



WWJND? SHUDDER AND SHUTTER THE HOUSES OF WORSHIP

by Sam Stonybrook

A quick Google search of “churches and coronavirus” or “churches and COVID-19” will pull up distressing news: Churches are allegedly a hotbed of biological destruction and should be immediately disbanded for the wellbeing of all mankind! In fact, the media and the COVIDiots with their political, Orwellian Thought Police agendas, wish to villainize houses of worship as houses of death run by selfish, careless clergy and attended by clueless, couldn’t-care-less congregations.

Regardless of these satanic and misleading search results, churches never should have closed. That’s right. I said it. I said it as a member of a small, local Baptist church that has not held one live service since all of this nonsense started, and, at the risk of offending or embarrassing my fellow church members, I’ll repeat it: **CHURCHES SHOULD NEVER HAVE CLOSED, SHOULD NEVER HAVE STOPPED IN-PERSON SERVICES, AND IF THEY DID FALTER THIS WAY, THEY SHOULD REOPEN IMMEDIATELY, WITH AS FEW INTERRUPTIVE MODIFICATIONS AND RESTRICTIONS AS THEY CAN.** Show me one scripture that condones halting services, and perhaps we can discuss it, but I doubt you’ll find such a verse. And if that’s true, why did they close? There are two answers: the political and media frenzy using COVID for sinister motives to literally scare those churches closed and a cowardly congregation and clergy who bought into the lies.

PROBLEM 1: TOTALITARIAN TERROR

You’ve read the First Amendment, right? That’s the one that “guarantees freedoms concerning religion, expression, assembly...”¹ This is supposed to allow

¹ https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment

for that legal tenet called separation of Church and State, from the great Thomas Jefferson, an idea churches have traditionally expected and cherished in America,² yet the *p*landemic has seemingly given the State some unwritten right to trespass on hallowed ground.

You've likely also read many of the horrifying headlines revealing just how far the government will go to disregard their own laws and the rights guaranteed to us. Remember that church in Kentucky, where it wasn't the Easter Bunny sneaking around the parking lot but the police, collecting license plate numbers and issuing quarantine orders to all who dared to exercise their rights of religious expression and assembly?³ Things were just as bad in Greenville, Mississippi: "Police there issued \$500 fines to people attending church *within their own cars* because the drive-in service was after the town curfew."⁴ Unfortunately, these stories are not isolated incidents. These atrocities against people of faith have happened in countless states, countless counties, countless cities, and in COVID-paralyzed and pandemic-delusioned nations worldwide. I am almost certain they will continue and worsen if we do not speak up and stand up to do something about it.

In Ohio, the state I'm most familiar with, the one whose tyranny has infected my personal 2020, this was done in a very sneaky manner, as all governmental mandates and actions typically are. Here is an abbreviated chain of events, the relatively underhanded, devious schedule by which pastors, churches, and churchgoers were purposely confused and terrified (of the exaggerated virus itself and also of legal trouble) into shutting their doors in the Buckeye State:

- March 9, 2020: Executive Order 2020-01D was signed by "Republican" Overlord...er, "Governor" Mike DeRINO...er, DeWine. This order declared a "state of emergency," based on WHO recommendations. It advised, "All citizens are urged to heed the advice of the Department of Health and other emergency officials regarding this public health emergency in order to protect their health and safety."⁵ Translation? "Whatever we say from here on out, you must do...or else you and your loved ones may die, and it will be all your fault for not complying."
- March 12, 2020 (just five days later): Director's Order to Limit and/or Prohibit Mass Gatherings in the State of Ohio was signed by overstepping, then-Director of Health Amy [overre]Acton, forbidding the gathering of 100 people or more. This order by the former director (who has since taken a cowardly stepdown from her position after she was protested and after the Jewish doctor herself made some very heinous, rights-trampling, offensive, and nearly anti-Semitic suggestions that Ohioans should live in a "show-

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_church_and_state_in_the_United_States

³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/04/12/kentucky-churches-hold-in-person-easter-services-despite-order/2980456001/>

⁴ <https://reason.com/2020/04/13/religious-freedom-clashes-with-public-health-enforcers/>

⁵ <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/Executive-Order-2020-01D.pdf>

me-your-papers” society)⁶ did state that it excluded “religious gatherings...weddings, funerals;”⁷ however, this was never clearly communicated in DeWine's and Acton's afternoon modern-day version of Two Minutes Hate...er, uh “press conferences.” This silent coercion was likely purposeful and caused many churches and pastors to believe they were no longer allowed to congregate. The result of this fearmongering and the blatant refusal to verbally clarify their constant orders and mandates and amendments to those orders and mandates from the health director and the governor? Pastors statewide believed they had to close their churches down, and many, like mine, haven't held live-studio-audience services since.

- March 17, 2020 (just five days later): Amended Order to Limit and/or Prohibit Mass Gatherings and the Closures of Venues in the State of Ohio was signed by “Doctor” Amy Acton. This order reduced the previous one by half.⁸ Now, even smaller churches began closing their doors, because congregations over 50 persons believed they were not legally allowed to meet. Of course, that very unlucky St. Patrick's Day was also when Amy Acton served as DeWine's loophole to close Ohio's polling places, just one day before the presidential primary,⁹ resulting in thousands upon thousands of Ohioans being unable to cast their votes in time. Apparently, freedom of religion and the right to vote are fair game for a useless, unelected official in lab coat.
- April 2, 2020: Ms. Acton signed Amended Director's Stay at Home Order, a terrifyingly tyrannical document that stated, “*All public and private gatherings of any number of people occurring outside a single household or living unit are prohibited...*” and, “Nothing in this order prevents the Department [of] Health or local health departments from issuing and enforcing isolation and quarantine orders.” The only exceptions to this so-called order (again, issued by a nonelected official) were “for health and safety...for necessary supplies and services...for outdoor activity...for certain types of work...to take care of others.”¹⁰ None of those indicated that going to church was acceptable or allowed.

The list could go on and on and on and does, with the endless orders continuing to this day. At the time that I write this, we now have a statewide masking order, which includes churchgoers sitting in the pews. We went

⁶ <https://cleveland.adl.org/news/state-senator-wife-compare-actons-statement-to-being-in-nazi-germany/>

⁷ https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/b815ab52-a571-4e65-9077-32468779671a/ODH+Order+to+Limit+and+Prohibit+Mass+Gatherings%2C+3.12.20.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_M1HGGIK0N0JO00QO9DDDDM3000-b815ab52-a571-4e65-9077-32468779671a-n6IAHNT

⁸ https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/dd504af3-ae2c-4d2e-b2bd-02c1a3beed89/Director%27s+Order+Amended+Mass+Gathering+3.17.20+%281%29.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_M1HGGIK0N0JO00QO9DDDDM3000-dd504af3-ae2c-4d2e-b2bd-02c1a3beed89-n6XVz7y

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Ohio_Democratic_presidential_primary

¹⁰ <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/Directors-Stay-At-Home-Order-Amended-04-02-20.pdf>

through the initial stay-at-home orders, then to something called a “stay healthy and safe at home” situation, then to something called “Responsible ReStart Ohio.”¹¹ When DeWine was questioned about churches, he offered up an alibi about as believable as Bill Clinton’s “I did not have sexual relations with that woman.”¹² On March 22, after receiving much heat about the confusion and the mass gathering orders and lockdowns that coerced pastors into shuttering, Governor DeWine’s answer was a fearmongering, defensive tweet: “We did not order religious organizations to close, but my message to EVERYONE is that this is serious. When you are coming together, whether in a church or wherever, this is dangerous...We have the ability to do religious services other ways. I implore religious leaders to think about their congregations...”¹³ Did he actually suggest, with that smug look on his face, that pastors and preachers don't care about the flocks they shepherd? Yes, my friends, he did, and maniacal Mikey has spouted off these callous things more than once, often in even harsher ways. It’s rather sad that Mr. DeWine is less wise than Taylor Swift. He ought to know, “If you say it in a Tweet, that’s a cop-out.”¹⁴

I’ve witnessed this with my own eyes and ears in Ohio, but it is not limited to this state alone. Many governors may not specifically order religious places of worship, may not have the *cajones* or the gall to explicitly say it. Nevertheless, they spend plenty of time making the general public believe they can be prosecuted and should be persecuted if they gather together for any reason, including worship, marriages, baptisms, and memorial services. After all of these mandates and orders in Ohio came the statewide masking orders, forcing the churches that dutifully and bravely stayed open to force their congregants to diaper and cautioning them that making a joyful noise to the Lord in song is simply too dangerous. Thanks to the infamous exaggerations of the Centers for Disease Control, which “noted that singing can spread the coronavirus even beyond the six-foot standard distancing requirement,” the state of California even banned singing and chanting in religious gatherings.¹⁵ Back in the Midwest, governors like Mike DeWine just keep scaring the churches closed. To emphasize and exacerbate the fear and threat of illness and legal action, he even sent a “friendly reminders” to every house of worship of all faiths in Ohio on August 4,¹⁶ printed on paper and sent with postage that were bought on taxpayers' dimes. This document suggested, once again, that churches who dare to open their doors and pews to their people are uncaring and ungodly. “DeWine [also] conducted a conference call with Ohio clergy and encouraged them to offer services online instead of meeting in person during the pandemic,” and what a shame that is.¹⁷

¹¹ <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/home>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clinton%E2%80%93Lewinsky_scandal

¹³ <https://twitter.com/govmikedewine/status/1241804435615072256?lang=en>

¹⁴ “You Need to Calm Down,” Taylor Swift, June 14, 2019, Republic.

¹⁵ <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20200709/ohio-now-requires-masks-at-religious-services-in-worst-covid-counties>

¹⁶ <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/families-and-individuals/resources-for-parents-and-families/faith-based-letter>

¹⁷ <https://www.marionstar.com/news/>

PROBLEM 2: PETRIFIED PULPITS AND COWARDLY CONGREGANTS

The second issue has been fearful pastors and churchgoers who buy into the fearmongering, a direct opposition to what the Bible says we should do, along with congregants who are equally fearful. I do not mean to suggest that pastors should do anything that is blatantly harmful to their congregations, as that would also be a direct violation of scripture. However, there are consequences for falling prey to fear rather than praying through it.

First and foremost, we must remember that fear is not godly. In fact, it comes from a very different source indeed: “For *God* has not given us a spirit of fear.”¹⁸ If it is not coming from God, the only other places fear can come from are from ourselves or, more likely, from the hotheaded one who lurks below, hoping to cripple us, separate us, and destroy our testimony.

Secondly, we are literally ordered by our Maker to live unafraidly. “Do not be afraid” is the most frequently mentioned *command* in God’s Word.¹⁹ In the King James Version of the Bible, you’ll find “fear not” and “be not afraid” 103 times.²⁰ Why is this so important that it should be mentioned so many times? Simply put: God knows we easily fall prey to fear and also because fear prevents us from being functional and able to do what we need to do.

We need to forego our fear and actually offer people the chance to attend church, in person, with our Christian brothers and sisters. Of course, precautions can be taken. Those who wish to mask and distance, or even those who choose not to attend, should follow their hearts and God's guidance for them. We should not all be forced to settle for cyber churching. We need the fellowship, the altar calls, the Christian activities, the weddings, the funerals, the baptisms, and the communions. These things cannot be accomplished via Zoom. If you think about it, all the world’s urging to do everything virtually is quite scandalous; the very definition of virtual includes words like “simulated,” “almost but not nearly,” and “unreal.” I don’t know about you, but I don’t want my spiritual worship, service, learning, and fellowship to be merely simulated via videoconference.

Throughout scripture, there is a call to meet together. In biblical times, Christians did this in the midst of greater fear than any media-overblown virus. Whereas our modern churches have been quick to shut their doors because of government mandates and projections of faulty and misleading case numbers and deaths, the saints of old courageously gathered in houses, basements, caves, and among copses of trees, risking more than a quarantine

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 1:7

¹⁹ <https://bodytithethe.com/frequent-command-bible/>

²⁰ <https://www.quora.com/How-many-times-is-fear-mentioned-in-the-Bible>

order. They knew they could end up as lion bait for a cheering crowd at a Roman coliseum or forever entombed in the catacombs. “Only for approximately 10 out of the first 300 years of the church's history were Christians executed due to orders from a Roman emperor..., but one historian of the persecutions estimates the overall numbers as between 5,500 and 6,500.”²¹ Today, our pastors and churches are unfortunately not so bold.

The fact is that Christians should be together, in person, in church, to celebrate, learn, worship, share, give tithes and offerings, and bear one another's burdens in an interpersonal, real way no teleconference can allow. Remember, virtual literally means "not completely" or "not physically existing." Our Christian fellowship deserves better than remote and virtual.

Not only that, but refusal to go to church tells a fearful world that God is unable or unwilling to look after his own. It is a poor testimony of terror to a world that needs hope. Many Christian people like me are upset that church leaders have given in to this fear, that their shuddering has led to shuttering. “Most regular attenders say they are either very or somewhat confident they could safely attend religious services in person right now, without spreading or catching the coronavirus,” yet nearly 40 percent of mainline protestant churches remain closed.²²

Fortunately, President Trump announced his view that churches and other houses of worship are essential and that states must allow them to remain open. The U.S. Department of Justice has also stepped in, supporting churches by filing two amicus briefs in cases in Mississippi and Virginia.”²³ Is it true, then, that the government is, in some cases, more faithful and less fearful than the pastors and pew-sitters themselves? This is as shameful as it is shocking.

The enemy of God wants churches to languish, suffocate, and fail financially. He wants to separate God's people from one another. Like it or not, and whether they admit it or not, he is using our politicians and fear-sliding media to accomplish this goal. We should be praying to God for forgiveness for ever closing our church doors or refusing to attend, for relying only on technology to give us a false sense of fellowship, for eliminating the opportunity for people to come to altars in a live invitation, where souls can be saved and lives can be changed...and we should be praying those prayers for forgiveness in our *opened* or reopened churches, shouting, “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord.”²⁴

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire

²² <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/08/07/americans-oppose-religious-exemptions-from-coronavirus-related-restrictions/>

²³ <https://www.thereview.org/2020/05/30/states-close-churches-covid-19/>

²⁴ Psalm 122:1