



Lux Mundi

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Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." John 8:12



In this Issue

Covid stories from South Korea, New Zealand,
Canada, South Africa
Reflections of a missionary on covid

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Pray for Peace

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they be secure who love you!
Peace be within your walls and security within your towers!
(Psalm 122:6-7, ESV)*

The impact of covid-19 and the responses of governments to it have had many further consequences. One of them has been disquiet among God's people. Opinions are strongly divided on how best to react in the current circumstances. What is essential to worship? What justifies restrictions on how Christians worship? What are the roles of state and church where matters of public worship are concerned? When is one justified in practising what one professes, even if it means defying the orders of civil authorities?

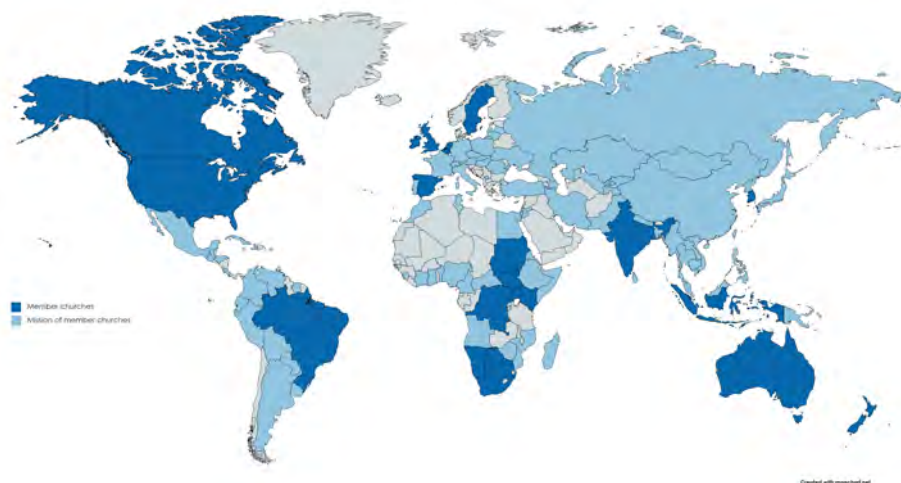
In a sense, division is good. For indicates that people take their faith seriously. It means that the matters in discussion are important to people.

However, division is not right. "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." (1Corinthians 1:10) God's people are exhorted "to walk in a manner

worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3).

How is this done, when the rifts run deep? It is through prayer to the God "who is able to far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). It is through the careful study of Scripture, which proclaims Christ, who created peace between God and us (Romans 5:1), and who left us His peace, who gave us His peace (John 14:27). It is through listening to each other and doing all we can so that another does not stumble. For the kingdom of God is a matter of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

May LORD lift up His countenance upon us and give us peace. ✳



Nations where ICRC member churches and their mission projects are located



The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).

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Whose Domain?

During the late 1860s, early 1870s one finds in the writings of the Rev. Dr. Abraham Kuyper the first references to what would eventually become known as the idea of sphere sovereignty. This concept was carefully articulated by Kuyper, among others, in his Six Stone Lectures on Calvinism, presented at Princeton in 1898.

“Sphere Sovereignty” is the idea that God has divided creation in to various “spheres”, each with its own laws. Thus, in time, especially through the musings of the Calvinist philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd, this idea has also become known as the “Philosophy of the Cosmogenic Idea” or, to translate the Dutch more closely, “Philosophy of the Law Idea” (*Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*).

Among others, this worldview posits that God has determined three basic “spheres of sovereignty” for human existence. Those three spheres are family, church, and civil society. It was argued that these three spheres are under the direct authority of God and that it is contrary to God's design for one sphere to order things in another sphere. There is an own sovereignty before God in each sphere.

Now, individual humans operate in all spheres, and have a right to act. However, especially where church and state are concerned, the authorities within each sphere are not to encroach upon the terrain of another. One very practical consequence of this thinking, is that education is the responsibility of parents and thus schools are to be operated by parents, not by the church, nor by the state.

The current pandemic and the responses of governments around the world to the pandemic have rekindled thinking about Kuyper's legacy. It should be noted that Kuyper's concepts have been expanded, nuanced, and critiqued during the past century. Thus much of today's thinking builds not only on Kuyper, but also on Reformational Philosophy, on the thoughts of men like Herman Dooyeweerd and Klaas Schilder, and of other theologians and philosophers, not necessarily Dutch (John Frame is one of them).

The burning question today is, to what extent does the government have authority in the matter of public worship? It is commonly accepted that the government has a right to prescribe a building code for a church building, and hold a church to a fire code. But on what grounds may the government prohibit in-person public worship?

In The Netherlands this is impossible, as the Dutch Constitution prevents it. In Canada, however, such a prohibition has happened. Where I live, it has been in place now for four months. Some argue that this is contrary to the Canadian Constitution, more specifically the Charter of Rights which protects freedom of conscience, freedom of assembly, and freedom of conscience. Others argue it is allowed, provided the measures are temporary and justified.

The issue of sphere sovereignty is a difficult one. On the back page of this *Lux Mundi* you will find a version of the Belgic Confession article 36 on the civil authorities. Two versions actually: the one printed is that of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the one that would include the “deleted words” – deleted under the influence of Kuyper – is that of the Free Reformed Churches in North America. For the sake of completeness, where words were deleted the United Reformed Churches in North America, inherited the following from the Christian Reformed Church in North America:

And being called in this manner to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to God, the civil rulers have the task, subject to God's law, of removing every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and to every aspect of divine worship.

They should do this while completely refraining from every tendency toward exercising absolute authority, and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them, with the means belonging to them.

They should do it in order that the Word of God may have free course; the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress; and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.¹

What does the Reformed/Presbyterian confession on the civil authorities imply for the church as it sees governments do things that impact or interfere with the core business of the church: to assemble together for the public worship of the LORD God Almighty, our Triune God?

This edition

Elsewhere in this *Lux Mundi* I describe (at length, I beg your indulgence) what has happened in British Columbia,

¹ *Trinity-Psalter Hymnal*, 2018, p. 870



Canada. Presented also are reflections on the church during covid-19 and pandemic restrictions from New Zealand, South Korea, and South Africa. We gratefully publish the musings of a missionary with a Canadian background, currently serving for an Australian church in the nation Papua New Guinea.

Further, you will find a press release from the coordinating committee of the ICRC (including the decision to postpone

the next ICRC to October 2022) and the fruit the ICRC Diaconal Committee's hard work. Finally, there is a book review by the ICRC chairman, the Rev. Dr. Dick Moes, on the Rev. S.G. de Graaf, an important figure in history of redemptive historical exegesis and preaching.

Enjoy the read!



A Pandemic of Disassembling

Many around the world are saying that things will never be the same after the Covid-19 pandemic. Some have also applied that to the church. I cannot say for certain whether the Reformed Churches of New Zealand will be permanently altered or not. But I would like to point out some of the danger-areas.

The vanishing member

I have heard, anecdotally, that some churches have experienced membership loss in the wake of lockdowns. This is, perhaps, the most obvious effect of the pandemic, though perhaps not the most common in our churches. Those who leave during or after a lockdown are most likely those who were never committed in the first place. I can think of a few reasons why lockdown might move them to action they might otherwise not have taken: perhaps they discovered that they enjoyed not having anything to do with the church and concluded that this must mean that they did not really belong; perhaps they had been planning to leave for some time and thought that it would be easier to disappear when church was not meeting anyway; or perhaps they discovered that they preferred the on-line services of some non-Reformed church.

The smorgasbord diet

Lockdown provided an opportunity for members of our churches to vary their diet. Of course, internet has for some time now enabled our members to watch services from other churches from around the world. No doubt, many have taken advantage of this option when on holiday, or

when sick at home on a Sunday. Some, also, watch these services in addition to attending the services of their own church regularly.

This technology has a good side, but it also comes with dangers. One of those dangers is more acute owing to the time in which we live: a restless age, where people are taught from an early age that they must have constant change in order to entertain. Having the same man in the pulpit from week-to-week, preaching in the same style, is not exactly refreshing change. The style may not be very entertaining. The temptation is to look elsewhere for a more varied and more amusing diet. There are plenty of preachers to choose from – celebrity preachers, those who appeal to the youth, those who tell jokes etc. Dissatisfaction with one's own church or minister might then increase. Lockdown did not create this danger, but it did provide ample opportunity to explore the possibilities. It could accelerate the trend toward seeking a wider set of options on the ecclesiastical and homiletical smorgasbord.

The dispersed assembly

During lockdown our churches had to work through the issue of whether “virtual services” were church services in the full sense. Opinions varied considerably on this. In my view, this is the biggest area of danger connected with the Covid-19 pandemic. The danger is best illustrated by taking an extreme point of view – that virtual on-line services are still just as much services as when we assemble under normal conditions. For the logical conclusion might be that



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it is not necessary to assemble together at all. Why bother meeting for church services, if an on-line service ticks all the boxes?

I am not suggesting that any of our members would take things to such an extreme. But I would suggest that the zeal for assembling may decrease if one believes that an on-line service is pretty much the same thing. If you feel tired, or just a little out-of-sorts, why not stay home and watch? In some ways, it is even more enjoyable: on the one hand, you can remove annoying distractions, while on the other hand, you can fix yourself a coffee while you watch, pause and take a break etc.

To combat that kind of thinking, I want to point out that the Bible puts a huge emphasis on physically meeting together for worship. You can get at this by looking up details of the biblical words for “church,” “congregation” and “assembly.” There are five main words used to cover these ideas in the Old Testament and five in the New Testament. There are many instances of these words in the Scripture e.g., Num. 10, where the whole congregation was called to assemble when they heard the silver trumpets blowing. Some of the New Testament words are quite well-known – *ekkle̓sia* and *sunagõge*. The word *ekkle̓sia* (“church”) means “called out.” It is connected with the OT Hebrew, *qehilah*, which comes from a word that means “to call.” The *qehilah*, the assembly or congregation, refers to a group that is called to gather – in the case of a worship service, called by God to assemble in His presence. The other words in Hebrew and Greek are similar in meaning. We could combine the various nuances this way: corporate worship involves the people appointed by the Lord assembling together, to offer worship to Him together, at the appointed times and places. This definition not only fits the congregation on earth, but also the heavenly assembly (Heb. 12:23), in which verse the word for “assembly” emphasizes the gathering of *all* the elect.

In all this there is no mistaking the importance of physically gathering to worship the Lord side-by-side. As we do so, we magnify the Name of the Lord, by making a “loud noise” together. Note the emphasis on a multitude praising God with a loud voice in Revelation 5:12, 7:10, 19:1 etc. The glory of the Lord is so great that it warrants a multitude assembling to praise Him with a loud voice. This also encourages the members of the church, as they see others alongside them praising God and confessing His Name. That is why we must take care that we do not play down, however

inadvertently, the physical assembling together of the church. The effect of lockdown should have been to make us appreciate this privilege all the more, rather than to increase our desire for virtual services. I know that has been the effect in many cases, but I am concerned that for some it may have had the opposite effect.

Confusion over elements

As Reformed churches, we hold to the “Puritan Reformed regulative principle” – which has to do with how we use the Scripture to regulate our worship. There are different views on that subject, but I accept the one that is expressed in our Confessions: that we only do in worship that which is warranted by God's Word cf. LD 35, Q/A 96 and WCF 21:1. That implies that we should be sure that what we do in corporate worship is what the Lord wants to see in a corporate worship service, while what we do in private/family worship is what He wants to see in that context.

There has been much discussion about what elements are unique to corporate worship, as distinct from private or family worship. That there are distinctions should not be in doubt: we do not, for example, baptize or hold the Lord's Supper in our homes. May we, then, have an on-line Lord's Supper service from home? Should there be a “call to worship,” a vatum and salutation, an offering, a benediction? We have not been able to agree on such things.

Personally, I regard on-line “services” as essentially church-assisted family worship. I therefore favour leaving out some of the elements of corporate worship, to reinforce the fact that these settings are not the same. I also realize that during lockdown, our members wanted some sense of normality in their lives. If we go too far in distancing the on-line service from our normal worship – for example, by making the on-line service very informal – that might have the effect of encouraging a change in the way we hold our normal services.

Obviously, we need to strive to reach a common understanding of these things: one in which we do not make the abnormal seem normal; but one that encourages us to value what we normally have, even in abnormal circumstances.



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Korean Churches and COVID-19

It has already been more than a year since the outbreak of the COVID19, but we are still not able to completely overcome the pandemic. Expectations from vaccines are higher than ever, but there are still many challenges to overcome.

The problems caused by the virus also affected churches. Churches are not able to get together for public worship, to have fellowship of the saints and to operate Sunday Schools. This article contains brief details on how the Covid19 spread in Korea, affected Korean churches, and how churches in Korea reacted.

The spread of Covid19 in Korea

Covid19 began in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, with unexplained pneumonia patients, and from there spread throughout China and Asia, as well as around the world. The first confirmed case in Korea was from Wuhan, China on January 20, 2020 and by February 17th, the number of Koreans infected with the virus increased to 30. Compared to other countries, the rate of increase was insignificant, so it was not a level of concern. However, the situation changed rapidly with the 31st infected person in Daegu on February 18th.

The 31st confirmed person was identified as a member of the *Shincheonji*, a sect in Korea, and the nationwide pandemic began through the *Shincheonji* conference, which thousands of people attended. As a result, the number of confirmed cases increased rapidly, and on February 29, the number of confirmed cases reached 909.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government executed the

cancellation procedure of the *Shincheonji* Incorporation for procrastinating or false submission of the list of its members. *Shincheonji* continued their meetings through their secret gathering facilities.

Amid the spread of the COVID19 to *Shincheonji*, a mass infection of 41 people occurred in a Protestant church in Busan. The media reported that Protestants were the source of the coronavirus. Not long after the Busan Church incident, the *Sarangjeil* Church (Seoul) incident occurred where Jeon Kwang-hoon, a Protestant pastor and extreme-right political activist, is the senior pastor. The church had been pushing an opposition rally against the current regime. This continued during the spread of the virus, arguing the cause of the spread of Corona lies with the government and that the government is suppressing religious freedom.

On March 26th, the Seoul Metropolitan Government issued an order to prohibit the church from assembling for violating the health and quarantine guidelines. The city of Seoul announced that the church is prohibited from any kind of assembly, including worship service, and that it will impose a fine of 3 million won per person if it violates the order, and that it will also claim indemnities from the church. According to the Seoul Metropolitan Government, the church members worshiped without wearing a mask and there were even members of the church who were swearing and assaulting government officials and reporters. The collective infection of Covid19 in *Shincheonji*, Busan churches, and *Sarangjeil* Church sparked negative public opinion with respect to Protestant churches. As we will discuss later, divisions occurred even within the churches in



Korea. There are people who claim that the cause of the spread of Covid19 in Korea is church, and churches need to actively cooperate with the government. Others, meanwhile, claim it is wrong to blame church, and argue that the government has been oppressing the church. In April 2020, the number of cumulative confirmed cases exceeded 10,000 for the first time, and in early May, the group infection that occurred in the *Itaewon* club rapidly spread throughout the country. In November, detailed matters on social distancing were implemented (See the chart). The five stages are divided into stage 1, stage 1.5, stage 2, stage 2.5, and stage 3, with different stages being implemented depending on the degree of infection. As of February 16, 2021, the number of cumulative confirmed cases in Korea was 84,325, cumulative deaths, 1,534 and cumulative quarantine releases, 74,551. Currently, social distancing is at level 1.5. In-person capacity for on-site worship is limited to 30% and eating in church facilities is prohibited.

Five levels of social distancing					
A revised, five-level social distancing scheme will go into effect from Saturday. The rules have new levels of 1.5 and 2.5.					
Level	Level 1	Level 1.5	Level 2	Level 2.5	Level 3
Definition	Spontaneous outbreaks	Community transmission begins	Full-blown community transmission	Nationwide epidemic begins	Full-blown nationwide epidemic
Outbreak status	Seven-day average of daily new infections under 100 in the capital area, 30 in Chungcheong, South and North Jeolla and Gyeongang provinces, 10 in Gyeonggi and Jeju Island	Seven-day average of daily new infections under 100 in the capital area, 30 in Chungcheong, Jeolla and Gyeongang provinces, 10 in Gyeonggi and Jeju Island	When any of the following three criteria are met: 1) New infections double in an affected region after one week of Level 1.5 social distancing 2) Level 1.5 infections continue simultaneously in two or more regions 3) Nationwide daily infection cases remain over 300 for a week	Within any of the following two criteria are met: 1) Nationwide seven-day average of new infections stays between 400-500 2) Nationwide infections spike under Level 2 social distancing 3) Proportion of patients aged 60 or older, new infection rate and hospital bed capacity for the severity of cases are considered as additional factors	Within any of the following two criteria are met: 1) Nationwide seven-day average of new infections between 500-1000 2) Nationwide infections spike under Level 2.5 social distancing 3) Proportion of patients aged 60 or older, new infection rate and hospital bed capacity for the severity of cases are considered as additional factors
Core restrictions	In-person class attendance capped at two-thirds of student body, with adjustments allowed	In-person class attendance strictly limited to two-thirds of student body	In-person class attendance capped at one-third of student body, except high schools at two-thirds	In-person class attendance capped at one-third of student body	All classes closed online
Social gatherings	Gatherings of over 100 people require prior consultations with local authorities. Additional measures mandatory throughout event	Festivals and certain other types of gatherings with over 100 participants banned	All gatherings of over 100 people banned	All gatherings of over 50 people banned	All gatherings of over 10 people banned
Religious services	Worship services allowed, with every other seat left empty. Meals and nonworship gatherings discouraged	Regular worship services allowed with indoor occupancy rate under 30 percent. Meals and nonworship gatherings prohibited	Regular worship services allowed with indoor occupancy rate under 20 percent. No meals or nonworship gatherings	All religious services move online. A maximum of 20 persons can attend in person for assistance. No meals or nonworship gatherings	All religious services move online. No meals or nonworship gatherings

Social Distancing and Controversy

One year has passed since social distancing was implemented. There is a lot of controversy about the application of social distancing to the church. Some examples of controversy as of July 2020 are as follows.

- During early stages of the pandemic before 5 levels of social distance was established, the restriction on in-person worship was 50%, while there were no restrictions on other facilities.
- During level 1.5 there was no number limit on the department stores where hundreds of people were

crowded throughout week, but for churches the limit was 70%.

c. During level 2.5, the department store still had no number restriction, and all other businesses such as video games, performance halls, and movie theaters were open while worship was completely prohibited.

d. Singers and opera actors did not need to wear masks during performance, but pastors were required to put on masks while on the pulpit. Refusal to cooperate may result in fines, closure of churches, and removal of church signs. In fact, on July 13th, city of *Guri* implemented a policy to reward people for reporting violations of the quarantine laws such as prohibiting all gatherings other than regular worship, refrain from singing and pray loud.

2 Different Opinions in Korean Church

Over the social distance controversy, within the church, there were two conflicting positions on the government's measures. One is that the government should be actively supported. The other is that the government's guidelines for quarantine discriminate against the church and are a form of oppression. The position favorable to the government asserts it is an obligation of the church as many confirmed cases have occurred within churches.

First, the positions of the supporters of the government's regulations are as follows.

- The government is not oppressing the freedom of religion. The government's intention is to make an administrative effort to help people to get back to their normal life.
- The government's health law includes the safe protection of the church's worship services, and the government is not against the church, but rather is fulfilling its duty to maintain a civil order and keep the church's activities in peace.
- To faithfully cooperate with the government's quarantine guidelines is a good way of glorifying God.
- If the church does not follow government guidelines and maintain offline worship services, it is a violation of Christ's command to love your neighbor as yourself.
- Loving neighbors means to carry out a missional calling to bring the lost to our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is necessary to actively participate in the government's quarantine law and not focus solely on face-to-face worship. The positions of those who claim that the government is discriminating the church are as follows.
- Sunday is a day that is distinct from other days and must

be remembered and kept holy, and the entire day is a day to worship God and keep it holy.

b. Sunday worship is not a private devotion, it is a public worship where all members of the church get together, and all believers should not carelessly or intentionally neglect this worship.

c. God commands public worship and it is always related with actual and physical place.

d. It is not necessary to say that online worship in an unavoidable circumstance is biblical. If online worship is biblical, the churches in Korea should have insisted that online worship is biblical even before the outbreak.

e. The government may encourage moderation in church meetings, but never has the power to stop church services. These two positions have spread both online and offline. In some progressive camps, a poster saying “We (church) apologize for the coronavirus outbreak.” was posted on the outside walls of some churches, and some shared the same poster on Facebook. Some conservative camps issued a statement against the government and went to government facilities to protest. These two extremes are now being transferred from political conflict to theological conflict,

Official statement of the Presbyterian Churches in Korea

As the social conflicts were escalating, the three large Presbyterian denominations (The Kosin, Daeshin, and Hapshin) issued joint statements on July 10, 2020 and on Aug 21, 2020.

The summary of its contents of the first statement (July 10) is as follows.

a. Prime Minister Jeong Sye-gyun said that as of 6:00pm July 10, all small groups, hymns, and loud prayers and speeches in the church were prohibited. Violation of quarantine has occurred in some churches, the application of responsive measures that are extreme and were taken unilaterally is very regrettable.

b. Prohibiting only church gatherings is considered an unconstitutional measure that excessively infringes on the freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution, especially the freedom of religious consciousness and religious activities.

c. The request to stop all small group meetings in the church this time makes the quarantine authorities doubt that there is a political intention to transfer the responsibility for the spread of the infection to the Korean church. The demand to unilaterally stop all small group meetings of the church must

be reconsidered.

d. The Kosin, Daeshin, and Hapshin churches have actively cooperated with the government and will continue to cooperate in meeting the needs of victims and the community, such as providing plasma for cured members and donating blood by church groups for insufficient blood.

The summary of the second statement (Aug 21) after the announcement of social distance level 2 was as follows.

a. We regret the reality that while churches have been doing their best to abide by covid restrictions, the government has transferred responsibility for the failure of restrictions to impede covid solely to the church.

b. We take responsibility for the failure of the church to serve as the salt and the light of the world and to control the groups that are trying to make the church a vehicle for political opinions, and we repent before God.

c. Each church will abide by the quarantine laws, and over the next two weeks in the metropolitan area, we will convert public worship to online services and refrain from all small group gatherings,

d. We will pray for officials and medical staff who are working hard to end Covid19, patients and their families, neighbors who are struggling with flood damage.

Conclusion

There have been many difficulties in Korea (and the world) due to the Covid19. Not only the lives of people were sacrificed, but the damage caused by internal conflicts in the Korean church has also been increasing.

Regardless of which political position is supported, the Korean church needs to humble itself before God. If the pandemic is a terrifying thing, we must be more afraid in the presence of God, who is able to throw bodies and souls into the fire of hell.

Churches and Christians have an obligation to pray for the authorities, respect and obey their lawful orders. But it is also important to realize that online worship cannot replace in-person worship because essential elements such as the sacraments are missing in online worship. It should be allowed only in emergency situations. Therefore, we should pray that the pandemic will soon end so that we will be able to enjoy the true joy of worship. Looking at Church history, after a crisis, there has always been a period of revival. Likewise, I am confident that God will do the same when we put our trust only in Him. ✱

Church and State in British Columbia During the Pandemic

Canada is fast becoming a post-Christian nation. One: It is one of only three countries in the world that has no laws on abortion whatsoever.

Two: A few years ago, active euthanasia was legalized under the euphemism "Medical Assistance in Dying" (MAiD). Because the law was considered discriminatory it is currently undergoing review, to be expanded. Close to where I live a hospice saw its management taken over for refusing to offer MAiD.

Three: Sexual orientation and gender identity is on the radar, as a bill is before the parliament to make "conversion therapy" illegal. The definition of "conversion therapy" is so vague that the law likely will outlaw a pastor encouraging a church member to live by Biblical norms.

These are types of battle we've seen coming. In Canada we are blessed with organizations like WeNeedALaw and ARPA (Association for Reformed Political Action) as well as church members in the federal parliament, provincial parliaments, and on local councils.

Who would have thought, though, that the day would come where churches would take a government to court over an indefinite and unsubstantiated prohibition on in-person worship?

Allow me to tell the story.

How things were

In Canada, public health is primarily a provincial concern. It is provincial governments and the provincial chief health officer that decide on health orders. The story I tell is the story of British Columbia (known as BC), the most south-western province of Canada. When pandemic measures impacting public life were first decided to (mid March 2020), BC was ruled by a left leaning party with the slimmest of slim majorities in parliament.

Like many jurisdictions strict measures were decided to. A state of emergency was declared, and has been renewed every two weeks since; this declaration allows enforcement of health orders. In-person worship was restricted to just 10 individuals, and schools moved "on-line".

Within a few weeks, though, restrictions became more nuanced and thus more relaxed. All gatherings and events, including in-person worship, was increased to 50. It seemed

odd, for the number '50' was rigid, no matter how large the space, even for outdoors. The rationale was that this allowed for effective contact tracing. Facemasks were not mandated, and restrictions and enforcement, compared to other jurisdictions, were pretty minimal. With its approach BC became the poster child of Canada, if not North America. The restrictions were '50' per space, not event. Thus 'satellite' worship campuses were created: groups of up to 50 would gather in a gym or workshop to worship via a live stream from their church building. Church buildings were divided into zones, segregated from each other, with their own exit to outside and their own washroom facilities. In my own congregation there would be up to 50 in the auditorium and another 30 people in the foyer. Every member of my congregation could worship in-person at least once a Sunday.

There was a sense of injustice among the churches, though, as it seemed other sectors of society were treated more leniently and there was simply no attention for faith-based organizations. At the initiative of a Canadian Reformed Church (CanRC), this led to the creation of www.restorebcworshipservices.ca.



Screenshot from the website [restorebcworshipservices.ca](http://www.restorebcworshipservices.ca)

In October a provincial snap election was held. The left leaning government now won a comfortable majority. Soon after the election, infection numbers increased. On November 20 rigorous restrictions went into force. These restrictions included no interaction between households in



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private residences and a prohibition on in-person worship. “Faith does not need a building,” the chief health officer said. The Health Order specifically indicated that churches should move all worship online, using a service like Skype or Zoom.

Curiously it was not until a week later that it became clear that the measure closing down churches also implied the closure of theatres and cinemas. As to restaurants, the chief health officer noted that people need to eat, so restaurants should stay open, albeit with space restrictions.

An all churches meeting

At the initiative of a CanRC a BC a meeting of churches was organized. Initially it was primarily for ICRC/NAPARC member churches and some other invitees, but it became a broader meeting, both in-person and via Zoom. I did not check but I'm pretty confident all ICRC congregations in BC were represented at the meeting: Canadian Reformed (13), Free Reformed (3), Heritage Reformed (1), and United Reformed (6). Present also were lawyers from ARPA and JCCF (Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedom). Three of the four presenters/panelists were “ICRC” pastors, I was one of them. The discussion ranged broad, there were different opinions in the room, there was an eagerness to understand each other.

Several churches (including ICRC members) had decided to defy the prohibition on in-person worship and were looking for others to join them. They felt that God is not satisfied with online worship, that the government has no right to prohibit worship as it was, and that this act was a violation of the charter rights of Canadians.

Other churches (including ICRC members) considered online worship, for the most part, an acceptable form of worship, albeit seriously truncated. They felt that the authorities should be obeyed and, given that the Order would only last until January 8, believed it to be temporary. Some churches thus remained open or opened up for worship. Some of these have since been fined for doing so, including a church just 2 miles from my own church.

Some churches had an audience with the health minister (himself a professing Christian). I understand that when the health minister realized the churches would not toe the line, he quickly ended the meeting.

By January 8 the infection numbers were still high. Thus the government continued the order prohibiting worship. The next “reconsideration date” would be February 5. Pressure

mounted on churches to defy the order. The number of those doing so increased somewhat. Others felt that by February 5 things would be better. For Canada had started vaccinating.

Meanwhile, churches less confident were beginning to check out their legal options.

Charter Challenge

The Canadian Charter of Rights, which is part of its Constitution, guarantees freedom of conscience, of religion, and of assembly to the citizens and residents of Canada. If the exercise of these rights is suspended, there has to be a clear justification for doing so.

CONSTITUTION ACT, 1982 (80)	
PART I	
CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS	
Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law:	
GUARANTEE OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS	
Rights and freedoms in Canada	
1. The <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</i> guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.	
FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS	
Fundamental freedoms	
2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:	
(a) freedom of conscience and religion;	
(b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;	
(c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and	
(d) freedom of association.	

A group of three local churches and individuals submitted a charter challenge to the BC Supreme Court. They felt that there was no clear justification for the health orders, and thus the BC government was acting contrary to the Constitution. Two of those local churches are “ICRC” congregations.

In response to the challenge, the government sought an injunction from the courts to force these churches to comply with the health order. The request for an injunction was heard and on February 17 the judge indicated he had decided to reject it. The government has sufficient means at its disposal to escalate enforcement, the judge said, it should not use an injunction to do so. Some thought it a victory, others saw it as the judge washing his hands off of

the case.

Following this rejection, the government issued a “variance” for the three churches. A ‘variance’ is an exception to an order applied to a specific person or group of persons. The government’s variance was: worship could take place with no more than 25 people, gathered outside, with facemasks on and no singing allowed.

Now the Fraser Valley is a temperate rainforest with temperatures hovering between -2 and +10C in February and March. Ironically, following this approach is a sure-fire way of catching pneumonia.

The actual challenge itself began to be heard by the BC Supreme Court on March 1 and lasted several days. At the time of writing, the three days of hearings became four and have ended. The judge’s decision will not be made known until some time later.

So, for now, that story ends here.

Variance

The majority of CanRC (also ICRC members) took a different legal path. In line with an article found in the BC Provincial Health Act, they submitted a covid safety plan to the government and requested that they be held to this ‘variance’, rather than the public health order. The request was submitted on January 8. On February 10 the government responded with an email.

Around the same time my own church sent a letter (our third) to the government on January 16, asking it to explain whether a Bible Study could be classified as a “support group”. On February 2 the government responded with an email.

The response my church received did not show any indication of interaction with our question. As a result, my church decided that Bible Studies could resume in our building, in keeping with our covid safety plan.

The response the group of CanRC did not show any indication of interaction with the covid safety plan, something the Health Act requires if a ‘variance’ is denied.

Using software, a check was run on the two responses. It indicated that the two were identical, except for the addressee. Later it was a clear another CanRC had also received the same response to a letter it had submitted.

It was then that the group of CanRC decided to petition the courts to overturn the government’s rejection of their plan. This petition was submitted to the government on March 2, the second day of the “Charter Challenge”.

As a sidenote, a few days earlier the Roman Catholic Archbishop of BC also submitted something to the courts, seeking permission for in-person worship. Thus there are now three challenges to the severity of the orders in the courts.

From the pan into the fire

On November 20 the prohibition on in-person worship came into effect, until January 8. On January 8 it was continued until February 5. On February 5 it was continued “until further notice”. There is no clarity whatsoever as to what conditions will have to be met for in-person worship to be resumed. Since early February the covid infection rate has been fairly steady, though very recently it has started to climb again. Our chief medical officer considers it too high for restrictions to change.

Now, during all this time, in-person dining (with seating restrictions and facemask mandates) continues to be allowed. Other than common covid precautions, there are no restrictions on stores. Gyms are open for certain types of activities. Recently Elections Canada asked if it could use our church building as a polling booth, should a federal election be called.

The churches feel they have gone from the pan into the fire. We now have no way of knowing when the prohibitions might end or under what conditions.

Eroding trust

We are called to submit to the authorities and to have patience with their weakness and shortcomings (Lord’s Day 39). The Dort church order mandates the leaders of the church to be in communication with the government to ensure that authorities are favourably inclined towards the churches (CO-CanRC article 28). Thus, as soon as I became aware that the provincial government was organizing a phone conference with the premier, health minister, and chief medical officer, I signed on. This was in July 2020.

On November 19 I became aware that I had not been invited to attend another such phone conference a day or two earlier. I inquired why, received a phone call from the premier’s office with a plausible explanation which I accepted, though the explanation did indicate neglect.

Thus, I found myself participating in a second phone conference on December 14. At that conference, churches were informed that the government had appointed an individual to liaise between churches and the government,



to gather experiences and thoughts on how to “open up”. We could all expect an invite to a meeting with this individual soon. You may guess where this is going, It has been twelve weeks now and I am still waiting for my invitation. “Sent into the reeds with a clod of dirt,” as a Dutch saying goes.

During that December 14 meeting a rabbi pointed out that orthodox Jews are forbidden the use of electricity on Sabbath; “online” worship is not an option, and so the order had shut down the synagogues. I sensed it was an awkward moment, for the premier, who has a warm and jovial character, introduced this rabbi as the man who had led the government's recent Hanukkah celebration. The chief health officer promised that the matter would be looked into. Given what the current orders state, it has been, for there is a variance for synagogues. It raises the question: why were synagogues granted a variance when the CanRC were not?

An issue for BC has also been that the government never presented data on transmissions in church settings. Such information was finally provided in early February, the figures spanned the summer and early fall of 2020 (i.e., they did have the figures). The figures made clear that 0.25% of all transmissions had taken place in faith settings. Realize that this includes transmissions that took place during wedding receptions held in faith-based buildings. Realize also that the highest infection rate has been in the city of Surrey, which is predominantly Sikh, and that the Sikh religion is very communal as it involves meals in gurdwaras. Finally, after much digging around someone found some comparable figures: the transmission rates in gyms for roughly the same period was 0.95%, 4x higher than for faith-based organizations.

Yet gyms are open while churches are closed.¹

Locally

In the city of Vernon, BC, there is a CanRC. One of its members sought the ear of a town councillor, and the councillor then moved that the Town Council declare churches an “essential service”. This motion was adopted with just one vote against.

In the township of Langley, where my church is located, a town councillor moved that churches found to be in non-compliance with health orders should be denied property tax-exemption. For my church, losing that exemption would increase our annual budget by 25%; we're talking tens of thousands of dollars. The minister of the local PCA (a

NAPARC church) made a legal submission to the local government and spoke during a council meeting. The council referred the motion for legal counsel. We suspect it will not gain the required support: several of the councillors, including our mayor, are members of churches. But while this motion grabbed the attention of the provincial media, the one in Vernon hardly did.

Complying under protest

When the order prohibiting in-person worship was issued, the council of my church (besides myself, 5 elders and 3 deacons) decided to comply under protest, and to engage the authorities. That, as I have already explained, did not really go anywhere.

As made clear in our testimony to the courts, my own church has likely never fully complied with the order. For the sake of the spiritual wellbeing of some members, we have allowed exceptions when it comes to worship. When it was reported by members that singing during worship is so difficult when one is participating “online”, we created the category of “singers” for our worship service, increasing the number present in the building. While most figure that the government caps the process for live-streamed worship at 10, we've always had over 15 people in church, and sometimes close to 25.

For December and January we closed our building to all small group activities, except essential meetings like those of the office bearers. Meanwhile, public sports bars remained open, and “support meetings” for organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous could continue. As noted earlier, in February we allowed Bible Studies again in our building, though other activities (e.g. choir) remain prohibited.

Thankfully the restrictions placed on youth and children has been minimal. Other than moving to a larger room, catechism instruction has continued this season uninterrupted. In BC schools have continued in-person, though larger schools have had to modify teaching schedules.

On Sunday, March 14, we began in-person worship and celebrated the Lord's Supper in three consecutive services, following a covid plan far more stringent than the one used by the restaurant I dined at on the Friday evening before.

¹ <https://churchforvancouver.ca/where-is-the-evidence-to-support-the-closure-of-religious-worship-in-bc/>



Why should a temporary but indefinite health order that shows no equity given how other sectors of society are treated override our confession to diligently attend the church of God (Lord's Day 38) and celebrate the Lord's supper at least once every 3 months (Church Order article 60)?

Peace and harmony

A major concern since March 2020 has been peace and harmony in the churches. Discussions among CanRC minister have been hefty. In part, I find, because ministers reason from their own (provincial) context. Discussions within local councils have been hefty. As churches open-up in defiance of the health order, office bearers and congregations are divided. Our next classis has several appeals on its agenda, regarding a church's decisions with respect to in-person worship.

At bottom the issue is one of freedom of conscience in the church. The Belgic Confession states in article 32 on the discipline of the church: "Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God." Some believe obedience to the fifth and sixth commandments requires them to stay away from the

church building at this time for however long it takes, others believe obedience to the second and fourth commandments requires them to be in the church building for worship.

For an opinion on this, see the article by Rev. Dr. J. VanVliet (CanRC) in the last Lux Mundi. He has since written a resource for the churches, which has been revised in the light of responses. It is "an opinion", there are many within CanRC leadership, especially in BC, who are of a different opinion.

Faith and prayer

Somewhere in the future there will be a time for reflection. But the history of God's people shows that in the heat of the battle revelation is understood with a new clarity and convictions are formed. In all things we need to remember that our convictions need to be firmly based on God's Word, and that our actions are to reflect our convictions. "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23)

We pray for an end to the prohibition of in-person worship in BC. We pray for an end to the current pandemic. We pray for an end to the march of secularism in Canada.

We pray for the Kingdom of Christ to come in all its fullness. ✱

The Lord willing
the next
General Meeting
of
the International Conference of Reformed Churches
hosted by
the Reformed Churches in Namibia and South Africa
will take place in
Windhoek, Namibia
in
October 2022
(note change of year)

What does COVID-19 say about you?

Like everyone else in this world, COVID-19 has greatly affected my life. Unlike nearly everyone else in this world, I have travelled all over the world and observed first-hand how different people and cultures have reacted to the global pandemic.

I was in Canada on furlough last year when the world heard the first rumblings about the “Wuhan Virus.” Shortly after that, the media was reporting how China erected a massive field hospital in a very short time to deal with the outbreak. Canada's reaction was much different. I remember being at my in-laws – Chinese Canadians – when health officials made the announcement that Canada had seen its first case. We were told not to worry, the COVID-positive travellers were to go home and self-isolate for 14 days, and everyone would be fine. Good, I thought, we aren't freaking out and applying heavy-handed governmental solutions like the Chinese. I'm a Canadian, and like other Canadians, I like the moderate solutions.

Singapore

On our way back to Papua New Guinea in February 2020 we transited through Singapore, where we also spent a few days, and here we had our first thought of “Oh, this is a big deal.” We arrived on a Sunday and managed to get to the First Evangelical Reformed Church for their evening service. When we arrived, I had my first experience of someone holding a gun-like implement to my head. While I was ready to confess Christ or be shot, the purpose was to check my temperature, not my devotion to the Lord. After the service, I asked a brother there about the current situation. His answer surprised me: “Yes, we believe that the government is taking this quite seriously and we should follow their instructions.” The attitude was very different from prevailing attitude that I had heard—and read on Facebook—from fellow Canadian Christians.

The attitude displayed by my brother-in-Christ in Singapore turned out to be reflective of Singaporeans in general. Almost every store had a sign posted out front that read “Masks Sold Out,” but there were no stores or public places that required masking. They didn't need to, as the populace was generally so compliant. It was here that I learned a

valuable lesson for this pandemic: how you respond to COVID-19 probably says more about your culture than it does about your faith in God or his Word.

Papua New Guinea

Returning to Papua New Guinea, I could see the same correlation between the larger cultural reaction and the reactions of my brothers and sisters in Christ. PNG, you might remember, remained COVID-free longer than most countries. But when it did come, the government followed the playbook that had been established by many other countries in the world by this time: close the airports, lock down the country, ban all gatherings including churches, tell people to stay home, practice good hygiene. Well, the government was able to enforce some of these measures and attempted to enforce others, but after about a week, life quickly started going back to normal for most people. Papua New Guineans in general are okay with other people telling them what to do, but they are also fine with ignoring those people and doing what they feel they need to do. “The freedom to come and go and do as I please” is a deeply ingrained cultural value. The churches generally followed the same course. Initially, many of them stopped services for a week or two in deference to the government. After that, many started gathering again, but perhaps they put

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Rev. Ryan deJonge preaching in a market place in the highlands of PNG

some measures in place for washing hands or avoiding handshakes. This too lasted only a week or two. One congregation I work with stopped services for two weeks, and when they returned, they asked members not to shake hands. This lasted for about one Sunday, I think, before a senior woman in the congregation stood up after the service and, just like always, started walking around and shaking everyone's hands. No one was going to be so rude as to tell her not to; instead, everyone sort of shrugged their shoulders, and everyone started shaking everyone else's hands. Shaking hands is a cultural practice that is also deeply ingrained.

Australia

I haven't travelled to Australia during this pandemic—and woe to the foreigner who tries—but living next door in PNG and being sent by Australian churches I had some insight into how they reacted to the pandemic. The Australian reaction has probably been surprising to many. They put into place a very hard border and strict lockdowns wherever the virus was present, and they did so without very much pushback or complaining from their citizens about rights and freedoms. What is up with these people? many people from other Western nations thought. There are two aspects of Australian culture that I think played into their reactions. First, they are a strongly egalitarian culture, but not a strongly individualistic one. Thus, they have a strong sense of “we are all in this together.” It has been described by others as a culture of “mateship,” where that word is understood, of course, in the Aussie sense of the word. There is that, and also a strong independentist streak, which makes them say, as a whole, we are going to do things our own way regardless of what the WHO says. What I have noticed among the Australian Christians is that, while they may not like the approach of strict lockdowns, they are content to go along with them and not raise much of a fuss because, after all, “we are all in this together.”

Canada

Returning to Canada again this past December, I found I had to put my cross-cultural missionary skills to use. As a missionary in a foreign context, there is a sense where you are always trying to figure out what the 'rules' are—the unwritten, unspoken, cultural assumptions—so that you don't cause unnecessary offence and so that you can effectively communicate the gospel. Every new interaction



Church plant in Hila, PNG

requires openness and grace. In Canada, not only have I had to learn what the rules were in the grocery store—put on a mask, follow the arrows, stand 6 feet apart in line, etc—I also have to try to approach every new interaction with that same openness and grace, because I don't know what the person in front of me thinks about this “new normal.”

Cross-cultural missionaries need to become students of culture as they seek to impact those cultures with the gospel. In sharing these observations, I am not saying that all reactions are equal, nor are they equally right and just, nor are they equally biblical. What I am saying, however, is that we are all impacted by our culture and in many ways operate in ways that are consistent with our broader culture. In my experience, the COVID-19 pandemic has proven this to be true.

What we should do with this observation is another matter, and not one that there is space to discuss in depth here. But let me offer two applications in closing. First, I believe that this

realization should make us slow to judge our brothers and sisters in Christ. One's faith in Christ or his Word is not the only factor that impacts how that person is reacting to the pandemic and all that has gone with it. Second, as we engage with the reactions of others, we should do so with an attitude of openness and grace. The Apostle Paul tells us to “in humility count others more significant than yourselves,” because of the union that we have with Christ. We need to be concerned about what our governments are doing, how our worship services are being affected, and what effects lockdowns are having on the individuals and businesses in our communities. But in all this, we need to put on a Christ-like attitude of humility, love, and grace as we interact with others, especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ. ✱



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Churches Writing a Direct Letter to the President about Covid-19 Restrictions

Introduction to the letter

With the letter below we do not provide a theoretic exposé of the relation between church and state, but it does illustrate how churches interact with government in practice, specifically regarding the current Covid-19 pandemic. It reveals how the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa, an ICRC member, view their role towards the authorities in the present circumstances, a role that can perhaps be described with the following keywords:

- independent position,
- respectful attitude,
- constructive criticism,
- Scripture based advice.

This letter is not unique to the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. A first version was drafted by the Antioch Bible Church in Johannesburg. As Free Reformed Churches we edited it in several respects, not however changing the main gist of it. We offer it for publication in Lux Mundi. Perhaps it can be helpful to churches in other parts of the world. We currently face a global pandemic, with governments taking very similar actions all around the world.

Dr PG Boon



January 27th, 2021

To the Honourable President of South Africa and the Honourable Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

Dear President Ramaphosa and Minister Dlamini-Zuma,

Letter requesting a change to the regulations relating to the current Level 3 Lockdown and Churches

This request concerns the recent regulations promulgated on 29 December 2020, no 11217, Volume 666, specifically regulation 36(3) which prohibits all religious gatherings until half February ("**the recent regulation**"). It is written in anticipation of what will follow thereafter.

Respect

As Christians we have the highest regard for our President and his government, and your God-given role, as the Bible instructs us to honour all established rulers (1 Peter 2:13-17; Titus 3:1-2). Our God has instituted the realm of state government and has placed you in authority as his servant, to punish evil and enforce the law, for which we are very grateful (Romans 13:1-7).

Know that we pray regularly for you and the many challenges you face, that God may strengthen and uphold you, and giving you much wisdom (1 Timothy 2:1-4). As Christians, we are called to obey the authorities that God have placed over us and to make your job easier, not harder. Our Christian faith should make us the best of citizens. It is for this reason that we make our humble and respectful appeal.

We are appealing that you please consider adjusting your latest gazetted regulations (29 December) to recognise the right of *religious gatherings*, based on three grounds: (1) our conscience; (2) the good of our nation; (3) our Constitution. Furthermore, we write to express our objection to any extension of the recent regulation, which is an outright prohibition on religious gatherings.

Our conscience

According to the Bible, public assembly is an essential, non-negotiable article of our faith. The New Testament word “church” itself means “assembly, gathering”. Physically meeting together isn't merely a nice thing to do; it's part of what a church is. We do not believe the church equals the building; but the church does, by definition, require public gathering (1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19,23,28). We have the possibility to livestream services, however this by far does not match the experience and fellowship of a real church service. Furthermore, livestream worship services are a luxury of the rich; the majority of churches in South Africa have no such option.

Please understand that in no way do we seek to be rebellious or troublesome to you, or any civil authorities. We are simply continuing in our obedience to our highest authority, our risen Lord and King, Jesus Christ.

The Good of Our Nation

In the latest regulations, there is thankfully now much allowance given to most public activities for the health of our economy. We fully support your recognition of these *acceptable risks* for the overall good of society. Why then can a religious gathering not also be seen as an acceptable risk, this of course subject to regulations as wearing facial masks, sanitizing, taking temperature, and reducing the number of attendees in a building to ensure social distancing. Surely the risk of viral spread in a taxi, restaurant, casino, shopping centre is no less (if not greater) than a religious gathering? Yet now religious gatherings are banned entirely.

As Round 2 of the Covid-19 Democracy Surveys by the University of Johannesburg and the HSRC show, emotional and mental support is urgently required by all who are living in this country. In this survey a list of nine different emotions was presented to choose from. The most commonly experienced emotion was stress (57%). This was followed (in descending order) by fear (42%), frustration/irritability (39%), depression (36%), and boredom (30%). Sadness was mentioned by 27%, loneliness by 27% and anger by 24%. These emotional conditions affect all the people of our country. These include those who are infected, and are often in fear of death; those who care for the infected people, such as medical personnel, cleaners, ambulance drivers; and those who feel threatened by the pandemic.

History often shows that Christian churches are unparalleled in their ability to instill faith, hope, and charity in people. Such character traits are vital to the well-being of society, particularly in times of crises. God has made us as both bodies and souls, and the health of our land depends on caring for both. We would maintain that the spiritual and mental health of the nation is of equal significance. Our mission is to tend to those needs, and we are very eager to do so.

We are all aware of the current rise in mental health issues including panic attacks, depression, suicide and many other social ills – the very needs which religious gatherings seek to relieve and remedy through our message of faith, hope and peace. In addition, the Covid crisis has brought much trauma and grief, not in the least among the poor, for which the church offers true comfort.

Our Constitutional Rights

In appealing to our Constitutional rights as Christians, we are following the example of the Apostle Paul, who twice appealed on his legal rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:25). Unlike the rights of the businesses you have allowed to remain open, our Constitution enshrines and gives a special place to the Freedom of Religion (Sections 15 & 31).

In times past, we are thankful that the Constitutional Court has often stated the importance of the right of religious freedom as part of human dignity and equality within society. We are appealing to you to uphold our hard-won Constitutional rights by allowing us to gather responsibly, for the sake of our collective conscience and the health of your people.

The following are further reasons why we request a change in the regulations as for the churches:

- a. No specific reason has been provided to the religious community as to why meeting in a Church setting is dangerous to the extent that it warrants an outright ban. More specifically, there has been no documented evidence provided to the Christian community that gathering in a Church is directly linked to the “second wave” of Covid and increased transmission.
- b. The previous Lockdown Level 3 regulations provided for the opening of Churches and places of Worship subject to a maximum number of attendees. Why, in the current Level 3 regulations are places of worship subjected to the Level 5 scenario, whereas other

businesses and organisations, previously closed in Level 3 remain open? These include inter alia, gyms, spas and public open spaces.

- c. The Christian community, unlike bars, casinos, spas and the like has a direct Constitutional right to practice our faith and to meet. Considered against the inconsistency to shut down churches and to keep the other institutions open, the limitation cannot be said to be reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on dignity, freedom, and equality.
- d. The Christian Church has also not been consulted, prior to the promulgation of the Regulation. This is opposed to the previous position adopted in the former Level 3 stage in 2020, when Churches were reopened after extensive consultation. We genuinely feel that through consultation a more viable “middle ground” could have been sought, to responsibly address any concerns regarding transmission short of an outright ban.
- e. Given the narrative of fear published in relation to the “second wave” of Covid, we further feel that the Christian Church is being deprived of a fundamental role, to meet peoples' profound spiritual need, in a climate of great uncertainty and fear.

Constructive Demeanour

Unlike various industries, we per se have not litigated against government to overturn regulations, which may well be successfully subject to judicial scrutiny and oversight. Instead, we desire to seek a more constructive demeanour in attempting to consult and engage. It is unfair that the Christian Church should be met with such an extreme, oppressive and encroaching ban, set against this history of previous consultation.

We call upon you to permit the re-opening of the Christian Church. We further conclude with a request that no further restrictions be placed on the Christian community without consultation. We are praying for the government and our President. We realize the inexplicably difficult challenges under which you currently have to govern our country. We do not envy your position for a moment!

May our Lord richly bless, keep and guide you in these trying times, and may we come through this together stronger as a nation. Nkosi Sikelele' iAfrika!

Pastors and congregations of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa



Book Review



S.G. deGraaf

Author: Rev. Dr. Dick Moes
Rev. Dr. Dick Moes is a minister with the United Reformed Churches in North America. He presently serves as chairman of the ICRC executive.



H.T. Wendt, *S.G. de Graaf: Life, Influences, Theology, a preliminary study. I*
nheritance Publications, Neerlandia, AB, Canada. 141 pages.

Perhaps, some of you are familiar with the four-volume set on covenant history called Promise and Deliverance. If you are, you will probably know that the author of these four volumes is Rev. S.G. De Graaf. Perhaps, you want to know a bit more about this man and his theology. Well, the author of the present volume, Rev. H.T. Wendt, minister of the Reformed Church of Waardhuizen, the Netherlands, revised

the master's thesis he wrote at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and published it in book form to help us understand De Graaf's life, theology, and the influences that shaped his theology.

Rev. S.G. De Graaf (1889-1955) was a pastor in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, pastoring a church in Amsterdam for almost 30 years. He did not join the



Vrijmaking or Liberation in 1944. As a youth, S.G. De Graaf experienced a mixed upbringing in the Dutch state church and the Reformed church. As a student, he was especially influenced by the views of Bavinck and his pastor in Amsterdam, J.C. Sikkel. As a pastor, he realized how the covenant of grace was needed to give people assurance concerning their salvation. The world De Graaf lived in was marked

by deep uncertainty and confusion because of two world wars. This had its own effect on the churches. The Reformed Churches he ministered can be divided into three groups: a conservative group, which wanted to adhere to all of the teachings of Kuyper and Bavinck; a middle-orthodox group, which was more focussed on experience and synthesis; and a group known as the Reformed Movement that challenged some of the teachings of Kuyper and Bavinck, such as, the pluriformity of the church, common grace, and the covenant and baptism. Whereas some divided the covenant up into an external and internal covenant, contrasting the covenant of grace with the covenant of works and strongly emphasizing election, others rejected this distinction, seeing a continuation of the covenant of grace with the covenant of works and thus strongly emphasizing the obligation of man in the covenant. In this social, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal environment, De Graaf developed his theology of the covenant.

Central to De Graaf's covenant theology is the glory of God for God creates and saves for the sake of his own glory, i.e. that his people would share in the fellowship of his love in Christ through the Holy Spirit and serve him in his kingdom through being obedient to him. Through the covenant God shows us how to do this. That is why God made a covenant with Adam in Paradise. Initially, De Graaf referred to this as a 'covenant of works', because in this covenant Adam would have to earn eternal life. Later he rejected this term and referred to it as a 'covenant of favour' because Adam would inherit eternal life by accepting God's favour and remaining in it by responding to God's love with his love. After Adam

fell into sin, God made a new covenant with him, viz. a covenant of grace. Initially, De Graaf considered this covenant to be a replacement of the covenant of God's favour. Later, however, he considered it to be a renewal of this covenant. De Graaf was fond of comparing this covenant to a marriage in which God gives his love to us and we respond to his love with our love in a way that living in God's covenant becomes everything for us. The flame of his love for us kindles a flame of our love in return. However, because we do not always respond to God's love with our love, this same flame of love consumes everything that is not responsive to his love in our lives. (The title of Wendt's Master's thesis is: *The Love of the Lord is a Flame: The Covenant Theology of S.G. De Graaf in the context of his Work and Life.*)

De Graaf describes responding to God's love in faith as surrendering ourselves to God and resting in what he has promised. When we do, we enter into a relationship that was determined in eternity, according to De Graaf. Because the covenant of grace is made with the church, members of the church have a right to what God has promised. The sacrament of baptism is a sign and seal that God has bound himself to us in love and obligated himself to be merciful. Consequently, parents and children receive the assurance of God's love for them by resting in the promises of their baptism.

Because De Graaf stressed that God made his covenant with the church and that faith is resting in what God has promised, the author believes that De Graaf's theology of the covenant is a powerful antidote to individualism and subjectivism of our day. Wendt's book is only a preliminary study. His desire is that in the future a bilingual (Dutch-English) 'Complete Works' will be published.

I enjoyed reading Wendt's book. If you are interested in reading more about how the flame of God's love is meant to function in the life of the church, I would recommend that you purchase a copy of the book (<http://inhpubl.net/products/17601>). Heartily recommended. ✱

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ICRC Coordinating Committee Press Release

On February 3, 2021 the ICRC Coordinating Committee met for the third time since ICRC 2017. Normally Coordinating Committee meetings are held in October or November of years in which there is no ICRC. This time the meeting was postponed to be closer to the planned convening of ICRC 2021, allowing the committee to weigh whether to postpone the upcoming conference.

The convener, the Rev. Bruce Hoyt, spoke some opening words and then invited the Rev. Dirk van Garderen to open the meeting with devotions. The latter read Psalm 91, spoke some words of encouragement with a view to the ongoing pandemic, and led in opening prayer.

The Rev. Dr. James Visscher presented the annual Corresponding Secretary's report. He noted the many requests the ICRC receive for membership, for partnership, and for assistance and explained how he responds to these. He noted, among others, that two requests for ICRC membership have been received, one from a bond of churches in India and one from a bond of churches in The Netherlands. He also reported on requests of some individuals within the ICRC organization to retire at the next ICRC. A response has been received from the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) regarding their membership in the ICRC; the Executive Committee will ensure that the matter of their membership will be properly on the agenda of the next ICRC. With a view to continuing travel restrictions, it was decided to postpone the ICRC to October 2022, provided the facilities in Namibia are available.

Mr. Kyle Lodder presented the annual Treasurer's report. In general things are fine. Some discussion took place on how to expect smaller and less capable churches to pay their assessment. It was noted that for such churches, given the small amount and the cost of international transfers, it probably makes most sense to note that churches may pay dues at an ICRC once every four years. It is also possible for churches to indicate they are not capable of paying their assessment. Some discussion took place on how to fund activities of the various ICRC committees, especially now that the gap between ICRCs is five years, not four. It was decided to request the member churches to contribute to the ICRC for the year 2022 as per the assessments since 2017. The Theological Education Committee will present a

proposal to the Executive Committee regarding funds they are requesting for a proposed meeting which was cancelled due to COVID-19. The Executive Committee will then decide about the allocation of funds for this purpose.

The coordinator for Regional Conferences, the Rev. James Sawtelle, has requested to be relieved of his duties. A successor will be sought. Due to travel restrictions, there have been no Regional Conferences this past year.

The Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen reported on the work of the Publications Committee. He noted the continuing health concerns of our webmaster, Mr. Martin Vanwoudenberg. The Web Subcommittee was requested to look into email addresses connected to our domain. The Magazine Subcommittee reported that *Lux Mundi* continues to be published. Because broadest assemblies of most ICRC member churches were postponed or cancelled, there were no press releases or reports on such assemblies. This in turn has meant that *Lux Mundi* was not published as frequently as intended. A concern is that there is still no editor or coordinator for Europe. With a view to sourcing materials, an attempt will be made to involve the network of librarians created by the Theological Education Committee.

Mr. Mark Bube reported on activities of the Missions Committee. Because of travel restrictions, which among others meant the cancellation of NAPARC 2020 and the planned ICRC Regional Conference in conjunction with it, consultations have not taken place.

The Rev. Dr. Douw Breed presented the report of the Theological Education Committee (TEC). The face-to-face meeting planned for August 2020 could not happen, instead it took place via video conferencing. The postponement of the next ICRC to 2022 will mean that the TEC will have to reconsider its plans for a conference. A network of seminary librarians is being formed. Some discussion took place about the best way to set up digital forums under ICRC committee facilitation.

The Rev. Dirk van Garderen presented the report of the Diaconal Committee (DC). The DC has especially focused on developing a vision for diaconal work and the role of the ICRC in this. It was noted that one member of the DC is resigning at the end of 2020; a replacement from a different ICRC member church but the same geographic region has been approached.

Regarding ICRC 2022, the Rev. Dr. James Visscher reported that all speakers have been confirmed.

A church serving Hungarian speaking people, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe is seeking membership in the ICRC. This church is being sponsored by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales. The Rev. Dr. James Visscher noted that the paperwork has not yet been received. Requests for membership are also coming from the Reformed Churches The Netherlands, sponsored by the Christian Reformed Churches [The Netherlands] and Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (Bangalore).

Initial discussion took place on a proposal from the Executive Committee to allow single churches as members provided they have a presbyterian polity. The Executive Committee will come with a concrete proposal to the next Coordinating Committee meeting. As editor of *Lux Mundi*, the Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen sought input from the Coordinating Committee on the wisdom of devoting an edition of *Lux Mundi* to the topic of how churches in various parts of the world are reacting to government restrictions. Advice was given.

In his closing prayer the Rev. Dr. Dick Moes expressed gratitude for the work of the ICRC in all its committees, and brought the needs of the member churches before the Lord. ✱

Diaconal Ministry

Reformed and Presbyterian churches, following Calvin, reinstated the office of the deacon alongside that of ruling and teaching elders. However, the task of deacons and the diaconate is often poorly understood and applied in our churches. The Diaconal Committee of the International Conference of Reformed Churches has therefore prepared a statement entitled 'The Diaconal Ministry of the Church' in order to clarify and encourage discussion on this vital ministry. We would urge local church courts and church members to receive and study this document accordingly.

The Diaconal Ministry of the Church

Old Testament

Already in the Old Testament the Lord impressed upon his people Israel the obligation to show mercy to the needy. God repeatedly commanded that the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow might eat within their towns and be filled (Deut. 16:11,14). In the old dispensation the needy and suffering were protected and provided for by God's fatherly love (Deut. 24:19-21; 26:12,13; 27:19). His ordinances taught the covenant people to imitate that love

as beloved children. We read many times that God's old covenantal people had to show mercy, especially towards the sick, lonely, poor, foreigners and strangers. God's people of the Old Testament also had to be a diaconal people (Isaiah 58:6-7; Micah 6:8).

Christ's example

The Lord Jesus Christ, who has shown us the Father (John 14:9), came into the world to serve (Mark 10:45). In his mercy he fed the hungry, healed the sick, and showed compassion to the afflicted (Matt. 4:23,24). Thus he gave an example, that his church should do likewise (John 13:15, 12:26; Matt. 20:26, 23:11, 25:42-46; Mark 9:35, 10:43; Luke 6:36, 10:25-37, 22:26-27). The ministry of mercy, as assigned to the deacons, proceeds, therefore, from this love of our Saviour (1 John 3:16-24).

The New Testament Church

After the example of her Lord, the first Christian congregation took care that no one in her midst suffered want (Acts 2:45). To each was distributed according to need (Acts 4:32-37). The office of deacon is a new office Christ gave to his church (Acts 6.1-7). With it he ensures that his liberation from the powers of sin and death receives hand and feet in everyday life. He ensures that mutual care is

given in his congregation in the face of challenges like illness, loneliness, poverty and old age, in line with his own example when he was on earth.

The purpose of diaconal ministry

The reality of the new covenant helps us to understand a little why Christ instituted the diaconal office. It is a gift of Christ for an era in which Christ's church consists of converts from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev. 7:9). It is the task of the deacons to ensure that the congregation functions like a harmonious family, taking loving care of each other's needs. So the Lord calls on us to show hospitality, generosity, and mercy, so that the weak and needy may share abundantly in the joy of God's people (2 Cor. 9:12-15). No one in the congregation of Christ may live uncomfortable under the pressure of sickness, loneliness, old age, poverty and the like. It is therefore the responsibility of the deacons to see to the good progress of this service of charity in the church. They shall acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties, and exhort the members of Christ's body to show mercy. They shall gather and manage the offerings and distribute them in Christ's name, according to need. They are called to encourage, comfort and exhort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's love. In this way God's children will increase in love to one another and to all men.

Scope

The scope of the deacons' ministry is not limited to the church. The apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia: "let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10) Deacons are called to help equip the church to fulfil this ministry also in the world. Through the ages the church has demonstrated Christ's ministry of love in the world. The early church reached out to the sick during epidemics and to those orphaned and abandoned. Missionaries not only preached the gospel, but also practiced it by giving medical care, educating the illiterate and teaching trades to the poor. In the past deacons often stood at the cradle of institutions like hospitals, homes for the elderly and for those with physical or mental disabilities. In Church history, when believers ministered to the needy around them in both Word and deed (Col. 3:17) the Lord has saved many. Ministering to temporal needs can, and with God's blessing should, become a wonderful means of ministering to eternal needs as well.

Task


Those called to the special diaconal office are to spearhead the church in the ministry of love, as Christ taught us. This ministry starts in the church towards fellow believers, yet also radiates into the world. In this ministry something of God's future purpose and plan becomes visible in this broken world. In its diaconal ministry the church works out Christ's plan to demonstrate and restore God's righteousness, mercy and peace in this world (Rom. 12:9-21). Deacons are called to lead and equip the members of Christ's church in this ministry of love (Rom. 12:6-8). This ministry already reveals the basic principles of the future recreated world, the kingdom of God, where there will be no more loneliness, poverty, aging, imprisonment, illness, disabilities or refugees (Ps. 72:12-19; Ps. 146). With this ministry of love Christians are called to labor for the coming of his kingdom in this still broken world.

Diaconal ministry

It is thus evident that the task of the deacon is not limited to the collection and distribution of funds, maintaining church property, or being a stepping stone towards eldership. Scripture indicates that diaconal ministry includes much more (1 Tim. 3:8-13). A deacon ought to be:

- A man of prayer: he prays with and for those to whom he ministers.
- A watchman: he is vigilant in identifying needs at the one hand and God-given gifts and resources at the other. He seeks out ways to comfort and restore.
- A coordinator: he promotes and facilitates cooperation where necessary, especially in times of need or disaster.
- A bridge-builder: he knows how to establish, maintain and build contacts and connect people.
- A protector: He upholds and protects the vulnerable, and bears burdens.
- A helper: He offers a listening ear, he looks for solutions for those in need, he is quick to help.
- A trainer and motivator: he trains, encourages and motivates the congregation in its diaconal ministry in the church and the world.

* * *

It is our hope and prayer that this statement will encourage and strengthen the diaconal ministry in our churches for the glory of God. 

Reformed Statements of Faith on the Civil Authorities

Westminster Confession Chapter 23 *Of the Civil Magistrate*

1. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates, to be, under him, over the people, for his own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evildoers.

2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth; so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the new testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion.

3. Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith. Yet, as nursing fathers, it is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the church of our common Lord, without giving the preference to any denomination of Christians above the rest, 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, without violence or danger. And, as Jesus Christ hath appointed a regular government and discipline in his church, no law of any commonwealth should interfere with, let, or hinder, the due exercise thereof, among the voluntary members of any denomination of Christians, according to their own profession and belief. It is the duty of civil magistrates to protect the person and good name of all their people, in such an effectual manner as that no person be suffered, either upon pretense of religion or of infidelity, to offer any indignity, violence, abuse, or injury to any other person whatsoever: and to take order, that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance.

4. It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience' sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them: from which ecclesiastical persons are not exempted, much less hath the pope any power and jurisdiction over them in their

dominions, or over any of their people; and, least of all, to deprive them of their dominions, or lives, if he shall judge them to be heretics, or upon any other pretense whatsoever.

Source Acknowledgement: Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Belgic Confession Article 36 *The Civil Government*

We believe that, because of the depravity of mankind, our gracious God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers.¹ He wants the world to be governed by laws and statutes,² in order that the lawlessness of men be restrained and that everything be conducted among them in good order.³ For that purpose he has placed the sword in the hand of the government to punish wrongdoers and to protect those who do what is good (Rom 13:4). Their task of restraining and sustaining is not limited to the public order but 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,⁴ and God may be honoured and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word.

Moreover, everyone—no matter of what quality, condition, or rank—ought to be subject to the civil officers, pay taxes, hold them in honour and respect, and obey them in all things⁵ which do not disagree with the Word of God.⁶ We ought to pray for them, that God may direct them in all their ways and *that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way* (1 Tim 2:1, 2).

For that reason we condemn the Anabaptists and other rebellious people, and in general all those who reject the authorities and civil officers, subvert justice,⁷ introduce a communion of goods, and overturn the decency that God has established among men.

* The following words were deleted here by the General Synod 1905 of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*): all idolatry and false worship may be removed and prevented, the kingdom of antichrist may be destroyed.

1 Prov 8:15; Dan 2:21; Jn 19:11; Rom 13:1. 2 Ex 18:20. 3 Deut 1:16; 16:19; Judg 21:25; Ps 82; Jer 21:12; 22:3; 1 Pet 2:13, 14. 4 Ps 2; Rom 13:4a; 1 Tim 2:1-4. 5 Mt 17:27; 22:21; Rom 13:7; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:17. 6 Acts 4:19; 5:29. 7 2 Pet 2:10; Jude 8.

Source Acknowledgement: Canadian Reformed Churches