

Clarion



HAS SOCIETY GONE MAD?

MARIJUANA TO THE GLORY OF GOD

A NEW CHURCH IN NIAGARA SOUTH!

Clarion

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What's Inside

Issue 18 begins with the question: Has society gone mad? When Rev. Van Luik sent his article to me, he told me that it's a bit longer of an article than he usually aims for; that's because there's a lot to cover when attempting to talk about our current times: the terms "woke" and "intersectionality," "unconscious bias" and the "cancel culture," are words we are faced with every day. How do we view these issues with a biblical perspective?

Another topic we face today, particularly with the legalization of marijuana, is how the church views marijuana use. We are thankful to have permission to reprint Pastor Jeff Lacine's article, "Marijuana to the Glory of God?"

Our issue has the third part of Dr. Van Dam's series, "Should We Keep the Ten Commandments in Our Sunday Liturgy?" There is a Treasures, New & Old meditation, news of a new church institution, the You Asked column, and a Canticle.

Laura Veenendaal

- 479** Has Society Gone Mad?
- 483** TREASURES, NEW & OLD
- 484** Marijuana to the Glory of God?
- 487** The 10 Commandments and the Sunday Liturgy
- 491** A New Church in Niagara South!
- 493** YOU ASKED
- 494** CANTICLE



Has Society Gone Mad?

From a recent conversation with a police officer in the church parking lot, I learned that the officers had been warned that morning to watch their backs, for there were credible threats against them. Never in her career had she received such a warning. In the time that my father was a police officer, he always felt the support and respect of the community. Threats only came from the criminal element, never from law abiding citizens in society.

It is hard to imagine that those who have sworn an oath to protect society from danger and crime now feel a lack of support from many of those they are called to protect. There is now a movement in Canada that has spread from the United States to defund the police. While the term “defund” the police means different things to different people, it conveys the sentiment that the very people we look to protect us are now considered a public enemy.

In cities such as Seattle, activist groups have set up autonomous zones where police are forbidden, and self-rule is allowed to be established. Many government leaders bow down to the demands of the mob, as if in penance for past wrongs by society. Monuments of historical figures are torn down and names of past public figures are being removed from streets, buildings, and schools. The past deeds of many (if not all) historical figures are considered so abusive that they need to be expunged from the memory of society.

You may be scratching your head and wondering: why do we need to tear down the memories of Christopher Columbus, who discovered the new world, why erase the memory of our first prime minister, John A. McDonald, and the founding fathers of the United States of America? If you don't get it, it is because you are not yet woke.



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In the New Testament, the barrier between people of different races and nationalities and classes are erased so that all are equal, whether free or slave, Jew or Gentile, male or female.

Since the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, many leading elements of our society now declare that they have become woke. It is like a great spiritual revival has happened so that people have begun to see the evil deeds of the past (original sin) for which we are all guilty and need to make penance. At least, that is how the narrative is being spun.

Being woke

What does it mean to be “woke”? The term was first used during Abraham Lincoln’s presidential campaign, when the Republican Party organized “Wide Awakes” as a youth organization, partly to oppose the spread of slavery. In Barry Beckman’s 1971 play, “Garvey Lives!” there is a line: “I been sleeping all my life. And now that Mr. Garvey done woke me up, I’m gon’ stay woke. And I’m gon’ help him wake up other black folk.” He says he “woke” up to the social and racial injustice against blacks.

Another important term in understanding our modern context is “intersectionality.” This has become a major theme in our universities as scholars examine the experiences of people who are subject to multiple forms of oppression in society. Here things can get complicated. It argues that a white woman faces oppression in the face of the patriarchy of our society differently than the oppression faced by a black woman. The classic feminist in the past spoke only for other white women, but she did not and could not speak for black women, for they were also dealing with social (discrimination because of race) and economic inequality. And there is still another level of complexity, for people’s lives are affected by the influences of race, class, gender, and sexuality (one’s sexuality is different from one’s gender).

For example, J. K. Rowling of Harry Potter fame can be considered a classic feminist, for she defends the rights of women to be free from oppression. But she is not considered suitably woke, for she has indicated her concern whether transgendered women (males) should not use the same washroom facilities as other women (females). Her concern is that many women who have been sexually abused by men are now being traumatised again by having to face a male in a very personal space.

Woke to our unconscious bias

The concern for intersectionality is that everyone needs to become aware of the diversity of experiences others endure, for we need to understand oppression as it is felt by others. As a society, therefore, we need to become woke to our unconscious bias. As a white male writer, my unconscious bias is formed by white supremacy, for unconsciously my attitude is one of superiority towards women and people of different colours. This unconscious white bias can be taken over by people from different cultures. Recently, an Asian writer, who called out a white female personality, was found herself to have written a number of racist and homophobic posts in the past. When she apologized, she did not accept responsibility but blamed it on the fact she had been conditioned by white supremacy. As a woman of colour she had appropriated something from outside her culture for which she is now sorry.

The ultimate goal is the conversion of all of society that will result in our present social structures being torn down and, in their place, a new society will arise in which everyone is socially and economically equal. Oppressive structures such as religion, the family, the police, as well as the political and economic order need to be torn down. An important step for this conversion of society is “training in unconscious bias,” which is now often administered by corporations, government agencies, and other organizations.

How does one determine if they have unconscious bias? No one can determine that for themselves, but those who have received the appropriate training must determine it for us. It means that free thought is no longer allowed, for it is dangerous. Free thought, after all, leads to the oppression of others. To speak ideas and thoughts that are hurtful and disrespectful to others becomes a dangerous crime that justifies punishing people through the growing cancel culture.

Cancel culture

The movement in our streets today is a puritanical one that knows no grace. There are many examples today of well-known personalities who are being called out on things they have written on social media that are considered racist or homophobic.

Suddenly these personalities have become woke, apologize for what they have said, and swear that they did not know what they had written was hurtful. But apologies are not sufficient; such people need to be “cancelled.” Cancelled means they lose their position of influence and power; they get banned from social media and lose their job.¹ A woke society is not a forgiving society. Everyone must pay for their transgressions.

From the perspective of most people, what they see on the streets may seem to be insanity and only the actions of some angry people. It is true that many just follow the mob and do not really understand what is happening. After all, protesting injustice is a good thing, isn't it? Many believe that they are supporting a righteous cause. How can anyone justify the brutality of some police actions, such as that of the death of George Floyd? Obviously, justice needs to prevail, but the solution prescribed by this secular narrative will only lead to the demise of society. That is already evident in the violence and anarchy that is playing out in many places today.

Secular vs biblical narrative

Over against the secular narrative the Lord gives to us a biblical narrative that explains what ails our society and directs us to the solution. The secular narrative believes that the problem lies inherently in the power structures of our society. The root problem is that the man (male) holds power in marriage and family relations, in society police wield power over people, and in the business world, corporations wield power over their employees and use their wealth to control the government. We are dealing with Marxist ideology that says that society is built on power structures and the only way to overcome the ills in our society is to tear down those power structures.

The biblical narrative identifies many of the same problems in our society. God warns against oppressing the poor,

the orphans, and the widows; God rails against those who use their power to commit injustice against the vulnerable; God warns against rulers who use their power to abuse their

citizens, against the master who enslaves his workers, against those who abuse and rape women, and against those who enrich themselves on the backs of the poor. In the New Testament, the barrier between people of different races and nationalities and classes are erased so that all are equal, whether free or slave, Jew or Gentile, male or female.

In the biblical narrative, God reveals that the root problem is not our social structures, but the corruption that lives deep in the heart of all mankind. All of mankind are “irredeemables” and therefore worthy of eternal damnation. God has given us the social structures in society to create the kind of order that makes it possible for mankind to live together. He has given

order to our marriage and family life, he has given governments and the police authority to protect us, businesses and corporations for our economic well-being. God reveals that on account of our corrupt hearts, people use the power that comes with their authority in corrupt ways for their own pleasure or gain.

For that reason we can understand much of the anger on the street when people see the injustices in our society. When a police officer abuses his authority and power by unnecessarily taking the life of a man, that calls for justice. When men with power and money sexually abuse women, it calls for justice. When one race discriminates against another, it is a great injustice for which Christians must also call for change. When someone hates another person because of their race, nationality, or gender, Scripture declares it to be sin and demands justice.

Wokeness or repentance

Today many argue that the solution is to become woke, recognizing the prejudices and bias in your own heart. This will lead to

In a world
where there
is no grace,
but only anger
and a desire
for revenge,
the Lord Jesus
reveals the
grace of God.

¹Cancel culture does not just affect the elite (media personalities), but it is now being applied throughout society. Anyone who posts anything considered to be racist or homophobic on social media can have their job terminated (cancelled) with the justification that they do not represent the values of the company.

Forgiveness is impossible without Christ, for only when we experience Christ's forgiveness is it possible to forgive others.

an awareness that the system cannot be redeemed and needs to be destroyed and completely rebuilt. The problem is, how can those who are irredeemable redeem themselves? How can those who hurt others ever repay those they have hurt? How can a man who has used his authority to unjustly kill someone ever repay that family for the injustice? How can a man who has abused a woman ever repay such a woman so that she is made whole again? He can't! How can a society that has racially discriminated against other elements in society ever repay for the injustice and make them whole again? Society can't; tearing down society will not resolve the problem either.

So what is the answer? Well, the Lord sent his Son Jesus Christ to redeem those who are humanly irredeemable. In a world where there is no grace, but only anger and a desire for revenge (Gen 4:24), the Lord Jesus reveals the grace of God. When Jesus Christ came to the world, he called all mankind to repentance. His call, accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit, convicted many of their own sin and corruption. The Holy Spirit awakens our heart so we may begin to see the sinful attitudes within us. The Spirit helps me to see my rebellious attitude against the Almighty and recognize my guilt in hurting my neighbours. My thoughts are never pure. I do not always treat my wife and family with the love and respect the Lord demands of me. My heart is not always free from bias and prejudice against people from other races and nationalities, and I do not always treat others with kindness and respect when they have been hurtful to me.


Redemption

There is no way that I can redeem myself to God or my fellow man, for I deserve the eternal wrath of God and the condemnation of my neighbour. Praise be to God that Jesus Christ has come to redeem my life and the life of all his people. That which I could not make right Christ has made right for me through his death. When the Spirit opens my heart in repentance, Christ

begins to set right the things I have destroyed in my life. Christ makes it possible to again restore broken relationships for he makes forgiveness possible. To set things right when the social fabric is broken, two things always need to happen: there needs to be forgiveness and a new desire to do what is right and just in the eyes of God.

The most comforting thing the woke culture does not understand is that forgiveness is possible again through Christ and through him we can experience a new life. The hurts, the injustices, and the pains that society experiences cannot be overcome through a new, woke attitude. For true healing to take place in society, there needs to be a true and heartfelt sorrow that we have grieved others and we seek the forgiveness of others. Forgiveness is impossible without Christ, for only when we experience Christ's forgiveness is it possible to forgive others.

That lays the foundation for a beautiful new life. In this new life, we begin to understand the needs of others and our heartfelt desire is to care for the needs of others. A husband no longer seeks to use his power to control his wife, but he uses his authority to protect her and provide for her. A father no longer uses his children for his own gain, but he lovingly cares for the needs of his children. Government officials no longer use their power to gain advantage over their citizens but seek to care for them and the police do not use their power to abuse others but to protect them.

When it comes to race relationships, a Christian repents of his or her racist attitudes and instead looks at everyone, no matter the colour of their skin, as fellow human beings made in the image of God. The gospel breaks down the barriers between all people, for Christ gathers his people from every tribe, nation, and race. Through Christ, we become brothers and sisters in the one family of God. In this family we seek justice for one another, we care for each other, and we love one another as Christ first loved us. 

(Re-)wired to Work

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)


Labour Day conjures up thoughts about work even though it is ironically a day off for many. Nevertheless, thinking clearly and Christianly about our work can be a challenge. For instance, the purpose of work is not always readily apparent, and the biblical separation between work and rest is not always easily maintained. Another challenge is knowing where to draw the dividing line between underworking and overworking. For, as all perceptive Christians are aware, idolatry can tempt those who live for their work as much as those who live for the weekend.

As Christians we live always to the Lord (Rom 14:8). Our lives are meant to glorify him and our work is subservient to that fundamental purpose. This implies that our Christian identity outweighs every other source of identity, including the identity we derive from our work. In his book *Just Thinking*, Jason Bouwman helpfully illustrates this truth with a simple grammar lesson. He proposes altering our understanding of the word "Christian" as an adjective to a noun so that we see it as our core identity (p. 34-5). This radically reorients our perspective toward work so that it becomes peripheral to our Christian identity and not vice versa.

When this shift occurs, our work is no longer seen as a relentless burden or tedious toil, and our occupations will not fall prey to short-sighted ends. Instead we discover that God has wired us to work. Work is a creation ordinance and therefore a good ordinance. This explains our human impulse to work. Sin has not eradicated this impulse, but it has warped it. The corruption of sin is manifested in our failure to do good works and in the replacement of good works with evil works. Sin twists our time and energy, what was originally meant to be used for God, against God. The devil is the prime example of this. Scripture reveals that he is no slacker but a worker, for our Lord Jesus came to destroy "his works" (1 John 3:8).

But as those who are redeemed and restored in Christ, we have been cleansed from our evil works and re-wired to our original purposes and consecrated unto God. Paul belabours

this point (pun intended) as he instructs the Ephesians that our whole lives, including our work, are wrapped up in God's eternal purposes. These eternal purposes reshape everything about us, even at the workplace (Eph 6:5-9), so that our work becomes a pivotal platform for living out our Christian faith.

Christ himself also dignified work, not only in his work of ministry but also in his carpentry. He was known as "the carpenter" in Mark 6:3. While this remark contained obvious disdain, it was disdain directed toward his emergence as a religious teacher, not toward his industry. In fact, the comment suggests his carpentry was of such value and quality that he should have continued in that practice. Thankfully for us and our salvation, he did not. Instead he devoted himself to a greater workmanship. While his physical constructions may not remain, his other workmanship will stand the test of eternity. We are that workmanship! Even now he continues to build his church using imperishable materials, and this includes the good works we contribute to that end. May our work then imitate his and so demonstrate the durable quality of gold, silver and precious stones, lest it otherwise be exposed as wood, hay and straw on the day of testing (1 Cor 3:10-15). 

For further study

1. **What is your perception of work? Have you consciously or unconsciously adopted a sacred/secular divide in your life?**
2. **Consider how your work provides you with a place through which God wants to bless you and make you a blessing to others.**



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Marijuana to the Glory of God?

By **Jeff Lacine**

A pastor in Portland, Oregon

I used to smoke marijuana every day.

Sixteen years ago, when I was in my late teens, cannabis was a big part of my life. Today it continues to confront me as a pastor in a city where recreational marijuana is legally celebrated. Our church office is directly across the street from a dispensary where I can legally buy a pre-rolled joint for seven dollars.

How are we to think about recreational cannabis use in the church? A growing number of Christians today believe that it is biblically permissible to use cannabis recreationally. Are they right?

Cannabis versus alcohol

Quick, pat answers to the question of recreational cannabis use are often unhelpful. Responses without nuance will not best serve the church in the long run. To say that alcohol is permissible, and cannabis is not, because “Christians drink beer and wine for the taste, but people only smoke pot to get stoned,” just won’t do. Such a simplification distorts the truth.

For one, Christians don’t drink beer and wine *only* for the taste. Even moderate drinking, which is biblically permissible, has lubricating psychoactive effects. From a biblical perspective, this lubricating effect can be acceptable. While drunkenness is clearly prohibited (Eph 5:18; Rom 13:13; Gal 5:19-21; 1 Pet 4:3), God has given “wine to gladden the heart of man” (Ps 104:14-15).

However, evangelical churches sometimes have prohibited the use of *alcohol* among members because the Bible forbids *drunkenness*. This is a mistake. The Bible warns us against such extrabiblical prohibitions (1 Tim 4:3; Col 2:16-23). Scripture permits the moderate use of alcohol, when it can be enjoyed in faith, even though it has psychoactive effects.

Does God, then, also permit the recreational use of cannabis? Should we treat cannabis like alcohol in the church? Is it okay to light up around the campfire just like it may be to enjoy wine at a wedding?

Similarities and dissimilarities

Let’s examine this commonly used comparison between alcohol and cannabis. The following are ways that cannabis and alcohol are similar and dissimilar.

Ways that cannabis is like alcohol:

- Cannabis, like alcohol, is an organic substance.
- Cannabis, like alcohol, has the potential to intoxicate and distort reality.
- Cannabis, like alcohol, has different effects on someone who uses it regularly than someone who uses it occasionally. (In other words, tolerances can be built up with regular marijuana use similar to the way tolerances can be built up with regular alcohol use.)
- Cannabis, like alcohol, can be habit-forming (see 1 Tim 3:8).

Ways that cannabis is unlike alcohol:

- Unlike alcohol, you can't blackout or die from an overdose of cannabis.
- Unlike alcohol, there are many different strains of cannabis. The same amount of cannabis smoked or ingested from two different cannabis plants can have different effects on an individual – even if both plants have the same exact amount of THC (the primary psychoactive chemical in cannabis).
- Unlike alcohol, marijuana has many different effects on an individual due to its complex chemical makeup. There are at least 113 different chemical compounds (cannabinoids) inside the cannabis plant that combine to cause a variety of effects on an individual when smoked or ingested.
- Unlike alcohol, cannabis has not been a staple in cultures all around the world for use in celebrations and ceremonies (see John 2:9).
- Unlike alcohol, regular cannabis use is strongly correlated with mental health disorders such as schizoaffective disorder. While heavy drinking (alcohol abuse) has also been linked to mental health disorders, moderate drinking has not.
- Unlike alcohol, cannabis has been a cultural symbol of rebellion for a large part of the last century.
- Unlike alcohol, cannabis was not used by Jesus in his Last Supper, which is to be regularly commemorated by the church (Mark 14:23-25).
- And, perhaps most importantly, unlike alcohol, cannabis is not directly addressed in the Bible.

It is unhelpful to make direct correlations between cannabis and alcohol, as if all the Bible's teaching on alcohol applies to cannabis. Not only are cannabis and alcohol vastly different chemical compounds, with vastly different effects, but the Bible gives us clear and direct permission for the moderate use of alcohol while never directly referencing other psychoactive compounds such as marijuana.

The big picture

Even though cannabis is never directly mentioned in Scripture, we do have God-revealed principles to guide and direct our thinking about its recreational use. We often get help on specific questions when we keep our eyes on the big picture. What is

the endgame for the Christian life? What should we be aiming at in all things?

As Christians, our goal is knowing and experiencing the full and undistorted reality of the glory of God in our resurrected physical bodies (1 Cor 15:12-49; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Cor 13:12). This is our trajectory as Christians. This is our aim.

God is glorious beyond measure, and Christians seek to experience the reality of his glory, for the sake of his glory. Sin has distorted our vision and corrupted our world. Ever since sin first entered the world, all of us have been born spiritually dead, unable to discern the true glory of God (Eph 2:1-5; Col 2:13; 2 Cor 4:4). When we experience the redemptive work of Christ through the Holy Spirit, we are awakened to the reality and beauty of God (2 Cor 4:6). But until we see him face to face, we still see his glory as through a glass dimly (1 Cor 13:12). As redeemed believers, we are on a journey to knowing him without obstruction. Therefore, we do not want to distort reality; rather, we aim to know him as he really is. We want to see things as they really are.

The Christian use of any kind of psychoactive substance should always align with this gospel goal of looking to see things clearer. We do not want our vision of reality distorted.



Christian cup of coffee?

Consider this principle in terms of a psychoactive substance most American adults use every day: caffeine. Why do people drink coffee in the morning? To help them to see things as they really are, rather than through the fog of grogginess. The right and proper use of this God-given substance helps us see things as they really are.

But how does this principle apply to alcohol? At times moderate lubrication in Godward celebrations can be in keeping with the reality. People don't drink wine at funerals, which are a reminder of the curse and consequences of sin. If someone drank wine at a funeral, I would wonder whether they have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol.

But people do drink wine at weddings, in which we celebrate the profound parable being played out before our eyes: the great Bridegroom is coming for his bride, the church (Rev 19:7)! And wine (explicitly) will have a God-given role at the final consummating celebration (Mark 14:23-25). In this way, the proper and moderate use of alcohol can be a clarifier, not a distorter. It points us to the joy, fellowship, and celebration of the great coming feast.

What about weed?

Is there a proper and moderate use of marijuana that can actually serve to clarify and point to biblical realities like alcohol may in certain circumstances? Or does the recreational use of marijuana always distort?

I believe, both from research and experience, that recreational cannabis distorts reality and numbs people to the ability to experience life as it truly is. Even a relatively small amount of THC puts the infrequent user into a fog. A larger amount can potentially cause paranoia.

What about more regular, high-functioning users who have built up a tolerance and experience a less intense high when they smoke or ingest cannabis? While cannabis won't induce hallucinations or the same intense high for frequent users, we have other troubling factors to consider with persistent use.

There is a reason that marijuana has long been associated with the couch, a bag of chips, and a television remote. Put another way, marijuana has never been associated with engaged parenting. Regular marijuana use causes disengagement, dulling individuals into a long-term, slow, and subtle numbness. If you ask almost anyone who has formerly used cannabis on a regular basis, he will speak about this phenomenon. To

confirm this testimony, studies have shown a high correlation between regular cannabis use and the clinical diagnosis of Amotivational Syndrome.


It doesn't surprise me when a regular marijuana user tries to refute the reality of cannabis's reality-numbing effect. When you are in the numbing cloud of regular cannabis use, it is hard to realize that you are in such a cloud – even when it is obvious to close friends and family. Cannabis may distort reality in a more subtle way for the regular user than for the occasional user, but the subtlety of it makes the negative effects all the more insidious and deep.

Counsel and hope

Though the Bible does not forbid the use of every substance that affects the mind, the recreational use of cannabis seems to violate the Christian value of sobriety (1 Thess 5:6-8; Titus 2:2, 6; 1 Pet 4:7). As our culture celebrates the casual use of cannabis today, and does so increasingly in the coming days, we should be vigilant not to be deceived as a church. We should not idly stand by as we watch brothers and sisters who profess faith in Christ enter into a mind-numbing, reality-distorting cloud of cannabis. We should encourage one another to peer through the dim glass and discern the glory of God with all our might as the Day draws near (Heb 10:25).

However, it is worth saying that we should also be careful not to make the same mistakes that churches made by previous generations with regard to alcohol, adding extra prohibitions to God's revealed Word. Because of the many variables involved with marijuana use (for example, its medicinal use), I believe we should be very slow to make a firm prohibition policy for members of the church, such that we would *automatically* proceed with church discipline upon unrepentant use. However, it should be clear that unrepentant marijuana use could easily lead to church discipline.

We should be quick to engage with individual members who use marijuana, asking them questions and seeking to understand, being ready to exhort and rebuke them if it becomes apparent that they are violating the biblical standards of sobriety and integrity.

The details and nuances we'll encounter will be complex, but Jesus's church, holding fast to his Word, led by a team of wise elders, will be up for the challenge. God will have new mercies for us as we walk together by faith in the age of legal marijuana. 

Should We Keep the Ten Commandments in Our Sunday Liturgy? (3 of 3)

In the previous article we saw how the Decalogue functioned in the early Christian church and in the liturgy at the time of the Reformation. Now we consider the usage of the Ten Words today, beginning with the two obvious uses.

There are two obvious uses of the Ten Commandments in worship: First, the Ten Words show us what is needed for us to be perfect and holy as God is (Matt 5:48; 1 Pet 1:16). When we listen honestly to the Ten Words, it is like a mirror which exposes our sins (Rom 3:19; 7:7) so that we can humble ourselves before God and ask for forgiveness. This is the predominant use of the Decalogue in the liturgy of Reformed churches today. The reading of the law is therefore usually followed by a prayer for forgiveness.

A second reason for the liturgical reading of the law is to map out for us how we can show our thankfulness to God for his salvation (Rom 6:11-14; 12:1-2). The God who saved us from the bondage of the Egypt of sin, as the prologue to the Decalogue can be understood by the church today, graciously indicates through the law how we can be pleasing to our Father in heaven

and enjoy the freedom in Christ (John 8:34-36; Rom 6:11-14). The reading of the law is thus an occasion for thankfulness and joy. God's commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3) and his ordinances lead to true freedom and happiness in accordance with God's design for our lives.

To sing or not to sing the Decalogue?

Scripture supports the singing of the law when used to express our gratitude for it. "Your statutes have been my songs" the psalmist exalted (Ps 119:54). You sing about what you love and gives joy. "How I love your law! It is my meditation all the day!" (Ps 119:97). "Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end" (Ps 119:11-112). Even though the apostle Paul struggled against sin, yet as he put it: "I delight in the law

A worship service is a meeting of God with his people. The Lord our God has graciously embraced us in Christ and we are now in a covenant relationship with him.

of God in my inner being" (Rom 7:22). The Ten Commandments are a tremendous gift of God in which we can rejoice! It maps out the way of freedom in Christ by honoring God's will for our life.

Singing the Decalogue has been opposed by those who argue that a church service consists of a dialogue between God and his people. Singing the Ten Commandments cannot be construed as a congregational response to God since these are God's commands to his people and therefore these commandments cannot be sung. Singing should be the congregation's prayer to and adoration of God in response to his Word. There is of course truth in these concerns, but not enough to conclude that the sung Decalogue cannot have a place in the liturgy. The singing of God's Word to his people is also done when the congregation sings the psalms. Many examples can be cited.¹ Quoting God's Word when singing does not exclude the fact that it can at the same time be praising the Lord by honoring his Word and rejoicing in it. Similarly, singing the Ten Commandments is not only proclaiming God's Word, but rejoicing in the law he has given to us. At the same time, the singing of the law reminds us of God's high standards and our sin.

Furthermore, one must realize that when it comes to the point, all the psalms are God's Word, inspired by his Spirit. Every time we sing an inspired psalm we are singing God's Word and so the singing of the law is basically in the same category – singing God's Word.

In addition, an important factor for Calvin was that singing the law helps the congregation to remember it and to internalize it in their hearts. It is a fact that words sung are easier to remember than simply spoken words. J. Smelik has noted that Calvin's vision of seeing congregational singing as proclamation, prayer, praise, and confessing brought him to make a rhymed version of the Decalogue so that the congregation could sing it. While singing God's commandments, the congregation once again makes them known, but also proclaims them to each other in accordance with the apostolic word: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,

teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). Singing the Ten Commandments also means recognizing and confessing one's sins and so acknowledging and praising God's goodness and grace.²

It is clear that which function of the Decalogue is to be stressed in a worship service will depend on whether it precedes the confession of sins, in which case the law is used to expose our sin and misery, or follows the confession of sins, in which case the law is joyfully used as the rule of thankfulness. Since a believer is both sinner and justified, the place of the law in the liturgy can vary depending on the specific character and emphasis of the particular service and its sermon. On the other hand, one must not make too much of the order since both functions of the law are there regardless of its liturgical place.

Reading the Decalogue as part of covenantal worship

Besides exposing our sins and teaching us the way to show our thankfulness to God, the Decalogue has another important function which is not always articulated but needs to be brought to the fore. A Reformed worship service is a time when the congregation renews its covenant and covenantal commitments to the Lord. Since the Ten Words are basic to the covenant, their liturgical use enhances that aspect of the worship service.

A worship service is a meeting of God with his people. The Lord our God has graciously embraced us in Christ and we are now in a covenant relationship with him. But since we are living in a sin-filled world that is hostile to God, this covenant relationship needs to be constantly renewed. That is the beauty of Sunday worship. God comes to us with his promises and he renews those promises through the reading and preaching of his Word. But as God renews the promises, we are strengthened in our faith by the gospel proclamation and the desire grows to respond in gratitude to God for his redemption. Within that

¹ E.g. Ps 12:5; 91:14-16; 95:8-11; 110:1, 4; 132:11-12, 14-18.

² For the above, see J. Smelik, "De decaloog gezongen," *De Reformatie* 65 (1989-90): 55-58.

interplay of God renewing his promises and the congregation's renewed commitment in faith to the Lord, the reading of the Decalogue has an important place in the liturgy.

Since it was used as a document of covenant renewal in ancient Israel, the reading of the Ten Words of the covenant is in keeping with covenantal worship today. Through the reading of those Ten Words, God comes to us and reaffirms his identity as our Saviour. "I am the Lord who led you out of bondage!" "If you love me, keep my commandments!" (John 14:15). As the Ten Words are read, the congregation renews their covenantal commitment to their Lord and Saviour by listening, by confessing their sins, and so resolving to once again commit themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord's service. In this beautiful back and forth dialogue of covenant renewal are the echoes of Mount Sinai; but the New Testament congregation may know that they are facing Mount Zion, the city of the living God and Jesus the mediator of a new covenant (Heb 12:22, 24)! But let us be mindful, we approach the same God. At Mount Sinai, his voice shook the earth, but he promised that he will shake not only the earth but also the heavens, for God will judge the earth and all things will be made new. Therefore, "let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29, also vv 26-28).

Being in covenant with God is a serious reality. The late Prof. C. Trimp appropriately characterized each church service as "a feast of covenant renewal."³ Those words of the Decalogue which almighty God personally inscribed in stone – even twice – with his own finger (Exod 31:18; 34:28) are of fundamental importance also for those who are in covenant with God today. Giving them an honorable place in our worship where they can be heard again and again is quite appropriate.

Now some would say, but to hear the same words every Sunday is deadening and therefore why not take some other passages from Scripture which more or less get the same point across? But, as an old saying put it, repetition is the mother of learning. Hearing the Decalogue over and over again makes it

become part of us and foundational to our thinking and worldview. It is one way which the Holy Spirit can use to put the law within us and write it on the tablets of our heart (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10). As the psalmist put it: blessed is the one whose "delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:2). To hear that law every Lord's Day is therefore a real blessing. To be sure, for a little variety, one can

read the Decalogue from either Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5, the latter being a slightly different version given under the inspiration of the Spirit just before entering the Promised Land. If the Decalogue is placed after the prayer for forgiveness of sins, then the Ten Words can also be sung as a response of gratitude. Forgiven sinners rejoice in the gift of the law because it is God's directive for true freedom and happiness.

But what about reading some of the apostolic injunctions about God's will? Can we not substitute reading those instead of the Decalogue? However, if we understand that the Ten Words function as a God-given

constitution of the covenant which he used to renew his covenant with Israel and realize its subsequent importance in the history of revelation, then we will be reluctant to give preference to other Scripture. Given the unique significance of the Ten Words, it does not seem appropriate to have other Scripture take its place.

In addition, when the argument not to read the Decalogue to avoid repetition is brought up, one must remember that many other parts of our worship services are the same Sunday after Sunday, such as the Votum, Salutation, the Apostles' Creed, and the benediction. But the solution to no longer actually "hearing" these parts of the liturgy is not to get rid of them but to pray to the Lord that he protect us from becoming tone deaf to the beauty of his Word and biblical liturgy.

In the good Reformed tradition, it is the morning service that has the reading of the Ten Words. This need not be repeated in the second service, which is essentially a continuation of the first service, but has a different character with its emphasis on instruction with the use of the Catechism.

Internalize
the Decalogue
so that it
becomes
a part of our
DNA, our
identity.

³ C. Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie: een leesboek voor kerkgangers* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1983), 59.


The current context

As noted in an earlier article, Presbyterian churches historically did not have the reading of the Decalogue in their worship services, although today some in that tradition have included the practice in their liturgy. Reformed churches have this reading in their heritage. Now is not the time to abandon it, but to reaffirm the practice and retain it. The Western world in which we live is abandoning with frightening speed the good ordinances of the Lord our God which are meant for the well-being of the human race which he has created.

It is striking that the elimination of the liturgical reading of the Decalogue has largely gone in lockstep with the secularization of society. According to Presbyterian professor William J. Carl, Presbyterian, Anglican, Reformed, and other churches started leaving out the reading of the Ten Words at the beginning of the twentieth century. He asked "Why? Is it irrelevant for our time? Too harsh? Too blunt for our sensitive ears?" These commands "confront us with the absolute claim of God upon our lives. There is no escape from it."⁴ Indeed, I recall that when I was a pastor in Brampton, Ontario in the 1970s, I got to know a Christian parole officer in Toronto. On his office wall behind his desk, he had hanging the Ten Words. When people came in to report, they would see God's law and often wince or look the other way. It was his way of reminding those in his charge that the Ten Commandments were the ultimate law and God was the final Judge. Such a display of God's law would probably no longer be allowed in a government office in our permissive society, but that is all the more reason for the church to uphold it in its liturgy and not to downplay it or eliminate it. Surely we are not concerned or ashamed that someone visiting our service would take offense to hear these precious words from the pulpit – words of grace and the divine norms?

It is precisely in our largely post-Christian Western world where the Decalogue has in effect been silenced and excluded from public life and from public education that the Ten Words need to be heard. In mainline churches the Decalogue has all too often been silenced. Indeed, according to Reinhard Hütter, "It is safe to say that all contemporary mainline liturgies converge in denying the Decalogue a regular appearance in the structure of the Sunday worship."⁵ One of the very few places left where the Ten Words can still be proclaimed is in a Reformed church service. Surely this is an opportunity not to be missed for hearing them is a blessing not to be underestimated.

Each Lord's Day Reformed pulpits proclaim the glorious gospel of salvation. Let us not tire of hearing God's grace, also as articulated in the Ten Words of the covenant. What you truly love, you never seem to get enough of. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit can use the repeated hearing to internalize the Decalogue so that it becomes as it were part of our DNA, our identity. Do we not need all the help we can get when it comes to adhering to biblical norms in a world that has jettisoned any regard for God's law and will? Now more than ever the Ten Words need to be heard!

Let us retain their place in holy worship, as we have also agreed to do by adopting common liturgies. With the Ten Words we meet our God who has claimed us for himself and who demands that we be holy as he is holy. This realization appropriately raises the level of respect and devotion that should characterize our worship. 



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⁴ William J. Carl III, "The Decalogue in Liturgy and Preaching," *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 272-74; also see Howard Hageman, "The Law in the Liturgy," in *God and the Good: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob*, ed. Clifton Orlebeke and Lewis Smedes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 44-45.

⁵ See, e.g., Reinhard Hütter, "The Ten Commandments as a Mirror of Sin(s): Anglican Decline - Lutheran Eclipse," *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2005): 54.



A New Church in Niagara South!

By Henry Homan and Nick VandenOever

An unusual institution

The Lord has abundantly blessed us! What began as two Growth Committees, established by two separate Canadian Reformed churches of Dunnville and Spring Creek because their facilities could no longer adequately hold an increasing number of members, moved on to one Institution Committee established in May 2019. Under the Lord's blessing, this resulted in what officially became the Niagara South Canadian Reformed Church as of Friday, May 8, 2020 in a live-streamed service. Due to restrictions under COVID 19, signing of the subscription form by office bearers took place several days earlier with witnesses and photographs as proof.

The online institution service and ordination of office bearers was officiated by the pastors of the two mother churches, Reverends P. Holtvlüwer (sermon) and J. VanWoudenberg (ordination).

The congregation was instructed by Rev. Holtvlüwer to "take care in building on the church's one foundation." This was expanded under: "the fool proof foundation" and "the fire-proof building" as Scripture teaches us in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

Today we live in a "rock star" world. One needs name recognition, signatures, viewings, exposure, and appeal to emotions to be successful in numbers! In contrast, we as church today work with elders, deacons, and everyday preachers and pastors. Christ is our only solid rock foundation – who builds with God's Word. Our builders are ordained to build the house of the church using the materials God's Word provides. In practical terms this means: elders must use the Word of Christ; deacons must use the mercy of Christ.

This contrasts with today's human philosophy of having people feel good or the social gospel's mantra of "help for the underdog" (without the call to repent and believe in Christ) to

draw the people in! Even our Dutch pragmatism of “if it works, let’s do it” is tempting. Such are the building materials of wood, hay, and straw. They will not stand the test of God’s fire on the day of judgement!

The Lord instructs us to work hard as office bearers, as parents, to not use flammable and destructive building material, but instead the Word of God as the true plumb line. This summary was sung together in closing with the words of Hymn 52, “The Church’s One Foundation.”

Rev. VanWoudenberg read the forms for the ordination of elders and deacons. With the documents signed and witnessed the day before, the elders and deacons were now ordained. The Niagara South Canadian Reformed Church was hereby officially instituted.

Following the service, letters of greeting and encouragement were read from many of the CanRC churches of Classis Niagara, from our neighbouring Niagara United Reformed Churches, and from the Hope Community Church (formerly Knox Presbyterian) in Welland, from whom the new NS church is renting the facilities. Thanksgiving was expressed how in one lifetime the original Niagara church of Smithville has blossomed into seven separate churches. The new church members still looked forward to a farewell evening with their former church members of either Dunnville or Spring Creek when it would once more become possible to be together as a group.

Additional comments

During the process of institution, the question was frequently asked by those of the Dunnville church, “Is this to be an institution of a new church or a church plant?” There was good reason for this question. It was perceived that the best location for a new church was in the Welland area. At present there is very little Reformed Christian presence there. Besides, for young families the housing costs would be quite reasonable. But the fact was that very few of those involved actually lived in Welland! The vast majority of the exploding Dunnville church membership lived relatively close to or in the town of Dunnville. All amenities were there, house prices had been very reasonable, the Christian elementary school is relatively close by, the gospel was proclaimed and support within as a member of the congregation was by and large highly appreciated. Indeed, the Lord had blessed.

Yet, in Welland and the Port Colborne area, let alone Fort Erie, there was very little in the way of Reformed churches or Reformed schools for younger families to have an incentive to find an affordable home to live in.


The background in the Spring Creek church was somewhat similar. Families were beginning to move in the Welland direction, but not enough to justify that congregation to institute a church or church plant there. Considerable interest had been expressed to fill the void and to provide the gospel message in the area and so provide an incentive for families to move into that area.

The Lord used the “bursting at the seams” of both Spring Creek and Dunnville churches to work in the Welland area to provide an opportunity to proclaim the gospel of “in Christ alone” to those who do not know him and provide a place where increasing numbers of members would have a new place to go.

So back to the question; “Is this an institution or a church plant?” It is our desire that under his blessing the “instituted” Niagara South Canadian Reformed Church will be firmly planted and rooted in the infallible Word of God and the Reformed confessions. Praise be the Lord.

Additional information since the time of institution

The unusualness of this institution continued after May 8, 2020. For the next five weeks the Niagara South congregation was prevented from meeting in worship due to the COVID-19 restrictions. While this was the plight of most churches in our area and right across the globe, the void this created for the communion of saints in this new congregation was exacerbated by the fact that we were somewhat in “limbo” and so we continued to worship by way of live-stream in our “old” congregations.

By God’s grace, on June 14, 2020, we were able to worship by wards in order to comply to the guidelines, and this was very exciting. In the weeks following, the sacrament of Holy Baptism could be administered to two children of the congregation, one young brother did public profession of his faith, and on numerous occasions new members joined the fledgling church. This has continued and on Sunday, August 9, 2020 the way was opened to worship with all the members and at the same time celebrate the Lord’s Supper for the first time. This was indeed a great Sunday! Soli Deo Gloria. 


Is the Form for the Baptism of Infants clear enough in its transition from first to second part?

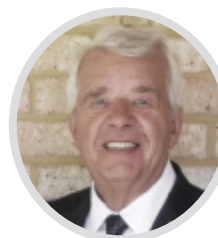
Our forms for baptism make the following argument: "Baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." At first glance, the conclusion (specifically mentioning all three Persons of the Trinity) does not seem to follow directly from the premise (mentioning only Jesus Christ). What implicit premise ties the two together? Why does our washing in Christ mean we are baptized into the name of the Triune God, each Person named separately?

Indeed, when reading the Form for the Baptism of Infants it could strike us as a remarkable transition to read this introduction to the second part, the part of our deliverance, our redemption: "Baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. We are, *therefore*, baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." "Therefore?" Is that the logical extension, the clear connection, between Christ's cleansing and the Triune God? Does the blessing and benefit of baptism, signifying and sealing to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ, lead directly to the baptism into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Is there not something missing here that should be mentioned explicitly?

Christ, being Mediator between God and us, is the one with whom we "seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves" (last sentence in the first part). The Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper mentions this explicitly: "We seek our life outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ, and in doing so, we acknowledge that we are dead in ourselves." Although the Form for the Baptism of Infants does not make this transition between the confession of our sins and misery (first part) and the seeking of our life outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ with the *same* words, it does make the connection clearly in this transition as well.

This direct transition between this "seeking of our cleansing and salvation" (seeking of life!) outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ and the belonging to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we confess as well in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1: "I belong to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ who paid for all my sins with his precious blood...; he also preserves me through the Father ... and assures me by his Holy Spirit." The connection is made directly (though in reversed order) in Belgic Confession, Article 34 as well: "[Jesus Christ] commanded baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By this he signifies to us ... so the blood of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, does the same thing internally to the soul."

Christ is at the centre of our deliverance and salvation! He came to us from the Father. He is our Mediator who brings us to the Triune God. He is our Intercessor who gives us peace with the triune God. He gave us his Holy Spirit to remove our sins (HC, LD 27, Q/A 73). He restores us by his death and resurrection, through faith, with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence, we see a direct connection between both sentences in the form: the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ *and* the baptism into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, for the *Reformed* confessor, the word "*therefore*" is correct and appropriate and provides the basis, giving in Christ's blood the restored bond with the Triune God (HC, LD 1)! 



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The Song of the Three Young Men in the Furnace

1. Oh bless - ed be the Lord our God... of all our fa - thers, him we
 2. All in God's tem - ple shout and sing... praise to their Lord, the might - y
 3. O an - gels, join the cher - u - bim... and sing a - long with ser - a -

laud. Praise him glad - ly! Al-le - lu - ia! And bless - ed be his ho - ly
 king. Praise him loud - ly! Al-le - lu - ia! Praise him who sits on heav - en's
 phim. Praise your Mas - ter! Al-le - lu - ia! Ex - tol his name for - ev - er -

name from age to age al - ways the same... Praise our Sav - iour for his
 throne. All praise be - longs to him a - lone... Praise the Fa - ther and no
 more. Let an - gel songs from heav - en pour... Praise your rul - er, your Com -

13

fa - vour! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!
 oth - er! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!
 mand - er! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!

George van Popta, 2018
 Apocrypha additions to Daniel, inserted between 3:23 and 3:24

LASST UNS ERFREUEN
 Geistliche Kirchengesang Cologne 1623

4. May all the skies and planets sing
 and glory to their Maker bring.
 Let them praise you! Alleluia!
 The sun and moon and every star,
 the spheres and orbs both near and far:
 Praise your Sovereign, heaven's Captain.
 Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
5. May all the waters of the earth
 praise God on High, who sends them forth.
 Praise him fully! Alleluia!
 Praise God who made the fire and heat,
 the clouds and ice, the snow and sleet.
 Praise the Founder, the Creator.
 Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
6. Let all the beasts of field and fen
 and those that live in tree or den
 praise their Maker. Alleluia!
 Praise God who made the meadows green,
 all creatures, large and those unseen.
 Praise the Author, the Designer!
 Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
7. Praise him who made both man and wife,
 from whom we have the breath of life!
 Praise, oh praise him! Alleluia!
 Exalt his Name both young and old.
 Do not from him your praise withhold.
 Praise your Father and your Saviour!
 Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

