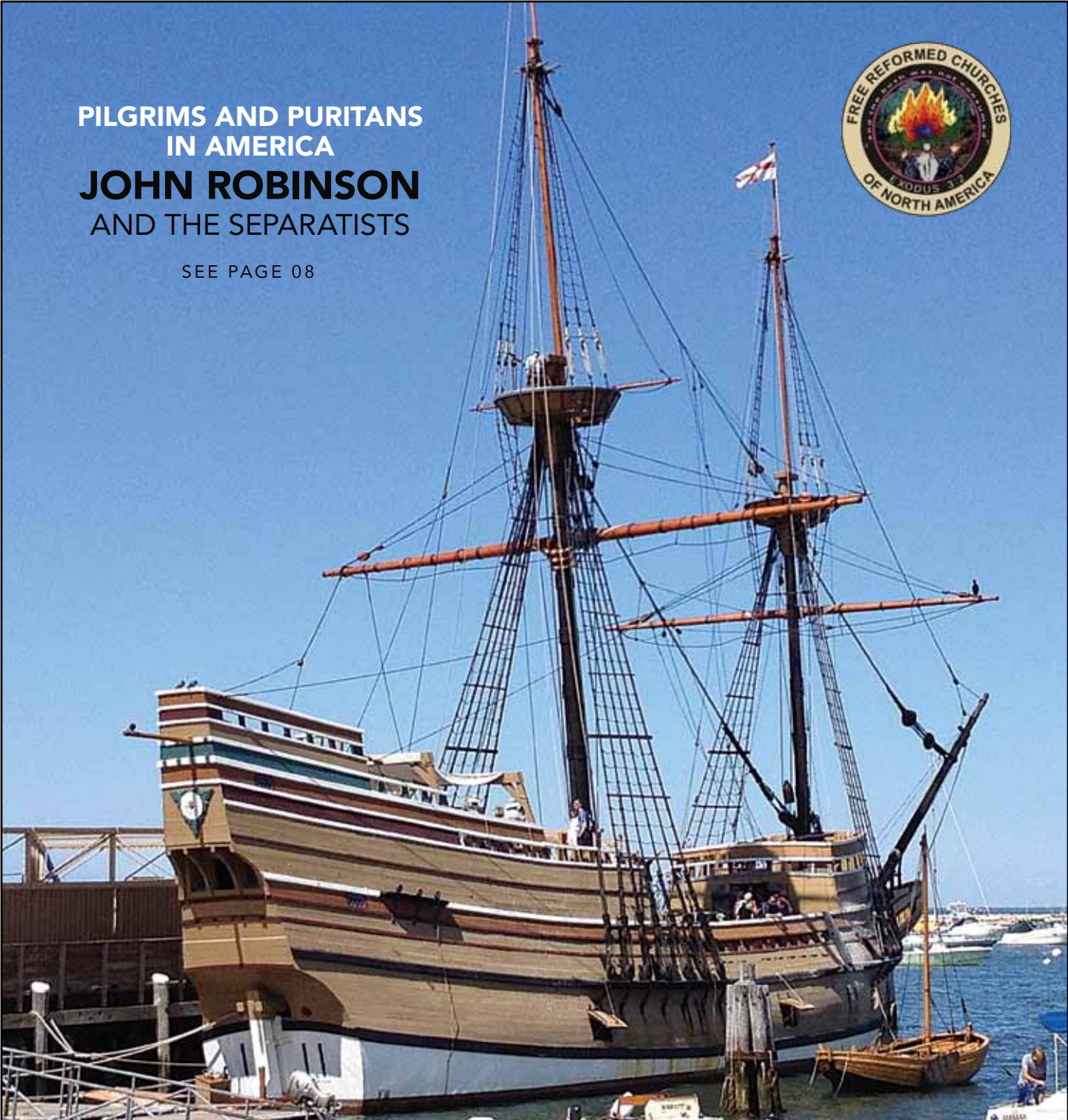


THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA

**PILGRIMS AND PURITANS
IN AMERICA
JOHN ROBINSON
AND THE SEPARATISTS**

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REST FOR RESTLESS DAYS

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28

We just began the New Year 2021. The past year 2020 started off like any other year, but it did not take long before the year was filled with turmoil. That was not because of a war or because of economic collapse, but because of a virus, Covid-19. Many people were affected. In many cases, travel was suspended. This crisis is still continuing. As I am writing, various countries in Western Europe are in lockdown, as are areas in Canada. This all has a profound effect on people's mental health. Many people are lonely and are longing for peace and rest. They need stability and crave comfort. At the beginning of this New Year, the Lord Jesus calls to us: *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Coming to Jesus

What does it mean to come to Jesus? Many people were with Him at that time. They came to listen to Him. They, however, did not repent; they had no true faith in Christ. They did not entrust themselves to Him. Coming to Christ involves coming with everything you have, with your whole being and your whole soul, together with all your burdens and sin, because you know He is the Saviour. Coming to Christ involves denying yourself, coming behind Him, taking up your cross, and following Him wherever He leads you.

Someone will only come to the Lord Jesus when the Holy Ghost draws him to close with Christ. When the Spirit works, we experience how hard our heart is and how dull our conscience is. Then one can complain that he does not sense the burden of sin as he should. One also accuses himself for not longing more after the rest Christ gives. Yet we must come. Whether or not we feel our sins and guilt, we should simply recognize the fact that we have departed from the ways of the Lord and confess this before Him. If you cannot come to Christ with a broken heart, you may come to Him to receive a broken heart. If you cannot come to Christ with a burdened conscience, you may come to Him for a burdened conscience.

This coming to Christ is essential for every one of us. We can even say that this is the reason why the Lord grants us a New Year. The Lord is calling us and encouraging us to receive rest and perspective on life in this New Year.

Rest in Jesus

The Lord Jesus alone grants rest. He is the only One who can say that He shall give us rest. No other person can say thIsa. Abraham could not say this and Moses could not give us rest and neither could David do thIsa. Not one of the leaders of world religions can give us rest. Muhammed gives no rest. Buddha cannot give rest. Only One can give you rest, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What does it mean to find rest in Christ?

Deliverance

Rest in Christ entails deliverance from chasing after more possessions. Outside of Christ everything in this world is vanity and vexation of spirit. It is terrible how so many people are always busy chasing after the proverbial carrot but never reach it. The water this world gives is salty. It will never alleviate our thirst. But the water the Lord Jesus gives will surely satisfy and those who drink it will never thirst again.

Rest in Christ also involves deliverance from a burning conscience. Guilt weighed upon you, but this is now removed in the way of coming to Christ to rest on His finished work. Arrows of guilt pierced your soul, the curse of God weighed on you, and the wrath of God troubled you. But now through the rest which Christ gives, you have peace for your tormented soul and your heart melts in love for the Lord. Christ gives peace which surpasses all understanding.

Rest in Christ also means to be delivered from the slavery of sin. How distressful it is to be a slave of Satan! What peace flows from being redeemed and set at liberty! No longer are you a slave to your own lusts or sins. Though you were tied down by the chains of the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life, you are now set free.

Rest in Christ also means to be delivered from our futile attempts to merit our own salvation. Our attempts to gain righteousness before God are doomed to fail. We can only be justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ. This justifying grace gives sure peace and trust in the Lord Christ.

Remaining Rest

There is also a rest that remains for the people of God. Heavenly glories are awaiting the people of God. In glory, there will be no more sin. Their inner corruption and depravity will be gone. In Heaven, there will be no more fear or anxiety, for there the Lord will be with His people. No pain, no sorrow, and no tears will mar this rest in any way. There will be no more afflictions or temptations. There the people of God will be changed to perfection and be made fully conformable to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are invited to come

We are invited to come to find rest in this Christ. Our own resolutions for this New Year are insufficient. Futile is the resolution that we will simply do our best in life from now on. Simply resolving to be church-going people who display a Christian lifestyle will not do. We can do all this without really coming to Christ.

Living with Christ makes life worth living. He invigorates and blesses. He leads in a new life of peace and abundance. His people are most blessed, for He is their Lord and Master. His nearness is sweeter than life. His rest gives perspective even on a deathbed. His love applied to the heart warms the soul. Then you see that He is the very best. He is indeed the fairest among the children of men.

Refusing to come

Rest in Christ also involves deliverance from a burning conscience. Guilt weighed upon you, but this is now removed in the way of coming to Christ to rest on His finished work.

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MEDITATION

In the setting of our text, the Lord Jesus is referring to the people of Capernaum. They were with Him at the time. Physically, all of them came to Christ. The whole village had gone out to meet Him and were amazed at the miracles He did. But they did not repent. They did not exercise true faith in Christ. So, the Lord Jesus warned them that, although they had been lifted up to heaven, they would be cast down into hell. That was because they never came to Christ spiritually. They had never learned to follow Him with their whole heart. They had never come to Him with sorrow for their sins. They had never learned to hunger or thirst after righteousness.

God's good pleasure ensures that sinners will be drawn and will come to find peace everlasting.

The setting in which the Lord Jesus speaks these words shows us how serious this matter is. People think they know Christ, without ever having come to Him. It is most pitiful and tragic that people are perishing by living outside of Christ. While they hear of Him, they never come to Him.

It is possible for us to stay away from Christ out of fear that we are too sinful or out of pride that refuses to surrender ourselves. We refuse to give up our own sins. But why do we ignore our salvation and cling to sin? Such a life is so miserable.

Sovereignty of God

At the same time, it is a great comfort that Almighty God shall take care that His counsel shall stand and that sinners will be drawn to come to Christ. The Lord Jesus tells us here that His Father hides these glorious truths from the wise and prudent, but reveals them unto babes. The Lord Jesus rejoices here in the sovereignty of God. God's good pleasure ensures that sinners will be drawn and will come to find peace everlasting.

Therefore, if you see that you cannot come to Christ because He seems to be so far away, take courage in a sovereign God. What is impossible with man is possible with God. You know you must come to Him, and you desire to do so, but you find yourself unable to do so. Cast yourself then upon a promising and sovereign God. He will bring a thirsting soul into communion with Christ.

How are we starting this new year? There is only one real way: by finding peace and rest in Christ alone. He calls us, also in 2021, *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* In Christ Jesus is rest for restless days. ¹

Rev. G. R. Procee is the former pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Hamilton and current pastor of the Christeljk Gereformeerde Kerk of MiddelharnIsa.

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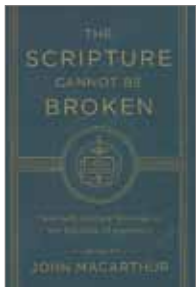
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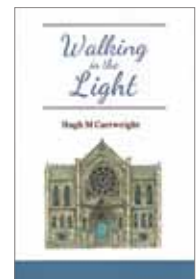
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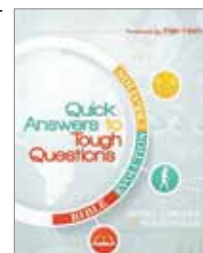
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LESSONS FROM JOB (3):

JUDGMENT DAY HONESTY

We usually think that we should begin by focusing on the beginning and end by focusing on the ending of something. The brilliance of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is to *begin* with the *end*: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

One of man’s problems is that he no longer sees the end properly. Blinded by sin, he doesn’t think of the end, or, if he does, he thinks of it mistakenly. By nature, we imagine that our happiness or that our honor is our chief end. Some more altruistically leaning people think that the goal is serving the collective good of society, discovering beauty in life, or engaging in random acts of kindness. Though most of these things have their place, none of them ought to be our ultimate aim or purpose. Man’s chief end is indeed to glorify God and find joy in Him forever. We do well to start from the end and work back. That includes looking at life with what Pastor Albert Martin often referred to in his sermons and writings as “judgment day honesty.”

The Value of Self-Assessment

To see ourselves with judgement day honesty means that we look at our lives through what Scripture says about us. It involves grace to rightly understand our end and seeking grace to examine our lives by God’s light. Animals cannot examine their ways, but people can and must. God says: “Consider your ways” (Hag. 1:5, 7). Socrates even is reported to have said: “An unexamined life is not a life worth living.”

Suffering often makes us examine our lives in ways that we might not do otherwise. Suffering certainly did so for Job. Suffering makes us wonder about its purpose. From there we often move to the question: What is the purpose of life that helps explain suffering? It also makes us look back and take stock of how we have lived our life. What purpose did we have? How did that purpose guide our actions? Did we keep that purpose in view in our actions? Jonathan Edwards is known to have been very deliberate and resolute about his life and how he purposed to spend it to the glory of God. Think only of his first resolution: “Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God’s glory, and my own good, profit, and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many and how great so ever.”

The Record of Our Life

In the midst of his struggle to come to grips with the suffering which he experienced, Job lets us see how he ordered his life. He looks at his past public life and the record of it in chapter 29, which he compares with the misery he is experiencing in the present (chapter 30). Job’s public life was marked by a steady, considerate, and just deportment with respect to all around him. He acted honorably to all and justly in his office as magistrate, in which he upheld the cause of the poor and defenseless (see 29:12-17).

More importantly, Job’s life in private was also free from apparent blemish. Job

uses chapter 31 to list how intentionally he lived his life. We have no reason to believe that Job's record of his life was mistaken or pretentious. He appeals to God as his witness (31:35). Also, nowhere in the book does God negate Job's claims or charge him of having lived in secret or open sin. The testimony of God in the opening of the book is that Job "feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1).

None of this can be said of us apart from the great Savior of Job, the Lord Jesus Christ. God made Christ, also for Job, "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). At the same time, ingrafted into Christ, Job worked out his own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

Covenant With Our Eyes

We do well to take Job's review of his life as a pattern for how we ought not only to review our own life, but order our conduct in the fear of God. The Bible commends those who order their "conversation aright" (Ps. 50:23).

What might we learn from Job's life? First, he is aware of the importance of putting his desires in check. He speaks in chapter 31:1-12 of having made a covenant with his eyes not to look with lust on someone who is not his spouse (v. 1). The way Job speaks of this shows that he realizes that sin arises in the heart of man and needs to be mortified there. He understood what Christ would say centuries later: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). He practiced what Paul would also later write: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Rom. 6:12). Every person in every age should learn to do as Job did, especially now that many more people are liable to cross the path of our vision, whether physically, digitally, or mentally.

A Spirit of Charity and Fidelity

Job also makes clear that he is aware that power and privilege abused is sin in the sight of God (Job 31:13-23). He understood that everyone was watching him and how he conducted himself. He realized that the fear of God did not just mean that he should abstain from any sensuality; he needed to deal with everyone around him in a spirit of charity, righteousness, forbearance, and lowliness of mind. He knew that God had formed both him and someone poorer than himself. He realized that he did not deserve his power and privilege and would one day give account of how he had stewarded it. He lived in the consciousness of righteousness and equity, as well as generosity and helpfulness, being his calling. He did not swerve from his calling or try to shave corners off these clear duties to which God had called him by virtue of his position and place.


A Conscience Void of Offense

Job took stock of his own thought life to see whether secret sins lay unmortified in his heart (31:24-40). He mentions insidious sins in all of us such as:

1. Putting confidence in his possessions or prosperity: "If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much" (v. 25).
2. Rejoicing in the sufferings of others: "If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me" (v. 29).
3. Lacking hospitality: "The stranger did not lodge in the street: but I opened my doors to the traveller" (v. 32).
4. Excusing sin: "If I covered by transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom" (v. 33).
5. Fearing man: "Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, and went not of the door?" (v.34).

Job showed remarkable knowledge of how sin works and arises in our hearts, and was careful to live with a "conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

Conclusion

None of this judgment day honesty kept Job from the suffering that came upon him. We ought not avoid sin simply to avoid suffering. Nor should we imagine that we can attain to a righteousness on our own that God may accept at His great tribunal. Christ's righteousness alone can and must avail for us now and on judgment day. But may Christ's Spirit also enable us to live with judgment day honesty by the strength and clarity supplied by Him. 

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PILGRIMS AND PURITANS IN AMERICA (2)

JOHN ROBINSON AND THE SEPARATISTS:

THEIR DECISION TO EMIGRATE TO AMERICA

Where Would They Go?

When the Dutch authorities heard of the Pilgrim's decision to leave Leyden, they offered to relocate them to any other part of Holland or to any of their distant colonies. Evidently, they did not want to lose these decent and God-fearing people. However, while appreciating these offers, the Pilgrims were determined to settle in an area where they could preserve the English language and culture, and especially where they had the freedom to practice their religious convictions unhindered.



JOHN
ROBINSON

This naturally made them think of America. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the English government realized that it was essential to their future prosperity to participate in the conquest and colonization of North America. France, Holland, and especially Spain had already taken advantage of the seemingly limitless resources of the New World. But the British government at the time lacked the financial wherewithal to fund a broad-based colonization effort of its own. What the government was not in a position to do, some private parties were willing to attempt. Two groups of noblemen – one based in London and the other in Plymouth – were eager to underwrite British settlements in America as a business venture. Their petitioning of the government resulted in King James creating the Virginia Company in 1606.

After the Plymouth group's attempts to found colonies in Maine and Virginia proved to be less than a financial success, the two branches of the Virginia Company realized that they had to come up with a different plan to make these ventures profitable. They decided to franchise future settlements by issuing subsidiary, or "particular" patents to those interested in beginning a plantation. These conditional patents gave the settlers the right to attempt to found a colony in five to seven years' time, after which they could apply for a new patent that gave them a permanent title to the land.

The Virginia Charter

This new development created an opportunity for the Pilgrims. They sent Deacon John Carver and Robert Cushman, who had business experience, to London to negotiate with the London branch of the Virginia



Company. After several setbacks and seemingly insurmountable obstacles, they eventually managed to secure a patent to start a plantation in Virginia. The charter, authorized by King James himself, came with the assurance that upon arriving in Virginia, they would be allowed to practice their religion according to their conscience. It is important to note, however, that this assurance was not communicated to the Pilgrims in a formal and official way, the king refusing to make a commitment of this nature in writing.¹

The Decision is Made

Although this rather vague assurance left the Pilgrims with a great deal of uneasiness, they had no choice but to proceed with the plan to emigrate and they did so trusting that God would provide and prosper their way. They accepted the terms of the Charter, promising that, from their side, they would honour all obligations expected from them, including taking the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown. This meant they were willing to acknowledge King James “as the supreme governor in matters ecclesiastical as well as temporal, and at least technically to admit that he had the final say in the matters of their separated church.”² This admission was very significant because, as David Weir explains, “Ultimately, in order to fulfill their desire for a plantation in the New World, where they could covenant with God and with one another, this particular group of Separatists was willing to enter into a covenant with authorities who had been deemed so evil that the Separatists had resolved to separate from them in earlier years.”³

The decision having been made to go to Virginia, many obstacles remained to be overcome. But in God’s providence, all hurdles they faced were cleared with the result that on the 21st of July 1620 Robinson and his Leiden congregation met for a day of humiliation and prayer in Delftshaven in order to set the first group of emigrants on their way to the New World. They boarded a ship that would take them to Southampton, England, where another ship, the famous Mayflower, would transport them to America. For his farewell address, Robinson had chosen Ezra 8:21: “Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.”⁴





Eventually, only a minority of the congregation (thirty-five members), led by William Brewster, sailed on the *Mayflower* from England to America. They were joined by sixty-six people from Southampton and London whom the Pilgrims called “Strangers” because they were nominal Anglicans whose motives for going to America were anything but religious.

The majority of the congregation remained in Leyden, and planned to make the next voyage at a later date. John Robinson agreed in advance to go with this larger group and thus did not make the first great historic trip. For the next several years, the advance group of Pilgrims anxiously awaited the arrival of Robinson and the rest of the congregation. But their arrival was delayed year after year until the Lord finally took their leader to his permanent home in heaven. Robinson became ill on February 22, 1625, and recovered enough to preach twice the next day, which was a Sunday. By the next Lord’s Day, Rev. John Robinson, the great “Apostle of Leyden,” passed into glory.

Landing at Cape Cod

When the around 100 Separatist Pilgrims boarded the *Mayflower* to cross the Atlantic Ocean, they expected that, with divine protection and guidance, they would arrive in Virginia, the first English colony in the New World. As it turned out, they landed 65 days later at Plymouth, near Cape Cod, an area outside the jurisdiction of Virginia and without authorization from the Virginia Company to start a “Plantation.” From the human point of view, this was all due to the exceptionally rough weather and contrary winds, but the Pilgrims saw God’s providential hand at work, steering them to this more northern location rather than the other one. They were right in concluding that this was God’s doing. Had they ended up in Virginia where the Anglican Church

had the same official status as in the mother country, it is highly unlikely that Puritanism would have made the impact on America that it ended up making. No doubt they would have faced the same struggles they had gone through in England and not been able to pursue their vision of a pure church. Now they had a real “chance” of success since they were able to start from scratch, so to speak, in order to fulfill their “*Errand in the Wilderness*,” as Perry Miller has so aptly described their migration to America.

The Pilgrims seemed to have realized this unexpected opportunity because, when the decision was made not to sail farther south to Virginia but to land where they were now, they made their famous *Mayflower Compact*, in which they resolved to organize themselves into a “civic body politic” under the king of England – to be sure – but still with the power to govern themselves. Also worth noting is that they were able to persuade the so-called “Strangers” among them, meaning the non-Puritan settlers and servants on board, to join in signing the *Mayflower Compact*. This showed the foresight of William Bradford, their leader and first governor of the colony-to-be, because it enabled the Pilgrims to create a government based on mutual consent, while at the same time ensuring that they – the Pilgrims – would retain control over the entire settlement.

The Pilgrim “Plantation” at Plymouth

After a tentative landing on Cape Cod, the Pilgrims settled in what they immediately called Plymouth. Thus began their “*Errand in the Wilderness*,” and a wilderness it was. The new settlers, God-fearing and nominal Christians alike, suffered greatly during that first winter in the New World. Some of the passengers had already died during the transatlantic voyage, but many more were so weakened by the crossing that they died of the

scurvy soon after arriving. The food supplies they had brought with them were meager and would soon run out. They were not skilled in hunting and fishing, moreover, it was an exceptionally cold winter that first year.

The American artist, Jean Ferris, has painted a beautiful painting of the first Thanksgiving celebration of the Pilgrims. The scene features a dozen or so well-dressed settlers sharing a meal with half-naked Indians in an atmosphere of friendship and hospitality. This idyllic picture, however, belies the reality of the many life-threatening challenges that faced these Pilgrims each and every day. Of the seventeen married couples, ten husbands and fathers and fourteen wives and mothers were dead after three months. By April, more than half of the population had succumbed to disease and famine.

Yet the painting is not altogether misleading. The summer of 1621 did bring a welcome reprieve from the harsh environment. The native population, the Wampanoag Indians, although in dire need themselves, having been decimated by plagues of epidemic proportions resulting from contacts with Europeans visiting their shores from time to time, treated their new visitors with surprising kindness and civility. Despite their own limited food supplies, they helped the starving settlers survive by sharing what little they had. When spring arrived, they showed the Pilgrims how to plant corn and to fish.

Being accustomed to field work in rural England, the new settlers quickly caught on and soon conditions improved to the point where they could feed themselves and build houses to live in. Eventually, they were able also to trade furs for items they needed from Europe and thus the colony managed to survive and even prosper under the able leadership of their first elected governor, William Bradford.

Yet, despite its slow but steady progress, the Pilgrim Plantation remained relatively small and insignificant. They never attracted new separatist settlers from England in substantial numbers. Therefore, unless there would come an influx of other reform-minded people, Puritanism would remain a small and soon to be forgotten religious sect.

Such an influx did arrive a decade later. In March of 1630, the first group of non-separating Puritans, numbering 700 men, women, and children, left England on board the ship *Arabella* and joined the original settlers, who were soon to be outnumbered by them. ①

Rev. C. Pronk is an emeritus Free Reformed pastor residing with his wife in Brantford, Ontario.

Endnotes

- 1 Alexander Young, *Chronicles of The Pilgrim Fathers*, Gov. Bradford's History of the Plymouth Colony, pp. 56-57.
- 2 David Weir, *Early New England, a Covenanted Society*, p. 81.
- 3 David Weir, *Early New England, a Covenanted Society*, p. 81.
- 4 David Fountain, *The Mayflower Pilgrims and their Pastor*, p. 40.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved”
Romans 10:1

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THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

As we begin a new year, we are reminded of the reality of change, the brevity of life, and the uncertainty of so much here below. How fitting it then is to look above this changing world to the unchanging or immutable God who reveals himself in His Word. A. W. Pink gives us guidance in our meditations on God's immutability.

Immutability is one of the divine perfections which is not sufficiently pondered. It is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a "Rock" (Deut. 32:4) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state; even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. Because God has no beginning and no ending, He can know no change. He is everlastingly "the Father of lights, with whom is no variability, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

First, God is immutable in *His essence*. His nature and being are infinite, and so, subject to no mutations. There never was a time when He was not; there never will come a time when He shall cease to be. God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been, and ever will be. "I am the LORD, I change not" (Mal. 3:6) is His own unqualified affirmation. He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse. Altogether unaffected by anything outside Himself, improvement or deterioration is impossible. He is perpetually the same. He only can say, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). He is altogether uninfluenced by the flight of time. There is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity. Therefore His power can never diminish nor His glory ever fade.

Secondly, God is immutable in *His attributes*. Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so for ever. Necessarily so; for they are the very perfections, the essential qualities of His being. *Semper idem* (always the same) is written across every one of them. His power is unabated, His wisdom undiminished, His holiness unsullied. The attributes of God can no more change than Deity can cease to be. His veracity is immutable, for His Word is "for ever ... settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). His love is eternal: "I have loved thee with an ever-



Picture courtesy of the Herendeen Family and the A.W. Pink Archive

lasting love" (Jer. 31:3) and "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). His mercy ceases not, for it is "everlasting" (Ps. 100:5).

Thirdly, God is immutable in *His counsel*. His will never varies. Perhaps some are ready to object that we ought to read the following: "And it repented the LORD that He had made man" (Gen. 6:6). Our first reply is, Then do the Scriptures contradict themselves? No, that cannot be. Numbers 23:19 is plain enough: "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent." So also in I Samuel 15:29, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent." The explanation is very simple. When speaking of Himself, God frequently accommodates His language to our limited capaci-

ties. He describes Himself as clothed with bodily members, as eyes, ears, hands, etc. He speaks of Himself as "waking" (Ps. 78:65), as "rising up early" (Jer. 7:13); yet He neither slumbers nor sleeps. When He institutes a change in His dealings with men, He describes His course of conduct as "repenting."

Yes, God is immutable in His counsel. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). It must be so, for "He is in one mind, and who can turn from Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth" (Job 23:13).

Change and decay in all around we see,

May He who changeth not abide with thee.

God's purpose never alters. One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse his plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees. No, "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). Therefore do we read of "the immutability of His counsel" (Heb. 6:17).

Herein we may perceive the infinite distance which separates the highest creature from the Creator. Creaturehood and mutability are correlative terms. If the creature was not mutable by nature it would not be a creature; it would be God. By nature we tend toward nothingness, since we came from nothing. Nothing stays our annihilation but the will and sustaining power of God. None can sustain himself a single moment. We are entirely dependent on the Creator for every breath we draw. We gladly own with the Psalmist, Thou "holdeth our soul in life" (Ps. 66:9). The

realization of this ought to make us lie down under a sense of our own nothingness in the presence of Him in Whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

As fallen creatures we are not only mutable, but everything in us is opposed to God. As such we are “wandering stars” (Jude 13), out of our proper orbit. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest” (Isa. 57:20). Fallen man is inconstant. The words of Jacob concerning Reuben apply with full force to all of Adam’s descendants: “unstable as water” (Gen. 49:4). Thus it is not only a mark of piety, but also the part of wisdom to heed that injunction, “cease ye from man” (Isa. 2:22). No human being is to be depended on. “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help” (Ps. 146:3). If I disobey God, then I deserve to be deceived and disappointed by my fellows. People who like you today may hate you tomorrow. The multitude who cried, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” speedily changed to “Away with Him, crucify Him.”

Herein is solid comfort. Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God can! However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, God changes not. If He varied as we

Herein is solid comfort. Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God can! However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, God changes not.

do; if He willed one thing today and another tomorrow; if He were controlled by caprice, who could confide in Him? But, all praise to His glorious name, He is ever the same. His purpose is fixed; His will is stable; His word is sure. Here then is a Rock on which we may fix our feet, while the mighty torrent is sweeping away everything around us. The permanence of God’s character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises: “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isa. 54:10).

Herein is encouragement to prayer. “What comfort would it be to pray to a god that, like the chameleon, changed color every moment? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that was so mutable as to grant a petition one day, and deny it another?” (Stephen Charnock, 1670).

Should someone ask, But what is the use of praying to One whose will is already fixed? We answer, Because He so requires it. What blessings has God promised without our seeking them? “If we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us” (1 John 5:14), and He has willed everything that is for His child’s good. To ask for anything contrary to His will is not prayer, but

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“Behold, children are an heritage from the Lord.” Ps. 127:3

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rank rebellion.

Herein is terror for the wicked. Those who defy Him, who break His laws, who have no concern for His glory, but who live their lives as though He existed not, must not suppose that, when at the last they shall cry to Him for mercy, He will alter His will,

revoke His word, and rescind His awful threatenings. No, He has declared, "Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezek. 8:18). God will not deny Himself to gratify their lusts. God is holy, unchangingly so. Therefore God hates sin, eternally hates it. Hence the eternity of the punishment of all who die in their sins.

"The divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of His threatenings, as well as the performance of His promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to His frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchanging in veracity and purpose, in faithfulness and justice" (John Dick, 1850).

A. W. Pink was born in England in 1886. He acted as a spiritualist medium, but was then converted to Christ. He went to the United States, where he briefly attended Chicago's Moody Bible Institute in 1910. He served as a pastor in Colorado, and then in other churches in the United States and Australia, before moving to Scotland where he spent the rest of his life. He set up a magazine, writing many articles that eventually developed into books.



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

City of Refuge is a committee established by and under the oversight of the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of North America. Our mission is to encourage churches to consider the needs of Christian refugees all over the world with a view to sponsoring them to come to Canada. City of Refuge is a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada. We are currently looking to hire a Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator (10-15 hours per week) for our sponsorship program starting Jan 1, 2020.

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If you are interested in applying for this position, please submit a letter of application and resume via email (to: jackschoeman@outlook.com) to the chairman of City of Refuge, Rev. Jack Schoeman and pastor of Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, BC.

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PEACEABLENESS (3)


MEANS TO CULTIVATE PEACEABLENESS

We learned from Wilhelmus a Brakel that peaceableness is “a believer’s quiet and contented disposition of soul, inclining him toward, and causing him to strive for, the maintaining of a relationship with his neighbor characterized by sweet unity—doing so in the way of truth and godliness.” This installment concludes his application of this subject.

If you are desirous to live in peace:

- (1) Crucify your desire for money, honor, and love; it is impossible to have and maintain a peaceable heart without self-denial. Or else you yourself will be the cause of others quarrelling with you, since you are seeking after what they pursue. It can easily be that you will encounter them while in such a disposition, and your inner peace will thereby be disturbed. Whatever stirs in the heart will soon spill forth from our mouths. Greediness is a breaker of the peace. “He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house” (Prov. 15:27). Ambition begets strife: “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife” (Prov. 28:25). Wherever there is envy toward the honor, gain, and love that others enjoy, the heart cannot but be restless, and this will readily burst forth one way or the other. Envy and strife are therefore conjoined, for together they are a fountain of confusion and every evil work (James 3:16).
- (2) Keep to yourself and let others govern their own matters. Do not appoint yourself as a detective and judge concerning the deeds of others; close your ears for backbiters. Do not listen for what is being said about you. “A whisperer separateth chief friends” (Prov. 16:28); “Where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Prov. 26:20). Solomon therefore wisely counseled: “Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee” (Ecc. 7:21). And regarding you, remain silent in order that you speak no evil about your neighbor, for that will continually bring you in trouble and frequently stir up discord. “He that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction” (Prov. 13:3). If you hear

others quarreling, see to it that you do not involve yourself in this quarrel. Do not appoint yourself as judge, and then immediately execute your sentence by rendering assistance to the one party. It is an entirely different matter when you counsel others to be at peace. “He that passeth by, and meddeth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears” (Prov. 26:17). Such a one (who minds the matters of others) is thus in peril of being bitten. “But let none of you suffer...as a busybody in other men’s matters” (1 Pet. 4:15).

- (3) Be always the least—both in your own eyes as well as in your conduct toward others. Endure being wronged, and forgive such deeds (Col. 3:13). In all things yield to the will of others, insofar as this is not contrary to the will of God, following Abraham’s example: “Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee...if thou wilt take the left hand, then I shall go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I shall go to the left” Gen. 13:8–9. In this respect one will become rich by giving. By yielding in some measure one will gain peace and a peaceful heart, which is more precious than gold, rubies, and power. “Seek peace, and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14).
- (4) If someone else encounters you in an unpleasant manner, or if you detect the first stirring of displeasure, arm yourself at once and resist strife at the very outset; be completely silent. For, if you are not on your guard, the quarrel will increase hand over hand and you will not be able to hold it back. “The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water” (Prov. 17:14). 

Rev. Wilhelmus a Brakel (1635-1711) was a Dutch pastor best known for his work, The Christian’s Reasonable Service (published by RHB and translated by Rev. B. Elshout). This section is taken from Volume 4, chapter 85.

SERVING THE LORD WITH MUSIC

MRS. FREDERIKA (RICKY) PRONK



Garry Postma at the Dundas FRC organ

For sixty-eight years, ever since he was twelve years old, Garry Postma of Hamilton, Ontario, provided the musical accompaniment of the church at worship. He loved to play the organ and, even more, he loved to accompany and lead the singing of the congregation. Chronic back problems and years of treatments for leukemia did not stop him, until shortly before his death on September 8, 2020, when the Lord took him to Himself by pancreatic cancer. His wife asked us to make known something of his long, faithful, and loving service as church organist and supplied us with a hand-written essay of his views on church music. We are happy to do so because his life and his views display how the faithful and judicial use of musical gifts may contribute to God-glorifying worship.

In Scripture and therefore in traditional Reformed worship, the preached Word is central. Yet, there are elements of worship wherein the whole congregation expresses itself. Singing is one of them. In song the people of God express their response to the message of the Word. Ideally, the words of the songs should be the response of the heart to the Lord's Word of grace. To do this in an orderly and appropriate fashion was Garry's aim as church organist.

Throughout Scripture are many references to music and singing, usually in response to God's great deeds. The angels sang when the "foundations of the earth" were laid (Job 38:4-7). Adam burst out in praise in response to God's gift of a suitable helper – Woman (Gen. 2:23). Jubal gave the world musical instruments and is called "the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (Gen. 4:21). The gifts of song and instruments are used throughout the Old Testament. Great deliverances, such as the safe passage through the Red Sea and the destruction of the enemies of God's people are celebrated with joyful praises to the Lord (Ex. 15:1-21) with Miriam as the song leader and the women accompanying her with timbrels (15:20). David's favorite instrument was a harp (1 Sam. 16:23; 2 Sam. 6:5). The harp was also combined with other instruments such as psalteries, cymbals, trumpets, and stringed instruments in public worship (1 Chron. 25:3; Ps. 33:2; 81:2; 150:3-6). The book of Psalms is the church's great and inspired songbook to express experiences of faith and trust, but also of lament, penitence, and even complaint.

David was not allowed to build the temple, but he composed songs for the sons of Korah to sing at its dedication. The Book of Psalms contains eleven songs of the sons of Korah, who were designated to make music and sing for temple worship (e.g. Ps. 42, 70, 88, 84, 91). Apparently, some of Korah's descendants survived (Num. 26:11) the terrible judgment upon Korah, Dathan and Abiram who rebelled against God's appointed leaders, Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). David appointed the Levites to choose from among themselves "the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy" (1 Chron. 15:16). The climax of Old Testament worship took place at the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:1-66; 2 Chron. 5:2-7:22). "And when they lifted up their voices with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever" (2 Chron. 15:13). At the rebuilding of Jerusalem, Nehemiah called the sons Asaph (descendants of Levi) to celebrate the rebuilding and dedication of the wall (Neh. 7:44; 12:28-43).

At Jesus' birth, the message of the angel's "tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people" is concluded with the singing of "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:10,14). No doubt singing was still part of temple ritual in the New Testament before the destruction of the temple. Jesus and His disciples sang (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). However, after Pentecost, instead of choirs and musicians, it becomes evident that the Holy Spirit more directly fills God's people with songs of praise. For example, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises

in prison (Acts 16:25). Singing is mentioned as part of worshipping God (Rom. 15:9; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16, 1 Cor. 14:15; Jas. 5:13). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews quotes the Lord Jesus saying, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee” (2:12). In singing, the voice is prominent (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) in the assemblies of the New Testament worshippers.

In heaven there will be much singing. The book of Revelation mentions singing 27 times. The praises are to God for His victory over sin and evil, and specifically to Christ, the Lamb of God. “Then I [John] beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!” (Rev. 5:11-12).

The Reformers, especially Calvin and Luther, placed corporate singing in its rightful place in the worship services and in the home, after the Roman Catholic church had confined it to the clergy and choirs. Calvin preferred the human voice without musical accompaniment in order to better concentrate on the words being sung. Later, the Puritans, some Reformed and Presbyterians, and others, used the regulative principle of worship to sing the Psalms without instrumental accompaniment, except a pitch pipe, a song leader, and a song book.


Typically, the organ has been prominent in Europe as a religious and cultural instrument. Just think of the great organists and composers Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. The organ also became the musical instrument of choice and consent in churches tracing their history to European countries. As part of its heritage, the Free Reformed Churches and other Reformed and Presbyterian churches have made use of the organ as the chosen instrument to accompany the singing in their worship services. The organ possesses a combination of the tones of many instruments in one. As church buildings and congregations grew in size (and wealth), the volume and tonal qualities of the organ made it very suitable to lead and accompany a large number of people. A large church auditorium needs a greater volume organ than does a small auditorium, if it is to lead and accompany the singing.

In the essay Garry Postma wrote many years ago, he began by asking: “Is church music a stage for musical entertainment, or a showcase for performers, a concert before and after the service to show their technique?” He answered these questions by quoting Scripture, and especially Ephesians 5:19: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” He believed that singing is primary. Singing is not only with our voices, but the outward praise should be an inward expression of our spiritual



harmony and union with Christ. He believed that the organist too should strive to be in tune with the words of the song as he or she accompanies the singing of God’s people. For him, that was the greatest blessing an organist could have.

Brother Postma was also practical and concerned with techniques. He offered some advice on handling criticism, as well as recognizing the abilities or inabilities of the congregation to appreciate the musical accompaniment. It is reported that in the 1950s, during the early immigrant days of the Hamilton congregation, its first used organ (which it could not really afford) required the organist’s expertise and regular use of a screwdriver and other tools to keep it working.

Not often is an organist recognized for long and faithful service, but on Garry’s 45th anniversary as church organist, a special evening of meditation, audience singing, and organ solos was held in the Hamilton Free Reformed Church, attended by members of the congregation, family, and friends (see *The Messenger* of November 1999). There is a place for concerts outside the worship services to praise the Lord, to enjoy the gifts of music, and appreciate the talents the Lord gives. Let us thank the Lord for all who accompany and lead us in “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). 

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PRAYER FOR THE SUNUN FAMILY

DECEMBER 08, 2020



Santos Sunun is the pastor of one of the Reformed churches in Cubulco in a small remote community called Pichal. More than 30 years ago, the Lord powerfully saved him from a life of sin and misery. The change in his life was dramatic and was especially evident in his role as husband and father. Even years later, when his wife, Lucia, would speak of the change in her husband, she could not help but cry out of thankfulness to the Lord for His saving grace. Her life had been rather miserable up to that moment. After seeing the transformation that the Gospel wrought in her husband, she also placed her trust in the Lord. Since that moment, Santos and his wife have dedicated their lives to the service of the Lord. Santos attended the Bible Institute for many years, became an evangelist, and eventually was ordained as a minister of the Gospel. Throughout all of this, Lucia was his faithful companion and support. She accompanied him on his visits to homes and other Reformed churches in the area. She was always prepared to serve those who stopped by to visit or as they were on their way to another church. Often, women in the Mayan culture are rather shy around men, partly due to cultural norms and many not being able to speak Spanish well. Lucia was different. She was friendly, open, and godly.

I always enjoyed visiting and talking with her and her family.

As the years went by, Lucia increasingly suffered from chronic pain and illness. The lives of many Guatemalans living in very rural communities are quite difficult due to hard work, lack of access, nutrition, etc. For this reason, one does not find many elderly people in these communities as the average life expectancy is probably below 60. Particularly, the lives of women are often difficult. They work very hard in the home, raising children, and in the fields. Most wake up at 3:00 or 4:00 AM each morning to get their corn ground to be able to make tortillas for the day. At times, they must hike for more than an hour each way to get to the nearest corn grinder. Most communities do not have electricity and, even if they do, they do not have fridges where they can store their food. Therefore, this is one task they do every day for 7 days a week since corn meal does not store well in the heat. I remember being in one community for a few days and the house I was staying at had a corn grinder. Each morning a lady would come at around 2:30 AM to get her corn ground. When I asked how far she had to walk, she told me it took her about 1.5 hours, but that on her way back it would take 2 hours because it was mostly uphill.



Lucia suffered for many years and there were times when she expressed her desire to be with the Lord. However, this was not to be the case. Instead, her suffering would increase. In January of 2019, Lucia suffered a debilitating stroke that left her paralyzed on her left side. In the Lord's providence, I "happened" to be in Cubulco with a WD team a few days after she had been hospitalized and, in the days that I was there, I was able to minister to her and the family on different occasions. I was able to bring her to the hospital on several occasions and encourage them with Scripture and pray for them.

The troubles for the Sunun family were not over after thIsa. Around 6 weeks following her stroke, the eldest son (Mario) also suffered a stroke. In the months following, with the help of AMG and FRMI, we were able to continue to minister to this family by providing medical help and medicine through the Cubulco hospital, and encouragement and prayer. In the months since her stroke, Lucia has recovered some of her mobility and

is able to walk. However, her left arm continues to be paralyzed. Her son, Mario, tragically suffered several more strokes in the months following and passed away in September at only 39 years of age.

I share this story to encourage those who read this article to pray for our brothers and sisters in Cubulco. Suffering and hardship are very common under even normal circumstances. However, they are amplified during times of illness, natural disasters, and pandemics. Please pray regularly for Lucia, Santos, and their family as they carry such a heavy burden. Please pray for Lucia's healing, Santos' calling as pastor, and their grief in losing a son. As followers of Christ, we are called to pray for one another and carry one another's burdens. ¹¹

Mr. Nico Kattenberg served for many years the Free Reformed mission in Guatemala and continues to serve in an occasional way from British Columbia.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



GEERTJE VAN VEEN (ZWIERS)

August 30, 1946 (Doesburg,
the Netherlands) – November 16, 2020
(Chilliwack, BC)

In His perfect time, the Lord took unto Himself our beloved wife, mother, oma, and great-grandmother at the age of 74 years. She fought a long and courageous battle with leukemia and has now entered into her eternal rest. Dearly beloved wife for 52 years of **Gerrit Van Veen**. Loved mother, oma, and great – grandmother of:

John and Jacquelin Wubs

Nathan and Cassidy, Nicole and Jason (& Brooklynn), Kayla and Ben (& Adelaide), Shaylene and Ellianne

Wes and Karin Kooyman

Travis and Taylor, Riley and Emma (& Kohen and Paisley), Calvin and Ashley

Andrew and Sandra Van Veen

Brendan, Samantha, Gavin, and Aiden

The funeral service was held on November 19, 2020, at the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, with Pastor John Koopman officiating. The interment was held prior to the service at Chilliwack Cemeteries, also led by Pastor John Koopman.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:7-8

OBITUARY

The Lord took to Himself on
Wednesday, November 25, 2020,

BEREND VLIETSTRA,

in his 99th year. Loving husband of Lammigje (nee Hagen) for 72 years.
Much loved father of:

**Albert of Geneseo, NY,
Grace (the late Ray Halma),
Jake (Lona),
Trina,
Wilma,
Conrad (Teresa),
Bernie (Arlene),
Fred (Betty),
Martin (Yvonne),
Peter (Marlene),
Trudy (Harry) and
James.**

Beloved Grandpa of 41 grandchildren,
97 great-grandchildren and
3 great-great-grandchildren.

Berend is predeceased by his great-granddaughter Charlotte Stewart. A private service was held at Ebenezer Free Reformed Church, Dundas, on Monday November 30, 2020. *"And the LORD shall guide thee continually"* Isaiah 58:11a

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