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*The Evil Which
Lies Within*

The Open Bible

*Eligibility
for Office*



*What is
the Lord's Day?*



R. Aasman

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The Evil Which Lies Within

The fact is, all people are conceived and born depraved, and they are all “inclined by nature to hate God and their neighbour.”

Depravity scale

In recent years, research psychiatrists in the United States have been developing a “depravity scale” which will assist the judicial system in sentencing murderers. Determining *whether* a person is a murderer is one thing a court has to ascertain. But *how* and *why* a murder is committed needs to be established for the purpose of sentencing. For instance, there will be a different sentence for the mild-mannered person who was provoked to anger and violence and unexpectedly killed someone, than for someone who prolonged the act of murder, accompanying it with torture and sexual abuse, and derived tremendous pleasure from doing so. Basically forensic psychiatrists are saying that there is evil in this world and it can be measured. By developing a Depravity Scale that measures evil, courts and juries will no longer make their judgments based on the inconsistency of subjective emotions but on the consistency of a carefully measured index of evil. In this way, the murderer will consistently receive his or her just desserts.

From a theological point of view the Depravity Scale raises some questions. Evil is not just something to be measured in a murderer. The fact is, all people are conceived and born depraved, and they are all “inclined by nature to hate God and their neighbour.” At the same time, I appreciate that in an age where it is popular to excuse bad behaviour because of psychological problems or because of negative experiences in one’s life, there is blunt talk of evil which lies within people and the need to hold people accountable for that. This can only bode well for America and for the American justice system.

Close to home

Only a few days after articles on the Depravity Scale started appearing in Canadian newspapers, a deadly evil manifested itself in horrific fashion in our own country. March

3, 2005, proved to be the blackest day for Canada’s national police since the Northwest Rebellion in 1885. In cold blood, James Roszko, 46, shot and killed four RCMP constables: Anthony Gordon, 28, Lionide Johnston, 32, Brock Myrol, 29, and Peter Schiemann, 25. This took place near the tiny hamlet of Rochfort Bridge, only 110 km from Edmonton. The officers were present on Roszko’s farm for the purpose of maintaining the peace while a vehicle was being repossessed. While there, the officers discovered a small marijuana growing operation and a vehicle chop shop. The obvious question is why anyone would kill four policemen and then commit suicide when all he had to do was let them take away a pickup truck on which he had defaulted payment. It is a question that haunts the RCMP, the families of the four young slain constables, and our society as a whole.

The murderer

Because James Roszko took his own life, his actions will never be brought to trial. This case will be one for the text books. His horrific actions will generate a lot of discussion regarding the why and the how he did it, and what could be done to prevent such actions by others in the future. Since I am writing this only a few days after the event, there are a lot of facts not yet made public. But some facts were made public within hours of the quadruple murder and single suicide. These were not the actions of a man who spontaneously and unpredictably lashed out in violence. On the contrary, everyone who knew him seemed completely unsurprised by what he did. This was a man whose entire lifestyle and attitude exuded an evil which pulsed with violence, hatred, and disregard for authority – particularly the authority of police officers. To coin a slang phrase, he was a cop hater.



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Evil within

James Roszko was a loner from his teenage years, caught up in drugs, with a love for knives, guns, and conflict. On more than one occasion he shot someone. He was a crack shot who would shoot anyone who came on his property. He was also a sexual predator who sexually abused a ten-year old boy for seven years in a horrific fashion, forcing him to do so under threat of a fatal beating. He spent twenty-one months in prison for this crime – the only significant time he spent in jail. He had been psychiatrically assessed and given a clean bill of health, but he was known to have a serious anger problem, always blaming everyone else for his problems, particularly the police. Although he was forbidden to own guns, he had many of them hidden around his property, including an illegal Heckler & Kock .308 automatic which apparently was the gun used on the constables. Regular police armour is useless against such a gun which also has the distinction of being an assault rifle. James Roszko was a violent and dangerous man; he even intimidated the police by stalking them and their families. When he was in court on weapon charges, witnesses mysteriously did not show up, apparently intimidated by Roszko.

This was a man whose entire lifestyle and attitude exuded an evil which pulsed with violence, hatred and disregard for authority – particularly the authority of police officers.

On the day of the shooting, his father stated emphatically about him, “A wicked devil. . . I feel he is not my son.” An in-law of the family stated, “He wasn’t happy unless he was in conflict . . . He had a life-long hatred of the cops.” A friend confided that Roszko said about his continual conflict with the police: “If anything happens, I will kill them and then kill myself.” His brother George was incensed that high-priced lawyers kept his younger brother out of jail all these years, adding, “With his record of crime, he should have been deemed a violent criminal and one who could not be rehabilitated.” Former police officers in that area spoke of the failure of the justice system to keep Roszko imprisoned in spite of his criminal past.

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One clear fact that emerges from the life and actions of James Roszko is that he had an overwhelming hatred for his fellow man in general and for police officers in particular. James Roszko was an evil man. Although the Alberta Hospital gave him a clean bill of health, there is no denying that he was a walking time bomb who sooner or later was going to kill someone. No one in the area of Rochfort Bridge seems surprised that he killed four police officers in cold blood.

What to do?

Some say the actions of James Roszko indicate that we need to get tougher with marijuana grow-ops and the gun registry. I doubt that either of these are a significant point of issue in this case. If our society is to be protected from such violence and evil, then police officers need to be empowered to deal with known criminals and the justice system needs to back them up by dealing appropriately with these criminals. Judging by his past actions of sexual abuse, violence, and weapon offences, James Roszko should have been behind bars. This is something that our government needs to look at closely and to address appropriately. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 13:

Last Sunday, churches in the area of Alberta where the killings took place were filled to capacity.

“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

Role of church

As Christians and as church we need to pray for those in authority over us. We are often disappointed by our secular government and courts, and no doubt we are not happy when a police officer pulls us over for a traffic offence. But these



men and women have been placed in authority over us by God for the sake of peace and order in our society. They need to know they have our respect and our prayers. Please do pray for them.

The death of those four young policemen in rural Alberta will remain in our thoughts for a long time. They should not have died. At least their tragic deaths should renew our society’s respect for the law and for a determination to deal with evil appropriately when it rears its ugly head.

One final note: last Sunday, churches in the area of Alberta where the killings took place were filled to capacity. A lot of people have been seeking answers from the preaching. I understand that murders of police officers tend to have that kind of an effect on society. May this be an opportunity for the church to proclaim that there is only one solution to dealing with evil, and that is in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

B.J. Berends

The Open Bible

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MATTHEW 13:52

“There is an open Bible, and. . . it must remain open!”
Revelation 22:10

Near the end of Revelation, the Lord said to his apostle John, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.” This is in connection with what Daniel was told after he received his prophetic visions towards the end of the Old Testament, visions touching the future, visions of severe persecution of God’s covenant people by brute world-powers, specifically the one led by Antiochus Epiphanes who ruled from 175-164 BC.

We may consider this oppressor the forerunner of the man of lawlessness, the anti-Christ. This king sought to replace the only true religion with the pagan customs of the Greeks. Worship of the only true God had to be suspended. All the religious ceremonies were strictly forbidden. In fact, the prophet Daniel gave such an accurate picture of what was going to happen that many present-day “scholars” theorize that the second part of the book Daniel must have been written by someone else. However, we who believe that the Bible is divinely inspired, and that God is the God of the ages, will immediately accept that Daniel is the author of the whole book.

Daniel is charged not to publicize his prophecy. Unlike John at the end of Revelation, Daniel is told to seal up the words until the hour appointed by God. It was still going to be many years, at

least three centuries, before this prophecy was going to be fulfilled. That’s why Daniel had to roll up the scroll and seal it, until some time in the distant future, when the Lord God wanted to open it up for a specific purpose. He wanted to convince his people living in that future time that He is the God of the ages, and that He is the One who is in control of all world events. They would have to learn to understand that his prophetic Word was true and trustworthy. It would prove to his people that this one-time sealed prophecy did not have its origin in Daniel, but that it had come from Him, the eternal and ever present God. For Daniel, too, had been carried along by the Holy Spirit in what he was told to record and seal.

Well, there is no talk of sealing the testimony of the Lord as given in the book of Revelation. The apostle John not only had to record everything the Lord told and showed him, but He also received the word to reveal it all. This meant that there was no longer any part of Scripture hidden. There was now a completely open Bible. Nothing was allowed to be kept back from his people, from the Church of Christ.

In the New Testament the members of the Church had to know all that God had revealed over the course of the ages, from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. This Revelation of God, as recorded in

the Bible, is now open from cover to cover. It is to be kept open in the Church, so that the whole counsel of God will continue to be proclaimed from Lord’s Day to Lord’s Day. This one undivided Word of God will be kept open at home, and will be read both collectively by the family around the table and personally from day to day in our “inner” room.

Only in that way will we be able to accept and know the truth of the saying “the time is near.” Only in that way will we have some understanding of what the Lord wills and permits to take place. Only in that way will we be able to observe the wonderful workings of the Son of Man, in the gathering and preservation of his catholic universal church. Only in that way will we be able to discern what the man of lawlessness is presently allowed to achieve. Only someone who knows of the open Bible, who under all circumstances keeps it open, will be able to hear the footsteps of our Lord and Saviour coming closer. And it is only he who will then await his Saviour’s appearance with ardent desire.

Therefore, let us show in word and deed that we treasure this one complete Revelation of God, by keeping it open in every sphere of life, to his glory and our own salvation.

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 33



Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.

When you see a crawling caterpillar, you are looking at an unfinished animal. It is not yet the beautiful butterfly it will become. After a while it finds a spot in a corner of the wall or under a window sill. It winds thin, silk-like threads around its body. These form a shell around it, a cocoon, which looks like a wad of cotton wool. But after some time, a beautiful butterfly emerges from the cocoon. The old caterpillar has become a new animal.

Much more could be said about caterpillars and butterflies. But now we want to talk about people who need to change. You, too, must change from ugly to beautiful. Not on the outside, but inside.

Are you and I ugly on the inside? If Adam and Eve in paradise had been obedient, their children would have been good. But sin has made everything ugly. My sins and your sins make us really ugly on the inside. We are just like a

caterpillar that spins threads about itself. We spin threads of unfriendliness, and threads of evil and disobedience. We become a caterpillar in a cocoon, closing ourselves off from God.

We are often like that, but this should not go on. Your cocoon must be broken open. Those sinful threads must be removed. You cannot do that all by yourself; the Holy Spirit must help you. And when you pray for it, then He will help you. He uses the Bible for that, for the Bible shows you that you must fight against the ugliness inside you.

So you must fight to break the threads around you, just like the caterpillar. Break away those threads of sin. A caterpillar becomes a beautiful butterfly. You too can become beautiful for God. You too can begin to enjoy doing what God likes and wants. Detest sin more and more.

The Catechism calls these good works. Already in the previous Lord's Day you read about them. Are Christians the only ones who do good? No, other people do things that are good. However, if they do not do these works out of love to God, that is sin. Then they are not really good works.



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What is the Lord's Day?

Part 1: Biblical Background, Old Testament

God demanded that his covenant people rest on the Sabbath Day to show that they believed God was their Creator and would take care of them.

If we are going to explore what the Lord's Day is, then everyone understands that we need to begin with the Old Testament and see what it teaches about the Sabbath Day.

Exodus 16

Where do we begin? Let us begin at Exodus 16:23. There we find the first record of obligatory Sabbath observance. You know the story. Israel was just in the desert. The Lord was feeding them with manna from heaven. The Lord gave them enough on the sixth day (Friday) so that they could gather twice as much and so have enough for the seventh day—a day the Lord called the Sabbath Day. There would not be any manna on the Sabbath Day. The extra they gathered on Friday would be enough for them on Sabbath.

Some of the people went out on the Sabbath Day to gather manna but found none. This made the Lord very angry. He told them that they were to stay still on the Sabbath Day and not go out. They were to rest.

Exodus 20

This command to rest on the Sabbath Day was set in stone, literally, when God gave the Ten Commandments. The Fourth Commandment says:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord

your God. On it you shall not do any work... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

This is when and where keeping the Sabbath Day holy, resting from work, became an official covenant obligation. That is clear from Nehemiah 9:13-14:

You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees, and laws through your servant Moses.

Although keeping the Sabbath Day became a covenant obligation at Mt. Sinai, it had for Israel creatorial significance. It commemorated God's work of creation and God's rest. The Fourth Commandment as we have it in Exodus 20 ties the keeping of Sabbath to God's resting on the seventh day of creation week. There we read in Genesis 2:2,3:

By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that He had done.

God demanded that his covenant people rest on the Sabbath Day to show that they believed God was their Creator and would take care of them.

Of course a question wants to be asked at this point: Was the Sabbath Day there between Genesis 2 and Exodus 16? Did the patriarchs observe the Sabbath Day? We cannot say with certainty. We can point to how the Lord told Israel to "remember" the Sabbath Day. This seems to indicate a restoration of usage. Perhaps an originally commanded Sabbath Day had been forgotten. The seventh day was holy from the beginning. There was religious activity from the beginning. The early patriarchs may have worshipped the Lord especially on the Sabbath. The fact, however, remains that there is no mention of obligatory Sabbath observance until Exodus 16. Arguments from silence do not convince either way.

Exodus 31

In Exodus 31 we read about how strictly Israel was to observe the Sabbath Day. Anyone who did any work on the Sabbath Day was to be put to death. In verse 16 God calls the Sabbath Day a covenant. It was a sign between Him and his people. It was a holy day. Working on it would desecrate it. Anyone who would desecrate the holy day by working on it would trample this covenant sign underfoot. And so he would be cut off from God's people – excommunicated – and put to death.

Exodus 35

These very strict sanctions are repeated in Exodus 35:1. Anyone who does any work on the Sabbath Day was to be put to death. They were not even allowed to light a fire in their homes on the Sabbath Day (v 3).

They had to observe the Sabbath Day even in doing something as holy and great as designing and building the Tabernacle of God.

The law about what to do with Sabbath-breakers as we find it in Exodus 31 and 35 is given in the context of the building of the Tabernacle. They had to observe the Sabbath Day even in doing something as holy and great as designing and building the Tabernacle of God.

Numbers 15

In Numbers 15:32-36 we read an account of a Sabbath-breaker being put to death. A man was found to be gathering wood on the Sabbath Day. The witnesses brought the man to Moses. Moses did not know what to do with the man and about his offence. The Lord said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp." He had to be excommunicated by the church and put to death.

A very good rule of exegesis is to consider the context of a portion of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is the primary author of scripture. We believe that He did not haphazardly throw laws and narrative together. For instance, if a

piece of narrative is inserted in between laws, then we need to ask why the Holy Spirit arranged that part of Holy Scripture that way.

Here we find an instance of narrative following some law. What is the context in this case? It comes in the context of the Lord giving the law about unintentional sins and defiant sin. In the verses 22-29 of Numbers 15, the Lord gives laws about the sacrifices that are to be brought if someone sins "unintentionally." As Dr. Van Dam says in an article about the translation of the word "unintentional," this is referring to the sin of man "...as he wanders away from the demands of God, in his weakness as a sinful human being." Any sin committed because of human frailty could be forgiven. There was a sacrifice for it. But there was no sacrifice for defiant sin (Num 15:30-31). Defiant sin is sin with uplifted hand. It is sin committed in "...open apostasy and impenitent contempt for the law."

This is the only distinction made between sins: on the one hand, unintentional sin committed because of human weakness, repented of and forgiven; on the other hand, defiant sin committed with full knowledge of the law, of what one is doing, and with a hand raised in contempt for God. Someone who committed the latter sin was to be excommunicated.

That's the context in which we find the narrative of the Sabbath-breaker in Numbers 15:32-36. Contemptuous of the law – the covenant obligation – that forbade work on the Sabbath Day and commanded rest, he went out to gather wood. The church had to excommunicate him, to stone him to death. It seems an extreme punishment for picking up sticks on the Sabbath Day, but he was trampling the covenant underfoot.

Church News

Called to the church of Aldergrove, British Columbia:

Rev. R. Schouten
of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Declined the call to Orangeville, Ontario and Calgary, Alberta:

Rev. W. Bredenhof
home missionary of Smithers, British Columbia.

Accepted the call to Langley, British Columbia as co-pastor:

Rev. W. Bredenhof
home missionary of Smithers, British Columbia.

Deuteronomy 5

In the second edition of the Ten Commandments, as found in Deuteronomy, the Sabbath Day receives another layer of significance. There, as you know, another motive is added for observing the Sabbath Day. The motive is (Deut 5:15):

Israel's observance of the Sabbath Day was a sign of their special covenantal relationship with the Lord.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath Day.

Now the Sabbath Day was said to have redemptive significance as well as creatorial significance.

The Prophets

The prophets also spoke about the Sabbath Day. Isaiah 56:2 says that the man who keeps the Sabbath Day without desecrating it is blessed. Again in Isaiah 58:13ff, an extended beatitude is pronounced upon the one who keeps the Sabbath Day holy:

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.

In Ezekiel 46, we can read about how the gate in the inner court of the temple that faced east was to be opened (only) on the Sabbath Day, and how the prince of God's people was to enter through the gate into the temple yard. He was to stand there in worship while the priests were to offer sacrifices on his behalf.

In the prophets not only do we find positive statements about the blessedness and joy of the Sabbath Day; we also read prophetic indictments against Sabbath-breakers. In Jeremiah 17:19ff, the prophet forbade in no uncertain terms any Sabbath work. They were not allowed to carry any load on the Sabbath Day, either out of their houses or through the streets of the city. If they would carry a load or do any work, God would burn the city with unquenchable fire.

Amos indicts the people who longed for the Sabbath Day to be over so that they could get back to work and make money. If we go to the end of Old Testament history, we can read about Nehemiah, the governor of Jerusalem, getting angry about Jews and

Gentiles working on the Sabbath Day (Neh 13:15ff).

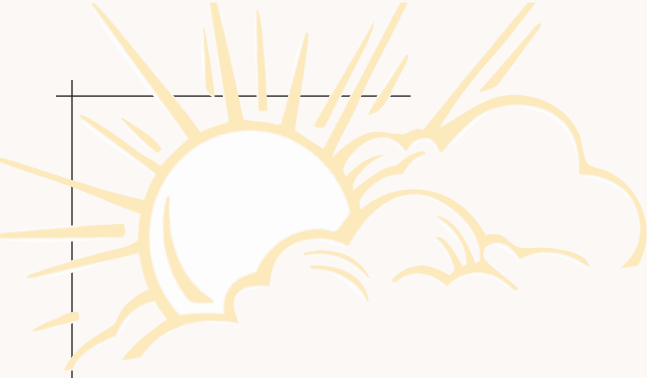
If we summarize the Old Testament teaching of the Sabbath Day, then we conclude that keeping the Sabbath Day became a covenant obligation at Mt. Sinai in the Fourth of the Ten Commandments. It had for Israel both creatorial and redemptive significance. Of special significance is the deeper layer added in the Ten Commandments as they were re-given in Deuteronomy 5. That Israel was to commemorate the rest God gave his people from bondage in Egypt on the Sabbath Day shows that the Sabbath is part of God's counsel of salvation. Desecrating the Sabbath Day by working was breaking covenant. Their observance of the Sabbath Day was a sign of their special covenantal relationship with the Lord. Desecration of it was trampling God's grace under foot. And therefore, gathering wood, lighting a fire, carrying a load, or any other work, was punishable by death at the hands of the congregation.

Greater Sabbath legislation

We also do well to remember that the Sabbath Day was part of a greater Sabbath legislation. In Leviticus 22-25 we read law about the Old Testament festivals. There was the Sabbath Day, the Sabbath Year (every seventh year) and the Year of Jubilee – the seventh Sabbath Year. As Ezekiel 20:12 says, after God had set his people free from bondage in Egypt, He had given them his Sabbaths (plural). Jubilee and the Sabbath Year were about redemption. So was the Sabbath Day. All the Sabbath legislation spoke of salvation and it reached its climax in the year of Jubilee.

This article series was originally a speech delivered at the Burlington Reformed Study Centre.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“The LORD is my shepherd. . . .”

Psalm 23:1a

In this ray of sunshine we would like to focus on our Shepherd who guides us and protects us through all of life's paths. What does a good shepherd actually do? What can we learn and how do we then benefit from listening to our Shepherd?

When we open our Bibles, then we learn how Jesus is referred to as a shepherd in several passages in the New Testament. In John 10:11 we read, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, so Jesus, the good shepherd, cares for those who follow in his ways. The shepherd owns the sheep and has so much love for his sheep that He will even lay down his life for us.

In Hebrews 13:20b we read, “That great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.”

In 1 Peter 5:4 we can see how Christ is also referred to as the Chief Shepherd: “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” The Chief Shepherd here is Jesus Christ. This refers to his second coming, when He will judge all the peoples.

Going back to Psalm 23 we see how David writes and confesses with absolute confidence: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil.” How can David say that he fears no evil? We live in a world that is completely filled with sin and evil. The Lord, his Good Shepherd, is ever with David and protects him from all harm and danger. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ traveled through the valley of the shadow of death. He took the sins of his people on Himself and became the object of God's burning wrath. He was nailed to a cross, and cast into deep darkness and brought to the open doors of hell. Indeed, He laid down his life for his sheep. Having died and risen, the Good Shepherd is able to lead his sheep safely through death itself in order that they may live in righteousness and holiness before God. Death can so often cast a frightening shadow over us because we are so entirely helpless in its presence. We can often struggle with other enemies as well,

such as pain, suffering, diseases, and handicaps; but strength and courage cannot overcome death. Death brings an earthly finality. Therefore the only one who can bring us safely through these times is our Shepherd: the God of Life.

When we follow Him, He will lead us, comfort us, and bless us; not only now, but more importantly to live with Him in all perfection in life eternal. Yet we live in a world filled with sin and imperfections. How then can we seek a good shepherd? Open your Bibles to Ezekiel 34 and take some time to read this chapter. Here we can learn how the sovereign Lord criticized Israel's leaders for taking care of themselves rather than taking care of their people. Then He promised that a true Shepherd, the Messiah, would come and take care of the people.

A good shepherd will take care of his flock and keep his sheep together with a protective hand. This protection must be done in love, ensuring that the sheep have the good pastures to graze in. A good shepherd will also take care of the sick and strengthen the weak, and search for the lost, with a gentle and guiding hand.

May we be comforted and feel protected in the knowledge that we have a Chief Shepherd who watches and tends and gently guides us in the ways that we must go. Take heed to his staff, when we go wayward. In being meek, submit to our Shepherd who knows the “green pastures” and the “quiet waters” that will restore us.

*Loving Shepherd of Thy sheep,
All Thy lambs in safety keep;
Nothing can Thy power withstand,
None can pluck them from Thy hand.*

*Where Thou leadest may they go,
Walking in Thy steps below;
Then, before Thy Father's throne,
Saviour, claim them for Thine own.*

Hymn 45:1,4

Birthdays in May:

- 4** **DEBBIE VEENSTRA will be 31**
RR 1, Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0
- 10** **ROB DE HAAN will be 40**
Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 30** **BERNIE DEVOS will be 30**
40 Kerman Avenue, Grimsby, ON L3M 3W5

Address Correction for:

James Boone

1020 Abbeydale Drive NE, Calgary, AB T2A 6H5

Congratulations to all who are celebrating their birthday this month. Also to James Boone who celebrated his birthday in March. We hope that you will receive some mail with your correct address printed now. May God graciously bless you all in this new year with good health and happiness. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman

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Press Releases

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held on March 11, 2005

On behalf of the convening church of Burlington-Waterdown, Rev. J. Huijgen called the meeting to order. He read Mark 8:27-38 and meditated briefly on Christ's warning not to speak about Him. He requested the singing of Hymn 21:1, 3 and led in prayer. He then welcomed the delegates.

The church of Burlington-Waterdown examined the credentials. The churches were properly represented. There were two instructions.

Rev. Huijgen noted the continued vacancy of Burlington South and wished them the Lord's blessing and wisdom as they move forward. He also noted that on this day a prayer service is being held in our sister churches in The Netherlands on the eve of a new synod which will deal with some crucial matters.

Rev. Huijgen then declared classis constituted. The following officers took their place: chairman: Rev. G. Nederveen; vice-chairman: Rev. M. Jagt; clerk: Rev. J. Huijgen.

In his memorabilia, the chairman mentioned that the building project of the church of Toronto is going well; that the 't Hart and Togeretz families are going on furlough shortly and he wished them the Lord's blessings as they travel

through the churches; he also rejoiced with the church of Burlington Ebenezer in their upcoming fiftieth anniversary on May 1, 2005.

The provisional agenda was adopted with the inclusion of the two instructions.

Classis received the report of the treasurer. All is found to be in good order.

A report was submitted on the Fund for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry. No request for funds has been made. Classis accepted the recommendation not to assess the churches for 2005.

In accordance with Article 44 CO, the churches reported that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. In closed session advice was given to the churches of Toronto and Burlington Ebenezer on matters of discipline.

The Church of Flamborough was appointed to convene the next classis to be held on June 10 in the Burlington Ebenezer church building at 9:00 a.m. The following officers were suggested: chairman: Rev. J. Huijgen; vice-chairman: Rev. M. Jagt; clerk: Rev. G. Nederveen.

A question was asked about the process of church discipline.

Another was raised about the possibility of elders as classical moderamen.

The chairman asked whether censure was necessary. It was not required.

The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was approved for publication.

The chairman thanked the brothers for their good co-operation.

After the singing of Hymn 19:1, 2, 6, he closed the meeting with prayer.

*For classis,
M. Jagt, Vice-chairman*

Press Release of Classis Contracta Alberta of February 22, 2005

On behalf of the convening church, the Church at St. Albert, Rev. R. Bredenhof opens the meeting with the reading of Psalm 68:1-20; he leads in prayer. Rev. R. Bredenhof is chairman for Classis while Rev. R. Aasman is the clerk. Classis Contracta is convened for the specific purpose of approbating the call which the Church at Neerlandia has extended to Rev. J. Louwerse. The call is approbated with thankfulness to the Lord. Rev. W.B. Slomp is appointed to represent Classis at the installation of Rev. J. Louwerse on March 6, 2005.

After a very short meeting, Rev. R. Aasman closes in prayer.

*For Classis,
Richard Aasman*



Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is a grade 8 teacher and vice-principal at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario. To receive his sources or more information on this topic, he can be contacted at ksikkema@istop.com



Eligibility for Office

Introduction

How one educates his children sometimes has a bearing on perceptions of eligibility for church office. In one place, the question may be the qualification for office of a father who home schools in the presence of a Reformed day school, or who sends his children to a more broadly defined Christian school. Elsewhere, the issue may be the qualification of a brother who does not home school, but sends his children to a public or even a Christian school. The challenge may also be whether a brother qualifies who chooses a public over a Christian school. Even though moderate voices may be heard on these issues, the issues may divide and politicize communities, and distract from the honour due our Lord.

Meanwhile, it is not only about education that such issues arise. Historical examples could be cited, among others, about dress-codes, grooming customs, possession of certain items of home entertainment, preference for a particular Bible translation, a specific understanding of the fourth commandment, or the meaning of baptism. In this article, I discuss some principles that should be considered when there is controversy about the selection of office bearers.

Called to church office

The office is given to serve the household of God, and nomination to the office is therefore not a political, but a spiritual matter. Likewise, it ought to help

build the unity of faith, rather than confirm popularity, majority, or factional representation. Nomination also rightly seeks direction from and submission to the Word of God. In the same vein, we seek people with heart and zeal for the Lord and his church, who submit themselves to the Head of the church for the benefit of others. They have an attitude given by the Spirit of God, as evidenced by its fruits.

Nomination to the office is not a political matter, but a spiritual matter.

This spiritual character is recognized in our process of selection and ordination. Eligible brothers are selected and called with the involvement of the congregation and with prayer. This involvement recognizes that Christ lives and works in the congregation with his Spirit, and that members of the congregation are thereby equipped both to choose and to serve. A call to the office is then to use in regular service the gifts received from Christ for building up the Body of Christ, with a special mandate and authority to prepare or equip God's people for works of service. In line with 1 Corinthians 16:16-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, the congregation also respects the lawfully selected and ordained people who are over them in the Lord.

The spiritual nature of the office is further recognized when, to be ordained, a prospective office bearer must affirmatively answer the question, "Do you feel in your heart that God Himself, through his congregation, has called you to this office?" His work would be hampered and misdirected if he is not convinced that it is God's own call for him to serve the chief Shepherd's church. This conviction is not directed by emotion, but involves one's mental capacities and judgement, and spiritual discernment. As God's own call, it could not be based on an emotion or experience, even though the question uses the term "feel." It certainly is a humbling question to answer for one who knows his misery. Only if he also embraces his deliverance and has received God's gift of gratitude can he take on this noble task fully, humbly, and in faith.

Who qualifies

Who does qualify for church office, as even the holiest of men have but a small beginning of the obedience God asks of us? As Scripture itself gives characteristics that office bearers should and should not have, church councils will often read one of these passages before beginning the process of nomination. However, Scripture gives no comprehensive checklist to determine whether a person would be eligible. It does not directly address the specific questions raised in the introduction above. Furthermore, other passages also have a bearing on eligibility (for instance,

Rom 12; 1 Cor 12-14; Gal 5; Eph 4; Jam 3), and who is fully self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach, gentle, etc.? Only Christ perfectly meets all these requirements, and only in Him can office bearers be confident that their labour-done-in-weakness is not in vain. Rather, Scripture teaches us to look for certain kinds of men. Giving general standards that hold true for all times and places, and that supersede local and ever-changing specific questions, the Lord wants us to give the matter of eligibility for office in our situation some careful thought and consideration.

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The Reformed churches recognized this early on. For instance, the Genevan Church Order (1541) stipulated, “For elders, it will be desirable to elect. . . good-living and honourable men, without reproach and beyond all suspicion, above all who fear God and possess the gift of spiritual prudence.” Likewise, the Convent of Wesel (1568) noted about requirements for ordination, “One shall make every effort to find people who have the qualities Paul requires: They must be above reproach, pure in doctrine, and excellent in godliness and spiritual wisdom, whereby it will be especially useful if they have some insight in civil matters as well. Above all, they ought to be far removed from all ambition and desire for fame, yes even from suspicion of

such.” God allows for different solutions to our questions as long as we remain within the given parameters.

Thorny questions

Still, from time to time thorny questions arise regarding eligibility. The National Synod of Dordrecht (1578) was asked, “Should one bar an elder or deacon from office who, though capable to serve the Church, has a stubborn and recalcitrant wife?”¹ Synod Homewood-Carman (1958) considered whether a brother should be ordained as elder who had not joined the local Canadian Reformed school society, while in fact helping to establish an interdenominational Christian school.² Furthermore, councils may face difficulties with producing a full slate of eligible office bearers. In that regard, with reference to 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Haggai 1:4, Jude 20, and 1 Peter 2:5, Dr. C. Trimp (1982, pp. 9-10) wonders whether people are now too focused on themselves and their own house, while neglecting to prepare themselves and each other for office and building the house of the Lord. People whose focus is not on the things of the Lord should not be nominated. What, however, if people make certain choices that depart from standard practice?

In different times, places, and circumstances, Christians have made a (stronger or weaker) case for various choices mentioned above, and each has also been a matter of controversy and rejection. This alone should caution us to issue rash condemnations or quick justifications. What is justifiable in the eyes of some is not always so for others; what is locally or personally legitimate, is not by implication also universally valid. Moreover, as always,

councils who are faced with such thorny issues do well to carefully consider the reasons for a particular choice before jumping to conclusions.

Common consent

Sometimes the positions people take or choices they make may be questioned because they are a departure from commonly accepted ones. Such time-honoured positions or choices may begin to lead a life of their own, and come to be treated as absolutes, or principles. For instance, when immigrants first began to institute churches in the 1950s, they frequently faced local controversy about their varying ecclesiastical practices in the old country. Harmony was restored when they realized that scriptural principles allow for different practices, and they agreed with common consent on how to do things in the new country. Later resistance to a proposed (or implied) departure from such a practice may indicate how it, in turn, has come to lead a life of its own. The practice becomes, in effect, a social norm that describes how things ought to be done.

People whose focus is not on the things of the Lord should not be nominated.

However, a social norm, even within the church, is not the same as a scriptural principle, and to elevate it to that level would amount to binding consciences beyond Scripture.

Even the Church Order, which is an agreement among the churches on how we will live together orderly and in unity,

acknowledges that it is not a universal law, but may, and at times ought to be, changed (Art 76). It also wisely stipulates, however, that no one consistory, classis, or regional synod may make such changes by itself. Indeed, it is characteristic of the church and the communion of saints, as a body, that members have due consideration for each other if they are to live in true love and harmony. There is room for varying applications of scriptural principles, but living in true love and harmony would require that changes (or even new interpretations of agreements) should not be made unilaterally, without consideration for and discussion of their impact on others. Thus, we should keep the agreement until we agree to change it, even if we hardly have the patience to do so. That would also apply to established social norms.

The benefit of such consideration and discussion is not only that harmony is maintained, but also that God is honoured. After all, only through carefully and prayerfully searching the Scriptures will we find the parameters God sets for loving Him and our neighbour. Too easily do we set our own standards; too easily do we claim Christian freedom to justify our position without consideration for others; too easily do we forget that we are part of the body and are called to use our gifts for the benefit and well being of others. On the other hand, we should not lay burdens on each other that Scripture does not lay by requiring what it does not demand. Either way, we effectively rob God of his honour by acting as though we are wiser than God. Unless the applicable principles get discussed, explained, understood, and

agreed upon, we might find ourselves barring brothers from office whom God would not bar.

Wisdom

When a council must prepare a slate for upcoming elections of new office bearers, it is faced with a humbling and daunting task. It is humbling because the brothers are confronted with their own shortcomings and failures. It also is a daunting task, especially when there are issues brewing that could divide the congregation and drive its members into factions. At such times it can become very difficult to maintain a humble heart and attitude, and to find brothers who also have the fruit of the Spirit and a desire to use their gifts for the benefit and well being of their fellow members. May their deliberations be driven by the wisdom and Spirit of God.

A social norm, even within the church, is not the same as a scriptural principle.

Whether it pertains to often imperfect agreements, to choices that are perhaps no longer commonly accepted, or to our understanding of how things ought to be done, we should always consider the principles the Lord sets before us. Whether the questions relate to education or to other issues, we should also be considerate of people's reasons to make a choice other than the prevailing one, and be prepared to set

our personal preferences aside. There should be no reason to bar an otherwise suitable brother from nomination for office if his particular choice does not violate scriptural principles, does not harm or negate the communion of saints, and does not generate conflict with a common understanding or agreement. Hence, the brother should also, in good conscience, be able to sign the subscription form, and if it turns out that an agreement no longer serves its purpose, we should be prepared to take the agreed upon route to change it. If a brother has made a controversial choice, we should be prepared to discuss that with him, and see whether it should indeed be a permanent impediment to his serving in office and leading the congregation in love and unity with spiritual discernment. We seek a spiritual unity that shows itself in word and in deed, and God is honoured if his people live together in such true love and unity.

¹ Without further grounds or considerations, Synod responded, "As the woman would be an affront to the Church, he shall be kept from office; however, if he already serves, he should not be deposed" (F.L. Rutgers, *Acta*, (1899/1980), p. 265).

² It decided that Classis West of September 5, 1957, had erred in effectively defining a (new) prerequisite for office in the church of the Lord.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone willing to respond or interact to an article or anyone willing to write an article for us is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman (bouwman@surepost.net).

Letter to the Editor

RE: Readers' Forum, Volume 54, No. 4

Dear Editor,

I would like to express my appreciation to Brother G.J. Nordeman for alerting the readers of *Clarion* to the dangers of operating local church government as if incorporated. There are, however, additional points surrounding this issue which should also be considered and discussed.

While Br. Nordeman feels that actual incorporation is not at issue, I understand that there are Canadian Reformed Churches which have in fact discussed whether they should incorporate. For the reasons that Br. Nordeman adduces, to do this would be in opposition to Scripture, our confessions, and our Church Order. Organizations which operate in response to scriptural directive, unlike businesses, may not be incorporated.

One justification put forward for incorporating is the idea that the government somehow demands this of us. This is simply not the case. Churches and other unincorporated bodies have historically operated under various government acts and there is no reason to discontinue doing so. Another reason given is that of minimizing responsibility of the individual members of the board of directors. This again is not the case. In fact, this would be reason not to incorporate. We should not try to find ways to shun our accountability before God and man. In fact, directors of a corporation are more exposed to legal action than board members of unincorporated bodies.

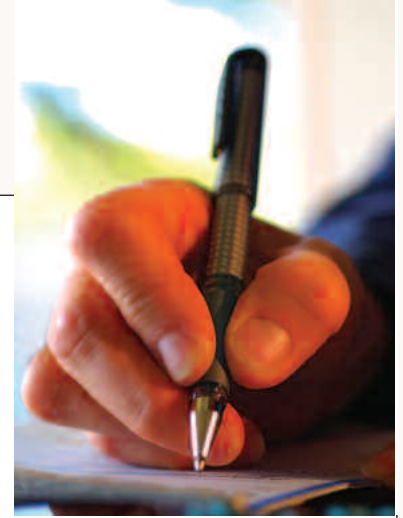
One aspect of incorporation that must be taken into account is that the membership of the organization must approve of all acts and decisions made and done by the board of directors. In the church situation this results in a Congregationalist form of church government. The congregation (membership) becomes the final arbiter of the decisions of council/consistory (the board). While the elders must rule in an even-handed manner, taking into account the

views of the congregation (cf. 1 Pet 5:2,3), they are the authority of the church under Christ. The final decision and responsibility rests with them. With incorporation, the congregation, by law, becomes the highest authority.

A second important aspect that Br. Nordeman does not mention is the fact that, as a corporation, the church is governed by rule of majority, rather than obedience to God's Word and the Church Order. Even if the articles of incorporation state that the organization will be governed in accordance with such, in principle, it is no longer true. The will of the majority must prevail according to the laws and regulations dealing with corporations. Consistories should always strive to make informed decisions by consensus, convinced that the decision is in obedience to Scripture, confessions, and the Church Order. I realise that in some circumstances, consistories and councils may have to make some decisions by majority vote. These decisions must always be consciously made in obedience to Scripture and confessions. Under the laws of our land, in a corporation this is not a requirement, as the majority has the final say. This is a fundamental change in principle. While the individuals involved can strive to act in obedience, the incorporated organization acts only by the will of the majority.

This is an issue which must have our attention, for the Canadian Reformed Church community, but also as this relates to our discussions with the United Reformed Churches, as it is common practice for them to be incorporated.

Respectfully submitted,
George Helder
Hamilton, ON



By **W.L. Bredenhof**

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof has accepted
the call to co-pastor the
Canadian Reformed Church at
Langley, British Columbia.
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**An Unexpected Journey:
Discovering Reformed
Christianity**

Written by W. Robert Godfrey
(Phillipsburg: P & R, 2004).
Additional Information: Paperback, 150
pages, \$9.99 US.

In many of our churches across the country, Reformed identity seems to be a hot issue. Especially since most of us have never had to make some kind of ecclesiastical stand for Reformed character, the question is pressing: what does it mean to be Reformed? The younger generations are not as certain on this point as the older ones.

Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, a professor at Westminster Seminary California and a minister in the United Reformed Churches, has the potential to give us some much-needed guidance on this issue. His life experience qualifies him to point out not only what it means to be Reformed, but also the value of being Reformed. Dr. Godfrey grew up in a

nominal Methodist home and became acquainted with the Christian Reformed Church through a high school friend. Through that friend and his family, and the witness of the Alameda CRC (near San Francisco), Dr. Godfrey was converted to the Christ of the Scriptures and the Reformed faith.

An Unexpected Journey chronicles Godfrey's life experiences and how he has come to value Calvinism as the faith of the Scriptures. Intertwining personal experience and Scriptural teaching, this winsome little book is warm and inviting. A sense of humour pervades it. One example: Dr. Godfrey tells us of his studies with the Reformation expert Lewis Spitz. "History is fun – or should be. Dr. Spitz used to say that history is so inherently interesting that one has to work very hard to make it dull. He would then add that many historians are very hard working."

Since Godfrey's area of expertise is Reformation era church history, you can expect to find this laced throughout the book. But Godfrey also covers other

important areas as well: worship, the value of intellectual pursuits, the importance of spiritual disciplines, the magnificence of God's promises in Scripture, and many others. In the concluding chapter, Godfrey gives some profitable thoughts to the Psalter and the Christian life. He has a deep appreciation for the Psalms: "They have focused and united for me the theology, the worship, the piety, and the church life taught in the Scriptures. They have united for me head, heart, and mouth in the praise of the Lord. They are the soul of the Reformed faith."

This personable volume will be helpful for readers to form (or reform?) their own understanding of what it means to be Reformed. Then it would be helpful to give to your non-Reformed Christian friends as you seek to explain why you are Reformed. It might also be a useful book for pre-confession classes or study groups. Familiarity has an old cliché that doesn't need repeating. That old cliché is the reason this book needs reading!

