

Clarion



SPRING AND SUMMER READING

SLAVERY IN THE BIBLE

CHURCH OR KINGDOM

Digital Subscription No. 1659 - Janette Dewit

What's Inside

Our issue is led by an article entitled "Spring and Summer Reading" by Dr. James Visscher. Here he recommends some books for the coming months that will help develop our knowledge and insight and better equip us in our daily lives as Christians.

In this issue and the next Rev. Tyler Vandergaag discusses slavery in the Bible and what that really entailed. His first article, which you will find in this issue, is entitled, "I Love My Master!"

Issue 10 also contains a MERF newsletter, the Treasures, New & Old and You Asked columns, a letter to the editor, and a press release.

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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

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

Canada 

LEAD ARTICLE



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

Spring and Summer Reading

A waste of time?

I am not sure if you still do this, but I dearly hope so. What am I referring to? I am referring to the reading of books. Contrary to what the Preacher says in the book of Ecclesiastes, reading is not a weariness to the flesh, at least not if you read the right books. So, are you still engaged in this vital activity?

I ask this question because it seems to me that when I look out from my perch, I do not see a lot of readers today. I see a lot of smart phone gawkers. I see a lot of electronic gamers. I see a lot of Facebook scribes. But actual readers, not so much.

And that is a sad thing. I know that its hip to have the latest cell phone and to be able to surf the net almost day and night. But has it really led to a more knowledgeable, insightful, better equipped and well-mannered populace? I seriously doubt it. Instead, it has turned us into a myopic nation of skimmers. We skim over this story, glance at that headline, take note of that development, but we do not take the time to dig any deeper. As a result, we may know a little about many things, but not much about anything.

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We are turning into a myopic nation of skimmers

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So here is some free advice for the spring and summer of 2021: ration and restrict your cell phone time, give Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Parler, MeWe, and all the rest a real rest, and pick up a good book.

Ortund's Gentle and Lowly

You might for the sake of your soul pick up a copy of Dane C. Ortund's book, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners*

and Sufferers (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, 240 pages). As the subtitle suggests, this is a book about the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and then especially about his heart. I do not know about you, but is there a better topic to read about and to reflect on than this? We may spend time personally and in our Bible study groups examining the miracles of Christ, debating the meaning of the words of Christ, even reflecting on the sufferings of Christ, but how much time do we spend on his heart?

Ortlund's book, as the introduction states, is written for the "discouraged, the frustrated, the weary, the disenchanted, the cynical, the empty. Those running on fumes." Now, that's quite the crowd, and I am sure that we can find our place in it somewhere. As a result, he has developed this "strategy," which is "to take either a Bible passage or a bit of reading from the Puritans or others and consider what is being said about the heart of God and of Christ."

In a series of 23 chapters, he explores this most exalted of subjects. In so doing, he deals with the happiness, gentleness, and emotional life of Christ, the Spirit and Christ, the Father and Christ, the mercy of Christ, the love of Christ, the endless love of Christ and so much more.

I would encourage you to grab hold of a copy of this much acclaimed book and read it. It will refresh your soul and give you a greater appreciation of our most wonderful Saviour. The hope it conveys goes well with spring-time flowers.

Keller's Hope

Another book that I would recommend to you is newly minted and just off the press. It comes from the pen of someone who I was introduced to years ago and who encouraged me relentlessly to finish my doctoral work when I was burdened and distracted in my ministry. His name is Timothy Keller, and he is deathly ill. You see, like Alex Trebek of Jeopardy fame, he has pancreatic cancer. It's one of the worst cancers that you can contract.

Now, Tim has written almost a library full of books since I was one of his students at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia during the 1980s. At a certain point, he decided to leave seminary life behind and attempt to evangelize the impossible, namely the financiers and stockbrokers of Wall Street. Well, surprise, surprise, God decided to bless that work and now today there is a large network of faithful churches not just around New York City, but in it.

These days, however, Keller is retired and coping with chemo, but that has not stopped him from thinking and writing a book called *Hope in Times of Fear* (New York: Viking, 2021, 244 pages).

I think the title pretty well says it all. This is a book about hope in the face of suffering and death. Tim writes about hope, all kinds of hope: certain, future, glorious, subversive, and personal. He writes about hope for you, for our relationships, for justice in society, for hope in the face of suffering, and in connection with the future.

He does so with great skill, much pastoral warmth, and deep insight. And in the process, he gives us hope for our personal lives, hope for our troubled world, and hope in the face of death.

If you have a friend or relative who has been visited by pain and grief, or even a friend who is seriously ill and at death's door, give him or her this book. It will do more for their soul than a thousand gin tonics.

Graham's Cheer Up

We must move on, however, and now we come to quite a different book. It's a biography. It's about the life of a man whom you have probably never heard of called C. John Miller. Along with Keller, I met him too in the 1980s in Philadelphia. At that time, he was the pastor of New Life Church in Jenkintown, PA. The book I am referring to is written by Michael A. Graham and is called *Cheer Up: The Life and Ministry of Jack Miller* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2020, 240 pages).

So, who was Jack Miller, or C. John Miller? He was in all respects a most remarkable man: pastor, theologian, missionary, professor, counsellor, visionary, mentor, and writer. For much of his life, he was a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and later he joined the Presbyterian Church in America. At the same time, he was also a man with a burden. He wanted to bring the gospel to those who were often regarded as unreachable. In his youth he himself had been one of those "unreachables" and later he wanted to evangelize American untouchables. By the way, the impetus for Tim Keller to go to New York City and minister to the Wall Street crowd was because he had been influenced deeply by Jack Miller. As well, the rise of the so-called "missional church movement" in Presbyterian and Reformed circles owes a great debt to this man.

Jack was also quite a character, and he was known far and wide for his apt sayings: "Cheer up, you are far worse than you think!" and "Cheer up, God's grace is greater than you ever dared hope!" and "Cheer up! Come on, let's die together! It's a great way to come to life!" and "The best news you ever heard is that original sin is true!" and so forth.

All I can say is that if you want to change it up when it comes to your spring and summer reading, this is the book that will do

it. It will give you insight into this remarkable man and his zeal to bring the gospel to others. You will be taught much by this man who wrote so tenderly about a wayward daughter in his book, *Come Home, Barbara* and so pointedly about the church in his book, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*.

Trueman's Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self

Thus far we have considered three books, let me now introduce you to a fourth and kind of different and deeper sort of book. It is written by a church historian and social commentator called Carl R. Trueman, and has the long title: *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, 426 pp.).

As the title suggests, this book is not for the faint of heart. It cannot be quickly read and easily summarized. It forces you to read carefully and to think hard. Yet, in the end, it pays all sorts of benefits for those who persevere. Why? Because it is one of the most perceptive studies of what is currently happening in our modern world from a Christian point of view. In a few short years so many things have changed when it comes to how people view themselves, their natures, their sexuality, their relationships, and their status. Words like "woke," "cancel culture," "binary," "androgynous," "transformation," and others abound. A whole new vocabulary has and is being created. Human sexuality is in convulsion and confusion. And much of it threatens to change the world as we know it.

Now, all of this may not interest some of you; however, many of you would like to know as to where this has come from, how this has developed, what are its roots, and where is it headed. For answers to those and other questions, Trueman is a sure and able guide. He knows his stuff. He makes sense. He imparts understanding. He lays bare the cultural wars. So, pick up this book, read it and sweat a little. It will all be worth it!

Waters, Reid, and Muether's Covenant Theology

In addition, some of this can also be said of our next and last book. It is not the work of one person, but it is a compilation of essays, twenty-seven of them, to be exact. They have been vetted and edited by the trio of Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether. The book is called *Covenant Theology*

(Wheaton: Crossway, 2020) and, at 672 large pages, it is a pill. Only, it is for those who love the term "covenant" and have an interest in covenant "theology," a nice pill.

It should be said as well that this big book was a joint project of the men who teach at Reformed Theological Seminary and its campuses in Atlanta, GA, Jackson, MS, Orlando, FL, Dallas, TX, Charlotte, NC, and Washington, DC.

In any case, almost all that you ever wanted to know about "covenant" can be found in this book: the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, the covenant in the OT and in the NT, the covenant in history, and the covenant today. The list of topics goes on and on.

Is it complete? No! It would be impossible to write one book only on this subject. At the same time, it is also Presbyterian as all of the authors teach at Presbyterian seminaries and subscribe to the Westminster Standards. Is it Reformed? My reading of it would answer that question in the affirmative. This is not to say that it is above criticism. There are some distinctions that I have reservations about. As well there are some evaluations that I do not share. Nevertheless, by and large, this is a comprehensive, faithful, and well written book on covenant theology. All who read it will be rewarded by a richer and deeper understanding of the Reformed faith.

A closing tip

All in all, there are a lot of pages to read and digest here in these five books. And no doubt some of you are inclined to add "and there's a lot of money needed to buy them too." True enough! Still, let me tell you about a way to build a library without taking out a mortgage. It goes like this: (a) buy yourself a Kobo or iPad; (b) download Kindle for free; (c) monitor Tim Challies's website (challies.com) and keep an eye out for his Kindle ebook bargains; (d) buy and download when on sale.

Since I retired, I no longer receive a book allowance from the church, so I have to be creative when it comes to stretching my book dollars. Thanks to Kindle and Tim, I now have a virtual library at very little cost. Of course, I know that reading ebooks takes some getting used to, but there is in life no gain without pain.

Happy reading! 

TREASURES NEW & OLD :: MATTHEW 13:52

Turning the World Upside Down

“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.” (ACTS 17:6)

What should we make of these words? Were they simply an offhand comment thoughtlessly expressed in a moment of great intensity? Just an example of the inflamed rhetoric of the first century? Or are we given here words fit for a *Clarion* Pentecost meditation? I tip my cards.

For context, this charge was brought against Paul and his companions by their opponents in Thessalonica, a group of jealous Jews who formed a mob intent on causing trouble for the new believers in the city. These words were therefore meant as criticism and not as a compliment or commendation.


The NASB renders the charge as having “upset the world,” while the ESV translates it more colourfully as having “turned the world upside down.” Whatever the case, it was quite the accusation! This was no mere local matter. Whether they understood it or not, the accusation implied that the whole world was affected by this modest team of travelling missionaries and their message. They were reckoned to be having the kind of impact most missionaries can only dream of.

So what happened? From Acts 17 and Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, we get a good sense of how these missionaries had disturbed the peace in the city. It was by their preaching and teaching the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and by living a new and counter-cultural life aligned with that message! For these reasons, they were viewed as a threat to societal order. In today’s terms, they might be labelled radicals and extremists. And indeed the gospel does produce a sort of radicalism and extremism, but not in the way most think. Those who embrace the gospel do not incite insurrections, plant bombs, or start riots. Instead they live as good citizens who love their neighbours and speak the truth at any cost. Rather than killing for Jesus, they lay down their lives for Jesus. The only peace they want to disturb is the peace of the graveyard.

That was precisely the impact the gospel had in Thessalonica. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, “Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” When the gospel was proclaimed it persuaded

hearts, shattered falsehoods, challenged worldviews, and upended the social order in many ways. This gospel was clearly dangerous to the status quo. Thessalonian Twitter certainly would have banned it.

But who was responsible for this upheaval? Notice that Paul and his companions do not take the credit themselves. They attribute it to the work of the Holy Spirit! It was the Spirit of Pentecost who opened ears and transformed hearts, and made the Thessalonian Christians receptive to the Word. It was the Spirit who made them reflect their teachers and their Lord. The Spirit gave them strength of faith and conviction to face persecution and affliction with joy. The Spirit dissolved their love for idols and replaced it with a greater love for God, and the desire to serve him and devote themselves to him. The Spirit filled them with anticipation for Christ’s return and amplified their witness throughout the world so that their reputation spread like wildfire. The list goes on.

Such are the effects the Spirit induces and produces when the gospel is embraced in faith and echoed in life. A more accurate and appropriate description would therefore be to say this was not turning the world upside down, but rather right-side up! 

For Further Study

1. How can you disturb the peace of the graveyard in your own life, in your closest relationships, and in your interaction with unbelievers?
2. Would we as Christians today be found guilty of the charge of turning the world upside down, for the reasons we should be?



Calvin Vanderlinde Minister
American Reformed Church
Nooksack Valley, WA
calvinvanderlinde@gmail.com

I Love My Master!

“You have given me an open ear” ~ Psalm 40:6

Introduction

Slavery is one of those topics in God’s Word that probably makes you a bit uncomfortable. It just doesn’t seem to fit with the God we know and love. The Lord God himself had gone to great lengths to rescue his people from slavery to wicked Pharaoh and the ruthless Egyptians. He’s done the same for us by rescuing us from sin and the devil through the person and work of Christ. Yet, one of the first things God does after rescuing his people from Egyptian slavery is provide them with their own set of slavery laws. How could God do this? How could he permit one member of his holy nation to enslave another? Although this two-part series on slavery (which will focus primarily on Exodus 21:1-11) will not address every difficulty we have, it will go a long way in terms of helping us understand biblical slavery and to view it in light of the gospel.

Temporary slavery

Immediately after God gave the Ten Words of the covenant to his people (Exod 20), he gave them the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22-23:33). It’s a book with a variety of specific laws to help God’s people live as his holy nation and royal priesthood.

One of the first laws the Lord sets before his people has to do with slavery. It begins like this: “When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing” (Exod 21:2). It was this verse – among others – that many in nineteenth century America used to support slavery.

The language of “buy a Hebrew slave” might give the impression that there is some legitimacy for using this as a proof text for slavery. It seems to suggest that people were forced into slavery and sold against their will. This was not the case. Biblical slavery was not forced, but voluntary. Deuteronomy 15:12 makes this clear when it speaks about a person who “sells himself” into slavery. The only time a person could be forced into slavery was if that person stole something and couldn’t pay it back (Exod 22:3). So, to use Exodus 21:2 in support of nineteenth century slavery is to misuse and abuse it. A slave in biblical times wasn’t captured against his will by ruthless slave traders, tossed on a ship, and sold like cattle in a market in a foreign land, worked to the bone, mistreated, and abused. Slavery was a voluntary act.

Now, why would people sell themselves into slavery? Nine times out of ten it was because they ran into financial difficulties or

Biblical slavery was voluntary, limited, and temporary

mismanaged their money. When this happened, they would voluntarily sell themselves into slavery to pay their debt.

Biblical slavery was not only voluntary, but limited and temporary. Six years was the max. In the seventh year, the slave was free to go without paying a penny (Exod 21:2). He did his time. His work paid for the debt he owed. In fact, his six years of slavery would have more than paid for his debt. It's for this reason that the Lord forbids a master from sending a slave away "empty handed" (Deut 15:13). The master was required to liberally supply the slave from his flock, threshing floor, and wine press (Deut 15:14).

Life-long slavery

Although slavery was primarily intended as a temporary measure, life-time slavery was possible in certain circumstances. If a man went into slavery single and his master gave him a wife, then his wife and any children they had belonged to the master. This meant that after the six years was up, only the man was free to go (Exod 21:3-4). This seems somewhat harsh, but it protected generous masters. If a master gave his slave a wife, the master would have to pay the large dowry price for his slave's bride. He would also have to supply a house for the growing family, food, and diapers (or whatever they used back then).

In all likelihood, a slave would only marry during his six years of slavery if he already planned to say: "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free" (Exod 21:5). Such a vow is a direct result of the master's kindness and care to this slave. The master has been so good to him! He's given him stability. The slave doesn't have to worry about his finances anymore. He has a wife and children. Life is good. He doesn't want his freedom back. He wants to be a slave for life to a master who loves him, who has kept him on the straight and narrow, and has enabled him to thrive.

When a slave made a vow of life-long slavery, it had to be officially verified and publically confirmed. The master had to

"bring him to God" (Exod 21:6). "God" here is sometimes translated as "judges" (NIV). Those are not necessarily two different things. By taking the slave before the judges, the master is also taking him before God who appointed judges over his people (Exod 18). The point is that the slave must publicly declare a love for his master. This would prevent any abuse on the part of a cruel master. If a man vowed to be a slave for life, he must not be coerced or forced into it. He must confirm his vow publicly before the Lord and in the presence of witnesses. Once the vow is publicly confirmed, the master takes his slave to a door or doorpost and pierces his ear with an awl. His pierced ear was a sign that he was a slave for life (Exod 21:6).

Slavery and bankruptcy

This kind of biblical slavery is a far cry from what happened in nineteenth century America. In biblical times, the slave was to be treated with love and care. His slavery was temporary – six years max – and then he was free to go, but not empty handed. He was to go with gifts from his master. If the slave decided to stay that was his decision, not his master's. He could decide that being a slave for life with a master who loved him was better than to be free and have to deal with the pressures of managing his own affairs.

Looking at it this way, even though we don't condone slavery in our day and age, we could cautiously say that the general principles laid out here for dealing with debts is perhaps better than our current system. If you run into serious financial difficulty, you can declare bankruptcy. In many cases, those you owe money to don't get a penny. After bankruptcy, it's very hard to get back on your feet again. No one wants to give you a loan. So, no one wins. No debts are paid, no second chances available. At least in biblical times, debts were paid, the individual had six years of apprenticeship – so to speak – and could be trained to handle his finances better. After the six years, if the man did not want to be a slave for life, his master would liberally supply him with enough for him to get back on his feet again.

Slavery and the gospel

As helpful as biblical slavery might be in helping reform current bankruptcy laws, we must also think of these laws in the light of the gospel. Jesus Christ is the suffering servant or slave of the Lord (Isaiah 53). Our Saviour sold himself into slavery on our behalf. He declared a love for his master (his Father in heaven) and refused to go free. The words of Psalm 40:6 most aptly belong on the lips of our Saviour: "In sacrifice and offering you


He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave

have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear" (cf. Heb 10:5-7). An open ear is probably not a reference to a listening ear, but to the pierced ear of a slave. That's what the Lord Jesus was given by his Father – not literally but truly! That's why the Lord Jesus delighted to do God's will (Ps 40:8).

His heavenly Master asked him to die a sinner's death. Out of love for his master, Jesus did. "He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a slave ... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-9). There – on the cross – it wasn't his ear that was pierced, but his hands and his feet for our transgressions, for our iniquities, for our peace (Isa 53:5).

In light of his open ear and pierced hands and feet, we must now declare ourselves to be his slaves for life. We love the Lord Jesus. We love him for all he's done for us. So, we too must declare publicly before judges, before God, "I love my master... I will not go out free." We too must put an ear to the door in faith as our Master and Lord gives us an open ear and makes us his slaves for life!

Have you done that? Have you put your ear to the door in faith? Do you realize that it's better to be a slave of Christ than to be your own master or to live under the harsh slavery imposed by sin and the devil? They're horrible masters, worse than the Egyptians. The love of money will destroy you. The promises of worldly pleasure are always temporary. In the end, they will leave you empty and miserable. These masters promise the world, but never truly satisfy. You can't thrive under them.

So run to the one master who promises life, who always satisfies, and allows us to thrive. Run to the Lord Jesus. Be his slave. Like the eyes of the slave girl in Psalm 123, intently linger and look to your Master's face knowing that he will grant you his grace. Thrive under his love. He gives us rest when we are weary and burdened. His yoke is easy; his burden light (Matt 11:28-30). He's relieved us of our spiritual bankruptcy. He's given us stability, purpose, hope, and life. He satisfies hungry and thirsty souls. It's a blessing not a curse, a delight not a burden, to be a slave of Jesus Christ, not just for six years but for life! 



Tyler VanderGaag, Minister
Canadian Reformed Church
Taber, AB
tyler.vandergaag@gmail.com

NOTICE OF CONVOCAATION

We hereby extend an official notice of convocation of General Synod Guelph 2022, to commence Tuesday, May 10, 2022.

A prayer service has been scheduled for Monday, May 9, 2022 at 7:30pm, at the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph.

All material for Synod should be sent to the attention of the Synod Organizing Committee at the address of the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church:

8037 Highway 7 East, RR#2,
Guelph-Eramosa, ON
N1H 6H8

Electronic submissions and communication should be directed to:
generalsynod2022@emmanuelguelph.ca



According to the Guidelines for General Synod, as provided in the Acts of General Synod Edmonton 2019 (Appendix 20):

'all material for Synod should be received by the convening church in paper or digital format (searchable text PDF as much as feasible) no later than six weeks prior to the convocation date of general synod. Those submitting material shall ensure that one signed copy is available for the archives of General Synod. Material received after this date shall ordinarily not be added to the agenda unless Synod is satisfied that the reasons given for later arrival are reasonable.'



www.merf.org

MERF News

Middle East Reformed Fellowship—"Declaring the Whole Counsel of God"

March 2021



Indonesia Reformed Fellowship (YPRI)

Kabar tentang ketaatanmu telah terdengar oleh semua orang. Sebab itu aku bersukacita tentang kamu. Tetapi aku ingin supaya kamu bijaksana terhadap apa yang baik, dan bersih terhadap apa yang jahat.



ROMA 16:19

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www.give.merf.org



Responses to Gospel Radio & Online Ministry:

JAVA

Online Sunday School Ministry

Caesario, Sunday school student -Yogyakarta:

I am very happy to be able to listen to God's Word regularly and also participate in online Sunday school and prayer meetings, especially now ... [due to coro-

na lockdown] have been to church only twice.

Kyntia, Sunday school student - Central Java:

I am very happy to be able to join the online fellowship. Besides being able to learn God's Word, there are also prizes for the activities and online quizzes. The prize is also really good too, a daily devotional.

Kefas, Sunday school student - Lampung-Sumatra:

Praise God I was able to join the online Sunday

school. Even though it was only online and I could only listen to God's words [Not interact in person], but I was very blessed and my faith can continue to grow.

Erlin, Sunday school teacher - Central Java:

Thank you for the blessings our Sunday school children receive through the online program. This is extraordinary, especially because of the Muslim pressures on us.

We believe that God lacks

Jakarta Online Sunday School

no of means to help and care for us.

Our Sunday school children are very happy to hear the devotions. Although short, the message conveyed is very clear and easy for children to understand.

Listener Community

Mrs. Jaminah, small vegetable stall owner, Banyumas-Central Java:

Thank you because I can listen to God's words and Javanese spiritual music is



Sulawesi island - Mrs Jumiati can now hear the gospel in the Makassar language

beside me when I look after the shop every day.

Mr. Rasim, farm worker, Sokaraja-Central Java:

I am grateful for the radio and USB flash drive that were given to me, because with this radio I can listen to God's Word every day.

Mr. Pariman, unskilled laborer, Purworejo-Central Java:

With the radio and USB flash drive provided, I can hear daily Javanese devotions and sermons from the church during this pandemic.

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support! Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.merf.org/support

New Radio Station at Lewa, Sumba-East Nusa Tenggara

Rev. A Taranau, Sumba Christian Church at Paraikauki-Lewa:

Praise God that now we can listen to God's words more often over the radio. During this pandemic children can continue to learn long distance daily through radio. This is a great blessing for us to always maintain our faith and grow even more with the spiritual radio broadcasts.

Children are also no longer being left behind in learning, because they are able to study every day from home or together in the Hambila Humba reading garden.

SULAWESI

Mr. Rannu, bank employee, responding to the online video program "Injil Masih Menyelamatkan"

Keep the joy of serving the

Lord. I am very inspired by your online media ministry.

Hendra, self-employed, responded to the online video "Merenung Semenit"

I am very blessed with the teaching from the Word of God from the YPRI channel -- simple and easy to understand, Thank you.

Ika, a student, responds to the Toraja language broadcasts:

Every evening, coming home from school, I enjoy listening to the Toraja language broadcasts. Through these broadcasts, I learn God's Word and clearly understand it.

Mrs. Jumiati, housewife, responds to the Makassar language broadcasts:

Thank you for giving us the radio. We can now hear our favorite broadcasts on Cristy radio.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."

— Isaiah 9:2

Praise God for Indonesian Reformed Fellowship (YPRI) teams reaching out with the gospel by radio and online to the multi-lingual 276 million Indonesians on the many islands.

The ministries are in 5 major regional languages plus Bahasa Indonesia, the national language. Pray for the churches to grow in number and in faith.



Central Java island - Mrs. Jaminah listens to gospel radio in her shop

YOU ASKED

During His Ministry on Earth, Did the Lord Jesus Favour the Kingdom of Heaven Over the Church?

What is the difference between the kingdom of heaven and the church of God? Both terms seem to be used somewhat interchangeably in the New Testament, and they both seem to refer to the concept of all Christendom.


From the gospel accounts, it seems as if Christ favours the kingdom over the church.

When we go by the frequency of the Lord Jesus's mentioning of the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God) and of "the church," you would indeed get the impression that he favoured the *kingdom* over the *church*. In fact, in the gospel of Matthew, for instance, it is in Matthew 16:18 only that he mentions "the church." And then we should note that his mention of "church" (*ekklèsia*) in that pronouncement of the Lord Jesus to Peter might not even be considered a reference to "church" as we think of it today. It is, however, a normal Greek word for every form of meeting, gathering. It is the translation of the OT term for God's people Israel, the Gathering (*qahal*). In Matthew's account it doesn't yet have that technical meaning of "church." The Lord Jesus is "gathering" the New Testament Israel, as Shepherd of the sheep (9:36; 11:28; 15:24). Although many have walked away from him, his disciples are the ones persisting in following him, forming a small "gathering" around him. He promises his disciples that they will be the basis, foundation, of his *ekklèsia*.

Right from the start the Lord Jesus preached the coming of the kingdom of heaven (just as John the Baptist did as well). In his preaching and teaching he brings the gospel of the kingdom, the *restoration* of the life of God's people in obedience with the will of God and the *renewal* of the heart of the believers for their life with God. In the parables, for instance, he reveals the secrets of his kingdom, and in the listeners' response they show whether they belong to this kingdom or not. It was a matter of faith!

The Lord Jesus taught his listeners what they had to believe, how they were to live and act, and according to what ordinances of God's Word they had to direct their lives. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples," he said (John 8:31); "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14); and, in Matthew 16:19; 18:18, he gives his disciples the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which they have to handle according to

his instructions. In the exercise of this authority, the church is permitted to declare who are included among the *obedient* citizens of the kingdom of God. The church is also allowed to proclaim who has no part in the kingdom of Christ. The "church," then is the assembly of the *obedient* citizens of the kingdom. In that sense "church" and "kingdom" are very close!

In the gospel accounts, then, we don't read much about the "church" or the gathering of the church *per se*. In the book of Acts, however, the unity between church and kingdom comes strongly to the fore. The gospel by which the church is gathered is the *gospel of the kingdom*. Only those who have seen from the Scriptures that the church is the assembled people of the kingdom of heaven can understand that the spread of the kingdom in the first place means the institution of local *churches* of Christ. That aspect also God shows in the NT. He makes the members of his church citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Phil 3:20), those who are seeking the things of his kingdom. The kingdom of heaven (or of God, used interchangeably and synonymously) reaches farther than the church; the church preaches the redemption of life, the restoration of man in the image of God, through the regeneration of the believer. The church has to preach the gospel of the kingdom to equip the believer for the struggle over the whole width of public life. The church, therefore, is there for the sake of the kingdom: to train the co-workers in the kingdom (Col 4:11), in order that they may walk worthy of the calling of kingdom and glory! 



William den Hollander, Minister emeritus
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church
Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I would like to thank *Clarion* and specifically Rev. Eric Kampen for his Lead Article in the last issue. I remember quite a few years ago Dr. Faber, in a mini lecture series, in which he gave us a whirlwind tour of Calvin's *Institutes*, saying something to the effect that we too easily in our hearts and minds dismiss the time that Jesus spent in the grave. We move too swiftly from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. Allow me to remind the readers that in the *Christ's Psalms our Psalms* devotional, between the meditations on Christ's suffering and death and Christ's resurrection, we find two meditations on Christ's time in the grave, one on Psalm 39 and one on Psalm 71. Thanks once again Rev. Kampen for reminding us of this "Awful" and yet "Awesome" Saturday and of what this means for us.

Norm Schuurman

PRESS RELEASE

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held on March 26, 2021

The convening church was Redemption Canadian Reformed Church and as of the regular practice, Classis met at the Ebenezer Church building. Because of the COVID restrictions, three groups were connected by Zoom. Thank you to Ebenezer for providing the technology to make all this possible.

1. *Opening*: Rev. Jake Torenvliet, on behalf of the convening church, welcomed all the delegates and opened the meeting with Scripture reading from Philippians 2:1-18 and prayer.

2. *Credentials*: Rehoboth Church reported that the primi delegates are in attendance. The credentials were examined and found to be in order.

3. *Classis was constituted*.

4. *Appointments*: Rev. Ian Wildeboer was appointed as Chair, Mr. Nathan Helder as Vice Chair, and Rev. Winston Bosch as Clerk.

5. *Agenda*: The agenda is adopted with one change.

6. *Memorabilia*: The chair notes the recent accident and hospitalization of Dr. T. Van Raalte and the health concerns of Dr. A. de Visser and retired pastors Rev. John van Popta and Rev. Chris Bosch. Also noted is Rev. Hilmer Jagersma's acceptance of a call from Fellowship, and the publication of Rev. DeGelder's book on Revelation.

7. *Reports*:

- a. Church visitation reports were received for: Bethel, Blessings (Mercy), Ebenezer, Fellowship, Jubilee, Redemption, and Rehoboth Church. With gratitude to God, it could be reported that the work of proclaiming the Word, administering the sacraments, and shepherding God's people continues to occur faithfully in these congregations and in accordance with the Church Order.
- b. Special report update re: Proposed Changes to Classical exam Guidelines: After a discussion it is decided to have the Ad Hoc Committee work with the suggestions given and bring back a new report at the next classis.

8. *Question Period according to Article 44 C.O.*

- a. Rehoboth Church - seeking advice for the call to Rev. Victor Atallah, to continue his work with MERF. After discussion and committee work, support was given with recommendations.
- b. Advice is given to Ebenezer regarding how to respond to Fergus Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church's request to the churches to form a committee to interact with the government.

9. *Proposals or Instructions of the Churches*:

- a. Burlington Fellowship - Approbation of Call was completed according to classis regulations. The installation date is April 9, 2021. Ebenezer church was appointed to represent Classis.
- b. Burlington Ebenezer - an overture for a change

to Church Order Article 44 regarding Advisory Members was discussed. After committee work the overture was not adopted.

10. *Correspondence Received*:

- a. An appeal from Ebenezer was received regarding Lord's Supper admission at Fellowship. After committee work the appeal is declared inadmissible according to classis regulations for appeals.
- b. An appeal from the Orangeville Canadian Reformed Church was received regarding practices at Blessings. After committee work the appeal is declared inadmissible according to classis regulations.
- c. Licensure Extension for Anson Vandelden - After discussion Classis unanimously decides to approve the Licensure Extension for seventeen months (until classis of June 2022).

11. *Appointments*:

- a. Convening church for the next classis will be Blessings (Mercy)
- b. Suggested officers for the next classis:
 - i. Chairman: Rev. Winston Bosch
 - ii. Vice-Chairman: Elder delegate from the convening church
 - iii. Clerk: Rev. Gerrit Brintjes

12. *Date of Next Classis*: June 11, 2021

13. *Question Period* was made use of.

14. *Censure according to Art. 34 C.O.*

- a. The Chair noted with much thankfulness that censure was not needed.

15. It was decided that the Acts and Press Release would be approved by the Classis Officers post meeting.

16. *Closing*: Rev. Ian Wildeboer led in closing prayer. The meeting was adjourned.

Nathan Helder, Vice-Chair

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
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Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living