all the blessings and privileges of being members of that covenant and united to Christ but have different responsibilities (Acts 1:15ff, 1 Cor 11:3, Col 3:10, 1 Tim 2:12ff, Eph 4:24, Gal 3:28). We might say that men and women believers equally share in the office of all believers as prophets, priests, and kings with varied responsibilities. Women too have minds filled with the Spirit and can exercise the New Covenant gifts of discernment and wisdom (1 Cor 2:15). 2) Moreover, in the New Covenant, the special offices in the church, which pertain to teaching and ruling, are reserved for men – the creation order ought not to be super-ceded.

Placing the two conclusions, mentioned above, next to each other however may tempt some to conclude that women ought to be encouraged to vote at congregational meetings in Christ's church. The general "office of all believers" and specific "special office" descriptions and congregational



involvement in decision making does not give ground to change the present practice of restricting voting in congregational meetings for office-bearers to the communicant men only. This is an obligation placed by the consistory on male communicant members. The consistory delegates a responsibility, the use of a vote. It is within the jurisdiction of a consistory to involve the male members in voting for office bearers. The delegating of the responsibility to join in voting is within the authority of those in the special office and of the headship responsibility of male communicant members founded upon the creation order concept. Because of this, women ought not to be allowed and encouraged to vote for office bearers.

Based on this conclusion one can now briefly address the two scenarios addressed in questions 5.2.1.1 and 5.2.1.2.

### **2.3 The position of widows and single female communicant members (5.2.1.1)**

#### *5.2.1.1: What is the position of widows and single female communicant members?*

In the social world of the New Testament, women who didn't have the economic and social protection of a man were vulnerable and easily preyed upon. Therefore Jesus condemns Pharisees as those who "devour widows' houses" (Mk 12:40). James teaches us that true religion partly consists of looking after "orphans and widows in their distress" (Jas 1:27), showing that the social position of widows was analogous to that of an orphan, easily oppressed and downtrodden. To be sure, not all widows lacked financial security, which is why Paul counsels Timothy to "give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need" (I Tim 5:3). Furthermore, the families of such widows are directed to help them first of all, so that the church may prioritize those widows who lack any other means of support (I Tim 5:4-8, 16). This passage highlights the responsibility of the church, the congregation, specifically via the office bearers, for the relationships in each household.

In terms of headship, it is important to emphasize that the problem faced by many widows in the early church was that they lacked a male head of the household. Against this background, we can appreciate the significance of Jesus' miracle in raising the dead son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-15): not simply restoring a boy to life, but also ensuring the future livelihood of the widow.

We may conclude that widows and single female communicant members are not under the headship of any man in terms of the sphere of their household. Though this situation often brought economic difficulty in the first century, with a few exceptions such as Lydia (Acts 16:15), we may be thankful that it does not always do so today. Nevertheless, these women remain under the authority of the office-bearers, and so in God's household they are still called to submission to male leaders. The brothers, single and married, in the congregation who are not office-bearers are similarly called

to such submission and all fall under the headship of office-bearers. It is inconsistent to conclude that male office-bearers should be elected to office by the voting of single women and widows because they are not under the headship of a man in their household. Brothers and sisters are equal in status before the Lord but have different responsibilities, at home and in the church, even in the office of all believers.

## 2.4 The relationship between husband and wife in voting (5.2.1.2)

*5.2.1.2: What is the relationship between husband and wife when they decide for whom to vote? Are they not to show and practice equality as joint heirs of the grace of God?*

We have shown that the New Testament clearly calls wives to be submissive to their husbands. Such submission it can be argued is not intended to override the responsibility that every woman has as a member of Christ. In principle, the question of whether to grant the sisters the privilege of voting in the congregation does not relate to the sphere of the household; rather, it involves the responsibility of the sisters in the congregation. However the concept of headship cannot be proven to be exclusively true for those in the marriage state and not in their responsibilities towards one another within the congregation in submission to office-bearers.

The following objection is commonly raised with respect to extending the vote to the sisters: What if a wife was to vote differently than her husband? This line of objection is considered to be germane to the discussion of what the Bible teaches about the authority of women in the congregation. It imports the issue of a husband's authority into the discussion in order to suggest that the sisters should not vote. Surely, a marriage would exhibit unity and harmony if the husband and wife were to vote for the same brothers. A husband could even use his leadership role to demand that his wife vote in same way he does, though one might question whether such an order would be an expression of love and service. The authority of the husband does not suggest that the wife is no longer to have any opinions or preferences of her own. The authority of the husband certainly cannot be used to suggest that the wife need not exercise her communicant membership in the congregation as a Spirit-filled believer. However, the possibility that a wife votes differently than her husband is only peripherally relevant to the prior, more important, question, whether or not women are to be given such responsibilities in congregational life.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that investigating the biblical teaching on gender has not advanced anything new. One can readily affirm the status quo regarding voting by men for office bearers in the congregation while not questioning the equality of status of women in the New Covenant, as well as maintaining that the special offices are for men alone. The interpretations of

the key texts provided may indeed be controversial. The raising of the women voting issue in the Canadian Reformed Churches has in many discussions remained on the level of raising a contemporary social consciousness based on selective biblical passages.

This [minority] report has sought to show that extending to the sisters the privilege to vote is in fact inconsistent with biblical practice [re Gen 2:23; 1 Tim 2:14 - “the creation order”] and a biblical understanding of the relationship between equality, responsibility and headship. The practice of excluding female communicants is consistent with a long held faithful understanding of the scriptural teaching about “headship and voting”.

In particular, this minority report has emphasized a conclusion opposite from the majority report regarding our GS given mandate. We know and all agree that every covenant member receives both promises and obligations in the office of all believers. However, a General Synod should not advocate that a consistory should include the women in the election of office-bearers based on at best inconclusive contemporary interpreted biblical considerations summatively referred to as an ‘obligations to participate’.

### 3. Scripture and Church Order (5.2.1.3)

*5.2.1.3 With regard to voting: What do the Bible and our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?*

#### 3.1 Biblical teaching with regard to voting

##### 3.1.1 Old Testament

There is, also according to the “Form for Ordination” [p. 628ff BoP], an obvious corollary in the Old Testament for the New Testament offices of minister, elder and deacon. The Old Testament provides a number of important principles for the selection of leaders in the Christian church. Before the institution of the monarchy, the people of Israel knew of two classes of regular office beside the extraordinary positions held by Moses and Joshua: **spiritual** and **political**. The Levites were specially chosen by God (Numbers 8) to minister in the tabernacle and to atone for the sins of the people. The second class of regular office in Israel, variously described as “elders”, “heads of families [clans]”, and “judges”, were appointed by Moses to function as political leaders—in the sense of providing leadership in social, judicial, and other organizational areas. The two offices can be seen in Deut. 31:9: “So Moses wrote this law and gave it **to the priests**, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and **to all the elders** of Israel.” Two distinct offices, distinguished both in their appointment and their function – yet unified in their common submission to the law of God’s covenant.

Three months after the exodus from Egypt, Moses chose and appointed judges to whom he delegated the task of deciding legal cases (Exodus 18: 25-26); these appointments addressed the immediate need of

lifting the burden from Moses, while also laying the foundation for the office which the LORD established more formally two years later (Num 1). Forty years later, when Moses gave the law to the new generation of Israelites about to enter Canaan, Moses described the appointment of these judges. (In Exodus, the focus is the narrative of deliverance, whereas in Deuteronomy the purpose of recounting the appointment of judges is more legislative than narrative.)

*“how can I bear your problems and your burdens and your disputes all by myself? Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you.” You answered me, “What you propose to do is good.” (Deut. 1:12-14)*

What follows in Deuteronomy 1 is similar to what we read both in Exodus 18 and in Numbers 1. In Num. 1, God instructed Moses and Aaron to institute the political (and, at times, military) leadership by choosing a representative from each of the twelve tribes with local, regional and national responsibilities:

*These were the men appointed from the community, the leaders of their ancestral tribes. They were the heads of clans of Israel. Moses and Aaron took these men whose names had been given, and they called the whole community together on the first day of the second month.*

In each of these passages relating to the choosing of leaders, we see three important principles: the men were *chosen from the community*, *for the community*, and *appointed by Moses and Aaron*. To anticipate the perspective of the Church Order, these men were called to leadership by God by means of the congregation, for the congregation, and under the authority of the ordained officers.

It was, however, the men in the congregation who are involved in decision making to enter Canaan (Num 13:26, 14:29) or not, and to choose a king (Deut 17:15 - ‘allowed to set their own king’, 2; 2 Sam 2:4, 5:3 ‘men of Judah’, ‘elders of Israel’ make David king). It is instructive to see that “the community” in the Old Testament is inclusive but that it is the fighting/mature aged men over 20 years of age who make decisions (Num 1:45-46; 14:29). The male members make decisions on behalf of the whole community.

When the people of Israel returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem, the whole congregation that assembled to hear the law of God is described as consisting of “men and women and all who were able to understand.” (Note that “assembly” is translated in the Greek Septuagint as “ekklesia”.)

*all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and*

*all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:1-3)*

Again, in Nehemiah 10, when the people vowed to keep their covenant obligations, the text clearly indicates that, while specific offices and functions remain distinct, the corporate responsibility of God's household is addressed by the community as a whole:

*The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, **together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand**—all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath... We will not neglect the house of our God (Nehemiah 10: 28-29, 39)*

Throughout the Pentateuch, as in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the covenant community listened and spoke as one in response to instructions — hearing the law and responding with one voice in renewal of covenantal obligations (Josh. 8:35; Neh. 10) – highlighting the involvement of the whole congregation men, women and children. It may furthermore, however, be assumed that the male members on behalf of the congregation as a whole were not only active and instructive but lead the whole congregation in decision making. To suggest otherwise is imprudent.

### 3.1.2 New Testament

Directly involving the brothers, in the choosing of leaders in the Old Testament continues in the New Testament. In the passage in Acts that speaks most clearly to the issue of the election of office bearers, one sees that one of the brethren as chosen by the men from among the congregation and by the congregation (Acts 1:15-16), to be appointed (and ordained) by the apostles:

*“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility [care for the needy] over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, et al.... They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them. (Acts 6: 3-6)*

It is suggested that the Greek word here for “brothers” (*adelphoi*) may be considered inclusive, signifying “brothers and sisters” – the whole congregation, all the members. That this may be a correct interpretation is apparently evident from the context, for the text later says that the proposal pleased “the whole group” (NIV), “the whole gathering” (ESV), or “the whole

multitude” (KJV) (παντος του πληθους). The same gender-inclusive word (“plethous”) is translated in Acts 4: 32 as “all the believers” (NIV) or “the whole multitude” (KJV) to describe the entire community of believers. It may however not be concluded that it was not the male members only who elected the office bearer.

In this the single most instructive passage in the New Testament on the election of office bearers in the apostolic era, election is by the gathering of believers as a whole, yet no mention is made to suggest all voted irrespective of gender. No firm conclusion can be made indicating that women voted for office-bearers, in fact it is most logical to suggest, given the spirit of the time, at that time, that only the men voted or ‘elected’.

One notes, too, that, just as the office of elder in the New Testament continues important characteristics of that in the Old Testament, so do the principles for the *choosing* of elders. While there are clear and significant differences between the governance of the church in the Old and New Testaments, there is no distinction between Old and New Testaments in terms of community. In fact, the ceremonial distinctions between men and women, as well as between Jews and Gentiles, are removed with the completed atonement of Christ Jesus, allowing a more active participation of all those in the office of all believers including women in the work of the church in the New Testament. Not only is the sign of the covenant graciously extended to women in the new covenant by baptism, women are occasionally called to important functions in the gathering work of Christ; this is clear from the significant contributions made by believing women such as Lydia, and others in the Book of Acts who are acknowledged warmly by Paul in his letters. The diaconal tasks performed by women in the New Testament church are another indication of the central place of women among God’s people. Thanks to Christ’s work of removing the curse of sin, the promise to Abraham is fulfilled:

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus... 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. (Galatians 3: 26-29)*

But it is also important to note that, although Scripture makes no distinction between men and women as members of Christ’s body (Gal. 3: 28), distinctions do remain in the responsibilities between men and women. The creational ordinances are not removed by the work of Christ (indeed, they are renewed by Him), nor is the calling of men as “heads” in the church rescinded in the New Testament. Paul explicitly makes this point in 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 and Ephesians 5: 22-33, as does Peter in I Peter 3: 1-17. In the Old and New Testament alike, when Scripture speaks of the qualifications for office (Exodus 18: 21; Titus 1; I Timothy 3), the ordained offices are exclusively *male*: clearly, in the institution and practice of the offices, God appointed men to fill positions of authority. Women are to “remain silent” (I

Tim. 2:12) in the context of orderly worship, teaching and prayer. Admittedly, nowhere in the New Testament are these distinctive roles of men and women directly invoked in the context of choosing office bearers. Voting for office bearers does not warrant a doctrinal defense – the matter of women’s voting, “headship and voting”, is not a doctrinal matter but a matter of faithful application of biblical norms.

The choosing or electing of leaders from among the congregation and for the congregation has in the modern era, since the Synod of Dort, been characterized in political terms as “voting”. In a liberal democratic context, voting is regarded as a right of citizenship, as a matter of equal rights, of entitlement, and as an expression of authority: after all, “democracy” means “rule by the people.” If women are not to have authority in the church, they ought not to be given a vote. This is (as the argument goes) a completely secular understanding of election, which according to some is foreign to the Bible since the act of choosing leaders in the Old and New Testament never abrogates the authority of those who appoint men to office. It is suggested, notwithstanding Acts 11:5ff and 1 Tim 2:12ff, that just as the New Testament does not refer to gender distinctions in the context of choosing office bearers (as in “the whole multitude”, Acts 6), so the New Testament nowhere associates the election of office bearers with speaking, exercising authority, or headship – functions in the church which are distinctly assigned to *male* members. The Bible indeed says that the whole congregation participates in the choosing (“voting”) of office bearers. However, to suggest that voting by women did occur and that it was not men only who voted for office-bearers cannot be conclusively deduced from scriptures.

### 3.2 Church Order with regard to voting

At the Reformation, the church returned to the Biblical practice of choosing and appointing office bearers by involving the congregation. In response to the abuse of power by the popes, cardinals and bishops (who frequently made clerical appointments along political lines that did not serve the people well), the Reformers returned to the principles of election found in the Old and New Testaments. In fact, according to the majority report, the reformation of the unscriptural means of clerical appointment was an important expression of the biblical ecclesiology of the Reformers. This reformation of the election of ministers, elders and deacons - as deliberated upon in a parallel manner in the majority report – will be considered next, as

- A. spelled out by John Calvin,
- B. reflected in the church polity of the Belgic Confession,
- C. practiced in the voting procedures in the Scottish Reformation, and
- D. maintained by the Church Order of Dort.

### 3.2.1 Calvin on the Reformation of clerical appointments

Calvin, during a time of revision, deals specifically with the vote of the congregation in the calling and appointing of ministers, elders and deacons in Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV. iii.15 (“The Doctors and Ministers of the Church, Their Election and Office”):

*Someone now asks whether the minister ought to be chosen by the whole church, or only by his colleagues and the elders charged with the censure of morals, or whether he ought to be appointed by the authority of a single person. ... For they [i.e, clergy] were over the rest only to give good and salutary advice to the people, not that they alone, in disregard of all the rest, might do what they pleased! ... Therefore, the above passages [which instruct Titus and Timothy to ‘appoint’] are to be understood as not to diminish any part of the common right and freedom of the church.... We therefore hold that this call of a minister is lawful according to the Word of God, when those who seemed fit are created **by the consent and approval of the people**.... (McNeill and Battles, Vol 2, pp.1065-66)*

In the following chapter, Calvin describes this practice of consent in the ancient church before the introduction of the papacy:

*In ancient times no one was even received into the assembly of the clergy without the consent of all the people.... The freedom of the people to choose their own bishops was long preserved: no one was to be thrust into office who was not acceptable to all. (1078-79) [Note: Calvin uses “bishop” in the New Testament sense of “overseer”.]*

In the examples that Calvin cites of this practice in the early Christian church, whether the participation of the people comes in the form of election, consent and affirmation, the principle of consent by the people is consistent. Voting, by members of the congregation, was re-established as an appropriate practice. In the phrase that Cyprian uses, the election of overseers is “by the suffrage of the whole people”, “with the calling together of the whole of the people.” Calvin emphasizes that the consent of the people will not descend to ‘mob rule’ since the ecclesiastical (and, when necessary, civil) leaders are required to give approval of the election of office bearers by the people: as with the election and appointment of elders in the Old and New Testaments, the choosing of overseers by the people leads to the appointment by ordained leaders in Calvin. In the area of the calling and appointment of office bearers, Calvin and the Reformers returned to the Scriptural practice of the early church: rather than being radical innovators in doctrine and practice, the Reformers turned the church back to biblical and historical orthopraxy (‘right practice’).

The Reformation properly wrested the authority over the church from the pope, cardinals and bishops in order to give Christ His rightful due



as Head of the church. However, to use this sound development during a transition time to conclude that what has been a practice for over 400 years ought to be further reformed is not convincing.

### 3.2.2 Voting in the Belgic Confession (1561)

While the Reformed confessions do not address the matter of voting procedure at any length, the doctrine of the church summarized in the confessions provides the frame for understanding the Reformed practice of involving the congregation in the election of office bearers. Articles 27-32 deal with the nature, composition, governance and discipline of the church, beginning with the confession of the church as “a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ”. These articles flow from the confession (also found in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 19) that Christ in heaven is the Head of His church, and that true believers constitute the church: the church is the “assembly” or “gathering” of believers, not an institution that exists apart from the members of which it is comprised.

In Art. 30, we confess that the church is to be governed “according to the Spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word” ... “By these means everything will be done well and in good order when faithful men are chosen *in agreement with the rule that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy*”:

*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. (Article 31, emphasis added)*

While Art. 30 refers to the *qualifications* for overseer in I Timothy 3, Art. 31 refers to the *process* by which men are chosen. The proof texts for this article rightly point to Acts 1: 23-24 and Acts 6: 2-3, which describe the participation of the whole gathering of believers through the “brethren”. This is what “lawful election of the church” entails. As a pre-modern summary of what the Bible teaches about governance in the church, the Belgic Confession does not present the voting of officers in the church as an expression of authority nor does it not do so. The Belgic Confession honors Christ as the only Head of the church, with the ministers, elders and deacons as exercising His authority and discipline in the church. These men are chosen “by lawful election of the church”, which since the Synod of Dort has in practice involved the male communicant members in voting.

### 3.2.3 Voting procedures in sixteenth-century Edinburgh

The majority report highlights that the Reformed church in Scotland approved Calvin’s polity and followed his understanding of election for office bearers in its voting procedure. An excerpt from the relevant portion of, a little known, The Form of Prayers and Administration (Edinburgh, 1584)

illustrates how the church in Edinburgh practiced what the Belgic Confession called “lawful election of the church”:

*they [i.e., retiring office bearers] should name and give up in election such persons as they in their consciences thought most apt and able to serve in that charge: providing that they should nominate double more persons than were sufficient to serve in that charge, **to the end that the whole Congregation might have their free voice in their election.** And this order hath bin ever observed since that time in the Church of Edinburgh: that is the old Session before their departing nominates a certain sufficient number according to the want of the Church: which persons nominated are publicly proclaimed **in the audience of the whole Church** upon a Sunday before noon after Sermon, with admonition to the Church, that if any man know any notorious crime or cause that might unable any of those persons to enter into such a vocation, that they should notify the same, the next Thursday to the Session: or if any know any persons more able for that charge, they should notify the same unto the said Session, to the end that no mane without the Church, should complain that he was spoiled of his liberty in election.*

*The Sunday following in the end of the Sermon before noon, **the whole Congregation** are commanded to be present at after noon, to **give their voices as they will answer before God, to such as they think most able to bear the charge of the church** with the Ministers. The **voices of all** being received, the scrolls are delivered to any of the Ministers, who keepeth the same secret from the sight of all men, till the next Thursday, then in the Session he produceth them that the lots may be counted, where the manyest lots or voices without respect of person, hath the first place in the Eldership: and so proceeding, till the number of their want be complete. [emphasis added]*

{The Forme of Prayers and administration of the Sacramentes, used in the Eng Church at Geneva approved and received by the Churche of Scotland, where you to besides that which was in the former bookes, are also added sundrie other prayers [Geneva?. 1584), STC – 16581 <Early English Books Online 1315:14>}] [- as quoted in the majority reoport]

Upon their appointment, the new office bearers are called “to accept that charge, that God by the plurality of voices had laid upon them.” Clearly, this sample from the Scottish church after the Reformation indicates they implemented the teaching of Calvin in the Institutes as it was also understood in the Belgic Confession, namely, by hearing the whole congregation. However this assertion does not by itself give proof that both male and female communicant members then voted for office-bearers nor

that the period of transition – immediately following the reformation during a non-normative transition period – should be anything more than interesting for us today. The existing practice of male communicant members exercising the vote has, according to all accounts, been in effect in the Reformed churches for more than 400 years.

### 3.2.4 Voting in the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches

A questionable conclusion is reached or implied re Calvin, the Belgic Confession and the church in Scotland at the Reformation by the majority report to provide a doctrinal and historical background to the second component of the question posed by Synod Smithers in 5.2.1.3 of Art. 136: ***What does our Church Order say about congregational participation in electing office bearers?*** Art. 3 describes the process:

*The election to any office shall take place with the cooperation of the congregation, after preceding prayers, and according to the regulations adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons.*

*The consistory with the deacons shall be free to give the congregation the opportunity beforehand to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices.*

*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 choose as many as are needed.*

*Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations [note the majority report omits this clause].*

*Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for its approbation or at least two consecutive Sundays.*

In each of the three steps in the process of choosing ministers, elders and deacons (nomination, election, and approbation), the “congregation” participates without seemingly distinguishing between male and female communicant members at any point. However, the practice maintained since 1618-1619 has been consistent with our present practice in the Canadian Reformed Churches and upheld by previous synod decisions.

The “congregation” or “assembly” mentioned in Art. 3 of the Church Order is the same body that is mentioned in Numbers 1,14,23, Nehemiah 8 and Acts 1, 6, the same “gathering” of Art 27 of the Belgic Confession.

Simply put, the nomination, election and approbation of men in Art. 3 of the Church Order is the responsibility of the whole congregation, the body of believers assembled to form the local church. However it falls within the responsibility of the male communicant members on behalf of the whole, to directly elect those to be appointed by the consistory with the deacons as office-bearers.

In the second stage of the process (which we typically call “voting”), the congregation elects men from a slate of nominees presented by the consistory with the deacons. The consistory with the deacons delegates its authority when it gives the congregation the jurisdiction to elect men from those nominated for office. Similarly the election of deacons presumably by the male members on behalf of the whole group in Acts 6: 3-6 did not diminish the authority of the apostles who may delegate their jurisdiction.

Choosing men it is suggested does not constitute governance, and the exercise of the responsibility to choose men does not imply authority. However the logic for that conclusion is not biblically derived. The logic is seemingly straightforward: the Bible as summarized in the Belgic Confession teaches that “congregation” means all believers; the Church Order calls the “congregation” to choose men qualified for office; therefore, all believers are to participate in the choosing of office bearers. However, that logic excludes the implications given in the elections described in Acts 1 and 6 and the creation order discussed in 1 Tim 2:12ff. Our present practice appears most consistent with Old and New Testament directives.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In both the Old and New Covenants, mature male members of the covenant community participate in the choosing of leaders in the congregation. The present practices in the Canadian Reformed Churches for the election of office bearers follow biblical practices imbedded in the Belgic Confession and the Church Order. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Scriptural views of election by the congregation are transgressed by our present practice.

## 4. The Process of Election in Art. 3, Church Order (5.2.1.4)

*5.2.1.4 With regard to voting: What is the relationship between congregational (a) nomination, (b) election process, (c) ratification/approbation, and (d) the final appointment by council?*

### 4.1 The stages of election

Article 3 of the Church Order describes the process by which men are nominated, elected, approbated and appointed to office (see **Section 3.3.4** above). It is important to note that council calls on the congregation to participate in each of the steps of the calling process, thereby retaining its

authority over the complete process. Authority may be delegated by involving the congregation yet remains with the council of the congregation at all times. Thus, council gives the congregation the opportunity to nominate; council presents the candidates for election; council conducts an election with the cooperation of the male members; council announces the names of those elected for the purpose of approbation; and council shall appoint those elected. The Church Order indicates that the same "congregation" that is free to nominate brothers in Step 1 also "shall choose as many as needed". In Step 2 however, the current practice in the Canadian Reformed Churches excludes the female communicant members from the exercise of the *vote* in the election process.

During the nomination process, the congregation is asked to help council identify men who are fit for the office as elder or deacon. The congregation is encouraged to give biblical reasons for their preference. Council, upon examining the nominations, presents a slate of names to the congregation by which it is inferred that any one of those men is deemed eligible for the office to which they are nominated. Council has exercised authority in vetting the various names that the congregation has presented and authorizes the male members to exercise the vote. The female communicant members are free to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices.

Based on the list of names for the office of elder and deacon the consistory together with the male members on behalf of the whole congregation, is invited to elect those whom they wish to serve. The consistory takes the list of men who are elected according to local regulations and appoints them.

Council, having appointed them to their office again requests the congregation's input into whether there may be any lawful objections to their installation into their office. Again both male and female communicant members may participate in this process. Council of course retains the authority in determining whether or not an objection is legitimate.

All three steps in the process (nomination, election, and approbation) are related by the involvement of the congregation and by Council retaining complete authority in each step of the election process, from nomination to ordination. In our current system the sisters are encouraged to take part in nomination and approbation, but are barred from voting. This apparent inconsistency highlights the importance given to the election by vote. This is a delegated jurisdiction involving the male communicant members only. Although it may be argued that all three steps ought to include the full involvement of the congregation, male and female communicant members, while council's supervision over the entire process is retained, the unique decision making of the vote for male office bearers exists within the headship responsibilities of the male communicant members. They exercise this responsibility on behalf of all those in the congregation as was the practice in the OT and NT.

Further it may be argued that the vote of the congregation binds the consistory by virtue of the phrase in the Church Order (Art. 3) that those elected “*shall be* appointed by the consistory with the deacons”. This traditional understanding takes the phrase to mean that the consistory must comply with the election by the congregation; if women are given the vote, consistory must also follow their say in the election, thereby granting women an “authority” that contradicts Paul in I Tim. 2: 12ff – the creation order.

Some argue that this is a mistaken understanding of the language of the Church Order. When “shall” is used in the third person in a semi-legal situation, it expresses “determination, promise, obligation, or permission, depending on the context” (The American Heritage Book of English Usage, I.56). They suggest that it is often used to describe the expectations and obligations of a contract or agreement (“The party of the third part shall...”). It has the connotation of typical or usual practice for the duration of the contract according to the purpose for which the agreement is made. It is in this sense, it is argued, that the word “shall” is used throughout the Church Order, not only in Art 3. However, this view must be rejected when the word shall is more properly and commonly defined as indicating “compulsion” and “certainty” as per official legal documents – see Collins Dictionary of the English Language 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. P.1402.

It is also argued that even if one were to understand this obligation as “binding” the consistory to the election by the congregation, one cannot construe this obligation as granting **authority** to the congregation, since communicant members select men from a list of candidates nominated and approved by consistory with deacons, normally by majority vote. At no point, it is suggested, in the process in the Church Order, from the invitation to submit names of eligible men to the appointment of the men elected, does consistory rescind its authority to the congregation. However in the pivotal process of the calling of office-bearers the consistory does give the congregation the authority to choose, to elect, by majority vote which male communicant member is to serve as an office-bearer. A delegated authority or jurisdiction is given by the consistory to the male communicant members participating in this decisive part of the process, the vote. In the words of the Proposed Church Order (Art 22), the consistory is the only assembly to exercise direct authority within the congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ – they may indeed as the prime decision making body involve, by delegated jurisdiction, the male members in that exercise of authority.

## 5. Conclusion

This minority report concludes, based on a study of “headship and voting,” that female communicant members do not have the responsibility according to biblical directives nor church orderly requirement, to participate in the election of office bearers. The Canadian Reformed Churches should maintain previous general synod decision and our present practice of allowing only male communicant members, under the direct authority and

supervision of the consistory to join them in the vote for office bearers. Meanwhile the nomination and approbation of men for office remains within the jurisdiction of all church members. The minority report from the Council of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, the Synod Smithers (2007) appointed "Women Voting Committee", therefore, recommends that:

*Synod Burlington (2010) uphold previous general synod decisions and present practices in the Canadian Reformed Churches and not allow the participation of female communicant members in the voting for office bearers.*

*And;*

*The GS Smithers given mandate to: "Examine the biblical teaching on headship and voting and also study the following questions..." has hereby been fulfilled.*

Elder, Art Witten