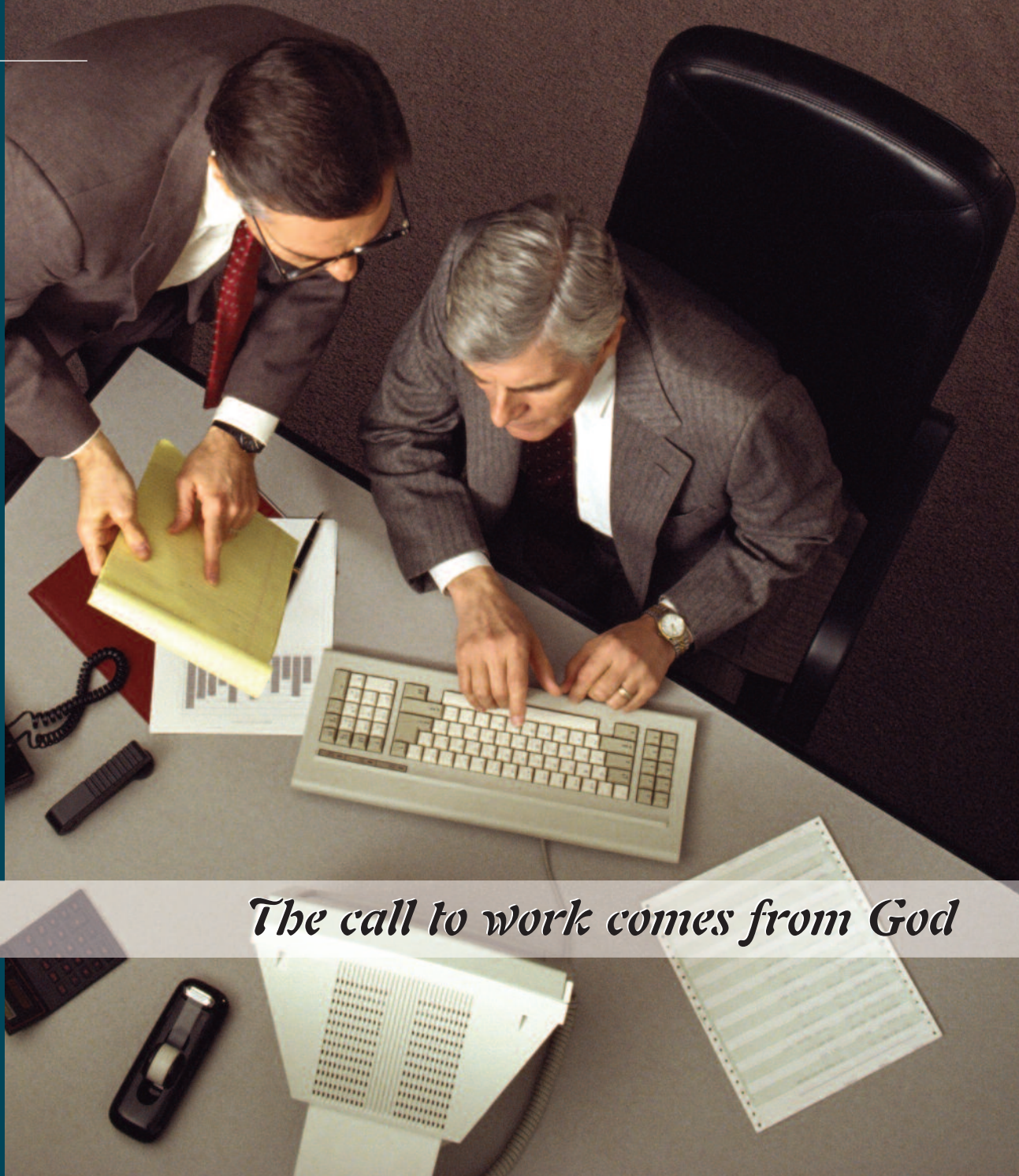


Why Work?

*Given a Task
by God*

*Making the
Most of College:
Recovering the
Lost Logic of
Church*



The call to work comes from God



Why Work?

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Work was God's plan for a perfect world

Today's popular culture is a culture of leisure. The more important issues of life include the weekend's weather forecast and the latest score of a ball or hockey game. Many in our society live for the weekend and the fun and games that come with it and the sports scene competes with international events for headline space. These are the odd priorities of a culture enamoured with leisure and fun. Many view work negatively. Is it not just an evil necessity? And a Christian might add "brought on by the fall into sin"?

The origin of work

The fall into sin has certainly turned work into a toil of sweat and struggle. The ground from which humankind had been taken was cursed. Only after battling thorns and thistles could the tiller of the soil now coax the earth to yield its bounty. The consequences of a fallen creation had a ripple effect on all of life. Work and labour of every conceivable sort was deeply affected. We need to remember however that work did not come about by the fall, but work was God's plan for a perfect world. Work originated with God and He designed it as a very important and good activity!

Did the Lord our God not say: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen 1:26)? God placed human beings on this earth with the express purpose that they be his image, his representatives, in ruling and cultivating the earth and all that belongs to it. When God placed the man He had created in the Garden of Eden, He gave him work to do. He had to till it and take care of it (Gen 2:15). He was to do this as God's image bearer who represented God's interests on earth. It was part of Adam's being human that he had a task from God Himself which God expected him to do on earth.

This truth therefore also holds today, even after the fall into sin (cf. Gen 9:1-3). Whether one is a farmer or realtor, teacher or mechanic, by virtue of our being created in God's image, our work ultimately derives from God Himself. He is the one who in the final analysis has given us a task in this world. For this reason we should do our daily labours in such a way that we reflect God's will in our work. Then we show ourselves to be his image. Realizing this gives meaning and fulfilment to our daily work and we can find joy in it. As Christians we work as God's representatives in whatever calling He has given to us. For example, by our diligence in working the soil as a farmer, we show God's purpose in giving the good earth to us. By our honesty in our bookkeeping job, we display something of God's integrity and truth. By our moral example as a teacher, we exhibit something of God's standard of holiness. By our making the most of the time while on the job, we display God's desire that we, as good stewards, use his resources, like time, in the best manner possible. By doing our best, we reflect God's desire for perfection. And so one could go on. The call to work comes from God (think also of the fourth commandment) and He expects us to do it as representing Him and his interests in a world now fallen into sin.

Purpose of work

All of this being the case, the ultimate purpose of work is God's glory. God did not place us on earth for our own sakes in the first place, but for his sake. He is God and He wants us as his creatures to serve Him in his creation for his purposes. Indeed, in all areas of life our chief purpose for being on earth is to glorify God (e.g., Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 10:31).

If all our work and labour is ultimately to serve God and his glory, then the daily tasks which Christians do are holy and honourable. There is no contrast between those engaged in so-called holy



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
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work, like ministers, and those engaged in so-called secular work, like just about every one else. *All* work done to God's glory is holy. This implies that your job is your vocation, a holy office and calling from God, which we are to do as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven (HC, Q/A 124). Another implication is that if one has a job that works against God's glory, then Christians should not be engaged in that.

By doing our best, we reflect God's desire for perfection

Specifically when it comes to work, God's intent is clear. Work is also a means by which the Lord our God wants us to support ourselves (cf. 2 Thess 3:10-12) and help others. One "must work. . . so that he may have something to share with those in need" (Eph 4:28). When one's work is blessed, and one prospers, also financially, then this is due to the grace of God (Deut 8:17-18; Ps 127:1). In the western world we are living in great prosperity and the attraction of materialism is enormous. But we must resist the pressures of egoistic consumerism and the insatiable appetite for more, more, more. We do not work for more possessions but as good stewards we are to use the resources God has given us by means of our labours for his purposes and to his glory. A Christian's budget will look vastly different from that of an unbeliever. Indeed, studies have shown that Christians on average give four times as much to charity and altruistic causes than the general population.

The joy of work

When we honour God's purpose, also for all our work and endeavours and the way we do our tasks, then our work will be a joy. We will not find true fulfilment in purely materialistic goals (Prov 23:4). Such work is really in rebellion against God and his design and our efforts become a form of idolatry in

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the service of money (1 Tim 6:9). Our daily labour, whether as a home maker or as a retired volunteer, as company executive or plumber, can have meaning because it is not just work. It is our holy calling which ultimately has a much higher purpose than satisfying our immediate needs. In the end we work to show to God our thankfulness for his grace in Christ Jesus our Saviour.

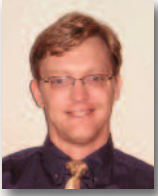
He has redeemed us from the brokenness of this life and raised us to a new life. It is this new life that enables one to find great joy and fulfilment in our daily labours. Therefore, even the lowly slaves who were told by the Apostle Paul to obey their earthly

masters were encouraged with the words: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col 3:23-24). What's true of slave labour is true for all of us. What a wonderful perspective on work for the children of God! In our daily work, we may do it as for the Lord. That has many positive implications. Surely, there is no greater joy than to be in the service of our Redeemer, even as we are busy in our daily tasks! And this reward far surpasses earthly dollars. A heavenly inheritance awaits us.



As Christians we work as God's representatives in whatever calling He has given to us.

S.C. Van Dam



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Given a Task by God



MATTHEW 13:52

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.”

Genesis 3:17

At this time of year, everyone gets back to the regular routine. On Labour Day, many go for the last time to the beach and the day after, it is back to labour indeed. For many in the world today, work is simply an evil necessity. The real reason for living is the parties and fun on the weekend. Work is simply a means to that end. How do we, as God's people, view our work?

The Lord does not leave his people in the dark about this. Last time we saw that God made man as the climax of his creating work. We have been made in his image and are his children. When God made man, He gave him a very specific task, namely to rule over creation and fill and subdue the earth. We often refer to this charge of Genesis 1:26 and 28 as the “cultural mandate.” Man was given the highest possible office. He was placed over the earth as God's viceroy.

But man was not satisfied with this position. He desired more and fell for the devil's temptation. He disobeyed God and suffered spiritual death. This also had consequences for the manner of man's work. Adam will feel the result of his disobedience daily and pass this on to all his descendents, also to us who live in the twenty first century. The ground which Adam tills and works is now

cursed. The ground will be full of stones. It will become very hard clay. It will produce thorns and thistles. Man has to work hard to gain food from the earth. It is only through the sweat of his brow that man will be able to eat.

As we contemplate our work now as well, the saying “there is always something” is all too true. Because of this situation after the fall, we may be inclined to think that work itself is the problem. The devil and the world want us to think this way, making our situation even worse and delighting as we grumble against God and resist his task for us in this world.

Work is not an evil necessity but a glorious responsibility that God has given to us. May the Lord have mercy upon us and use the prickly thistles instead to drive us to our knees in prayer so that we may confess our sins before him. May we always have an eye for God's mercy in Christ and work faithfully in our God-given mandate with that perspective always before us. We may engage in our work as those who know that they are fulfilling God's task for their lives.

The Lord has indeed assured us of his blessing upon our labours here and now. In our text, the Lord promises that we will have food to eat as the result of our work. The promise of this blessing is found

throughout Scripture. Those who obey God's command to work will be blessed abundantly (e.g. Deut 28:11-12; 2 Thess 3:10-12).

Let us today do our work in the context of the salvation and redemption which Jesus Christ has brought about. Our work here is not in vain but it contributes to the coming of God's kingdom. We all have our own small part to play in this great kingdom of our heavenly Father.

When we are faced with particular trials and troubles in our work, let us not hesitate to bring these before our Lord Jesus Christ as He sits at God's right hand (cf. Heb 4:15-16). Jesus Christ also worked on this earth as a carpenter before his public ministry and wrestled with the thorns and thistles which the ground produces. He knows exactly what we are going through. Turn to Him when the struggles in this world become too much and He will help you.

Let us do our work in this world with joy and enthusiasm, showing to the world that we are Christians. It is true that we are not yet in paradise restored but we may know for a certainty that paradise is returning. How wonderful that day will be when we will be able to enter into the service of our Master in heaven!



Pornography, our Purity, and our Posterity (Part 1 of 2)

The topic of pornography¹ and sexual purity is a topic that one would rather leave untouched. Most find it far too sensitive a subject to address or, like me, feel unqualified to deal with the whole matter effectively. However, the burden that is placed on my heart with the burgeoning problem that pornography is becoming in many Christian homes compels me to draw “again” our attention to this subject.

The fact remains, no one is immune to the power of this sin; not pastors, professors, teachers, missionaries and the like and so too all other members of Christ’s church: the elders, the deacons, the board members, the fathers, and their sons. It should be mentioned here that women are purposely excluded in this discussion, not because some have not fallen in this area of sexual impurity, but because the problem of pornography is seemingly a bigger evil in the lives of men than woman.² Although, I should quickly add that women have a role to play in this raging battle with respect to their husbands and sons who are fighting or not fighting against this sin.

Still, I want to approach the sin of pornography and the call for purity from the angle of fathers, though not excluding their sons. That is, if so-called “faithful” men are living with this secret sin, and

committing the shameful acts associated with it, what can we expect of the next generation, specifically our sons and theirs? And inseparably connected to that: how are we, as fathers, preparing our sons for this battle for purity and can we, if this sin is captivating us? Finally, are we carefully fitting – by the grace given us – their armour so that they too can stand up under Satan’s barrage of arrows filled with the sin of pornography and licentiousness?

How are you faring?

In order to address these questions, we need to begin with this question: how are you faring in this battle for purity? If statistics account for anything, many Christian men may not be faring that well. In a 2003 survey from the Internet Filter Review, they found that forty-seven percent of Christians admit pornography is a major problem in their homes (Ibid). Another equally alarming statistic shows that of several thousand Christian men interviewed, over fifty percent confessed to having “used pornography” in the previous seven days.³ This means that in many Christian churches every other man sitting in the pew has used pornography since the last time he’s been in church. These surveys were taken in America but

one would not be hard pressed to find such findings in Australia or Canada and in our churches no less. Further, these statistics support the following stories of people in our churches struggling with this sin. Here are just three stories that serve as representatives for, sadly, many more.

I am 20 years old, and I am addicted to pornography. Even when I say I won’t do it again, I do. Again and again. I worship this god, that I hate but not enough, I guess. I can’t seem to pray, I am too ashamed to; I feel I am lost in this sin and it is affecting my relationships and also the way I look at girls and putting disgusting thoughts into my mind. . . my parents don’t know, of course, and I am far too ashamed to tell them or my friends.

Or, says one wife,

I just found out my husband has been visiting pornographic sites on the Internet. He has been doing this for years. Many years, secretly setting his eyes on another woman or women and all along I never knew. I thought he was faithful, true to me and to our children. I mean, he has held office a number of times in the church. One probably couldn’t have seen it, though now as I look back, I can account for many chinks in his

armor. But now. . . but now, what do I do? I am deeply hurt. I am betrayed. I am angry.

One more. Another wife comments: I thought he had it beat, he said he did. . . and I thought we worked through the problem together, and this was hard. But now my husband has just told me he is enslaved again. . .

I hate it. I want to leave him, but I know this is not what the Lord wants. I hurt and I feel so deeply betrayed. What do I do?

These are only a few stories and many of you could account for many more – maybe you are living one of these stories right now. Though I sincerely hope you aren't. Sadly there are stories that aren't told and some are much more deadly in their magnitude. The path of sin is a relentless movement to more shameful, abominable, and even hellish acts until death. So in James 1:15 we read: "sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." This path of sin has led some men to adultery, rape, incest, participation in orgies, sodomy, and homosexuality. Some of these men may have merely begun by entertaining themselves with illicit images not realizing the journey, the road to the "grave" that they were beginning.

I don't think I need to inform anyone that this sin of pornography is wrong. We all know or should know that it is sin. It is evil. It is a vile, repugnant, repulsive, repellent, loathsome act that fills the heart with all that is impure and immoral. It pollutes the well spring of life, your heart, where God through his Spirit wishes to make his home. It destroys relationships, causing detachment, shame, distance, and tension to mount where peace and joy and love should flourish. It corrupts, defiles, and cheapens the beautiful sexual union that God

has ordained to exist between a husband and a wife. Finally, it is seeking satisfaction outside of Christ and replacing the worship of God with an idol, a woman who is but a mere object of shameful activity feasted upon by millions of eyes.

Rationalizing the sin away

Sadly, in the research and discussions I have had on the matter, some men work hard to rationalize or normalize this sin away. This is not surprising, as the heart of man is naturally prone to sin and sin is above all deceitful. So we read in Psalm 64:6, "Surely the mind and heart are cunning." Therefore, comments like the following ones might be heard or thought. "I can't help it anyway, God made me like this." Or, "At least I am not addicted." Or, "I am not engaged in hard porn, only sunshine girls, sensual TV shows, and the like. . . that's all." Or,

How are we, as fathers, preparing our sons for this battle for purity?

"Who will ever know?" Or, "I just need to know what is out there so I can warn my family." To the most brazen comment of all: "It is my right: my TV, my computer. . . my voyeurism." Others may not be in that camp and may find pornography as a means to escape the pressures and burdens and even pains of this life. This is a form of escapism into the world of erotic fantasy. Although the reasons for engaging in this sin may be manifold and I do not have the time nor the ability to deal with the physiological or emotional reasons that may have led some men to go down this road, the fact

remains it is practiced or continued through some form of rationalization. Excuses are made and the journey continues.

However, there is a cost to rationalization. Rationalization makes the covering up of this sin like a game of charades. One lives one way in public and another way in the secrecy of his room, office, or wherever. He is merely striving for people's praise and recognition while barring the door to the hideous activities of his heart. As one author put it, "Such men are satisfied with a form of excellence, without obedience."⁴ The evil of pornography lurks so close to the surface, but it is suppressed by the actor who just plays his religious part scrupulously. However, you and I know that integrity is not marked by how we perform in the consistory room, in the school board room, on the committee you've been placed, or at work, or even in front of our children and wife – even if they will notice our possible double standards. Integrity is marked by how we perform by ourselves under the ever-present reality of a holy, awesome God. The philosopher Blaise Pascal writes: "I try to be. . . faithful to all men; and whether I am alone or seen of men, I do all my actions in the sight of God, who must judge of them and to whom I have consecrated them all. . . [and] who has implanted these sentiments in me."⁵ For He alone holds the measuring rod on integrity. He knows what captures our heart, our mind, the idolatry that feeds it and the lust that captivates it. He knows (c.f. Heb 4:13).

We need to understand that rationalization is merely the devil buying time, waiting, baiting, and luring us into more and more despicable acts, to our shame and the degradation of the Lord's holy

name. It is for good reason that God sends forth this clarion call to his children: "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality" (Eph 5:3). Although we serve a gracious God who "does not treat us as our sins deserve" (Ps 103:10), He also says, "Not even a hint of sexual immorality."

Without obedience to Christ in this battle we open our homes and our families to the consequence or burden of this sin

We serve a holy God who desires one thing of us: a pure heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God," Christ says so simply in Matthew 5:8. In Philippians 4:8 the Lord calls us to fill our hearts with whatever is true, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. We are to meditate upon those things. Indeed if our mind, our heart, our spirit is enraptured by God and all that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy in Him, there is no place for idolatry, false worship, and therefore the vile, secret sin of pornography.

Counting the cost

Need we be reminded of the cost of living in disobedience in this sin? David felt that cost when he allowed the lust of his flesh to reign. His family felt the consequence of this sin until his death. Read 2 Samuel 12-20 to see the burdens borne by David for the sin with Bathsheba. The truth is that without obedience to Christ in this battle we open our homes and

our families to the consequence or burden of this sin. And in the same breath, we become inept in serving our wives, our families, and leading them down the path of righteousness. Indeed, Satan and his hosts have a sure foothold in your home if you constantly bathe yourself in fornication. Someone captured it this way: "Every time you retreat into your world of lust, you shut the door in God's face. You are dangling your soul and the souls of your children over the fire of eternal damnation."⁶ We may say that is a bit too strong, but Scripture gives us no more latitude with this sin and the consequence of this sin. It is a banquet in the grave, the consequence of which is death. However, the opposite is also true as we learn in Proverbs 20:7, "The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him."

Grace and obedience

Yes, when it comes to sexual sins, like every other sin, Christ does not treat us as our sin deserves. We deserve hell, but He, by his sanctifying grace, through faith, gives us heaven with Him. His grace is abundant and his Spirit works with great tenacity to cleanse us from all ungodliness. Peter states in 2 Peter 1:3 that "His divine power has given us everything that we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." In Christ this sin has no more power over you than it does Him. Paul confirms this reality in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price."

However, Paul through the Spirit of Christ does not end there.

No, he applies it to our redeemed will and states: "Therefore honour God with your body." Or in Romans 13:14 "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." The Lord is saying to every man who is lured by the devils schemes, enticed by the vileness of this sin, "Be obedient. Be engaged. Fight!" He is saying, "You can and in the grace God provides, you must!" You must see past the fleeting and sordid fantasy to the living and true reality of Christ and reset your gaze. Indeed, you must. You must for your sake, for your wife's sake, for your children's sake and their children's sake, for the church's sake, and ultimately for Christ's sake and the glory of his name.

Obedience to Christ must settle the fear of being humbled and dealing with the fleeting emotion of shame

Yes, the grace of Christ should spur us on; and it is his grace which says: "Go and leave your life of sin!" (John 8:11) And by God's grace we can.

Exposing the sin to the light

It is known that deeds of the darkness will stay with increasing tenacity until exposed. Some will say, I have confessed this sin to God, countless times, and still I am ensnared. Possibly such people have not truly brought it to the light, then. If you are living in this sin, have you made others aware of it, especially your wife and faithful men in the church? Have you opened the doors of your heart to Christ and those Christ has put in

your life, so they too can spur you on and keep you accountable! Here obedience to Christ must settle the fear of being humbled and dealing with the fleeting emotion of shame. It must be stated that the shame that is felt in exposing this sin is nothing compared to the burden of a dysfunctional marriage, a break up, children who have an absent father who lacks integrity and the journey to more gross sins at the cost of God's holy and glorious name. Have you counted the costs?

The three stories I mentioned above are success stories, in some way, because the sin has been brought to the light. And only the light of God's grace with much patience and love can bring the necessary change that is needed to purify the heart. Each one has to be brought into the light and God will be merciful.

Some men, I have realized, need help to take this step. They would rather try to believe they can go it alone. They can't. Others, so deeply engulfed in this sin, may need professional help in dealing with it and must not delay in receiving it. Notwithstanding, I challenge each wife and mother reading this article to ask their husband and their sons: have you been faithful with your eyes? How are you faring? Have you visited pornographic sites or are you viewing erotic TV shows or worse? Straight up: yes or no? You say, "No, I can't do that, I trust my husband wouldn't." Good. Then he will say, "No" with all the confidence of heaven to back him up! But this question may be the only way he may be called to account; it may be exactly what he needs to bring this evil to the light! And by the power of God's grace and enjoy the freedom that Christ

has won for him. Your question is an act of love, to save him from the bondage of this sin.

Indeed, before men can serve effectively in their homes and then in Christ's church as fathers, as ambassadors for Christ, this sin has to be dealt with radically. And the grace of God must be brought to bear on each and every sexual sin that enticed the heart. Then the road to recovery, which I don't have the time to deal with in this article, can begin. Recovering lost ground in your marriage, friendships, and most importantly in Christ may be a slow and arduous journey.

This sin has to be dealt with radically

Like in every sin, much hurt and pain is involved. I realize that in some cases professional help will be needed immediately also for the wife.⁷ And yet, it remains the road and journey to hope, grace, joy, purity, and freedom. It is a journey that will bring glory to Christ for what He accomplished for us all! It is a journey that will enable you to sing with an enraptured and pure heart the beautiful doxology written for us in Jude 24-25: "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

¹ According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word is said to describe all various mediums,

including pictures, writing or films or photos that are intended to stimulate sexual excitement. However, this may seem to lessen the weight of the sin or judgment that we know of in Scripture. Therefore it is better to understand it from the Greek word *pornōo*, which simply means: "to prostitute or practice sexual immorality." See Walter Bauer's, "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament" (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

² According to one survey 1 out of 7 women, both Christian and non-Christian alike, are said to engage in pornography. However, they are said to be involved in sexual chat rooms or sexual explicit stories over viewing illicit images. See story by Mark Bergin, "Porn Again" in *World Magazine* April 23, 2005.

<http://worldmag.com/articles/10555>.

³ Michael Pearl, "Pornography – Road to Hell," January 01, 2005, <http://www.lifeandlibertyministries.com/archives/000148.php>.

⁴ Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey have a whole chapter on this matter of obedience over excellence in their book *Every Man's Battle: Every Man's Guide to... Winning the war on Sexual Temptation One Victory at a Time*. (Waterbook Press, 2000) p. 49.

⁵ Blaise Pascal, "Pensees," 549, in "A Flame With Love: Selections from the Writings of Blaise Pascal." (World Wide Publications, 1992) p. 37.

⁶ Pearl, "Pornography – Road to Hell" Jan 2005.

⁷ There are websites and resources available for women who have come to learn that their husbands are living in this sin. One such website that has links to other resources is: <http://erlc.com/article/what-is-a-woman-to-do-if-her-husband-is-using-pornography>

Making the Most of College: Recovering the Lost Logic of Church

Personal spirituality v. organized religion

Book after book and survey after survey tell us what any parent can easily observe by watching their “twenty-something” children: “spirituality is cool, church is not.” Dan Kimball’s book, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Zondervan 2007), is representative of this. For the emerging generation, “church” is too homophobic, too male-dominated, too judgmental, too negative, and too political. Kimball’s conclusion is that the traditional church is significantly “out of synch” with postmodern youth. As with many others, he suggests changing the style without changing the substance.

There is more at stake here than what first meets the eye. The generational fault line is actually more than style. Ceding style usually results in ceding substance as well. This strategy is an example of well-intended incremental decisions that frequently lead to disastrous unintended consequences.

Price of consumer religion

Consider for a moment the typical beliefs of the emerging generation. For them, religion is a

personal experience relegated to one’s private life. It meets a personal need and is chosen accordingly. For those born after the cultural dislocations of the 1960s, religious truth is subjective – that is, person-specific. When I’m talking about “spirituality,” I’m talking about “my” truth. I dare not impose my views on you and the reverse is especially true. If religious truth is subjective, if authority is personal, and if religious experience is individual, then church as the traditional, institutional locus of religious authority has no place. In reaction, church leaders appeal in myriad ways to the consumer preferences of a particular target market. But in so doing a consumerist mindset is reinforced and the authority of the institution is ceded to the individual. Under these conditions, the church no longer claims any binding address on the person. The threat of excommunication or withholding the Eucharist is of little consequence when one can go down the street to sample from a different religious brand. This is the cultural situation that Nietzsche foresaw, when he stated that it would soon be impossible for any institution – family, church, school, or state – to say with any meaningful conviction, “Thou shalt

not.” In consumer religion, the consumer rules.

Under these conditions, many ask, “Why bother going to church when I don’t feel like it?” Cannot a walk in the woods be as spiritually meaningful? Cannot a latté at Starbucks be as deep a time of fellowship? Cannot sleeping in on Sunday morning be as personally refreshing?

The church has lost its logic for church.

Church and college life

This is especially true for college students. College life has its own rhythms and church is not one of them. Only twenty percent of students who attended church regularly before college will attend church at all after two years in college. There is an eighty percent drop-off rate. Only ten percent of students who identify themselves as Christians attend church regularly while at college. But regular church attendance while at college is the single strongest, statistical indicator of whether or not a person will maintain their faith commitments after college.

These statistics prompt three observations: the church has lost its logic for church attendance by young adults; the typical way the church is seeking to restore its

rationale – by becoming more appealing – is counter productive because it doesn't address the underlying issues; and church attendance is the most important variable for maintaining an ongoing relationship with Jesus while at college. This is a significant, personal and institutional problem.

History of scepticism

A student in college does not lose her faith overnight. It is a gradual process, but slippage can be profound within a single semester. In Tom Wolfe's novel about contemporary, college life, Charlotte Simmons lost her faith and her virginity by the end of the first semester of her freshman year. As with Wolfe's character, it is not the academic subjects that present the greatest spiritual dangers, but the social environment. The Christian student wants to fit in and only later uses pseudo-intellectual rationalizations to defend his loss of faith. The process was described brilliantly by William Wilberforce in the nineteenth century:

A typical case of such unbelief begins when young men are brought up as nominal Christians. Their parents take them to church as children and there they become acquainted with those passages of the Bible used in the service. If their parents still keep some of the old habits, they may even be taught in the catechism.

But they go off into the world, yield to youthful temptations, neglect to look at their Bible, and they do not develop their religious duties. They do not even try to reflect, study, or mature in the thoughts that they once might have had as children. They may even travel abroad, relax still further their religious habits, and tend

to read only about those controversial issues of religion.

Attending church occasionally, these occasional incidents more often offend such youth than strengthen them. Perhaps they are tempted to be morally superior to those they think are superstitious. Or the poor examples of some professing Christians disgust them. Or else they stumble because of the absurdities of others who see they are equally ignorant to themselves. At any rate, they gradually begin to doubt the reality of Christianity. A confused sense of relief that it is all untrue settles within them. Impressions deepen, reinforced by fresh arguments. At length they are convinced of their doubts in a broad sweep over the whole realm of religion.

For the emerging generation, "church" is too homophobic, too male-dominated, too judgmental, too negative, and too political

This may not be universally so, but it may be termed the natural history of skepticism. It is the experience of those who have watched the progress of unbelief in those they care about. It is confirmed by the written lines of some of the most eminent unbelievers. We find that they once gave a sort of implicit, inherited assent to the truth of Christianity and were considered believers.

How then did they become skeptics? Reason, thought, and inquiry have little to do with it. Having lived for many years

careless and irreligious lives, they eventually matured in their faithlessness – not by force of irreligious strength but by lapse of time. This is generally the offspring of prejudice, and its success is the result of moral depravity. Unbelief is not so much the result of a studious and controversial age as it is one of moral decline. It disperses itself in proportion as the general morals decline. People embrace it with less apprehension when all around are doing the same thing.

What Wilberforce described is the gradual decisions and the subtle changes in priorities that undermine faith. Rarely is the loss of faith the result of careful inquiry or a single experience. It's more like gaining weight than falling off a ladder. When your friends, your roommate, and others in your dorm all treat church as irrelevant, it is easy to adopt the same attitude. Arguments against organized religion are used to bolster these already formed attitudes. If a relationship is involved, if casual sex is in the picture, then the arguments take on a particular inevitability. Let's be honest: if you are sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend there are a lot of things one might think about doing on a Sunday morning at college, other than attending church.

Signs of apprenticeship

However, if you are serious about being apprentices of Jesus, you will go to church each Sunday. Gathering with the people of God was Jesus' practice from youth. It will become yours. Luke writes, "He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day" (Luke 4:16). Wanting to worship with other believers is a sign of genuine belief. The Psalmist

observes, "As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (Psalms 16:3). As with David, attending church will not be a burden, but a joy: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" (Psalm 122:1). But proof texts don't constitute an argument.

Wanting to worship with other believers is a sign of genuine belief

The institutional church only makes sense if truth is objective, if belief is determinative, if plausibility is communal, and if real presence is uniquely promised.

Truth is objective

If truth is objective, then the source of truth is outside myself. I am no longer the epistemic centre of the universe. I stand under truth – both that revealed in nature and in Scripture. I am accountable to truth and I need others to help me guard against my own intellectual self-deception and behavioural rationalizations. We harbour suspicion of institutions because it is often easier to see the failures in institutions more readily than in ourselves. But at a deeper level, we don't want to acknowledge the authority of institutions over ourselves. We are rebels. Paul warns his spiritual son, "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim 1:18-19). We must

hold on to a body of doctrine. Faith is more than having a religious experience. It is a dynamic ongoing relationship based in truth about the truth. We need regular instruction in God's Word and for others to hold us accountable to God's Word.

Beliefs are determinative

Our beliefs determine our behaviour. We may not live what we profess, but we always live what we believe. Wrong behaviour is symptomatic of what we really love, trust, and follow. Over time our beliefs will always be revealed in our practice – most honestly in what we do in secret behind closed doors away from public view. This is why we need public confession before others and accountability to others. Although little practiced in Protestant circles, we are commanded for good reason to "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). There is more honesty in the local Alcoholics Anonymous meeting than in most church services on Sunday morning.

Plausibility is communal

Social context determines the plausibility of belief. The pious quip, "One person and God is a majority," may be good theology, but it is terrible sociology. Social context does not make something true, but it can strengthen or weaken whether or not I think it is true. Take heroin, for example. The average student will readily acknowledge that heroin is dangerous. But consider the seventeen-year-old over-dose victim who taught Sunday school at a local church. She told *Newsweek*, "In the beginning I was

so against it. I was raised in a real strong Christian home, and I'm strong-willed. But once you're around it every day, it becomes pretty ordinary. Then you get curious, and you think it's not a big deal to do it one time." Without constant resistance, we will inevitably mirror our immediate social context. The pervasive culture on college campuses today combines nihilistic hedonism with metaphysical naturalism. Meaning is personal pleasure. Life is an accident. Everything else follows naturally from these two beliefs. Unless one makes the choice to go to church, to place oneself periodically in the context of those who believe the truth about reality,

Wrong behaviour is symptomatic of what we really love, trust, and follow

this unreality will become one's own personal reality. Attendance at campus parachurch activities, however valuable, are no substitute for going to church, because they do not really break one out of one's insulated sub-cultural reality, nor are they God's chosen institution. At their best, they should point one to church rather than being a substitute for church.

Real presence is promised

Most importantly, we are promised that God uniquely shows up at church. Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt 18:20). We come to church to be with Jesus in the preaching of

the Word and the administration of the sacraments. We need *real presence*. We need an encounter with the living loving, communicating Heavenly Father. We need a sense of the sacred, a space and time set apart from the routine of daily life. The Sabbath is not a day of leisure, but a day when we rest or stop our daily routines to receive spiritual nourishment. It is to be both "holy" in the sense of "set apart" and "to the Lord your God." The purpose of keeping Sabbath is directed by this defining relationship (Exod 20:8-11). It is a creational ordinance that we disregard or dilute with serious consequences.

"In synch" with reality

The church is collectively the Bride of Christ. There are no "Lone

Ranger Christians." We are part of a body, an institution. The church is Christ's idea. Uniquely through it we are nourished to do his work. Through it his Word is received. Through it his body is given as food. Contemporary, western culture is "out of synch" with God's reality. If the emerging generation is individualistic, subjectivistic, consumer-oriented, anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, and consequently anti-church, then they are in great peril. If we want to know how we can grow spiritually – to increase in love and good deeds – the author of the Book of Hebrews writes, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging



Church News

Declined the call to Elora, Ontario:

Rev. D. VandeBurgt
of Glanbrook, Ontario.

Declined the call to Willoughby Heights, BC:

Rev. A. Souman
of Smithville, Ontario.

Free Reformed Church of Baldvis

Please note the following details for the new church in Baldvis:

Mailing Address:
PO Box 2020, Rockingham, DC,
WA 6967 Australia

General Secretary:
Willem Vanderven
Email: wvdvl@iinet.net.au
Telephone: (+61 8) 9523 1636

Meeting location:
Tranby College
Corner of Cleland Cr and
Brennan Promenade, Baldvis

Service times:
9:30 am and 4:00 pm

one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb 10:24-25).

We need each other because we need Jesus. He is the Rock on which He builds his church (Matt 16:18). To deny this anchor is to be set adrift. Church leaders must do more than pander to the preferences of potential participants. They must address underlying assumptions that make church a personal, consumer option. . . instead of a spiritual necessity.

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www.wrf.ca

Hans VanDooren is Principal of Guido de Bres Christian High School, Hamilton, Ontario



What is an Excellent School?

Excellent! Exceptional work!
Sets the standard for the rest of the class!

If a student's report card had these comments on it, parents would be reassured that their child was doing very well. While we don't have an exact definition of what "excellent" means, comments like the ones above and marks in the mid 80s and higher would, by common consensus, label the child as an excellent student.

Defining an excellent school becomes more difficult because the school is a very complex organization that defies easy analysis. Schools are human institutions, involving hundreds of relationships in unpredictable situations. However, we don't think twice about using a variety of techniques to determine the level of excellence of our students. All our students are unique creations with different backgrounds, interests, and talents. Yet several times per school year our Christian schools issue report cards as an attempt to measure their students' level of excellence. Are you able to issue a report card for your school?

Quantitative methods

One method of measuring our level of excellence is using quantitative methods based on tests that give clear, measurable results. In Ontario we do not have external provincially-administered

exams as they do in the western provinces, so we have limited quantitative results to work with. Ontario schools rely on some of the following external results:

1. In May 2006, a study of all private schools in Ontario was conducted by a graduate student at the University of Western Ontario. Parents were selected at random and asked to complete a questionnaire that asked them to rate their school on sixty-one different questions. The following sample lists the points that these parents agreed or strongly agreed on as being characteristics of their private school.

- High academic quality
- Dedicated teachers
- School values parent-teacher collaboration
- Motivates students
- Educates the whole child
- Good discipline
- Supports family values
- School has a good reputation

2. In the Literacy Test written by all grade ten students in Ontario last March, Christian private schools' passing average is about ten percent higher than the provincial average.

3. Over the last few years, approximately ninety percent of Christian private high school graduates have been accepted into the colleges and universities of their choice.

These quantitative measurements are helpful to measure the level of school excellence, but they are limited in the number of areas of a school operation that are measured. These kinds of measurements also tend to limit discussion. Can you imagine a parent-teacher conference where only student marks were discussed? Typically at these conferences more time is spent on talking about less measurable but very important factors such as personal qualities, learning styles, interests, and future plans. Similarly with schools, we have to find a way to talk about the deeper and more important elements that build school excellence but don't lend themselves to easy measurement.

Qualitative evaluation

We need to turn to qualitative evaluation. This refers to a general description of factors important to running a good school. While less precise than the former approach, qualitative evaluation allows for a better discussion of possibilities and addresses the wide range of important school activities.

In a study that I conducted among several high schools during my leave of absence in 2006, I was able to identify nine factors that excellent schools have in common. For each factor, I will give

suggestions on how to apply it to your school.

1. Our schools need a *clear focus* or *vision* that is understood by the community, board, school administration, and teachers. The school vision allows the board, principal, and faculty to assess change agents and to balance the potential tensions of different views of what should happen in our schools.

To maintain excellence, the entire school community needs to reflect on a regular basis how its vision is integrated into daily instruction and learning at your local school

Many of our schools have a vision statement similar to the following: "Reformed education aims to assist the parents fulfill their baptismal promises by equipping the students to employ their talents in the service of God and his Kingdom." To maintain excellence, the entire school community needs to reflect on a regular basis how this vision is integrated into daily instruction and learning at your local school. Making sure that in daily instruction the following concepts flow out of the school vision, teachers are to:

- emphasize God's created order; stand in awe of his creation;
- assist students to develop their talents in service of God;
- help the student develop a Christian mind; teach discernment;
- acknowledge the redeeming work of Christ; recognize that

the world has not been abandoned;

- keep in mind that knowing and fearing God is essential to attaining true knowledge and wisdom;
- reinforce faith of the students, remembering that we do not create faith or conversion.

2. Our schools need *high quality* teachers who are life-long learners and interact with colleagues to establish best practices to help all students. To maintain this level of excellence, teachers attend many professional discussions and conferences throughout the year. New teachers require regular support from teacher-mentors and evaluation from their principal, with a view to emphasizing strengths and clearly outlining areas in which growth is required. More experienced teachers may benefit less from regular formal evaluation. A more effective method would be a formal self-assessment process every three years. Further accountability is maintained by regular classroom visits by the education committee and /or board.

3. Our schools need a *principal* that is a strong leader and visionary who is responsible for supervising what happens in the school within broad policy parameters established by the board. To maintain this standard, school boards need to establish things such as a leave of absence, a clear job description, a formal principal's evaluation every few years, and direct accountability to the board.

4. Our schools need a clear understanding of student needs, especially for *students "at risk."* To maintain this standard, high schools need to meet with parents and special- needs teachers from their elementary feeder schools to get a better understanding of students who may have learning

difficulties. These students need to be closely monitored, their progress reviewed and communicated to the parents, and they need to be provided with the in-class help of educational assistants. Less accepted is the concept of providing special programs for gifted students.



5. Our schools need to focus on *program selection* to enhance learning and on a determination of what knowledge and skills are worthwhile to teach to the students. It is impossible for any school to teach students all the knowledge and skills in the subjects that we offer. Therefore, to maintain our level of excellence, teachers need to make choices of what information and programs best fit our school vision, and properly prepare our students for work and a life of service within their families, churches, and broader community. This selection process is assisted by input from education committees, and direct comments from parents. These programs must fit into a master plan from grade to grade, and not be dependent on the whim of a single teacher who takes the program along when moving to a different school.

6. Our schools must have a sense of *pride in the school* that involves not only enforcing the rules but also *teaching good behaviour*, so that students develop respect and self-discipline. Daily devotions and the examples set by the teachers show students the importance of showing Christian love in our walk and talk within our school community. At the high school level, student leadership can be developed through formal training sessions and regular reinforcement throughout the year. This process moves student leadership beyond organizing special events to a level where they have a vested interest in the school and provide good models for their school mates. Proper leadership training equips students with specific leadership skills and also helps them understand their roles within the context of Christian service.

7. There is a *balance between school autonomy and accountability* and recognition of

what supports families' value. Our schools are community schools with a clear sense of their history and local parental values. The boards maintain this standard with the support of representatives that reflect a cross-section of the community. This arrangement helps the board set clear policy that reflects the community they serve. The principal and teachers implement and are accountable to the board for these policies, yet are given freedom to operate within the limits of the policies.

Our schools need high quality teachers who are life-long learners and interact with colleagues to establish best practices to help all students

8. There is an *atmosphere of trust and professionalism* that creates the environment to develop innovations and best teaching practices. This standard can be supported by a tradition of regular subject department or grade division meetings, staff meeting discussions, and many daily interactions among veteran and rookie teachers.

9. There is a *clear communication to the supporting community* of what the school is doing and its future plans. This communication helps to close the gap between actual school excellence and the perception that the community has of the school's quality.

This last item is probably one of the most difficult standards to maintain. The good will and perception of the excellence of a school is regularly promoted by school newsletters, parent-teacher

conferences, membership meetings, and the daily reports brought home by our students. Proper lines of communication are reinforced. Policy questions are directed to the board. Questions about student performance or behaviour or specific actions within the classroom are directed first to the teacher, then the principal, if required, and then (rarely) to the education committee and board.

However, one negative report about what happens in your school can quickly lead to a temporary loss of trust and a by-passing of the defined lines of communication. But even in these cases, a strong history of dealing with problems in a timely and appropriate manner will quickly restore confidence in the school. All schools, like families, will experience problems. It is an excellent school that effectively resolves problems within the context of its school vision, fairness, and policies.

Conclusion

How is your school's report card? Hopefully you can conclude that by both quantitative and qualitative measures, you have an excellent school. This excellence is possible because of the blessings of our Lord, the prayers and support of your community, and the dedication and efforts of your staff, board, and committees. We can celebrate this excellence in humility. We also need to be on guard for complacency, a taking for granted what we have. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman
obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, June 8, 2007

On behalf of the convening church of Burlington-Waterdown, Rev. J. Huijgen called the meeting to order. He asked that we sing Psalm 65:1, 2 and read from the same psalm. After a few words of meditation on the sovereignty of God, he led in prayer. He then welcomed the delegates.

The church of Burlington-Waterdown examined the credentials. The churches were properly represented. There was one instruction.

Classis was then constituted. The following officers took their place: chairman: Rev. G. Nederveen; vice-chairman: Rev. M. Jagt; clerk: Rev. Huijgen.

In his memorabilia, the chairman noted that in the last months Rev. Huijgen has received two calls, which he declined. Thankfully, none of the churches of Classis are vacant. The chairman also gave thanks for the work of the recent Synod and expressed his wish that the Lord would bless its decisions.

The provisional agenda was adopted with some small changes.

It was decided to allow Roelf den Hollander, who is currently taking the pastoral proficiency program with Flamborough, to observe also when Classis enters closed session.

Classis received a letter, given in Christian courtesy, of a decision of Burlington Fellowship regarding women's voting. Some pastoral comments were made to Burlington Fellowship.

All the churches had been visited by the church visitors. In open session, their reports were read and received with thankfulness. Classis observed with joy the rich blessings of the Lord in the life of the churches.

In accordance with Art. 44 C.O., the churches reported that the

ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. A question was raised regarding the nature of "judgment" and "advice" as mentioned in the Church Order. In closed session advice was given to the church of Toronto on a matter of discipline.

The church of Flamborough was appointed to convene the next classis to be held on September 21, 2007, in the Burlington Ebenezer church building at 9:00 a.m. The following officers were suggested: chairman: Rev. J. Van Popta; vice-chairman: Rev. Nederveen; clerk: Rev. Jagt.

Question period was held.

The chairman asked whether censure as per Art. 34 C.O. was necessary. It was not required.

The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was approved for publication.

The chairman thanked the brothers for their good co-operation. After the singing of Ps. 133:1, 2 he closed the meeting with prayer.

For classis,

M. Jagt, Vice-chairman, e.t.

Press Release of Classis Alberta on June 12, 2007, held in Edmonton, AB

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. W.B. Slomp opened the meeting by inviting the delegates to sing Psalm 145:1, 3, the reading of Romans 10:1-15, and prayer. He then extended some words of welcome to the delegates. It is noted that while fraternal delegates have been invited to Classis, none were able to make it this time. Rev. Slomp noted the vacancy of the church of Taber, the fact that Rev. Aasman declined the call to Hamilton, and the work of General Synod Smithers this past month. The church of Edmonton

Immanuel examined the credentials and found them to be in good order. Classis was declared constituted and the following officers were appointed: Chairman: Rev. Slomp, Vice-chairman: Rev. D. Poppe, Clerk: Rev. R. Bredenhof. The agenda is adopted.

Examination

Br. Richard Horlings undergoes his preparatory examination in order to be declared eligible for call. He presented his sermon proposal on Matthew 25:1-10 and after receiving a report and discussing it, Classis judged that the sermon was sufficient for the examination to proceed. Classis examined br. Horlings on Old Testament exegesis, New Testament exegesis, and doctrines and creeds and came to the decision that br. Horlings did not sustain the examination. Br. Horlings was informed of this decision and remembered before God in prayer.

Reports

The classical treasurer reports on income and expenses in the past year and was thanked for his work. The church of St. Albert reports that the books of the treasurer are in good order. The church of Edmonton Immanuel, as the church responsible for the inspection of the archives, reports that the archives are in good order. Br. J. Leffers was commended for his work as the classical archivist. Rev. E. Tiggelaar, as the representative for Classis to government, reports on his contact with the government. The church visitors report on the visits to the congregations of Coaldale, Barrhead, and Taber. These reports are received with thanksgiving and discussed as needed. Rev. Bredenhof gives a favourable report on a visit to the RCUS

South-Central Classis in Sutton, Nebraska. The treasurer requests that the treasurer report to the fall classis instead of the spring classis. Classis grants this request. The Committee for Aid to Needy Students reports that they will need \$10 per communicant member for the year 2007-2008.

Proposals and instructions from the churches

The church of Taber is deeply grateful for the pulpit supply they receive and they ask for this to continue. This request is granted. The consistory of Edmonton Providence reports that they are working towards calling br. Dmitry Kiselev regarding a missionary

endeavour in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Question period

Question period according to Church Order Article 44 was held. All churches responded that the ministry of the office bearers is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. No church requested the advice of Classis with respect to discipline or other matters.

Appointments

The church of Edmonton Providence was appointed as the convening church for the next classis on October 16 or December 11, 2007. Suggested officers for the

next classis are: chairman: Rev. Tiggelaar, vice-chairman: Rev. Slomp, clerk: Rev. Poppe.

Closing

Delegates were given opportunity for question period and some brothers made use of this. The chairman noted with thankfulness that censure according to Article 34 of the church order was not needed. The Acts of Classis were read and adopted and the press release was approved. In closing we sang from Hymn 48:1, 4 and the chairman closed the meeting with thanksgiving prayer.

For Classis Alberta
D. Ph. Poppe
Vice-chairman at that time

