

Clarion



HONOUR THE EMPEROR

THE STATE OF THEOLOGY

ORDINATION OF AIDAN PLUG

Digital Subscription No. 1659 - Janette Dewit

What's Inside

Dr. James Visscher leads Issue 4 with a question about how Christians should view the role of civil government – and where to turn for answers to such questions. We also have an article from Rev. Jim Witteveen, “The Remembering Church in a Forgetful World.”

Clarion has received permission to reprint an article from *Tabletalk* (magazine of Ligonier Ministries). “The State of Theology” looks at the key findings of their 2020 survey data. We will be publishing this article in three parts. Readers can also go to thestateoftheology.com to peruse the data in more detail.

Issue 4 reports on the ordination of Rev. Aidan Plug; there is also a press release and regular columns Treasures, New & Old and Ray of Sunshine.

Laura Veenendaal

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 83 Honour the Emperor | 90 The State of Theology (1) |
| 86 TREASURES,
NEW & OLD | 98 Ordination of Aidan Plug |
| 88 Remembering the Church
in a Forgetful World | 100 RAY OF SUNSHINE |

CORRECTION NOTICE Due to human error, two articles in recent issues were printed without the authors' names, credentials, or sources. We offer our sincere apologies to our contributors for leaving out this information and to our readers for the confusion.

A Story about a Pastor and a Pandemic (Issue 01)

By Ted Van Raalte

Professor of Ecclesiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, ON tvnraalte@crtcs.ca

How to Respond to Conspiracy Theories (Issue 03)

By Ilse VanderMeulen

Ilse VanderMeulen has a degree in Journalism & Communications and attends the Elora Canadian Reformed Church in Ontario ilsevd3@gmail.com

Sources

“Security and Conspiracy in Modern History” (2013) by Cornel Zwielerlein and Beatrice DeGraaf, *Historical Social Research*

<https://www.weforum.org/focus/the-great-reset>

Christianity Today, April 2020

“Christians are not immune to conspiracy theories” (May 8, 2020), www.thegospelcoalition.org

Clarion

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; **Copy Manager:** Laura Veenendaal

Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliwer, E. Kampen, J. Van Vliet, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

CLARION

8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert AB T8N 5J5

Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION Premier Printing Ltd. One Beghin Avenue

Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5

Phone: 204-663-9000 | Fax: 204-663-9202

Subscriptions

subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca

Advertisements

ads@clarionmagazine.ca

Website

clarionmagazine.ca

2021 SUBSCRIPTION RATES



	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada	\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$69.00	\$102.00
International	\$98.00	\$171.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra. GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2021 ADVERTISING RATES

We reserve the right to refuse ads.

Advertisements

\$20.00 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements:

\$21.00 per column inch.

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd. Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd. All rights reserved.

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

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:

One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Canada

LEAD ARTICLE



James Visscher *Minister emeritus*
Canadian Reformed Church
Langley, British Columbia
jvisscher@telus.net

Honour *the* Emperor

Any number of you, our readers, have been living with government restrictions for some time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For some parts of the country there is an end in sight as the infection numbers go down and the vaccines roll out. In other places, uncertainty remains the order of the day. In short, these have been and continue to be tough times for many.

In the process, these times have also raised a number of questions. Among those questions there are some that have to do with the role of the civil government. For example, does the government have the right to lockdown society? Is it within its powers to restrict the number of people with whom we may have contact? Is it legal to close down some businesses and not others? And then, for Christians perhaps, the biggest question of all: Does the government have the right to forbid in-person worship services?

Are you surprised about honouring this emperor?

In Canada this last question has generated all sorts of debate and division. Christians are divided. Some are of the opinion that the government has that right. Others believe that the government is over-stepping itself. For support of the latter, reference is often made to the Canadian Charter of Rights, which refers to fundamental freedoms such as "the freedom of conscience and religion," "the freedom of peaceful assembly," and "the freedom of association."

Answers – where?

Where do we go with this as believers? Where should we look for answers? For most of us this means turning to the Word of the Lord. What does the Bible, which acts as "the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith," say?

For starters, it is true that the Bible has a lot to say about the civil government, as well as about the interaction between believers and rulers, church and government. Think in this regard of Abraham and Abimelech, Moses and Pharaoh, Elijah and Ahab, Naaman and the King of Syria, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord Jesus and Pontius Pilate, Paul and Caesar. All of those interactions teach us something.

Still, we do not have the time or the space to consider them all. For our purposes let us restrict ourselves to two New Testament passages, namely Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. Of the two there is no doubt that Romans 13 is the better known and most often quoted.

Romans 13

Looking at Romans 13, we see that the apostle Paul filled with the Holy Spirit makes the following assertions: (1) as to the duty of citizens – every person is to be "subject to the governing authorities;" (2) as to the reason – all authority comes from God; (3) as to the warning – those who resist the authorities resist God and will incur judgment; (4) as to the explanation – rulers are a terror to bad conduct; (5) as to intent – a ruler is "God's servant for your good;" (6) as to power – a ruler bears the sword; (7) as to additional duties – citizens are to pay taxes, show respect, and render honour.

1 Peter 2

Next, we turn to 1 Peter 2 and we meet the following injunctions coming from the apostle Peter. He urges us as believers and followers of Christ (1) to be subject to every human institution; (2) to embrace this subjection as "the will of God;" (3) to live as free and "living servants of God;" (4) to silence fools, to show honour to many, and to fear God.

Honour the emperor

Now all of this is instructive, but what perhaps really stands out here and catches us off-guard is what Peter, and by extension Paul, says about the emperor. Peter writes "honor the emperor." So, who is the emperor? Is he a nice guy? Is he a reputable figure? Is he a good leader? No! The Christians of those days knew that both Paul and Peter were referring to that despicable emperor called Nero. In the annals of history, it is hard to find a more evil ruler, a more blood-thirsty tyrant, and a more depraved despot. No parent would dare call their son, Nero, even today. It is a name shrouded in infamy, along with such other despicable names in history as Attila the Hun, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Pol Pot.

So, are you surprised about honouring this emperor? Shocked? In a way you should be. What God is saying here is that while he is the ultimate Ruler and Sovereign, he often uses strange men, arrogant men, even cruel men, to do his bidding. He also allows for the fact that his people, as well as all other people, will experience times of discipline and judgment. Yes, and those times are not meant for rebellion and revolution, but for submission and subjection.

The early church and the Reformation church

Surely the history of the early church is a testament to that as well. Did the ancient Church Fathers of either the eastern or western churches preach rebellion and insurrection against persecuting rulers? Did they get on their soapboxes and incite people to riot? No, Christians in those days earned the title “martyr,” not “rebel.” They went to their deaths in the coliseums and amphitheatres of Rome without protest and rage. They entrusted their souls to their faithful Creator.

The same is true during the Reformation era. That too was a time of much conflict and bloodshed. Only, the struggle was not against Roman Caesars but against Roman Catholic kings. The Reformers were careful when it came to church-state relations and stressed what Christian duty was all about. It was about respect for those who ruled no matter who and for obedience even to oppressors. It was about prayer for those in authority and about paying taxes.

Why, so strong were the Reformers in their views on civil obedience that they reacted with horror and outrage to the excesses of those who belonged to the revolutionary Anabaptists wing of the Reformation. They viewed the events at Munster, Germany from 1534-1535 with disgust. You can still sense that when you read the last paragraph of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession. “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, introduce a communion of goods and overturn the decency that God has established among men.”

Article 36 of the Belgic Confession

In short, the Reformers preached submission to the authorities. You can read that in the first part of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession too. There mention is first made of the fallen human situation, namely “the depravity of mankind” and the need to restrain lawlessness. Then we are told that God ordained “kings, princes, and civil officers” so that the world would be governed “by laws and statutes.” Mention is even made of the sword as an instrument to “punish wrongdoers and to protect those who do what is good.” Thereafter, the purpose of good government is also stressed, which is to maintain “the public order” and “the protection of the church.” Finally, everyone is exhorted to “be subject to the civil officers, pay taxes, hold them in honour and respect and obey them in all things which do not disagree with the Word of God.” From all of this it becomes clear that,

according to Scripture and confession, believers are to have a high view of the government. The same emphasis can also be found in the Church Order, Article 28 on Civil Authorities.

Sadly, however, that is not always what we hear today. As I read the comments of many who call themselves Christians, even Reformed Christians, on Facebook, Twitter, Parler, and elsewhere, I am often appalled and perplexed. How can you claim to be a sincere child of God and at the same time insult those who rule over you and even at times make it sound as if you support rebellion and insurrection? Some make no excuses for calling Prime Minister Trudeau or past President Trump (and no doubt now President Biden) the most terrible of names. Is there no respect left for the office they hold? Is there anyone out there who still dares to call them “ministers of God” (Rom 13:6)? It would seem that our politics have become poisoned. Some have become infected with a spirit of rebellion and revolution. Only, such a spirit does not come from God. It comes from the devil.


Imperfect rulers

Of course, you may protest and say that governments are not perfect or that they attack our freedoms. And that is often true. I look at local COVID regulations in my province and I am dismayed by the inconsistencies. Why can Costco and Canadian Tire continue to do business while churches have to close their doors? Is that right? Is that fair?

Yet the answer is not to be found in outrage, anger, name calling, and revolt. It is to be found in addressing the authorities, in seeking legal counsel, and in using the avenues of redress that the law provides. All the while we are to keep what God says about those who rule over us in mind and that means, if you have to disagree, do it respectfully. Oh, and do not forget to pray for them.

John Calvin

Many years ago the great French Reformer John Calvin penned a letter (you can find at the beginning of the Institutes of the Christian Religion) to Francis I, the King of France. He was not a nice king. Yet, it is instructive to read what Calvin writes to him and to note how Calvin treats even this enemy of the Reformed churches with honour and respect. It is something that deserves imitation today.

Let us remember that we are children of the Reformation and not of the revolution. 

A Feeling Faith

*“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.”*

(HEBREWS 11:1)

To meditate on the feelings of faith is difficult. Knowledge can be studied, learned, and passed on. Feelings are different. The Bible says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” We can know why someone rejoices or weeps, but joining them in their feelings of joy and weeping is a different challenge. Feelings can be observed but are hard to pass on to another. Yet, the Catechism teaches that faith is a “sure knowledge” and a “firm confidence” (a feeling, LD 7). In explaining faith, Hebrews 11:1 includes both knowledge and feeling and, remarkably, the focus is on the feelings of faith.

Knowing God’s promises provides the bedrock of faith. Each of the so-called “heroes of faith” has something they “hope for.” Their hope is not shaped by their own imagination, but by God’s revelation. God revealed to Noah that a flood was coming, and he would be saved in an ark. Noah, by faith, knew and held on to the promise of God that he would be saved even though the need for salvation (the flood) was “not yet seen” (v. 7). Faith is promises held.

Similarly, Abraham hoped for the home God promised him (Gen 12). He left, even though he did not know where he was going: no map, no pictures, only God’s promise (v. 8). Furthermore, Abraham willingly offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice because he had God’s promise that Isaac was the promised son of blessing. Faith is promises held and these promises are the bedrock of faith.

Holding God’s promises without feeling they will be fulfilled is no faith at all. To hold a cheque and not believe in the payment is unbelief in the promissory note. Therefore, Hebrews 11:1, in explaining faith, focusses on the feelings of faith. Faith is the “assurance” and the “conviction” of the fulfillment of promises held. You could even say: faith is the realization of things hoped for and the proving of things unseen. Faith is fulfillment felt. To walk by faith is to confidently walk in the promised, and yet unseen, reality.

Noah felt the heavy reality of the coming flood and so built the ark “in holy fear.” Abraham felt the fulfillment of blessing through Isaac, and so willingly offered Isaac. He reasoned God

would raise Isaac back from the dead (v. 19). Faith is promises held and fulfillment felt. The cloud of witnesses that walked by faith acted on a promised reality because they deeply felt fulfillment of the promise.

Where do the feelings of faith come from? They come through a sure knowledge of God’s promises and a deep understanding of God’s faithfulness. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). Feeling God’s promises fulfilled comes through knowing the faithful God who never lets one of his words fail (Josh 21:45). That is why a feeling faith can never be separated from knowledgeable faith.

As we walk by faith in Jesus Christ – let our hearts speak to the depth of our faith. In Jesus Christ, we know that our sins are forgiven. We know that we have peace with God. We know that for those who love God all things work together for good (Rom 8:28). We know that death has no power over us. We know the present is temporary and the best is yet to come. Do we feel the reality of these wonderful truths? Do we live in their unseen reality? If not, look to Jesus even more (Heb 12:1-2); in him all God’s promises are made clear and find fulfillment. As we hold on to promises and feel their fulfillment, our lives will look different, even strange. We live by faith in an unseen reality. **C**

For Further Study

1. Study the stories of Hebrews 11 identifying the promise “held” and what fulfillment “felt” looked like.
2. Is there a part of your hope of faith that does not feel real to you? Why or why not?
3. How does deepening your knowledge of God’s promises and his faithfulness help the assurance of faith?



Gerrit Brintjes Pastor
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church
Toronto, Ontario
gbruintjes@gmail.com

Remembering the Church in a Forgetful World

Utopian visions throughout history

One of the traditional “cardinal virtues” is the virtue of prudence. Prudence is defined as “the ability to discern the appropriate course of action to be taken in a given situation at the appropriate time” – or, to put it somewhat more simply, it’s knowing the right thing to do, in the right situation, at the right time.

Prudence

According to the Reformation-era Danish theologian Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600), prudence is composed of three parts: memory, understanding, and foresight. If you want to be a prudent person, you must first of all remember. That memory leads to understanding what would be the right thing to do and what would be the wrong thing to do in a given situation,

and to foresight – being able to foresee the likely results of a certain course of action. In this article I want to focus on the first necessary part of prudence – memory. Without memory, we simply cannot be prudent. Only a people that focusses on remembering can live wisely – for our own good, for the benefit of others, and, most importantly, for God’s glory.

Memory matters

God’s Word shows us repeatedly the importance of memory. Positively, we are called to remember in passages like Deuteronomy 5:15 (along with many other passages in Deuteronomy and elsewhere): “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with

We have a God-ordained, divinely inspired, and authoritative account

a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

And negatively, we are reminded of the disaster that befalls God's people when they do not remember: "How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power or the day when he redeemed them from the foe" (Ps 78:40-42).

In a society with a very short memory, in which history is being reinterpreted, reimagined, and rewritten, in which the past is evaluated negatively and disparaged, if it is recalled at all, we are called to remember. To be virtuous, to live a life of wisdom in obedience to God's commandments, glorifying him in our words and deeds, we must remember.

Niels Hemmingsen wrote that memory is "the virtue by which the mind revisits the things that have been." You cannot deliberate prudently, he said, without the memory of things past. Because "memory is the storehouse of all things and the guardian of the rest of the parts of character."

The Christian church as memory storehouse

The Christian church must itself act as the storehouse and guardian of memory, and this is especially important in an ahistorical, or even anti-historical, age such as ours. We are to remember and recount God's mighty acts in history. We are to remember his commandments and teach them to our children. We are to remember our past, how the LORD delivered us from the land of

Egypt, how the LORD worked salvation, and how the LORD kept his covenant promises to our forefathers in the faith. We must remember the history of previous generations of believers – not just to avoid repeating the errors of the past, but to find comfort and encouragement in God's provision for the faithful throughout the generations. Memory is not just a personal matter; our communal memory, the memory of the community of faith, is the treasure with which we have been entrusted. Our collective calling is to remember, and to pass that treasure on to the next generation.

In 1989, social anthropologist Paul Connerton wrote a book called *How Societies Remember*. In this book, Connerton sought to explain how what he calls "traditional societies" manage to maintain themselves in a society that is so very forgetful. We may be a little reluctant to think of the church as a "traditional society," especially when there is a tendency to think of the word "tradition" as being almost a dirty word. But the fact is that the Christian church is, and must continue to be, exactly such a "traditional society." As the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:15: "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter." And, simply put, what we need in order to hold to the traditions that we were taught is memory.

Types of memory

There are three different types of memory. "Historical memory" is an objective recalling of the events of history. For example, World War II was fought between 1939 and 1945. Canada's first Prime Minister was John A. MacDonald. Martin Luther wrote his ninety-five theses in 1517. That's historical memory – and even this simplest, most objective form of memory is failing us.

The second form of memory is "social memory" – a society's collective decision regarding which past events are important, and which are less so. You can tell a lot about a culture's "social memory" by the historical events that it celebrates and commemorates, and by those that are forgotten. Is Reformation Day celebrated outside of Protestant churches, or even by them? If it is, it's because this historical event has remained an important part of our social memory. If it's not, that means that our social memory of this important event has begun, at the very least, to fade.

The final form of memory is "cultural memory" – the stories, events, and people that a society chooses to remember. This cultural memory is what we use to build our identity. Canadian

culture (or at least, the way in which our intellectual elites would like to define it) is based on this carefully cultivated and manipulated history. But as God's people, our self-understanding is not (or should not be) based on the cultural memory of the nation in which we live. Because we have a God-ordained, divinely inspired, and authoritative account that gives us our own "cultural memory" – his Word.

Meaning for us

So, what does it mean for us, as the church of Christ, to live as the repository of memory, and the transmitter of that memory, in our forgetful world? Paul Connerton does not write from a specifically Christian starting point, but the three central factors that he lists could have been taken from Scripture, and must remain our focus if we are to live counter-culturally, under ever-increasing pressure from the world.

First of all, we have a sacred story that tells us who we are. Secondly, we commemorate our sacred stories by "ritual performances" – sacred rites that "take their participants out of ordinary time and connect them to past generations of the community." And finally, these rituals must involve the body. Connerton says that they must be "sedimented into the bones." By participating physically, we are living out our memory, and our story becomes what Connerton calls "habit memory."

Getting practical

All of this may sound rather academic, but, practically speaking, what does this mean for us? To put it in theological terms, what Connerton wrote about were the "means of grace" which God has graciously entrusted to the church – the preaching of the gospel, and the regular use of the sacraments.

We must be reminded, again and again, of the history of redemption, in order to live it, in order to find our place in it. Those reminders come to us by means of the preaching of the Word, by means of catechetical instruction and Bible studies, family worship, and personal devotions. We are bombarded with the messages that our culture wants us to unquestioningly accept like never before in the history of the world. That means that we need to be all the more dedicated, in a very deliberate and thoughtful way, to telling the sacred story, teaching it diligently to our children, talking of it when we sit in our houses, when we walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise (Deut 6:7).


And since we are physically embodied beings, our gracious God, in his perfect wisdom, gave us the sacraments, and the regular rituals of our faith life, as a vital means to strengthen our faith – to help us to remember! That means that regardless of the technological advances that humanity has made, "virtual reality" can never take the place of the physical, bodily practices that God has instituted for our own benefit.

In order to have foresight, we must have understanding. In order to understand, we must remember. In order to remember, we need to work at it – carefully, deliberately, and purposefully. God has given us the means to do just that, and has given us the responsibility and privilege of passing on our "cultural memory" to the coming generations. And it's by these means that he preserves and grows his church.

Being church in a forgetful world

And we know that we live as the church in a forgetful world. Because the world is forgetful, it lacks understanding. And because the world lacks understanding, it lacks foresight. When memory fades, memory of the things that really matter, and what they mean for us individually and corporately, wisdom fades along with it.

In order for us to shine the light of the gospel in a dark world, we must first of all remember. And as God's remembering people, we begin with Paul's injunction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:8: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel."

We need not live in the past, but we must never forget it. Our faith is rooted not in ideas or philosophy, but in history. History is God's story, and his story must become our story, defining who we are, what we have become in Jesus Christ. It's only by means of memory that we can live wisely and joyfully in the present, in hope of the glorious future that awaits us, in him. 

Works referred to: Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1989. Hemmingsen, Niels. *On The Law of Nature: A Demonstrative Method*. CLP Academic. 2018 (1562).



Jim Witteveen *Missionary in Brazil*
Sent by the Aldergrove Canadian
Reformed Church
jimwitt71@gmail.com

THE State OF Theology (1 of 3)

Every other year since 2014, Ligonier Ministries has partnered with LifeWay Research to survey the beliefs of Americans on a number of theological and ethical issues. Like past surveys, the 2020 State of Theology survey reveals some encouraging results, but it also reveals confusion and a lack of theological knowledge among evangelicals. In this article, we will take a look at each of the thirty-one questions on the survey in an attempt to help readers understand the orthodox Christian view on these issues as well as the biblical grounds for it.

To take the survey yourself and explore the data, go to www.thestateoftheology.com. New this year is the option to create a group survey that you can send to your friends, family, or church. It's completely confidential and is a great way to start a discussion on what the people in your community believe.

This article was first published in *Tabletalk*, the Bible study magazine of Ligonier Ministries. Find out more at TabletalkMagazine.com or try it free for three months today at TryTabletalk.com.

1. God is a perfect being and cannot make a mistake

Christians strongly affirm that God is a perfect being because to deny that God is a perfect being is to deny that God is God. An imperfect being, by definition, is not God. The great Princeton theologian Archibald Alexander rightly said, “The very idea of God is that of a being infinitely perfect.” God’s work is perfect (Deut 32:4). His way is perfect (2 Sam 22:31; Ps 18:30). His law is perfect (Ps 19:7; James 1:25). His knowledge is perfect (Job 37:16). All this is true because God himself is perfect (Matt 5:48). Westminster Confession of Faith 2.1 expresses this biblical truth in the following words: “There is but one only, living, and true God: who is infinite in being and perfection” (emphasis added; see also Westminster Larger Catechism 7).

The Apostle James makes it clear that to be perfect means to be complete, to lack nothing (James 1:4). Theologically, this idea is most obviously related to God’s attributes of self-existence (aseity) and self-sufficiency (independence). Unlike creatures, whose being is contingent and dependent, God’s being is necessary and independent. In other words, God cannot not

exist, and God depends on nothing else for his existence. The One who is “I am” does not have the potential to be anything more or less than what he is. He is, therefore, infinitely and unchangeably blessed in his being, and he is infinitely and unchangeably blessed in his being because his being is infinitely and unchangeably perfect.

For God to make a mistake, there would have to be in him some imperfection in his holiness, goodness, knowledge, or wisdom. The fictional pagan gods make mistakes because they are created in the image of man, and human beings are less than perfect in goodness and knowledge. God, on the other hand, is neither malicious nor ignorant. Instead, he is perfect in all his attributes because he is his attributes. He cannot, therefore, make mistakes. To suggest otherwise is blasphemous.



2. There is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit

In this short sentence we find a concise statement of the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Although the word Trinity is not found in the Bible, it is a helpful way to speak of a doctrine that is a “good and necessary consequence” of what is expressly taught in the Bible (see WCF 1.6).

The doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in several explicit teachings of Scripture. First, according to Scripture, there is one,

and only one, God. We read, for example, in Deuteronomy 4:35, “To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him.” Second, Scripture affirms that the Father is God. Jesus often speaks of “God the Father” (e.g. John 6:27). Paul speaks numerous times of “God our Father” and “God the Father” (e.g. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3).

Third, Scripture also affirms that the Son is God. In the prologue to the gospel of John, the “Word,” who is revealed to be Jesus (1:14), is identified as God (v. 1). Fourth, Scripture affirms that the Holy Spirit is God. He is equated with God in Acts 5:3–4. Elsewhere, the New Testament authors identify the Holy Spirit with Yahweh through their use of Old Testament quotations. Compare, for instance, Isaiah 6:8–10 with Acts 28:25–27 and Psalm 95:7–11 with Hebrews 3:7–11. Fifth and finally, although the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are affirmed to be God, Scripture also distinguishes the three. They are distinguished, for example, by use of the language of sending, loving, speaking, interceding, etc. (see Luke 3:22; John 3:16–17; 3:35; 11:41–42; 14:15; 15:26; Rom. 8:26–27).

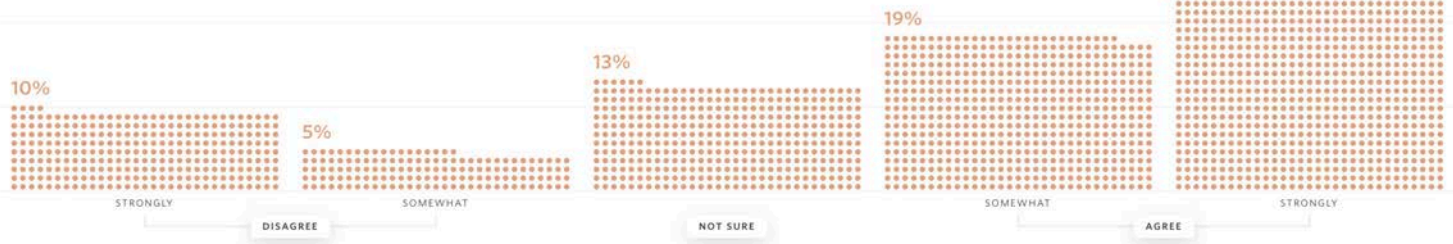
The biblical doctrine of the Trinity is summarized in the Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being

of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets.

The doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to the Christian faith. If any element of it is rejected or altered, every other Christian doctrine is negatively affected.



3. God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam

In the contemporary world, it is common for people who believe in God to affirm that God accepts the worship of all religions as long as the worshiper is sincere. There is no evidence for such a view in Scripture, however. In fact, from Genesis to Revelation, Scripture reveals the exact opposite.

This is clearly seen in the first of the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:2). The ancient Near Eastern world in which Israel lived was filled with all manner of religions and “gods.” God rejects these other religions. Why? Because the “gods” of these other religions are actually demons, and the worship of these demons is an

abomination (Deut 32:16–17; Lev 17:7). The apostle Paul teaches the same in the New Testament (1 Cor 10:20).

During his temptation, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 to Satan, saying, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve” (Matt 4:10). That is religious exclusivism. In the incarnation, the Word who was with God and who was God became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14). He is now the one mediator between God and men (1 Tim 2:5). There is no other.

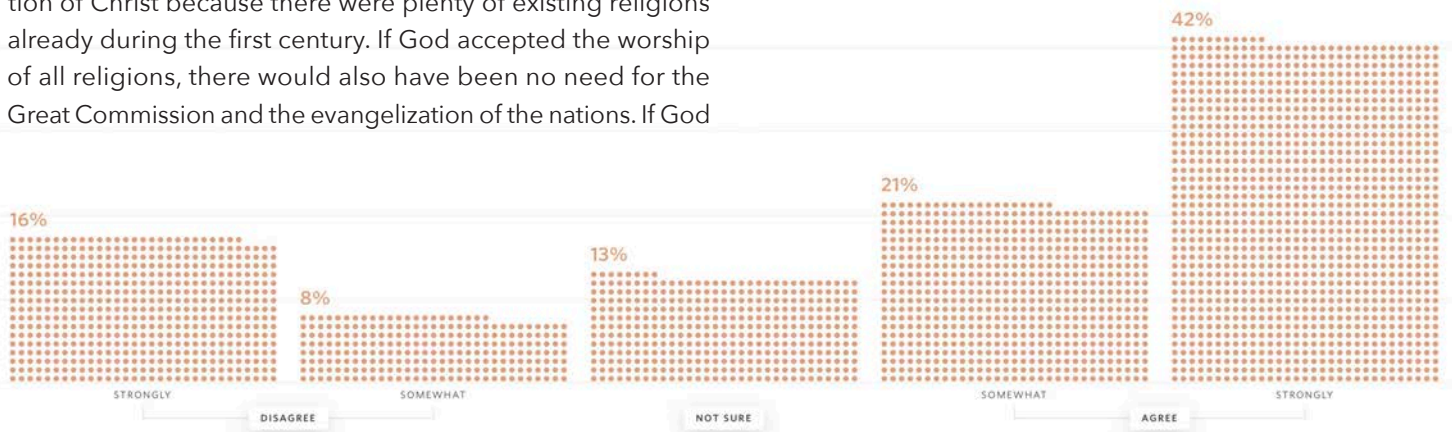
Jesus himself clearly expressed the exclusivity of Christianity when he said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one

comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). "No one" means no one. This is why Peter, when filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed the following regarding Jesus: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). For those seeking salvation, there is no one else.

If God accepted the worship of all religions, there would have been no need for the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ because there were plenty of existing religions already during the first century. If God accepted the worship of all religions, there would also have been no need for the Great Commission and the evangelization of the nations. If God

accepts the worship of all religions, the evangelism that Jesus commanded is a waste of time.

God does not accept any religion other than the one he graciously provided. He does not accept religions that substitute worship of the creature for worship of the Creator. God does not accept false worship. God does, however, accept the worshipers of any religion when they repent of those religions and trust in Christ.



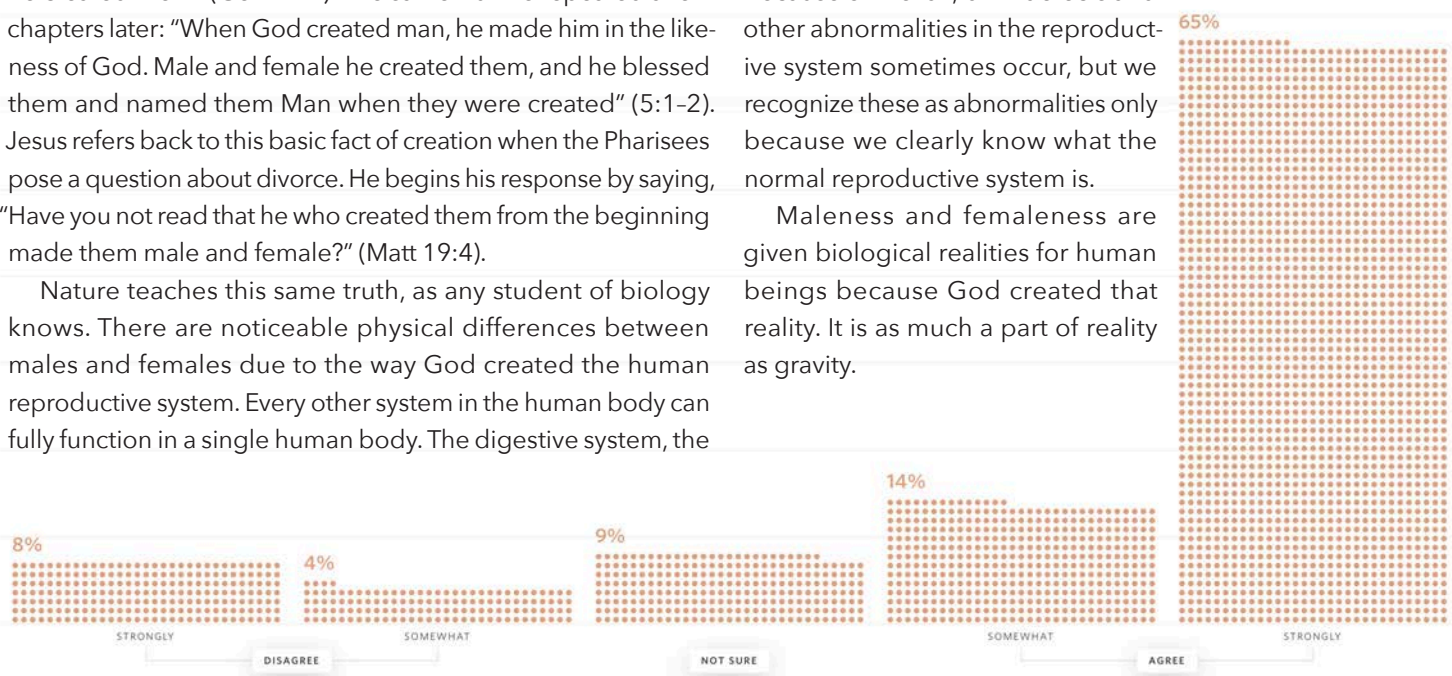
4. God created male and female

A fundamental aspect of human nature is that human beings are male and female. This is the case because God created human beings as male and female: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). The same truth is repeated a few chapters later: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created" (5:1-2). Jesus refers back to this basic fact of creation when the Pharisees pose a question about divorce. He begins his response by saying, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?" (Matt 19:4).

Nature teaches this same truth, as any student of biology knows. There are noticeable physical differences between males and females due to the way God created the human reproductive system. Every other system in the human body can fully function in a single human body. The digestive system, the

respiratory system, the circulatory system, the immune system, etc., can all fully function in an isolated single human being. The reproductive system, on the other hand, requires a male and a female to fully function and to actually reproduce human beings. Because of the fall, birth defects and other abnormalities in the reproductive system sometimes occur, but we recognize these as abnormalities only because we clearly know what the normal reproductive system is.

Maleness and femaleness are given biological realities for human beings because God created that reality. It is as much a part of reality as gravity.



5. Biblical accounts of the physical (bodily) resurrection of Jesus are completely accurate. This event actually occurred.

To deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is to deny one of the central tenets of Christianity. It is, in fact, a rejection of Christianity. The apostle Paul made this abundantly clear when he included the bodily resurrection of Christ in his summary of the Christian gospel (1 Cor 15:4). He goes on to say, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (v. 14). If that were not clear enough, he then says, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (v. 17). He says both of these things in the context of a lengthy discussion of bodily death and resurrection.

The Gospels also clearly teach that the resurrection of Jesus was the raising from death of the same body that was crucified. It's why the tomb was empty (Luke 24:3). When Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, he goes out of his way to make it clear to them that he has been raised bodily:

And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. (Luke 24:38-40)

He goes so far as to tell Thomas to touch the wounds he suffered at the crucifixion (John 20:26-27).

Numerous alternatives to bodily resurrection have been suggested by skeptics over the centuries, but none of them

explains the actual evidence we have. The "swoon theory" suggests Jesus did not really die on the cross. He merely fainted, and then the cool air of the tomb revived him. He rolled the massive stone away and walked out. Given what we know about Roman scourging and crucifixion, this would have required a miracle on par with bodily resurrection.

Others have suggested that the many people who saw Jesus after his death and burial experienced a mass hallucination. A hallucination involves perceiving something that is not actually present in the world outside the mind. In other words, a hallucination is internal to the individual experiencing it. It is completely subjective. In order for the hallucination theory to even approach plausibility, one would have to posit multiple people, one after another, experiencing the same subjective hallucination. On top of that, one would have to suggest that hundreds of people simultaneously experienced the same hallucination (1 Cor 15:6). In short, one would have to change the very definition of hallucination in order for the hallucination theory to be plausible. There are other theories that have been suggested, but like the swoon theory and the hallucination theory, they cannot account for the actual evidence.



6. Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God

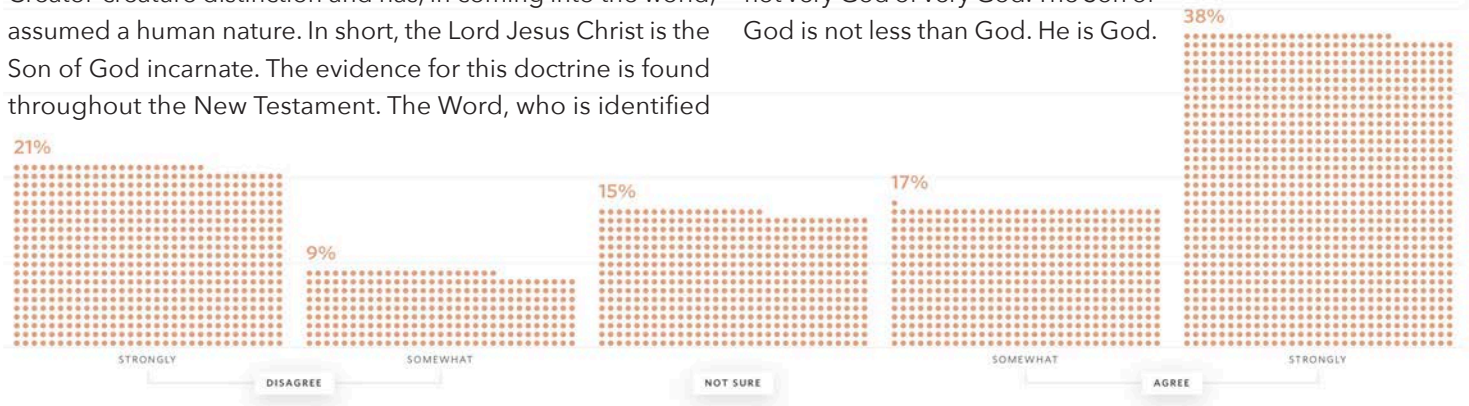
To affirm this statement is to align oneself with one of the most serious heresies ever to confront the Christian church. The orthodox Christian doctrine, as found in the Nicene Creed, states that the Lord Jesus Christ is "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

The Nicene Creed was a result of the Arian controversy in the fourth century. Arius, and those who followed him, taught that the Son is the first and greatest being created by God. This puts the Son on the creature side of the Creator-creature distinction, which would mean that the Son is not "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God" and not "of one substance [Greek *homoousios*] with the Father."

The original Nicene Creed was produced at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. It was a direct response to the teaching of Arius. After the council, variations on the Arian theme developed along with new heresies regarding the Holy Spirit. The Council of Constantinople met in AD 381 to deal with all this. It supplemented the original Nicene Creed to more fully address these new developments. The Nicene Creed summarizes the church's belief in the teaching of the Scriptures regarding the Holy Trinity.

The Scriptures assert that the Son is on the Creator side of the Creator-creature distinction and has, in coming into the world, assumed a human nature. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God incarnate. The evidence for this doctrine is found throughout the New Testament. The Word, who is identified

with Jesus in John 1:14, is said to be God in John 1:1. The New Testament also repeatedly attributes to Jesus words, deeds, and properties that can be properly said only of One who is truly God. Jesus is rightly worshiped (Matt 2:2). Jesus encourages his disciples to pray to him (John 14:14). Jesus forgives sin (Matt 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26). Jesus is sovereign over nature (Matt 8:23-27). Jesus will be the judge on the last day (John 5:22; Acts 10:42). None of these things could be properly said of Jesus if Jesus were not very God of very God. The Son of God is not less than God. He is God.



7. Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God

Arians, who believe Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God, affirm that Jesus was a great teacher, but those who believe that Jesus was a mere man often affirm the same thing. They will say that Jesus was simply a great teacher. Many people in our day affirm something along these lines. What many of them do not understand is that one cannot affirm that Jesus was merely a man and at the same time affirm that he was a great teacher. Why? Because if he was merely a man, what he taught is delusional at best and demonic at worst. Many years ago, C. S. Lewis made the same basic point in his book *Mere Christianity* when he argued that given the things Jesus said and did, He is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord.

The problem with the claim that Jesus was merely a great teacher but not God is that his teaching and actions repeatedly included both explicit and implicit claims that he is God. If a teacher is not God and

yet claims to be God, then that teacher is not a great teacher. He or she is either a liar or insane. So, what did Jesus teach through his words and actions?

Jesus claims to have existed with the Father before the creation of the world (John 17:24). He uses the Old Testament name of God in reference to himself (8:58). He claims authority to forgive sins (Matt 9:6; see Isa 43:25). He encourages his disciples to pray to him (John 14:13-14). He taught that he is to be the object of men's faith (14:1). He claims sovereign authority to judge all mankind (5:21-27; see Matt 28:18). He claims omnipresence (18:20). He claims a kind of knowledge that requires omniscience (11:27). Anyone who is not God and says all these things is not a great teacher. Jesus said these things. He can be a great teacher only if he is God incarnate.



8. The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being

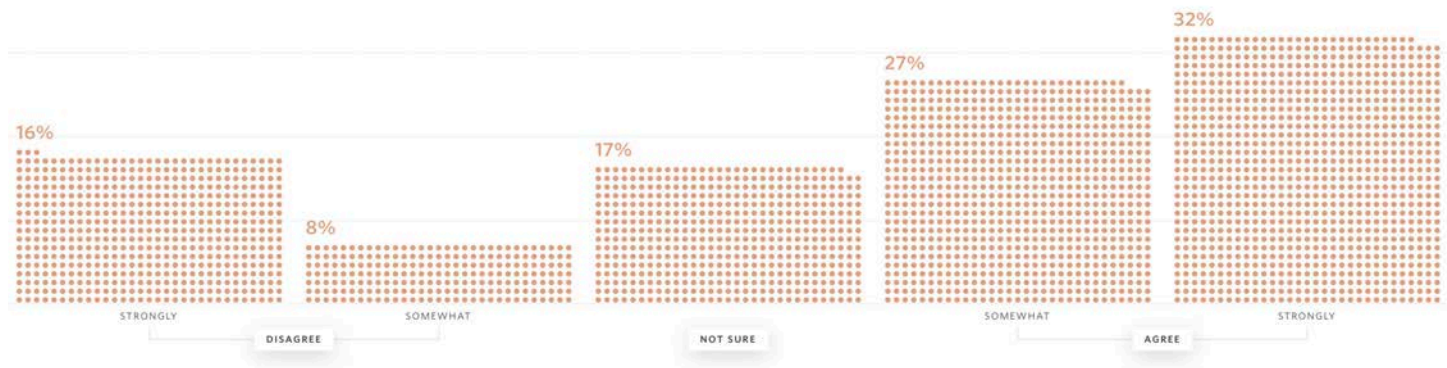
The idea that the Holy Spirit is a force rather than a person is an old heresy dating back to at least the fourth century, but it has survived to this day. It is the view, for example, of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who argue that the Spirit is God's "active force." They argue that Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit's being "poured out" on someone or "filling" someone. A person cannot be "poured out" or "fill" something, they argue, so the Holy Spirit must not be a person. They argue that when Scripture uses personal language in regard to the Holy Spirit, it is using figurative language.

Those who argue in this way have the facts precisely backward. In the first place, the language of "pouring out" and "filling" is applied to subjects in the Scripture about whose personal-ity there is no doubt. David (a human person) cries out, "I am poured out like water" (Ps 22:14). Paul (another human person) speaks of being "poured out" like a drink offering (Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6). Since we know that David and Paul were real persons, we know that the language of "pouring out" is being used figuratively. What about the language of filling? In Jeremiah 23:24, God declares that he fills heaven and earth. This does not mean that God is an impersonal force. Jesus is also said to

"fill" all things (Eph 1:23; 4:10). Jesus, too, is not an impersonal force. In short, if someone is said to be "poured out" or to "fill" something, it is not proof that that someone is not a person.

Additionally, personal language is applied to the Holy Spirit in a multitude of ways and in a multitude of contexts that make it impossible to conclude they are all examples of personification of an impersonal thing. Scripture regularly uses personal pronouns when speaking of the Holy Spirit (e.g. John 15:26; 16:13-14; Acts 10:19-20; 13:2). The Holy Spirit is "he," not "it." Scripture ascribes to the Holy Spirit personal properties such as understanding (Isa 11:2; 1 Cor 2:10-11) and will (1 Cor 12:11; John 3:8). Scripture also ascribes numerous personal activities to the Holy Spirit, including speaking (Mark 13:11), revealing (Luke 2:26), guiding (John 16:13), teaching (Luke 12:12), bearing witness (John 15:26), loving (Rom 15:30), warning (1 Tim 4:1), and appointing people to office (Acts 13:2).

Has a force such as gravity ever appointed anyone to office? Has a force such as magnetism ever exhibited understanding and will and the ability to speak and love? No. The Holy Spirit does these things because the Holy Spirit is not a force. The Holy Spirit is a personal being, the third person of the Trinity.



9. The Holy Spirit gives a spiritual new birth or new life before a person has faith in Jesus Christ

The important theological truth communicated in this statement is that regeneration precedes faith. Regeneration must occur first because every descendant of Adam is born dead in sin (Eph 2:1; see Rom 5:12). Eventually our spiritual death

will be followed by our physical death (Gen 3:19). This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). Those who are spiritually dead - and that includes every human being - must be brought to spiritual life. We must be spiritually

resurrected, and this is not something we can do ourselves. It is a sovereign work of God. We cannot be regenerated by having faith because dead people cannot do anything.

Our situation is similar to that of Lazarus (John 11). Lazarus was dead and could do nothing about it. Jesus stepped forward and commanded Lazarus to come out of the grave. It was impossible for Lazarus to respond, however, unless God gave him life first. In a similar way, we are all spiritually dead when

Christ comes and commands us to believe in him. It is impossible for us to respond until and unless God first gives us spiritual life. God first regenerates us (gives us spiritual life), and as a result we have faith, which itself is a gift of God (Eph 2:8-10).


Throughout his ministry, Dr. R. C. Sproul often said that this little phrase, “regeneration precedes faith,” captures the essence of Reformed theology. He could not have been more right.



10. The Holy Spirit can tell me to do something which is forbidden in the Bible

For this statement to be true, two things would have to be possible, both of which are false. First, the Holy Spirit would have to be able to contradict himself. Scripture, the Bible, is the very Word of the triune God: “All Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16). The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is closely associated with the inspiration of Scripture: “No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). In other words, that which

is forbidden in the Bible is forbidden by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit cannot command you to do something he himself has forbidden because he doesn’t contradict himself (Num 23:19).

Second, for the Holy Spirit to be able to tell you to do something forbidden in the Bible, the Holy Spirit would have to be able to sin. Encouraging someone to sin is a sin (Jer 28:15-17). When God forbids something in Scripture, that law is an expression of his will. Sin, by definition, “is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God” (Westminster Shorter Catechism 14). As John puts it, “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). The Holy Spirit is holy. If a spirit is telling you to do something forbidden in the Bible, you can be certain that it is an unholy spirit. 



Ordination of Aidan Plug

By Ginny VanderHorst

The Canadian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C. has enjoyed a two-pastor ministry for many years, the latest combination being Rev. Doug Vandeburgt and Dr. William den Hollander. But when Dr. den Hollander received an appointment to be professor at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, it was time to place a call again. We as a congregation were very thankful when Candidate Aidan Plug, just graduating from CRTS, accepted the call.

The Plug family, Aidan, his wife Claire, and their two young sons, Austin and Pierre, safely made the trek across Canada and moved into the recently vacated manse. Candidate Aidan successfully sustained his last hurdle, the examination in the meeting of Classis Pacific West, and could be ordained!

Ordination

The ordination took place on October 18, 2020 in the morning service. Due to COVID restrictions of the day, there were only 150 congregants in the building. Even the Plugs' Australian parents on both sides could not attend, but joined the rest of our congregation to witness via livestream. Rev. Doug Vandeburgt preached on 1 Timothy 4, and had as his theme, "Instructions amid the challenges of being a young minister." He encouraged Aidan Plug with three points:

- 1: Be determined to set an example;
- 2: Be devoted to preaching and teaching;
- 3: Be diligent in personal holiness and in faithful preaching.

After the preaching, the laying on of hands could take place, a moving and meaningful tradition which dates back continuously

Dameris Vane





to the New Testament church. Again, due to physical distancing protocols, only three men took part, Rev. J. Visscher, elder Mike Stam, and Rev. D. Vandeburgt. The congregation was encouraged to receive Rev. Aidan Plug with all joy!

Rev. Plug preached his inaugural sermon in the afternoon, again only 150 (different people) physically present. He chose to preach on 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, his theme being "Powerful Preaching." His three points were:

- 1: Content of powerful preaching;
- 2: Effectiveness of powerful preaching;
- 3: Result of powerful preaching.

Rev. Plug preached powerfully, indeed!

Welcome evening

That evening, there was a welcome evening, with a mixed program of speeches, songs, skits, solemnity, and silliness. Again 150 different people were present, trying to include as many congregation members as possible. Many submissions were done by video. A young adults group said, "HI and WELCOME" via video, as did the old adults, saying "HI and WELCOME from Manoah Manor." Joyful and joy-filled singing interspersed the program.


A fast-paced video, produced by a husband and wife team, had us zipping up and down and around Langley, introducing the Plugs to all the important roads, parks, businesses, and "must-sees" in Langley, accompanied with gift cards from many.

Rev. Jeremy Segstro welcomed the Plugs, speaking on behalf of Classic Pacific West. However, he said, "I'm representing

Classis, but our brother Aidan has probably had enough of Classis, so we'll talk about something else!" And he regaled us with stories from the two years that he spent at Seminary with "The Gentle Giant, Aidan Plug," admiring his academic prowess, while feeling obliged to try to Canadianize some of his Aussie lingo. He assured the Plugs that they would feel very welcome and loved in their congregation, as he does in his congregation in Cloverdale.

A video skit followed, with a note that "the producers of this skit were 40% positive that the events they presented were pretty accurate!" It introduced us to the pursuit of Claire, by love struck, high schooler Aidan. She finally relented to his advances in university, they married, and the skit followed their time at CRTS, and finally to receiving and accepting the call to Langley. The actors and actress ACED the Aussie accents!

This was followed by a presentation from the Hospitality Committee to the Plug family, of gift cards and certificates, with maps, to "must shop" businesses in Langley, as well as a couple of gifts for in their new home. Pastor Plug and Claire were given the opportunity to say their thank you. They expressed that they had already felt so much love, and were looking forward to spending time and ministry in the Langley congregation.

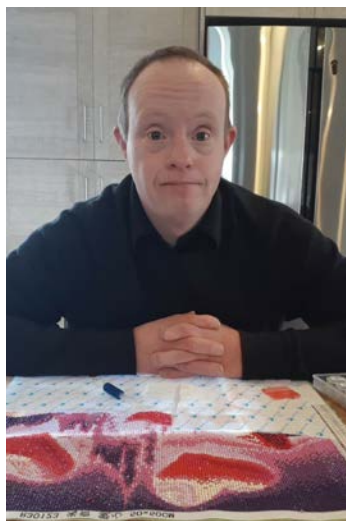
Unfortunately, due to COVID, no coffee social could be held. The evening was closed with prayer and with the singing of Hymn 10: "Now blessed be the Lord our God, who alone does wondrous works, his glorious deeds excel! The whole earth let his glory fill! Amen, so shall it be." 

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS If there are any address changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.
Rachel Vis >> 731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0 | tom.rachelvis@gmail.com | 905-329-9476

March Birthdays

- 3 Trevor Hofsink** will be **43**
14407 McQueen Road
Edmonton, AB T5N 3L3
- 9 David Rawson** will be **59**
c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8
- 12 Gerry Eelhart** will be **59**
2132-143 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5Y 1C9
- 13 John VanWyngaarden** will be **43**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 14 Tineille VanRootselaar** will be **25**
219 Lock St W
Dunnville, ON N1A 1V2
- 14 Lisa Alkema** will be **40**
c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3
email: lhalkema@gmail.com
- 15 Jim VanderHeiden** will be **62**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 23 Brent Baartman** will be **32**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

John VanWyngaarden



Hi, my name is John vanWyngaarden, I live at the Beacon Home in Dunnville.

I grew up in St. Ann's, Ontario; I have three sisters and one brother. My sisters' names are Ingrid, Monique, and Anne Marie, and my brother's name is Rob. I lived on a dairy farm growing up, I enjoyed helping clean the barn, making it spic and span.

My birthday is on March 13th and I'll be turning 42. I love receiving all the birthday cards every year.

In April 2013 I moved to the Beacon Home.

I have a new job at Linde's flowers where I trim and pick dead flowers, and do cuttings.

Since COVID started, I have not been able to work much, but am enjoying some down time at home. I keep busy with many different activities. I love doing crafts; I

am currently doing a diamond painting of Mickey and Minnie Mouse (which you see in the picture). I spend many hours doing these. I also love playing air hockey, and can get very competitive! I stay active by doing exercises, and Walk a Mile Videos. We also have a trampoline and a nice patio set that I spend time on. We have also been watching the Leafs play hockey; Eddie (a fellow resident) thinks they will win if they beat Tampa Bay.

I also enjoy helping clean the Beacon Home.

I go to Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church. I like doing the live stream and listening to our minister John Vanwoudenberg preach. He comes every year for a visit for my birthday which I really enjoy.

During the year I attend Friendship at Grace United Reformed Church. We sing songs, and do crafts. I am really looking forward to when this starts up again!

Around Christmas time this year all of us residents had to stay in our room for two weeks due to COVID, but many people made the time go by very fast. We had a bunch of gifts dropped off for us. Some people also came by for window visits, and two beautiful Christmas trees with lights were set up outside my window. On Christmas day we got a delicious meal including a turkey, ham, stuffing, potatoes, and gravy.

I am very thankful for a beautiful home to live in, and staff to care for me and make delicious food for all of us here. I am thankful to God for taking care of all of us at Beacon and that I can still listen to sermons on live stream.

John

Clarion

To equip God's people for his glory,
in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized
in the Reformed confessions, Clarion
adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed
Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living