

# Canopy of Prayer

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Author

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## *Dear Prayer Partners in Europe*

*John 13:35 "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another". Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart from this world and that He would go to His Father. He had loved His disciples to the end. He had told them many things, but only when the Holy Spirit would come, they would understand. And the Holy Spirit has come, so we all should understand now the way of the Lord. But history has proven different. Especially in difficult times, when people have to make choices from a point of crisis. Now is also such a time, our government leaders must take 100% decisions, while they have maybe only 50% knowledge about it. Our task is to pray for them and to live such a life that the world will see Who we follow.*

**Corrie Oosterhuis**

## **The Church, the State and the Pandemic**

Christians live with a tension around our relationship with the state. The cry of the early church was "Jesus Christ is Lord." This was a not so subtle challenge to the Roman imperial declaration "Caesar is Lord." If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not. But Paul also assured Christians in Rome that government was instituted by God for our good. Believers throughout history have sought to walk with God in that tension.

Today we have a new challenge in the Coronavirus pandemic. In response many governments have taken steps unprecedented in peace time. Economies are effectively shut down; freedom of assembly, including in churches, has been suspended or limited; 'unnecessary' travel has been largely forbidden; in some places even the freedom to venture outside is only for essential food and limited exercise. While restrictions differ from place to place, most European countries have some degree of lockdown. Apps for tracking our contacts, and movements, are being developed.

We are indeed in the midst of a genuine health crisis. Some degree of restriction is certainly warranted for our good. As such this fulfils the mandate of Romans 13:4a "For the one in authority is God's servant for your good".

But there are good reasons to be concerned. These powers are assumed in an emergency, but they set a precedent for the future. What one government led by people we may trust can do today, another government led by very different people can do tomorrow. European history in living memory (some in fairly recent memory) should give us pause. Even today many countries with long democratic traditions have seen the rise of undemocratic populist parties. Caesar is always tempted to want to be Lord.

How then should we respond? Let me make a few suggestions. First, let us love our neighbours. That is really why we should practice certain disciplines such as social distancing and limiting our contacts, not because of a government mandate. How can we serve our neighbours now? Second, we need to hold our governments to account. A potentially dangerous precedent has been set for future emergencies. Who determines what is an emergency, and what is essential? Do our rights come from the government, or does it exist to protect those rights?

Lastly, "By this shall all men know you are my disciples, that you have love one for another." This is an issue that many Christians have passionate differences over. What will the world see when it looks at us? We must give grace to one another in the midst of our differences.

### **Prayer:**

- Pray for the church in Europe, that the world will see that the people love one another and are gracious and a light in times of trouble for everyone
- Pray for wisdom for all the people who have to make big decisions during this Corona pandemic time for spiritual, physical, medical, social, political, economical and other areas.
- Pray for alertness and boldness for the Christians, and that they will stand firm and if necessary speak up, say what needs to be said (with an attitude of love and grace).



## **Opening Borders**

As governments across Europe seek ways to reopen borders, the EU is calling for a coordinated approach, especially as it seems each country is drawing different conclusions as to how best to proceed. What happens over the coming weeks and months will be important both for 'key' travel as well as tourism. In May, the EU set out plans for a phased restart of travel from the 15th June, giving guidelines about lifting restrictions at the internal borders.

### **Additional Prayer Points:-**

1. In the light of the tensions in the USA in recent days, pray for leaders in the USA and in Europe to identify real solutions to eradicate systemic racism in our societies.
2. Pray for those whose jobs or mental health have been affected by the Corona virus pandemic.

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