

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 54, No. 9 • April 22, 2005

*The Death of
the Pope*

*Our
Evangelical
Mandate*

*What is the
Lord's Day?*



*St. Peter's Square,
Rome*



J. Visscher

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The Death of the Pope

When it seems as if the entire world has this Pope on its mind, is it not worthy of some reflection and reaction on our part?

Much of the news during the latter part of March and the first part of April was dominated by the sickness, death, and burial of Pope John Paul II. For more than twenty-five years this man ruled as the supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church. Historically his reign was the third longest in Vatican history.

Why write about the Pope?

It was also one of the most remarkable, and as such it deserves some comment from this quarter. Of course, some of our readers may wonder about that. Why is a magazine that has the word "Reformed" in its subtitle, as in "a Canadian Reformed magazine," devoting space and print to the leader of a church that receives so much criticism in some of its confessional documents? Both the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism have some rather pointed things to say about any number of Roman Catholic doctrines and teachings.

On a number of moral and ethical issues, as well as on some political matters, John Paul II took a courageous stand.

Still, to say nothing may well be interpreted as an abdication of responsibility. When it seems as if the entire world has this Pope on its mind, is it not worthy of some reflection and reaction on our part? In addition, also in Reformed circles, there is some confusion about how one should regard John Paul II and the Roman Catholic Church that he led for so many years.

Credit where credit is due

It is with this in mind that we forge ahead. The first thing that has to be said in all fairness and charity is that on a number of moral and ethical issues, as well as on some political matters, John Paul II took a courageous stand. Without fear and compromise he looked the leaders of communist Poland, his home country, in the eye and demanded freedom for its citizens. He did the same for other countries which at that time were behind the Iron Curtain. Indeed, history will almost surely record that this Pope played a major role in the downfall of communism in the East bloc and Russia.

On the medical ethical front, John Paul II repeatedly denounced the evil of abortion, the rise of active euthanasia, and the experimentation that continues to go on in the area of stem cell research using human embryos. He showed himself to be a real defender of the sanctity of human life. Along with this, he went out of his way to direct the attention of the world to the plight of the hungry, the oppressed, and the diseased in Africa and other troubled areas of the world. He was also sensitive to the needs and situations of the handicapped.

In the moral area, this Pope showed himself to be opposed to sexual immorality generally, as well as to homosexuality and same sex marriage specifically. He also remained a staunch supporter of sexual activity only within the bonds of marriage. Of course, these positions were and continue to be roundly attacked by both the left-leaning elements in his own church and by the worldly press. Nevertheless, he did not back down.

The result is that when it comes to these issues and areas we need to acknowledge that the Pope did what he could to stem the tide of perversion and secularism that is washing over so much of the world.



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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**ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:
(subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):**

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
Email: clarion@premierprinting.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Email: premier@premierprinting.ca

Subscription Rates for 2005	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$44.00*	\$72.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$46.50	\$60.00
International	\$72.00	\$108.00

*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT
Advertisements: \$13.50 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$19.00 per column inch
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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

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Continual concerns

However, this is not the entire picture. For when we now turn to the areas of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice there is much that disappoints and continues to dismay. In these areas Pope John Paul II was not a reforming pope but a rigid defender of the status quo.

The role of Scripture

With regard to the supremacy of Holy Scripture as the only rule of faith and life, John Paul continued to assert that church tradition plays an equally important role. In other words, he considered “custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees, and statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God” (BC, Art 7).

The Roman Catholic Church is a church weighed down by centuries of man made customs and rules. A small part of that was evident in all the arrangements surrounding the sickness, death, and burial of the Pope. The administering of last rites, the three-fold tapping on the forehead, the processions of the body, the incense waving, the multiple chants, the endless religious ceremonies, all of these and more indicated that neither this Pope nor his church affirm the sufficiency of Holy Scripture. Indeed, as one viewed the proceedings it was as if tradition in all of its various forms overwhelmed everything else, and that included the Bible.

The place of Christ

With regard to the person and work of our Lord Jesus, we also need to make some comments. As Reformed believers most of our readers will gladly and thankfully assert that Christ is our only Mediator and our great Advocate. But what did John Paul II do during his reign? He became an aggressive promoter of adding to the list of the saints. According to him, the Roman Church needed more advocates and intercessors. Jesus Christ alone is not enough.

The cult of Mary

In addition, John Paul II did all that he could to advance the cause of Mary, the mother of our Lord. As Protestants we respect Mary as a woman of faith. We also recognize that God chose her to play a special role in the birth of his Son. At the same time, however, we have refused to venerate her. We do not believe that she was conceived without sin, that she escaped the grave and was assumed into heaven, that she has

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become the Co-Redemptrix (the co-redeemer with Christ), that she should be honoured as “The Mother of the Church” and “The Mother of God.” Indeed, we reject most emphatically this whole cult that has developed around Mary and about Mary.

John Paul II, however, never did. As a matter of fact, he was one of its greatest promoters. And what has been the result? In certain parts of the world like Poland, Latin America, and Africa, Mary receives more honour and worship than Christ. The ideal woman is more worshipped than her Son. And that is idolatry! It is a grave offence to the exalted person and work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We still need to object to much of the Roman Catholic Church’s doctrine and life, and to pray for her reform.

Other continual concerns

But there is more that is objectionable. There is Roman Catholic worship in which the mass remains central and in which the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is being repeated over and over again. His is not a finished work of salvation. It is a recycled work of endless death and dying.

There is the continued Roman Catholic contention that salvation comes through faith and works. True, on the one hand the Roman Catholic Church affirms that it believes in justification through faith, but it refuses to add the qualifier “alone” to it. The result is that human religious works of many types are seen as necessary components when it comes to salvation. It is not the grace of God that receives the credit. (Eph 2:5, 8).

Then too there are all sorts of extra doctrines and teachings that find no support in the Scriptures: purgatory, priestly celibacy, indulgences, marriage as sacrament, and so much more.

And what about the government of the Roman Catholic Church? At present Rome possesses the most hierarchical of all church political structures. The Pope is the head and the supposed Vicar of Christ, followed by the special officials at the Vatican, then the cardinals, the bishops and arch-bishops, and so



forth. Everything flows from the top down. Biblical eldership is unheard of. A biblical deaconate is none existent.

As I see it

What becomes obvious when one adds it all up is that while Pope John Paul II is to be commended for his social conscience and his moral courage, he cannot be commended when it comes to his support for many of the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. In some ways this church has changed after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). More and more of its members are reading and studying the Word. We can be thankful for that. Still, in too many of its basic tenets and fundamental ways, Rome remains Rome. Sadly, we still need to object to much of her doctrine and life, and to pray for her reform.

At least, that is how I see it.



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MATTHEW 13:52

Our Evangelical Mandate

“Christ ascended into heaven as the Head of his Catholic Church.”
Acts 1:9

As with so many earth-shaking events in the history of salvation, the Word of God covers the ascension of our Saviour with just a few verses. How we would love to have some details here, especially in our age of space travel. Not only to hear witnesses testify to his departure, but also to hear eyewitnesses speak of his arrival in that heavenly dwelling place as located somewhere in or beyond our universe. Just as with our Saviour’s wondrous resurrection from the dead, the gospel of his ascension is very brief and very sober. Whereas we would have filled in all the details, the Lord God gives us just the bare necessities. The Lord teaches us to live by faith.

There is enough written in the gospel to convince us that our Saviour’s ascension was a necessary conclusion to his work on earth, and that it was for Him a most glorious transition from earth to heaven. After all, that heavenly abode had been his special dwelling place ever since creation. But He came to earth for a specific period of time to live among us, sinful mankind. He came so that whoever believes in Him as the only Saviour would not perish but be accepted by a holy and righteous God, live with Him, and have fellowship with Him for ever and ever.

Even though the Saviour traveled a great distance from us, “ascended higher

than all the heavens,” He assured his apostles that He would continue to be intimately involved with them as they carried out their great commission to proclaim throughout the world the gospel of his birth, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection. The book of Acts contains the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ as performed by his apostles, the acts to establish his catholic church, of which He was and forever remains the Head. He assured his apostles that He as the Head would be with them always, “to the very end of the age.”

During the forty days between his resurrection and ascension the Saviour had been speaking with his disciples. In order to become his ear and eyewitnesses, the disciples had to be convinced of the reality of his resurrection. They had to be instructed for the special task He had assigned them. After Jesus summarizes their basic charge to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, He is on his way to his heavenly dwelling place, to manifest Himself there as Head of the Church through whom the Father was going to govern all things.

Well, today we know how successful that spiritual government of our Head has been throughout this New Testament

age. Despite continuous opposition from Satan and his millions of accomplices, from the billions in league with him, there has been throughout this New Testament age the steady expansion of the Lord’s catholic church throughout the world. Today we know how truly universal the church of Christ has become. We know that it has indeed reached the ends of the earth. We know that this catholic church has already drawn disciples from every nation and people, and practically from every tribe and language. We know and believe that it is all the result of the work of our ascended Lord and Head in his heavenly headquarters.

Therefore, no believer needs to doubt that Jesus will finish perfectly what He has undertaken for his one holy catholic church. To be sure, it is an undertaking in which He involves each and every member of that church. Thus, when we commemorate the Ascension of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we realize anew, as assemblies of his catholic church, the mandate to preach the Word of God from Lord’s day to Lord’s day, to do so right up to the day of his glorious return, and as living members of this church carry out our evangelical mandate: to speak of Him in our life every day, in church, state, and society.

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 34



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

This article and the ten following are about the Ten Commandments. They are read out every Sunday morning in the church service.

We have already mentioned the law of God in Lord's Day 2. Then we learned that the Ten Commandments help us to take a good look at ourselves. If we do that, we notice how sinful we still are. Our sins make God sad. The commandments help us to ask God for forgiveness.

In Lord's Day 34 we come back to the same law of the Ten Commandments. You know that Moses received these Ten Commandments when he was on a mountain. They were written on two flat stones, called tablets. One tablet contained the commandments which tell us that we should love God. On the other tablet were the commandments telling us to love one another.

Before the commandments begin, it says first: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." You may think that the slavery in Egypt ended a long time ago. Should that be said every time? Yes, I think so. It teaches you that you and the Israelites belong to the same great nation. The church from long ago and the church today is one people.

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. Their life was very hard. You must have heard stories about that. They were so glad when Moses and Aaron led them out. The Lord made that possible. The Israelites were free! We, too, are free. We are no longer slaves of sin. The Lord makes us hate sin, and then we begin to fight against it. We want to show to the Lord that we are grateful to Him because we belong to Him.

Now we want to know God's commandments and obey them. Tell God that you want to be obedient to his commandments, and ask Him to help you obey them.

What is the first of these commandments? "You shall have no other gods before me." You may say that you do not have a statue of a god in your room, and you only pray to God. But... do you always trust Him fully? Or do you think that when you grow up, then you can be good without God's help.

The Lord does not want to see superstition, either. Some people say that you should not walk under a ladder. If you do, you will be unlucky. This is trusting in luck, not in God. Keeping your fingers crossed will not help you. You do not need to be scared to walk under a ladder, because you should not be superstitious. We trust in God alone.



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Part 3: Living the Christian Life – Your Money or Your Life

This lesson covers three linked themes: the Christian attitude towards work and vocation (which was touched on in the last section), developing a Christian attitude towards money and possessions in general, and reflections on Christian giving. This lesson is important because Jesus taught frequently about money in the Gospels, particularly on how wealth is often a barrier to effective Christian discipleship. In addition, new Christians need to learn at an early stage of their journey about their responsibilities in giving, for their own sake and for the sake of the church to which they belong. It may be helpful to have your church treasurer with you for this session.

Telling your story

Ask the participants to share in small groups with each other the story of their working lives. Have them share how old they were when they started working, what different jobs they have had, which jobs they enjoyed the most, whether they have had periods in which they were unemployed, if they are happy with what they are doing now, how being a Christian made a difference at work, and how being a Christian changed their attitude towards money. Allow a lot of time for this exercise. It may be the first time the groups have ever talked much about their working lives and reflected on faith and work with someone else. Be sensitive to those who are passing through hard times in employment or unemployment. Draw the exercise together by asking each participant to say

one thing they learned or were surprised by during the time of sharing.

Christian vocation

Explain the meaning of vocation and draw out from the previous discussion what it may mean to live out your faith in the workplace; for instance, the importance of truth, honesty, and integrity. Ask the group if they can give examples of how some Christians fulfill their vocation and earn their living mainly through their daily work. Also ask the group if they can give examples of how some Christians earn their living through their daily work to support their calling to ministry in other ways, such as Paul who made tents to support himself. Again be sensitive to those who may have failed in their work or those who may not be in paid employment for different reasons. Show how discovering your vocation at different periods of your life is an important part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

First principles of Christian stewardship

Explain the concept of Christian stewardship and its deep roots in Scripture, emphasizing the grace of God. Point out how Christian stewardship challenges the contemporary concepts of materialism and consumerism. Explain why the church clearly has to lead a counter-cultural life in the area of money. Allow the participants to share their experiences or ask any questions they wish about Christian stewardship.

Bible study

Divide the following texts among the small groups: Luke 12:13-31; 18:18-30; 19:11-27; 20:20-27; 21:1-3. Let each group discuss how the passage they have been assigned is teaching about the Christian and money. Draw the groups together and allow them to share their findings with the whole group. The passages will raise significant questions that cannot be answered in one evening. This exercise shows how much teaching there is on money in just one of the books of the Gospel.

How should we give?

Remind the group that because God has given us so much He asks us to be generous in return. Point out that the New Testament instructs us to give in proportion to our income, in a regular and disciplined way, in a way that is realistic to the need, in secret, and with joy. Discuss the Old Testament principle of tithing with the group. Point out that many Christians still tithe by giving a tenth of their income back to God in various ways. Discuss with the group whether a tithing is something to work for.

Understanding your church's finances

At this point in the lesson, you may want to involve your church treasurer. If he or she is unable to attend, be sure to have copies of last year's financial statements with you. Have the group answer the questions on the handout.

These include what the church's total expenditure was for the previous year, what this would work out for per week, what the five largest items on the budget are, how much your church gave away last year, how much the income was, how much this would work out to per week. This is a very worthwhile exercise. Aim to give the big picture rather than getting lost in a lot of figures. Place all the emphasis on faith, on God providing what is needed, and on people being drawn into giving at the time and in the way that is right for them.

Steps in giving and ways in giving

Go through the steps in giving listed on the handout. Emphasize the grace and the patience of God. Be sensitive to those whose families are not Christians. Remember that some outsiders may have been turned off in the past by churches that were simply after their money. Go through the ways of giving listed on the handout. Give essential information as efficiently as possible. Remind the group that if one pays income tax, the donations one gives to

the church for which one has a receipt are tax deductible.

Ask the participants to thank God for all that they have been given. Ask them to pray between the sessions about their attitude to money and possessions.

If you would like to view the outline for this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. We have added an article by Larry Burkett to our Emmaus library entitled "Financial Stewardship: Finances and Your Relationship with God." Next time, we hope to introduce "Learning to love."



Book Review

Reviewed by R. Aasman

Treasures New and Old: Exploring the Riches of Scripture

Written by Jack De Jong, Edited by Cornelis Van Dam and Kristen Kottelenberg Alkema, (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 2004).
Additional Information: Paperback, 274 pages, \$13.00 CND.

About a year ago, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam wrote an article published in this magazine, "Saying Farewell to Dr. J. De Jong." At that time he wrote, "To mark Dr. De Jong's departure from teaching, his meditations which have appeared over the years in *Clarion* are being published under the title: *Treasures New and Old*." Dr. Van Dam noted that almost immediately after his ordination in 1978, Dr. De Jong started writing meditations for *Clarion* and he kept that up until 1990. With the permission of Mrs. Margaret De Jong, Dr. Van Dam and Kristen Kottelenberg Alkema (a student at the Theological College) have compiled these meditations in a beautiful and easy-to-follow format. This is a fitting tribute by Dr. De Jong's colleagues and students to mark his departure from teaching at the Theological College.

The book contains 123 meditations. Each meditation is two pages long and is



based on a short text, although some times Dr. De Jong uses more than one Scripture passage. These passages are selected from thirty-eight Bible books in the Old Testament and New Testament. In other words, Dr. De Jong searched and published from a broad spectrum of the Scriptures. The meditations are arranged in ten sections covering such subjects as *In Anticipation of the Christ, Christ on Earth, The Coming of the Spirit and his Work, The Christian Life, and In Anticipation of his Coming Again*.

Reading through the meditations, one is struck by two things: Dr. De Jong has the ability to dig into the riches of the text and to make it understandable to the reader. His writing exudes the

enthusiasm of one who loves God's Word and loves to share that with others. It is truly a blessing to have these meditations put together in a book and be able to read them.

This book could be used for personal devotions; it could be read by a family during their devotions; it could be used by a Bible study group. It can also be used for reference purposes. A very handy index of Scripture passages is included at the back of the book. I anticipate using it myself.

I would heartily recommend *Treasures New and Old* to all of you. It is a real blessing that the work of Dr. Jack De Jong may continue to be a blessing to all of us.



What is the Lord's Day?

Part 2: Biblical Background, New Testament

The Redeemer has come, and we have rest.

The New Testament

When we turn to the New Testament we need to pay careful attention to what Christ did on the Sabbath. As He came into the world, as He ministered to God's people, as He preached the gospel, true Sabbath was breaking into the world. His preaching and his healing brought Sabbath rest to the people of God. As Hebrews 4 teaches, the Joshua of the Old Testament could not bring the people of God into the final rest. A better Joshua had to come. Jesus Christ came to bring rest. He is the Lord of the entire Sabbath rest legislation. We've been set free from slavery. The Redeemer has come, and we have rest.

Luke 4:14-21 – Sabbath fulfilled

Luke tells us that when the Lord began his earthly ministry, He attended the synagogue service in Nazareth and there read from Isaiah 61 about the Year of Jubilee. Then He said that this scripture was fulfilled in their hearing, fulfilled that very day. He had come to proclaim the good news, the rest to which the Old Testament Jubilee was pointing forward. All the Sabbath legislation of the Old Testament which came to a climax in the Year of Jubilee was fulfilled that day as Christ began his gospel-preaching ministry.

Let us now look at those places in the gospel and see what the Lord Jesus did on various Sabbath days in order to

put into effect that gospel Sabbath rest – to be the body that cast a shadow back to the Old Testament Sabbaths.

Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 6:1-11

In these parallel passages, two events are recorded. The disciples plucked some heads of grain on the Sabbath and, as Luke tells us, rubbed them in their hands. Effectively, they were harvesting and threshing. The Pharisees objected to this Sabbath day work.

With the coming of the Messiah a new era has arrived.

Their objection would have been based on Exodus 34:21 ("Six days you shall labour, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest") and on the prohibition of picking up manna (Exodus 16).

How did the Lord respond? He did not debate different interpretations of the Old Testament texts (and those debates were current). Rather, He told the Pharisees that they needed to understand that the Son of Man, the Messiah, was now in their midst. He made reference to how David broke the law by eating the holy temple bread and

how the priests desecrate the Sabbath day by working at the temple without incurring guilt. Then He solemnly told them that one greater than the temple was in their midst. They needed to realize that. The Son of Man, the promised messianic king of the house of David, the fulfilment of the Sabbath day gospel, was in their midst. What were they arguing about?

Then Jesus healed the man with the shrivelled hand on the Sabbath day. The scribes and Pharisees objected to this, as they considered it work. Since the man's life was not at stake, Jesus ought not to have healed him. The Lord responded by saying that it was good to do good on the Sabbath day.

The contexts in which the gospel writers place these episodes are also very instructive. Matthew places these episodes right after he records Jesus speaking those famous words:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt 11:28-30)

Matthew tells us that these Sabbath day episodes happened "at that time." This is instructive. Jesus came to give rest – the redemptive rest proclaimed by the Sabbath day. Especially the healing of the man with the shrivelled hand shows how Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, the royal

Messiah, the one greater than the temple, came to give rest. The man no longer had to worry about his bad hand. He could function again in the community.

Mark and Luke place these same episodes in a different context. For example, Mark places them right after he records how Jesus proclaimed Himself to be the bridegroom. The time for festivity has arrived with the coming of the bridegroom. The new kingdom order has come. The new comes in place of the old. The new cannot be sewn on to the old, just like a new patch cannot be sewn on to an old garment. The new cannot be poured into the old, just like new wine cannot be poured into old wineskins. With the coming of the Messiah a new era has arrived. He has brought the redemption proclaimed by the Sabbath day.

Other Sabbath healings in Luke

In Luke 13:10-17 the Lord heals a woman who was chronically deformed for eighteen years on a Sabbath day. The synagogue ruler objected because there were six days to do such things and work ought not to be done on the Sabbath day. Jesus showed the hypocrisy of such sentiments. Any Jew would “unbind” his ox or donkey to let it drink on a Sabbath day. How could they object to his “unbinding” this woman and setting her free from Satan?

In Luke 14 we read about the Lord Jesus healing a man who was afflicted with dropsy on the Sabbath. These passages show us what our Lord Jesus Christ is about. He is about healing, setting people free, liberating those who had been bound by Satan, and bringing Sabbath rest. He sets us free from the

dominion of the evil one, sin, and all its miserable consequences.

John 5:1-15

In the Gospel according to John, we find similar teaching. In John 5, on a Sabbath day, the Lord healed a man paralyzed for thirty-eight years. He told him to pick up his mat and walk. The Jewish leaders met the man walking through Jerusalem carrying his mat and told him that he was breaking the law.

The New Testament calls us to be a worshipping community.

We should not brush this objection aside too quickly. Both Nehemiah 13 and Jeremiah 17 forbade the carrying of burdens on the Sabbath day. The man was carrying a burden. It was an open and shut case. Neither should we try to rationalize the matter by debating how to define “a burden.” The Lord does not enter that debate. He does not say: “Oh, but carrying a mat does not qualify as carrying a burden.” Rather, the Lord spoke of his relationship with God the Father and declared Himself to be God. He said, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

And so the Jews hated Jesus for two reasons: “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18). He revealed Himself here as the one who came to do the good work of the Father, to bring healing, joy, and life to God’s

hurting people. They saw Him as a Sabbath-breaker – covenant-breaker – and so wanted to kill Him. They did not recognize Jesus as the Mediator of the covenant, the one who fulfilled the Sabbath day. They did not see that He was bringing rest from God.

Summary of the Sabbath day in the gospel

The gospel shows that the Lord Jesus often healed the ill and distressed on the Sabbath day. What better day to do so? He came into this world as God Incarnate to bring about the redemption that the Sabbath day of the Old Testament looked forward to. He came to inaugurate the final and everlasting Jubilee. He forgave sins and healed God’s people of the miserable consequences of sin. In these Sabbath day episodes, He was bringing into effect the true and definitive meaning of what the Sabbath day was about. He was giving rest. He is the true Prince (Ezekiel 46) of God’s people, who opens the doors to the heavenly temple – the very presence of God – and bring us in to Sabbath rest. As Lord’s Day 38 says, we may today live in the joy of that eternal Sabbath rest. When Jesus Christ died, rose again, and ascended to heaven, He brought us into that Sabbath. And so, the Old Testament Sabbath, with all of its regulations, is fulfilled and no longer binding upon us.

The epistles

The apostle Paul makes it clear that the Sabbath day no longer binds us. In Colossians 2:16-17 he wrote:

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The Judaizers were insisting that the gentile Christians keep the Sabbath day. Paul said that in Christ it is over. There is no continuing legal requirement to keep a Sabbath day for the New Testament church. The Sabbath day was a shadow; the reality is found in Christ. The Sabbath day did not give way to the Lord's day; rather, it gave way to Christ. Christ is the body; the Sabbath day is part of the shadow He cast back over the Old Testament. Christ is, now, the Sabbath.

Just like the food laws of the Old Testament, just like the law of circumcision, so the Sabbath day was a shadow of Christ. Just like you don't need to be circumcised to be part of the people of God, and just like you don't need to keep the Old Testament food

laws or observe the Old Testament feast days, neither do you have to keep the Sabbath day. To insist upon keeping the Sabbath day would be to bring us back to the shadows of the Old Testament.

In Galatians 4:10-11 Paul said that by insisting on observing special days with legalistic rigor, one undoes the work of Christ. Paul also said that the observation of days is a matter of conscience: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). There is no longer a holy place or a holy time; rather, all is holy.

The Lord's day

The Old Testament Sabbath day is gone. However, there is the continuing command to worship. The New

Testament calls us to be a worshipping community. The New Testament shows us in several places that the first day of the week came to be the day for Christian worship in celebration of the resurrection of Christ, the better Joshua, who brought us real rest.

By what is the first day of the week to be characterized? By joyful worship proclaiming and rejoicing in the completed work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's day is a new day. It is not the Old Testament Sabbath day in New Testament clothes. It is not a day to be hedged in by all sorts of rules and taboos. It's about worship.

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



Amish Farm,
Sugar Creek,
Ohio



Photo courtesy J. Wanders

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Wedding Etiquette

Spring is in the air, and with it comes the blossoming of young love! Young love often translates into new marriages, and so we find ourselves on the verge of another “wedding season” charged with dreams, hopes, and expectations. It’s a beautiful time of year and a special time in the lives of all such couples.

But as every bride and groom know, the “dream” wedding only takes place upon the careful execution of a thousand painstaking details – from wedding hall to invitation lists, from dresses to streamers, and everything in between. In order to help make the life of wedding planners a little easier, I’d like to offer a few tips on what couples should consider doing with respect to the church. Call it “ecclesiastical wedding etiquette.”

There are certain customs and considerations that are sometimes forgotten or simply unknown to a given couple. I fully admit that these are customs, and not prescribed laws either in Scripture or in the Church Order. Still, we follow customs in all areas of life and in most cases they serve very necessary and useful purposes. This is also true for how we conduct the planning of weddings with respect to the involvement of the church.

The only thing our Church Order says about wedding ceremonies is, “The solemnization of a marriage may take place either in a private ceremony or in a public worship service. The adopted Form for the Solemnization of Marriage shall be used” (Art 63, CO). Almost exclusively in our time the bridal couple opts for a private ceremony and so they, in consultation with the minister, take

responsibility for many of the particulars surrounding that ceremony.

In order to promote good harmony between bridal couples and their churches (and individuals therein), I offer the following suggestions for wedding planners. They are not exhaustive, but hopefully you’ll find them comprehensive. I present them more or less in chronological order:

1. The engaged couple should seek to secure the services of a minister at the earliest possible date. Weddings are often in “competition” with the holiday plans of ministerial families. Given enough advanced notice, ministers can often work around wedding dates. Waiting too long may lead to a disappointing response.
2. The couple should also present their preferred choice of wedding text to the minister, several months prior to the wedding, to seek his agreement. A minister needs to be sure he can work with that text and that it is appropriate for the occasion. Not every text will be suitable, so be prepared for alternate suggestions from the minister. Better yet, have a back-up text in mind yourself.
3. Approximately six weeks before the date, the bride and groom should officially inform the consistories of their respective churches of their intention to become married. This allows time for the wedding banns to be read in church (See Form for the Solemnization of Marriage, p 634). This can be done simply by informing

one’s ward elder or by way of formal invitation (see #4 below).

4. The couple should extend a formal invitation to their respective consistories, as officially representing the church, to attend the wedding ceremony. Usually one elder will be delegated to attend. This custom is especially appropriate for the bride’s home church, as the usual practice is for this church to present a wedding Bible to the couple at the ceremony.
5. The couple is responsible to provide a fee or honorarium for those whom they request to serve at their wedding. Some may already have set fees but others don’t even mention it. However, a word of thanks along with a token of appreciation is fitting for those who take time out of their schedules to help make your wedding day memorable. Among those who commonly render services are:
 - caretaker of church building
 - organist/pianist
 - sound technician
 - etc.
6. Following the wedding, husband and wife should send a thank-you note to the consistory of the church which presented the wedding Bible.

I hope this list is helpful. If you are busy planning your marriage, I wish you much joy in savouring this unique time together. May the Lord bless all weddings this year which take place in his Name to his glory and the church’s edification.



Iran Update

Political tensions

The political climate in Iran seems uncertain these days. The Shiite Islamic revolution – led in the seventies by the late Grand Ayatollah Khomeini – now features two different strains vying for power.



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [kneeling] leading prayers during Ramadan.

The religious faction is led by the ultra-conservative Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It controls Iran's security forces and courts.

The political faction seems more open to the outside world. It advocates freedoms for secularists, artists, the media, and religious minorities. Its leader is Iran's elected president, Mohammed Khatami. This group controls Iran's economy and foreign affairs.

Opposition groups are sceptical about the genuineness of the public rift between the two sides. They claim it's a ploy to delude the West into believing that there is a less radical side to Iran's Islamic revolution.

Iran's neighbour Iraq is now a further complication. The party claiming victory in Iraq's January elections has been linked

to Iranian authorities for many years. It seems to enjoy the loyalty of Iraq's Shiite majority as well as the support of both factions of Iran's government.

This Iraqi Shiite party also seems to speak with two contradictory voices – one for an Iranian-style Islamic government and the other for a freer, pluralistic society. The United Nations and the West allege that Iran has a secret program and a growing capacity for producing nuclear weapons. In this, too, the Iranian government seems to speak with two contradictory voices. Why all this double talk?



President Mohammed Khatami talking with reporters.

The end justifies the means

Shiite Islam rose and developed over the centuries in hardship and suffering. The two apparently contradictory faces of these Shiite movements are rooted in adaptation to oppression in their longstanding conflict with the Sunni Muslim majority. Sunnis comprise about ninety percent of the world's Muslims.



Hundreds of Bible study groups meet together throughout the country.

They consider the Shiites to be a heretical sect. Pretentiousness and deception became legitimate Shiite survival tools. In Shiite Islam, as with many other religious and political ideologies, the end justifies the means – even if that involves saying one thing while meaning another, outright lying, or making false promises.

Winds of change

One thing is clear, the Iranian authorities know well that neither they nor Islam enjoy the loyalty of the majority of the Iranian population any longer. Unofficial (illegal) polls so indicate. The Islamic revolution has brought Iran poverty, misery, fear, and international isolation – not to mention immense brutality and the deaths of tens of thousands of Iranian people who held differing political or religious views.



Words of HOPE's David Bast interacts with Iranian believers

The advance of the gospel

Enforcement of some restrictive Islamic laws against political and religious dissent has recently eased. In so doing, Islamic authorities seem to seek some improvement of their international image and to placate the growing resentment of the Iranian population. Many view this as the answer to earnest prayers of many saints inside and outside the country. Some Iranian authorities have not only eased pressures against Christians and other religious minorities, but also publicly recognized their legitimate rights, as long as they remain low-key and politically uninvolved.



Two converts were recently baptized at MERF's Trinity Chapel.

It seems that some authorities may have concluded that Christians in particular do not pose a serious political or security threat. They are now encouraging believers to openly identify themselves as Christians. This has emboldened some converts to make their commitment to Christ more public.

Some have even dared to apply to officially register themselves and their children as Christians in government records. Most, however, remain uncertain about the government's motives and prefer the security of secrecy. In any case, as Islam loses ground the gospel of Christ's saving grace continues to advance among Iranian people.

The Word and Deed ministry of our Iranian brethren continues to bear fruit in the Bam area, devastated by a massive earthquake last year.

MERF's Iranian team leader reports encouraging progress in the discipling of young converts. Hundreds of Bible study groups are meeting quietly in homes throughout the country.

A recent gathering of Iranian believers at MERF's John Calvin Center confirmed the steady progress of the gospel. A Farsi Bible dictionary and study guide will soon be published to meet the needs of the growing believing community.

In partnership with Words of HOPE, MERF continues to fruitfully broadcast the message of the gospel to Iran in the Farsi language. Responses now arrive from Iranian listeners by e-mail, phone text messages, as well as by post.

A listener named Mohammed recently wrote:

"About two months ago I left the country. I am now able to listen to your programs daily. By listening to your messages of Jesus, my fuzzy understanding has been clarified. I have a deep desire now to belong to Jesus. I want to call myself his follower. I need your help. Please provide Farsi books which enlighten me more."

Thank you for your support! May we this time especially thank the students of Credo Christian High School in Langley, British Columbia and the Dufferin Christian School in Carman, Manitoba who together collected about \$8,000.00 CND to help Iraqi children. You did a wonderful job!! May the Lord bless you and the children you helped!

Please, make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address below.

With warm regards, yours
in the Lord's service,
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman,
Mrs. J. VanDam, secretary.

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TSUNAMI UPDATE

Praise the Lord for the generous response to January's MERF News report on the Asian tsunami! Through the efforts of faithful Indonesian and Sri Lankan partners, the tragic human impact of the tsunami has opened doors which had previously been closed to gospel outreach, especially in Muslim Indonesia.

Effective indigenous missionary efforts must now be directed to the more abiding need, the ministry of the Word: evangelism, training spiritual leaders, and building healthy local churches.



Press Release: A Progress Report on the Activities of the Reformed Curriculum Development Committee of British Columbia, March 3, 2005

The Reformed Curriculum Development Committee (RCDC) meets twice annually as stipulated in its mandate. At its March 3, 2005 meeting, the RCDC received several reports on activities conducted on its behalf. This press release is intended to provide you with a brief overview of the activities, decisions, and plans of the RCDC.

In our last press release (November 25, 2004) we reported that the Curriculum Cooperative Committee (CCC) presented a copy of the RCDC Social Studies Curriculum Project. This project was the product of a team of writers from across Canada, who worked on it during the summer of 2004. They followed a defined curriculum development model, known as the Understanding by Design model. This model includes three stages: Stage one deals with articulating those understandings which teachers would consider to be “enduring,” or lasting, or key understandings. Stage two considers evidences that need to be gathered to ensure that the students have indeed acquired the desired understandings and matching skills. Stage three outlines the instructional strategies teacher would employ in order for students to grasp the desired understandings. Last summer, the

writing team managed to complete only the first stage of this design. At the November 25, 2004 meeting, the CCC suggested to continue to the next stage of that project. Having been instructed by the RCDC at that time to investigate the need and costs of such further development, the CCC now proposed at this meeting to solicit writers to continue with the second (assessment) stage during the upcoming summer. The RCDC agreed, so that the CCC can begin soliciting curriculum writers, preferably the same ones as last summer.

Work on the *Flame of the Word* series is progressing, albeit somewhat slower than originally anticipated. Book 2B and its accompanying Teacher’s Manual is slated for publication sometime in April or May of this year. Some preparatory work is in progress for Book 3. For this volume, the authors wish to cover material that would optimally contribute to the shaping of the Reformed identity of a person living in the twenty-first century in North American culture. To that end they are also soliciting ideas via a small survey, to find answers regarding which topics should be included in such a volume.

The *Narration Course* continues to be in demand. The authors, A. Nap and P. Torenvliet, had to turn down a request from our Ontario counterparts to conduct such a course in the first week of July, 2005, as it had already been arranged for A. Nap to conduct this course at that time in Brazil. A. Nap has also been busy helping his Brazilian colleagues translate some

Christian world view literature to impact on the curriculum development for their own schools.

The RCDC continues to be encouraged by the many positive developments as these relate to curriculum materials for our schools. For example, it is pleased by the increasing interest from Canadian Reformed schools across Canada; several school societies from Alberta and Manitoba are now full-fledged members of the RCDC. Another evidence of this is that last summer’s Social Studies writing team consisted of representation from British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario. Finally, many Ontario schools are adopting the *Flame of the Word* series for inclusion in their Church History program. These developments demonstrate again that the Lord is blessing our endeavours. There are many reasons to thank the Lord for his continued guidance. Let us not take these blessings for granted, but respond to them in thankfulness, taking up our call to diligently work for the furtherance of Christ’s kingdom. May his Spirit work mightily in us and spur us on in the challenges confronting us.

*For the RCDC,
J.A. Roukema*

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

Press Release of Classis Alberta held March 8, 2005 in the building of the Providence Church at Edmonton, Alberta

On behalf of the convening church of St. Albert, Rev. R. Bredenhof called the meeting to order. He mentioned that since the last Classis Rev. R.J. Eikelboom has accepted the call to Launceston, Australia, and that Rev. Th.E. Lodder has accepted the call to the church at Cloverdale, B.C. In the meantime Rev. J.D. Louwse has been installed as minister of the church at Neerlandia. The death of Dr. K. Deddens was also mentioned. Thankfulness was expressed for the work he did as professor at the Theological College. Rev. Bredenhof read from Proverbs 3:1-18, and requested that Psalm 111: 3, 4, 5 be sung. In prayer he asked a blessing over this meeting.

The church at St. Albert reported that the credentials are in good order. The Classis was declared constituted. The officers were as follows: Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar, chairman; Rev. W.B. Slomp, vice-chairman; Rev. Th.E. Lodder, clerk.

After the adoption of the agenda the chairman welcomed the delegates. Rev. J.D. Louwse signed the Form of Subscription.

The treasurer's report was dealt with. Currently there are sufficient funds so that an assessment for this year is not necessary. The church at St. Albert reported that the books of the treasurer were found to be in good order. A report concerning the inspection of the archives was read and adopted. Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar, as contact person with the provincial government, made an oral report. This was thankfully received.

Church visit reports to the churches at Barrhead, Calgary, Coaldale, Edmonton Immanuel, Edmonton Providence, Neerlandia, St. Albert, and Taber were presented and dealt with in closed session.

Certificates of Release from Classis were issued for Rev. R.J. Eikelboom and Rev. Th.E. Lodder.

The churches at Calgary, Coaldale, and Taber requested pulpit supply during their vacancies. The church at Barrhead also asked for pulpit supply during the time of their minister's sabbatical. The church of Providence requested guest ministers to supply the pulpit during the time of their minister's sabbatical. Classis decided to supply the vacant churches once a month. Classis also advised the churches to assist as much as possible those churches whose ministers are on sabbatical.

Question period ad Article 44 CO was held. Advice concerning a case of discipline was given. Permission was granted to proceed. The church at Calgary asked advice concerning the appointment of a new treasurer for Regional Synod. The advice was given to the church at Coaldale to propose a new treasurer to the next Regional Synod. Upon the suggestion of the church at Calgary Classis decided that the next Regional Synod will be held on November 22, 2005 at 9.00 a.m.

The church at Coaldale asked advice about how to proceed further locally with respect to contact with the URC. Advice was given. At the suggestion of the church at Taber the Free Reformed Churches will be invited to subsequent Classis meetings in keeping with the decisions of Synod.

The next Classis was scheduled to be convened by the church at Taber on June 7, 2005, with alternate date October 4, 2005. The proposed officers are: Rev. J.D. Louwse, chairman; Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar, vice-chairman; Rev. W.B. Slomp, clerk. Rev. J.D. Louwse was appointed to replace Rev. R.J. Eikelboom as church visitor and as examiner New Testament and Ethics. Rev. R. Bredenhof was appointed to replace Rev. Th.E. Lodder as examiner of Knowledge of the Contents of Holy

Scripture, and (together with Rev. W.B. Slomp) as examiner Diaconology.

Br. J. Buitenbos was reappointed as treasurer. St. Albert was reappointed as church for the auditing of the books of the treasurer. Edmonton Providence was reappointed as church to inspect the classical archives. Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. W.B. Slomp were reappointed to the Committee of Examinations. Rev. R. Aasman was reappointed to be examiner Old Testament, Rev. W.B. Slomp as examiner Doctrine and Creeds, and Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar as examiner Church Polity. Rev. W.B. Slomp will also make up a schedule of preaching for the vacant churches.

Committee for Financial Aid to Students for Ministry: the brs. J. Moedt, M. Tams, A. Leffers were reappointed. Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches: the brs. C. De Boer, W. Noot, and J. VanderDeen were reappointed. Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar was reappointed as contact person with the provincial government. The contact person for the RCUS remains Rev. R. Aasman. Rev. R. Bredenhof was appointed as observer to the next RCUS Classis.

Rev. R. Aasman was appointed as counsellor for the church at Taber, and Rev. R. Bredenhof as counsellor for the church at Calgary.

Several members made use of the question period. The chairman judged that no censure (ad Art 34 CO) was necessary. The acts and the press release were read and approved. After some parting words to and from the two ministers leaving this classical district, the chairman asked the delegates to sing Psalm 121:1-4. The chairman led in thanksgiving prayer and closed this classis meeting.

*For Classis Alberta
Rev. W.B. Slomp,
vice-chairman at that time*

Press Release of Classis Pacific West of the Canadian Reformed Churches, held March 15, 2005

Rev. J.M. VanSpronsen called the meeting to order and led in opening devotions. Classis was constituted. The executive for classis consisted of Rev. J. Visscher, chairman, Rev. E. Kampen, vice-chairman, and Rev. J.M. VanSpronsen, clerk.

Classis granted the request that Rev. D. Poppe be given an honourable release from his duties in the classical district in connection with his pending move to the Canadian Reformed Church at Coaldale, AB. The chairman wished him the Lord's blessing in his new task and expressed the hope that the Church at Houston would soon find a minister to fill the vacancy. Rev. J.M. VanSpronsen was appointed as counsellor for the Church at Houston. Further, the Church at

Houston was granted classical pulpit supply for one Sunday each month, effective August of this year.

Classis received reports from the classical treasurer, the church for auditing the books of the treasurer and the church for the inspection of the archives. It also received reports from the Church Visitors on visits made to the Canadian Reformed Churches at Cloverdale, Houston, Langley, Smithers, and Surrey-Maranatha. Gratitude was expressed for the positive reports. A report had also been submitted on a visit made to Classis Western Canada of the United Reformed Churches of North America held on September 30 and October 1, 2004.

The Church at Langley requested advice in matters of disciple. Classis dealt with this request in closed session.

Classis reviewed the various appointments and made adjustments where necessary in connection with the

change of ministers serving in the classis. The next classis was scheduled for June 14, 2004, with alternate date of September 27, 2005, to be convened by the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church, Surrey, BC.

In personal question period, brothers from the Church at Cloverdale expressed appreciation for the assistance received in terms of pulpit supply and other counsel during their time of vacancy. Some discussion took place regarding possible classical involvement in church planting. The brothers were encouraged to take ideas back to their home congregation for further consideration.

After the Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved, Rev. J. Visscher led in closing devotions. Classis was closed.

*On behalf of Classis Pacific West,
Rev. E. Kampen*



Sailing Lake Ontario, Toronto, Ontario

Photo courtesy J. Wanders

