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THE MESSENGER

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THE SUFFERING SERVANT-LEADER, JESUS CHRIST

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Isaiah 53:5

Isaiah was one of the prophets to Israel around 740 B.C. God called him to record the Messianic prophecies contained in chapters 52 and 53 of his prophecy, not just for his contemporary Israelites, but also for believers that were yet to be born throughout the world. What happened on Good Friday is vividly captured in this book, which is often called the fifth gospel.

The servant song of Isaiah 53 begins already in the previous chapter, Isaiah 52:13. The first verse of this section introduces the Servant of God. Who could this Servant of God be? Some might think of various possible candidates, but this must be Jesus Christ for two reasons. First, He must be a person with a human body given all the descriptions following in Isaiah 53. Especially, His suffering and pain inwardly and externally is not just theoretical, man-made ideas, but a real happening in human history recorded as the most important transaction to accomplish redemptive history (Gen. 3:15). Second, this Servant’s divine humiliation, in turn, should be the foundation for a cure of all those who were, are, and will be under the curse and damnation of the law (Isa. 53:5). At the same time, we should know that this Servant must be the One who is able to lead lost sinners out of the vicious and cruel cycle of sins and condemnation by justifying them before God’s sight (Isa. 53:11). Let us meditate upon this Servant-Leader’s suffering by looking at Isaiah 53:5.

In the twenty-first century, it is still mind-boggling to think how these ancient prophecies were fulfilled in their entirety in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God, as the sinless Lamb of God, took on Him the form of a servant. He lived to die on the cross where God’s justice and mercy met in purest form and harmony. God’s justice could not be fully satisfied in any other way than in Christ’s hellish suffering and death. God’s mercy could not be fully known without this greatest sacrifice on His end: His delivering up His own begotten Son to the most shameful death. No true believer can ever forget what took place on that day that has been called “Good Friday.”

The Servant was suffering. Part of that great suffering was to be wounded. That deep wound in the body of Jesus Christ did not disappear even after His resurrection (John 20:27). He was wounded to such an extent that the blood and water had to come out from His broken and wounded body (John 19:34).

Many in our day do not acknowledge what sin is. Sin is often underestimated and so the relationship between sin and all its consequences is not well understood. It is even trivialized intentionally. We can resist considering our sin because it is painful to look back at our own sins, let alone the consequences of sins, from which we suffer. Repentance is a gift of God by the Holy Spirit. Without understanding the nature of sin, repentance is impossible. Repentance is turning away from sin unto God by God's grace. Sin cannot be washed away without the blood of Jesus Christ. Our sin is what so wounded the Saviour. When Jesus prayed for those who were crucifying Him on the cross, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34a). If He would be willing to be wounded for sinners, how much love had He shown on that day? One hymn declares such love this way: "Was it for crimes that I have done, He groaned up on the tree? Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree."

The same idea is repeated with another word: "bruised." What caused the Saviour to be so painfully bruised was our transgressions and iniquities (v.5). As the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ went through such great pain and agony in His true soul and body as God-man. Jesus was beaten and smitten. He was despised and rejected of men. He was crucified upon that shameful cross before the eyes of gathered men and women.

But what made His pain the greatest out of all His sufferings here on earth was the solemn fact that He was abandoned and forsaken by God the Father. In His soul, Jesus had known what was coming in God's eternal plan of salvation already the night before He was crucified. He pleaded for not taking the cup of suffering, but eventually He submitted to the will of the Father. Out of the depth of His human soul on that day, Jesus cried loudly as the most obedient Son, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Matthew 27:46).

The prophecy of Isaiah does not stop at the description of the Son's indescribable amount of pain and suffering. It says about something of the direct effect of it in the same verse. Notice the second part of this verse: "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." What a great wonder that our sins and transgressions could be replaced with peace and healing! Without the first part of hellish pain and suffering of the Messiah, there would be no peace and healing for us. No cross, no crown, people say; but the cross was borne by the Messiah and the greatest benefits from it are granted to sinners like us. Sinners left to themselves are lost forever. Their bodies will be buried after death and corrupted. Their souls will be under God's wrath and punishment in darkness. But God provided for us a Mediator and Redeemer who can lead sinners out of the darkness and coming destruction. What a change we can have! What a Saviour He must be! With the psalmist, we also could sing this out of true thankfulness for what the LORD has done:

What shall I render to Jehovah now, For all the riches of His consolation?

With joy I'll take the cup of His salvation, And call upon His Name with thankful vow (Psalter 426).

God is good forever because He alone is true peace (Jehovah Shalom) and He alone can heal us (Jehovah Rophi). The Servant's service for lost sinners cannot be better than this.

Not only did this Servant-Leader do his work for the benefit of sinners, but also for the glory of His Father. The cross was also what God the Father needed for His elect children from eternity. Verse 10 says, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him" and verse 11 says, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." We may be puzzled by these unusual expressions of pleasure and satisfaction, but it is what God the Father agreed from eternity to do with God the Son. By the suffering of the Son of God in the flesh and even His death, the justice of God could be satisfied. That in turn allows God the Father to enjoy His relationship with His children. With such payment of Christ's active and passive obedience toward God's justice, God could be both just and justifier of sinners.

The One who came out of the bosom of the Father came to serve sinners in a truly good way. The One who is worthy of glory, power, and honour became so humiliated on that shameful cross for our eternal good. The same One illustrated all these good attributes of God for sinners in a most dramatic way as we read in Isaiah 53:5. Therefore, we call that day "Good Friday." ●

Rev. Y. J. Lee is home missionary among Korean speaking peoples in the New Jersey / New York area.

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SPEAKING BOLDLY AS I OUGHT

Christian discourse should never be anemic, spineless, or defeatist. Neither should it be brash, pompous, or self-promoting. The three friends of Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:16-17). Here was boldness, but not brashness. After King Darius had stopped the building of the house of God, the exiles who had returned addressed the king respectfully: “Unto Darius the king, all peace.” Even Paul, after he had called the high priest, who ordered Paul struck on the mouth, “thou whited wall,” cancelled what he had said when he was told he was the high priest: “I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people” (Acts 23:5).

Paul knew the seriousness and power of all speech. To the Colossians he said: “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6; see also Eph. 4:29). If the Word of Christ dwells in us richly (Col. 3:16), we will know the power of God’s Word in our own hearts. This will affect our own words to each other, but also to those who are outside the Christian church.

This will most certainly be true when we speak to those who are in places of authority and power. The word that Paul emphasizes more than others in this context is “boldness” (Acts 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 2 Cor. 3:12; 1 Thess. 2:2). Paul urged his readers to pray for him to have such boldness: that “utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19-20).

Right to Speak

Paul was a prisoner. As such, he would have been looked down upon, and yet, as a Roman citizen, he had the right to appeal to Caesar. Before Caesar, he would use this right for the sake of the gospel and the honor of God.

The picture is then an entire paradox. To the watching world, Paul is a prisoner; but Paul knows he is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. The world expects him to be groveling, ashamed, pleading for his own benefit and freedom. Paul will speak boldly about the mystery of the one body of Christ on earth, made up of Jews and Gentiles. He takes the right he is given to speak, to speak about the One, who alone deserves to be spoken about: The Word made flesh. This Word stood once before Pontius Pilate, an earthly judge, and witnessed a good confession (1 Tim. 6:13).

The watching world will one day be a witness of Christ the Judge coming to judge the living and the dead. Already now the world should be arraigned before Him, though all His people are followers of the Crucified One, and like him, are crucified to the world and the world to them (Gal. 6:14). It is like one of the Reformers said: “Here I stand. I can do none else. So help me God.”

Fear of God

In Psalm 27, David is on trial. False witnesses have risen against him (Ps. 27:12). How can David become bold? It is by contemplating the character of God. He was for David a light, a stronghold, his Rock, and the One to lift up his head. Thus, David's desire was to behold the beauty of the Lord's character and to inquire in His temple, where God reveals Himself (Ps. 27:4). Nothing strengthens our deflated and anxiety-ridden hearts more than to look to and wait for God (see Ps. 27:14). Paul says himself that "the peace of God ... shall keep (guard) your hearts" (Phil. 4:7).

That is why the book of Psalms that expresses so much anguish and woe is at the same time the book that most lifts up the Lord and His character. It reveals the God that is the refuge of the tempest-tossed people of God. That is why "the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" (Dan. 11:32).

The fear of God truly drives out all lesser fears. When we fear man, we do not know and believe God enough. When Nehemiah feared God, praying God to remember His covenant (Neh. 1:5), he could conquer his fear of the king of Persia (Neh. 2:1-6) and any foe that came against God's cause.

Gospel of the Lord Jesus

Though the fear of God drives out lesser fears, the Gospel of a crucified Savior might seem on the surface to be shame-inducing. If fears can be conquered, what can take care of the shame we feel, especially when we align with a Lord whom the prince of this world crucified. Shame is a powerful force in our hearts. It can shut our mouths and make us hang our heads. Speaking boldly means we must overcome the shame that people might put on us or we might feel about speaking God's truth. That is why Paul's boast in Romans 1:16 is so powerful. Paul declared he had no shame for the gospel of God, no matter what environment he was in, hostility he encountered, or cost he would suffer. This is true even as he writes to believers in the powerhouse of his day, the great and auspicious city of Rome. How could anyone say that he was not ashamed of a message centered on a crucified Lord? By all accounts, the cross was an offense and foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23).

What made the difference was Paul's knowledge of the gospel as the truth and power of God for condemnable sinners, rebels, enemies of God. Paul knew far more deeply in his heart the shame and disgrace of having come short of the glory of God. In such light, glorying in man is the height of shame. That is why Paul says that he has no shame for the gospel, for therein is revealed the righteousness of God to whomever believes (Rom. 1:17). By light from on high, Paul, an avowed enemy of Christ and the cross, had discovered that the crucified Lord was the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believes, Jew and Gentile (Rom. 1:16). Should not that by itself make us bold?

So often we are ashamed of the gospel because we do not know enough of our shame as a sinner before God. When we are ashamed and unable to look God in the face because of our transgressions, we learn to pray: "O Lord, now open thou my lips, long closed by sin and shame; my mouth shall show before the world The glory of Thy Name" (Psalter 144:2). God is worthy that others learn the life of repentance and partake of His salvation by faith in Christ alone. When God brought Peter to repent of having shamefully denied his Lord, He turned it so that Peter stood up to proclaim boldly that there was salvation in none other (Acts 4:12). This is the boldness that flows from the gospel of Christ applied to the soul. Then we desire to teach sinners God's way and may anticipate that sinners are converted to the Lord (Ps. 51:13).

Freedom of the Spirit

Not only the Father and the Son work boldness in the heart of otherwise timid and beleaguered souls, but also the Holy Spirit. Christ told His disciples that the Spirit of His Father would speak through them when they would be brought before magistrates (Matt. 10:19-20). When the Spirit fell on the church at Pentecost, the Word of God went everywhere, the Spirit giving boldness (Acts 4:31). The Spirit gives boldness through an understanding of the Scriptures He has inspired.

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Through the Word of God, the Psalmist says that he will “speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed” (Ps. 119:46). The Spirit shows Christ, thereby weaning us from relying on man, and the sight of Christ by faith gives boldness (2 Cor. 3:17,18). The Spirit intercedes within believers, helping us with our infirmities, giving confidence even in the face of the reality of being “killed all the day long” (Rom. 8:26-39). As the Spirit gives perspective on eternity, on the judgment, on the terrors of the Lord, and the love of Christ constraining us, we speak boldly to others (2 Cor. 5:11).

Pray for Me

All these graces, which we so lack of ourselves and need from God, we may have from the treasury of God in Christ. How do we receive them? Paul tells us the key: “all prayer” (Eph. 6:18). Only through prayer can we have that boldness in speaking. That means that we are dependent on the Lord for that boldness, but also that the Lord will not withhold that boldness from those who ask for it. Do we pray for this for ourselves, our pastors, and all those who especially need it? May we look to the Triune God and pray and not faint until we have true boldness, all to the glory of God. ¹

Editorial Note: This issue contains several articles that give an update on the situation in British Columbia involving our congregations there in relation to government regulations. Seeing these are significant events and less than accurate reports can easily develop, we felt it was important to give pastors from BC an opportunity to explain the situation and the rationale for the actions taken by the churches there. We understand that there are different perspectives within our denomination, in part based on different local situations. As a denomination we do not have an official policy in these difficult times. We recognize the authority of local consistories to make decisions they feel are according to God’s word and for the best of their congregations. We trust that these articles will serve to inform and stimulate thoughtful and respectful reflection on the issues at stake. Since the writing of these articles, the BC court has ruled against the constitutional challenge by the churches.

THE CALL TO GATHER TOGETHER IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

What does it mean that Christ is head of the church? What is the public worship of God? What is the relationship between church and state? What is the church in comparison with other organizations in society? What does it mean to love our neighbour? Is ‘virtual worship’ an acceptable replacement for corporate worship? Most of us have been forced to grapple with these questions in the last year. All of us have answered these questions by how we have responded to our circumstances of this past year.

As churches in various jurisdictions, we have been challenged by various public health orders that required churches to conduct their worship services in a particular way or, in some cases, demanded them to cease from all in-person public worship of God. As churches, we have struggled with how we should respond to governments established by God (Rom. 13:1-2) when they gave health orders that have implications for our worship services. Are we not called to submit to Christ as the head of the church (Eph. 5:23)? Can the state dictate to us if, when, how, and where to worship? Can we submit to the government in their demands and still be faithful to Christ? What is our spiritual obligation in this particular situation?

Differing arguments have been made, however, as a church, the most important question to ask is: *What does the King of the church, Jesus Christ, require us to do?* We should not focus on how we might be perceived in the community, blindly follow public health orders, or be concerned about fines and imprisonment. We must show our allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ! Christ is the head of His church, meaning our allegiance is to Christ Himself.¹ We are called to worship God in the way that He has commanded in Scripture, including, though not limited to, hearing the preaching of the Word, partaking of the sacraments of baptism and communion, singing His praises, praying together, confessing His name, exercising church discipline, and having fellowship with other Christians. As a church, we appeal to higher authority, but it also means we have greater responsibility. He calls us to worship Him. The church has done so for hundreds of years, sometimes at great risk to her own safety and comforts. Loving God means loving and valuing His worship above all else. Loving our neighbor means that we have concern for their greatest need, which is for their never dying soul (Matt. 22:37-40). Rightly understood there is no tension between loving God and loving our neighbour.

Like most of our churches, when warnings of the impending implications of the spread of COVID 19 were made known to us, we felt it wise to implement various protocols for our congregation, including limiting the number of our attendees for the well-being of our congregation and society. We did not take this decision lightly since it concerned the worship of the Triune God. The corporate worship of God is the most important activity of human existence and should have priority in our lives (Ex. 20:9-11; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 2:42, 20:7). However, hearing of the wide range of unknowns and the potential threat to society, we thought it wise to acquiesce to the public health orders given in March. However, we made it clear that the authority to make such a decision does not rest with the state but with the local consistory.

We recognized that there can be justifiable reasons when the government might protect its citizens by *requesting* the church to limit her gatherings to control disease or avoid other catastrophic events. However, for the government to simply *order* the churches to cease to worship is not only contrary to the constitution of Canada, but more importantly, contrary to the Word of God. Our confessions summarize the biblical role of civil authority in relation to the church. Our Belgic Confession states that the government’s role includes the protection of the church and its ministry “in order that the kingdom of Christ may come, the Word of the gospel may be preached everywhere, and God may be honoured and served by everyone, as He requires in His Word” (Article 36). The Westminster Confession states it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord “in such a manner that all ecclesiastical persons whatever shall enjoy the full, free, and unquestioned liberty of discharging every part of their sacred functions... And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and dis-

cipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof... that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance" (Chapter 23, Section 3). One of the reasons government has tried to impose its directives on the church is because it considers the church to be just another organization, even less important than sports teams and bowling leagues. We cannot accept this heretical view of the church, which is the bride of Christ.

When churches merely acquiesce to government "orders," they are arrogating their God-given right to assemble freely. The church does not exist by permission of the state; it is established and ruled by Jesus Christ. We must protect that principle at all costs. The failure to do so could have serious negative implications for the future. Christ has purchased His church with His own blood that she might serve Him!

Hugh Martin adds some clarity in how this should function. He says: *Is it a claim of right on [the Church's] part to do simply what she pleases? It has been perpetually thus misrepresented, and ever will be so by those, who, through spiritual blindness, have no perception of her connection with Christ.... they have, in all ages, scorned the Church's claim of independence, as if it were equivalent to an assertion of her right to do whatever she may please. The Church challenges no such freedom. Her claim is exactly what Jehovah asserted on behalf of Israel: 'Let my son go free that he may serve me.' The freedom of the Church is freedom to obey her king - to hearken to his voice alone in his word and execute his will alone. With this freedom the 'Son over his own house' hath made his own house free. And 'if the Son hath made her free, she is free indeed' (John 8:36).*

Since the Lord has given us the right to worship, no government or official can take that right away from Christ's church. Considering the allegiance we owe to Jesus Christ, we were convinced that we must continue to gather in corporate worship. We did so, eventually even increasing our attendance, contrary to the health order, because we realized that there was considerably less transmission of COVID than other venues which were allowed to continue to operate. This was unacceptable. Further, we do not believe that observing corporate worship from home is an acceptable replacement for the meeting together on the Lord's Day.² Being convinced of these truths we continued to meet in corporate worship on the Lord's Day.

Beginning in March 2020, we met regularly without interference from the authorities until November 2020 when new public health orders were given "forbidding all in-person worship services." This left us with a problem since these rules were contrary to our convictions. Other theological statements were made by the provincial health officer including "The church doesn't need to meet for worship; the church is more than a building." However, God has not given government officials and agencies the authority to determine what constitutes faithful worship. They overreached their authority in making theological statements about the nature of the church and its worship, thus rendering their orders illegitimate. The government failed to recognize the separation between the institutions of the state and the church. That separation was created in part because of the temptation for the state to use its strong arm to impose its beliefs on citizens. For Christians, Scripture makes it clear that we are to gather regularly to hear God's Word, pray, sing, take part in the sacraments, and make contributions for those in need. The fact that the majority of churches have decided that they can substitute all of this with virtual alternatives (wrongly in my view) doesn't mean that all Christians ought to be coerced to come to the same conclusion, against their biblical convictions. The government had intruded into the life of the church.

We had hoped that the government would not enforce the orders of the provincial health officer which prohibited "in-person worship." Out of conviction, we continued to meet as a congregation. If the government would have continued to allow us to quietly go about worshipping our

God, we would never have made application to the court to intervene. However, after the frequent ticketing, the constant oppressive government enforcement, their blatant disregard for the worship of God, and their value judgement in ordering the shutting down of worship services, their refusal to answer our repeated appeals for consideration, their allowances to other sectors in society, and the fact that the charter gave the legal right to worship freely, left us with no choice but to challenge the orders in court. Recognizing that appealing to the court is legitimate course of action given to us by God,³ we did so to protect and promote the worship of God, not only for the present, but also for the future. The government had clearly veered out of their area of jurisdiction, so we took up contact with the *Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms* in Calgary, and they agreed to represent us. A request for a judicial review was filed on January 7, 2021. ARPA was also granted intervenor status to give the Reformed perspective in this matter.⁴

I want to close this article with a few reflections on the importance and nature of the worship service. I learned the importance of the worship services already from my dad who has gone to be with the Lord. We lived on a farm about 1 KM from a main road. The sideroad we lived on often blew full of snow in the winter, making it impassable. My dad would get up early Sunday morning to plow our sideroad out to the main road so that we could attend the worship services. There are times we even traveled through the field in order to get to the main road on Sundays. Would you do the same today to attend worship? Near the end of his life, when I was in Ontario, I stayed at his home on Saturday evening. He had been so uncomfortable because of a cancerous tumour that he was awake all night. During breakfast the next morning, I asked him: *Are you going to church today?* He said: *Of course*, with virtually no explanation. I have no memory of my dad ever missing a worship service until he entered the hospital the last weeks of his life. Are we committed to the worship of God in the same way?

Sadly, many seem to have developed a consumer mentality about the worship of God, meaning they can 'take it or leave it' at a whim. How people have responded to the public health orders demonstrates what they think about corporate worship. To many, and to our government, the worship service is a mere social activity for the benefit of the people. However, we call our gathering together a "worship service," because we gather there first of all to serve God, not to gain something for ourselves. Governments, by their orders, are trying to limit the worship of God Himself! Their battle is not with the churches, church members, or pastors, but against God Himself. Too many people have said: "I am fine with staying home for a few weeks!" But that isn't the point: "Is God fine with it?" Does He not deserve to be worshipped?

One good thing that could come out of this pandemic is that we carefully consider the nature and importance of our worship services. Let us sing with the Psalmist:

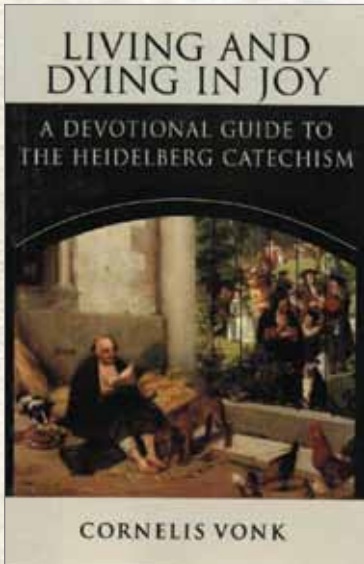
How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. 🙏

Rev. John Koopman is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, BC.

Endnotes

1. Listen to Pastor Schoeman's sermon preached on November 22, 2020, just a few days after the Public Health Organization's order prohibiting 'in-person worship', on the headship of Christ over the church: <http://tinysa.com/338340>
2. See Pastor VanDoodewaard's blog series on livestreaming: <https://northtruth.blogspot.com>
3. Listen to Pastor Schoeman's sermon on the "Appeal to Caesar," preached on February 28, 2021, just before the court case: <http://tinysa.com/338341>
4. See the written submission of ARPA to the court: <https://tinyurl.com/ytksw6u9>. See also a helpful summary of the court proceedings by ARPA: <https://tinyurl.com/par4kua7>.

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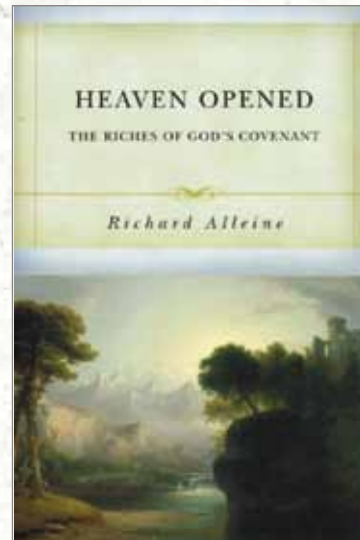


Living and Dying in Joy: A Devotional Guide to the Heidelberg Catechism

By Cornelis Vonk

The title of this commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism takes its inspiration from the catechism's second question, "How many things are necessary for you to know, that you, enjoying this comfort, may live and die happily?" The comfort referred to is that which is described in the famous first question and answer, the comfort of knowing "that I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ." The Christian art of living and dying in joy is explored in this guide to the catechism, which focuses on the biblical background and exposition of the grand themes of misery, redemption, and gratitude. Softcover, 259 pages, Christian's Library

RBS Price \$29.00



Heaven Opened: The Correspondence of Mary Winslow

By Mary Winslow

Mary Winslow (b. 1774) married Thomas Winslow and bore him ten children.

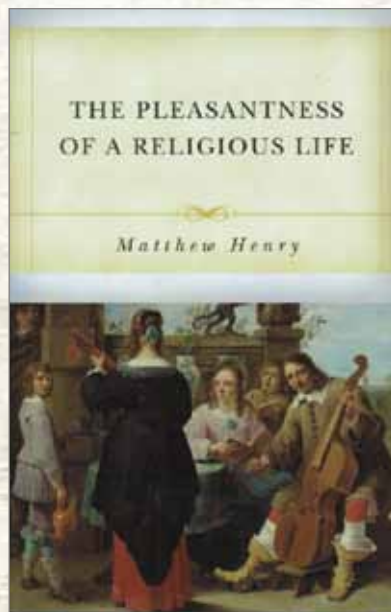
Widowed at forty, newly immigrated to the United States, and responsible for nine children, she experienced much affliction and sorrow. Out of these trials her faith came forth as gold and her deep communion with Christ continues to be a help and comfort to many. Hardcover, 344 pages, Reformation Heritage Books

RBS Price \$18.50

Puritan Pastors Series

Matthew Henry – The Pleasantness of a Religious Life
Matthew Henry, the great Puritan commentator, here looks at what gives people real joy. He looks at 12 different types of Christian pleasure, reviews what God has done to bring sinners joy, demonstrates that Christian experience proves this, and challenges the reader to join in. This was Matthew Henry's last book; it was at the press when he died in 1714. This book is brought to you by J.I. Packer who adds an extensive introduction, showing its significance from Henry's ministry. Softcover, 157 pages, Christian Focus Publications

RBS Price \$11.50



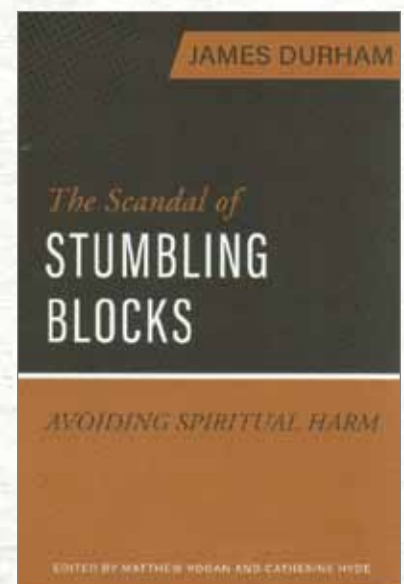
The Scandal of Stumbling Blocks: Avoiding Spiritual Harm

By James Durham

In *The Scandal of Stumbling Blocks*, James Durham helps us to consider the matter deeply by defining the nature of stumbling as well as showing its serious consequences. He looks in considerable detail at different kinds of stumbling and identifies the ways that people can stumble and be stumbled. Durham provides practical advice for avoiding and preventing these offenses.

This book is now edited in modern English Softcover, 103 pages, Reformation Heritage Books

RBS Price \$11.00



RBS NEW TITLES



Strangely Bright: Can You Love God and Enjoy This World?

By Joe Rigney

At the heart of the Christian life is a tension between the supremacy of God over all things and the enjoyment of all things for His sake. In this short book, Joe Rigney offers a biblical vision for enjoying God in everything and enjoying everything in God.

God's gifts are invitations to know and enjoy

Him more deeply, and, as this truth is impressed upon our hearts, we will discover that the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Softcover, 121 pages, Crossway

RBS Price \$18.00

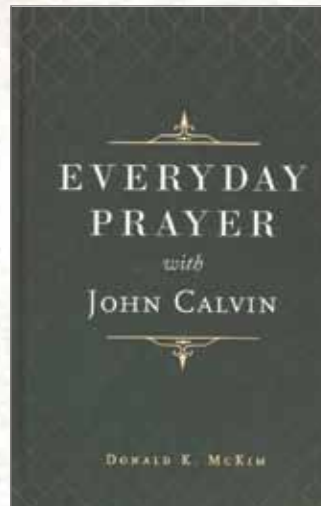
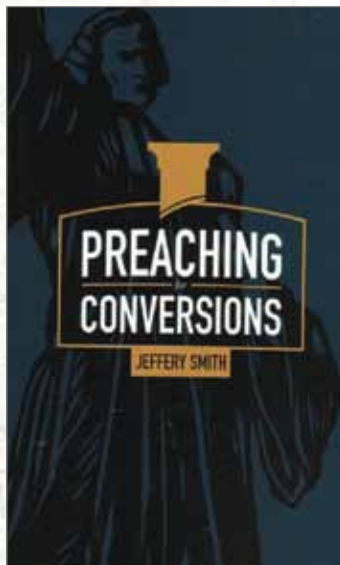
Preaching for Conversions

By Jeffery Smith

This little book does not attempt to be a work specifically on the topics of sermon preparation and delivery. Rather, the concern of the author is to urge his pastoral colleagues in the ministry to preach for conversions in their local church settings. Paul Washer comments on this book: "I cannot think of a more necessary message to be given to churches and ministers

of all types and kinds... This book will wake you from the deception of pragmatism and the comfortable slumber of orthodoxy. It will bid you stand in a valley of dry bones and call the dead to live." Softcover, 143 pages, Free Grace Press

RBS Price \$17.00



Everyday Prayer with John Calvin

By Donald K. McKim

Prayer is central to the Christian life, which is why John Calvin spends more time on prayer than on any other topic in his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Drawing from the Institutes and Calvin's Old and New Testament commentaries, Donald K. McKim comments on Calvin's biblical insights on prayer and intersperses his short readings with Calvin's own prayers. Reflection questions and prayer points help you to meditate on Scripture, understand Calvin's teaching, and strengthen your own prayer life. Hardcover, 127 pages, P & R Publishing

RBS Price \$14.00

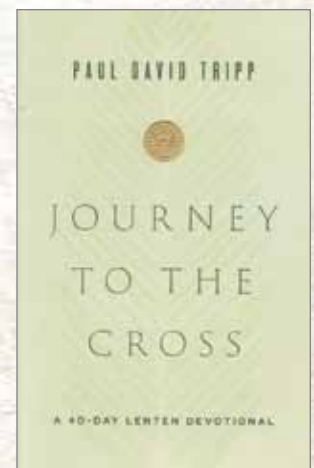
Journey to the Cross:

A 40-day Lenten Devotional

By Paul David Tripp

Lent is a time in the yearly Christian calendar when we mourn our sin and let go of worldly things that keep our hearts from experiencing God more fully. But how do we re-evaluate and recalibrate the values of our hearts to match those of our suffering Savior? In this forty-day Lenten devotional, best-selling author Paul David Tripp invites us to set aside time from the busyness of our lives to focus on the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus. Hardcover, 235 pages, Crossway

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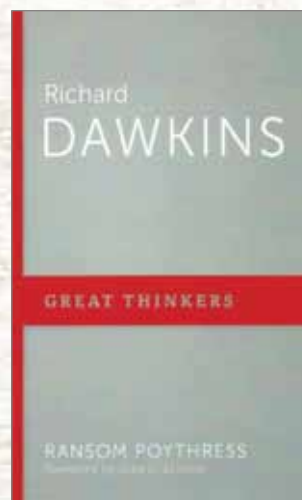


Great Thinkers – Richard Dawkins

By Ransom Poythress

Richard Dawkins, a leader in the New Atheism movement and bestselling author, is one of the foremost proponents of a gene-centered approach to evolutionary science. Not only does he claim that materialism offers a satisfying purpose for life, but he has trenchantly criticized those who accept the existence of a supernatural creator. Ransom Poythress, PhD, ruling elder in the PCA, provides a sound, Reformed, biblical toolkit for defending the faith-looking at where Dawkins' ideas on science cross philosophical concepts and critiquing them from a Christian perspective. Softcover, 163 pages, P&R Publishing

RBS Price \$14.00



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PILGRIMS AND PURITANS IN AMERICA (5)

SOME OUTSTANDING PURITAN LEADERS IN NEW ENGLAND (2) JOHN COTTON BIOGRAPHY

Having looked at New England's greatest civic leader, John Winthrop, we now turn to some of the leading theologians of the Massachusetts Bay Company. These easily outnumbered the civil magistrates. Compared with Old England, where there was one clergyman for every thousand parishioners, in New England, there was a pastor for every congregation numbering between two and three hundred souls. All of them were very well educated, most of them having been trained at one of Europe's most prestigious universities: Cambridge.

Biographical Sketch

The first of these prominent church leaders was John Cotton (1584-1652). Born in Derby, England, the son of a lawyer, John showed signs of exceptional intelligence early in life. Following the usual grammar school education in his hometown, he enrolled at Trinity College in Cambridge at the age of thirteen. Upon receiving his BD degree, he moved to Emmanuel College, also in Cambridge, where he served as head lecturer and dean of students. While at Emmanuel, he acquired a reputation as a great scholar and gifted orator.

However, despite the respect with which he was regarded by his Puritan friends and mentors, he knew he was still unconverted and went through prolonged struggles of soul during his years at the college. Being regularly under the searching preaching of William Perkins and Richard Sibbes, he became more and more convicted of his lost state. The story is told that, when Perkins died, young Cotton welcomed the sound of the bell tolling for the preacher's funeral and "secretly rejoiced in his deliverance from the powerful ministry by which his conscience had been so often beleaguered."¹ Shortly thereafter, in 1609, however, the Lord used a sermon by Richard Sibbes to bring the respected scholar to cry out to God for mercy and to embrace Christ freely offered in the Gospel.

Having experienced the saving work of the Holy Spirit and knowing Christ as his Saviour, he was ready to enter the ministry. He was ordained in 1610, but continued to lecture and preach at Emmanuel College. In 1612, he left Cambridge and was appointed as pastor of the Anglican church of St. Botolph in Lincolnshire, a position he held for twenty years.

In 1613, Cotton married Elizabeth Horrocks, sister of a Lancashire minister. During his ministry at St. Botolph, Cotton privately taught recent Cambridge graduates, some of whom were Dutch and German exiles from the war on the European continent. They lived with the Cottons, so that his contemporary, John Norton, noted that Cotton "had his house full of Auditors."²

By this time, Cotton was firmly committed to the Puritan cause. Right

from the start, he began to leave out certain elements of the Anglican worship which he believed were not scriptural, such as making the sign of the cross, wearing the surplice (special garments for ministers), and kneeling to receive communion. Cotton's opposition to these and other prescribed rules got him into trouble with his superiors in the established church. Between 1615 and 1621, he had to endure several short-term suspensions imposed by successive bishops.

By the end of the decade, however, Cotton's ministry was more seriously threatened because one of his most important protectors, Bishop John Williams, was viewed with suspicion by King Charles. This left Cotton in fear of arrest and imprisonment, so that he began to look for a permanent escape. By this time, many of his fellow Puritans had already found such an escape by moving to New England.

In 1630, Cotton preached a farewell sermon entitled *God's Promise to His Plantation* to the first non-separating Puritan emigrants sailing to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, led by John Winthrop. This event had left him with the resolve to go and do likewise, but his plan had to be delayed, first by a long bout with fever in 1630-1631, and then the death of his wife in 1631, after a childless marriage of eighteen years. In 1632, Cotton married Sarah Hawkredd with whom he had six children.

In that same year, Cotton was summoned before the High Commission Court. Being unwilling to comply with their demands, he knew the time had come for him to join the large number of Puritans who had already moved to America. On May 7, 1633, Cotton resigned his ministry at St. Botolph, and sailed for New England on July 13, 1633, along with Puritan ministers Thomas Hooker and Samuel Stone and their families. During the voyage, his wife Sarah delivered their first child, aptly named Seaborn Cotton.

Shortly after his arrival in Boston, Massachusetts, on September 4, he was called by the First Church in that city to be their pastor and teacher, even though they already had a pastor, John Wilson. Accepting this appointment gave Cotton a prominent position because Boston was on its way to becoming the leading city of New England.

Although Cotton was respected for his piety and powerful preaching, his success did not come without challenges. He soon became involved in two very difficult cases that threatened to disturb the peace of New England: The Antinomian controversy associated with Anne Hutchinson and the dispute with Roger Williams concerning the relationship between the church and civil authorities. We will deal with these issues later, but in order to prepare for the Hutchinson case, we need to know something about John Cotton's theology.

Cotton's Doctrine of Assurance

Cotton's theology was thoroughly Puritan and Calvinistic. All Puritans stressed that salvation is the work of God alone without any assistance or cooperation of man. For that reason they were called

monergists, in distinction from Arminians, who are *synergists* because they teach that salvation is the work of God *and* man.

Arminianism was condemned at the Synod of Dort (1618-19), but it was not destroyed. It lived on and spread to England and other countries. In England, where Calvinism had been part of accepted orthodoxy for a generation since the 1570s, Peter Baro,

a French refugee who had become professor of Divinity at Cambridge, caused a stir in 1579 by teaching that

God predestined all men to eternal life on condition of their faith and obedience. This was basically what Arminius would teach in Holland.

Sixteen years later, in 1595, William Barrett, one of Baro's students, used the same synergistic approach to salvation in his sermons.

The resulting furor led to the publication of the nine Lambeth Articles, which were similar in content to the Canons of Dort. These articles became a semi-official statement of English orthodoxy on predestination and grace. At the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, an attempt was made to add

the Lambeth Articles to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the official creed of the Church of England, but this request was turned down.

During the seventeenth century, many English theologians moved away from traditional Calvinism and toward the views of Baro and Barrett. Many church leaders such as Archbishop Laud and other prelates strongly disliked the Puritans and their Calvinism and increasingly favoured Arminianism, promoting it wherever possible. Interest in the Greek church fathers, which blossomed at that time, confirmed the trend. In the middle of the century, the Cambridge Platonists, who had close connections with the Dutch Arminians, were promoting their philosophical ideas rooted in rationalism, moralism, and natural theology. Absolute personal predestination by this time was seen as a distinctly Puritan oddity and gradually their opponents set the pendulum swinging against all that Puritanism had stood for. With few exceptions, Anglican theologians became decidedly Arminian in their religious outlook and world view.³

Cotton's Opposition to Legalism

John Cotton, along with other Puritan theologians, fought bravely against the inroads of Arminianism. They were afraid that, even within the Puritan brotherhood, some were gradually, and perhaps unintentionally, moving away from orthodox Calvinism towards a more synergistic view of salvation. Symptomatic of this trend was the new way some preachers understood and presented the doctrine of sanctification and its relationship to assurance.

The question for many Christians was, and still is, how do I know whether I am saved? What are the marks or evidences of saving grace? Like many Puritans, Cotton was becoming increasingly concerned that many professing Christians were in danger of resting their assurance of salvation on a false foundation. In other words,



JOHN
COTTON



St Botolph's Church in Boston Lincolnshire.

they were looking to their sanctification or performing good works as evidence of their justification. As Iain Murray wrote in 1978:

Cotton feared that men, devoid of evangelical experience, would reach assurance by a form of legalism... The school of preaching to which Cotton belonged had long emphasized that *profession* of faith in Christ was not enough to denote a real Christian. True religion must reach the heart, and change the life, and accordingly sanctification was preached as being a necessary evidence that faith is indeed

genuine and saving. Certainly, the Puritans did not teach that personal holiness was the cause of justification, but they held that where an individual is united to Christ for his justification, a change of character will invariably accompany his change of status... Thus, to avoid the danger of self-deception, they preached 'let a man examine himself (I Cor. 11:28). Self-deception, however, can take varied forms as Cotton recognized. An unregenerate man is able to render a *form* of obedience which may closely resemble the life of a true believer... Thus, Cotton feared a legalism sheltering beneath the very shadow of orthodoxy.⁴

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Invites applications for:

- **Secondary Humanities Teacher: for a maternity leave from August 2021 to August 2022**
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Adam Kloostr, Principal


198 Inksetter Road P.O. Box 70, Copetown, ON L0R 1J0
t. 905.627.5977 e. principal@rehoboth.on.ca w. www.rehoboth.on.ca

What then did Cotton mean by saying that sanctification cannot serve as evidence of justification? Can a Christian dispense with good works? I do not think Cotton would say that good works play no role in the life of believers. God does require obedience to His precept from all His creatures, but such obedience is only possible for those who have true faith, for "whatsoever [including works] is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). In other words, looking to our sanctification is not a reliable basis on which to conclude that we are saved because it is an *indirect* action which may or may not assure us of our justification. What we need is a *direct* action, and that can only be God's testimony to our spirit that we are His children. As Michael Jinkins writes, "In Cotton's view, God alone, through the Holy Spirit, acts to regenerate persons, and those who are to be saved must simply wait for the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to discern that they have been united with Christ and have been justified."⁵

Cotton's opponents disagreed with his view which they said "abandoned people to subjective impressions, bereft of any objective means for testing their election. They were also afraid his view came dangerously close to confusing the human person and her impressions with the divine Spirit."⁶

Many drew the conclusion that Cotton had become a *de facto* antinomian. But there were also others who supported his views and were convinced that he represented the true and authentic Reformation theology with its emphasis on God's sovereignty in salvation and human depravity and inability.

Modern scholars like Perry Miller and Robert Kendall agree with this assessment and make the case that the majority of the New England contemporaries of Cotton, for all their piety and scholarship, charted a course that led them away from true Calvinism. One of these theologians who opposed Cotton was Thomas Hooker, who in Miller's view, "with great eloquence magnified the possibilities of a man's producing in himself a receptive frame of mind."⁷

How valid are these scholarly assessments? Must we simply wait for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to find out whether we possess saving faith? Does this not lead to false passivity? We will try to answer these and related questions in our next article, *Thomas Hooker and his Doctrine of Conversion*. 

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

PROVIDENCE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

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We are looking for enthusiastic teachers who have a passion for Christian Education. We encourage applications by qualified teachers who submit to God's Holy Word, subscribe to the Reformed confessions, and are committed to educating children and youth for formation of a distinct Christian worldview.

Suitable candidates are encouraged to electronically submit:

- a letter of application
- a résumé containing three references
- a brief philosophy of Christian Education statement

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Please forward inquiries and/or applications to:

Mr. Brian Kemper, Principal

Heritage Christian School, 2850 Fourth Avenue, Box 400

Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada L0R 1S0

Phone (905) 562-7303 Fax (905) 562-0020

Email: bkemper@hcsjordan.ca Website: www.hcsjordan.ca

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

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Applications must include a resume, statement of faith, philosophy of Christian education, and references. Email applications to Mr. William Van Brugge (principal@orcschool.ca). Visit our website (orcschool.ca), or come and visit our school: 333182 PlankLine, Mount Elgin, Ontario.

How Did We Get Here?

WHAT LED SEVERAL CHURCHES IN BC TO TAKE THEIR GOVERNMENT TO COURT



Last month (March 1-3 and 5) an important hearing was held in the British Columbia (BC) Supreme Court. Three churches in the lower mainland - the Chilliwack Free Reformed Church, the Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church of Abbotsford (URC), and the Riverside Calvary Chapel of Langley (an evangelical church) – filed a petition asking for a judicial review of a public health order issued in late November by BC’s top public health official, Dr. Bonnie Henry. How did this happen?

Some Background

To answer this question, we need to start at the beginning. When a pandemic was declared in March 2020, most churches in BC, along with many businesses and stores, voluntarily decided to shut down to help bring the virus under control. When these efforts were unsuccessful, our chief public health officer ordered churches in our province to restrict the number of people gathering for worship to fifty (regardless of sanctuary size). A church could host more than fifty so long as they were seated in separate “spaces” (e.g. sanctuary and fellowship hall) and the congregants did not mix.

At the time, we were told that such drastic measures would be

of short duration – two weeks at the most. But this reassurance proved to be wildly optimistic. Despite our best efforts, the virus continued to spread here in BC and around the world. Initially, most of the churches in BC (including the churches that filed the petition) dutifully complied with this order. In addition, most churches practiced physical distancing and set up hand-sanitizing stations throughout their facilities. Some even mandated the wearing of masks (even though this was not required by the government). In short, we did everything the government required us to do and more.

“In Person” Worship Banned

On November 19, with Covid steadily increasing in our province, our public health officer sought to “flatten the curve” by prohibiting all in-person worship services for a three-week period, after which the situation would be reassessed. This put the churches in a difficult position. Some churches (including all three Free Reformed churches) decided to disregard the order and continue to hold in-person worship services. We did so for the following reasons:

1. The order was unfair. According to the order, up to fifty peo-

ple can meet for a “support group” meeting (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous), retail stores, bars, restaurants, gyms, and initially cinemas could remain open (so long as they observed certain protocols), but churches had to remain closed.

2. The order was unjust. Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the freedom of religion and peaceful assembly. This order effectively stripped us of our constitutional rights.
3. The order was unbiblical. We viewed this order as a frontal assault on the headship of Christ over His church. Only Christ – through His office bearers – has the authority to regulate the worship of God. Besides, if Christ Himself calls us to worship Him, who is the government to say that we cannot do so?

Other churches decided to abide by the order. Still others did not know what to do. To assist the churches in this matter, two elders from the Canadian Reformed church in Chilliwack called for a meeting of the Reformed churches in Chilliwack to discuss this matter. I then suggested they broaden the scope to include all the churches in the Fraser Valley, which they did. Approximately 50 churches sent representatives to the meeting (which was held in our church building), while many others joined online.

Some of these churches were Reformed (FRC, Can. Ref., HRC, NRC, URC, RCNA, and Reformed Baptist); some were evangelical community churches. Andre Schutten from ARPA linked in via Zoom, as did Marty Moore, a lawyer for the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedom (JCCF), based in Calgary, which offered to represent us *pro bono* (without cost) should we decide to take this matter to court. The meeting ended with a general resolve among the churches that had decided to obey the order to resume worshipping, if the order was renewed upon expiry in three week’s time. For those of us who had decided to disregard the order, this was a positive development since we believed that a united front would benefit our cause.

As expected, the order was renewed in mid-December. To our dismay, most of the churches did not resume worshipping in person. But some – both Reformed and evangelical – did, observing the same protocols that were in place prior to the order being issued. Most even continued to cap their number at fifty.

Throughout this time, many churches and individuals also wrote letters to the government and to the public health officer, urging them to reconsider this provision of the order. We contacted our Members of the Legislative Assembly. Some church leaders even managed to have a conference call with the Health Minister. Yet,

nothing changed. We did not even get a response back from the government to acknowledge they received our letters.

Some churches applied for a variance to the order (allowed under Section 43 of the order). A variance is a special exemption granted to religious groups who can prove that they are “worshipping safely.” But they also did not get a response.⁽¹⁾

Dark and Difficult Days

The following weeks were dark and difficult. The police stepped up their enforcement of the order. Police cars started showing up in parking lots of churches that continued to worship. Police officers took surveillance videos and recorded license plate numbers.

Then they started issuing tickets of \$2300 every time a worship service was held. The police even threatened to start ticketing individual members. I received a ticket for preaching in Chilliwack FRC. The RCMP saw me preaching online and made the half-hour drive all the way from Chilliwack to Abbotsford to issue me a ticket. By now pastors in Chilliwack have received over \$70,000 in tickets. Some police officers, posing as worshippers, sought to infiltrate the worship services in some churches (including Chilliwack FRC) to gather evidence to be used against them. In one church, the police even entered the



sanctuary *while the minister was preaching* and angrily ordered him to stop and clear the building. In another church, the police banged on the locked church doors during a worship service (which is a crime in Canada), creating a major disturbance and bringing several women and children to tears. One pastor received a death threat for continuing to keep his church open. He was told also that if he kept his church open, his church building and home would be vandalized or burned down. We felt at times like we were living in Communist China.

On top of this, the mainstream media (CBC and CTV as well as numerous newspapers) started to hound some of the churches – especially the Chilliwack FRC and the Free Grace Reformed Baptist Church in Chilliwack. They set up their video cameras at the church before anyone arrived and tried to interview people as they came into church. When they were asked to leave church property, they camped out at the end of the driveway to film people driving into the parking lot and walking into church. One reporter sat in her car and counted the number of people entering the building. The editor of the local newspaper in Chilliwack wrote several editorials denouncing churches that had decided to continue to worship, stirring up much anti-church sentiment, especially on social media.

Court Injunction

This continued for several months into the year 2021. In the meantime, with the support of most of our members, we continued to gather for worship. We also decided to launch a court challenge to the order on the grounds that it constituted an unreasonable limitation on our constitutionally guaranteed freedom to worship and assemble.

The hearing was set for March 1-3, but only two weeks before it was scheduled to begin, the government applied to the BC Supreme Court for an injunction against churches that were continuing to hold in person worship services. The injunction, if granted, would have provided the police with the power to detain – and even arrest - anyone hosting a worship service and even anyone whom the police suspected might even be intending to attend a worship service. It would also have increased the fines from 20,000 to 3 million dollars. The government’s decision to apply for an injunction appeared vindictive, as the only churches named in the injunction were the three churches that petitioned for a judicial review, even though other churches in BC (including our own) had also continued to worship.

Thankfully, the judge denied the application. He gave several reasons:

1. Providentially, in Feb of 2020, the government applied for – and received - an injunction against protesters who were attempting to prevent access to the port of Vancouver. But the government in the end decided it was “not in the public’s interest” to enforce the injunction and so no action was taken. The judge believed the government’s refusal to enforce this injunction brought “the reputation of administration of justice...into disrepute because no consequences were pursued,” leading him to wonder, if he granted this injunction and the government again refused to enforce it, “whether the administration of justice would again be brought into disrepute”;
2. He doubted whether an injunction would have any effect. He wrote “I have reservations that an injunction alone...would overcome the deeply held beliefs of the petitioners and their devotees” (and he was right!);

3. He pointed out that the public health officer did not need an injunction as she already had sufficient powers in the existing legislation to enforce her orders – including the power to levy fines up to 3 million dollars and the power to imprison anyone found to be in violation of her orders up to 36 months.

Judicial Review

All of this brings me to March 1, the date of the first day of hearings regarding the judicial review. The case was heard by Chief Justice Hinkson, the Chief Justice of the BC Supreme Court and the same judge who denied the government’s request for an injunction. The lawyer hired by the Justice Centre to represent the churches – Mr. Paul Jaffe – advanced the following arguments (taken from a summary of the hearing provided by ARPA):

- It is inconsistent and arbitrary for the government to allow schools to function, businesses to remain open, gyms to operate, and people to congregate at the bar to watch a hockey game, but not allow masked, physically distant individuals and families to gather for worship.
- The orders are overly broad; the government doesn’t need to completely shut down in-person worship services to accomplish its objective of reducing the spread of COVID-19.
- The orders infringe on several *Charter* rights: the freedom of religion (*Charter* section 2(a)), the freedom of expression (section 2(b)), the freedom of peaceful assembly (section 2(c)), the freedom of association (section 2(d)), the right to liberty (section 7), and the right to equal treatment under the law (section 15).
- The public health orders also demonstrate how Dr. Henry’s prioritization of values apply to all British Columbians, whether they share her priorities or not; she appears to value school, workouts, or shopping more highly than corporate worship.

ARPA Canada was also granted permission to intervene, accepting 20 pages of written legal argument and twenty minutes of oral arguments. Geoffrey Trotter, the lawyer speaking on ARPA’s behalf, focused on how the importance of assembling together for



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worship is a central, deeply-held belief of Reformed Christians. He explained that there is no “magic number” of how many people must be present to fulfill the obligation to gather for worship, but that number certainly is more than zero. He also drove home the point that it is unfair to allow people to engage in a wide variety of activities, but not to attend an in-person worship service.

The government’s lawyer sought to derail the process on a point of procedure. He pointed out that only a few days before the judicial review began, the BC public health officer granted a “variance” to the order allowing churches to hold outdoor services with maximum 25 people, capped at one hour, with no singing, and with the wearing of masks while remaining physically distanced for the entire service. He argued that since a variance had been granted, the churches could no longer challenge the health order. The only thing they could challenge was the reasonableness of this variance. As such the case had to be refiled.

This was clearly a tactic on the part of the government to avoid the possibility of the judge declaring the original health order unconstitutional or having the case thrown out. Thankfully, however, the judge did not accept that argument. So then the government’s lawyer tried something else: On behalf of the government he conceded that the public health order did indeed violate section 2 of the Charter, but he argued that these infringements were reasonable and justified under the circumstances and, therefore, was not unconstitutional.

Although throughout the hearing the judge appeared to understand and even have some sympathy for the churches, in the end he agreed with the government’s arguments: the restrictions on our rights were justifiable in light of the pandemic.

Now what?

Needless to say we were devastated by this ruling. But we have not given up. The three churches that launched the judicial review have all agreed to appeal. At the same time, the Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver and a number of Canadian Reformed Churches have also filed legal challenges of the worship service prohibitions. Although a judge has the power to strike down or modify the restrictions as they apply only to the petitioners before them (e.g. the three churches, Catholic churches, or Canadian Reformed Churches), it is also possible that the decision the judge issues will be general enough to benefit all churches in the province. So we will have to wait and see.

What we Learned

As Reformed Christians we believe that God is in control of all things (HC, LD 9 and 10). What is more, He uses even adversity to teach us and to conform us more and more to the image of Christ. So what have we learned?

1. We did the right thing.

Sometimes when you look back at certain events in your life you wonder: did I do the right thing? Would I do what I did all

over again? Looking back over the past several months, I believe wholeheartedly that we were right to not close our churches down. We were right to take our government to court. Paul did the same when he appealed to Caesar. I am glad we did as well. For us this is a struggle for the headship of Christ over His church. As churches, we simply cannot stand by and allow the government to unilaterally and without consultation interfere in the worship of God – not even in a pandemic. To do so is to set a very dangerous precedent.

2. Christ has His people everywhere.

Throughout this struggle, we came into contact with pastors and believers from other denominations – Reformed and evangelical – who were on the same page as we in responding to this public health order. At the second interdenominational meeting held in our church building, around 20 churches were represented, with some of the men taking several hours to travel there. At the end of the meeting, we had a time of prayer. One man after the other stood up and besought the Lord – with great passion - to have mercy on our province and our churches. Then we sang together “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” It was powerful and moving - a foretaste of the day when all theological differences will fall away and we will gather with believers from all over the world before the throne of God to worship and praise His name.

3. The Devil is alive and well.

In my personal devotions I have been reading through the Book of Ezra. When Ezra and the men of Israel began rebuilding the temple, they immediately encountered opposition. The inhabitants of the land tried to do everything in their power to put a stop to the work. They threatened and cajoled them. They wrote a letter to the king. They even hired counsellors to lobby the king on their behalf. Behind this opposition, of course, was the devil himself, seeking to destroy the church.

We experienced something similar – and still do. I have already mentioned the fines, threats, and heavy-handed police actions, as well as the negative publicity and even vicious attacks on social media. It reminded me again that the devil still goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He is always on the prowl and will stop at nothing to attack the church of Christ.

4. We can be thankful for our judicial system.

To be honest, I do not always agree with the decisions made by our judges. I don’t agree with the judge who ruled in this case either. But the court hearing gave me a new appreciation for our

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judges and our judicial system. The judge who heard our petition was fair, wise, and very perceptive. The lawyers on both sides (for the most part) were respectful of each other. The judge extended the hearing for a full day and made no attempt to cut the proceedings short. Our judicial system is not perfect. But it is far better than many countries. For this we may be very thankful.

It reminded me too that we need to pray for our judges perhaps more than we do. They have a great and heavy responsibility. Let us beseech the Lord to enable them to carry it out faithfully and fairly.

5. The law is an honourable profession.

Lawyers are often viewed rather negatively. There is, perhaps, some justification for this. But not all lawyers are bad! In fact, we had the great privilege of getting to know several lawyers over the past several months. All of them were men of great intellect, character, and conviction.

It reminded me of the need for more Christian lawyers. I hope that some of our young people, after reading about these events in BC, will resolve to study law, and even become a lawyer – perhaps even a judge. The light of the gospel needs to shine also in our courtrooms!

6. ARPA is a great organization deserving our support.

As mentioned, ARPA was granted intervenor status at our hearing. ARPA has had to walk a fine line on this issue between supporting churches in the Reformed community that have decided to remain closed and churches that have decided to continue to worship. But we were grateful for their support and encouragement and for their balanced, high quality work. If you are not a monthly supporter of this organization, consider becoming one.

7. We must conduct ourselves as Christians – even when we disagree with our government (and each other!)

Every now and then I am dismayed by how some professing Christians express their concerns - vocally, in print, and on social

media - about the government handling of this pandemic. Thankfully, this was not widely reported in the news, but for the first days of the hearing, a group of fanatical Christian activists staged a protest rally on the steps of the Supreme Court building in Vancouver. I was shocked by what I heard and saw. I heard government officials being denounced. I saw posters depicting our chief public health officer with horns coming out her head, claiming she worshipped at the church of Satan, denouncing her as a liar and a communist traitor. When I engaged some of the people at the rally about this, I was told we live in a free country and that everyone is entitled to say whatever they like. When I pointed out that some of their messaging was slander, I was verbally attacked. Sue Koopman (the wife of Pastor John Koopman) who was also present on this occasion, was told by one protestor that she was going to hell for voicing the same objection. I felt like I was surrounded by godless, radical leftists - not Christian brothers and sisters.

Such conduct is not pleasing to the Lord and is contrary to the fifth commandment which, according to our Catechism, requires us “to show all honour, love and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me...and also patiently bear with weaknesses and infirmities since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.” We may not always agree with our government, but surely we can voice our disagreement in a calm, rational, and respectful way. If we as Christians don’t do that, what can we expect from the world?

8. Governments do not always act justly or fairly.

Earlier I mentioned that, according to the public health order in BC, up to fifty people can meet for a “support group” meeting (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous), retail stores, bars, restaurants, and gyms can remain open (so long as they observed certain protocols), but churches have to remain closed. This is not fair or just. As our lawyer pointed out several times during the court hearing, viruses do not suddenly become activated just because the gathering is of a religious nature.

A good illustration of the injustice of this occurred in December of last year. A local newspaper, *Chilliwack Progress*, reported on a complaint that had been lodged with the RCMP detachment in Chilliwack about a church in Cultus Lake (a recreational area just south of Chilliwack) that appeared to be worshipping based on the fact that there were a large number of vehicles in the parking lot. When the RCMP went to investigate, they found that a movie was being filmed at that location, which is allowed under the current public health order. So, if one gathers in a church to film a movie, that’s OK; but as soon as you gather to worship, that’s not OK.

In mentioning this I do not mean to rail against our leaders. I believe they are doing what they think is best to protect the health and well being of the citizens of our province. Nor do I believe they are deliberately targeting churches. They do not understand churches. Some may not even care about churches. But I do not believe they are deliberately targeting them. I am no “conspiracy

theorist.” I mention this only to illustrate that sometimes governments do not always act fairly or justly and therefore must be held to account.

9. There comes a time when we simply cannot obey our government.

Admittedly, it is not always easy to know when we should or should not obey our government. Many are fond of citing Romans 13:1: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” They rightly point out that, as Christians, we must ordinarily obey the government because its authority is delegated to it by God. But many of these same people fail to read these verses in their context. For Paul goes on to say (vv.3-4): “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” These words are not an accurate description of every civil government, but are a prescription for every government. Governments are mandated by God to reward good and to punish evil by the standard of God’s moral law. Peter says the same in 1 Peter 2:13-14. When a government fails to carry out its delegated calling, doing evil rather than good, it is not acting as God’s minister. In such cases, it not only may, but must be resisted.

The apostles understood this very well. When Peter and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin not to preach in Jesus’ name, they refused saying, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5: 29). They understood that secular governments have no authority to restrict the preaching of the gospel. That is the purview of the church. What is more, they understood that, like the church, the government is subject to Christ as the “King of kings and the Lord of Lords” (Rev 19:16). When they do evil rather than good, we are under no obligation to obey them. In fact, we must call them to account and if they do not listen, we must stand for the crown rights of King Jesus. In our case, this includes appealing before the courts to uphold the right of the church to worship publicly.

10. God is in control.

I know we often say that, but it is true. He IS in control. In Lord’s Day 9 of our *Heidelberg Catechism* we confess that “the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; who likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence) is for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body; and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and

willing, being a faithful Father.” What a beautiful confession!

Knowing and believing this enables us to go forward no matter what the outcome. In the meantime, we pray – and we ask you to pray with us – that the Lord our God may so work in the hearts of our leaders and our judges that they understand their calling and execute the duties of their offices to His glory so that the work of His kingdom may continue without hindrance until the day He comes again. ❶

Rev. J. Schoeman is pastor of the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church, Abbotsford, BC.

❶ Only a few days after the order was issued, an Orthodox Jewish synagogue on Vancouver Island applied for and immediately received a variance on the grounds that they were not permitted to use electronic devices on the Sabbath (meaning they could not livestream services). The variance stated that they could gather with a maximum of 25 people, outdoors, masked, without singing. But a few weeks later, they received another variance permitting them to meet indoors so that they could celebrate the Feast of Purim. A few days after that, they received permission to meet indoors every Sabbath day. But presumably when the government realized this would open them up to the charge of discriminating against Christians, they (on the first day of the hearing) said that the variance was only meant for the one day – all of which was fully disclosed during the court hearing.

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MUCH NEEDED RELIEF FOR CUBULCO

March 5, 2021

It has been a year since the world panicked after devastating news and disturbing images emerged out of China concerning a potentially deadly virus. Countries around the world scrambled to keep the virus out by limiting travel and closing borders. When cases started appearing in these countries, severe lockdowns were often instated. Guatemala reacted very quickly by limiting flights into the country even before the US or Canada did and by quarantining everyone who entered by air. However, it was already too late as within weeks, reports of people being hospitalized and dying of the virus surfaced. In a desperate effort to contain the virus, the country imposed very strict lockdowns on the people by requiring masks, imposing curfews and stay at home orders, closing schools, and limiting travel within the country. Failure to do so resulted in heavy fines and arrest. Initially, it appeared that the measures taken were working as Guatemala had one of the lowest infection rates in the world. But as we all know, it is next to impossible to contain a virus once it has been introduced.

Like many poor countries, most Guatemalans (75%) rely on informal work to earn enough each day to put food on their tables. Although the government offered financial assistance, it only benefits the 25% who have formal employment. This past year many Guatemalans had the difficult choice between obeying the government by staying home and possibly dying of starvation or disobeying the government and potentially exposing themselves to getting sick



and receiving fines. Most Guatemalans chose the latter because the risk of contracting COVID and dying from it was one with which they could live.

Although the lockdown measures and restrictions were less severe in rural areas, the effects became quickly apparent. For many in the rural areas of Guatemala, their sole source of income is as a migrant worker who spends up to six months out of the year traveling around the country to work on sugar cane, coffee, and melon farms. Without being able to travel within the country, they could not earn any money. Although many practice subsistence farming, most are not able to produce enough staple food (corn and beans) for the whole year. For this reason, they need to earn money to be able to buy additional food, seed, and fertilizer. To compound the problem, the supply chains were interrupted and food became scarce and expensive. I spoke to pastor Felipe from the Reformed Church of Patuy, and he told me that, even if they had money, they could not find any corn and beans to purchase.

To make matters worse, much of Central America, including Guatemala, was hit by two hurricanes (Eta and Iota) in No-

vember, which caused a lot of damage to homes and crops. Although little structural damage happened around Cubulco, the intense rains destroyed most of the crops that was almost ready for harvest. Harvest time for corn is usually in late December and the people lost their main food source for the coming year.

As reports were coming in from Guatemala of suffering and devastation, Word and Deed reacted quickly to raise money for COVID/disaster relief. Through the generous support of Christians in North America, Word and Deed, through their local partner, AMG, was able to provide much needed food and basic hygiene products to thousands of desperate families in different parts of Guatemala. In Cubulco, hundreds of families living mostly in remote communities were helped. Much of the help was given to needy families of the Reformed Churches, and each church was also asked to help needy families in their communities. Many expressed their gratitude for the help that they received. Francisca, a 36-year-old single woman who attends the Reformed Church in Xeul (a remote community 4 hours on foot from the nearest road), said that, due

to COVID, she was not able travel to the nearest town to work as a house cleaner. Since the pandemic started, she has not been able to provide for herself and her aging parents. Food had become scarce, but they trusted that the Lord would provide for their needs. The Lord answered their prayers by sending much needed food and hygiene products through AMG and Word and Deed.

For many of us in North America, it is hard to imagine what it must be like to go through life with no support network, government assistance, and not knowing from where your next meal will come. Although some have suffered financial hardships due to the restrictions, probably no one has gone without enough to eat. Some, including myself, may even have gained a few pounds during this time. This is not the reality for many of the poor in this world. For most, even a good day involves a struggle to provide for daily needs. Add a pandemic and natural disasters to the equation and life goes from bad to worse for many of the desperately poor in the world. According to the World Food Programme, more than 9 million people in the world die each year of hunger (25,000/day). They warn that the economic impact and the interruption of the supply chains and aid due to COVID restrictions could cause upwards of 300,000 people to die each day of hunger and hunger related illnesses (110 million/year). The number of COVID deaths pales in comparison. These numbers are sobering and staggering especially as we look at the excess in the West. I want to thank those who gave generously to this cause and at the same time encourage all who read this article to give generously and sacrificially to organizations who help meet the basic needs of the poor of this world.

“Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD WILL DELIVER HIM IN TIME OF TROUBLE” (PSALM 41:1). ①

Mr. Nico Kattenberg lived with his family in Guatemala for many years as he served the work of the Free Reformed Mission there and continues to assist this work.



YOUTH & EDUCATION

*In Psalm 78:6-7 Asaph contemplates,
That the generation to come
might know them,
even the children which should be born;
who should arise and declare them to
their children:
That they might set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments:*

A pivotal time in establishing the next generation's faithfulness to the Lord is often in the time of youth. This is a time when the Lord often moulds a softened heart, touches a mind made tender, and establishes patterns and convictions for the rest of life. This is a time when the Lord can personally become their God of salvation. This is a time spent questioning worldviews, examining philosophies, and deciphering the world around them. This is a time of making decisions in career, in relationships, and in future goals. During this precious and critical time, the bride of Christ needs to come close with biblical wisdom, a listening ear, and fervent prayer.

This grace is the prayer and this task is the calling of the Youth & Education Committee. Our desire and mandate are to give advice and direction to the youth of the denomination through youth camps, devotional publications, practical biblical advice on relevant topics, and Reformed study materials for youth groups.

While we were unable to operate youth camps in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia this past summer of 2020, we wait to see what future gathering regulations will look like this summer. The Ontario Camp typically hosts 215 counsellors and campers, the Alberta junior and senior camps host around 100, and the B.C. camp hosts close to 40. Camps are usually a few days filled with spiritual encouragement, fun activities, and connections with friends.

The Youth & Education Committee published five different devotionals covering the ages of 6 to 18+. These daily, thought-provoking meditations for children to late teens can be purchased through Free Reformed Publications and Reformed Book Services for \$15 CAD per copy.

Previously, the Youth Messenger was published in a small, printed booklet twice per year to provide helpful



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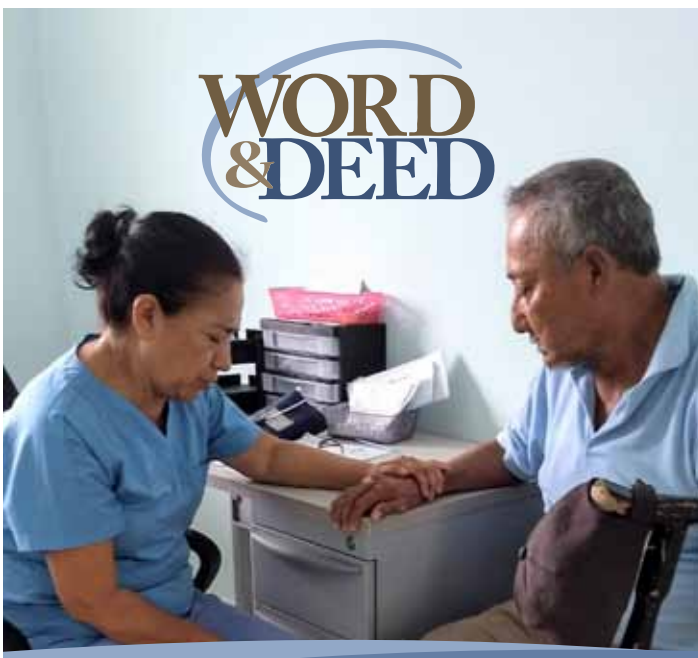
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"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."
John 6:12



WORD & DEED

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:17

www.wordanddeed.org

and biblical articles on relevant topics. In 2018, we decided to reach Reformed youth through a website titled *Plants & Pillars*. Our name is based on Psalm 144:12 which says, “That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace” (NKJV). Our prayer is that God will use this website to help youth grow: our sons as plants fully grown, and our daughters as corner pillars, made for a palace.

The website features an “Ask a Pastor” section where youth can anonymously submit their questions. Pastors from the FRC and HRC formulate practical and biblical answers to these often complex and pressing issues. Readers can also subscribe to weekly meditations delivered to their inbox. The website is a helpful resource addressing over 150 topics ranging from relationships, mental health, and drug abuse to public worship, theology, and missions. We encourage you to visit *Plants & Pillars* when seeking answers to difficult questions, encouragement in your spiritual walk, and information on upcoming events. Search www.plantsandpillars.net or follow our Facebook and Instagram pages for more regular postings. If you would like to contribute and assist with *Plants & Pillars*, please let us know by emailing editor@plantsandpillars.net. We are specifically looking for someone with filming and video editing skills as we aspire to strengthen our outreach to the youth!

Recently, we were able to host a live Prayer for Revival event on Youtube in mid-February with many tuning in to pray with us. Pastors, youth, parents, and grandparents from the FRC and HRC denominations prayed together for our nations, authorities, hospitals, churches, missions, families, and for lost souls in need of the grace of Jesus Christ. In this time, churches need to unite in prayer, seek the Lord for wisdom, and find our hope in the promise of salvation.

This spring, you may find promotional items in your mailboxes from *Plants & Pillars*, along with a short listing of recommended Bible studies for youth groups. Together with Reformed Book Services and Reformation Heritage Books, we hope to present valuable and instructional studies for youth groups/leaders to consider for the beginning of their season in September 2021.

As a synodical committee, we formally meet twice per year and report our activities to Synod. Apart from these formal meetings, monthly meetings, emails, and Zoom calls continue in the background. Our work can only be accomplished through the dedicated pastors, volunteers, promoters, editors, camp directors, camp counsellors, and above all, the grace of God. Please continue to pray, walk along side, and listen to our youth so they may “set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God.”

Scott Dekorte is chairman of the Free Reformed Youth & Education Committee and member of Zion Free Reformed Church of Fenwick, ON.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



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July 20, 1924 (Hoogeveen, The Netherlands) –
February 26, 2021 (Grimsby, ON)

In His perfect time, the Lord took unto Himself our beloved father, grandfather, and great-grandfather at the age of 96 years. He was predeceased by his wife of 71 years, **Margje Otten**, on September 5, 2020.

He was the much loved father of:

Mark and Jane Otten
Henry and Mary Otten
Bert and Joyce Otten
Jenny and Ed Bouman

Beloved grandpa of 21 grandchildren and 77 great-grandchildren.

He will be missed by his 3 brothers, 2 sisters, 1 brother-in-law, and 1 sister-in-law in Ontario, and 3 sisters-in-law and 1 brother-in-law in the Netherlands. The funeral service was held on March 3, at Zion Free Reformed Church in Fenwick, with pastor Mark Wagenaar officiating.

Psalm 73:26: *My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

ANNIVERSARY

1961- April 7 - 2021

"Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore" Psalm 105:4



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