

The History of the Theological College of Canadian Reformed Churches

At the first Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Homewood 1954), the need for a theological school for the federation was recognized, and it was decided “to ask the churches to take four collections a year for our seminary and to appoint delegates to take charge of the money and to be diligent concerning the whole matter of the theological training.” The training of the ministry has been a matter on the agenda of every subsequent Synod since then.

Two leading principles were established by the churches right from the beginning: that the training for the ministry should be provided by the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that future ministers of the Word should receive good academic training. The churches consequently decided that only those persons who held a Bachelor of Divinity degree were to be admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations.

The Synod of Hamilton (1962) decided to set up provisional training for men desiring to enter the ministry of the Word. In order to facilitate this, a number of ministers were appointed to teach while they continued to serve in their congregations. Students were expected to have as minimum a Bachelor of Arts degree or its equivalent. In addition to this, it was agreed that a library should be established for the benefit of teachers and students.



The first seminary building on Queen St. in Hamilton, Ontario.

On November 20, 1968, the Synod of Orangeville decided to establish a full-fledged Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches. (Its name was later changed to the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary; see below.) It was agreed that the Theological College should be set up in Southern Ontario, close to a university with appropriate library facilities, and that a suitable estate should be purchased.

Three full-time professors and two part-time lecturers were appointed.

As professors:

Dogmatology - Rev. Jules T. Van Popta, of Cloverdale, BC
Old Testament - Rev. Dr. Jelle Faber, of Rotterdam, the Netherlands
New Testament - Rev. Lubbertus Selles of Chatham, ON

As lecturers:

Church History & Church Polity - Rev. Hendrik Scholten, M.Th., of Smithville, ON
Diaconiology - Rev. Gijsbertus Van Dooren, M.Th., of Burlington, ON



The First Faculty:

Front row (l-r): Rev. Scholten, Dr. Faber, Rev. Van Dooren
Back row (l-r): Rev. Kouwenhoven, Rev. Selles

However, the Lord decided otherwise. Synod received the sorrowful tidings that Rev. J. Van Popta had passed away before he could be informed of his appointment. Synod therefore decided to fill the vacancy by changing Dr. Faber's appointment from the chair of Old Testament to that of Dogmatology, and to appoint in his place Rev. François Kouwenhoven, M.Th., of Toronto, Ontario, as professor of the Old Testament disciplines.

The "Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches" was officially opened in Hamilton, Ontario, on Wednesday, September 10, 1969. During the opening ceremony the principal, Dr. J. Faber, gave an inaugural address entitled "The Catholicity of the Belgic Confession." At the opening ceremony, all professors and lecturers signed a Form of Subscription.



A member of the Board of Governors speaking at the opening ceremony.



Rev. H. M. Ohmann

Shortly after the opening, the new College suffered another heavy loss. On October 4, 1969, the Lord took to himself Professor F. Kouwenhoven. In his place, Synod New Westminster 1971 appointed Rev. Heinrich M. Ohmann of Dokkum, The Netherlands, as professor of Old Testament.



The first class graduated from the Theological College of Canadian Reformed Churches in September, 1971.

Front row (l-r): Rev. Van Dooren, Dr. Faber, Rev. Selles

Back row (l-r): Students: C. Van Dam, W. Huizinga, C. Werkman, J. Godschalk

In 1981 the Canadian Reformed Theological College Act was adopted by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This Act empowered the Senate to grant, among others, the degree of Master of Divinity (M.Div.), which replaced the former Bachelor of Divinity degree. The Master of Divinity degree is conferred to a person in possession of a Bachelor degree who has completed the program at the Theological College.

When Professor Ohmann left Canada in 1981 to take up an appointment at our sister institution in Kampen, the Netherlands, Rev. Dr. Cornelis Van Dam of Surrey, BC, became the professor of Old Testament. Rev. William W.J. Van Oene, M.Th., of Fergus, Ontario, replaced Rev. H. Scholten as lecturer in Ecclesiology. After he and Rev. G. Van Dooren retired, a fourth full-time professor was appointed: Rev. Dr. Karel Deddens of Groningen, the Netherlands, as Professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology. Therefore, from 1984 to 2013, the faculty was made up of four full-time professors.

Front row (l-r): Rev. Van Dooren, Dr. Faber, Rev. Van Oene

Back row (l-r): Dr. Deddens, Dr. Van Dam, Rev. Selles



In the summer of 1985 the Theological College left its location on Queen Street, which it had occupied since its opening, and moved to larger premises in a quiet residential area on Hamilton's West Mountain. The purchase and renovation were made possible by a large grant from the Women's Savings Action and a special fundraising drive in the Canadian Reformed Churches. The Theological College still occupies these premises.



The new building at 110 West 27th St. Hamilton, Ontario.

In 1990, after the retirement of Dr. Faber, the office of Principal was rotated among the professors, on average every three years. More recently, the Board of Governors has decided to adopt a policy of term principalship, with the maximum term being nine years.

In 2010, Synod Burlington made a decision to change the operating name of the College to Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). The official name remains the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Also, in 2010, CRTS became an associate member of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada and the Commission on Accrediting of ATS. CRTS was granted candidacy status by ATS in 2011. Furthermore, in 2013 CRTS became a fully accredited member of ATS.

Below is a brief description of the further succession of professors within each department.

Old Testament department

In 2010, due to the imminent retirement of Dr. Van Dam, Rev. Dr. Jannes Smith of Albany, Western Australia, was appointed as Professor of Old Testament.

New Testament department

In 1986, Professor L. Selles retired and was succeeded by Rev. Jakob Geertsema, M.Th., of Surrey, BC. Professor Geertsema retired in 2001, and his successor was Rev. Gerhard H. Visscher, of Burlington, ON. Rev. Visscher received his doctorate in 2008.



Former Faculty (l-r): Dr. Van Dam, Dr. Gootjes, Rev. Geertsema, Dr. De Jong

Ecclesiology & Diaconiology department

Dr. K. Deddens became Professor emeritus in June 1990. His successor was the Rev. Dr. Jacobus De Jong of Burlington, ON. In the spring of 2003, the College community was saddened when it became evident that a debilitating illness prevented Dr. De Jong from continuing to teach. His successor was Rev. Dr. Adriaan J. de Visser of Pretoria, South Africa, who assumed his teaching responsibilities in September 2004. Later, in 2013, this department was divided into two. Dr. de Visser continued to teach in the Diaconiology department, and Dr. Theodore G. Van Raalte of Surrey, BC was appointed as a new professor in the department of Ecclesiology.

Dogmatology department

On January 1, 1990, Dr. J. Faber retired. His successor was Rev. Dr. Nicolaas H. Gootjes of Pusan, Korea. However, after many years of faithful service, the College was saddened when Dr. Gootjes became ill and was unable to continue teaching. Rev. Jason Van Vliet of Surrey, BC, was appointed as lecturer for the academic year 2009/2010. After receiving his doctorate in 2009, Dr. Van Vliet was formally appointed by synod as professor.



The current CRTS Faculty (l-r):
Dr. Smith, Dr. Van Vliet, Dr. Van Raalte,
Dr. de Visser, Dr. Visscher

From the initial desire in 1954, to the official opening in 1969 and the first graduating class in 1971, right up to the present day with modern facilities and five full-time faculty, it is clear that the Lord has blessed the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary far more abundantly than we asked for or even imagined (Eph 3:20). As this brief historical overview has indicated, there have been difficult days along the way. However, also then the Lord has proven faithful and provided all that was needed when it was required. May our gracious God continue to bless CRTS. May his Word always be the light on our path (Ps 119:105) and may his Name receive all the praise and glory (Rom 11:36).