



GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL-CANADA
COMMUNION INTERNATIONALE DANS LA GRÂCE, CANADA

May-June 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus,

It's been almost two months since I last wrote to you. I don't know about you but reflecting on the last two months it amazes me that so much has happened in such a short time.

The Winnipeg congregation experienced the death of their beloved pastor, Alan Redmond, on April 26th. Alan served their congregation and our group in Thunder Bay Ontario for over 20 years. Please continue to pray for his wife Carolyn and their family at this difficult time.

Many of our provinces have faced increased lock-down measures because of the pandemic. But now it looks like there will also be a loosening of public restrictions due to many people being vaccinated against COVID 19. A few of our congregations are looking at opening up sometime this summer and others perhaps in the fall.

Then recently, news of the discovery of graves containing 215 bodies at the site of a former residential school in Kamloops BC has caused a lot of soul-searching in Canada regarding our treatment of indigenous Canadians over the centuries. This discovery is especially more poignant given the fact that most of the residential schools were operated by churches in conjunction with the Canadian government.

I don't know how you felt at this news, but I personally felt a lot of angst when seeing those black and white photos of little children removed from their families at such an early age, with too many never returning home. We have all read the stories of the physical and sexual abuse that they suffered. Or the other conditions such as: lack of food, forced labour, punishment for speaking their home languages, and the forced removal of their culture.

A few years ago, I attended a conference in Regina of various NGO's who are providing services to the homeless (who in this part of the country are primarily indigenous). The various groups present (including some Christian based organizations) gave reports about what they were doing in their communities. Then there was a time for a discussion of what we had heard.

One of the leaders of a well-known Saskatchewan indigenous group that provides housing services stood up with anger in his voice and said, "I just wish the churches would leave us alone and let us take care of our own people. You've done enough damage!"

Later on, at supper, a manager of a Christian organization's homeless and food bank outreach in his community expressed his frustration. He said that they do valuable work, and do serve the indigenous homeless with respect. I didn't disagree with him, but explained that it is time as Canadian Christians to listen, instead of getting defensive.

This whole debate that is going on in our country has caused me to ask myself why we as a society, or various groups, including Christians, treat others or consider others as less than ourselves. And in doing so, commit such despicable acts.

The Bible tells us that we are all affected by what we call the "Fall". The time when our first parents rejected an intimate relationship with the Triune God. This intimate relationship is due to the fact that we were made in the image of God.

In his book *Life in the Trinity* Donald Fairbairn says this about this important fact:

“Christianity teaches us that our significance does not ultimately lie in what we accomplish or what we do; it lies in the one to whom we belong. This is precisely where the discussion of Genesis 1-2 becomes so crucial. The implication of the creation account is that we do not need to do anything to acquire significance. Instead, we already possess a significance greater than that of any other created beings, simply by virtue of being made in the image of God. We belong to him. We are created resemblances of his uncreated Son. We share (or at least Adam and Eve used to share) in the fellowship that has characterized the persons of the Trinity from all eternity. There is nothing we need to do indeed, nothing we could possibly do that would make us any more significant than we already are.”

“Significance does not lie in what one can accomplish on one's own. It does depend on the one to whom one is connected. But everyone possesses true significance, because all are created in the image of God. There is no one else, one could attach oneself to who could give a person greater significance than that person already possesses, by virtue of this connection to God. Furthermore, this significance is linked to creation, not to whether a person follows Christ. It is not just Christians who are inherently significant in God's eyes. All people bear the image of God in a way that unites them to one another and distinguishes them from the rest of the beings in the universe.” (pp. 67, 68, *Life in the Trinity*, Donald Fairbairn, InterVarsity Press)

Gary Deddo, president of Grace Communion Seminary, has said this about these passages and the potential of all people:

“While most English translations use the word “in” (in the image of God), many Hebrew scholars think it would be better translated “according to” (according to the image of God). This corresponds better to understanding “the image of God” to mean created according to a purpose, or for a purpose rather than indicating a particular human attribute or capacity such as the power of reason that humanity possesses. “According to” pictures something involving purpose and relationship. We are created according to the image of God, who is Jesus Christ. We are created to be images of The Image.”

As we come to realize this important truth about the special place of humanity in God's creation, how can we ever consider others as “less than” in our dealings with them? Unfortunately, the Fall does impact all of us, and even Christians can act against, or treat others as if they do not have that special place in God's eyes. However, when we view others how the Triune God views us, hopefully our perception about and actions towards them will change.

In closing, I wanted to add that I would appreciate your prayers for our churches, as we endeavour to reopen once local COVID restrictions are eased. Many of our congregations will be looking for new venues where they can hold services and they are seeking God's guidance in discovering the place where he wants them to do ministry.

In addition, I want to personally thank you for your generosity in responding to the call to help our brethren in St. Vincent who experienced the eruption of La Soufriere volcano. We have raised just over \$17,000.00 to help them.

May the love of the Triune God find you in the peace of Jesus.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Hall". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "B" and a cursive "Hall".

Bill Hall
Canadian Director