

Clarion



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*Good Friday is about the
forgiveness of sins*

Inside this Issue

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- Jesus Denies Himself Relief





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Determined to Forgive

Good Friday is about the forgiveness of sins

"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." These are some of the first words spoken by the Lord Jesus as he hung on the cross on Good Friday. They're also some of the first words people throw at you when you are struggling to face someone who's sinned against you. "You have to forgive him, you know. That's what Jesus did. He even forgave the people who crucified him!"

But did He? And is it so simple that we are required to forgive another person no matter what the state of their heart or what they think about their actions?

God's forgiveness of us

It hardly needs to be said that Good Friday is about the forgiveness of sins. In every Lord's Supper celebration we remember and celebrate that on Golgotha our Lord's body was broken and his blood poured out for the complete forgiveness of all our sins. Forgiveness is the wonder of the gospel that keeps us coming back for more – the cancellation of our debts in the once-for-all payment laid down by Jesus!

But there must be repentance. Forgiveness itself is a free gift of God's grace. He asks no payment from us but only that we accept it in faith and repentance. Repentance means to turn away from our sin in sorrow of heart, to be contrite before the LORD on account of having offended him. This is God's clear message already in the Old Testament for example in Psalm 51 or in Ezekiel 18:30-32. "Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!"

Forgiveness is wonderful for it means the wrath of God has been removed from over our head and in its place the peace of God fills our hearts. But if there's no turning away from the sin, no changing of our heart, no repentance, there is no forgiveness. The Lord Jesus Himself also taught this from the beginning of his earthly ministry when he came preaching, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt 3:2). He underlined

this necessary condition in Luke 13:3, speaking to the crowds of Israelites, "But unless you repent, you too will perish!" Just read the ascended Lord's letter to the church of Thyatira in Revelation 2 to see how unflinching he is about our need to repent to be forgiven by God.

Our forgiveness of each other

But now what about from our side towards our neighbour? What does God expect of us when our neighbour commits a sin against ourselves personally? Perhaps someone cheated me out of big money or hurt me with lies or darkened my reputation by gossip. Maybe the transgression has been darker still: physical abuse, sexual abuse, adultery, or rape – do I have to forgive such persons even if they do not repent? Is that what the work of Christ on Good Friday obligates me to do?

To support this, some point to a text like the fifth petition in Matthew 6:12, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." The Lord's added commentary in verse 14 seems to make it categorical, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." There you have it, they say. Repentance is not mentioned much less demanded as a pre-requisite and thus we are required to forgive others unconditionally, hard as it may be.

Hold on a minute. Notice that the Lord's Prayer does not specify either the necessity of our repentance before we are forgiven by God, though we know Jesus taught that. Apparently some things are assumed by the Lord as already being in place before these petitions are made. In this short, compact prayer one of those things is clearly we cannot expect God to forgive us our sins unless we repent.

In the same way, the Lord Jesus must assume that our neighbour has repented from his sin against us and desires to be forgiven. Christ brings that requirement out quite clearly in Luke 17:3, "So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive

him." Here Jesus specifies that repentance is necessary also for forgiveness of human to human. If it were not needed, the Lord could not have made these statements.

Imitating God

What is necessary from our side is the *willingness* to forgive, even the determination to do the necessary work to bring about a person's repentance and reconciliation. This is the posture of God toward us sinners and he insists that it be our posture toward fellow sinners if we are to be his children. Paul urges us in this direction in Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. *Be imitators of God*, therefore, as dearly loved children."

The Lord Jesus teaches the very same thing in Matthew 18:15-18, the well-known passage about church discipline. However, it only becomes full-blown *church* discipline when the transgression against *one's person* is not resolved in repentance, "If your brother sins *against you*, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. *If he listens to you*, you have won your brother over." Jesus teaches us to seek out our neighbour's repentance and subsequent reconciliation *by way of his repentance* (i.e. if he listens to you). If Jesus had intended

What's Inside

Issue 8 is our Good Friday issue. Rev. Peter Holtvliwer addresses forgiveness. Does forgiveness come before or after repentance? How do we approach forgiveness as forgiven Christians? As we approach Good Friday we are reminded of the attitude we are to approach sins of others against us, just as we were forgiven.

This issue also includes a Treasures New and Old meditation and a Canticle on the Good Friday topic.

Rev. Klaas Stam discusses titles such as "Reverend" and "Pastor" when addressing ministers. He explains that the distinction is important, as it is connected to our understanding of the office of minister.

Dr. Wes Bredenhof reviews *Christians Get Depressed Too*, discussing the need for understanding and information regarding this complex issue.

Issue 8 brings you reports on the Welcome of Rev. Witten and Grand Re-opening of the Vernon church building as well as the Fiftieth Anniversary of Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church. We also have two press releases.

Laura Veenendaal



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us to forgive our neighbour's transgressions against us without his repentance, he would not have commanded us to work toward the person's repentance.

Besides, would it not be strange to personally forgive someone's sin against you but then still proceed with bringing along witnesses and even telling it to the church because he hasn't repented? What message would that send: "I've forgiven you but no one else has"??

Repentance benefits the neighbour

Consider it from another angle. Would it be helpful and spiritually beneficial to our fellow Christian if, after they have sinned against us in some way but not repented, we say, "Brother, I forgive you!"? In the first place, the person would not accept it because in his mind he has done nothing wrong. So reconciliation is no closer. But much worse, is this person's guilt now cleared away before God simply because we have personally forgiven him?

Not at all. Sins against our neighbour are still first of all sins against God (second table of the law!). David already recognized this. After he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, he said, "Against you (the LORD), you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:3). Forgiving someone without their repentance might make us feel good for a while but it does nothing for their standing with God. Only when that person realizes in sorrow of heart that he has offended the LORD first of all will he then come to be reconciled both with his God and his neighbour – but not before. Forgiveness that does not lead to reconciliation – that isn't really forgiveness, is it? The debt still stands and God will one day bring it to account.

A determined saviour

Instead we must learn from our Saviour the grace to be fully *determined* to forgive. That is the attitude of our Father in heaven toward us as pictured in the parable of the prodigal son. All along the father is waiting for his son to repent. He is eager for it. He wants to give it. He looks for the opportunity to extend it. He shows that by daily keeping an eye on the road, hoping his son would return. Given the way his son had left, the very act of his return would show that he had humbled himself in repentance and his father was eager for that. Indeed, as soon as he spots his son "a long way off," he is filled with compassion for him, runs to him (breaking cultural protocol even!), throws his arms around him and kisses him (Luke 15:20)!

As with the Father, so with the Son, as our Lord Jesus showed on Good Friday, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." It's a moving prayer for the forgiveness of the crowds and soldiers who had ignorantly called for his crucifixion. Though they could have known better, they were ignorant of his true identity. The masses had not understood his work or his

message. Whipped up by the hate-filled Jewish leaders, they had shouted for his crucifixion and helped to sway Pilate to bring down the frightful sentence of death.

Christ wants them to be forgiven but did you notice that He doesn't actually forgive them himself? He could have if that was appropriate. More than once in his ministry he had directly pronounced the sins of certain people forgiven. He showed that he had power on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:9, 10). But here he does not extend that forgiveness. Instead he asks his Father to as yet lead them to forgiveness. He's praying for his Father to bring them to repentance that they might be forgiven for *that's what he came for!* Christ's mission was to seek and save lost sinners like those crowds, like you and me, and he was always *eager to forgive!*

And determined to make it happen too. Less than two months later this same Jesus now raised as Lord at the Father's right hand sent out a preacher to these same crowds in Jerusalem. Filling Peter with his Spirit, Christ impressed the call of the gospel on their hearts, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. . . Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." What was their response? "They were cut to the heart" – and 3000 repented and were added to the number of the church that day! The prayer of Good Friday was answered on Pentecost Sunday in the repentance worked by the Spirit of God!

Eager to forgive

And that, now, is to be our approach to our neighbour! As Christians we are to take on the mission of Christ, preaching the good news of the forgiveness of sins through faith and repentance and eagerly hoping and praying to see it happen in all our neighbours, also those who sin against us. This can be very difficult, especially when the sin has been very hurtful. But let us bear in mind that our sins against God are a million times more hurtful to him and his holiness than anything we've experienced and yet he stands ready and willing to forgive us everything. That needs to be our posture now. Ready to let it go. Eager to cancel the debt. Hungry to reconcile and restore the peace.

Sometimes people don't want to be forgiven. They refuse to repent despite our overtures and admonitions. What then? In the church setting, the rest of Matthew 18 comes into play, of course. But from our side personally, we are called to live in peace with all men as far as it depend on us (Romans 12:18). Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Not bitterness but concern. Not hardness of heart but a spirit that longs to forgive. Not paying back evil for evil but doing good and kind things even to those who hate us. And also praying for those who have sinned against us as the Lord did, that as yet the Father may bring them into the joy of Good Friday's forgiveness through the avenue of repentance. **C**



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MATTHEW 13:52

Jesus Denies Himself Relief

“Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.”

Mark 15:23

In the passion narrative, there are many small details that can easily be read over as we are swept along to the crucial moments of Christ’s suffering. Yet every detail was recorded for our edification and instruction in the faith. This is also the case with the text before us about the wine mixed with myrrh.

We know from Jewish tradition that those who were going to be executed and suffer much pain in their death would be offered at that time some relief in the form of wine, mixed with something else that would provide relief. One such substance was myrrh which apparently has narcotic qualities, as attested by the ancient physician Dioscorides Pedanius who did an exhaustive study of many plants and drugs in the first century AD. While not all commentators agree on the precise meaning of the soldiers offering Jesus wine mixed with myrrh, given the circumstances it seems quite likely that Jesus was being offered pain relief.

Jesus had just undergone a lot of physical suffering. He had been flogged and beaten. He had had a crown of thorns set upon his head and the soldiers repeatedly struck him on the head with a staff. Finally they took Jesus out to Golgotha to crucify him. Crucifixion is a very painful way to die. Anyone else in these circumstances would have gladly welcomed any kind of relief from the terrible suffering he had

undergone and was still about to undergo. But when Jesus was offered the wine mixed with myrrh, he did not take it.

Why not? Why could Jesus not have a little bit of relief from the pain, the worst of which was yet to come? Because there was a lot more going on here than simply physical pain, however severe that may have been. The wine mixed with myrrh may have been offered in a gesture of basic human kindness, but the devil used it to tempt Jesus to take an easier way, to pay attention to his own body rather than the will of God for his life.

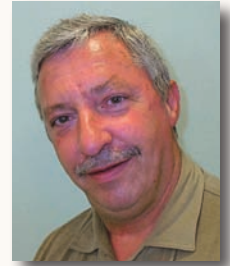
In this simple offer of the wine mixed with myrrh, Jesus Christ is faced with a real temptation to take the easier road, to enter the depths of hell in a dulled state so that he could take the edge off the pain somewhat. But thanks be to God! Jesus remains faithful and does not take the easier road. He knows that he has to suffer God’s wrath and punishment for our sins completely to make perfect satisfaction. Nothing less than complete satisfaction would meet God’s holy and perfect standards.

See the love of Jesus Christ for sinners like you and me in this action of denying himself relief from pain! He does this willingly and consciously. He lived his life in perfect obedience to all of God’s commandments. He had the plan of his Father uppermost

in his mind at all times. Under no circumstances would he take shortcuts when it came to God’s commandments. He always had his eyes fixed on what God expected from him. He presented himself as the perfect lamb, the lamb without defect – also without the defect of a stupefied mind and an intoxicated spirit. He was slaughtered whole and complete in every way. He experienced the rejection of God with his whole mind, soul, and being. When he cried out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34), he did not do so as someone who didn’t know what he was saying. He was not hallucinating or imagining things. No, he was experiencing reality to the fullest.

Jesus Christ descended into hell in a total way in order that we might be totally delivered. We do not need to experience it a little bit because part of Christ did not experience it. No, he did it in a way which involved his entire being. Because of his suffering and death, we may have the forgiveness of *all* of our sins. Jesus drank every drop of God’s cup of wrath in order that our cups might be overflowing with the wonderful blessings of the Lord: the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and life everlasting. Let us drink deeply from these treasures which Christ has obtained for us, and live in the joy of his salvation all the days of our life.





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Pastor Klaas Meet Reverend Stam!

For most of my years in the ministry I was known and addressed as Reverend Stam. Often in a Dutch immigrant congregation, the title "Dominee" was still used, but it soon became "Reverend," mostly abbreviated to "Rev."

I did not choose this lofty designation; I simply inherited it. But in the course of time I noticed that especially in the North American setting, the title "Reverend" was regarded with some suspicion. That title has in it the verb "to revere," and most certainly we are not to revere men. The Apostle Peter wrote, "Fear God, honour the King" (1 Peter 2:17). We must honour earthly dignitaries and magistrates. But only God is to be feared and revered. By implication, then, no man ought to be called "Reverend."

The name "Dominee" is also taboo. It comes from the Latin name "*dominus*" which means "lord." If it comes down to it, only our Saviour merits the name *Lord*. It is the great Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Let no man assume this title, not even in Latin.

Someone asked me once, "Are all these titles not the result of *clericalism*?" Well, you'll have to look that word up, because I am afraid of what it may mean.

Minister of religion

Some confused congregation members tried for a while to address me as "Minister." But that did not fit very well either. The title "Minister" is usually reserved for members of cabinet, especially those who are regularly called by the Her Majesty's loyal opposition to resign or be sacked. It's not easy being a minister on Parliament Hill. It is much easier to be a minister on Pulpit Hill.

The title "Minister" does mean that someone is *servicing*. A minister is responsible to those who

appointed him. Actually, the minister is not responsible to people, first of all, but to God who called him. Sometimes we speak of our local minister as a "verbum divini minister" (VDM), a servant of the divine word. It is the Lord who appointed him, and therefore you simply cannot hire and fire a minister at will.

However, I do not use the anachronism VDM because it is easily confused with another abbreviation *DVM* which reminds me too much of the title of doctor of veterinary medicine. In rural areas a minister does appear often on the farm and sometimes in the barn, but the Rev. is not a Vet. I did have a young farmhand once ask me, "Are you the Vet?" I said, "Not yet."

"Minister" is an accurate word, yet it does not function as an address in our language, unless you hold a specific portfolio in government. Besides, ministers generally don't last long. One booboo and you're toast. So I concluded that the word "Minister" as proper nomenclature was improper.

The discovery of the name "pastor"

While I was mulling over these weighty matters, it was brought to my attention that the name "Pastor" is really in vogue these days. This name has a number of advantages. First of all, it emphasizes that a minister of the gospel is to shepherd the flock of Christ. Pastor means "shepherd" and that seems to be a fitting designation.

The title "Pastor" also has a nice side-effect: it knocks the "Dominee" from a clerical pedestal and brings the lofty "Reverend" into a more mundane sphere. It is not uncommon that the title of pastor is followed by the *first name* of the man involved. This is a nice *personal* touch, much-appreciated nowadays.

It goes like this. Pastor Klaas will open the meeting and it will be closed by Rev. Stam. Same guy, different

epithet. In a time of increasing emphasis on *pastors*, one cannot easily maintain the obsolete title "Reverend" without coming across as a stuffed shirt. Pastor Klaas may still be cool, but Rev. Stam is definitely out of touch.

What does the Bible say?

Is this matter really important? Who cares if a minister of the gospel allows himself to be called "Reverend" or "Pastor"? Well, I care because it has something to do with our understanding of the offices.

The name "Pastor" is not used in the Bible solely for ministers of the gospel. In truth, *all the elders are pastors*. The fact that a dominee is supposed to be a pastor is not peculiar to his office, for it is the task of all the elders, individually and together. Consider, for a moment, the words of Paul to the elders of Ephesus as found in Acts 10:28, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkepoi). *Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood.*"

*Our ministers are called to
preach and teach the Word, and this
fact alone sets them apart and accords
them double honour*

Once when I was hospitalized in intensive care for exhaustion and related deficiencies, I was visited by almost all my elders. Normally only family members and clergy were allowed to visit in that area. But the discerning elders told the nurse on duty that they were *pastors*. Another nurse commented, "Wow, you sure have a lot of pastors!" What was I to say? I was the most pasteurized minister on the block.

The elders are overseers who have the task of governing the church. At the same time they are *pastors* who must shepherd the flock. The title "Pastor" alone and by itself does not adequately do justice to the office of the minister.

The special character of the minister's work is that besides being a pastor, like the elders, he has the added calling of being a preacher and a teacher. It is the extra responsibility that makes his office into a full-time task. This is why he needs to be trained in the theological disciplines. The minister is a pastor *and* a teacher, and the element of teaching even stands in the foreground.

Let me elaborate a little on one pertinent passage of Scripture. In 1 Timothy 5:17 we find, "The elders

who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of *double honour*, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

Is the expression "double honour" perhaps behind the title "Reverend"? And is this double honour not especially meant especially for those whose work is *preaching and teaching*? Our ministers are called to preach and teach the Word, and this fact alone sets them apart and accords them double honour.

What is this *double honour*? Some explainers take the word "honour" to mean "salary." Paul does say in the next verse that "the worker deserves his wages." This means that the ministers of the Word should receive a double salary. I wonder if this can be applied retroactively.

In any case, the office bearer who is charged also with the demanding and time-consuming work of preaching and teaching should receive special respect because of his office. He brings the Word of God and that calling sets him apart.

Therefore I do not think that the title "Reverend" is out of place. It is not meant to revere the man but to esteem his special office. The word "Dominee" means to be a *major domo*, someone who exercises the master's will over his house. That title, too, is very fitting.

The word "*Pastor*" denotes the office of elders. The combination "*pastor and preacher*" properly characterizes the office of the minister. This insight is particularly relevant in a time when things are highly personalized and easily trivialized. Pastor Klaas. . . meet Reverend Stam! The Bible leads us to make proper distinctions also when addressing office bearers.

Expectations

The elders and deacons have responsible tasks in the church of Christ. They should be honoured because of their offices, especially if they do their work well. This sets the bar high. The Lord and his people rightly have high expectations of the office bearers.

The same holds true for our ministers. The ministry of the Word is a very intense occupation. Ministers may never neglect their calling to do the work of preaching and teaching well. God asks this and the churches need this.

Pastor Klaas is still Reverend Stam, weaknesses and blemishes and all. The minister is only a jar of clay, slated to decay. This is meant to show that the all-surpassing power is from God, and not from man (2 Corinthians 4: 7). In our speaking about and to office bearers we must maintain biblical principles.





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Canticles

The Obedient Servant

1. The So-vereign LORD has giv - en Me
 a tongue by which I give in - struc - tion
 to know the word of con - so - la - tion,
 the time - ly word for those who sigh.
 Each mor - ning He calls Me to lis - ten
 for I must do as I am bid - den.

2. My ears are open to the LORD
 and I have never been rebellious.
 I have obeyed with utmost calmness.
 I will not disregard His word
 but will accept what He commands Me
 and do whatever He demands Me.
3. I gave My back to cruel beasts,
 to those who flogged Me without mercy.
 My cheeks I gave to those who shamed Me.
 They pulled My beard out by the roots.
 I did not hide My face from mocking
 and from their filthy hateful spitting.
4. Because the Sovereign LORD gives aid,
 before Him I am not embarrassed.
 I will trust Him though things look bleakest.
 And so My face like flint I've made.
 He will defend My reputation
 so that I am by shame not smitten.
5. My Vindicator is so near.
 Who then will bring a charge against Me?
 I challenge them to try confront Me.
 I don't think anyone will dare.
 I'm ready to face My accuser.
 None can condemn Me — God's My Helper.
6. His troubled Servant God will bless.
 He will avenge Me for My suffering.
 His eyes were open to My writhing.
 He saved Me from all My distress.
 My mockers will wear out like garments
 and moths will eat up all the fragments.

Text: Isaiah 50:4-9; vers. George Ph. van Popta, 2009, ©
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Vernon Welcomes Rev. Witten

Ordination

With great joy to our Lord the Canadian Reformed Church at Vernon, BC welcomed our newly ordained pastor, Rev. A. Witten, to our congregation on October 17, 2010. Following his ordination in the morning service, Rev. Witten preached on Psalm 1 in the afternoon. With the theme "Follow the blessed path of the Lord," Rev. Witten asked three questions: Where is the path? Where is it heading? And how are we going to get there? He expounded on these points by showing that we cannot find the path among sinners but rather through studying God's Word, which he hopes to preach faithfully from the pulpit each week. This path leads to a fruitful life, lived in the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the Word keeps us on the narrow path that leads to eternal life.

Welcome

At 7:00 pm the congregation met again under our capable MC of the evening, Brandon VanDelft, who graciously handed the opening of the evening to the retired pastor in our midst, Rev. C. VanSpronsen. He opened with Bible reading and prayer and welcomed all present. Rev. VanSpronsen welcomed the newly minted pastor to our midst and encouraged the congregation to make him feel welcome especially as their family and friends are far away. On behalf of Classis Pacific East, Rev. Bouwman of the Yarrow Canadian Reformed Church welcomed our new pastor and gave an entertaining rendition of an audio feed that Rev. Witten had put together for Rev. Bouwman on his departure from Australia. After some singing, accompanied by our able trumpeter Vicki Doesberg, the congregation heard words of welcome from the seniors and a poem by Mrs. VanSpronsen. Ladies



Aid presented an introduction- to-Vernon basket and Rev. Reeves of the Kelowna URC said a few words of welcome to our pastor on behalf of the United Reformed Church in Kelowna. After a kangaroo court held by the Young Peoples, where the Reverend as judge made a neutral judgment on the case, Arnie Hofsink presented a beautiful handcrafted wood sign to hang on the manse. Joel Vandermolen gave us a beautiful tour of Vernon via video introducing our pastor to the many wonders of our city. The Youth Group made a poetic limerick of household items our pastor and his wife may need in their new home. Henry Vandermolen, on behalf of the care group, urged the congregation to think of practical ways to make the Reverend welcome in our town and provided a list of people willing to show the pastor a thing or two about what life is like here in Vernon. Finally, Sherry Vanderdeen on behalf of Young Adults gave a run down of everyone's occupation just in case the Pastor needed a handyman, financial advisor, accountant, furniture refinisher, programmer, etc. Rev. Witten closed the evening with thankfulness to our



God for bringing him to this place and anticipation in fulfilling his place as shepherd of God's flock. Thus with great eagerness we look forward to our pulpit being filled each Sunday again and the true preaching of the Word proclaimed to the honour and glory of our God.

Grand Re-opening

The Grand Re-opening of the Vernon Canadian Reformed Church building was celebrated March 3 at 7:00 pm. The fellowship committee had done an excellent job of organizing the event as many pictures from the initial construction of our church and now the recent renovation were on display for all to see. Ben Hofsink from the original committee of administration

of 1991 gave a short speech on the history of the construction of the original structure while Leonard Douma from the more recent building committee gave an overview of what had been done to expand our church building. Much thankfulness was given to our God that we are able to meet together as congregation in freedom and peace in such a beautiful facility. Many thanks as well to the countless volunteer hours and donations that made this building possible. Along with a video of the original construction, many games were set up for all to enjoy: ping pong, foosball, crokenal, and shuffleboard just to name a few. Along with some good refreshments provided by the youth group a great time was had by all. Be sure to stop by if you're in Vernon to fellowship with us and hear the preaching of our new minister.



Fiftieth Anniversary of the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church

"Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness." Psalm 115:1

On February 24, 2011 an evening of celebration took place at the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford. Her members and guests had the privilege of reflecting on fifty years since the institution of this church on February 24, 1961. The first Canadian Reformed Church in the Fraser Valley began in New Westminster in 1950 with a second church beginning in Langley in 1954. From the Langley church, members who lived to the east began to hold services in Abbotsford in September 1960. Institution soon followed along with the purchase of property and a building where the current church stands.

Harm Vanderlinde opened the evening with Bible reading and prayer remembering God's love and faithfulness to his church. A letter of congratulations from the church at Vernon was read. George Geurts spoke words of encouragement on behalf of the Yarrow church. Abbotsford URC delegate, John VanMuyen, spoke of God's faithfulness through the generations. Rev. VanOene outlined the early years leading up to the institution of the church. He recalled travelling the small roads across the valley to teach catechism in the homes of members.

Abbotsford has only had four ministers in the fifty year span. The organizing committee divided the evening into the decades and gave glimpses of how life was back then. The 1960s began with a fashion show of young people representing a large family dressed in black and white with hats and KING peppermints dutifully passed around. The humorous pair, Tony Bikker and Tom Sikma, gave commentary to go along with the events that happened in the decades as shown on a PowerPoint presentation. Since the members were spread over quite a distance the church services were held at 11:00 AM, followed by lunch and another



service. Songs from the *Book of Praise* were practiced in English between services. The consistory's minutes were written in Dutch until 1969. Rev. L. Moes served as minister from 1963-1969 and son, Harry Moes, gave an overview of the events of those years, concluding with the words, "As mountains surround Abbotsford so God surrounds his congregation."

The 1970s fashion show saw the hair growing longer and the hemlines shorter, along with bellbottoms and plaid pants. The church members living in the Chilliwack area instituted a church in 1970 and also John Calvin School in Yarrow opened its doors. Work began on a new church building the same year as Abbotsford welcomed Rev. M. VanderWel as minister, and he served from 1971-1991. Son, Dick VanderWel, imitated his father well with a "sermon" on 1. The early years; 2. The middle years; 3. The latter years. The 1980s fashion show highlighted a colourful array of clothing and big glasses along with the ever present KING peppermints. A pipe organ was installed in 1980

and an annex built with meeting rooms in 1981. The members to the south in the USA instituted a church in Lynden in 1985. John Pruiam gave some highlights of the smoke-filled consistory meetings that lasted late into the night.

Floral prints, "big hair," and colourful ties were on display in the 1990s fashion show. The church balcony was completed in 1991 and members in the Yarrow area instituted a church in 1993. Rev. R. Schouten arrived as minister in 1995 and served until 2006. He commented that coming from the small congregation in Calgary to the 500+ member congregation of Abbotsford took some adjusting. The workload always remained full but the people were a great listening congregation. Many joys and sorrows, struggles and triumphs were recalled. Rev. Schouten also relayed congratulations from the neighbouring congregation of Aldergrove where he now is minister.

For the fashion show of the 2000s everyone stood and greeted those around them while seeing the

fashion trends of the day. Rev. K. Janssen became Abbotsford's minister in 2009. He displayed some graphs of current membership numbers of over 520 including 347 communicant members. God certainly has shown his love and faithfulness and continues to allow his church to grow.

Mary VandeBurgt presented a solo on the organ and then was welcomed to the stage along with Jean Breukelman, another of the original members, to unveil a new baptismal font. There are eighteen of the 106 charter members who have remained in Abbotsford all fifty years. The final contribution of the evening was music by a group of Sudanese members with songs in Arabic and English. The decades continue to pass by and from the original church in New Westminster in 1950 there are now ten churches in the Fraser Valley and beyond. As the evening closed, the words of Hymn 8 were sung, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."



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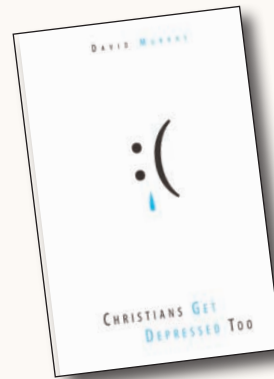
Christians Get Depressed Too, David Murray, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010

Additional Information: Paperback, 112 pages, \$10.00

Dr. David Murray is rapidly becoming well-known. He blogs regularly (headhearhand.posterous.com), does a podcast with Tim Challies, is a regular Facebook user, video producer, and preacher. Besides all that, he finds time to teach Old Testament and Practical Theology at Puritan Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Murray has developed a reputation for being theologically astute, biblically faithful, and pastorally sensitive. All of those qualities come together in this short book on a tough subject.

There is a perception out there that depression is, at its roots, a spiritual problem. According to this perception, people become depressed because they have done something sinful. A true and faithful Christian would never get depressed. Part of Murray's burden in this book is to dismantle that perception. He does that with an open Bible, explaining how godly believers in both Testaments struggled with this problem.

The author goes on to outline how complex depression is – there are no trite and easy answers. He describes the problem in a way that will be helpful for those trying to understand it. He also gives hope, comfort, and help for those who are suffering. Again, all of this is grounded in the Word of God. Yes, Murray



believes that Christians can learn from medical science and he attempts to incorporate some of those insights into this book. He is also firmly convinced that medication cannot only alleviate symptoms, but also address the causes of depression in many cases.

There are a lot of people out there who struggle with this ailment. In severe cases, it can be debilitating. It's hard to know what to say or do if you're watching someone go through it. Those who want to help should read this book. And don't be afraid to buy a copy for the person suffering either. It may give the encouragement and help they need. The book is short enough so as not to be intimidating and written clearly enough so as not to be misunderstood.

I've read and reviewed several books on this subject over the years. I've learned that depression is a dark and ugly consequence of the fall into sin. It is no less a part of this world of dysfunction than is cancer. At the same time, I've learned (and Murray's book has reinforced this) that depression reminds us of how little we know about the workings of the human brain and how it relates to our non-material aspect (our soul). Finally, I've become convinced that God brings trials (including depression) our way so as to shape, teach, and lead us. This little book brings us back to the Word through which that all happens.



Press Release of Classis Alberta held on March 8, 2011, in Edmonton, AB

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. W. B. Slomp opened the meeting by reading Psalm 111, inviting the delegates to sing the same Psalm, and leading in prayer. He then extended some words of welcome to the delegates, and a special welcome to Rev. Kok from the URCNA and the delegates of Regional Synod. Rev. Slomp noted the fact that Rev. Louwerse and Rev. Poppe declined the call to Smithville and that Rev. Jagt declined the call to Abbotsford. He also noted that it may well be possible that this is the last classis meeting for Rev. Tiggelaar. He also remembered with thankfulness the work that is being done at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary and the on going health concerns of Dr. Gootjes and Dr. DeJong. The church of Edmonton Immanuel examined the credentials and found them to be in good order. Classis was declared constituted and the following officers were appointed: Chairman: Rev. W. B. Slomp, Vice-chairman: Rev. D. Poppe, Clerk: E. Tiggelaar. The agenda is adopted.

Reports

The church of St Albert reports that the books of the treasurer are in good order. The church of Taber reports since we are cooperating together as a federation in providing funding for needy students, the committee for needy students will report at the next classis. It is noted with thankfulness that there are no needy churches in Classis Alberta. The church of Edmonton Immanuel, as the church responsible for the inspection of the archives, reports that the archives are in good order. Rev. E. Tiggelaar, as the representative for classis to government, reports on his contact with the government. The church visitors report on the visit to the congregation of Calgary. This report is received with thanksgiving. Rev. M. Jagt gives a favourable report on a visit to the URCNA Classis in Lethbridge, AB. One of the highlights was a successful examination of a student for the ministry. They also provisionally received several new congregations into the federation: Parkland South, a daughter congregation of the church in Ponoka and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, in New Westminister, which included a colloquium doctum of their minister, Rev. Gary Zekveld. These were thorough examinations, comparable to a similar examination in our federation. They also

appointed a new member to the Psalter Hymnal Committee from Classis Western Canada.

Proposals and instructions from the churches

As suggested by a church to a previous classis, the church of Edmonton Providence presented a proposal to change our classical regulations so that the Free Reformed Churches of North America are no longer invited to our classis. Classis notes with regret that the reason for doing so is because we no longer have any official ecclesiastical relationship with them. Classis agreed to this proposal.

The church of Barrhead has made arrangements for the retirement of their minister, Rev. E. Tiggelaar. All the documents are found to be in good order and with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, classis approves this request. Rev. Tiggelaar is commended to the care of the LORD after a lifetime in the ministry and almost thirty years serving in the congregation of Barrhead.

The church of Barrhead requests Rev. Louwerse to serve as councillor for their congregation during the time of their upcoming vacancy. This request is granted. Rev. Louwerse is also appointed as a representative of Classis to attend the final service led by Rev. Tiggelaar to be held, DV, on June 26, 2011.

Question period

Question period according to Church Order Article 44 was held. All churches responded that the ministry of the office bearers is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. One church requests advice in a matter of discipline. Advice is given.

Fraternal greetings

Rev. D. Kok was given the opportunity to address Classis on behalf of Classis Western Canada of the URCNA. He expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have interaction with the brothers, indicating that being present at one another's ecclesiastical assemblies are a wonderful way in which we can show our love to one another. He also invited a classical delegate to their next meeting. Rev. Roukema thanked him for his presence and for the good cooperation between our federations.

Appointments

The church of Edmonton Providence was appointed as the convening church for the next classis on June 14 or October 11, 2011. Suggested officers for the next

classis are: chairman: Rev. J. Louwerse, vice-chairman: Rev. W. B. Slomp, clerk: Rev. D. Poppe. Rev. Louwerse is appointed as delegate to the next URCNA classis to be convened by Neerlandia, DV. Rev. Tiggelaar is willing to continue to serve as the contact person with the provincial government. Regarding the appointment of delegates for the next regional synod, the next convening church of classis will be responsible to ensure that there are sufficient names put forward for delegates for regional synod.

Closing

Delegates were given opportunity for question period and some brothers made use of this. Since this will likely be Rev. Tiggelaar's last meeting, he expressed gratitude for the way in which we could work together in this classis over the past years. He wished the Lord's continued blessing on the churches in our classical district. He reflected on how greatly the Lord has blessed us in making decisions together and enabling us to live in love with one another. Rev. Aasman noted that Rev. VanBeveren has decided to move to Ontario to be closer to his family. Rev. Aasman also noted that Rev. Dong will be travelling through the churches in Alberta to make a presentation about his work. The chairman noted with thankfulness that censure according to Article 34 of the church order was not needed. The Acts of Classis were read and adopted and the press release was approved. The vice-chairman closed the meeting with thanksgiving prayer.

For Classis Alberta

D. Ph. Poppe

Vice-chairman at that time

Press Release of Classis Niagara held on March 9, 2011

Opening

On behalf of the convening church of Smithville, br. J. Jonker calls the meeting to order. He requests the singing of Psalm 66:1 and 2, reads from God's Holy Word: Ephesians 1:1-14, and leads in prayer.

The credentials are examined and found to be in order.

Constitution of Classis

The classis is constituted and the following officers take their place. Chairman: Rev. S.C. VanDam; Clerk: Rev. K.A. Kok; Vice Chairman: Rev. J. Huijgen.

The chairman in his opening remarks remembers the arrival of Rev. Holtvlüwer, the recovery of Rev. Huijgen, the vacancy of the church of Smithville, and the near completion of their new facilities.

The agenda is adopted.

Signing of the subscription form

Rev. P. H. Holtvlüwer signs the form after the chair has read the form.

Question period ad Art. 44 C.O.

The question period is held and the churches answer the first two questions in the affirmative and the third in the negative.

There are no proposals, correspondence, reports, nor greetings from fraternal observers.

Appointments

a) Convening church next classis: Springcreek Canadian Reformed Church of Tintern.

b) Date for next classis: June 15, 2011.

c) Suggested officers for next classis. Chair: Rev. D. Wynia; Clerk: Rev. S.C. VanDam; Vice-Chair: Rev. K.A. Kok.

d) The convening church of Tintern will invite the churches of the URC, OPC, RCUS, and Free Reformed Church.

Personal question period

Some questions are asked and answered. An insightful, cordial discussion is had concerning the nature and content of church visitation and preparation for it.

It was observed that good harmony was enjoyed and no censure was required.

The acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved.

Rev. VanDam leads in closing prayer.

Vice-Chair at the time.

Rev. J. Huijgen

