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Gambling

Not Satisfied to be Saved Alone

The Candlestand Statement

Gambling: the downward spiral of self-destruction

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Gambling

There is a growing awareness that gamblers are involved in a downward spiral of self-destruction.

It's a sunny and warm Monday morning as I drive past a local casino on the way to a pastoral visit. Incredibly, the large parking lot is packed with cars, pickup trucks, SUV's, and motor homes. Apparently a lot of people have nothing better to do on a beautiful summer morning than seek their entertainment in a gambling house. There is something pathetic about this waste of time. But there is a darker and more insidious side to this. There is a growing awareness that gamblers are involved in a downward spiral of self-destruction. This can involve anything from depression to financial problems to marriage break-ups and even to suicide. This casino on a beautiful Monday morning is a symptom of a society in deep trouble.

Some history

Gambling is betting money or something of value on an event of uncertain outcome in the hopes of winning even more in return. It is the desire to receive material gain without having properly worked for it or receiving it along such normal lines as inheritance.

It also needs to be stated clearly that gambling is a problem in our church community.

Many readers will remember a time when gambling was considered a crime and a vice in Canada. They will remember a time when there was little or no talk of lotteries, casinos, VLT's and online Internet gambling. It is true that in 1892 the Criminal Code of Canada was amended to tolerate gambling in certain circumstances, and ironically, that included such things as bingos in church basements. But it was not until 1969 that gambling was no longer considered a crime and the provinces gained the right to conduct and regulate lotteries. Lotteries proliferated in the 70's and 80's; private casinos started to spring up in many of the provinces; by the 90's VLT's were introduced (except for Ontario and British Columbia). A more recent form of gambling that has become prevalent is online gambling.

Why the change?

The reason that gambling in its many forms has been widely embraced by our society is directly related to the general moral decay of our culture. The biblical warnings against the love of money and against coveting are scarcely heeded by many Canadians. Even the basic moral sense of right and wrong, of what is helpful and destructive, go unheeded. This point is easily proved by checking current literature (this includes the Internet) on gambling problems. No one seems to suggest that gambling is inherently wrong or dangerous. People speak of "responsible gambling" and "prevention of problem gambling." In other words, gambling is not a problem. Abuse of gambling is a problem. That tells you something about the current state of morals in our country.

However, there is something else involved in the popularity of gambling in our country. Governments love it. I take as an example the province in which I live. As you may well know, Alberta is prospering because of its natural resources. But it also receives at least five percent of its provincial revenues from gambling, which is estimated at almost $1.2 billion. In general, the gambling-related profits of our provinces approach what comes in from taxes on fuel and liquor. No wonder the provinces have been extremely reluctant to heed danger warnings about gambling. It is a lucrative business.

Warnings

It took almost twenty-five years before provincial governments started to take heed of the terrible destruction that gambling was causing in people's lives. In the early to mid 90's some programs were being set up for problem gamblers.

But it has taken time to acknowledge the real toll. Recent articles in a number of newspapers have summarized statistical data about the number of marriage collapses, job losses, and suicides among gamblers. Gambling has similar problems to those found among alcoholics and drug addicts. I do not have the space here to outline all the problems. But we mention a few. Gambling can lead to marital problems, child neglect, poor work performance, crime, and even suicide. It has an impact on physical, mental, and social well being: stress related ailments (e.g. depression, anxiety, and panic disorders), alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide contemplation and attempts. The financial toll can be incredible and lead to bankruptcy. A compulsive gambler, even while losing money, believes he or she will eventually win a lot of money and is "chasing the big one." He or she is willing to embezzle from employer, steal from spouse, empty the bank account, smash a child's piggy bank – do whatever it takes to go on gambling. In short, a life and many other lives are destroyed. But the gambler believes that when the "big one" comes in, then everyone will forgive and all will be well. Of course this never happens. Even big wins cannot undo the damage done.

Gambling is not the vice of a certain type of individual. Gambling is a normalized activity in our culture which involves people from all walks of life, male and female, young and old. The elderly are vulnerable and are attracted to casinos where they find relief from loneliness. Children and teenagers grow up with gambling and see it as normal activity since the day their parents bought them their first lottery ticket.

It also needs to be stated clearly that gambling is a problem in our church community. It has led to deadly results such as job loss, marriage collapse, and criminal charges. We need to be aware of this.

What to do?

Because of the bad press gambling has been receiving lately, governments may be more open to the concerns of its citizens. For instance, plebiscites have been held in a number of communities in Alberta regarding the removal of VLT's. As a result, they were removed from Rocky Mountain House and Sylvan Lake as early as 1997. We need to call for such plebiscites and also warn against the opening of new casinos. I realize that we might think that we have as much chance of changing the state of gambling in our country as preventing the legislation of same-sex marriage. But we need to do what we

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can. We trust that our Lord Jesus Christ is King and Lord in all of life.

Certainly in our homes and church community we need to stay the course in speaking of gambling as a vice and a sin. Parents need to set a good example for their children and to speak of this with their children. This involves not simply the topic and practice of gambling itself, but one's outlook on material possessions in general. Love of money and materialism is a poison in our lives and in our families. When children see that their parents are preoccupied with materialism, then that has a huge impact on them. Rather than gratefully accepting God's gifts and using them to his praise and glory, children grow up preoccupied with the accumulation of material prosperity. Gambling can easily grow from this and have a further adverse effect that drives a wedge in one's relationship with God. Parents, teach your children well by both word and deed!

Help

As in the case of alcoholism and drug addiction, those caught up in gambling can receive help and do not need to face their problem alone. We have family and friends who will support us. We have office bearers who will guide us. We have a Saviour who sympathizes with our weaknesses and struggles. Turning to God in prayer is our help and shelter even in our darkest moments.

There are also organizations who can give professional help. For a start, one can phone the Problem Gambling Help Line at 1-888-347-8888 or TDD 1-888-347-3331 (hearing impaired). One can also access www.gamblersanonymous.org. It is advisable to seek your minister's or another office bearer's help when dealing with such organizations. It is proper that an office bearer be involved to help a church member in trouble. Moreover, guidance may be needed when dealing with secular organizations which do not have a biblical understanding of what is involved with gambling.

The Holy Spirit teaches us in 1 Timothy 4: "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." Greed, coveting, materialism and gambling are not thanksgiving to God. On the contrary, they hurt one's relationship with God. At the same time, God gives us many gifts, including material gifts, which we may enjoy and use in his kingdom for our pleasure and for the praise and glory of his Name.

HERE ARE SOME SIGNS THAT A PERSON MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM:

1. Spends large amounts of time gambling. This allows little time for family, friends or other interests.
2. Begins to place larger, more frequent bets. Larger bets are necessary to get the same level of excitement.
3. Has growing debts. The person with a gambling problem is secretive or defensive about money, and may borrow money from family members or friends.
4. Pins hopes on the "big win." The problem gambler believes the big win, rather than changing the gambling behaviour, will solve financial or other problems.
5. Promises to cut back on gambling. The problem gambler is unable to reduce or stop gambling.
6. Refuses to explain behaviour, or lies about it. The person with a gambling problem may be away from home or work for long periods of time, or may make an unusually high number of telephone calls.
7. Feels frequent highs and lows. If unable to gamble, the problem gambler misses the thrill of the action and may be bad-tempered, withdrawn, depressed or restless. During a winning streak, the gambler is on a high.
8. Boasts about winning. The person with a gambling problem loves to relive a win but will make light of losses when others express their concern. Wins and losses may also be kept a secret.
9. Prefers gambling to a special family occasion. The problem gambler may arrive late or miss family events such as birthdays, school activities and other family gatherings.
10. Seeks new places to gamble close to home and away. The problem gambler may insist that evenings out or even family vacations be at places where gambling is available.

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T.G. Van Raalte

MATTHEW 13:52

Not Satisfied to be Saved Alone

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"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."
Exodus 33:15

The ground-up ashes of their golden calf linger in their stomachs, the Levites have killed about 3000 of their brethren, and the people have suffered a plague of death. But worse than all this, the Lord has said that He will no longer accompany the people of Israel. Otherwise He might destroy them on the way due to their recurring idolatry. Moses alone would live in the presence of the Lord, but not Israel. Here is what the Lord had said to Moses alone: "My Presence will go with *you*, and I will give *you* rest" (33:14). It was at this point that Moses replied, "If your Presence does not go with *us*, do not send *us* up from here… What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" Moses understood that God's living, gracious, and holy presence constituted Israel as a *nation*.

This text depends on a very important interplay of the singular and the plural. The Lord has declared that He is abandoning his people and will go only with Moses (singular), but Moses pleads in response that these people are God's people and thus God must go with all of them (plural). Moses is unwilling to abandon his post as mediator and prophet for this people. Either the Lord goes with them all, or they remain where they are.

Moses could have given in to pride and agreed that he and his own descendants ought to be the new Israel. Instead, he shows that he is interested in his salvation only within the context of the whole nation being under God. He is willing to deny himself in the hope of securing the covenant blessings for all Israel. Don't send us on our way, unless you come with us all!

Israel's mediator was subjected to a thorough-going test. While God on the one hand reveals his great wrath against Israel for their idolatry, He also tests his office bearer Moses to see whether Moses will stand in the gap on behalf of God's rebellious covenant people. Moses does. His words prove his faithfulness.

In this event the church is given a window through which it receives an early glimpse of the great office bearer, Jesus Christ. God gave Moses to Israel to point ahead to the Archetype. By God's grace, and ultimately because of Christ's cross, Moses acted obediently and selflessly (in this instance). He truly did stand in the gap, and was accepted.

If the Lord could say to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name" (33:17), then what has He said to his only-begotten Son? We know that "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses" because he was faithful not just as a servant like Moses, but as the Son of God (Heb 3:3-6). His faithfulness to God surpasses that of Moses by innumerable degrees, for He ate the ashes of the golden calf, He suffered the sword of his brothers, and He came under death-plague of God's wrath. All for us. Whereas God offered to make a new people out of Moses, He put his own Son under condemnation. This Son, our precious Saviour, would not and did not return to his glory until He had secured the presence of God for us. He did not return alone with the words, "Here am I, to do your will," but in the company of many, with these words: "Here am I, *and the children God has given me*" (Heb 2:13).

Do you know yourself as one of those children, saved by his precious blood? Do you live in the presence of God? In Christ, the redeemed people are assured, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Heb 13:5). But none of us is an island, and so we should be careful not to read that promise as though it is only for individuals. Here God's presence is promised for all of us *as his church*. None of us should be satisfied to be saved alone. We belong in a body within which we must also seek the salvation of our brothers and sisters. Ask God to show you where you are falling short in this matter, and then act in ways that serve the salvation of the body of Christ.

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 41

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

When a boy and a girl really love one another, they want to get married. They want to live in the same house. The couple could go to a Justice of the Peace, and he could marry them. After the ceremony, he would give them a marriage certificate, a document which says that they are married. Then they would go away for a honeymoon. When they returned, the couple would live together in the same house.

People who believe in God ask the minister to marry them. He reads God's Word, and explains what that means for a Christian husband and wife. A minister also prays that God will bless the couple. A married couple can ask God for his blessing, and pray to God for all they need in their married life together. They can also ask God to give them a baby. You cannot ask anyone but the Lord for that.

The seventh commandment says that you shall not commit adultery. This commandment means that when you have married someone, you should be faithful.

The government does not want husbands and wives to divorce, but they will allow divorce if a married couple really wants one. The Lord does not allow divorce even if a husband and wife really want to end their marriage. At a wedding, the husband and wife say "I do," and they should still say "I do." When a married couple has problems, they must ask for help. Once married, you are married. A husband and wife are married until God Himself ends it, when one of the two dies.

A boy's body is different from a girl's body. And a man is different from a woman. A left shoe is different from a right shoe. But together they are a pair, for they belong together. The Lord made men different from women. Together they make a pair, a couple. They belong together, and they match. Praise God that He made the bodies of boys and girls different! It is not right to make dirty jokes about it.

You must not do wrong things with your body, things that you would not want your parents to know. The Lord Jesus explained that this command, too, belongs to the seventh commandment. As the catechism says, we should keep our bodies pure, for Jesus Christ should be living in us through the Holy Spirit!

Gerrit Riemer

The Candlestand Statement: A working document about the Holy Spirit

Rev. Gerrit Riemer (1951-) has been working as a missionary in Papua New Guinea for the Reformed Church of The Netherlands (Liberated) of Enschede-North. Since he is back in The Netherlands he is writing theological books for the Reformed community in Indonesia. He is also involved in the organization of Intercultural Reformed Theological Training for De Verre Naasten.

Fourteen brothers from Kenya, Indonesia, the Netherlands, India, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, church leaders from various churches and nationalities, drew up a document about the Holy Spirit. They addressed it to "all Reformed believers, and to all who value healthy biblical teaching." It is the result of a process which was started two years previously as an answer to the increasing influence of the Charismatic Movement. This article looks at the history and the contents of this document, named the "Candlestand Statement."

An urgent request from Africa

As training department of *De Verre Naasten* (which is the trademark of the general synod committee of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands [Liberated] involved with Mission, Assistance, and Training), the Intercultural Reformed Theological Training institute (IRTT) organizes international meetings with church leaders from many countries, in order to build each other up. Churches involved share certain historical roots, or wish to become acquainted with Reformed theology.

Within this framework, the IRTT received an invitation from a Presbyterian church in Zimbabwe (the CCAP) to organize a seminar for church leaders there. The argumentation was clear, and came straight out of the experience of these churches. The subject requested was "the Charismatic Movement" (a difficult concept, by the way); its influence was working its way more and more into the churches. The church youth, but not only the youth, were particularly receptive to it, especially to the evident manifestations of the Spirit: speaking in tongues, faith healing, miracles, and prophecies, as well as the promises of success and prosperity. As churches with a Presbyterian conscience, the CCAP felt compelled to turn the tide but did not know how to and felt rather powerless. Their worship services are boring, for example, in comparison with the festive services of charismatic groups, to say nothing of the mass meetings where talented foreign ministers come to perform miracles. Such "competition" is more than they can match. In these services, which could also be followed on television via various charismatic channels, it was claimed that the Holy Spirit was at work.

Storm or fresh wind?

A "charismatic hurricane," as it is sometimes negatively dubbed, is tearing at many churches and old church trusses. Members of established, traditional churches are beginning to withdraw, the familiar foundations are being damaged, and the fragmentation of complete church federations appears to be merely a question of time. Many new groups assemble around new prophetic leaders. All established churches throughout the world are faced with it, especially because many feel attracted to the promises of healing, fertility, and prosperity.

The IRTT wanted to help look for an answer and had to decide which approach to adopt. This was not just a problem in Africa; increasing charismatic influences are drawing ever more attention in The Netherlands as well. The discussion about speaking in tongues, faith healing, and baptism with the Holy Spirit is being carried on in all churches. Also in Reformed churches, voice is being given to the desire for a renewal of the special gifts of the Spirit. And does Scripture not speak clearly about this? Is it not time then to free those churches from the vigorous language of exegesis and dogmatics which stand in the way of the Spirit's work? Do we have to face another difference of opinions? Or should we be praying that these developments may gain ground in our country, and, like a breath of fresh air, prove to be a blessing for the proclamation of the gospel and the coming of God's kingdom?

Looking at our Calvinistic selves

After the first seminar in Zimbabwe, the IRTT organized two international meetings in The Netherlands entitled "The Power of Reformed Discernment" (2002), and "Do Not Quench the Spirit" (2003). Together with about fifty church leaders, an attempt was made to understand what the Bible says about the work and methods of the Holy Spirit. It became clear that a different way of working with God's Word (hermeneutics) was a major issue.

We studied the charismatic urge to recover all the gifts named in the Bible, such as apostleship, prophecy, and the gift of healing. We studied the intense experience of glossolalia (speaking in tongues), dreams, and visions. Should Presbyterian and Reformed churches not make more room for these experiences? Should they not agree that the Reformation of the sixteenth century was more or less incomplete, and that it was only completed when the Pentecostal Movement was born in the aftermath of Methodism and the Holiness Movement on January 1, 1901?

Fragmentation of complete church federations looks like merely a question of time.

(At last, the Spirit could blow again wherever He pleases!) Should we not be speaking with a little more subtlety about all sorts of dusty doctrines? For example, does not the tight connection between Word and Spirit confine the Spirit, and actually imprison God in the canon of Scripture? Are Reformed hermeneutics not too interfering, and does the Reformed view on the origin of the Bible not seal up too many questions? Do complicated explanatory rules not stand in the way of the unrestricted and frank use of God's words and so cause them to lose their power in daily life?

An open mind for the Charismatic Movement

It is clear that the Charismatic Movement raises important questions which the churches cannot avoid. Are you not trying to control everything? Are you afraid that otherwise things will go out of control? Give some space! Open the doors and windows! "Do not forbid speaking in tongues!" (1 Cor 14:39). Do not forbid miracles of healing, the use of anointing with oil and the laying on of hands, the exorcism of evil spirits, and the driving out of demons. Don't be afraid, the presence of the Spirit will become as visible as light, or as flames of fire. God's angels are no longer far away but just around the corner, in a real encounter, in a word which we can directly receive. Therefore our ministers and prophets can stand up in the worship service on Sunday and say: "Brothers and sisters, I have a word from the Lord for you."

It is thus asserted that the many shifts and faults in the church landscape are, in that case, not loss but gain! Christ renovates his church via a sort of re-allotment procedure, and in that way prepares disciples for Himself.

Reformed–Presbyterian challenge

The church leaders gathered at the IRTT meetings set themselves the task of looking into the charismatic way of thinking and forming an opinion of it. They wanted to take home valuable insights which would be of service to their churches (including the churches in The Netherlands). In doing so they could call upon a whole range of experience and knowledge. There were those present who had enjoyed charismatic experiences, had themselves spoken in tongues, had witnessed miracles and ecstatic moments. All the ingredients for a good discussion were present.

Are we open towards each other as churches throughout the world, also in order to learn from each other and to warn each other?

As for their method of working, they aimed high: drawing up a document in the form of a confession. Originally the document was meant only as a feeler, a formulation to try out together, but later it was used as means of providing fellow church leaders with something concrete as an aid in discussing charismatic influence with their congregations. They realized too that they risked going astray and becoming false teachers. This recognition brought them on their knees before God time and time again to ask for wisdom, insight, and the Spirit's guidance. But while going down this road, they hoped to come to a clear proclamation, formulated in a document, which both rejoices in the riches of the work of the Spirit and publicly refutes heresies concerning his work.

The Candlestand Statement

In 2004, a number of participants met for the third time, in the *Kandelaarkerk* (Candlestand church) in Amersfoort, The Netherlands, to go over the results of the previous year's work one more time. They gave themselves no rest until the whole document lay on the table, including a preamble which consisted of a letter "to all believers of Reformed faith, and to all who desire to have sound biblical teaching." They named the document after the church where they had enjoyed such warm hospitality: the "Candlestand Statement." They promised together to offer this working document to the churches they belonged to, and to spread it further via these churches. They then returned home, each with a copy of the document in his luggage.

The reception of the Candlestand Statement in the various lands is difficult to follow. We hear positive reactions from Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Australia. A copy was sent to all churches and to all ministers of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. A website has also been opened: www.candlestand.nl. It is the intention that all translations of the Candlestand Statement be put on this site. At this moment in time there are only Dutch and English versions available. An Indonesian translation is almost ready, and there is a push to make translations in French, Hungarian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The Statement is being used in India at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun. The Dutch participants are regularly invited to give lectures about it in local churches.

The blessing of giving and receiving

We sincerely hope that the Candlestand Statement can function as a beneficial example of ecumenical reciprocity. This, too, is a fruit of the Spirit! The time is ripe for this. The relevant subject is not a subject which

churches with a Reformed identity can merely skip over. It touches the very fibre of being Reformed. Thorough discussion is required, and so is giving an honest account when it is clear that a change of direction is necessary or not. Are we open towards each other as churches throughout the world, also in order to learn from each other and to warn each other?

For now the Candlestand Statement is intended as a helping hand in a world-wide discussion. The authors of this working document have called themselves the Candlestand Fellowship for the time being. They present their document with the prayer that the Lord will bless their work in such a way that it supports responsible choices within the process of ongoing church renewal or reformation. If that should happen, it would make them happy. They, too, are adverse to traditionalism and weak Christian living. Their motivation is in the biblical charge to obey and to remain in the Lord of the church. That is why they desired to examine the compatibility of charismatic claims with the Word of our God.

What follows is the Preamble of the Candlestand Statement. The Statement will be published in several upcoming issues.

The Candlestand Statement

Preamble

To all believers of Reformed faith, and to all who desire to have sound biblical teaching:

We, church leaders of different churches and nationalities, being concerned about the growing influence of the Charismatic Movement around the world and the unprepared state of our churches to meet its impact, feel obliged to make the following statements about the use of the Holy Bible, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of grace.

One of the foremost characteristics of Reformed or Presbyterian churches is that they should always be reforming – *Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda.* This rule calls the churches that are rooted in the Great Reformation to a progressive and dynamic attitude and willingness always to adjust to the Word of God alone – *Sola Scriptura.* The church must apply its developing insights from

God's Word to the needs of our ever changing times and circumstances. This important characteristic of being Reformed should guard the church against formalism, traditionalism, or laziness when it comes to meeting the concrete needs of the church in her context. Church history shows that Reformed and Presbyterian churches have striven to be faithful and zealous in living up to the Reformed standards and in meeting the criteria of being a true church of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, we have to acknowledge that we and other so-called "traditional churches" are not always successful in avoiding unhealthy and formalistic views on tradition and doctrine. Sometimes we have to admit that churches become trapped in the pitfalls of rigid formalism, traditionalism, or dogmatism.

We also observe that many Christian churches tolerate the misleading influence of false teachings in their midst. We briefly mention liberalism, modernism, and wrong forms of ecumenism. This creates fertile soil for all kind of teaching in the churches, prepares the way for secularism, or for the Charismatic Movement.

Even when we do not recognise the above-mentioned elements in our own churches, the Bible gives us enough reason to regularly examine ourselves by asking important questions about biblical standards of Christian spirituality and church-life. Do we really strive to live up to these standards? Or have we become lukewarm and clever in making up arguments, hiding behind our church-walls and so avoiding the consequences of our confessions which call for holiness and being obedient children of God's covenant?

With regard to the work of the Holy Spirit: are we receptive or alert to the leading of the Spirit? Or are we suppressing private experiences of the Spirit through the Word of God by not allowing the expression of emotions and special experiences in our worship or in our Christian lives? Are we intentionally letting go of the ethical aspects of our Christian lives, leading to a life not transformed by the Word of God but conforming to the standards of the world?

The Charismatic Movement raises important questions which the churches cannot avoid.

We do not suggest easy answers to all these questions; however, we should be aware of our responsibility to lead the churches that Jesus Christ has entrusted to us away from pitfalls and cliffs. If not, we are preparing the ground for falsehood to grow abundantly within our ranks, overcoming and swallowing up our *sound teachings*. These teachings which, however sound they might be, have not succeeded in preserving the church from lifelessness, lukewarmness, and unholiness. Therefore, we humble ourselves before our Lord, confess our weaknesses and shortcomings in leading his beloved church, and pledge to make ourselves more available in his service.

At the same time we pray for his wisdom and guidance to fight against any false teaching and prophecy, and to do this in a biblical, loving way. Our attitude should be open to other opinions, receptive to good points and suggestions, and avoid being too quick to judge or prejudice other teachings or understandings of God's Word. We should show a sincere willingness to seek points of contact with others and together to find the truth of God's Word.

Our loving and respectful attitude should not excuse us from persevering in sound teaching, as well as openly and clearly refuting false teachings suited to the desires of men. In order that we may live according to the biblical standards of persevering in sound doctrine and true Christian life through faith alone – *Sola Fide*, dependent on God's grace alone – *Sola Gratia*, let us be patient. Let the love of Christ reign in our hearts and determine our attitude.

May the Lord help us, and may his Spirit guide us to understanding the Word of God and so preserve the truth in his Church. To Him who is able to establish us by the gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, to the only wise God, be glory forever, through Jesus Christ!

Glory be to Him alone – *Soli Deo Gloria!* Amen.

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Just How Generous is this Orthodoxy? (2)

Part 1 of this article reviewed the first half of Brian McLaren's book (A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN, *known hereafter simply as* A Generous Orthodoxy), *covering the introduction and why the author is a Christian.*

The next fifteen chapters form the second part and the heart of the book. They are an examination of many of the different traditions within Christianity and tell us why McLaren considers himself a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN.

What Type of Christian is he?

McLaren is *Missional* in the vein of Lesslie Newbigin, because he places in the forefront of Christianity the need to be active in improving the world in the name of Jesus. He defines the church's mission "to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ in authentic community for the good of the world" (p. 107). He further muddies his view on hell in this chapter so that if the reader was confused before, he will be only further confused now.

McLaren is *evangelical* (note the small "e") because he cherishes an identity beyond a doctrinal array or practice. He has an attitude toward God and his neighbour that is passionate, based on a respect for Scripture. He has a personal walk with God, a belief that intimacy with God is possible, and a desire to evangelize, though not necessarily in the way most people think of evangelism.

McLaren is *Post/Protestant* in that he no longer protests what the first Protestants fought against, but instead Pro-testifies, telling his story to others. In this and several of the subsequent chapters he writes about the Reformation, saying that it was essentially "Christianity going post-medieval or modern" (p. 132). This does a great disservice to those men and women who protested Roman theology, even to their deaths, and rediscovered the faith of the Bible! They did much more than take Catholicism to a new era. He simplifies the Reformation, making it more about indulgences than authority and justification. In this way he can indicate that issues keeping Protestant from Catholic at the time of the Reformation are no longer valid, for even Catholics now reject indulgences and many other excesses of medieval Catholicism. McLaren proves here what a low view he has of Protestantism.

McLaren is *Liberal/Conservative* which seems to indicate emphases on both social action and evangelism, a balance the church has had great difficulty maintaining in recent years.

McLaren is *Mystical/Poetic* in that he speaks of a "non-prose world, called unreal by the rulers of this age, but real to people of faith...the world entered by the mystic, the contemplative, the visionary, the prophet, the poet" (p. 146). He criticizes modern Christians who build "conceptual cathedrals of proposition and argument...known popularly as systematic theologies" (p. 151). While he continues to value prose and narrative, he places greater emphasis than most on mystery and metaphor. He believes systematic theology is inconsistent with a biblical understanding of the mystery of God.

McLaren is *Biblical* in that he has a high regard for the Bible – higher now, he says, than it ever has been. He values it differently now than in his youth, seeing it less as a book of answers. Despite a chapter-length treatment of the subject, it is difficult to discern exactly what his view of Scripture is. He indicates that he believes the Bible contains Paul's opinion (1 Corinthians 7:12), a common misunderstanding that perhaps betrays his lack of theological training, and that it also contains Paul's own biases (with Titus 1:12-13 as an example). He seems to believe that the Bible's primary purpose is to train people for their mission to the world, downplaying terms such as authority, inerrancy, infallibility, revelation, objective, absolute, and literal. He indicates that the profitable use of Scripture is to leave the comforts of home and go to the world. His examples

of people who have understood what it means to be biblical Christians are St. Francis, Mother Teresa, and Billy Graham. Our modern assumptions of the Bible have often been wrong, so to move forward we need to reclaim the Bible as narrative rather than didactic in nature.

McLaren is *Charismatic/Contemplative* in that he believes in the miraculous, supernatural works of God, yet prefers quiet contemplation. He writes about his discovery of the writings of Brother Lawrence and says that the discipline of practicing God's presence became "the single most important spiritual discipline in my life" (p. 176). As one would expect, this chapter is laden with quotes from and references to Catholic contemplatives.

McLaren is *Fundamentalist/Calvinist* because he affirms the *semper reformada* of the Reformation. He believes, as did the Reformers, that we need to be continually reforming our faith. Of course the Reformers would never have separated this from the doctrine of *sola scriptura,* which ensured that the Bible was their guide to reform. In this chapter McLaren denies the doctrine of grace as summarized in the acronym TULIP, and also states that the *sola's* of the Reformation are restrictive, unnecessary reductionism. He believes truth is "often best understood in a conversation, a dialectic (or trialectic), or a dynamic tension rather than in non-negotiable *sola's*. In this chapter he shows a blatant disregard for the heart of the Reformation and gives no real reason to believe he has ever read or understood John Calvin or any of the Reformers. He rewrites the TULIP acronym in such a way that it loses all meaning: Triune Love, Unselfish Election, Limitless Reconciliation, Inspiring Grace, and Passionate, Persistent Saints.

McLaren is an *Anabaptist/Anglican* in that he appreciates the pacifism and simplicity of the Anabaptists and the liturgy and willingness to compromise of the Anglicans. He mentions, cryptically, that one becomes a Christian by making a personal commitment where one identifies with Jesus, his mission, and his followers.

McLaren is *Methodist* in that he identifies with the Wesley's original emphasis on reaching the outcast of society.

He shows a blatant disregard for the heart of the Reformation and gives no real reason to believe he has ever read or understood John Calvin or any of the Reformers.

McLaren is *Catholic* for many reasons which he identifies more clearly here than in most chapters. He enjoys the sacramentalism, the liturgical nature of worship, the respect for tradition, the celebration of Mary, and the fact that Catholics know how to party (as emphasized in *Mardi Gras*). In regards to Mary he expresses a realization that his Protestant faith has been impoverished "with its exclusively male focus" (p. 228). He explains how much Protestants have missed by failing to see the beauty of the incarnation through Mary.

McLaren is *Green* because he emphasizes good stewardship of creation. He adopts an Eastern Orthodox outlook of continual creation rather than stagnant creation.

McLaren is *Incarnational* in that he seeks to become all things to all men. He respects and values other faiths and seeks to enter into constructive dialogue with them. Should someone from another religion wish to become a Christian, McLaren encourages that person to become a Buddhist or Muslim or Jewish follower of Jesus. People should often remain within their religious contexts rather than joining a Christian context. His hope is that God will redeem all of the religions of the world. He writes, "I must add, though, that I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all?) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts. This will be hard, you say, and I agree. But frankly, it's not at all easy to be a follower of Jesus in many 'Christian' religious contexts, either."

McLaren is *depressed-yet-hopeful.* He is depressed as he looks back on Christian history, but hopeful as he looks forward. He indicates that all believers need to repent of the atrocities of the past committed against other religions. He mentions, as one example, the horrible acts of the conquistadors against the kingdoms of South America and indicates that we all need to repent of these awful deeds. This shows, once again, his belief that all the traditions within Christianity are, to some extent, equally valid; why else would I, as a Protestant, need to repent of deeds done under the banner of Rome by those who were not true Christians?

McLaren is *Emergent.* This chapter is perhaps the culmination of all that has been said before, since McLaren is primarily known as being a leader of the Emergent Church. He compares the emerging church to a butterfly that is halfway out of its cocoon. It looks ugly now, but as it swings back and forth between absolutism and relativism, it will eventually emerge in the middle as something beautiful. In this chapter he provides something of a definition of sin, a definition which would take too long to recount but is clearly at odds with that of the historical confessions.

McLaren is, finally, *unfinished.* Because he realizes he has not arrived at any firm conclusions, he knows that he must keep seeking, keep learning, and keep growing. The book closes in mid-sentence to illustrate that it is, likewise, unfinished.

Discussion

That is a brief but I hope accurate assessment of what one will find in the book. Not everything McLaren has to say is bad. For example, he brings out some valid criticisms of each of the traditions he examines. He has good things to say about the shortcomings of the church growth movement. Even his desire to *semper reformada* is admirable. But the positive aspects of the book are by far outweighed by the negatives. I have hesitated to speak of the author in this way, but before God I feel I have no choice. He teaches false, anti-biblical doctrine throughout this book. The faith of Brian McLaren is not the faith of the Bible and only bears the vaguest resemblance to Christianity.

Before I conclude, I would like to make several important observations.

The positive aspects of the book are by far outweighed by the negatives.

There are many arguments I would like to make, but I know most of them would have little meaning to those involved in the Emergent Church because *McLaren acknowledges no authority outside himself.* I would like to appeal to Scripture to understand where a generous orthodoxy is commanded, suggested, or even hinted at. But if Scripture is not authoritative, we have no need to look there. McLaren does not examine each tradition in light of the Scripture and decide which are most biblical. He makes no attempt to examine traditions and beliefs in light of Scripture and discern what God says about them. Instead, he interprets and develops theology in light of what is important to him. For example, because he loves the environment he cannot believe it can be evil and fallen, and thus is forced to do away with a biblical view of original sin. Quotes from the Bible are by far outweighed by quotes from mere human authors, a majority of them Roman Catholic. Chesterton appears to be his primary influence and quotes by him must outweigh biblical quotes by at least a margin of three to one. A man who rejects God's authority should not be a leader within the Christian community.

He builds and then refutes straw man arguments. McLaren continually paints issues in the worst possible light, often in a completely false light, and then seeks to be profound in refuting those arguments. This was most notable to me in his discussion of Calvinism. He presented beliefs no true Calvinist adheres to and then proceeded to show that the false views were wrong. Ironically, he criticizes both liberals and conservatives for continually comparing "their own best to their counterpart's worst" (p. 135), yet that very spirit pervades this book.

He proves nothing. Time and time again he mentions facts, especially from history, with no attempt whatsoever to prove them true. He gives no context, no proof, no particulars, and no citations. I suspect many of his readers have as little knowledge as he does of history, especially reformational history, and will thus believe what he says, regardless of its truthfulness.

He is nice. Those of us who are concerned far more with truth, and by that I refer to God's truth as revealed in Scripture, are rarely as nice as McLaren. We are forced to call sin what it is. We are forced to reject much of what other people value, treasure, and believe. We unapologetically reject what does not adhere to scriptural models. McLaren and other Emergent leaders are always exceedingly nice, accepting everything and politely, though often sarcastically, rejecting truth. What chance do Reformed apologists have against such niceness? Yet we can have confidence that it does not matter, for foolishness in the eyes of man is wisdom in the eyes of God. God be true though every man be a liar!

Conclusion

In the end this book must be rejected as being something entirely different than Christian. It portrays some sort of faith modeled loosely on aspects of Christianity, but there is far more error than truth. McLaren has proven himself to be just one more in a long line of "Christian" leaders leading people away from Scripture and away from the absolute truth it contains. Of course McLaren can always claim that we, the old-fashioned, non-Emergent Protestants, just don't get it; that somehow we are so absorbed in our modernism that we cannot make the transition to the new realities of our society. But we must be committed to the Bible and to remaining under God's authority.

A man who rejects God's authority should not be a leader within the Christian community.

After reading McLaren's statement of beliefs there is little evidence that he understands or accepts even the basic tenets of the faith. I do not doubt McLaren's niceness, kindness, or even his desire to see the church reformed for the better. But his generous orthodoxy is far removed from true Christian orthodoxy. I will close with challenging words penned by Albert Mohler.

> Orthodoxy must be generous, but it cannot be so generous that it ceases to be orthodox. Inevitably, Christianity asserts truths that, to the postmodern mind, will appear decidedly ungenerous. Nevertheless, this is the truth that leads to everlasting life. The gospel simply is not up for renegotiation in the twenty-first century. A true Christian generosity recognizes the infinitely generous nature of the truth that genuinely saves. Accept no substitutes.

Deborah Huttema

Fifty Plus One: Open House in Cloverdale

On March 7, 2004, Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Just short of a year later we celebrated the re-opening of our newly renovated church building. It's truly a blessing to give God our best and rededicate a beautiful building for worship and outreach.

Now for a brief history of the building process this past year. After a couple of months of intense planning, last May our church building was lifted off its basement, put on a truck, turned 180 degrees, and moved over fifty feet to the southwest corner of the property. The basement was history. Built onto the sanctuary is now a large foyer where Cloverdalians, renowned for their socializing, can converse after church. Adjacent to this are the consistory room, fellowship hall, kitchen, library, nursery, little lambs rooms, catechism room, and washrooms. The sanctuary was updated with new carpet and a paint job. Our building committee, contractor, and countless volunteers did an incredible job throughout, down to the details.

Food, fun and singing

On February 25, 2005, our congregation, true to form, started the celebration with a potluck dinner in the William of Orange School gym. After wonderful fellowship and great food, many hands made light work of the clean up. We moved over to the church, where the official celebrations began. It was wonderful to be back in our church building. The sanctuary withstood its first test, surviving joyful and rousing renditions of Psalm 150 and "O Canada". Council chairman, Pete Schouten, began

A typical Cloverdale Sunday scene.

the evening with a warm and heartfelt thank you to the congregation. He went on to say that Cloverdale is blessed with people who give their ideas, gifts, money, talents, and then do the actual work. Through this process of renovating and building, members have grown together and matured, and even more importantly, the spiritual building is ongoing. He thanked the Lord and prayed that this building would be a beehive of activity, a beacon of light as we look towards March 7, 2054, the one hundredth anniversary; may this building last till then.

The evening's honoured guests, MLA Kevin Falcon, MP Russ Hiebert, city councillor Marvin Hunt, and school trustee Heather Stillwell all offered congratulations and words of encouragement. Two of them had watched the construction progress as they had driven by almost daily. Minister of Highways Falcon offered congratulations on behalf of provincial government. MP Hiebert encouraged us to stand firm in line with the words of Scripture engraved on the Peace Tower in Ottawa (Ps 72:1, Pr 29:18, and Ps 72:8). Councillor Marvin Hunt, himself an ordained pastor, suggested that Surrey's (Cloverdale being one of the town centres) greatest need is more church buildings. More than 1,000 people move into Surrey each month, giving us a fine opportunity to evangelize in our community. May that lead to a full church building. Hunt warned us not to get too comfortable, thinking of it as *our* church and so being content with the *status quo*. Instead, we should see it as God's building, which we are to use to his glory. Stillwell, who spoke next, wished she could have a recording of our singing "O Canada" so she could let her fellow school trustees hear how it should be sung.

Bulldozing the front steps.

Congregational contributions

Rick VanOene, Chairman of the Building Committee, made a PowerPoint presentation which related the process from the initial building concepts last March to completion February 2005. Seeing the hard work of a whole year condensed into fifteen minutes emphasized the sense of cooperation and community that had surrounded this project.

Next, each of the Bible study groups contributed to the festivities of the evening. The women's society related the humorous aspects of having church in the William of Orange School gym. The backbenchers and balcony folk, of necessity, were lost and scattered amongst the rest of the flock. Babysitting had moved to the portable – so you couldn't tell when the service was over. The chairs were not ideal for toddler control – no squishing a squirming child into the corner of the pew. And now the whole church had moved from "the centre to the left" – referring of course to the physical relocation of the building, not our theology.

The young people acted out in costume "Nostalgia Gone Mad": old people worried that the lovely new church building would make people soft. Men's society summarized from the history books that Cloverdale has actually been renovating for thirty-five years. To give just one example, the kitchen and nursery had switched places necessitating an innovative but not always reliable pump system to empty the kitchen sinks. Women's Morning Bible Study re-enacted life in the empty, cold manse – where they met for the last year – with BYOE, bring your own *everything*. And what Cloverdale celebration would be complete without a stanza or two from one our resident poets about how Cloverdale celebrates – usually with food, laughter, and singing: "Every Clover in Cloverdale, from the tall to the small. . . . Sang and sang."

Cloverdale's "new" church building.

Tokens of appreciation

Adult Bible Study presented JARS – jars with time in them – dinner certificates for the members of the building committee to get reacquainted with their spouses. J=Jerry Bysterveld, A=Arnie Versluis, R=Rick VanOene, S=Shelia VanDelft. They were truly the unsung heroes who would rather not have the attention but really deserve credit for making the renovation/building project run smoothly from start to finish. The council also thanked them with "time away with spouses." Hopefully they will be able to find things to fill their "spare" time with now that the church building is done.

Rev. Dick Moes, our neighbouring minister from Covenant United Reformed Church, urged us to reach out into the community. As Moses asks God, "If you are not with us how can we be distinguished from others," so Pastor Moes challenged us to take a picture of the congregation, place it in full view, and continue to ask this same question of ourselves. The Evangelism Committee members had the final word, and echoed the sentiments of various speakers. They urged the congregation to pray for renewed vision and enthusiasm to keep in step with the spirit. Pastor James Visscher, who retains a special relationship with us as an "old" Cloverdalian, closed the evening with heartfelt thanksgiving.

Marya VanBeelen

Langley Welcomes Rev. W. Bredenhof

On Sunday evening May 15, 2005, Langley's first co-pastor Wes Bredenhof, his wife Rose, and their children Josiah, Julie, and Emiline were welcomed into the congregation. To make the transition from the densely forested area of Fort Babine to the densely populated area of the Fraser Valley requires in itself a major adjustment. However, differences become insignificant when new/many church members help the new co-pastor and his family with the adjusting process. And so the Bredenhofs were to be eased into their new environment.

The evening's M.C., Paul Sikma, ably assisted by his co-M.C. and wife, Shelley, submitted briefly to an entertaining word-game of male versus female, master M.C. versus mistress M.C., and co-pastor versus senior pastor. Eventually they "sub"mitted amicably to each other.

Elder Ron de Haan was then given the floor to officially open the evening. He read Philippians 2:1-11 and led in prayer, after which Frank Ezenga, church organist and conductor for the evening, took the stage. Clearly feeling at ease amidst a sizable adult choir of eager enthusiasts, he ably led them and the audience into bellowing out Psalm 135.

As a first launch into "exploring" the Langley congregation, long-time Langley resident and Credo's vice-principal Harry Moes explained the local church map. He observed that one could barely distinguish the church pins through the densely urban forest, except for a concentration of pins at the Manoah Manor Seniors Center. He explained that the most active, party going people are known to congregate there.

Since Langley church boundaries overlap the Surrey/Cloverdale area, he presented the Bredenhofs with a map-book to ease their way into finding everyone quickly for a first visit.

Dave Doornbos and Derek Hoogerdijk continued on the map theme. Fully aware that Pastor Wes is an avid outdoors man, they eased him quickly through events that fill everyone's church agenda. But when they mentioned the natural beauties of B.C.'s parks, lakes, and trails, Pastor Wes suddenly straightened up. More so when Dave, a former Smithers resident himself, mentioned places of more secluded outdoor activity. Surely the Fort Babine environment contributed to Pastor Wes's love for the outdoors. Time permitting, the "Guide to Trails of B.C." will give Langley's new co-pastor ample opportunity for further exploring beautiful British Columbia as well as time for reflection and meditation.

As a prelude to what the Bredenhof children Josiah, Julie, and Emiline can expect in their Fraser Valley future, the stage turned into a sea of light blue and

gray uniforms when the Gems and Cadets youth groups made their presentation. For now the Bredenhof children were promised a sandbox yet to be built for them.

As Classis representative, Rev. Eric Kampen welcomed the new pastor and his wife and reminisced on the new status of the Langley church. Being one of the largest congregations in the federation, Langley has again become "a middle of the road" congregation now that the per-pastor ratio is an average 300 members.

An evening like this is not complete when the Young People cannot have their share and poke some fun. A cartoon backdrop was lowered portraying a "Titans" team consisting of a glamorous, testosterone-loaded, cow-licked, chest-expanding young punk and a bent-over, cane-carrying senior. To this satirical challenge the tie-and-suit Titan team was requested on stage. They were subjected to questions ranging from how familiar/close they are with each other (Pastor Wes was baptized by Pastor Jack) to how well they were acquainted with various theological matters. This included minor but puzzling Mentos and King trivia. Conferring frequently, it became clear that a team spirit was already growing.

Several musical interludes and intermezzos by the choir and piano virtuoso Vanessa Rook, accompanied by Frank on the organ, then followed. Ginny VanderHorst jovially talked the Bredenhofs through a PowerPoint presentation of who-is-who in the congregation. Assisted by computer buff Mary-Ann Moes, she generated laughs when her picture gallery distinguished the many different females by name, from drooling rug rat to respectable senior. She also matched all the many Tom, Dick, and Harry's with their picture, gleefully noting there was only one Burke, her son.

And just to eliminate the guess work out of anyone's shopping, Shelly revealed the eagerly anticipated results of a Where-are-the-Best-Places-for-Service-and-Shopping survey. She also presented Rose with local store gifts and a wad of free coupons.

Both Paul and Shelley followed with a memory-lane walk through grassless territories when Burke VanderHorst, on behalf of Church Council, presented Pastor Wes with a brand spanking new lawnmower. Now they are finally able to cut that famous Fraser Valley grass as short, or grow it as long, as they want to.

At the close of the evening Pastor Wes mentioned that he felt not only invigorated by the welcome but expressed his thankfulness that his call to Langley was meant to be. He considered his past missionary experience useful, knowing there will be a possible need for future outreach with a recently opened Casino in downtown Langley.

A challenged but definitely no cane-carrying Pastor Jack expressed his confidence in the new Langley "Titans" team and closed the evening in prayer. Coffee and fellowship followed.

T. Van Raalte

Further Discussion

Re: "What is the Lord's Day?" by G.Ph. van Popta

Having read Rev. G. van Popta's series of three articles on "What is the Lord's Day?", I can appreciate that he had an enormous task on his hands as he surveyed all of the scriptural evidence. I benefited from the series, for example, regarding Numbers 15. I also found useful Rev. van Popta's suggestion that we could return to the Jewish way of counting the days, and so observe the Lord's Day as a twenty-four hour period from Saturday evening till Sunday evening. This would indeed help many people prepare for worship with a proper rest, a better frame of mind, etc. However, it did make me wonder when ministers will finish their sermon writing.

Genesis 2

At the same time it seems to me that the articles would be greatly enhanced by a more careful study of Genesis 2:3. Permit me to offer my explanation. It says, "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." In a perfect world, God blessed that seventh day, but not the other six. In a perfect world, He made that day holy, but not the other six.

This ought to catch our attention, for in Paradise every day would already bring perfect praise to God. For six days every stroke of the hoe, every cut of the scythe, every shake of the ripe plum tree would be completed to the glory of God. Everything Adam and Eve would do at any given time would glorify God. They had all they needed to completely serve Him. Yet God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because his own activities changed on that day. He rested rather than creating.

God wanted the seventh day to be different, or holy. What is holy is dedicated to God in a special way. This can only mean that every seventh day would be used by mankind purely for communion with God, no work taking up their thoughts and energy. On that day they would rest, as God did. It would not be a day to sin less, for there was no sin. It would be a day to stop work and dedicate the day to knowing God all the more. In this way much good spiritual fruit would come from that day, more than from the other days – this is what it means to have that particular day "blessed."

If in the holy perfection of Paradise God had already ordained one day out of every seven for such a purpose, his act needs to weigh heavily in our discussion of the Lord's Day. We are not now speaking of an ordinance for Old Testament Israel, but a creation ordinance that binds the entire world to worship *and rest.*

Pivotal turns in New Testament section – gospels

Further, there are a few pivotal points in the articles that deserve more thought.

In this regard I turn to the second article. I found it unusual that Rev. van Popta concedes to the Pharisees that Jesus' disciples were actually breaking the Old Testament Sabbath by rolling heads of grain and eating. We read, "Effectively, they were harvesting and threshing." Likewise we read that the man carrying his mat was "carrying a burden" on the Sabbath, in contradiction to Nehemiah 13 and Jeremiah 17. Regarding the first example, there is a great difference on the one hand between taking the heads of grain that lean over the path and eating a few as one walks and on the other hand taking a threshing scythe, sledge, etc. and harvesting. Our Lord was simply freeing the Sabbath from Pharisaic oppression. His disciples were no more "harvesting and threshing" than I am when I spread peanut butter on my Sunday morning toast. Regarding the second example, both texts mentioned are about loads that were being carried in connection with commerce. They do not apply to the man skipping along with his mat.

Rev. van Popta writes that we should not "try to rationalize the matter by debating how to define a 'burden.'" I ask, "Why not?" Rev. van Popta states that the Lord does not enter into that debate. True. I would say He goes deeper. The problem with the Pharisees was not merely their definition of a burden, but their wicked hearts. They refused to love the poor and weak on the Sabbath day. They knew nothing of the Sabbath's declaration of freedom from slavery to sin and its effects (Deut 5:15). Salvation for them consisted in these many trifling manmade laws. So the Lord Jesus deals with the deeper issue, their rejection of the Liberator, Himself. If they would accept Him, they would discover the right framework for their service to God – not burdensome wage-earning, but joyful responsive service. Those who receive Christ as their Liberator also receive Him as their Lord; He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). Within the context of his lordship we may certainly return to the question of what is a burden on the Sabbath. By the Spirit and Word, we know that it has nothing to do

with size, weight, or distance moved. The fourth commandment was never about the scientific definition of "work" as energy expended, but about work that is done to make a living, the work that distracts one from focussing on the Lord God all the day. The Pharisees had lost sight of this.

All of the care of body and soul shown by our Lord on the Sabbath highlights the restoration of his people – precisely the reason given for Sabbath-keeping in Deuteronomy 5. Instead of conceding to the Pharisees that Jesus was breaking the law, we ought to conclude that He was demonstrating the true meaning of the Sabbath. It was a day of life and joy. In light of this purpose our Lord made the choice to use that very day for healing. The man would have been none the worse for wear if Jesus had waited till Monday, but Jesus intentionally chose the Sabbath to heal him. Our Lord was not breaking the Sabbath law by doing so; He was precisely fulfilling the law of God!

Pivotal turns in New Testament section – Colossians 2

Staying in the second article, I turn to where Colossians 2:16-17 is explained. I missed any real discussion of the heresy the apostle Paul was dealing with in Colosse. Still, Rev. van Popta rightly notes that the Old Testament Sabbath belonged to the "shadows" which are fulfilled in Christ. He then states that "the Sabbath did not give way to the Lord's Day; rather, it gave way to Christ." He concludes, "Christ is, now, the Sabbath." Let us note that similarly circumcision belonged to the shadows, a rite which Paul mentions in Colossians 2:11-12. Does this mean that it gave way only to Christ, and not to baptism? We confess that baptism has replaced circumcision (HC, Q/A 74). How about the animal sacrifices? They too belonged to the shadows (Heb 8:3-5). Were they merely replaced with Christ, end of the matter? No. Their truth/meaning remains valid for us in Christ (BC, 25), and therefore we are commanded, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices… your spiritual act of worship" (Rom 12:1; cf. Heb 13:16).

When Rev. van Popta connects the Sabbath as shadow to Christ the reality, I can follow well, but when he says that "Christ is, now, the Sabbath" I have no idea how to understand that. I submit that Rev. van Popta has not completed the discussion. He should have followed through from Christ to the Lord's Day, so that the truth and substance of the Sabbath in Christ would come to expression in the Lord's Day. If not, the fourth commandment should no longer be read as part of the law today.

"Living off Constantinian capital"

Coming to the third article, we find that marking Sunday as a day of rest in the West is nothing more than "living off Constantinian capital for some 1600 years" (p. 228). This suggests that the day of rest was really little more than a political creation. We read, "Western society has largely been living with a Constantinian view of the Sunday" (p. 228). Earlier it was written: "Although the civil authority decreed Sunday to be a day of rest, the church kept the focus where it was to be, namely, on the call to worship" (p. 227). I read this to mean that the church should not speak about rest on the Sunday. Interspersed with this was a description of enforced Sunday rest in sixteenth century Scotland that appears to be designed to show how misguided was such legislation (really, this is a straw man). It appears one is to conclude that treating Sunday as a day of rest has more to do with Constantine than with Scripture. Therefore, when Rev. van Popta later asked whether the Supreme Court of Canada was wrong in throwing out the Lord's Day Act in 1985, I expected him to say they were right to do so. I was also surprised that he fully endorsed the 1970 brief of the nine Canadian Reformed ministers. Something seems inconsistent.

In response, I would point out that pitting "day of rest" against "day of worship" introduces a false dilemma. After all, "day of rest" is a term used in Lord's Day 38 of our catechism for the Lord's Day today, and that is based on Scripture. Further, Rev. van Popta equates "day of rest" with the "Jewish Sabbitarianism" (p. 227) which he mentions in the next sentence. These are two very different things because they exist within a different framework. The Christian day of rest is a matter of thankful service; the Jewish Sabbath (i.e. not the scriptural Sabbath) became a matter of earning salvation. If the church is "losing its focus" whenever it speaks of a "day of rest," then the term should be taken out of our Catechism. I hope not!

Role of conscience

Based on what I have written, I find that Rev. van Popta has not adequately dealt with the scriptural grounds regarding the Lord's Day. The result is that he now gives too much over to the individual believer's conscience. We then come into dangerous territory, for the sinful human heart will soon find more and more room for selfish decisions, while appealing to "personal freedom of conscience."

As for the text of Romans 14:5 – "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" – its use is permissible in this case *only* if it has indeed been shown that the matters under discussion are purely Old Testament ceremonial matters that are entirely in the freedom of the Christian today. For it is with a view to ceremonial questions of diet and *Jewish* feast days that Paul writes as he does in Romans 14:15. These were matters to which there is absolutely no binding on the New Testament church. But Paul is not writing about the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10). If then Romans 14:5 is appealed to for freedom of conscience, those who use it in regard to working on Sunday will have to go the whole way and clearly state that it is entirely in the freedom of the conscience of the Christian to work on Sunday and none shall be judged for doing so, as long as they are careful not to offend their fellow believers. I doubt that Rev. van Popta would state this, but I think it is the only legitimate position to take if Romans 14:15 is to function in the discussion.

The question for the hypothesized farmer or any other person caught in these proposed dilemmas must be, "Am I doing this for the Lord?" That is a question for every day, but it is particularly the question to ask on the Lord's Day. And since we are to rest,

how can one claim work for the Lord on that day, unless the nature of the work clearly fits the categories covered by the Lord in Matthew 12? Here it may be noted that these were not new categories (mercy, necessity, and religion), but drawn out of the Old Testament by Christ Himself.

Being very concrete in conclusion, I would be far more cautious than Rev. van Popta in endorsing Sunday ball games. I have room for such things, but using the word "absolutely" and calling this "communion of saints stuff which flows out of the Sunday" (p. 229) is too absolute and provides *carte blanche* for much more. The selfish heart would rather turn to entertaining type activities than the pursuit of the knowledge of God and the practice of godliness. Parents should be able to answer their children's questions about what is permitted or not permitted on Sunday in their household simply by saying: "We have six days to do that already. We want this day to be different. It is a special day for the Lord. We will find the most personal pleasure when we use this day according to its purpose, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord." Let's be careful not to allow selfish thinking to determine our ethics about the Sunday. I think that everything on that day should, as much as possible, remind us that God has asked for one-seventh of our time to particularly draw our hearts to Him. Let nothing stand in the way of this.

Ted Van Raalte
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Note: See next issue for Rev. van Popta's response.

From time to time Clarion *will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.*

Press Release of Classis Alberta held June 7, 2005 in Taber

On behalf of the convening church at Taber, Br. Wayne Veenstra called the meeting to order. He welcomed the delegates of the churches of Classis Alberta. He also welcomed Br. Harry Halma and Rev. Eric Fennema as observers from the Trinity URC at Lethbridge. It was also noted that an invitation had been extended to the Monarch FRC, but observers were unable to attend.

The following items were remembered concerning life in the churches since the last meeting of the churches of this classical resort: the departure of Rev. Eikelboom to Tasmania, and the departure of Rev. Lodder to Cloverdale. It was also noted with thankfulness that Rev. Poppe is soon to arrive in Coaldale.

Br. Veenstra opened the meeting with the reading of 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; he led in prayer and invited the assembly to sing Psalm 25:2.

The brothers of the convening church reported that the credentials are in good order. All *primi* delegates were present except from the churches at Immanuel, Providence, and Barrhead. Classis was declared constituted. The following officers were suggested and took their place: Chairman: Rev. J. Louwerse, Vice-chairman: Br. Harry Noot, Clerk: Rev. R. Bredenhof. It was noted that Rev. Slomp is absent because he is in Ontario to attend the FRC Synod, and that Rev. Aasman and Rev. Tiggelaar are on sabbatical for the summer months. The agenda was adopted after some small additions and changes.

A report from the Committee for Financial Aid for Students of the Ministry was received with thankfulness.

Three proposals from the Providence Church in Edmonton amending Classis Alberta regulations were adopted. The proposals were: change of kilometre rate, invitation of FRC and URCNA observers, and documentation for release of minister and approbation of call. Thankfulness was expressed to the Providence council for their work done on these changes. By proxy Rev. Aasman volunteered to send out the updated classis regulations.

Rev. Fennema spoke some words of appreciation for the relationship that is gradually developing between the two federations. Rev. Bredenhof reciprocated in an appropriate manner.

An appeal was dealt with in closed session.

There was a request from church at Coaldale re: approbation of call of Rev. Poppe. All the documents were found to be in good order, and the call was approbated. Rev. Slomp was delegated to speak on behalf of the churches of Classis Alberta at the installation of Rev. Poppe.

The chairman asked whether the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of the church. All churches of the classis answered, "Yes, yes, and no."

Appointments: Convening church for the next classis will be Barrhead, on October 4, 2005. Suggested executive officers for the next classis will be: Chairman: Rev. Aasman, Vice-chairman: Rev. Louwerse, Clerk: Rev. Tiggelaar.

Some brothers made use of the question period. Thankfulness was expressed by the church at Coaldale for pulpit supply received. The chairman judged that brotherly censure was not required. The Acts and Press Release of Classis were adopted after some minor changes. The chairman asked the assembly to sing Psalm 122:1 and 3, led in thanksgiving prayer, and closed the meeting.

For Classis Alberta, June 7, 2005
Harry J. Noot, vice-chairman at that time

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Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

Births

With thanks to the Lord for the miracle of new life, we announce the arrival of our first born

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6th great-grandchild for John and Hennie Helder
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O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you. Psalm 89:8

With all praise and thanks to God we joyfully announce the birth of our newest miracle

JORDANA ALEXIS

Born May 21, 2005
Brian and Erna Nordeman
A sister for *Luke, Rachelle, Joel, Isaac*
Jordana is the 40th grandchild for Gerard and Johanna Nordeman
25th grandchild for Gerald and Hetty Jans

I have called you by name, you are mine. Isaiah 43:1

With great thankfulness to God, we announce the birth of our second son

BENJAMIN PETER

Born April 1, 2005
Jeff and Michelle Temple
Excited big brother *Aidan*
4th grandchild for Keith and Terry Temple
2nd grandchild for Pete and Teresa Bergsma
690 Platt's Lane, London, ON N6G 3B2

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Psalm 90:1

With great joy and thanksgiving to the Lord, the giver of life, we announce the birth of our son and brother

JEREMY PHILLIP HELDER

Born April 3, 2005
to **Fred & Sharon Helder** and excited siblings,
Faythe, Rachel, Zachary, Gregory†, Rieneke and *Rhiana*
7127 Patterson Avenue SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 139:14a

With thankful hearts, we praise God for granting us another precious gift, and we announce the birth of our son

BROCK ALAN

Born June 15, 2005
Brad and Melinda Stiksma (nee Vegter)
A little brother for *Kyle*
5606 - 186 Street, Edmonton, AB T6M 1Z9
bmstiksma@yahoo.ca

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. Psalm 89:1

With great thankfulness to our Heavenly Father who has made all things well and has blessed us with another one of His precious gifts, we joyfully announce the birth of our fourth child, a daughter. We have named her

HANNA JANELLE

Born on June 28, 2005
Jeff and Karen VanSydenborgh (nee Jonker)
Hanna is also welcomed by her big brothers *Joel, Aaron* and *Jonah*
her grandparents Peter and Henrietta Jonker and Albert and Nelly VanSydenborgh as well as her Great-Grandmothers Hanna Kottelenberg and Gre VanSydenborgh
11 Oxford Street, Orangeville, ON L9W 3P3
jkvansyd@auracom.com

Weddings

With praise and thanks to God for bringing us together in love, we

ANDREA NICOLE VANDERHORST
and
STANLEY NEAL DE HAAN

joyfully announce our engagement on July 3, 2005
The Lord willing, a July 15, 2006 wedding is planned.
34995 Page Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1N8

Anniversaries

30th Wedding Anniversary
1975 ~ August 15 ~ 2005

May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children. Psalm 128:5-6a

Giving thanks to the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness, we hope to celebrate the 30th Wedding Anniversary of our parents and grandparents

HENRY and MARGARET VAN IPEREN (née Visser)

May our heavenly Father continue to bless them and grant them many more years together in His service!

With love:

Beamsville, ON: Henry and Irene Van Iperen
Derek, James
John and Francine Van Iperen
Kenton, Johann
Jason and JoAnn Van Iperen
Caleb

Smithville, ON: Garett Van Iperen and LeeAnna Van Luik
Janine
Jo-anne

Mailing address: 2741 South Grimsby Rd. 16, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
E-mail address: hmvaniperen@sympatico.ca

1960 ~ September 3 ~ 2005

For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous. Psalm 125: 3a

With joy and thankfulness to the Lord, we are happy to announce the 45th Wedding Anniversary of our dear parents and grandparents

EVERT and TERESA SCHULENBERG (nee Bethlehem)

Campden, ON: Art and Teresa Schulenberg
Trevor, Amanda, Ryan, Jason, Kevin, Scott

Beamsville, ON: Shirley and Henry Tenhage
Kyle, Shannon and Greg, Troy, Stacey, Vanessa

Campden, ON: Bob and Rose Schulenberg
Tim, Steven, Karissa, Shawn, Cody, Melanie, Tyler

We hope to celebrate this joyous occasion, D.V., with an Open House to be held September 10, 2005 in the Lincoln Church building from 2-4 p.m.

4225 Merritt Road, Beamsville, Ontario L0R 1B1

1965 ~ September 4 ~ 2005

Give thanks to God, rejoicing, because the LORD is good. Bless Him with anthems voicing, your love and gratitude. He who our peace ensures, forsakes His promise never. His steadfast love endures, and we are His forever. Psalm 107:1 Book of Praise

With great joy and thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we announce the 40th Wedding Anniversary of our dear parents and grandparents

GEORGE and TINA ROODZANT (nee Orsel)

We thank the Lord for guiding and protecting them through these past years and we pray that the Lord will continue to bless them in the future.

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Neerlandia, AB: Helen and Erwin Peters
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(Chuck†) and Frieda Roodzant

Winnipeg, MB: Jenny and Peter Verhelst
Juanita, Izaak, Rebecca, Emily, Benjamin
(Alida†)

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Romans 12

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Mr. Kasper VanVeen, Education Committee chair of MCS
(acting on behalf of the newly formed society of ECHS)
(519) 856-9605

Applications to be addressed to:
Maranatha/Emmanuel Christian School
c/o Education Committee
RR 3, Garafraxa Street, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

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