

INTERVIEW About Creating a Third Way

This August 2022, Dr. Phil Teeuwsen, Dean of the School of Education at Redeemer University, and Dr. Adrian Guldemond, retired educator in Hamilton, former Executive Director of the OACS, sat down to discuss the current condition of Christian Education in Ontario. The occasion was the publication of Dr. Guldemond's new book, *Creating A Third Way: A History of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools-1952-2018*. Part of their discussion follows:

Teeuwsen: What is your latest book about?

Guldemond: The main narrative is the growth of the Christian Schools within the Dutch Reformed Tradition in Ontario after World War Two. Specifically, the book is about the provincial leadership role of the OACS in encouraging the development of a professional and comprehensive organizational framework for the 10 schools operating in the early 1950s. By 2002 that handful had grown to a federation of 78 schools with a staff of 15 and a significant political outreach. In Canada there were 140 schools and two University Colleges, Redeemer in Hamilton and King's in Edmonton.

While the communities were pretty clear about the Kingdom vision behind the schools - Abraham Kuyper's sphere sovereignty doctrine - these new immigrants were not well informed about educational practices in Ontario. The OACS Staff, Board and Committees filled that vacuum by providing advice on a host of practical problems, such as building codes, contract format, certification, salaries, insurances, pensions and related legal requirements like taxes.

Then in the 1970s, attention turned to the quality of the curriculum materials in the classroom. There was great interest in creating distinctively Christian resources, but there was little agreement on what that meant in practice. The debates between the progressives and the traditionalists raged on for about a decade, before a coherent philosophy was finally implemented across the province.

Teeuwsen: Why did you write this particular book? After all, in your 40-year career you've already written articles on most educational issues.

Guldemond: First, I promised the OACS Board in 2006 that I would write this history as a retirement project. I also promised to work on an archive project for Christian education in Canada. Second, there are currently no adequate histories of the

Christian school movement in Canada. There are archives at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but there are no archives in Ontario, or Canada.

Third, more importantly, the OACS history reveals an inspiring story of ordinary people doing extra-ordinary things with faith and moxy. Back in the 1960s this pluralistic vision was *avant garde* and ahead of its time. Today this vision would still have had the capacity to improve Ontario's educational systems. This working solution needed to be recorded for posterity.

During the COVID pandemic we were all stuck at home, and I decided to push hard to finish this project. The political mess in the public schools reminded me that our Reformed tradition had some really good solutions to the systemic gridlock in the public school system.

Fourth, one of the themes in the book is how the internal divisions among Calvinists impeded the outreach impact of the OACS. I wanted to alert our Reformed communities of the damage done to Christ's Name when Christians keep majoring in minors. The historical record shows that it is possible to have serious but constructive debates without sinking the ship, so to speak.

Teeuwsen: **Although I've read your earlier book, I'm not sure that you explain what moxy is in either one. I get the faith part, but what is moxy?**

Guldemond: I wanted to use a new word for the *Dutch* character part of the "Ora et Labora" motive. In the book I use the words *audacious*, and even *brash*, to describe this group of Calvinistic immigrants. Fresh off the boat with no money, they are seriously talking about God's Kingdom. More surprisingly, they planned to build it in short order...on their own! That's moxy, a certain "can-do" spirituality not restrained by circumstances. I'm sure God was smiling, occasionally.

Teeuwsen: **Why would anyone want to read a history book? As you well know, history is no longer a required subject in most schools.**

Guldemond: History used to be a required subject because it creates a common culture memory for the community. Without that basis communities polarize. All the current divisions in the reformed (and others) communities fall along standard points of contention for the last six decades. As the Preacher noted, there is nothing new under the sun. Some communities learn how to deal with diversity of opinion, while others fracture under the pressure from purists. Some collapse under the weight of the self-righteous mind, the zealots, while others humbly adjust some principles and grow.

Historical studies reveal how communities and societies deal with the inevitable dynamic changes which God designed into our world as it moves to completion. History can reveal the recurring social patterns which cloak/reveal human nature, and cultural trends which reveal the soul's desire for beauty, goodness and meaning in a given period. Such discernment should still be a goal of Christian Education today. Without the temporal perspectives provided by historical studies, current affairs are just partisan bickering.

Hope for tomorrow can be strengthened by utilizing the Reformed Tradition's standard philosophic tools for a sound analysis of cultural trends and ideological camps. I describe them in the book and recommend them for educators as well.

Teeuwesen: **How will this story help promote Christian Education? As you know from your long involvement with Redeemer (I believe you were on the original Board of Governors) we have had our ups and downs. Many faculty members are hoping to witness ups, not downs.**

Guldemand: Great question. One of the frequently quoted devotional texts in the good old days was the one about *not* building a house on sand (Matthew 7: 24-27). The Lord's clear message was that the character of the foundations (rock) matters if you wish to build sustainable organizations with a future. The early leaders of the school movement were clear about the necessity for deep pillars of a philosophic type. One cannot build an alternative school system if one adopts the superficial fashions of the day. Besides, most of these fashions, especially in ethics, reflect non-Christian anthropologies. Why trade the blessing of God's Word for a bowl of pottage?

Teeuwesen: **What is the most exciting section of the book?**

Guldemand: The two chapters which describe the Justice Campaigns to remedy the grave injustice perpetrated on faith-based schools in Ontario. Many immigrants were most upset about the fact that Catholic schools received government funding, while Calvinist, Jewish and Muslim schools did not. Not a penny! This Government policy was clearly irrational and racist. Hence the OACS led many campaigns to change government policies both at the federal tax level and at the provincial grants level. It was very rewarding to achieve the Equity in Education Tax Credit on our 50th anniversary in 2002. We had a Gala Celebration in Oakville.

Teeuwesen: Did you provide any lessons for the future of Christian Education?

Guldemond: Yes, I put nine lessons in the Retrospective chapter. However, they only make sense if you understand the texture and the principles of the Dutch Reformed Tradition and the basic premises of Ontario politics. Respectfully, to get to the pearls of wisdom, one will have to read the book.

Teeuwesen: Do you have any advice for future historians?

Guldemond: Yes, we need more research and information about the contours of Christian education in Canada. As the pioneers of the movement are passing onto Glory, we need to set up archives for the original school documents. Human memory is a very fickle thing. Real documents can be a necessary reality check. A request to all Christian education supporters is: Please call us before you toss those old minutes and newsletters.

Teeuwesen: Where can we learn more?

Guldemond: The book is available from Monarch Educare by mail and from the Redeemer University Bookstore in person.