

Clarion



What's Inside

Clarion

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Canada 

While our readers undoubtedly know about Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the title of our lead article, "Awful Saturday," may catch your attention. Read on to find out what Rev. Eric Kampen has to say. The Treasures, New & Old column from Rev. Randall Visscher follows with a meditation for Easter.

Rev. Clarence Bouwman has written an article entitled, "A Call for Patience." This article is a discussion relating to the growing questions and frustrations surrounding restrictions on public gatherings. We at *Clarion* share his prayer that this article "will serve in some way to enhance God's glory, advance his kingdom, and promote the peace of Jerusalem."

Issue 7 includes a CRTS Principal's Report from Dr. Jason Van Vliet, the Women's Savings Action annual newsletter, the You Asked column, and a letter to the editor.

Laura Veenendaal

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LEAD ARTICLE



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Awful Saturday

This time of the year, we have Good Friday and Easter Sunday services to give extra attention to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Saturday between his death and resurrection just passes by in deadly silence in terms of our ecclesiastic calendar. We may wonder, though, why we do not take note of the day in between and call it *Awful Saturday*?

Need for reflection

It may seem strange to draw attention to this day. Jesus was dead. Was his work not done with his death on the cross? Did he not cry out, "It is finished" (John 19:30)? Had he not told one of the robbers on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43)?

Christ did experience death in all its dimensions

We need to think this through more carefully, though. When our Lord said, "It is finished," that was not a comprehensive statement with respect to all his work. If that were so, his death would have instantly ushered in the new heaven and new earth. The Lord Jesus is not finished with his work until the day he comes to judge the living and the dead. What was finished was the giving of his life as a ransom for the sins of his people. There was more waiting for him. While, upon his death, he gave his spirit into the hands of his Father, when we think of where he was between his death on the cross and his resurrection, there is reason to speak of Awful Saturday.

Testimony from Scripture

That we can speak of Awful Saturday comes out if we think about his death in terms of his body and soul. Death is the separation of body and soul. Upon his death, his body was experiencing the effect of the curse over sin by being in the grave, where the process of going back to the dust had begun. As for his soul, we must think of various passages that describe where believers are when they die. In the words of Psalm 27:13, they are removed from the land of the living. After hearing about the alleged death of Joseph, Jacob spoke about going down to Sheol to his son, mourning (Gen 37:35). In 1 Thessalonians

4:13, Paul describes those who have died as being asleep. As our Lord was truly man, these terms would also apply to where his soul was when he died. This is underlined by Peter's words on Pentecost that Jesus had been held in the pangs of death (Acts 2:24). A little further in that same passage, referring to Psalm 16, he mentions that the Lord Jesus had experienced Hades, which is a general term for the realm of the dead. To be sure, Christ was not abandoned to Hades, nor did the corruption of the body in the grave take its full effect, but Christ did experience death in all its dimensions, affecting his body and soul. We can add to this the way Paul describes death as the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26). No matter how we look at it, when Christ was dead, he was in the grip of the last enemy!

Considering this then, just like we can say that he gave his spirit into the hand of the Father, we can also say that he experienced the dissolution of body and soul like every human being. That means, also when it comes to his soul, we can say he was in the realm of the dead, away from the land of the living, asleep to this world. This was part of his humiliation, for this state of existence is the result of the fall into sin. To be our Saviour, he had to also endure this part of the curse.

Testimony expressed in confession and hymnody

This reality that our Saviour spent time in the realm of the dead in body and soul is expressed in the Apostles' Creed when it mentions that he was buried, which applies to his body, and he descended into hell, which applies to his soul. We are thrown off a little by the mention of hell because we understand hell to be a place of torment. That was not how the word was used in the English language in earlier times. It simply referred to the place of the realm of the dead or the state of death.¹ While the Heidelberg Catechism gives a metaphorical explanation of the descent into hell (Answer 44), when we consider its place between the burial and the resurrection, the original meaning points to Christ being in the state of death, or, we could say, in the realm of the dead. So, it is not redundant in the Creed.

We can also think of the words about the two natures of Christ in Article 20 of the Belgic Confession. This article stresses the two natures in the one person. Near the end it states that "his divinity always remained united with his human nature, even

¹For a popular reference on the meaning of Hell, see Wikipedia's entry on "Hell." For a more scholarly explanation, on understanding the words "Descended into hell" and the meaning of "hell" as the state of death, see Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* Vol. 3, pp. 410-417.

when he was lying the grave. And the divine nature always remained in him just as it was in him when he was a little child, even though it did not manifest itself as such for a little while." The divine nature, therefore, does not take away the full extent in which our Saviour identified with us in all the stages of life and death.

This awareness of the *Awful Saturday*, when Christ, in his soul, was among the dead, is described in several hymns in the Book of Praise. In Hymn 30, we read in the first stanza, "Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands, for our offences given." In the second stanza we read, "It was a strange and dreadful strife when life and death contended. The victory remained with life; the reign of death was ended." This refers to more than our Lord's body. His soul was in the land of the dead. It brings out the awful, humiliating condition he experienced.


In Hymn 31, the first stanza sings of Christ risen from the dead, followed by, "He has conquered sin and Satan. Where, O death, is now your sting." That reminds us of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 about the last enemy. By his resurrection, Christ broke free from the last enemy. That same triumphant cry about breaking the power of death is heard in Hymn 32, "Where, O death is now your sting?" A little later it says, "Death in vain forbids him rise ... Christ has opened paradise." This same theme of defeating the last enemy is heard in Hymn 33, "The strife is o'er, the battle done, the victory of life is won ... the powers of death have done their worst, but Christ their legions has dispersed ... *The three sad days* [italics added] are quickly sped, he rises glorious from the dead." And finally, in Hymn 34, the third stanza states, "The *gloomy darkness, sin, and death* [italics added] are conquered, as the Scripture says, by Jesus Christ, the risen Lord; who brought back light, and life restored." In the last stanza it also mentions how death has lost its bitter sting.

The confessions and hymnody of the church, therefore, shows an awareness of *Awful Saturday*. It may not have been a time of torment for our Lord, as his atoning suffering was complete, but it was still a time of experiencing humiliation for our sake. It was an *awful Saturday* because he was in the realm of the dead, the place where souls exist separated from their body. It might even appear to Satan that he had succeeded, for Jesus had not made it to the throne of David but was in the realm of the dead. Perhaps we can even say that it was not the death of Jesus that scared Satan. What scared him would be the resurrection, just like it made the Pharisees and Scribes tremble when they heard of the resurrection!

It was still a time of experiencing humiliation for our sake

Awful – awesome

It is important that we have an eye for the *Awful Saturday*. As was indicated, our Saviour did not have to suffer the torment of hell. His suffering was done. That does not mean his humiliation was done. He entrusted his soul to the Father. At the same time, at his death, our Saviour experienced what all human being experience because of the fall into sin, namely, the separation of body and soul. As his body was put into the grave and his soul into the realm of the dead, this brought him to the depth of his humiliation on our behalf. It would not have been good enough for our salvation for our Saviour to continue in that state, because the last enemy, death, would have had the last laugh. The gates of Hades, though, could not hold him. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:10 that Christ "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...." As he explained in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. That is why we can also call that Awesome Saturday. On that day, Christ our Saviour was in the dreaded place of the dead as part of his mission to break its power, which he did on Easter morning.

So, perhaps from now on think not only of Good Friday, but also *Awful Saturday*, to give even more joy in singing "Hallelujah" on Easter Sunday. 

The First Witnesses

“But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.’” (MATTHEW 28:5)

When a group of women went to see the tomb where Jesus was laid, they expected to see his body. After all, they had watched him die a horrible death. In his account of the crucifixion Matthew tells us, “There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.” At least some of these women had seen his bloody body being taken from the cross and placed in a tomb, for as Joseph of Arimathea laid Jesus in his tomb, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there as well, sitting opposite the tomb. Going to the tomb on Easter morning these women expected to watch over him in death. They weren’t looking for an open tomb; they were looking to mourn because they loved the one who had died.

But God had other plans; he had his plan of salvation, and in that plan the grave would not hold his Son. And these women, these watchers of the crucifixion and the burial of Christ, would be the first to know about it in honour of their devotion and faithfulness.

The angel tells the women, “He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.” The angel gives them a chance to see for themselves that the impossible has come true. A miracle beyond all understanding had taken place. Death had been defeated.

The angel encourages the women to see the empty tomb for themselves, but he doesn’t tell them to keep it to themselves. He tells them, “Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.”

Who would believe such a message? Who would believe them? Many commentators have noted that it’s surprising that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because women did not enjoy the same status as men in ancient Palestine. A woman’s testimony was considered

unreliable at best. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote, “But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex ... since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment” (*Antiquities* 4.219).

So why does God see to it in his providence that these women are the first to hear of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? We might see it as a response to the love they had for Jesus Christ. A kind of blessing given to these women who had been among his most faithful followers during his life and even in his death. Jesus didn’t reveal himself first to those who could make the strongest case for his resurrection; he reveals himself first to those who had demonstrated unwavering love for him in life.

The women departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. They went to carry out the angel’s command, even though their words would seem insane and unbelievable to many. They went to spread news of the resurrection, because it brought them such great joy that they could not keep it to themselves. Do we share in their joy this Easter? Are we eager to speak with others about the resurrection of Jesus Christ or do we fear how they might react to such unbelievable news?

For Further Study

1. What had Jesus done for Mary Magdalene during his ministry in Galilee? How did she respond? (Read Luke 8:1 - 3)
2. What might keep us from speaking about the resurrection with others?



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A Call for Patience

Over the course of the last few weeks, several folks have engaged me in discussions in relation to the restrictions we have been and continue to experience in relation to public gathering. So many of those discussions were born out of frustration at the restrictions the authorities have been laying upon us. For my part, I share many of those frustrations and have found myself having to work through answers that are, to the best of my knowledge, responsible before God's throne. As undoubtedly many others have questions and frustrations, perhaps there is merit in sharing some of the thoughts that have slowly grown in my mind over the weeks past. I express here a word of thanks to those who have helped to sharpen my thinking on this topic. My prayer is that sharing these thoughts will serve in some way to enhance God's glory, advance his kingdom, and promote the peace of Jerusalem.

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We need to
examine what
thoughts and attitudes
are dominating
our minds

.....

1. Christ Jesus is King of Canada. With that statement I do not simply mean that all Canadians need to acknowledge Christ as King – though that certainly is true! I mean instead that Christ is actually sitting on the throne of Canada and governing our nation. COVID happened not just under his watch but happened because he sovereignly sent this virus into today's world. Similarly, Christ Jesus allowed governments and health officials to respond in the way they have, irrespective of whether those responses have conformed to the Lord's revealed will or not. Through this virus none other than King Jesus has rearranged the furniture in the living rooms of our lives.
2. The Devil, great troubler of the world that he is, does his utmost to play havoc with our thoughts so that we would respond in an unspiritual fashion. That's something we need to be aware of and to double-check ourselves on, lest sinful thoughts and rebellious attitudes dominate our minds. The Lord made no mistake in pulling us out of the comfortable manner of living we were used to.
3. Getting used to change always takes time. We invariably go through stages of Denial, Anger, Bargaining, and Depression before we get to Acceptance and Contentment and Joy. We all walk this road at different paces. Here is where we need the comfort of God's promises step by step as we navigate the various emotions we go through. That's also why we need to be daily busy with God's Word individually and in our families.
4. Our eternal King providentially has us living in a western democracy. That means in real terms (and I intend no disrespect for our elected leaders) that our officials are all relative novices at governing. The Premier in the jurisdiction where I live, for example, entered government only a couple of years ago and few (if any) of his caucus had any experience in government prior to our latest provincial election. Further, in our democracy our elected officials are beholden to the will (or mood) of the public. Those two facts mean that governments in our western democracies are commonly slow-moving and somewhat bumbling in their actions. That comes out particularly in crises. This does not make our governments evil; it does mean that we need patience with our leaders. And hence multiply prayer for them.
5. Directly connected with the previous point is this: if the general population of our province sees more value in casinos or sex shops or sports events than in religious meetings (whether churches or mosques, etc), it ought not to surprise us that religious gatherings will not receive priority treatment in being opened. We can write letters to the Premier and to relevant cabinet ministers (and we should!), but as we do so we do well to be aware that living in a secular democracy has consequences. Similarly, we can lay before the Premier and his ministers what the will of the Lord is as revealed in Holy Scripture (and we should!), but we ought not to be taken aback when our secular leaders do not bend before our arguments.
6. Again, the hearts of our elected officials are as sinful and as inclined to evil as our own. It is human nature (as a result of our fall) to be selfish and so to use the opportunities available to us for personal (including party) advantage. Honesty compels us to admit that we do the same. So, we ought not to be surprised to find examples in government regulations that are not only inconsistent but are bent in the authorities' favour (eg, where are more votes available). Again, with this statement I'm not justifying inconsistencies; I'm encouraging some understanding for government decisions and hence patience.
7. Too easily we speak of the closing of churches as evidence of persecution. The blessed fact is that we are *not* told we may not worship the Lord God or place our trust in him (as Daniel was prohibited from doing in Daniel 6). We are not told we can't preach the gospel or listen to its preaching. We are told that there is a public health crisis and so need to refrain from congregating – whether for worship or for sports events or for the Pride Parade (yes, the mayor of Toronto has cancelled this year's Pride Parade).
8. The bottom reason for much of our frustration is that we're not convinced that a mortality rate hovering below 0.05% warrants shutting down society. If, say, some 15% of our family members, or of our congregations and

communities, had died in the last year from COVID, we would feel quite differently about our governments imposing restrictions on gathering in their efforts to contain the plague. (I leave to one side now the discussion that could be had on whether governments or consistories ultimately make the decision to close a church building.) The fact is that in a democracy the government is beholden to the will of the public. As long as the public is 1) Of the mind that government has to solve society's problems; and 2) Reasonably content with how the government is going about solving society's problems, the government will carry on with its (publicly dictated) course of action. Our impatience should not be directed to the government but should get Christians engaging more with our neighbors. Only when the majority of the population feels the government's safety measures have gone too far will the government change its approach. That's the nature of a democracy.

9. A church here or there engaging in civil disobedience (meaning: calling the church to gather together despite government prohibition on congregating) will not convince the government to change course. To be successful, such action needs the support of the wider population. As long as the wider population considers a church's gathering in the face of prohibition to be morally wrong (on the grounds of protecting public health), such gathering will only convince the public that Christians do not ultimately care about the community. And that does not advance the cause of the gospel.

10. As to whether in fact the Lord calls his people in a given community to gather for public worship altogether, at one address, at the same time, I refer you to a previous article in this magazine on "Do We Need to Go to Church?" I won't repeat here what I wrote there.


Attitude

What attitude, then, is befitting Christians as we await the lifting of our present restrictions? In first place we need to be very deliberate about adopting a posture of prayerful patience as our officials find their way through this present maze. Being called to a position of leadership in government in the present circumstances must be one of the most difficult assignments anybody could ever receive. We need to pray for our authorities and let them know we pray for them.

Secondly, let's make a point of assuming the best in others (be it neighbours, government officials, church leaders, etc). Like ourselves, they'll do their work in weakness. Let's anticipate that reality, encourage them, and pray for them.

Thirdly, let's accept how the Lord has rearranged the furniture in the living room of our lives and make the most of it. That means we should intentionally get creative to find novel ways to interact with our neighbours, friends, fellowship groups, etc. As to the Lord's instruction to gather, let's explore possibilities to meet in small(er) groups on Sundays.

Fourthly, let's very consciously resist the blanket of anxiety and fear that easily sucks the joy out of our lives. Christ our Saviour, Lord of Canada, has placed this calamity on our land with a view to advancing his kingdom. That confession makes the Christian purposefully optimistic. This will turn out well!

Finally, let's be aware that through COVID the Lord is also forming and sanding and discipling his people so that we're ready for further service - be it in this life or the life to come. We're on a sanctifying journey, and that really is a privilege. What idols, then, need to be turfed from our lives and hearts? 



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CRTS UPDATE

Principal's Report

Greetings from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. This update is being published later than expected. However, as you will soon discover, there is a reason for that: it has been busy!

Campus and COVID

Throughout its fifty-year history, CRTS has always been a completely on-campus seminary. It is not that we are opposed to using technology. Like most schools we have moved through the various phases of educational technology. For example, using PowerPoints has been commonplace at our seminary for many years and, in more recent years, lectures have been recorded and uploaded for use among theological students in South Africa who belonged to our sister church in that country but who were not able to come to Hamilton. Still, whatever technological aids and devices we have used in the past, we have always used them with all the faculty and our registered students on-campus.

Up until this academic year, we kept all our seminary education on-campus because we were – and we still are – convinced that education, in general, is best done in-person and this is certainly true for *seminary* education, in particular. Future pastors need to know the Scriptures, but future pastors also need to know how to bring the gospel truth into people's lives with pastoral sensitivity and growing wisdom. The best way to

develop those skills is by actually being among people – faculty, staff, and fellow students – on a daily basis, not simply sitting behind a computer screen for hours on end.

It goes without saying, then, that in-person education is our first choice. At the same time, under some circumstances we may need to opt for the second choice, namely, online education. The present pandemic, COVID-19, presents an obvious example of this. Like so many other schools, last spring we scrambled to put measures and means in place to finish the semester online since the province of Ontario was locked down in a state of emergency. Early in summer 2020 it became increasingly clear that most of our international students would not be able to join us on campus in Hamilton. Delays in student visa processing and travel restrictions combined to make that nearly impossible.

With this in mind, the Board of Governors decided to make a significant investment in hardware, software, and cloud services so that professors could teach both on-campus and online students simultaneously and as seamlessly as possible. This is what we now call *hybrid education* (more on this below). Other than a few expected glitches and tweaks, the investment has paid off and the Fall 2020 semester proceeded smoothly. Twenty-two full-time students were on campus while five more completed the semester online.



Thankfully, throughout the semester everyone stayed healthy. That began to change, though, over the Christmas break. Some individuals and families at CRTS began to test positive for COVID and went through the mandatory self-isolation period. With gratitude to the LORD, I can report that (at the time of writing) everyone has recovered or is on the road to recovery. Once again, we have been reminded not to take good health for granted.

The Winter 2021 semester began in a different mode, though. Once more, Ontario went into a full lockdown. All the students at CRTS had to study online from their homes. Faculty and staff have been working from home as much as possible, and at the seminary as much as necessary. As you can imagine, no one particularly enjoys this way of teaching or studying. However, we have certainly been blessed by the investments in technology that the Board made over the summer. Transitioning from having some students online to having all students online was far smoother than what we had to work through in the spring of 2020. In January we begin with a short "Interim Semester," as we call it. It involves two weeks of special lectures. This year we focused on the topics of catechism teaching and liturgical topics such as the history and musical characteristics of the Genevan psalms, as well as some of the more recent work of the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*. After the Interim Semester, we immediately settled into our regular semester with a full complement of courses.

Hybrid education

But what about after the pandemic recedes, the Lord willing? How will the new technology at the seminary be used in the longer term? For some years, the Board and Senate at CRTS have been working on a plan to offer hybrid education. The

principle that the Board adopted in September 2020 and re-affirmed in January 2021 is *on campus as much as possible, online as much as necessary*.

At times promising, prospective international students are not able to obtain a student visa. It is a real shame if a young man wants to study for the ministry but is prohibited from doing so by visa regulations and complications. As we are developing hybrid education at CRTS, this should no longer be an obstacle. If he cannot obtain a student visa, we should still be able to train him for the ministry through the technologies that we have in place. Moreover, if there are legitimate and legal opportunities for him to come to Hamilton for a shorter period of time, we will certainly pursue that. There may also be other special circumstances in which, all things considered, the wisest option is for a student to complete part of his program online.

Online and on-campus students interact with their professors and with each other, both seeing and hearing each other regardless of where they are located. There is also opportunity for faculty and students to discuss course material in an online forum. With a bit of imagination, you might compare it to a WhatsApp group that is specifically for educational purposes. Recently students also began making use of a Virtual Student Lounge, a Zoom-powered, online room that they can enter, with one click, at any time of the day (or night) to study with fellow students or just grab a coffee and have a chat.

CRTS will be working over the coming months, also with our close sister-churches of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and South Africa, to develop this hybrid mode of seminary education in the best possible way. We will also need to obtain approval for this hybrid education from our accrediting agency, and that work is presently underway. Nevertheless, throughout these developments, the pedagogical principle remains

the same: on campus as much as possible, online as much as necessary. We all agree that the best way to train a future pastor or missionary is to train him in-person and on campus.

Faculty and staff

At the end of the second week of February, Dr. Van Raalte was involved in a snowmobile crash in which he was seriously injured. At the time of writing this article (on March 12, 2021), he remains in hospital; however, we are thankful that he is in a section of the hospital that focuses on recovery and rehabilitation to help him to regain his ability to walk well and to overcome post-concussive symptoms. Under the Lord's blessing he is making progress, and by the time you read this, things may have changed, and we pray that those changes will have been in a positive direction. In the meantime, arrangements have been made for Dr. Van Raalte's teaching and administrative duties during the rest of this current semester. We express our gratitude to all those who have stepped forward to make this possible. Please continue to ask our heavenly Father that he would grant a full recovery for our professor, as well as strength and patience for his family.

By now our newest faculty member, Dr. W. den Hollander, has fit in well. He is into his second semester of teaching in the NT department. Students and colleagues alike appreciate his obvious enthusiasm for, and competence in, his new role as professor.

In the Fall 2020 semester, Dr. de Visser received a full sabbatical. Some of his sabbatical plans had to be changed due to COVID-related travel restrictions. At the same time, other opportunities opened for him to take some online courses in the areas in which he teaches. During his sabbatical, he put much time and effort into improving the courses he teaches, also with a view to the fact that, the Lord willing, he plans to retire at the end of the 2022-23 academic year. That is still off in the future, but it is a blessing that he can already now prepare enhanced course material for his successor. We express our gratitude to Rev. J. de Gelder for teaching a freshman class for Dr. de Visser and to other faculty members and local ministers who helped out during Sermon Session, our main course on teaching students how to preach God's Word.

We also remain thankful for the diligent work of Catharine Mechelse, our office administrator, Margaret Alkema, our librarian, and Leanne Kuizenga, our faculty assistant. You will not be surprised to hear that dealing with COVID regulations and transitioning to hybrid education has generated a lot of extra work within the walls of our seminary. These three ladies have done


their share, and more, every step of the way. We are indebted to them for their competent and caring labour.

Students

No principal's report is complete without some comment about our students. At present we have twenty-six full-time students in the MDiv program, one full-time student in the BTh program, and four others who are auditing or enrolled in specific courses. This adds up to over thirty students studying at CRTS, the largest student body in our history. We acknowledge the Lord's blessing in this.

We have already received some applications for the next academic year, and although the number of new students has not yet been finalized, it is shaping up to be another good-sized, incoming class. Looking ahead, five students will graduate this year, the Lord willing, four from the MDiv program and one from the BTh program. In an upcoming issue of *Clarion* you will be able to read their profiles and their plans. May the Lord grant them all that they need as they finish up their studies.

We often receive the question, "Which students are graduating?" or "Which students have preaching consent?" This information is readily available and regularly updated. Please go to our website, www.canadianreformedseminary.com and scroll down to the "Quick Links" section (on the right-hand side of the screen). There you will find "Preaching Availability," and after clicking on that you will see the current list of students who have preaching consent, as well as which year they are currently in. If you wish to contact any one of them for pulpit supply, you can also do that directly from the same webpage.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, on behalf of everyone at CRTS, I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your faithful and generous support, both in your prayers and your financial gifts. Through these turbulent times we have been reconfirmed in our conviction that being a seminary "of the churches, for the churches" is a most blessed privilege! 



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ANNUAL NEWSLETTER



WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

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*"The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations." (Ps 33:10-11)*

"For I the Lord do not change..." (MALACHI 3:6)

What a year it has been! More than ever, we can take great comfort in the fact that the counsel of the Lord stands firm and his plan of salvation remains the same, no matter how "off track" things might look from our perspective. Taking hold of that comfort, we can find peace as we press on in our day-to-day tasks, knowing that the Lord knows exactly what he is doing. In fact, he has specifically chosen us to live in these times as part of his purpose concerning the whole earth!

This past September the annual convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary took place at Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton. Although the venue was different, those in attendance were few, and graduates and faculty were donning their masks as per the style of the times, the ceremony was rich and meaningful as always. We are so thankful that the convocation could proceed and that our graduands became graduates under the Lord's continued blessings and goodness.

If you haven't already, and have just under five minutes to spare, please take a moment to view the WSA convocation presentation that has been posted on CRTS' Facebook and Instagram accounts (Yes! We're on Instagram now too!) We hope you are pleased with the video and the outcome of our library's interior decorating that helped make our library look a little less tired. Please take the opportunity to share the short video with others, encouraging the work we do.

Thank-you!

It is a beautiful thing when the Lord uses our circumstances to cause us to reflect and reevaluate who we are, what we do and why we do it. Furthermore, we are called to be purposeful in our work *despite* our circumstances and to use our talents to the best of our ability even when it's hard, and in fact *especially* when it's hard!

When some of our reps began their collecting in their respective congregations for this year's collection, life was "easy as she goes," so to speak. However, many of our reps collect in the spring and suddenly found themselves wondering how to wisely proceed. Could we ask our brothers and sisters to give when so many were dealing with times of uncertainty? Compassionately stepping forward in faith, many Women's Savings Action reps did indeed go about their task, requesting their brothers and sisters to give only if they were able to, considering their individual circumstances. The Lord blessed even in adversity. During a time when we did not know if we would receive anything, our dedicated reps collected \$26,840.55 this past year. Dear reps, thank you for being purposeful in your work, even when it wasn't easy! We thank our Heavenly Father deeply for his providence, recognizing that once again he has provided funds for our library.

We need your help!

We are losing our audience and there is a real concern that as the older generation disappears so will the support for our

seminary library. We see a trend in the giving, and we know that we are not reaching the next generation. How can we teach our younger brothers and sisters about the importance of our seminary and consequently its library? How do we educate others about the vital importance of books, teaching tools, on-line databases and subscriptions needed to educate our seminary students, especially when our student threshold is increasing? Considering that there are over fifty reps, we are hopeful that together we can find some innovative ways to help us reach our elementary/high school students and their families. Here's a thought: maybe it's time to bring back the "money tin" visual! Only this time, perhaps it can sit on a teacher's desk instead of your mother's dresser. Should we reach out to our schools and ask them if they would be willing to add us to their list of organizations that they collect for? Maybe they would be willing to let us show our videos and/or make a presentation at their school. If you are reading this and you have some thoughts on how we might connect with the coming generation, we'd love to hear from you!

A little update

Before signing off, we would like you to know that the students have mentioned more than once, and especially at the convocation, how much they appreciate the support of the church community and the work of the WSA and the effect it has had on their study space. They specifically mentioned the standing desks that were purchased and the accommodating sitting areas in a beautifully refreshed library. Your dedicated support to the work we do has very practical and positive significance and is deeply appreciated by staff and students alike!

May our unchanging God continue to bless you, no matter how much things might change.

Blessings and thanks to all of you,

Deb Alkema, Secretary

Karen Schuurman, Treasurer

Janet VanVliet, President

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor of *Clarion*,

I was struck while reading an article about masks when it mentioned how most people in many Asian countries wear masks when sick with the cold or flu so that they won't pass on their illness to others. They do this as a matter of common courtesy.

We are in a pandemic and had been asked, now mandated, to wear masks so that we don't pass this virus on to others. We should be doing this as a matter of common courtesy, but even more.

Romans 13: 9-10 says, "The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in

this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

Love does no harm to its neighbour.

So, we should wear our masks out of love for our neighbor and in obedience to the second commandment.

Respectfully,

John de Jong

Kelowna, BC

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions can be sent to editor@clarionmagazine.ca and need to adhere to a 750-word limit.

YOU ASKED

Can a Christian be Involved in Politics as a Member of a Mainstream Political Party?

It goes without saying that if a Christian man or woman were to run for MP or MPP for the Liberal Party or NDP, we would agree as Reformed people that is not appropriate. It seems, though, that the trend is that if they are a member of the Conservative Party caucus, this is acceptable. The Conservative Party, however, is really no different than the Liberal Party. Why then does this seem to be accepted and may be even supported by most if a Christian were to be a member of this caucus? Are there any biblical references for God's children as to what type of involvement they may have in politics?

Evidently, the scope of this question goes beyond the purpose and format of this column. Yet, the question certainly is a very important one to be discussed among Christians in general and among our Reformed people as well. Hence, let me first of all make reference therefore to an excellent resource in the book that's written by our own Dr. C. Van Dam, *God and Government*. In chapter 10 of his book, with the title "Getting Involved," p. 225ff, he extensively explains and illustrates the variety of ways in which Christians can be involved effectively in the political arena.

He shows from Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jer 29:5-7) what attitude they should have in their foreign country and unholy culture. They were to seek the peace and welfare of the city in which they lived. In analogy, he shows how Christians today have an obligation towards the society in which they live, even if that society is hostile to their faith and values. They should pray (1 Tim 2:1-2) and work, also in the political sphere!

As the Lord Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:13-16), they should be a salt and a light. They are salt by opposing the moral and spiritual decay of the society. They are a light by bringing the light of the gospel and the Christian principles into the public square and political affairs. Christians have the Lord Jesus as their Lord and King; and in his service they can do whatever is possible to influence the political direction of the government.

Against this background and on this basis, there is much that can be done; witness the impact the work of ARPA Canada has had on its fellow-Christians, educating, equipping, and encouraging them to be engaged in the political issues of the day. It is ARPA's mission as well to influence the political leaders in their development of legislation, even if their political pursuits are not based on Christian principles but on liberal, humanistic, and even ungodly ideologies. Coming to the pertinent point of the questioner, then, it is also possible still for Christians

to be involved as a member of a political party such as the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC). Admittedly, this may be very difficult and a challenge that few can handle, yet, in line with our democratic principles and the open approach of such a political party, this may still be feasible.

The concept that enables Christians who are politically engaged to be involved as a member (or even as an MP, MPP, MLA) is the so-called "open tent" that constitutes the CPC. As a member, Christians can bring into the policy discussions of the party biblical views, principles, and ideals. Among the CPC there is a large contingent of social conservatives who hold to conservative norms and values that used to be common in our Christian past; and among this faction, Christians are still able to defend their biblical views on social issues such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, and the like (or vote them down). Such involvement may meet with strong opposition to their biblical views, yet as long as they have the freedom and

reception for the presentation of these views and see them having an impact on the overall party policies, such involvement will be a blessing for the party and political affairs of the country. Of course, the *proviso* should be mentioned that for party membership and participation in public office, it should not involve endorsing immoral or unbiblical principles. As long as they are not obliged to tow the party line but receive permission to follow their (Christian) conscience in voting on matters that go against the Word of God.



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ASK A QUESTION

Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for? Send us your
most thought provoking questions to explore
in our **You Asked** column.

Please send questions to **William den Hollander**, *Minister emeritus*
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