

Joint Report 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), together with financial assessments to the churches to support the federational model.

5. For this model to gain approval or acceptance from the CanRC, the members of the CanRC will need to adopt in part the independent model which calls for endorsement of independent seminaries, and voluntary financial support.
6. There is agreement on the core elements of the required curriculum, whatever the model (see Appendix 3 attached).
7. Although we do not bring specific proposals, if the proposed hybrid model is adopted, we would envision a blended system of voluntary contributions and assessments to support the federational seminary and the independent seminaries, and are confident that a counsel of experienced wise men could develop an equitable manner to do so.
8. The synodical directions, the distinct historical experiences and the preferences for the two distinct models, do not allow the two committees to make a joint submission for consideration beyond that set out above.
9. The two committees are of the view that they have wrestled with the distinctives thoroughly and sufficiently and that this report, inclusive of its appendices, is intended to serve the churches by laying out the clear alternatives and assist for fulsome and considered reflection and discussion in the churches regarding this matter.
10. That the respective synods receive and approve of the work of the committees and declare that their mandates have been fulfilled and are at an end.
11. That the respective synods receive, approve and adopt the recommended model as set out in recommendation 3 above and direct and serve the churches in that regard.

Submitted on behalf of the Committees for theological education:

URCNA Members

Rev. Bradd Nymeyer (Chairman)
Rev. Mark VanderHart (Clerk)
Dr. Bob Godfrey
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CanRC Members

Rev. James Visscher (Chairman)
Mr. Karl Veldkamp (Clerk)
Rev. Richard Aasman
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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

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.¹

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*

¹ 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.

kerk, door de kerk” (The Training for the Ministry of the Word: “By the Church and for the Church”)²

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.³ 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 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.⁴ 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

²Published by J. H. Kok in Kampen in 1906.

³When 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.

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

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.⁵

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.”⁶

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 discipled 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 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

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

⁶Alfred 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.

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.⁷

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,⁸ 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).⁹ “The church is fundamental to the gospel ministry.”¹⁰ 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 salvation.”¹¹ 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.”¹² 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

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

⁸The 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).

⁹See 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.

¹⁰Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 512.

¹¹Calvin, *Institutes* IV.i.10 (Battle’s edition).

¹²Calvin 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.

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.”

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.¹³

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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

From the major ecclesiastical assemblies held in seventeenth century Holland, it is clear

¹³There 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.

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

¹⁵ H. Bavinck, *Het doctorenambt*, 27-34.

¹⁶ 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.

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.”¹⁷

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.

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.¹⁸ 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 began, 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.¹⁹ It was obvious to all that something needed to be done about the lack of ministers.

¹⁷See 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.

¹⁸D. 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.

¹⁹W. 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.

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.²⁰

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 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.²¹ When the seminary was officially opened in 1854, four ministers were charged to be “teachers of the theological school.”²² 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.²³ 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.²⁴

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

20 H. Bouma, ‘De voorgeschiedenis’, 21-26.

21 W. de Graaf, Een monument der afscheiding, 15-18.

22 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.

23 F. Vanden Berg, Abraham Kuyper (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1978), 97-99.

24 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.

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.²⁵ 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.

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.²⁶

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.²⁷

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

²⁵ W. De Graaf, *Een monument der Afscheiding*, 177-178.

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

²⁷ *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.

this training were applied by the Reformed churches on this continent. To limit ourselves to the sister church of the Secession churches, 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.²⁸

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.
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

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

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*

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.

The URCNA Church Order does not provide for an official seminary, one controlled by the denomination’s assemblies. There does not appear to be any desire among the United Reformed congregations to establish an officially-controlled seminary. The current arrangement seems to be serving the URCNA well.

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 to 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.