

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

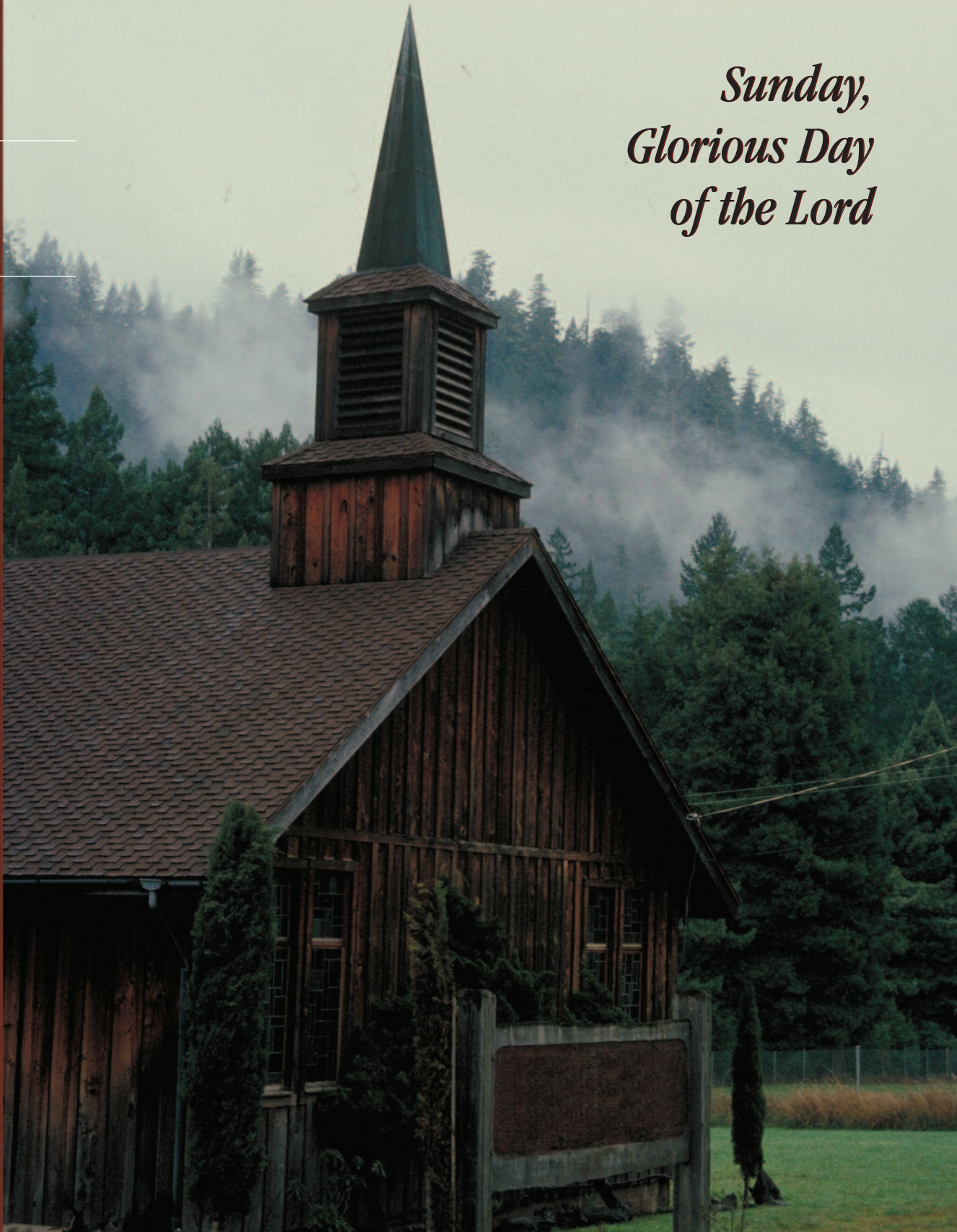
Volume 55, No. 9 • April 28, 2006

*Whose Day is  
it anyway?*

*David  
and the sons  
of Zeruah*

*Sabbath and  
Sunday*

*Sunday,  
Glorious Day  
of the Lord*





J. Visscher

Dr. J. Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia  
[jvisscher@canrc.org](mailto:jvisscher@canrc.org)

# Whose Day is it anyway?

*What can a Christian do or not do on Sunday?*

This issue of *Clarion* is largely devoted to the Sabbath-Sunday issue, and a contentious issue it is! For as long as I can remember there have been disagreements about it. When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s one of the things guaranteed to ignite a debate was the question, "What can a Christian do or not do on Sunday?"

## Growing up with controversy

In Christian homes at that time this question was answered in a variety of ways. In some you were allowed to watch television, but not in others. In some you were allowed to change your clothes after church; whereas, in others you had to keep on your Sunday best – all day long. In some you were allowed to play sports like baseball, tennis, or soccer after church, but in others such things were deemed to be much too worldly.

---

*The entire day is his and should be spent in such a way that the Lord stands in the centre of it*

---

Little wonder that growing up then was not without Sunday controversy. Some young people even said that Sunday, instead of being the best day of the week, was actually the worst day. Monday came along like a breath of fresh air and represented freedom from dispute and restriction, as well as an opportunity to escape from conflicting household rules.

## An age-old dispute

Perhaps it does not need to be said but behind all of this lies an age-old dispute. Sabbath-Sunday issues are almost as old as the church itself. When we

turn our attention to biblical times, what do we see? First, we have that long Old Testament period in which God's people were given the law of the fourth commandment, were repeatedly reminded to keep it, and were constantly upbraided for not doing so. Thereafter, we have a New Testament time filled with Sabbath watchdogs called Pharisees and a Saviour who is repeatedly at odds with them because they never grasped the real import of that day. After Easter we have a church that somehow has to cope with the transition from Sabbath to Sunday.

Moving from Bible history to church history provides no respite from controversy. For next we have a period of persecution during which little is said about the matter, followed by a zealous emperor who makes the Sunday a prescribed day and unleashes a flurry of activity resulting in the construction of church buildings for Sunday church services. The Medieval period reveals a host of varying responses to the Sabbath/Sunday matter, followed by a Reformation time wherein the matter is re-discovered, re-examined and re-applied. Thereafter, a post Reformation era dawned with its insistence on multiplying all manner of restrictions and prohibitions. Following all of this, we have what we have today, namely a constant debate about whether Sunday really is Sabbath, about whether it started at creation or at Sinai, about whether we may or may not work, about whether commerce should be allowed or forbidden?

## Will it never end?

Will the controversy never end? Probably not! Surely the past gives ample evidence to conclude that this really is one of those issues that will not go away until the Lord returns and settles the debate once and for all. In the meantime we may as well get used to the fact that it will remain a challenge and a source of dispute among Christians.



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:**

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal  
Coeditors: R. Aasman, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam, C. Van Dam

**ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:**

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

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

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.  
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5  
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202  
Email: [clarion@premierprinting.ca](mailto:clarion@premierprinting.ca)

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:  
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

<b>Subscription Rates for 2006</b>	<i>Regular Mail</i>	<i>Air Mail</i>
Canada*	\$46.00*	\$ 75.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$55.00	\$ 70.00
International	\$82.00	\$120.00

\*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$14.00 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch

We reserve the right to refuse ads.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, Canada through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

**Cancellation Agreement**

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date. Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

**Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.**

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

**Useful Link:** [www.canrc.org](http://www.canrc.org)

Is that all bad? It depends. On the one hand, it is a lamentable thing when people who believe in the same God, read the same Bible, pursue the same standard of holiness, and even claim adherence to the same confessions cannot get together on the meaning and application of the same worship day. On the other hand, controversy is not all bad, for it continues to engage us in biblical study and reflection, as well as in a debate of some importance.

**Common ground**

Speaking of debate, however, would it not serve some purpose to set the whole Sabbath-Sunday issue aside and simply concentrate on a fact that almost all Christians can agree on, namely that the first day of the week is the Christian day of worship (see John 20:1, 19, 26; Acts 2:1; 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10)? The seventh day or Sabbath was left behind. Instead the first day called Sunday was adopted and became known as the day when Christians gathered and worshipped. In the process believers spoke less of the worship on the Sabbath day and more and more of worship on the Lord's Day or the first day of the week.

Why did the New Testament church move its worship from Sabbath to Lord's Day? Why did it suddenly shift from the last day to the first day of the week? Because it wanted to celebrate one of God's greatest works, namely the resurrection of his Son from the dead and in Him the resurrection of all of God's people.

While the Sabbath looked back to creation (Exod 20) and liberation (Deut 5), the Lord's Day celebrated resurrection and re-creation. Resurrection means that the worst damage from the fall into sin has been addressed. It means that death no longer has the last word. It means that life has both meaning and future. It means that the way to fellowship with God and glory lie open before us. In short, the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything.

For all of these reasons and more, God's people chose the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection of Christ, as their special day. Little wonder that it also became the most fitting day for corporate worship. Little wonder too that it was soon regarded as the most appropriate day to reflect on all of God's other mercies. In addition, it also turned into the day to re-charge one's physical and spiritual batteries.

**IN THIS ISSUE**

Editorial – Whose Day is it Anyway  
— J. Visscher .....211

Treasures, New and Old – David and the Sons of Zeruiah — E. Kampen .....213

Sabbath and Sunday  
— F.G. Oosterhoff .....214

Sunday, Glorious Day of the Lord  
A resource .....221

In Memoriam — N.H. Gootjes .....225

Letter to the Editor .....226



## Points of agreement?

In light of all this, can we not agree at least on some basic points? What sort of points?

First is this: for all of God's people the first day of the week is the *Lord's Day*. In one sense all of the days of the week are days of service to the Lord. And yet there is a sense in which this day stands apart and is different. Indeed, the history of the church gives ample proof that Christians throughout the ages and around the world have recognized this fact.

Second is this: the first of the week is particularly the *Lord's Day*. This means that it is not our day but it is his day. It belongs to Him in a special way. He has transformed it and He alone should be honoured on it by those who follow Him. In other words, it is not Terry Fox Day. It is not Man in Motion Fundraising Day. It is not Sun Run, Cancer Run, or Hospice Run Day. It not even Life Chain Day. It is the Day of Christ.

Third is this: the first day of the week is the *Lord's Day*. This means that it is not his hour. Neither is it his morning. It is not even his morning *and* his afternoon. The entire day is his and should be spent in such a way that He stands in the centre of it.

Fourth is this: the first and foremost calling on this day is the calling to worship Him together as his people. Family time, leisure time, social time, community time – they should all take a backseat to corporate worship time.

Fifth is this: everything that detracts from this day and its promotion, be it work, commerce, industry, travel, and the like, is to be resisted and avoided. In the Old Testament there was a rather obvious reason as to why work was forbidden on the Sabbath day. Work crowds out worship. The hours that we spend at it, the time that we prepare for it and wind down from it, all mean that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for meaningful worship and meaningful work to share the same day. It is either one or the other. To try to incorporate and do justice to both is one of the most difficult balancing acts in the world.

## Publicizing our distinctiveness

From many pulpits the biblical message rings out that God's people have been made different and therefore are to be different from all the other peoples of the earth. They are to be a light in the world.

One way to highlight this difference is to take the *Lord's Day* and to turn it into Christ's special Day. Interestingly, in Old Testament times the Sabbath was to function as a beacon to foreigners (Isa 56:6). Would it thus not be fitting now for the *Lord's Day* to function as an even better and brighter beacon to peoples everywhere?

Let it be a day driven by our Saviour's resurrection triumph. In addition, let it be a day through which mankind receives a picture of how good it is to step off the treadmill of toil, materialism, and self-centredness, as well as to re-connect both with the Triune God and with true life in his creation.



E. Kampen



Rev. E. Kampen is minister of the Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia  
[ekampen@canrc.org](mailto:ekampen@canrc.org)

# David and the Sons of Zeruiah



**MATTHEW 13:52**

*A most intriguing relationship in Scripture is the relationship between David and his nephews Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. They were the sons of David's sister Zeruiah*

1 Chronicles 2:16

On the one hand, these sons of Zeruiah were of great importance for David and the kingdom of Israel. Abishai at one time killed three hundred men with a spear and he was chief of the thirty, men known for their valour. Joab was the commander in chief of the army. Asahel was among the thirty.

On the other hand, there were times when their actions caused David to indicate his disapproval of them. After Joab treacherously killed Abner, David cried out, "And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me" (2 Sam 3:39). Later, when Shimei cursed David as he was fleeing from Absalom, Abishai wanted to kill Shimei. David responded to Abishai's suggestion by saying, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah?" (2 Sam 16:10) He repeated these same words when Shimei was the first to humble himself before David after Absalom's defeat, seeking mercy. Abishai again wanted to put him to death (2 Sam 19:22).

A reflection on the context in which David takes his distance from the sons of Zeruiah reveals a common denominator, namely, the peace and unity of Israel. In the case of Abner, after seven years of civil war, he had come to David to make peace. In that very delicate process of bringing all the tribes together under one king, Joab decided he had to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel who had been

killed by Abner during the war. As David later told Solomon, Joab shed blood in peacetime as in battle. As such, Joab hindered the unity being built among God's people.

The same can be said about Abishai's request to kill Shimei. The unity of Israel was in the balance in the rebellion led by Absalom. While fleeing, David did not dare to touch Shimei, lest God had sent him. Not only that, it would have further alienated the people to see David act in what would come across as personal vengeance. When Absalom had been defeated and Shimei humbled himself, the reunification of Israel would have received another setback, even more so since Shimei came accompanied by 1000 Benjaminites who would not have taken kindly to such an action.

In these incidents we see how the sons of Zeruiah, brave men in fighting the enemies of God's people, did not understand the character of their shepherd king. As a shepherd he would valiantly fight those who attacked the flock, but he would show great compassion in gathering the sheep of the flock, even those who were straying. In this, David foreshadowed the Great Shepherd King, our Lord Jesus Christ. The sons of Zeruiah, however, could not discern the difference between the way of war and the way of peace. Whereas David knew when to speak gracious words, they only knew how to use their swords.

We have an example in the early New Testament church that shows what happens when the ways of the Spirit prevail rather than the ways of the sons of Zeruiah. It is in the way the disciples received Saul (Acts 9:26-30). There were some "sons of Zeruiah" types among the disciples. After all, were not James and John called "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:52)? Incidentally, like Abner and Shimei, Saul too was from the tribe of Benjamin. What would have happened, humanly speaking, if the disciples had treated the former persecutor of the church, one who had denied and defied the anointed King, who had gone to Damascus breathing threats and murder against the disciples, just as Joab had treated Abner, or as Abishai wanted to treat Shimei? Thankfully, the way of the Spirit prevailed through the work of a man like Barnabas, a son of encouragement. Saul was welcomed and in due time he would prove to be the most mighty man among all the disciples in the building of the kingdom of God.

In sum, the ways of the sons of Zeruiah do not work in the fragile, sensitive situation that so often arise when building up the peace and unity of the church. The only shed blood that builds the unity of the church is the blood of Jesus Christ. That blood is the foundation. The way to build upon that foundation is by walking in the way of the Spirit, which is the way of brotherly love.



# Sabbath and Sunday

Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff is a  
historian in Hamilton, Ontario  
[fgo@quickclie.net](mailto:fgo@quickclie.net)

The relationship between the Christian Sunday and the Old Testament Sabbath is a matter of much discussion and controversy in the Reformed churches in Holland. It has served at three general synods (Leusden, Zuidhorn, and Amersfoort) and played a major role in the decision of some 1250 members to secede from the federation. It has also, however, stimulated in-depth study on the nature of the Christian Sunday. In what follows I will give some of the highlights of this study and in the process try to explain the decision the synods have made.

First something about the background. The issue came to the fore in the 1990s. A minister somewhere in The Netherlands had said in a sermon on Lord's Day 38 that the Sunday as day of rest should be observed, but not necessarily because it was grounded in a divine command. His exact words: "Show how much you value that day. As far as I am concerned, not on the ground of an absolute, divine command. But because it is good when, following the example of Israel's Sabbath, we rest together on a day of the week."

## Synod Leusden

Objections were raised to this sermon and in the end the issue served at Synod Leusden, 1999. This synod concluded that the opinion "that the Sunday as day of rest is not founded in a divine

command is not to be condemned." Among the grounds for this decision was the observation that the Reformed churches have always allowed room for different answers to the question whether Scripture clearly speaks of an absolute divine command to keep the Sunday as a day of rest. Leusden did not say, as some critics claimed, that the Sunday was simply a human institution and that believers were free no longer to consider it a day of rest.

---

*The issue in question was whether there had traditionally been room in the Christian church for those who defend the Sunday as day of rest on other grounds than an immediate connection between Sabbath and Sunday*

---

It in fact rejected such a conclusion, observing that Lord's Day 38 clearly speaks of a *command* – namely that especially on the Sunday we diligently attend the worship services. This implies a cessation of labour. The issue in question was, however, whether there had traditionally been room

in the Christian church for those who defend the Sunday as day of rest on *other grounds* than an immediate connection between Sabbath and Sunday and who are not certain that the Sunday as day of rest is based on a direct divine command. Leusden answered that question in the affirmative.

According to Leusden, then, two opinions have always been allowed in the Reformed churches and neither of these is to be rejected. One is that the Sunday is directly based on the fourth commandment, the other "that the Christian church in her faithful response to the guiding of God's Spirit gives to the Sunday the special value of day of rest according to the example of Israel's Sabbath." In connection with the second opinion, namely that the Sunday as day of rest is grounded in a responsible choice of the Christian church, reference was made to J. Douma, *De Tien Geboden: handreiking voor het christelijk leven* (Kampen, 1992), especially page 56.

In the discussion attention was paid to the problem that believers face today because of the steady erosion of the weekly day of rest. Synod decided not to issue a declaration on this matter because it had not reached its table in the church-orderly way. During the discussion it was pointed out that it is indeed important to defend the Christian Sunday, but that this

should not be done with improper arguments. What cannot with certainty be shown to be a scriptural command must not be proclaimed as such. Nor is it right to limit the freedom that has traditionally been granted for different explanations of scriptural teachings regarding the day of rest simply because there is a need for clear rules (*Acta*, GS Leusden, Art 25).

### Synod Zuidhorn

The decision of Leusden did not end the unrest and the issue served again at the next synod, Zuidhorn 2002-3. Many of the letters and appeals that Zuidhorn received conveyed the conviction that: 1) there have never been two views on the Sunday and the opinion of the minister in question was a new and illegitimate one; and 2) the Bible makes clear that the Old Testament command to cease all work one day of the week applies also to the New Testament church. In fact, the Christian Sunday, in the view of many, is the Sabbath, although it has been replaced to the first day of the week. The decision of Leusden therefore went against Scripture.

A committee serving Synod Zuidhorn examined the data from Scripture and church history relating to Sabbath and Sunday and judged, like Leusden, that these data do not lead to a uniform conclusion but can be used to support either opinion. Zuidhorn therefore rejected the demands for revision and urged the churches not to bind consciences beyond the accepted doctrine. It realized, however, the disadvantages of the fact that there are two different opinions, one of which is under attack, and expressed the need for further deliberation and explanation. Zuidhorn therefore appointed deputies who were to

provide guidelines on the issue in question. The result was a 98-page report containing, among other things: 1) a study of biblical data on the fourth commandment, the Sabbath, and the origin of the Christian Sunday; 2) a practical-ethical part, dealing with the ethics of labour, rest, and Sunday against the background of the fourth commandment and in the light of Christ's resurrection; and 3) a church-historical part, describing the attitude of the early church with respect to the Sunday, the dominant view during the Middle Ages, the opinion of the Reformers, and so on.

---

### *The controversy on the nature of the Sunday has occurred time and again in the history of the Christian church*

---

This report, which provides the most extensive description of the grounds on which both Leusden and Zuidhorn based their decision, appeared in the fall of 2004 and was submitted to Synod Amersfoort, 2005.<sup>1</sup> I will be making use of the report in this article.

### Old Testament and Sabbath

The report shows that the controversy on the nature of the Sunday has occurred time and again in the history of the Christian church. A central question has always been whether the day of rest is a creation ordinance, that is, whether at the time of creation already God instituted the Sabbath for mankind, so that it must be observed by all people at all times. This opinion is found in the Westminster Confession. Deputies state that the view is certainly to be accepted.

Indeed, Zuidhorn itself has stressed the legitimacy of the opinion that the fourth commandment, and Scripture as a whole, teach a prohibition of physical labour on the Christian Sunday (*Acta*, GS Zuidhorn, Art 60).

But like Leusden and Zuidhorn, deputies question whether the evidence is conclusive and whether the view can be made binding. With respect to the opinion that Sabbath rest is a creation ordinance, they point out that we do not read of the seventh day as a day of rest for mankind until the exodus. In the history of the patriarchs the Sabbath is not mentioned, nor do we read in Genesis about a rhythm of six days plus one. Israel lived in Egypt for 400 years in a culture that adhered to a rhythm of ten days. The word Sabbath appears for the first time in Exodus 16:23, when Israel received the manna. Subsequently, at Horeb, Israel was given the fourth commandment. It is at this point that the Lord shows the connection between his own rest on the seventh day and Israel's Sabbath. The blessing He pronounced at the time of creation comes now to both man and animal in that for one day they may rest from their labours. The Sabbath becomes a sign of the covenant between God and his people (Exod 31:13-16). For that reason the punishment for breaking the Old Testament Sabbath was very heavy, whereas there were great promises for both Israelites and aliens who kept the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was God's gift to Israel. Deputies conclude that a study of the Old Testament does not prove without a doubt that it was a creation ordinance and therefore universally valid. They again stress, however, the legitimacy of such a conclusion.

## The New Testament

The New Testament, according to the deputies, also does not give a clear answer to the questions that have arisen. We learn here that Christ, according to his custom, visits the synagogue on the Sabbath day and teaches there. He calls all who are weary and burdened to come to Him to rest (Matt 11:28). It is not the Sabbath that is the focus of God's people, but Christ. He takes pity on those who are exhausted by trying to find rest in their own piety and good works. When He calls Himself the Lord of the Sabbath He does not abolish the Sabbath, but He does show that He has the authority to give it a new meaning. The Sabbath becomes the day on which He does his works of mercy and healing, thereby showing that it is He who truly fulfills the Sabbath. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read that Christ enforced the Old Testament Sabbath commandment, nor do we read that He instituted a New Testament day of rest.

The same goes for the apostles. In Acts 2 we read that the church came together not one day but every day of the week. Nothing is said here about the Sabbath or the first day of the week as a special day of meeting and/or rest. We also do not read in any of the epistles about the first day as day of rest, nor do the epistles draw a connection between the Sabbath and the first day. Like Christ, Paul goes on the Sabbath to the synagogues to preach the gospel, and the other early Christians, who were mainly Jewish, seem to have continued observing the Sabbath. The only time we read in Acts about the *first day of the week* is in chapter 20, which mentions the meeting of the congregation at Troas. But at this time Paul does not

replace the Jewish Sabbath with the first day as the new day of rest, nor does he do so elsewhere. Rather, he shows that not the first day of the week, but Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament Sabbath. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude from the meeting at Troas, and also from Paul's request to set aside contributions on the first day (1 Cor 16:2), that this was becoming the day when the congregation came together. In addition, there are the references to the first day in Christ's appearances after his resurrection.

---

### *Coming together for the reading and proclamation of God's Word of salvation is the beginning of entering God's eternal rest*

---

Deputies point out that the New Testament, which mentions all the other commandments, does not make any mention of the fourth. This is not to say, however, that it ignores it. In his teaching Paul follows Christ in *intensifying* the Sabbath command, showing its spiritual meaning – as the Lord did in the Sermon on the Mount also with other commandments. In Hebrews 3 and 4 we again read about the deeper, spiritual meaning of the fourth commandment. The Sabbath rest, which is an entering into the rest of God, is with us here on earth already in principle, but not in perfection. Christ is the way to that rest. Therefore Hebrews stresses the need to diligently attend the worship services (Heb 10:25). This coming together for the reading and proclamation of God's

Word of salvation is the beginning of entering God's eternal rest. The first day or the Sunday is still not mentioned here, however. In Revelation 1:10 John describes an appearance of Christ on "the Lord's Day." This is the only time that this expression is used in the New Testament. It is towards the end of the first century that the term "the Lord's Day" comes into more general use for the first day of the week.

Deputies draw the following conclusions from their New Testament studies: 1) it cannot be *compellingly* deduced from biblical teaching that there is a *direct* divine command for the New Testament church to keep the Sunday as day of rest; 2) it seems reasonable to conclude that the early church has *gradually* chosen the first day of the week – the day of Christ's resurrection – as special day of worship. The apostles may have instructed the church here, but we cannot prove this from Scripture. We may believe that the Holy Spirit has, in according with his promise (John 16:13), led the church in its choice of the Sunday as the Day of the Lord; 3) there are no indications that a cessation of physical labour was required on the day of worship in the early church.

## The Law in the New Testament

If the New Testament Sunday is not a Christian Sabbath, then what does the fourth commandment teach us? To answer that question, deputies refer to the well-known distinction between "ceremonial" and "moral" aspects of Old Testament law and worship. The first term refers to what was a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice, the second to what belongs to the life style of believers for all times



and places. Lately objections have been raised against this terminology and, following Dr. J. Douma, the report prefers to speak respectively of the *provisional* and the *permanent* in the fourth commandment. In addition, deputies mention the *new* elements that have come in Christ.

The report lists under the label *provisional* the following: 1) the *seventh* day and the fact that it lasted not from midnight to midnight, but from evening till evening; 2) the *absolute* character of the command to rest, with the death penalty for transgression; 3) the different context, evident in the fact that Israel lived in its own country, which was a theocracy, whereas the New Testament church lives "in exile" – indeed, many believers (for example those in Muslim countries) cannot observe the Sunday as day of rest; and 4) the name "Sabbath" with all its Old Testament connotations. Paul uses the term "Sabbath" for the Old Testament day of rest and states that Christians are not to be bound to it (Col 2:16f).

Among the *new* and *permanent* elements in the fourth commandment the deputies mention: 1) remembering the day of Christ's resurrection and meeting together as believers on that day; 2) setting that day apart and in that sense hallowing it; 3) resting from our own works and enjoying God's grace in creation and preservation as well as in redemption and sanctification; 4) keeping the day of the Lord as far as possible free from labour; 5) maintaining the rhythm of one day plus six; and 6) experiencing and celebrating with all God's people, slave and free, the new freedom from both slavery and sin in a life as God intended it for us.

## Summary from the biblical data

The biblical data as presented by the report uphold the opinion of Leusden and Zuidhorn that Scripture does not *compellingly* show a *direct* connection between Sabbath and Sunday, although, as deputies point out, it is certainly legitimate to draw that connection. The New Testament, more clearly yet than the Old, teaches the spiritual meaning of the fourth commandment, rather than stressing external observance. We will come back to that point; we will then also see how the Christian church over the centuries has interpreted the biblical teachings on the day of the Lord.

## Early church and Middle Ages

The report of the Dutch deputies on the relationship between Sabbath and Sunday concludes that the New Testament does not tell us exactly when and how the Sabbath was replaced by the first day of the week, nor does it speak of a specific day of rest under the new covenant. Because during the first three centuries Christianity was a forbidden religion, it seems probable that at that time believers met for communal worship in the morning and evening, before and after work.

In the early church, according to the report, both the Sabbath and the Sunday were kept, but there was greater stress on the *contrast* between Sabbath and Sunday than on any continuity. Whenever the fourth commandment was mentioned by church leaders, it was explained in a spiritual sense: the issue was not the cessation of physical labour, but the spiritual rest from evil works. When in 321

the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, proclaimed the Sunday as day of rest throughout the Roman Empire, he again did not do it with reference to the fourth commandment. Augustine (d. 430) also explained the Sabbath command in a spiritual sense.

Meanwhile the obligation to come together for worship was stressed throughout the period of the early church and again during the Middle Ages. Eventually, because of the problem of absenteeism and abuse of the Sunday, the church of the Middle Ages added the Old Testament Sabbath commandments to the civil and ecclesiastical laws regarding Sunday rest. This led to an often severe legalism with endless rules as to what was and was not allowed on the day of rest.<sup>2</sup>

## The Reformation

The Reformers held an altogether different opinion. Both Luther and Calvin rejected the sabbatarianism of the Middle Ages and returned to the view of the early church. Calvin wrote in his *Institutes* (Book II, Ch VIII, par 28-34) and elsewhere that the Sabbath has only ceremonial value: it is a sign or shadow that has been fulfilled in Christ. God's resting on the seventh day is indeed an example for us, but the Sabbath is, according to Calvin, no creation ordinance, nor is the Sunday a continuation of the Jewish Sabbath. There must be rest on the day of worship, but the rest God requires is first of all of a spiritual nature, a laying aside of our own works to let God work in us. In addition, Calvin taught, Sunday is the day when the congregation comes together in worship, and it further serves a social function – servants,

slaves, and even animals receive their day of rest on Sunday.

The rest from evil works is primary, however. We must, Calvin teaches, suppress and deny our own will and work and be open to the will and work of God. He consistently rejects any legalistic and "superstitious" observance of the Sunday. At the same time he exhorts believers to observe the Sunday by faithfully attending the worship services. Calvin concludes his discussion on the fourth commandment in the *Institutes* with the words, "We ought especially to hold to this general doctrine: that, in order to prevent religion from either perishing or declining among us, we should diligently frequent the sacred meetings, and make use of those external aids which can promote the worship of God." It is clear, incidentally, that Calvin's teachings are reflected in Lord's Day 38.

### **The seventeenth century and beyond**

The situation changed again some decades after Calvin's death. In the later sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth century various Reformed leaders promoted the sabbatarianism of the Middle Ages. We see this first of all in England, which had already in the Middle Ages held to an exceptionally high view of the Sunday. After the English reformation, state and church continued to enforce strict Sunday observance. A problem in England was that Henry VIII had in a single day changed the nation's religion from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. Rulers and clergy realized that for the new religion to take root, it was essential that everyone attended the Protestant worship services. And so, when civil

laws and ordinances did not succeed in abolishing absenteeism and idleness, the emphasis on the Old Testament law steadily increased. In some cases, theologians even suggested the death penalty for Sabbath breaking, just as in the Old Testament. It was common in this period to explain England's political setbacks with reference to the abuse of the Sunday and its victories to strict Sabbath observance.

---

*Synod Leusden stated that in the preaching it must become sufficiently clear that Lord's Day 38 speaks of a command, namely that on the day of rest we diligently attend the worship services*

---

A small but politically influential minority opposed these radical sabbatarian views and by the end of the sixteenth century England's lengthy sabbatarian conflicts began. These lasted into the next century and beyond and would become a cause of the English Civil War (1642-1649). It is in this time that the Westminster Confession was drawn up (1646), which like the stricter Puritans emphasized the continuity between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday and demanded strict observance of the Sunday as day of rest. This confession became the definitive statement of English-Presbyterian doctrine on the issue and influenced non-Presbyterian churches and believers as well.

Among these were the Dutch Reformed. Early in the seventeenth century sabbatarian conflicts had broken out in Zeeland. The Synod of Dort tried to end them by means of a compromise formula, but failed. The battle flared up again after the Synod of Dort. Leaders of the opposing groups were Gijsbertus Voetius, a sabbatarian, and Franciscus Gomarus, who defended the position of Calvin and of Lord's Day 38.

### **The twentieth century**

In spite of the teachings of Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism, and also in spite of opposition by later theologians, sabbatarianism succeeded in establishing itself. It has shaped ethical theory and practice throughout the modern period, and that not only in Reformed circles. The same thing happened elsewhere. The churches' success in defending the Christian Sunday as day of rest has been aided by the fact that until very recently governments cooperated with them and passed legislation that guaranteed the cessation of work on Sunday whenever possible.

This is no longer the case in our days. Legislators, generally speaking, do not take Scripture as norm and guide and neither does society as a whole. The rapid pace of secularization is not the only reason, however, for the erosion of the Sunday as day of rest. Another factor has been industrialization and the fact that in more and more industries Sunday labour is considered necessary.

This began already in the nineteenth century and played a role in the decisions of the churches of the secession. The general synods of these churches taught strict Sunday observance.

All labour, except works of compassion and necessity, had to cease "in order that the wrath of God not be kindled against the congregation." Church discipline was reserved for those who disobeyed. The spread of industrialization in this period, however, soon gave rise to questions. An urgent one was: what really belongs to the category of "works of compassion and necessity"? Only the work of police and hospitals, as was formerly believed? Or also such things as, for example, the production of gas, which was widely used as source of light and for which Sunday labour was essential? The Synod of 1857 answered that question in the affirmative. It reasoned that for other sources of light far more work had to be done. Therefore believers did not break the Sabbath command by using gas light on Sunday and employees were allowed to work in the gas factories on the day of rest. The number of such exemptions increased with time.

The great advances in technology since 1857, the rapid pace of internationalization and globalization, and the changed spiritual climate of our own days have further multiplied the problems. Today's situation makes necessary a good and open climate in the churches so that believers can speak about the ethical problems they encounter with respect to Sunday labour and so that they can strengthen and encourage each other to make the proper choices. Those who cannot possibly avoid Sunday work must receive extra help and support. Today's situation also means that believers must redouble their efforts in defending the Sunday as day of worship.

## Summary

As I hope to have shown, in the issue under discussion the Dutch synods have not departed from Scripture or confession, nor have they distanced themselves from church history. On the contrary, they have demonstrated that in the Christian church there has always been room for different answers to the question whether Scripture clearly speaks of an absolute divine command to keep the New Testament Sunday as day of rest.

---

*Both parties agree that the Sunday is to be kept as day of rest – either on the ground of the fourth commandment or because the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit has given to the Sunday the value of day of rest*

---

I also hope to have shown that the synods have not "frittered away" (verkwanseld) the fourth commandment, as critics have claimed. While allowing the meaning that the Sunday as day of rest is not grounded in a divine decree to stand, they also strongly emphasize the fact that the Sunday follows the model of Israel's Sabbath and is therefore in line with the fourth commandment. That command remains valid, even though, following Christ and the apostles, we interpret it in New Testament terms. In this connection we should note Leusden's statement that in the preaching it

must become sufficiently clear that Lord's Day 38 speaks of a *command*, namely that on the day of rest we diligently attend the worship services (*Acta*, GS Leusden, Art 25).

I believe that the Dutch synods have done us a favour with their in-depth study of the relationship between Sabbath and Sunday. It is true, the outcome is not what we would have expected and it is understandable that many have followed developments with suspicion and fear. I admit that initially I did so myself. The sabbatarian tradition has been well established among us: we have all grown up with it. It has given us a sense of security in that it provided us with definite rules with respect to Sunday observance. But it has also meant that we have been tempted to keep the Sunday in a legalistic manner. The fact that on Sunday we rest first of all of our evil works was not forgotten, for Lord's Day 38 continued to be preached, but the obligation to keep the Sunday "laws" inevitably had the effect of moving the spiritual meaning to the background.

The most important contribution of the Dutch studies, in my opinion, is that they have reminded us once again that we are no longer under the old covenant. Christ revealed to us God's deepest intention with all the commandments, including the fourth. He taught us that we are not to see the Sabbath command as a regulation that we can simply follow and so free ourselves from the absolute claim of God. This is a truth which, as we saw, the believers in the early church understood well. "These Christians," Rordorf writes, "said that it would be a misunderstanding of the Sabbath commandment if we



wanted to rest on a single day and to lull ourselves with the illusion that we were in this way fulfilling God's will...." They knew that it was Christ who fulfilled the fourth commandment. Their Sabbath theology was indeed "Christocentric to the core" (pp 296, 117).

We can still learn from these early Christians. We can also still learn from Calvin, who taught throughout his life that we keep the Sabbath commandment only when we rest from our own works and so let God work in us all the days of our lives. And therefore, Calvin warned, "whenever people are full of 'envy, rancor, ambition, cruelty and guilt,' they break the Sabbath commandment. But when they dedicate themselves to God and submit to the guidance and governance of his Spirit, then they faithfully observe the substance of the Sabbath command" (Primus, p. 128). Calvin points out that Christians, thanks to the sacrifice of Christ, have more freedom with respect to the day of rest than the Old Testament church. The increased liberty gives also greater responsibility, however. We are to keep the Sabbath not just one day, but all our days. "From that perspective, the spiritual keeping of the Sabbath is far more demanding than the mere external observance of the day. Anyone can take external rest from labour, but only by the grace and Spirit of God can people rest from their sinful works and allow God to work in them redemptively" (*Ibid.*, p 129).

### **Conclusion: the two opinions**

A problem which the Dutch synods were unable to resolve fully is that in the Christian church there are still two opinions on the relationship between Sabbath and Sunday. They had hoped to come to

greater unity and had asked deputies to see whether the data relating to the issue under discussion made it possible to come to an agreement. As the foregoing shows, the deputies have not been a hundred percent successful. Nor is that surprising, in view of the fact that the dilemma has been with us for close to two thousand years.

Nevertheless, considerable commonality does exist. The deputies conclude with gratitude that both parties agree that the Sunday is to be kept as day of rest – either on the ground of the fourth commandment or because the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit has given to the Sunday the value of day of rest according to the example of the Israel's Sabbath (*Acta*, GS Leusden, Art 25). The disagreement is not about the validity of the Sabbath command, but only about what belongs to it. Is it an ellipse with two focuses, namely rest and worship, which have equal weight, or is it a circle with one focus: worship, and therefore rest? However we may answer that question, we agree that there must be rest on Sunday at least for the worship services (LD 38), and also that there must be a day of rest.

It seems that at least for the time being we will have to live with the differences. One thing, however, is clear: we know that we may not give up meeting together but must encourage one another, all the more so as we see the Day approaching (Heb 10:25). And meanwhile we must defend the day of rest. As one commentator writes (J.P. de Vries, in *De Reformatie*, January 22, 2005): "How good would it be if our disputes about the relation between the fourth commandment

and our rest on the first day of the week were changed into a powerful witness to outsiders about the rest which Christ offers and of which we may already receive a foretaste every Sunday."

<sup>1</sup> The report has been published in book form under the title *Zondag, Heerlijke Dag*. Part of it has been translated into English and can be found on the Dutch churches' website (gkv.nl) under "Engelse artikelen." On the same website a number of commentaries and summaries can be found. They include an article by K. Wezeman, chairman of Deputies for Relations with Foreign Churches, titled "Not beyond what is written," and nine brief articles, titled "Sabbat en zondag," by P.L. Voorberg on behalf of the deputies appointed by Zuidhorn. I have consulted these documents. I have further made use of the summary of the report by K. De Vries, one of the deputies, in *De Reformatie*, January 8 and 15, 2005. See also the document "Sunday, Glorious Day of the Lord," which appears in this issue and summarizes many of the Synods' arguments and teachings.

<sup>2</sup> For this section, and also for what follows, I have relied on the documents listed in the first footnote, as well as on the following: John H. Primus, *Holy Time: Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Mercer University Press, 1989), Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Early Centuries of the Christian Church* (SCM Press, 1968); P. Visser, *Zondagsrust en Zondagsheiliging* (Kok, 1959).

Note to readers: *In two previous issues (no. 2 and 4 of this year) Dr. Oosterhoff's email address has been published incorrectly. Please note her correct email address: fgo@quickclic.net . We apologize for any inconvenience this has caused.*

This resource appeared in the March 2006 issue of *Lux Mundi* and is reprinted here with permission. It was written by a committee appointed by the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002-2003 of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands – Liberated.

# Sunday, Glorious Day of the Lord

## A resource

### Occasion

This resource has been drawn up for two reasons. The first is that, as has happened more often in history after the Reformation, disagreement has arisen about the relationship between the fourth commandment and the Sunday and about the consequences for this relationship with respect to the observance of the Sunday. The second reason is the backdrop to this disagreement, namely, the changing spiritual climate in our country into a secularized and multi-religious society. The economical and social developments (internationalization, globalization, and technology) have great influence on our national culture. This resource is intended to help the churches to renew the Christian conviction with regards to the rest and the celebrating of the Sunday in The Netherlands of the twenty-first century.

### Introduction

We, as Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, know ourselves to be under the authority of the fourth commandment as it stands within the whole of the Ten Commandments and of the instruction of Holy Scripture. It is in partly because of this commandment that we celebrate the Sunday as the day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus

Christ. It is our desire to understand more and more of how the Sunday is granted to us in Him unto redemption and sanctification for the whole of our lives.

### 1. Section of instruction

#### 1. From Sabbath to Sunday

In the same way that Israel celebrated the Sabbath throughout the ages, so the Christian church has received the Sunday as day of the Lord. Jesus Christ calls himself "Lord, also of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). He has completed the obedience to God and the sacrifice for sin. On the first day of the week He arose from the dead. God's great works in the completion of creation and in the liberation of the people from slavery were the motives for the celebration of the Sabbath. In Christ God decisively furthers the history of his redemption. God's great work in the resurrection of the Son from the dead is now an additional motive for the celebration of the Sunday.

In the New Testament the first day of the week stands in the light of Christ's appearances to his disciples (John 20:19, 26). The first Christian congregation gathered every day in the temple and in the houses (Acts 2:46). The first day of the week takes form in the assembly by listening to the instruction of the apostles, the breaking of bread (Acts 20:7), and in laying gifts aside (1 Cor 16:2).

Later this is called "the Day of the Lord" (Rev 1:10), the name that the Christian church later gave to the Sunday. That is why we call the Sunday the "glorious" day "of the Lord." [Translator: there is a play on words here in Dutch. "*Heerlijk*" is etymologically "Lordly, of the Lord" and in meaning "glorious."]

#### 2. The day and the days of the Lord

In the New Testament the celebration of the Sunday is not connected to the fourth commandment of God's law with so many words. Each day and the whole of life are sanctified by Christ. He who celebrates a certain day as a feast day does so to honour God (Rom 14:6). In the New Testament world, the Sunday was first an ordinary work day. This day soon received its specific colour through the assemblies of Christ's congregation both in the morning and in the evening.

Christ is the fulfilment of the whole law (Matt 5:17) and He takes up God's commandments in his teachings about the kingdom. The great commandment of love and perfection gives strength to life following in the footsteps of the Master. The gospel account tells us how He observed the Sabbath according to the commandment and participated in the assemblies in the synagogue. In the course of the gospel one would not expect the celebration of the seventh day to change until Jesus had died and

his body was resting in the grave on Sabbath. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead which clarifies the new with respect to the old.

Just like the other commandments, the fourth commandment comes to us in Christ. In his person and in the unity of the Scriptures the church wants to understand what the observance, the sanctification, and rest on the day of the Lord means. In the freedom of the Spirit we want to do justice to the temporary, the lasting, and the new aspects in the will of God in respect to the fourth of the Ten Commandments.

### 3. *The temporary, lasting, and new aspects*

God wants to give his creatures rest and allow them to catch their breath (Exod 23:12). He wants to free them from the cramp of working under the curse. The creation-motive (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:11) is reinforced by the redemption-motive (Deut 5:15). Man, animal, and land are allowed to share in the rest that God gives them to enjoy.

3.1 We see the temporary aspect of the fourth commandment in the seventh day, in the opportunities of the Promised Land, in the claim of God's law on Israel's society, and in the regulation with respect to the Sabbath which the Lord commanded of his people. In this way too, the law has led Israel to the Saviour. The Scriptures also call the Sabbath a shadow of things to come, while Christ is the substance (Col 2:17). The one Promised Land gave temporary expression to the rest. The Christian church in the world is now a sojourning church. Not always or everywhere in the world are Christians in a position to make the day of rest and the Sunday coincide.

3.2 There are also lasting aspects of the fourth commandment. We see those first of all in how labour and rest

alternate. We see these further in the assemblies before the Lord on the day of rest and the feast days. And thus in letting go of one's own achievement and living from the generous hand of God. Already at the completion of the world we hear how God rested from his work of creation in six days (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:11). The Lord Jesus adds that the Sabbath is made for man (Mark 2:27). He Himself makes this evident in the proclamation of the gospel. He also makes it evident in acts of healing and liberation for the children of Israel, also on the Sabbath. They especially belong to the rest which can be found in Him and to which He invites God's people (Matt 11:28-12:21).

3.3 The new aspect in Christ's resurrection is that no longer the seventh day, but the first day of the week comes into the spotlight. In Him the true rest can be found (Matt 11:28-30). He is our Sabbath. The whole life of sinners is freed from the burden of sin and guilt by Him. Light shines over all the days of the week and over all the peoples of the world. The coming of his kingdom will give us everlasting Sabbath peace (Heb 4:9). Hence we pray: "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

### 4. *Sunday, day for the church*

The lasting aspects of the fourth commandment can take shape from the new aspect which came in Christ. The command to rest from one's own work and exertion needs to be made concrete. Especially on Sunday we learn to find rest in the accomplished work of our Creator and in the accomplished suffering of our Saviour. The first day of the week gains form in Scripture proceeding from his resurrection. The living Lord gathers his congregation around Him on that day. He sends her out from that day into every day life in order to let the light shine.

The assemblies of the congregation are in line with Israel's "holy assemblies" on the Sabbath.

We are encouraged not to "forsake the assembling of ourselves," all the more in the light of the approaching judgment of the day of the Lord (Heb 10:25). The "today" of God's voice which calls to repentance applies to every day when the Word is sounded (Heb 4:1-13). His voice is heard especially as often as the Holy Scriptures are read aloud in the assemblies and proclaimed. Christ is the Lord of his church which He gathers in one body.

We want to do justice to the actual resting and remembering of God's works. We do so when we celebrate the Sunday and give room to the meetings of the congregation on that day. As Christian church we know ourselves to be called to thankfully accept the gift of this day of rest and to use it optimally to God's honour. Should this room be taken from us, the Sunday remains a sign of the desire to serve the Lord in full freedom.

We encourage each other to keep this day free from professional labour as much as possible and from any other activity which keeps us from the worship service of the Lord, from meeting as a congregation, and from the rest which characterizes this day. The fourth commandment is done justice when God's people enjoy this day of the Lord by distancing themselves from their ordinary activities (Isa 58:13).

### 5. *The congregation as Christ's body*

The double command of love is the summary of the law and the main theme of all commandments (Matt 22:27-40; Rom 13:8-10). Loving God as the highest commandment takes shape in the gathering of the congregation with her Lord. In the assemblies, the congregation presents herself to Him who is her Head.

Love of the neighbour finds expression in the will to come together as congregation which may be called the body of Christ. This command urges us not to



forsake our assemblies, but to exhort one another in that respect (Heb 10:25). Not one member can be missed in the whole of the body (1 Cor 12:12-31). The celebration of the Sunday binds the members together to form the one body, in which we are baptized in one Spirit (1 Cor 12:12-13).

#### 6. Sunday and society

The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands have always thankfully accepted the free Sunday as it has come to us in Europe by God's providence. The Dutch people have, however, abandoned the way of faith in God and appreciate the Sunday primarily as a free day. Now that the legislator offers more room to work on the Sunday, so decreasing civil protection of this day as a day of the Lord, publicly and unanimously, with word and deed, we want to testify to the gospel of Christ. This implies the following:

6.1 pointing to the Creator of all that lives who has given the rhythm of working and resting to people who are created in his image;

6.2 testifying to the Saviour who frees lost people from the power of sin and brings us together in his congregation;

6.3 praising the Spirit who wants to renew damaged people after the image of Christ and guides us to the renewal of heaven and earth.

We want to uphold the Sunday to the honour of the living Lord and as day of the Christian congregation. We also stand up for maintaining the Sunday as a day of collective rest. From the first beginning, the God of Israel has involved also the staff, the foreigner, and the animals in the day of rest (Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14). We also desire to give form to the celebration of the Sunday in such a way that it displays an attractive picture of rest with God and communion with each other. It is our prayer that this example and

witness will invite also our neighbour to Christ. In our daily work, in our leisure time, and on the Sunday we want to testify of Christ Himself by finding rest in Him. That is how we, united on the confession of Lord's Day 38 of the Catechism, want to do justice in this time and our circumstances to God's purpose with the fourth commandment and the Sunday.

## 2. Practical-ethical section

2.1 In a society with mobile phones, laptops, traffic jams, internet, and e-mail, people are rushed. Time spent in labour and leisure flow over into each other in spite of the shortened working week. It is thus high time that we go back to learn from the Creator who made labour and leisure. Christ is Lord of redeemed slaves and of the day of rest.

2.2 Life and work continue to be subjected to the curse of the fall into sin (Gen 3:15-19). Also in a highly developed economy and society, work remains toil for many (Eccl 1:3). Education exerts great pressure on younger and older people. For this reason, it is healthy that the Creator introduced a day of rest into the rhythm of the week (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:8-11; 23:12). In line with God's example and command we are to come to rest, learn to enjoy and look back on accomplished work. In this way God is honoured as the one who accomplishes all work. All depends on his blessing, not our performance.

2.3 The rest comes first (laying aside of labour) and then the celebration follows. God accomplished his work of creation and thus laid the foundation for the Sabbath. Jesus Christ accomplished the work of redemption and thus laid the foundation for the Sunday. He creates time to come to rest in his nearness. His commands, also to rest, are not heavy (1 John 5:3; Matt 11:30). Thus we learn to long for the perfect rest (Heb 4).

2.4 The Lord commanded that staff, animals, and the land also share in the rest. This rest has implications for the Dutch people, society, and the economy. God is concerned with the recreation (true re-creation) of his world. In word and deed the church shall testify of rest with the Creator, Redeemer, and Renewer of all that lives.

2.5 By resting we make clear that we realize that we have been freed from slavery, also from our own sins, performances, and economical laws. By celebrating the Sunday we give expression to the recognition that Christ is Lord also of the day of rest (Mark 2:28). When He says "Do not be anxious about the day of tomorrow," this applies certainly for the Sunday (Matt 6:34). On the day of rest we learn to enjoy his care, just as Israel learned it through the gift of manna.

2.6 Although the Old Testament had few direct prescriptions for the forms of worship on the Sabbath, this celebration is given form. For example, in the presence of the "tabernacle of meeting" and the offers, in the "holy convocations" of the people, and later in the synagogue. Jesus was accustomed to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). In the New Testament Christ appears to disciples and women after his resurrection. They assemble on the first day of the week (John 20; Acts 20), which is called "Day of the Lord" by the congregation (Rev 1:10).

2.7 Christ calls us to his congregation, which is his body. The congregation does not consist of individuals, but is the body of Christ, through the power of the Spirit comprised of many members. When the Redeemer calls us to his congregation there is no room for individualism.

2.8 In the convocation the congregation presents itself as the body that puts itself in the service of Christ. In the worship service she presents herself as people to

her God in all seriousness to enter God's rest (Heb 4). In line with the example of the early church we too need the second worship service to enjoy the Sunday as a whole and as congregation. If absenteeism of the second service becomes more common place, the congregation should be instructed and motivated to take part.

2.9 In church education it is necessary to make clear the interconnectedness of: a) God's command and willing obedience thereof; b) the congregation which assembles and being a living member thereof; and c) the choice of career and personal responsibility. We need the proclamation of the Word and the communion of saints to develop a Christian lifestyle.

2.10 When, due to economic and social pressure, Sunday labour increases, it is necessary to point out to each other the need for rest from our own exertion and our complete dependence on God's blessing. Work which is in service of the gospel (Matt 12:4-5) and works of compassion (Matt 12:6-7) can be necessary. This offers us also the opportunity to give form to the following of Christ. Under what circumstances (professional) labour is necessary shall be determined in Christian liberty. Such consideration shall take place by listening to God's Word, with prayer for wisdom and asking for advice. Isaiah 58:13 can serve as a practical directive and basis.

2.11 The danger of regular Sunday labour is that one is no longer used to the rhythm of Sunday rest, that one does not have the energy to attend even one worship service, and that you isolate yourself from congregational life. This makes a life of prayer even more necessary in order to receive dedication to the Lord of life and of his congregation. It is also good that the congregation supports those who, on account of their labour, have to work. This is possible through

prayer and personal attention for each other. In determining the moment of worship, times when they are able to attend are taken as much into account as possible.

2.12 Sunday labour which is accepted for increased returns is to be rejected, as is all love of money (1 Tim 6:9). "No one can serve two lords. You cannot serve God and Mammon" says Jesus our Lord (Matt 6:24).

2.13 The law of the Lord is a guideline of thankfulness for the redemption in Christ. The fourth commandment helps us – in labour and rest – to receive the sanctification of our whole life. The Holy Spirit fills the congregation as a temple. There sinners receive the power to live to God's honour all the days of the week.

2.14 Christ redeemed the Sabbath from human laws which place a burden on the day of rest. Developing a pattern of Sunday sanctification requires creativity: to discover what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2). It requires love so that we can be a hand and a foot to each other in this.

2.15 In judging each other and speaking about each other it is good to use a "lifestyle of patience and mercy." It is not the outer marks of Sunday labour which are determinative. One must judge the motives, on account of which one decides with respect to Sunday labour. In this context the following words of the Lord Jesus are redeeming: "If you had known what this means 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the son of man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt 12:7-8).

2.16 In the training in faith it is important to develop a personal and shared lifestyle. Household rules can assist us in finding rest and peace on the day of the Lord. Household rules are agreements among adults, in which clarity is given concerning choices with respect to lifestyle relevant to the

celebration of the Sunday (e.g., homework, media, and types of recreation). The room which the Spirit wishes to make in our hearts may not be put under pressure by our busyness. At the same time God has given the day of rest for the enjoyment of leisure and recreation. Household rules are agreements which are taught to children as a way of personally giving form to the Sunday rest. Thus the younger generation can learn how to give shape to Sunday rest in a responsible way.

2.17 One aspect of celebrating the Sunday is to lay aside all trust in ourselves and our own work. Only Christ is able to redeem us from the slavery of the curse and of the power of sin. Repentance from dead works is a turning to the living God.

2.18 A powerless and joyless celebration of the Sunday has to do with a small faith that fails to find its power in Christ as Lord. However, a living faith in Christ, the Living One, will lead to fervent and joyous celebration of the day of his resurrection.

2.19 Focusing on the accomplished work of Christ and the renewing power of the Spirit implies for the day of rest: doing everything which serves a joyous celebration of the day of the Lord and leaving aside doing those things which break this down.

2.20 Society has become estranged from the Sunday as day of rest. The Sunday as day of the church is primarily a matter within the boundaries of the congregation and the homes. The congregation of Jesus Christ shall seek ways and means to reach out to the neighbour and to invite him or her to taste something of this real rest. To those who come to faith in Christ and desire to join the congregation, we want to explain why this day is so valuable to us and show how we celebrate the Sunday with joy (cf. 2.15).



# Prof. Drs. Heinrich Marinus Ohmann

March 16, 2006



When the message reached us from The Netherlands that Prof. Ohmann had passed away, we realized that another of the early teachers at the College has died, to live with the Lord. We thank the Lord for what He gave to the churches in the person of Prof. Ohmann.

He studied theology in Kampen at the seminary of our sister churches in The Netherlands. Prof. Ohmann was ordained as a minister in Zuidbroek, where he ministered from 1956 to 1962. While in his second congregation, Hoek, from 1962 to 1968, he began to take up advanced studies in Semitic languages in Ghent. He continued this study when he accepted a call to the church in Dokkum. During that period, from 1968 to 1971, we saw him regularly on the pulpit in my hometown, Leeuwarden. I remember him as a big man, all the more impressive because he preached to us from an old fashioned high pulpit.

In 1971, the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches appointed him to teach Old Testament in Hamilton, as the successor of Rev. F. Kouwenhoven. He accepted the challenges of this special office and taught with much enthusiasm in Canada for ten years, till he accepted the call to teach the Old Testament subjects in Kampen. There he taught for another twelve years.

It was during this period that I got to know him. At that time the student body of the Kosin Seminary in Pusan, Korea, where I taught, invited him to explain redemptive historical preaching. He accepted the challenge and taught in his own enthusiastic way. However, he did not make it easy on his Korean translator because of the long sentences he produced!

Prof. Ohmann surprised us with his interest in the culture of Korea. When showing him the beauties of the country we took him to visit one of

the famous temples. He was mesmerized by a monk who was reading aloud from an old scroll in an unknown language. He wanted to know what was read and he was very disappointed when it became apparent that the monk did not know what he was reading and was simply pronouncing letters. Prof. Ohmann, with his love for languages, was ready for the new challenge to learn yet another language.

As professor of Old Testament studies in Kampen, he not only gave his regular lectures, he also supervised graduate studies in Old Testament. His successor in Hamilton, Dr. Van Dam, who had been studying under Prof. H. J. Schilder, finished his doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Ohmann. When he retired in 1993, he was honoured with a *Festschrift: Een Levendige Voorstelling*. In gratitude for the work he had done in Canada, the faculty of our Theological College contributed several articles to this book.

Prof. Ohmann did not only teach, he also published several biblical studies. He presented popular studies on Numbers and Isaiah 1-39. In addition, he wrote publications dealing with special issues such as God's wrath and creation. We are grateful for the work he has done for the churches and for the Theological College.

Recently his wife's health failed; she passed away last year, about five months ago. Now the Lord has taken Prof. Ohmann to himself, to wait for the day of Christ's return. We thank our heavenly Father for giving Prof. Ohmann to the churches. In particular we are grateful for what he contributed to the training of the ministry in Canada. We remember him as a faithful servant of the Lord.

**N.H. Gootjes**



## Letter to the Editor



Last November Dr. J. Visscher published an editorial titled "Trouble in the Church." He refers to "unhappy fellow believers" in our sister churches in Holland who are "reacting negatively" to a range of changes. Dr. Visscher says "the vital and fundamental question remains: have these [Dutch sister churches] turned their back on the gospel?" He believes that "is something that remains to be proven." It seems to me, sadly, that it has been proven, at least in relation to the fourth commandment.

Dutch General Synod Leusden 1999 (GSL) said that the opinion of Rev. D Ophoff, "that the Sunday as day of rest is not founded on a divine commandment" cannot be condemned (GSL, Art 25 decision 4.3). In other words, the GSL decided that a minister is allowed to say that the words of the fourth commandment "in it you shall do no work" do not apply to the Sunday.

Admittedly, GSL said more: the Old Testament Sabbath was an example for the Sunday and the Christian church acted responsibly when it chose to see the Sunday as a day of rest. However, it is important to note that when the Dutch synods speak about Sunday rest they do not see it as a God-given command to refrain from doing normal daily work. They effectively deny the literal interpretation of those words of the fourth commandment.

A flurry of appeals descended on the next synod. This Synod Zuidhorn 2002 declared that the appeals did not prove that Leusden's decision was in conflict with Scripture and the confessions.

Two successive synods had now spoken and hence the question of whether we must rest on Sunday was off future agendas. They'd made it quite clear: it's okay to preach that God has not commanded us to rest on Sunday.

This was further clarified by Dr. K. de Vries, one of the Dutch deputies on this issue. Writing in *De Reformatie* (August 30, 2003) in defence of Synod Zuidhorn's decision he said: "[In the decision of

Synod] the churches show how much room there presently is in the interpretation of the fourth commandment."

Referring to Lord's Day

38 Dr. de Vries said: "The text references do not speak of *resting* on that day; you shouldn't just read that into it." According to Dr. de Vries: "The [synod] committee says it is questionable whether one can prove from Scripture that the Sunday replaces the Old Testament Sabbath."

Synod Zuidhorn did appoint new deputies; however, not to question the synod decisions but to look at *how we can best celebrate* the Sunday in this twenty-first century. Their report "*Zondag, HEERlijke dag*" says many fine things about the Sunday but nowhere refutes the earlier synods' decisions that there is no divine command, either direct or indirect, to rest from daily labour on Sunday.

Every Sunday morning in church we hear the divine words: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. In it you shall not do any work." We have always understood these words to apply to the Sunday as the New Testament Sabbath (rest day) and to mean exactly what they say. Moreover the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. . ." (Matt 5:19).

The fourth commandment is part of the gospel. Sunday is the New Testament day of rest, replacing the Old Testament Sabbath. The command to cease from daily labour is a creation ordinance and an integral part of the fourth commandment. So it seems to me that by denying this, the Dutch sister churches have, indeed, turned their back on the gospel in relation to the fourth commandment.

Jelte Numan

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