

Clarion



What's Inside

Our lead article by Rev. Matthew Van Luik is entitled, "Lest We Forget;" a timely article on memorials as we approach Remembrance Day. Our Treasures, New & Old meditation is closely connected.

Most of our issue focuses on the forty-seventh convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). There is a report from the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Rev. John Louwerse, and an update from the Principal, Dr. Jason Van Vliet. Congratulations to Raoul Kingma, Kevin Star, Ruurd Offringa, and Timothy Veenstra for receiving the degree of Master of Divinity, and to Kim Lapiz for his Bachelor of Theology!

Our issue also includes Dr. William den Hollander's keynote speech from Convocation, "Christ (and) the True Temple." There is also a report from Women's Savings Action and the Ray of Sunshine column.

Laura Veenendaal

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On our cover: The Temple Mount,
viewed from the Mount of Olives

Clarion

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LEAD ARTICLE



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Lest We Forget

On Remembrance Day the nation remembers the sacrifices of men and women in the past to defend the freedoms that we enjoy today. A special day of remembrance is necessary, lest we forget. The motto, “Lest We Forget,” is found on war memorials to remind us about the danger of forgetting. If we do not value what these men and women have fought for, society will not protect the freedoms we enjoy today.

When you lift people up on a pedestal, they will fall when their sins become exposed

Modern trends

The trend today is to vilify the past and remove any reminders of it. This summer the city of Charlottetown, PEI, the birthplace of the Canadian confederation, removed a statue of Canada's first prime minister, John A. Macdonald. In other places in Canada, his statue was defaced or torn down by angry mobs. In addition, names of men who made important contributions to Canada have their names removed from important buildings or institutions of learning. This is a result of conversations in Canada about the role such people had in indigenous relations or residential schools.

South of the border in the United States, many express a desire to remove any remembrance of the founding fathers because of their involvement in slavery. Even a president such as Abraham Lincoln, who fought against slavery, is not immune to this movement. New revolutions need to wipe out the remembrance of past heroes to create a new movement based on new heroes, who champion a new order.

Why have memorials?

This raises an important question: how should Christians think about the numerous memorials commemorating important historical figures? I remember visiting Washington D.C. and seeing numerous statues of important American historical figures and feeling uncomfortable. These men and women are commemorated as great heroes for their role in the American revolution. While they played important roles in the forming of a nation, they were also people with many weaknesses and character flaws. When you lift people up on a pedestal, they will fall when their sins become exposed. That will happen to the people in the past, and modern heroes will also fall from their pedestals in the future.

While this movement to forget the past is understandable when we think about the weakness of former generations, it is also dangerous. If we do not learn from the mistakes of the past,

we are prone to make the same mistakes in the future. The past always informs us for the future. The reality is that those who control the narrative about the past gain control for the future direction of society. We often think history is just a straightforward understanding of what happened in the past, but those who have studied history will understand that people will weave different narratives around the facts. The narrative is always determined by the goal someone has for the future.

Controlling the narrative

For that reason, if someone wants to remake Canada as a nation, the way to do that is to discredit the founding fathers for their sins. If someone wants to deny the legitimacy of the Jewish state in Israel, they need to declare that the Old Testament is just a narrative fabricated by the Jews to give the nation its legitimacy. To undermine the legitimacy of the United States as a nation, recently the 1619 Project declared that "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written" (*New York Times*). When society feels the need to discredit the sovereignty of God as the creator, society promotes the evolutionary narrative as the true story of our origins. Regarding our war memorials, the narrative is that these men and women in the past fought for the freedoms that we enjoy today. It is a narrative that is being challenged by some who maintain that these men and women in the past fought to maintain an unjust and corrupt capitalist system. Those who control the narrative hold power.

Christian believers hold on to a narrative that is different from the narratives of society. We too hold on to a story about the past that determines how we think about the future. The Scriptures reveal how important our understanding about the past is for our future. When the people of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the Lord commanded the people to set twelve stones (one for each tribe) in the middle of the river as a memorial (Josh 4:7). These stones were to be a reminder of what the Lord has done for Israel. Generations

A day will come when we will also be held under the spotlight and be found wanting

later, Samuel set up a stone after the defeat of the Philistines and named it, "Ebenezer," saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us" (1 Sam 7:2). God also gave other kinds of memorials, such as the rainbow in the days of Noah and the Passover Feast to remember Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

Biblical representation of human characters

What sets biblical narratives apart from other historical narratives is that the Bible does not glorify the characters in Israel's history but presents them as they really were. The patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) as the founding fathers of Israel are not portrayed as men of impeccable character. When Israel looked back at their founding fathers, they saw men who struggled with their faith, and often fell into sin when they became unfaithful to God. The Bible does not idealize people but represents them with all their faults and deficiencies. Israel became a great nation despite the quality of their leadership.


This principle is still applicable today. The founding fathers of the Canadian confederation, or the new republic of the United States, were men with many weaknesses and faults. They were influenced by the moral standards of the day. To tolerate slavery or the unjust treatment of indigenous people is not defensible, and yet these are the people used by God to found our nations. The men and women who fought many different wars were fighting to maintain the freedoms threatened by the enemy. We must honour our forefathers for their contribution without turning a blind eye to the sins and weaknesses of past generations. A day will come when we will also be held under the spotlight and be found wanting, yet that should not stop us from building on the foundation laid by those who went before us.

When we memorialize the lives of people, we want to remember their contributions, even though every one of them has a dark side. Not only do they struggle with sinful desires, but they also are limited in wisdom and knowledge. People make

decisions based on what they believe at the time to be right and good, when later it may become clear not all their actions were wise. When we memorialize people, they can never stand up to human scrutiny in comparison to the Lord God Almighty. While Israel remembered men like Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, Moses, and Elijah as great leaders in Israel, as well as women such as Deborah, Ruth, and Esther, the one Israel truly needed to remember was the Lord their God.

Remembering the mighty deeds of God

Moses warned Israel before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget [lest you forget - KJV] the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live" (Deut 4:9). God's past actions becomes the basis for our life today and the future. Moses does not first focus the attention of the people on God's law, but on God's actions in the past. Yes, God's law is important, but Israel cannot obey the law of God if they do not remember the things they saw God do for them. Faithfulness to the Lord God rests in one's faith in the greatness of God. The people are to remember how God delivered them from the power of Egypt, how he provided for them miraculously in the wilderness and protected them from their enemies.

If the people of Israel should forget this narrative of God's dealings with his people in the past, they have no basis on which to trust God in the future. From a Christian perspective, the narrative of Christ's victory on the cross becomes the narrative that powerfully molds the direction of our lives. On Remembrance Day we may be so thankful for the sacrifices of many men and women in the past. We are thankful for the sacrifices made by these men and women to secure our freedoms today. Their sacrifice only becomes truly meaningful when they are seen within the context of the great work of Jesus Christ. Freedom without Christ is a life without meaning. 

A Sacrifice to Remember

“And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover.’” (EXOD 12:26–27A)

Remembrance Day is a memorial day, with the purpose of *reminding* and *teaching* us of cherished history and values. In Bible times, God’s children set up certain memorials. Some did so for prideful reasons. King Saul set up a monument in his own honour at Carmel; Absalom made a pillar for himself and named it “Absalom’s Monument.” Others set up memorials to remind and teach about God’s faithfulness. For Israel, nowhere was this more true than in the Passover. It was instituted to remind and to teach Israelites about one of the defining moments in their history: their escape from Egypt. It was instituted for the benefit of *both* parents *and* their children.

God wanted the Passover to become an annual event on Israel’s calendar, a lasting ordinance, a *memorial* to be kept throughout the generations (vv. 12, 17, 24, 25).

For the older generation of Israelites, who year after year celebrated the Passover meal, they would have known what it was all about. They would have understood it as *the* ceremony that defined the nation of Israel. It meant something to them.


For their children, though, the same could not be expected. Yet children are full of questions. “But why, Dad? Why do you do this? Why do you do that, Mom?” The Lord anticipated inquisitive minds from his little covenant children. He says through Moses, “Expect this question from your little ones: ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’”

It’s worth pointing out who heard God’s instruction here through Moses. Moses gave these instructions to the *elders* of Israel (v. 21). The heads of households. It was the *fathers* who were responsible to answer their children’s questions about the Passover and its significance. God’s ordinance is that the father first of all is the family teacher.

And when the children asked about this Passover ceremony, the father was to explain, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord.” The fathers had to tell their children about Egypt, about how Dad and Mom, Grandpa and Grandma were slaves to Pharaoh, how they had to endure backbreaking labour from dawn till

dusk. The fathers *also* had to pass on how they escaped this slavery, not by their own efforts but by the God of the covenant who showed mercy to them, who forgave them their guilt through the shed blood of the lamb. Year after year the people had to eat the Lord’s Passover as a lasting ceremony, to induce remembrance.

Passover was about getting saved. Without the shedding of blood, God’s purposes cannot go forward. The blood on the doorposts and lintel, therefore, pointed toward the coming blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was going to die *instead* of sinners. That’s the message of the Bible, the wonderful news of substitution. Sinners are spared because our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed in our place (1 Cor 5:7).

The Lord today has given us a feast to remember, a lasting ordinance for the generations. It’s the Lord’s Supper. It’s to be a lasting reminder of God’s final act of deliverance from sin. Parents are called to instruct their children, to inspire questions in them, to lead them to the Lord of redemption. So that they may remember and celebrate, and in turn, teach the next generation to remember and celebrate the saving work of God in Jesus Christ. 

For Further Study

1. **Memorials in Scripture are not just given for man’s benefit. How does God benefit from memorials? See Genesis 9 for help.**
2. **To what degree have you as parents taught your children about the sacraments? Are you satisfied with how much you have taught, or do you see room for growth?**



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Convocation 2021

Report of the Fifty-Second Anniversary Meeting and Forty-Seventh Convocation
of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, September 10, 2021

The 2021 anniversary meeting and convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) will be remembered as a wonderful celebration of God's many blessings. Once again restrictions brought on by COVID-19 prevented this gathering from happening at its usual place, Redeemer University in Ancaster. Thankfully, the restriction of attendees in person was less than the year before, and with God's gift of modern technology, many brothers and sisters from around the country and the globe could join the event by means of livestream.

Above, left: MDiv graduates: Timothy Veenstra, Kevin Star, Raoul Kingma, Ruurd Offringa

Above, right: Opening by Chairman of the Board Rev. Louwerse.

The evening began with the Chairman of the Board, Rev. John Louwerse, welcoming everyone. In prayer he expressed gratitude for the opportunity to have such an evening. He also gave thanks to God for the care of sister G. Deddens, widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens, sister Margaret Dejong, widow of the late Dr. J. Dejong, and Dr. N. H. Gootjes and his wife Dinie. He also expressed much thanks to God for the continued work of the retired professors, Dr. C. Van Dam and Dr. G. H. Visscher, among the churches.

After the opening prayer, a letter from Rev. D. Poppe, a deputy for training for the ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, was read. This letter of congratulations and encouragement was received with much gratitude. Then the chairman



read from Hebrews 8, in connection with the address of Dr. William den Hollander.

The Principal of the Seminary, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, presented his annual report. You can read the contents of this address elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. He expressed a deep thankfulness to the Lord for the strength provided in the past year. He also introduced a record number of new students for the upcoming year. Following this report, all praise and adoration was given to our Lord, with the singing of Psalm 27:1, 2.

Dr. William den Hollander gave his inaugural address, which was entitled "Christ (and) the True Temple." You will find the full text of this speech elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. den Hollander drew our attention to the significance of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and how Jesus Christ is the Temple not made with hands. And his address gave encouragement to all and especially to those who hope to be preachers of God's grace in Jesus Christ.


After the singing of Hymn 42:1-6, which was led by Arie den Hollander, the organist for the evening, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on Raoul Kingma, Kevin Star, Ruurd Offringa, and Timothy Veenstra, and the Bachelor of Theology on Kim Lapiz (in absentia). The Selles Book Prize was awarded by Dr. W. den Hollander to Raoul Kingma. This prize is given to a graduating student whose performance in the New Testament Studies has been outstanding throughout his course of studies at CRTS.

Above, left: Kevin Star speaks on behalf of the graduating class.

Above, right: Dr. den Hollander presents the Selles Book Prize to Raoul Kingma

Kevin Star spoke on behalf of the graduating class. He reflected fondly on the graduates' time in seminary and expressed much gratitude for the work of the professors and staff at CRTS and ultimately to the Lord our God.

The Women's Saving Action (WSA) presentation began with a brief video, which showcased a class of school aged children visiting CRTS. This was followed with sister Janet Van Vliet presenting the amount of \$40,000 to the seminary library. Dr. Van Vliet expressed the Seminary's thanks for the faithful work and the ongoing contributions by the sisters of the Women's Saving Action.

Once again, the collection was for the Foreign Students Bursary - a fund that gives the necessary financial assistance to qualified foreign students from developing countries who seek a Reformed theological education. Rev. Matthew Van Luik led in closing prayer, focusing particularly on the work of CRTS in the upcoming year. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of "O Canada." After the program, everyone had the opportunity to congratulate the graduates. You are welcome to view a video version of the convocation at canadianreformedseminary.ca. 



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Principal's Report

An Update from CRTS

Where to begin? In the past academic year, there were many reasons for gratitude and many challenges to face. Looking ahead, we see more things that excite us but also some things that concern us. So, where to begin? Some inspired words from Romans 5 provide the right perspective:

Through [our Lord Jesus Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope (vv. 2-4).

To be honest, in the past academic year, we did not always feel like we were *standing* so firmly. We started our year with a Convocation on September 11, 2020. But it was different. For

years Convocation had *stood*, if I may say it that way, in the auditorium of Redeemer University. It was also a *standing* tradition that hundreds of enthusiastic voices and one large pipe organ joined together in jubilant praise to our God. Even after the official part of Convocation was over, many of us still *stood* around for another thirty or sixty minutes, socializing with brothers and sisters from near and far. Our annual Convocation is always such an uplifting way to launch into a new academic year!

But Convocation 2020 did *not stand* where past convocations had *stood*. It moved to the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church. We are very grateful for this congregation's hospitality. But with physical distancing and capacity limits due to COVID-19, not only the location but also the atmosphere at Convocation has shifted for two years in a row. Yes, it is still





joyful, but with dozens, rather than hundreds, of voices singing those praises. Convocation 2020 was a shift, but there were more adjustments to come.

During the academic year, we *shifted* back and forth. At times most of us were on campus and in the classroom, while our online students joined us on the screen. Then a lockdown would be announced, and we all *moved* online. Zoom classes for hours on end. Then the lockdown was lifted, and we transitioned back into our building on West 27th Street. Then another lockdown, and we all moved online again. Tough stuff!

We hope this upcoming academic year will be more stable, but we do not know for sure. Will more viral waves crash onto the shore of society, also sweeping our seminary community back and forth like a piece of driftwood on the tides of uncertainty? We would rather not think about it, but the question still hangs in the air.

Yet, through everything that happened in the past year, we did *stand* – firm and unmoved. Looking ahead to this coming year, we say with confidence, we will *stand* – firm and unmoved.

“But what kind of talk is that?” you may rightly ask, “False bravado? Arrogant over-confidence?” It would be if we were attempting to stand firmly in ourselves and by ourselves. But by faith we focus on our Lord instead. As the Spirit-inspired apostle announces, through our risen and eternally invincible Lord Jesus Christ we have obtained free and open access, by faith, into God’s saving grace in which we *stand*. We may have to shift from classrooms to Zoom rooms, but Christ our King will himself *stabilize* us in the grace that he obtained for us through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave.

Standing, by faith, in his all-sufficient and ever-sovereign grace, we look both behind and ahead with joy. Paul, the servant of the Lord, assures us of joy either way. If our hearts are filled to the brim with the hope of the glory of God, we rejoice (v. 2). But even if our weary souls are dragged down with sufferings, we still rejoice (v. 3). Even in the deepest valleys of tribulation, the Spirit of Christ is hard at work, producing in us more endurance in our spiritual stamina and more refinement in our Christ-like character, and in this we rejoice.

Next, allow me to make this perspective from Romans 5 more concrete by sharing some details of the Lord’s ongoing work at our seminary.

The past academic year

Despite going into and out of lockdowns, every course was completed, all the students finished their work, and everyone advanced to the next year of studies. This, in and of itself, is a reason for much joy. In addition, by God’s grace, another five students graduate this year: Raoul Kingma, Ruurd Offringa, Kevin Star, and Timothy Veenstra from the MDiv program and Kim Lapiz from the BTh program.

The new academic year

We welcome *twelve* new, incoming students this year. In alphabetical order, here is the list of our new MDiv students and where they come from: Damon Bosveld (Western Australia), Mitchell Bosveld (Western Australia), Hongdi Chen (From China via Montreal), Reese Gaillard (Saskatchewan), Todd Linde (Ontario), Joshua Schouten (Ontario), Fred Struik (British Columbia), Adrian Tams (Alberta), Quentin Vandermeulen (Manitoba), and Marc Vermeulen (Ontario). As well, we welcome two new BTh students: Jasmim Barbosa (Brazil) and Jacobo Pacheco (Philippines).

Isn’t this noteworthy? After one of the most challenging years in recent memory, the Lord blesses us with the largest incoming class in the history of our seminary! As supporting congregations of CRTS, we humbly receive this as an answer to our many prayers. Our student body now numbers thirty-two. Indeed, our Redeemer does provide joy through suffering. We pray that the Head of the Church will stir the hearts of many more men to consider studying for gospel ministry.

Faculty and staff

About half-way through the past academic year, our office administrator, Catharine Mechelse, was admitted to the hospital with a serious case of COVID. About one month later, one

of our professors, Dr. Ted Van Raalte, was also hospitalized for an extended time after a very serious brain injury from a snow-mobile crash. Yet now both our sister Mechelse and our brother Van Raalte are carrying on with their respective tasks at our seminary. Again, we would be remiss if we did not pause, take note, and praise the Lord for these remarkable gifts of healing! Also, they both deeply appreciate all the prayers and the care from the seminary and the broader church communities that supported them through their dark and difficult days. Also at this time, on behalf of CRTS, I want to thank everyone – and it is a sizeable list of people – who stepped up to the plate and filled in for teaching and administrative tasks during this time when our heavenly Father put sickness and injury on our path.

Special occasions

Earlier this summer Dr. and Mrs. Van Dam celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary and, the Lord willing, in October Dr. Van Dam will have served fifty years in the ministry. What a milestone! Also, this summer Dr. Van Vliet and his wife commemorated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and the same evening as Convocation we also remembered Dr. Niek Gootjes and his wife, Dinie, as they mark their forty-fifth wedding anniversary. The circumstances surrounding these special occasions are different, but the Lord who gives them is the same. We therefore thank him.

Distance education

In the past year international travel was difficult, if not impossible, at times. For this reason, five of our students joined our classes online from South Africa, Korea, and the Philippines. With the recent technology upgrade at CRTS, this all went surprisingly smoothly, starting each class with a tap on a tablet. In the meantime, our accreditor, the Association of Theological Schools, has fully approved our distance education program. But, you may be thinking, is it not still best that future ministers and missionaries are trained in-person and on-campus? Gospel ministry involves so many inter-personal relationships, and when it comes to relationships nothing is better than face-to-face. Faculty and staff, the Board of Governors, and our students agree *wholeheartedly*. With this in mind, our motto for theological education is *on-campus as much as possible, online as much as necessary*.

At the same time, study permit issues, health crises, and other extenuating circumstances may prevent students from physically coming to Hamilton. In the past there was little we could

do. Now their training for the ministry can proceed online, and we are grateful for that.


International support and involvement

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia continue to support CRTS through sending their theological students, offering generous financial support, and remembering the seminary in their prayers. We remain very grateful for this involvement! The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa are witnessing a significant growth of interest in training for gospel ministry in their federation and they are looking to CRTS to provide this instruction. For this development we praise the Lord. Prospective students from other countries also express interest in studying at CRTS.

Looking ahead

Early in September a group had gathered in the seminary chapel: governors, faculty, staff, a retired professor, two alumni, and two current students – about twenty-five people in total. Together we listened to God's Word and offered up prayer to our Lord. Next, many different ideas were floated and refined, energetically yet respectfully. Care was taken that we do not overextend ourselves but also that we are not complacent, taking new steps and making improvements where necessary.

So, what was all this action in the chapel about? Often it is called strategic planning. Perhaps we can better describe it as taking stock of our blessings and helping each other understand how we can use them more effectively in the future. In the end, though, we rallied around a renewed commitment to serve our supporting churches, and beyond, in the best possible way, focusing on the primary need to have more ministers and missionaries ready to serve.

In conclusion, when a report must be given and there is much to share, sometimes a difficult question arises: where to begin? Thankfully, the companion question is much easier to answer: where to end? We quickly come full circle and end right here: Through [our Lord Jesus Christ] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we *stand*, and we *rejoice* ... in the *hope* ... of his *glory*. 



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Christ (and) the True Temple

Anyone familiar with the modern city of Jerusalem will be able to picture in their minds the iconic view of the Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives. That's one of the first places you visit when you're in Jerusalem, as we did in 2010 when my family lived there for a few months, and that's the place you get your tourist group pictures taken, as we did in 2019. The Temple Mount dominates the skyline, and your eyes are constantly drawn to the golden Dome of the Rock. Even if you haven't had the opportunity to see the site in person, you've no doubt seen pictures that you can readily call to mind.

The present scene, though, pales in comparison to the first century experience. The second temple, as it's called, was originally built by the exiles under Zerubbabel in the sixth century before Christ and it was a modest building. In fact, some of the exiles who remembered the glory of Solomon's temple wept when they saw its foundations being laid (Ezra 3:12-13; cf. Haggai 2:3).

But some five hundred years later, just before the birth of Christ, King Herod (nicknamed "the Great") completely overhauled and renovated the entire Temple Mount. He used massive stone blocks, still visible today at the Western or Wailing Wall, to expand the whole complex from seven to fourteen hectares. What's more, he replaced Zerubbabel's temple with a magnificent building that far outstripped the old in splendour.

The rebuilding of the temple by Herod was one of the largest construction projects of its day and made it one of the most beautiful temples in all the Roman empire. It was a sight to behold. According to a later Christian writer, the emperor Titus thought the temple surpassed all human achievements and wanted it to be preserved as one of the jewels of the empire (Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* 2.30.6-7).

The Jewish Talmud put it even more strongly: "Ten measures of beauty were given to the world. Nine were taken by Jerusalem, and one was distributed over all the earth" (*Kiddushin* 49b). Another rabbi proclaimed that "no one has seen a truly beautiful building unless he has seen the temple" (*m. Sukkah* 51:2). And the great Jewish historian Josephus describes how when the sun rose each morning and reflected off the golden walls, you would have to turn away your gaze as though it were the sun itself, shining in all its brilliance (*Jewish War* 5.222).

It's not surprising that one day, while leaving the temple after Jesus had been teaching there, the disciples called his attention to the beauty of the temple complex, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" (Mark 13:1; Matt 24:1; Luke 21:5).

His reply was striking, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Mark 13:2).

The destruction of the temple

Indeed, some forty years later, in AD 70, after four years of war between Jewish rebels and Roman legions, that magnificent temple was destroyed. Josephus writes that it was against Titus's wishes, that a Roman soldier fired by the heat of battle tossed a torch into the temple and it was unable to be saved (*Jewish War* 6.236-243). Then the Roman legionaries were set loose on the smouldering remains. Not one stone was left on another.

In fact, if you go to the Western Wall today and head south to where the remains of Robinson's Arch jut out from the Temple Mount, you can see an enormous pile of stones still lying there. More than 1950 years ago they were thrown down and that's where they remain to this day.

The words of Jesus came true.

The temple destruction was a significant historical moment by anyone's estimation. It was certainly traumatic for the generation that experienced it. One modern Jewish theologian, reflecting on the loss of the temple and the loss of so many lives in the war against the Romans, called the fall of Jerusalem the birthplace of Holocaust theology.¹ For him it prompts the question: why? How could this have happened to the people of God? It's the same question that the eyewitness Josephus sought to answer in the years following the destruction.

But it wasn't just a horrific tragedy for those who lived through it. Its long-term historical significance was greater. Historians point to it as a watershed moment in Jewish and Christian history, especially in terms of what they call "the parting of the ways," when Christianity and Judaism became more and more distinct.

Even apart from that, in the history of Judaism itself, it sparked tremendous change. In the absence of the temple ministry, Rabbinic Judaism came to predominate, and the synagogue became even more important as the centre of Jewish religious life. Modern Judaism is still without a temple and without the sacrifices and ceremonies that went on there.

The destruction of the temple in redemptive history

But did you ever think of the destruction of the temple as a redemptive-historical moment? One of our Canadian Reformed distinctives (our heritage!), and a key emphasis at the seminary, is our focus on redemptive history, and especially on



¹ Richard L. Rubenstein, "The Fall of Jerusalem and the Birth of Holocaust Theology," in *Faith Renewed: The Judaic Affirmation beyond the Holocaust*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994), 71-85.

How could this have happened to the people of God?

redemptive-historical preaching. Well, how does the temple destruction fit in? Do you see it as one of the great historical events that marks the continuation and progress of God's divine plan of salvation?

The first century was of course full of significant redemptive-historical moments – *the* most significant: the birth of Christ, the death of Christ, his resurrection from the grave, his ascension into heaven and session at the right hand of God the Father, the outpouring of his Spirit on the church at Pentecost. Does the destruction in AD 70 have a place among them?

I don't think we've been too inclined to think so. That's not entirely surprising. After all, it takes place some forty years after all these events, perhaps even after all the New Testament books have been written. What's more, it happens after Pentecost and we're accustomed to thinking that *this* was the last significant redemptive-historical event, the next being the return of Christ.

And yet, the events of AD 70 receive a lot of attention in the New Testament. A lot! Now, when I say that, some of you are perking up your ears and edging to the front of your seats. Because just how much attention it receives is a matter of no small amount of debate. The passages clearly pointing forward to the temple destruction are among the most difficult to interpret and understand. And not everyone even agrees that the temple destruction is in view in other places, like the book of Hebrews or the Revelation to John. There would be some challenging debates to deal with if we wanted to take a complete look at the destruction of the temple in the New Testament. I suspect that this project will take me a lifetime anyway.

In any case, there are enough undisputed and clear references to the temple destruction in the Scriptures to begin to answer the question: what is its redemptive-historical significance? That's what I want to explore in the remaining space. And lest you think this is will just be a dry historical exercise, let me say from the outset that my hope is that the answer to this question will give you further reason to marvel at the glory and

the radiance of Christ our Saviour, provide deeper delight to those of us who are called to preach his glorious gospel, and cause us all to long more eagerly for his return.

The destruction as discipline

Before we get there, though, we must start with another sober and somber answer to the question before us. It's the perspective on the temple destruction that Jesus himself gave, in one of the most powerful moments of the gospels (Luke 19:28-44). It is immediately after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowds had paved the way for Jesus into the city with their cloaks and cried out, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" For the disciples and other followers of Jesus it must have been the moment they were waiting for, a moment of overwhelming joy and excitement, of anticipation of coming glory.

But Jesus had a much different response. As he approached the city – and remember what Josephus said about the way the sun reflected off the temple walls – as he came near, Jesus wept. He knew already then that this excitement would pass. He knew that these same crowds would cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And so, he wept.

And then he uttered this sobering prophecy,

Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children with you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, *because you did not know the time of your visitation* (Luke 19:42-44).

Why did the temple fall? What was its redemptive-historical significance? Well, the first answer is that the people of God did not know the time of their visitation. That's why the city of Jerusalem would be besieged by the Roman army. That's why the temple of God would be destroyed, no stone left on another.

It was the direct consequence of their rejection of the Messiah, of the Dayspring who visited them from on high (Luke 1:78), who had come to lead them into the way of true peace with God.

You may recall that this was the same warning Jesus gave in his parable about the wicked tenants (Luke 20:9-18; Matt 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-12). When the master sent his servants to collect the fruit of the vineyard, they mistreated them. When the King finally sent his beloved son, they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Jesus ended that parable with a pointed question, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? *He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others*" (Luke 20:16).

For anyone who knew their Old Testament, the idea that the temple destruction was punishment for the sins of the people was nothing new. In fact, the very language that Jesus used of the temple destruction called to mind the language the prophets of old used when they prophesied the destruction of the first temple, almost six hundred years earlier.ⁱⁱ The people of God knew that their temple could be destroyed for the sins of the people. In fact, when the Jewish historian Josephus sought to answer the question "why?", that was his answer as well.

The good news of the destruction

But there is more to the picture than this somber insight into the question why the temple was destroyed. The destruction doesn't just reveal the discipline of God, but even more his grace and goodness towards his people, towards us. It reveals the depth and wonder of the gospel itself.

We get a hint of this in the words that Jesus quoted from the Old Testament (Ps 118:22-23), immediately after he told the parable mentioned above. "Have you not read this Scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" (Mark 12:10-11; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17).

The destruction was related to the rejection of Jesus, to be sure, but it was also related to the glorious reality that a *new* cornerstone had been established, in fact *the* cornerstone of the true temple was being laid. Why was the old temple removed? Because the new temple, the *true* temple, had arrived. This was the doing of the Lord, and an infinitely more marvelous reality than the copies and the shadows of the old covenant temple.

That's the message of the book of Hebrews throughout, but it touches down on the temple destruction specifically in the final verse of the passage we read together, "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old *is ready to vanish away*" (8:13) or, as I would prefer to translate, "*is ready to be destroyed*."ⁱⁱⁱ That is, the destruction of the old was inevitable because the new had come, and the new, as Hebrews triumphantly pronounces, is better: a better covenant, with better promises, a better priesthood, *and a better temple*.

The question is: where was this new temple that made the old obsolete and made its destruction inevitable? The glorious answer is not a "what" but a "who"! The reason the old temple passed away was because the new temple had arrived with the incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God!

It's the gospel of John that reveals this truth so clearly and wonderfully. From the opening of his gospel, he makes it clear that *Jesus Christ* was the new and the true temple of God: "And the Word became flesh and *dwelt among us*, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He *dwelt among us*, or, to translate the Greek more precisely, he "tabernacled" or "pitched his tent" among us.

Christ was the dwelling place of God on earth! He is the one in whom heaven and earth meet! He is our Immanuel, our God with us! "We have seen his glory," writes John ... not the glory cloud that filled the tent of meeting on the plain of Sinai (Exod 40:34), but the "radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3). We have seen his glory ... not the glory cloud that filled the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:10-11), but "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6)!

Recall what Josephus said about the reflection of the sun off the temple walls. Recall what the rabbis said of the beauty of the Herodian temple. They are but dim shadows, pale reflections. Nothing can compare with the shining splendour of the Son of God, the radiance of whose glory causes men to fall to the ground in worship, the light of whose face is life itself!

Christ is the fulfillment of the tabernacle and the temples, of all the old covenant meeting places between God and his people. But not just the fulfillment, he was their very substance. He was the one in whom they had their ultimate meaning and their significance. How could the old temple remain standing when the glorious new temple had come?

ⁱⁱ On this, also in comparison with Josephus, see William den Hollander, "Jesus, Josephus, and the Fall of Jerusalem: On Doing History with Scripture," *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies* 17.1 (2015), Art. #2942, 9 pages, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2942>.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is substantiated in William den Hollander, "'About to Disappear': Hebrews 8:13 and the Destruction of the Temple" (forthcoming).

That's why the destruction of the old temple goes hand-in-hand with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. That much is also made clear in the gospel according to John. John tells us about a crucial conversation after Jesus had cleansed the temple, driving out the sheep and oxen and overturning the tables of the moneychangers (John 2:18-22). Those who were watching asked, "'What sign do you show us for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'" The Jews didn't understand and asked, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But John then taught his readers the real meaning of Jesus's words, "He was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (John 2:21-22).

What Jesus's words and John's explanation teach us is that the crucifixion was not only the destruction of Christ's body, but it was also a type of temple destruction and, as such, pointed to the coming destruction of the old temple. More than that, it was itself the very beginning of that destruction. As soon as Christ died, the days of the temple were numbered. That's why, in the moment of Christ's death, the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt 27:51). The old had to make room for the new. The shadow had to make way for the reality. Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was the building of the *true* temple, "a temple not made with hands" (Mark 14:58; cf. Heb 8:2), the old temple was ready to disappear.

But that's not where it ends. The temple was not just the place where God dwelled with his people. The temple also pointed forward to the time when the whole universe would be the special place of his presence. That's why when the temple curtain was torn in two, the earth itself also shook and the rocks were torn apart (Matt 27:51-52). The destruction of the old temple was a prophetic sign of the destruction of the entire old creation. And in the rebuilding of the temple in the resurrected body of Jesus was the beginning of the new creation, of the new heavens and the new earth. It all began "on the third day."


We don't have the space to trace the progress of this glorious temple building project after the resurrection in and through the church, the body of Christ.¹⁰ But let's take a peek. Because

the true temple, established in the death and resurrection of Christ, is still being built, with each living stone, you and I, set on the glorious cornerstone. That's what Christ is busy with, also here in our churches, also through the work that's being done at the seminary. The foundation has already been laid. There can only be one foundation: the Lord Jesus Christ, the one in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:19).

A glorious vision for the future

Sometimes I've been asked as I take up my work at the seminary, "What's your vision for the seminary? How do you see your place there?" Sometimes I wonder the same. Those aren't bad questions to ask and reflect on prayerfully. Indeed, it's important to do so. But in this my inaugural address, I want to emphasize what I return to time and again in my own thoughts. There is only one foundation. Christ Jesus is the cornerstone. As I continue my work, along with the other professors, as students are trained and then serve the churches, as the gospel is preached, as the churches grow, we are simply building on that one foundation.

And it is Christ alone who will ensure the completion of this glorious temple, this place of God's presence. He is the ultimate builder. We are only humble servants doing our duty. We do so in adoration for and devotion to our radiant Saviour and we do in the sure hope of his return, when the new heavens and the new earth are fully ushered in, and the holy city descends from heaven (Rev 21:1-2).

Do you want a glorious vision for the future? Listen to John: "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev 21:22-23). *This* is what we long for, the day when "the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev 21:3). God himself will be with us, as our God! Come, Lord Jesus! Maranatha! 



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¹⁰ For more comprehensive look at these themes in Scripture, see G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2004); Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

2021 CONVOCATION

Women's Savings Action Presentation

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduates, and Guests,


Are libraries exciting? What about money? I suppose you'd get incredibly varied answers to both questions.

Now, from the Women's Savings Perspective, these two things *combined* can definitely be exciting! The reps get excited when their brothers and sisters are willing to generously support their Seminary. The librarian, Mrs. Alkema, gets excited when she has the means and resources to equip and maintain the library. The professors get excited when it comes time to order books and journals that are the necessary tools for teaching and research, and they have sufficient funds to do so! The students marvel at what resources they can delve into.

It does beg the question, however; how do we *maintain* a level of excitement among our *supporting churches* for the Seminary library, every year again? It's hard to imagine, but the \$35,000 that we've been giving for the last number of years has not been enough to pay all the bills.

This year we decided to make a video for children about the Seminary and the Seminary library. In the video, the children receive a tour of the Seminary. At the library, Margaret divides the students into teams and gives them missions to

complete. They must help seminary students find books for their research papers. We hope to ask our WSA reps to show this in the elementary school in their area to increase awareness of the need that our Seminary library has. You can access the video at this link: https://youtu.be/R_LVK9TfEAI.

A special thank you to Margaret, the professors, and the Grade Four students with their teacher, and the videographers who were willing to make this video possible. 

Janet VanVliet giving the WSA presentation.



November birthdays

Happy birthday Wilma! We wish you the Lord's blessing in the coming year. We all hope you have a wonderful day celebrating with family and friends. May we all continue to look our Father in heaven who continues to provide us with all we need.

3 Wilma Van Drongelen will be **64**

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"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

JAMES 1:17, 18

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS If there are any address changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

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