

Clarion



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*Our
adoption
will also
give reason
for
thankfulness
and
humility*



Inside this Issue

- Voice of the Church
- The LORD is Compassionate





Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer is minister of the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church at Tintern, Ontario
holtvlüwer@bell.net

Voice of the Church

A voter is someone who has been granted the privilege by the consistory to share in representing the whole body

My esteemed fellow co-editor Dr. C. VanDam recently penned a stimulating editorial on the matter of women's voting (Vol. 60, No. 10). Among the helpful things he brought forward is the statement that "this is a matter about which a difference of opinion can exist." I agree. I hold a different opinion myself and to broaden the discussion would like to flesh out an alternative approach.

What does the Bible say?

We all want to base our opinions on the Bible and rightly so. A major part of the difficulty throughout the decades of discussion has been how best to use and understand the Scriptures with respect to this issue. All are agreed that no Bible passage deals explicitly with our precise practice of congregational voting followed by appointment by the consistory with the deacons. Also, no passage lays out a *prescription* for what may be considered a related practice. The Lord has not given specific instructions for this matter. That means we are at best left with a *description* or some examples which may relate to our situation and help to shed some light on the matter. From whatever descriptions we find we may be able to see certain *principles* which may then be applied to our current practice. We will need to be careful not to jump to conclusions.

Underlying principle

At this point we have to be clear on what is the principle contained in congregational voting as we know it today. We need to compare apples with apples. In order to properly use any biblical example we need to see what about it is comparable to today.

It has often been stated that our Church Order (Art. 3) and the Belgic Confession (Art. 31) speak of office bearers being chosen by the *congregation* or the *church*. From this it is often asserted that since women are members of the congregation, they should be free to participate in the voting as well. But what is often

not understood is that this argument proves too much: if truly the *whole* congregation is called upon to do the choosing, then also the children should vote as well as adult non-communicant members! After all, the same Belgic Confession (Art. 34) specifically includes children of believers as members of God's covenant and congregation (see LD 27). Yet no one advocates this. In reality, proponents of female voting wish to restrict it to *male and female communicant members*.

Representation

This restriction highlights the underlying principle, namely that those today who vote for office bearers do so *representing* the whole church. In the election, a certain group within the congregation is called upon to speak on behalf of everyone in the church. A *smaller portion* of the church acts as the voice of the *entire* congregation.

This observation should help keep us away from seeing the act of voting as a personal right or giving voice to our personal views. A voter is someone who has been *granted the privilege by the consistory to share in representing the whole body*. A voter does not speak for himself personally. Every church member who votes needs to consider not: "Who is my personal favourite choice that will do me (or my family) the most good?" but rather: "Who is best suited at this time to serve the whole congregation for her edification and God's glory?" It would be good for voters to discuss this matter with various members (not just their wives!) and seek their input. The Lord then, by his Spirit, works in the hearts of the voters so that his choice is brought out through their collective wisdom. That wisdom is rightly seen as the wisdom of the *entire* congregation. For this reason, those who are not given the opportunity to represent the congregation need not feel left out, marginalized, or "disenfranchised." Their voice is heard in the representatives who cast a vote.

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P. Holtvliuwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
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In This Issue

Editorial – Voice of the Church — *P.H. Holtvliuwer* 474

Treasures, New and Old – The LORD is Compassionate
— *D. Poppe*..... 477

Adopted — *E. Kampen* 478

“He’s Just a Little-Bitty Baby”: A Look at the Structure of
the Covenant of Grace — *K. Stam* 481

Report of the 48th Annual Fraser Valley Women’s
Fellowship Day — *J. de Glint* 483

Further Discussion – Who Should Preside?
— A Response — *A. Oosterhoff* 485

Letters to the Editor 487

Voice of the church

Now the question becomes more specifically: who should or may represent the congregation? Do biblical examples shed any light on who may function as the voice of the church in choosing office bearers? Again, we must be cautious in that at best we find related examples and not all of them are clear as to the gender of the representatives. For example, when leaders were chosen in Deuteronomy 1:1, 13 then all we read about is that Moses addressed the *entire* people and asked them to choose. We aren’t told who exactly did the choosing (was it every individual present – man, woman, and child? Men only? Or men and women? Nothing specific is revealed.)

However, later in Deuteronomy 17:15 God commands Israel, once they have settled into Canaan and desire a king, to appoint the king whom God chooses. This is not an exact parallel in that first God chooses the office bearer but yet it requires some representation of the nation to put God’s choice into effect. In 2 Samuel 2:4 and 5:3 we read that it was in fact the “men of Judah” and the “elders of Israel” who actually anointed David as king. In this instance it was clearly not the ladies of Israel who were involved in representing the whole and giving voice to the church’s appointment.

What’s Inside

This issue begins with an editorial from Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer. He writes about the subject of women’s voting, broadening the discussion on this topic by presenting his opinion.

Rev. Eric Kampen contributes another article of a church historical nature. In this article he discusses the spread of the gospel from Old Testament Israel to the New Testament church.

Expanding on his recent editorial, Rev. Klaas Stam discusses the structure of the covenant in relation to infant baptism. Why is the covenant structured as to include the children of believers?

Issue 20 includes a report on the Fraser Valley Women’s Fellowship Day. We also have two letters to the editor and a Further Discussion article. There is the regular Treasures New and Old meditation as well as a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

Other kinds of representation

Still in the Old Testament, we find others sorts of representation taking place. While not exact parallels to those charged with selecting leaders, these examples give us a sense of who were commonly set aside to represent the church, albeit in different circumstances. In Numbers 1 we find that twelve helpers were selected to assist Moses in conducting a census, twelve *men*. In verse 44 they are described as “the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family.” Similarly, twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe, to spy out the land of Canaan (Num 13). Later, a different twelve males were assigned to select stones from the Jordan river upon Israel’s crossing, each representing his tribe (Josh 3:12). The New Testament has a similar example of males representing the assembly of God’s people when Paul describes the men travelling with Titus to Corinth as “representatives of the churches and an honour to Christ” (2 Cor 8:23). I could find no unambiguous example where sisters were put forward to represent the church and speak for the whole.

New Testament choosers

This also applies to the choosing of office bearers in the early church, the closest parallel to our modern form of voting for office bearers. It is sometimes stated that sisters were involved in choosing office bearers in Acts 1:15-16 and Acts 6:2-3 and that this is apparent from the context. But is it really? (You’ll need your Bibles to follow this next bit as we need to dig into the specifics). Indeed, sisters are indisputably present in Acts 1:14 and can safely be assumed to be included in the reference to the gathering together of “all the disciples” in 6:2. In fairness we should also assume that the children of believers were present in the latter gathering as well, from tot to teen – after all, it was “*all* the disciples.” But who did the choosing? Did every single person give an indication of his or her preference? Did also the teenagers “vote” or only those believers of a certain age? Few if any think the children would have participated. It seems fair to conclude that some *representation* of the congregation did the choosing on behalf of the whole, but who did the representing? Acts 6 does not say in so many words.

In Acts 6 the “brothers” are asked to make a selection of seven men to serve at tables (v. 3). It is often stated that we should not take this common address of the church as restricted to the male members. Now, in itself the Greek “brothers” is basically a masculine term (like our English “guys”) and yet it is true that it may include sisters on certain occasions (e.g. Acts 1:14 where Mary is included among the “brothers” of v. 15). But it’s also true that it may be used to speak of males alone (1 Tim 5:1). In many instances it is not certain whether the group addressed is mixed or male-only. The context

will have to decide what is more likely but in Acts 6 it remains ambiguous and unclear whether the apostles are addressing only the brothers among the disciples or all members together.

“Men, brothers”

Is it possible that the apostles are asking the men among the believers to represent the whole church and make the selection of office-bearers? It is *possible* in Acts 6. But it seems to me even *likely* to be the case in Acts 1 where it is often missed that Peter in verse 16 addresses the gathering of the church with a double-masculine phrase, literally, “Men, brothers” (See KJV and NKJV). The first word, “men,” is almost exclusively used in Greek to indicate male gender. This phrase appears in Acts at least thirteen other times and in each of those cases it seems clear that the group addressed is entirely male (e.g. Acts 7:2; 15:7 – see (N)KJV for the literal translation). If Peter means to include the sisters in Acts 1:16 then he is strangely using a very unnecessary double-masculine. Why not simply address the group with the more flexible term, “brothers”? In light of this, I consider it much more probable that Peter is addressing the male members of the church, singling them out with the intention to ask them (as representatives of the church) to choose new office bearers (v. 22).

From example to practice

When a closer look is taken at the biblical data on who speaks for the congregation, then the clearest and closest examples point in the direction of adult males (i.e. “men”) serving as the voice of the church. In the Bible, females are never clearly given this task. I repeat that this data is descriptive, not necessarily prescriptive, but it certainly suggests that churches today who assign the privilege of voting to male communicant members are well in line with biblical example. Certainly, no church or individual should be made to feel inferior or “behind the times” because they wish to follow the nearest biblical precedent and retain the practice we’ve had for over 400 years in the Dutch/Canadian Reformed churches.

For me, it carries a lot of weight that for over 400 years and many generations the practice has been for the male communicant members to represent the entire congregation in voting for office bearers. I’ve never heard that this practice has harmed the churches. To the contrary, through it God has blessed the churches with the regular provision of office bearers. If such a long-standing, beneficial practice that follows in the line of biblical examples is to be changed, should we not have excellent reasons for doing so? Both biblical prescription as well as description is lacking for the change. So why not stay the course?





Rev. Dirk Poppe is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Coaldale, Alberta
dapoppe@telus.net



MATTHEW 13:52

The LORD is Compassionate

*"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?
... My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused."*

Hosea 11:8

Do you ever wonder where your sins leave you? Have you ever sinned very seriously against the LORD and then wondered whether the LORD would reject you? That's the question the Israelites were about to struggle with.

Hosea told the Israelites that they were about to be sent into exile. Earlier in Hosea he compared Israel to an unfaithful wife who had gone after her illicit lovers. And now in Hosea 11 God spells out the case against them. They refused to repent, sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to images. How would he now deal with this unfaithful wife? God says that they would go to Egypt and Assyria would rule over them. It was going to be an extremely difficult experience for the Israelites and they would struggle with the question: Who are we if God sends us out of the promised land? Are we still his children? Does he still love us? Or does this mean that he has forsaken us completely?

God answered that question already in Hosea 1-3. There he told Hosea to take back his wife Gomer after she had proven herself unfaithful to him. This is an image of what God would do for his children.

And in Hosea 11:8-9 God tells us why. He says, "How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and

devastate Ephraim." The LORD says that he can't give up his people or treat them like Admah or Zeboiim. We should understand that these were towns in the vicinity of Sodom and Gomorrah and were destroyed together with them (Deut 29:23). The LORD will not treat his people like those cities. Sending them into exile does not mean that he is destroying them totally. On account of his justice, many of them would suffer deeply and only a small remnant of them would return. But that doesn't mean they would cease to be his children. He would again act to save them because, he says, his heart is changed within him and all his compassion is aroused. Our Father is deeply compassionate. He is a God who is moved to pity when he sees the suffering of his people.

This theme of God's compassion comes back time and again in the Bible. The first thing God reveals about himself to Moses in Exodus 34 is that he is "the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness." After David sinned in numbering the fighting men, and the angel of the LORD killed 70,000 Israelites, in 2 Samuel 24 we're told that the LORD was grieved because of the calamity and he told the angel to stop. In Psalm 78 we are told how the hearts of the Israelites were not loyal to the LORD in their time in the desert. But verse 38 says, "Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did

not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath." In Psalm 106:44-45 we're told that when the Israelites wasted away because of their sin, "He took note of their distress when he heard their cry; for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love, he relented." Do you see the extent of the compassion and grace of the LORD? And so also when his people were suffering in exile, God's compassion would be aroused and he would bring a remnant to the promised land.

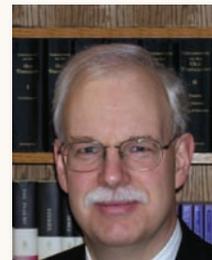
And the reason he does this, he says, is because he is God, not man (v. 9). He is the Holy One among them. It is natural for us to give vent to our anger and to ignore the suffering of others. In contrast, it is God's glory that he is slow to anger and that he loves to show compassion.

And then you see the profound depths of God's compassion because it means that he himself has to pay for our sins. As Hosea alludes to in verse 1 of our chapter, the reason the LORD has compassion on his people is because Christ bore his wrath for us.

Do you understand that the LORD delights to show mercy also to you and the rest of his people? Do not his compassion and grace move you to a profound sense of gratitude, a desire to show compassion to others, and a deep longing to worship him with all you have? 

Adopted

Eric Kampen



Rev. Eric Kampen is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Orangeville, Ontario
eric.kampen@canrc.org

We may all know a family that has adopted a child. In most cases, sooner or later adopted children will learn that they were adopted. Because of their adoption, they end up with two sets of roots. They will have the roots of their adopted family and their birth family. Many adopted children often become curious about their birth family and try to learn something about them.

This having two sets of roots is also true for Christians. Christians are people who have been adopted into the family of God. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul stated, "You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ." A little further he wrote that the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed us "that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal 3:26; 4:5).

This is not the full extent of the picture, however. Paul also wrote that "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29). In his letter to the Ephesians he wrote to those who were Gentiles by birth, ". . . remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). A little further in that same passage he wrote, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. . ." (Eph 2:19).

It is worthwhile to reflect on the how and when of this adoption aspect of our roots as Christians. It will help us understand some aspects of the life of the church. It will also give reason for thankfulness and humility.

The rock in the pond

To understand how we have become part of God's family, considering that most do not have Jewish roots,

it is helpful to think of an activity many will have done as children, namely, throw a rock into a pond or stream. When the rock hits the water, the immediate effect is that of waves rippling out in concentric circles. If the rock enters the water fairly close to the shore, the effect will be more like semi-circles. It is interesting, depending on the size of the rock, that the waves can still be seen moving out while the centre has become calm again.

This well describes the spread of the Christian faith in history. In the case of the Christian faith, it is more like a rock being thrown close to shore. It began in Jerusalem, with the ripples of the gospel message steadily moving westward. To be sure, there were some eastward ripples, even into the western part of China (sixth-tenth century), but they were feeble and never were more than a tiny presence before they faded out.

True to the image of the rock in the pond, the waves of the gospel have kept on moving outward while the place it began has calmed down. The areas first affected by the gospel only have traces remaining while new areas are experiencing the ripples dramatically for the first time. We see this in the way the gospel is receiving an audience in parts of Asia while areas like the Middle East and Western Europe, once centres of Christianity, are abandoning their Christian roots.

Three ripples: Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth

This pattern was foretold in Scripture. Of course there are the many promises of the gospel going to the nations (e.g., Gen 12:3). Our Lord commanded it when he commissioned his disciples (Matt 28:18-20). The particular pattern, however, was foretold by our Lord Jesus just before he ascended.

We read about this in Acts 1:8. The Lord Jesus told his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth." This process began when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost. The new, international character of the church became evident on the day of Pentecost in the way many were able to hear about the Lord Jesus in their own language (Acts 2:1-13). The message would radiate out from Jerusalem.

In the book of Acts we see the beginning of the ripple effect of the gospel. We see this in the way the book begins with the disciples in Jerusalem and concludes with the Apostle Paul in Rome. The book of Acts can be summed up as, "From Jerusalem to Rome." In the process we can note three ripples.

First, the gospel went from Jerusalem to Judea. This was the least dramatic ripple, for it simply indicates how the gospel spread among the Jews. At the same time, however, we should not underestimate the impact for the Jews who confessed faith in Jesus. Confessing Jesus as Lord was seen as abandoning the Jewish faith. It led to rejection by the Jewish community.

Second, the gospel went to the Samaritans. The Samaritans had settled in the land after the exile of the Northern tribes around 722 BC. There was animosity between Jews and Samaritans. We learn from Acts 8 how persecution drove many believers away from Jerusalem. One of the results was that Philip preached the gospel to the Samaritans and many believed. Their inclusion was confirmed by a special outpouring of the Spirit.

The third, and most dramatic ripple, occurred when the gospel was preached to the Gentiles, a term used to describe all races that were not Jewish. In Acts 10 and 11, we learn how the Lord used a vision to impress upon Peter that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles too. Peter ended up at the house of a Roman centurion called Cornelius. Again, the inclusion of the Gentiles was confirmed by an outpouring of the Spirit.

In Acts 11:20 we learn that it was in the church at Antioch that people began to speak to the Greeks, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The church at Antioch ended up sending out Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The rest of the book of Acts is an account of Paul's journeys, his eventual imprisonment, and his journey to Rome. In Rome, though a prisoner, he was able to preach the gospel freely.

Rippling beyond Rome

The book of Acts concludes in Rome. The waves of the gospel continued to ripple outward. The gospel slowly washed over Western Europe. It is interesting, for example, to note that it washed over England before it washed over The Netherlands. In fact, The Netherlands seemed to catch a backwash from England as missionaries from England finally succeeded in bringing the gospel to The Netherlands near the end of the seventh century. In general, however, the movement was, and is, westward. The activity is on the western edge of the wave, while areas behind the wave grow calm in the sense of becoming indifferent to the gospel.

Significant developments at the start of the third ripple

This third ripple is the most significant in the way it became clear Jesus is the Saviour of the world. To be sure, there were many Old Testament promises about the adoption of people from all nations into Israel. Further, the Lord Jesus had spoken about people coming from east and west and sitting at table with Abraham. The book of Acts shows, however, that it was a difficult concept for the early church to accept. The Lord gave Peter a special vision before he received the invitation to come to the house of Cornelius. It required a special meeting in Jerusalem to discuss whether the Gentile Christians had to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15).

The Spirit prevailed upon the church to make it clear that the church was the new Israel, without having to keep all the laws of the old Israel. The church was rooted in Jewish culture but it was not dependent upon Jewish culture. Gentile Christians did not have to adopt Jewish customs. The gospel was able to flourish and function in a Greek culture without needing to either compromise its message or destroy the culture.

A defining moment: the fall of Jerusalem

A defining moment in this process of the adoption of the nations into Israel was an event not mentioned in the Scriptures, namely, the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. The fall of Jerusalem was the final outcome of a Jewish rebellion against the Romans. The city and the temple were destroyed. The Lord Jesus had prophesied that this would take place (Matt 24:15-25). The believers living in Jerusalem and Judea fled to the area across the Jordan River called the Decapolis (region of ten cities), especially the city of Pella.

This event was significant for a number of reasons. First, it led to a clear separation of the Christian church from Judaism. At first, the Romans had looked upon the Christians as a Jewish sect (Acts 24:5; 14; 28:22). Now it was clear that Christianity was distinct from Judaism.

Second, it freed the church from attachment to Jerusalem and the temple. Jewish believers often still participated in the Old Testament ceremonial laws as performed in the temple. For example, Paul still went to the temple in accordance with the rules for purification (Acts 21:26). As long as the temple was there, the Christians of Gentile background would be reminded all the more of their adoption into Israel. The fall of Jerusalem put a definitive end to the involvement of Christians in rituals from the age of the shadows.

The Spirit prevailed upon the church to make it clear that the church was the new Israel, without having to keep all the laws of the old Israel

Third, the fall of Jerusalem also proved decisive in the shift to the Sunday as the day for Christian worship. Especially the early Jewish Christians had still honoured the Sabbath day. Sabbath keeping was one of the marks of the Jews. Worshipping on the Sunday set the Christians apart from the Jews. As the Christians distanced themselves from the Jewish rebellion, the church began to develop fully as a separate institution also in the eyes of the Roman authorities.

Being thankful and careful

We began by speaking about being adopted children in God's family. It is popular in our age to speak about the time of one's personal adoption, that is, one's personal coming to faith. Ironically, that approach suggests the child decides to be adopted, in contrast to the process of adoption where the parents are active and the children passive. When we look at our roots, there will be different individual stories of how the gospel has come to us. While not denying the individual ways the Lord has used to draw us into the household of God, the true Israel, we should have an eye for the bigger picture, of how God in his grace has adopted those who were not his people and made them his people. This whole process was set in motion at Pentecost and continues to work itself out in the present.

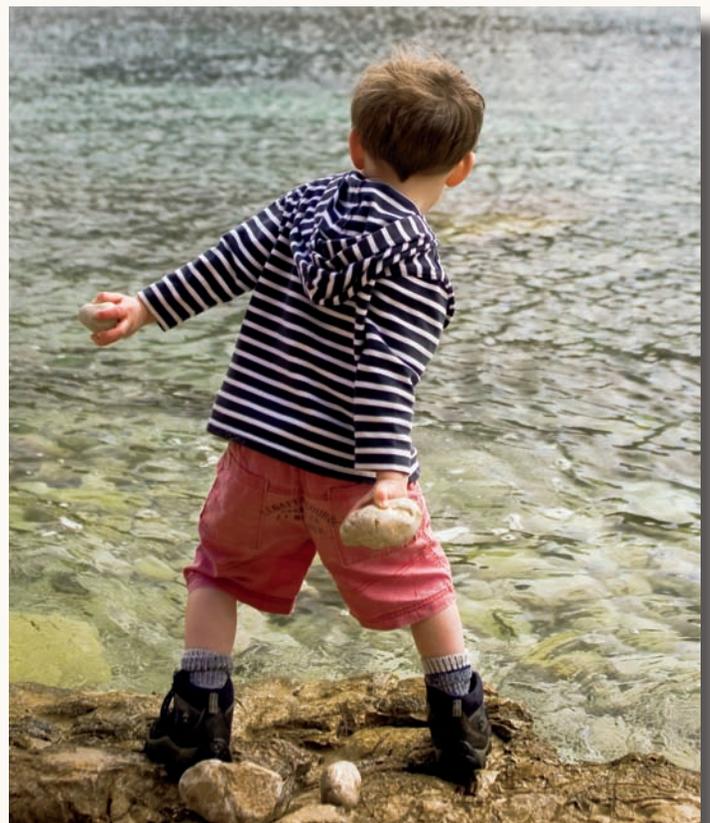
Our individual adoption as children of God plays itself out within that larger process of adoption.

The fact that we are adopted into Israel is important for it shows us our Old Testament roots. It means that Israel's history has become our history. Some of the events at the third ripple, where the gospel went to the nations, also are critical for understanding how to work with that part of our spiritual family history, the Old Testament Scriptures. It is reason for thankfulness that we have been adopted.

Israel's history has become our history

At the same time, the awareness of how the water has quieted down while the ripple moves westward should also caution us. Paul warned the Romans that those grafted into Israel through faith would be cut off if they fell into unbelief (Rom 11:17-21). The Lord Jesus also warned the church at Ephesus that he could move their lampstand elsewhere (Rev 2:5).

In the end, knowing about our adoption should make us both thankful and careful.





Rev. Klaas Stam is minister emeritus of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario
cstam@sourcecable.net

“He’s Just a Little-Bitty Baby”: A Look at the Structure of the Covenant of Grace

Recently I wrote an editorial about the fact that the Scriptures are clear on infant baptism, even without a specific text stating that infants must be baptized. We all agree, I think, that *adults* can only be baptized after public profession of faith. But why do we then profess and insist that *infants* of believing parents must also be baptized? Can a little-bitty baby believe?

Notice that in both cases – adult *and* infant baptism – faith is required. In the case of adult baptism, it is the faith of the person to be baptized which must first be publicly confessed. In the case of infant baptism, it is the faith of the parents and their sincere commitment that must first be publicly professed. Please note: in both cases faith is required. *There can be no baptism without faith.*

This must be clear ahead of time. Sometimes those who advocate infant baptism are accused of “jumping the gun.” But that is utter nonsense. Public profession of faith is *always* a requirement for baptism. It is important to state this “up front” to avoid stubborn misconceptions.

The structure of the covenant

The baptism of infants finds its origin the way the LORD has sovereignly *structured* his covenant. When the LORD makes a covenant, he does so with a believer. You may think here of Abraham. In Genesis 17: 7 we find this structure clearly articulated, “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you *and* your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”

What structure becomes evident here? *When the LORD makes a covenant with a believer, this covenant*

immediately extends to his descendants and the generations to come. This is also the reason why the sign of the covenant had to be administered through the generations, from father to sons.

When God accepts a believer, he also accepts his family, children, and descendants. The promises and obligations of that covenant now also apply to the children of believers. These children are to be taught about and nurtured in that covenant. This is what I call “the structure of the covenant.”

Some would have us believe that this structure is in effect only in the Old Testament, which is a physical covenant, while in the New Testament it is a spiritual covenant which an entirely different structure. Bully. Both covenants, the Old and the New, are fully spiritual. Circumcision meant receiving a new heart, just as baptism means receiving a new heart. Check the prophets of old (Jer 31:33-34).

This structure has not changed in the New Testament. On Pentecost, the Apostle Peter says, “The promise is for you *and* your children. . . .” Instead of the structure becoming a stricture, it is specifically added that the promise is also for all “who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). The New Covenant broadens and deepens what was already clear in the old dispensation.

Why does the covenant have this structure?

This structure exists because it is a matter of common biblical sense. When you enter into a close personal relationship with a friend, you also include in that relationship all who belong to this friend. You would not stand idly by if your friend’s wife and children were being slaughtered. Would you really



turn a blind eye? How much more will the God of righteousness and compassion not fully honour his covenant?

This structure exists especially because the LORD has willed it so. In this way he shows to us his sovereign grace and boundless love. This structure is God's special glory. He makes his covenant with whomever he wills, with those who are least esteemed in this world, and he stands by his word. That is why being included in his covenant from infancy on is such a tremendous blessing and surety.

There can be no baptism without faith

Please note carefully. A child is not baptized on the basis of his parents' faith. No human faith – not even of sincere Christian parents – is sufficient. *The only basis is Christ's sacrifice on the cross.* A child is baptized because God promises to children of believers that he is and will be their Father in heaven. He applies to us all the benefits of Jesus Christ. The basis is never our faith but only God's promises in Christ which are always true and sure.

Parents beware!

The above does mean that Christian parents have an immense responsibility. When requesting baptism for your newborn infant, you make important vows. Parents beware! Do not have your children baptized out of custom or superstition. The LORD will hold you to each and all of these vows. Let it not be because of unbelief

and laxness of apostate parents that baptized children go astray.

Is there a problem with the attitude of today's covenant youth? Sometimes I hear rumblings, even though I live on a dead end street. Perhaps the problem lies more with parents who are not being Christian examples and offering biblical guidance.

He makes his covenant with whomever he wills, with those who are least esteemed in this world, and he stands by his word

The structure of the covenant also makes us aware of the *sanctions* in the covenant. God works through the generations, *but grace is not hereditary.* Those who become unbelievers and break God's covenant also forfeit the blessing of the covenant for their children and the generations to come. Our decisions have great consequences for our children. Faith is passed on through the generations but can also be lost in the generations. The covenant is not a game. Entire generations can be lost for the kingdom of heaven when parents and/or children do not take its structure seriously.

Parents have hope!

The structure of the covenant is not only about the grace of God. That structure is designed to *involve all of us*, young and old, to meet the obligations that come with God's blessings. The simple yet profound fact that the structure of the covenant begins with and rests on God and his promises in Christ gives great hope to Christian parents and covenant children. God also promises to us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is with us all who work with our baptism.

Is there not one text in Scripture that says infants must be baptized? Do you remember poor Rev. Johan vanderHoeven who postulated this observation? *But the whole Bible speaks this language.* How could we ever miss this clear biblical line?

I'd really like to see more discussion and reflection on the structure of the covenant of grace. I'd like parents to be encouraged every time they witness a baptism of an infant. I'd like our youth to be positively reminded of the riches of their baptism. We have such a tremendous treasure and motivation in infant baptism. Get the lead out, people.

C

God has Made Everything Beautiful in its Time

Report of the Forty-eighth Annual Fraser Valley Women's Fellowship Day

Held on June 23, 2011 in the Langley Canadian Reformed Church Building

There is a time and a season for everything under the heavens. These words from the Preacher had an immediate relevance to the women who had traveled to Langley for their annual study day. Last year they attended the Forty-seventh Annual Women's League Day. This year they had registered for the Forty-eighth Annual Women's Fellowship Day. The time had come to switch to a name that more accurately reflects the variety of groups that the attending women represent: from Women's Societies, to Bible Studies that include couples, to Coffee Break, and more.

With typical cheerfulness and forthrightness Hilary Vandergugten extended a warm welcome to the locals, the out-of-towners, and those from related churches. After song and prayer our attention was focused on Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, which contained the theme of the

day, "God has made everything in its time." It was time for Rose Boeve and Monice Sikma, both skillful mothers who readily share their talents, to present their insights.

Using the image of the photographic picture the speakers illustrated how the moments in time that we capture with a camera in fact add up to show the Lord's faithfulness from birth to death. The picture of a smiling baby brings our attention to the beginning of time. Whereas God is beyond the limit of time and place (Ps 90:4), he created days and seasons. Since the first moment time has passed at a steady pace, even if to us it may have felt very fast or painfully slow.

The picture of a bride takes us beyond the wedding day. Marital bliss does not prevent trial and grief. We experience joy and sorrow, health and sickness. Whether we place the photographs of our life in an album or a box, they will illustrate how the Lord looked after us with his providential care, whatever the circumstances. The Preacher aptly describes this ebb and flow of life: birth and death, killing and healing, weeping and laughter, criticism and praise, silence and speech, war and peace. All these times are in God's hand.

God's people may experience pleasant or unpleasant things, yet they all must learn to use their time wisely. Under God's direction they discover that their deeds are not meaningless, but meaningful. They learn to make the most of every opportunity and they acquire the skill of seasoning their speech with salt (Col 4:5, 6). They begin to see how at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6).

As we looked at the many pictures that showed how the little girl grew up to become a loyal bride, we have





During the general discussion we pondered how time is experienced in heaven, where we do not have to be anxious anymore about tomorrow. We reminded each other to use our time wisely, always remaining aware that time and grace will run out. We acknowledged that there are cycles of grief. But God does not tempt us beyond our despair. He gives a way of escape. He shatters us, but he will not abandon us. The Apostle Paul reassures us that the Spirit will not only help us in our weakness, but he will also intercedes on our behalf with the God of our salvation (Rom 8:28).

After attending to the housekeeping matters we united our voices in prayerful praise. "Come Lord Jesus, Maranatha! pray the Spirit and the Bride."



arrived at the photograph of an old woman. Soon she will have to face death. But she is certain that God will graciously reward her with the prize for having finished her race. Her accomplishments will be blessed and her failures forgiven. She will remember her creator during the aging process (Eccl 12). As we look through the pictures that show our time under the sun, we will gratefully see that the Lord has blessed our labour with fruit.

After a round of lively group discussions we broke for lunch and fellowship. The afternoon session was opened with the singing of the traditional "Women's League Day Song." Two representatives of the Chilliwack region provided the official entertainment for the day. By way of a life-size puppet show they demonstrated that the Eye might boast to be higher than the Foot, but in fact both Eye and Ear function best in cooperation.



Further Discussion

Who Should Preside? – A Response

I enjoyed Dr. Visscher's article (*Clarion*, July 15, 2011, p. 358). He makes a good argument in favour of amending Article 38 of the Church Order to remove the requirement that, as a rule, the minister shall preside over meetings of the consistory. However, the article contains a misunderstanding of the law and I hope he won't mind a gentle correction. The issue is an important one: may the minister be a member of the consistory? It affects all the churches and the principles of Reformed church polity.

The article suggests that the Province of Ontario enacted conflict of interest rules that prevent a minister from chairing the governing body of his church. This is incorrect. No such legislation has been enacted. However, the common (judge-made) law has developed principles over many years dealing with this issue and these rules have a wider reach than indicated in the article. Of course, the common-law is as much law as statute law. But there is this difference: the common law often applies to many jurisdictions, whereas a provincial statute only applies to the enacting province.

The common law developed the principle that trustees may not place themselves in a position in which their duty and interest conflict. This law, originally developed in England, has been adopted by and is part of the common law of all the common law provinces and territories. It extends also to charities, because the law regards those who govern them, whether they are called directors (of corporate charities), governors, trustees, elders, etc., as trustees.

The courts (both English and Canadian) have addressed the question of directors of charities paying themselves remuneration on a number of occasions and have condemned the practice without exception because of the conflict principle. The directors' duty (to act in the best interests of the charity) and their (self) interest (being paid) are in clear conflict. Not surprisingly, some early cases quote the biblical injunction that one cannot serve God and Mammon in this context. None of the cases specifically concerned

churches, although one did involve a faith-based organization. It is true that most of the cases involved egregious breaches of the conflict rule. However, the principles apply indiscriminately to all breaches, intentional and unintentional.

What does this mean for churches? You cannot be a member of the governing body of the church if you are a paid employee. A minister who is a member of the consistory and is paid by the church is regarded as an employee. The problem is not solved if he absents himself from any discussion and decision regarding his honorarium, since he still has opportunity to influence the matter by other means. Further, the cases make clear that declaring one's interest and refraining from voting, while possible in the context of a commercial corporation, does not work for a charity, because it lacks the safeguards that protect the economic interests of the former.

Provincial governments exercise supervisory jurisdiction over charities. This jurisdiction is vested in the Attorneys General, but they have delegated most of it to an officer called the Public Guardian and Trustee (PGT). The Ontario PGT is probably more active than most, partly because Ontario has legislation that spells out the PGT's rights and obligations with respect to charities. She has taken the position, based on these common law principles, that a paid minister may therefore not be a member of the church's governing board.

The PGT and law firms that regularly advise churches recommend that if the church would like its minister to be able to chair the board's meetings, it should pass a by-law that would permit him, on the invitation of the chairman, to serve as acting chairman, provided no board member objects. Further, they see no objection to the minister being allowed to attend meetings of the governing board, but without a vote. Clearly, this is not a solution for churches that subscribe to Reformed church polity.

So what is to be done? For the reasons mentioned, I agree with Dr. Visscher that the solution adopted by some church federations, which allows the minister to be chairman of the consistory but not of council, is not effective. But neither will the proposed amendment of Article 38 of the Church Order have the desired effect.

One can continue to operate as one always has, sticking one's head in the sand as it were. After all, the PGT doesn't have the budget or the resources to investigate charities on a regular basis. Typically he or she only becomes involved when someone makes a complaint. However, citizens are presumed to know the law and ought to obey it. And that is surely true of Christians.

Incorporation is not an option, I would suggest, although I am aware that it is widely used in some federations. The corporate structure is incompatible with Reformed church polity, because it gives the members, rather than the consistory, a controlling voice. In any event, the standard incorporation document (currently letters patent in Ontario for charities and other not-for-profit organizations) prohibits payment of remuneration to directors. It is doubtful that the PGT would consent to anything different.

A private statute is an option. However, this is expensive and the PGT would probably object to a provision that would permit remuneration to a minister who is also a member of the consistory.

The cases indicate that if the charity's trust instrument allows for payment, the payment is permissible. However, this appears to refer to trusts by which a donor establishes a charity. There is no case law dealing with a charity that purported to enter into a trust instrument after the fact. There is case law that rejected the attempt of a corporate charity to change its by-laws to permit payment to the directors. So this does not appear to be an effective option.

The Deputy Director of the Ontario PGT indicated in correspondence that court approval must first be obtained if an organization wishes to remunerate a director, that court approval is given only in exceptional circumstances, and that the charity must prove that the remuneration is in the best interests of the charity, for example, because it is a requirement of the religious doctrine of the charity. This may therefore be the best option. Proof of adequate safeguards to prevent abuse, such as annual audits of the church's books, which are reviewed by the members, would also be helpful. Notice would have to be given to the PGT. Such an application would involve significant costs, both legal fees payable to the lawyer instructed by the church to bring the application and court costs. However, it might be possible to make it in concert with all the churches in the province and, perhaps, with other churches as well. There is strength in numbers and they may help persuade the court that there is a widespread problem that is best addressed by granting the application.

In Ontario there is a special statutory provision for a consent order, i.e., without an actual court appearance. It requires the consent of the PGT and that might be refused. However, it would be much less costly than a regular court application as described in the preceding paragraph. It would undoubtedly be wise to pursue this route first. The same kinds of evidence described in the preceding paragraph would have to be submitted.

I hope that this has clarified the law on this issue. The law presents a challenge for the churches but, as I have indicated, there may be a workable solution.

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.

C



Dear Editor,

I would like to express a sincere word of thanks to the editorial staff and writers at *Clarion* for bringing to its readership relevant and timely writing about our Christian walk and church life.

This morning, our teenage daughter made the comment that the term Reformed Baptist seems to be a contradiction. This afternoon, the August 12 issue of *Clarion* arrived, in which the lead editorial by Dr. Van Vliet took on this very matter. It is good that our ministers and professors write about these issues. We live in a time where there is little tolerance for differences among Christians. We do well to "sharpen the saw" so that we, young and old, are equipped for faithful service.

Please consider making available an online *Clarion* subscription for those who would be so inclined, especially the younger generation.

Sincerely,
Bob Lodder
Lynden, WA

Dear Editors,

Anyone building a logical argument must be sure that each and every premise is valid and properly supported, or the structure will fail.

In Volume 60, Issue 17, Dr. Janssen states that "The Council is here bound to the outcome of the election. This implies that those who elect exercise a form of authority over those who appoint" (p. 408). This primary premise and implication is not valid and is not supported in any way by Dr. Janssen.

If he were able to properly support the quoted statement, we would move from Reformed church polity to Congregationalism. However, his argument is without foundation, and not sustainable.

Sincerely,
Harry Harsevoort
Port Stanley, ON

Response

Dear Br. Harsevoort,

Thank you for your response.

If I understand you correctly, you are challenging the argument that "being bound to the outcome of the election. . . implies. . . those electing exercise authority." You also state that, if I am right, we "would move from Reformed church polity to Congregationalism."

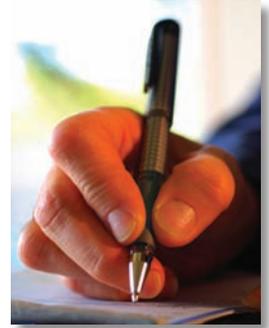
As to the first, "shall" is defined as "give an order or instruction" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th edition). Only those who have authority can "give an order or instruction." I consider my premise true and my argument valid.

As to the second, I would go a step further and say "to some extent have moved." In my opinion, Jansen's commentary in 1923 on the election process bears that out, for he says that changes were made "under the influence of the democratic current of our time" ("*onder den invloed van de democratische strooming van onzen tijd*," Jansen, p. 97). I myself deplore this move. For, with all respect for the office of all believers, the church is and remains a Christocracy in which Christ rules through his office-bearers and not a democracy, in which the people rule and office-bearers are no more than executives. We confess this explicitly with BC Article 30 and implicitly with HC Q/A 85. And it is also clear from our Church Order, in which the meeting commonly referred to as "congregational meeting" is not even named.

I believe my argument is very well founded and can be sustained.

Not that my opinion matters so much. As the Abbotsford CanRC plans to submit this material to the churches when they next assemble in general synod, the churches will have the final say.

In Christ's service,
Karlo Janssen



Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.