

faith in
focus

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of New Zealand

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REBIRTH:
the **ESSENTIAL**
inner transformation

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.....
All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Editorial Assistant:

Mrs Sally Davey

Production Staff:

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Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

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Editorial

"If all you have is a profession of faith and you have no fruit in your life, all that qualifies you to be, is a goat in the church. A bad tree, that bears only bad fruit" – RC Sproul. Sproul goes on to point out that in the church, we find both sheep and goats – people who are truly saved and those who are not – those who are regenerate and those who are not!

There have been many times in the history of the church when there has been controversy. There has been a time when some stated that we could be justified by faith alone, we could have a faith that is alone, we could have a faith that never brings forth fruit, a faith that never produces good works and still be justified. Yet this view and other views similar to it run counter to what the Scriptures actually teach.

Do the Scriptures not refer to a person who is in Christ, as being a new creation? (2 Cor 5;17) Do the Scriptures not say, that we must put on the Lord Jesus Christ? (Rom 13:14) Does not Jesus himself say that you must be born again, or born anew, or from above, in order to see and enter the kingdom of God? (John 3:3,5) Isn't the Scripture abundantly clear, that there must be a transformation in the life of God's people?

I think one of the clearest examples of a transformed life in Scripture is that of Paul the Apostle. While travelling on the road to Damascus, with the intent of arresting Christians to be punished in Jerusalem, he was confronted by the glorified Jesus, and something very radical happened to him. Instead of persecuting those who belonged to the "Way", he became part of it. He became a very enthusiastic instrument of the LORD and began preaching Christ in the synagogues.

Paul was a very fruitful servant of the Lord. He was not a bad tree bringing forth bad fruit any longer, but was transformed into a good tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither

Dear reader. Which one are you – a sheep, a goat, a good tree or bad tree?

Our contributors, Messrs Andrew de Vries and Andre Holtslag, write about that essential inner transformation, which is imperative for the Christian and the church.

Mr Andrew de Vries writes about the necessity of the new birth.

Mr Andre Holtslag considers a fruit of the new birth – faith.

Mrs Sally Davey reports on how Greek evangelical Christians are helping refugees.

Mr J. V. Fesko reviews *The Communicant's Spiritual Companion*, by Thomas Haweis, 1764; Mrs Kelli Clifford (wife of an OPC pastor) reviews *Keeping Your Cool: A Teen's Survival Guide*, by Lou Priolo. OP pastor Mr Shane Lems reviews *We Cannot Be Silent*, by R. Albert Mohler, Jr; Mr Alan D. Strange reviews *Gamechangers: Key Figures of the Christian Church*, by Robert Letham; Mr Christian McShaffrey reviews *God, Adam, and You: Biblical Creation Defended and Applied*, edited by Richard D. Phillips.

Mr Albert Mohler analyses our cultural crisis in his third instalment.

Mr Cornelis Van Dam looks at the privilege of worship.

Mr Hans Vaatstra reports on his guest lectureship at the Reformed Bible College, PNG.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

NB: In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

God's maternity ward

Andrew de Vries

If you are not really all that clear on what it means to be born again, you are in pretty good company. A recent article in the *Press* was entitled 'Born again Smolda wins Hunter Cup'. The article was about a horse whose career had revived and who was now raking in the prize money. Some have spoken of born again companies as those businesses who were experiencing new prosperity. Music critics speak of Bob Dylan's 'born again' period where he produced three albums which were explicitly Christian in content. And then we have Nicodemus.

John 3:1-9 reveals to us that he was pretty clueless about what it meant to be born again (the theological term used for this is regeneration). He sought Jesus

out for a conversation and got far more than he bargained for. The thing we need to recognise about Nicodemus is that he was no theological nincompoop. He was a teacher in Israel, a Pharisee, no less. Perhaps we should call him Professor Nicodemus. But Professor Nicodemus needed to be taught a thing or two about being born again. We'll explore the lessons he learned about what it really means to be born again.

What does it mean...

'Born again' is not a reference to a special category of Christians who are 'extra' spiritual and a bit full-on. It is clearly not a literal reference to going back into the womb to be re-born, for which all mothers are grateful. Being born again is not a superficial change

in external behaviour, like turning over of a new leaf for your New Year's Resolution. It is a radical transformation of the entire character of a person. It is a mighty internal change. JI Packer defined it as a *'drastic change wrought upon fallen human nature which brings a man under the effective dominion of the Holy Spirit and makes him responsive to God, which previously he was not.'* (page 150 of *God's Words*)

Being born again is something that is clearly massive. When a new life comes into the physical world we all recognise that something of great magnitude has occurred. I can't imagine any parent welcoming a child into the world, and then sitting in the birthing suite afterward saying: 'that was a bit dull, I wonder what's on the TV tonight.' Any new



parents are absolutely awestruck when a new life arrives. It's a miracle. New birth is amazing. Life is never the same again when new life arrives.

And it's the same in the spiritual realm. Every new birth is an absolute miracle. That's why every Christian is a miracle. Sometimes people who have grown up in believing families and who can't remember a time when they did not have faith, feel like they have missed out on something. They don't have a big conversion story. They suspect God might not have done as much in their life as He has done in the lives of others. But if you are a Christian, you have been born again and that is a staggering miracle. A massive change has taken place, regardless of whether or not you feel it, or can clearly see it.

In fact, when Paul describes being 'born again' in another place he calls Christians new creations (2 Cor 5:17). The language of the creation of the world is being marshalled to describe the

“The clear sign of life is that there are observable changes in person's behaviour as they begin to grow in the likeness of their elder brother Jesus Christ. This is quite important to highlight in our day and age.”

reality of being born again. Think about this. At the creation God brought an entire universe into being: Galaxy after galaxy, the colour spectrum, the laws that govern our universe. That's pretty big – a whole new world brought into existence. That is what new birth is – a whole new person being brought into existence. It's big.

Why is it necessary...

When Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of the new birth he emphasises the absolute necessity of being born again. It is not necessary in the sense that you need to bring mosquito repellent on your holiday to the beach because without it you'll get eaten alive. It is necessary in the sense that without it, you can't be saved. You won't go to heaven. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he can't enter, or even see the Kingdom of God unless he's born again.

He can't appreciate the beauty of Jesus Christ. He can't wonder in adoration at the way of salvation found in Jesus. He could never sing 'Jesus priceless treasure, source of purest pleasure.' He's spiritually blind unless he is born again. And if that's the case for Nicodemus, it's the case for all of us. Sometimes I just can't understand how a friend or family member I know has no interest in Jesus Christ. To me he's so infinitely glorious, but to them, they don't know what I'm on about. They can't see anything interesting about him at all. There's no attraction to him. They say, Christianity is irrelevant to my life. That's because by nature, we are all spiritually blind, unless we are born again.

Nicodemus was a man most people would have thought a likely candidate to be in the kingdom of God. He had everything going for him – he was a religious leader. He was a good man. He had orthodox theology. If anyone was going to understand spiritual matters and gain entrance into heaven, surely it would be a man like Nicodemus. Jesus says, no, he too had to be born again. It's not knowledge or the right environment or theological orthodoxy or being a regular attender at church that will make you a Christian. The one thing that is necessary according to Jesus, is the new birth.

Where does it come from?

That leads us to one of those paradoxes that we find in the Christian faith. The one thing that we desperately need is to be born again. But the one thing that is completely outside of own capabilities, is

being born again. Only God can make a person spiritually alive through the new birth. The word translated 'again' can mean either 'again' or 'from above'. The new birth comes from above, from God.

We have a word for this. It's called monergism. Alone working. God works alone in birthing people to new spiritual life. We don't help him out or make any contribution. It's not like going to see a gym instructor where you work together on the desired outcome of a new figure. This is more like natural birth. The child doesn't contribute anything to being born. They aren't consulted about whether they would like to be born. They don't give the midwife a helping hand when the birth gets a bit tough. They are either passive or working against the whole process!

And that's what Jesus is saying here. To make a man or woman, a boy or girl, a Christian, it takes a mysterious, powerful, supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to bring them to spiritual life. You can't do it yourself. That's what George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the 1700's, discovered. He had gotten in with a bad crowd as a teenager, and over time he became convicted of his sin. So he tried everything to change: he denied himself every luxury, he wore dirty clothes, he ate only foods he didn't like, he fasted twice per week, gave his money to the poor, and spent whole nights in prayer, on his face on cold stones or wet grass. But it didn't really change him. He remained the same person inside. A friend gave him a book and after reading it he realised that he could not save himself. He needed to become a different man, and only God could do this for him. And not long after, having given up trying to accomplish the new birth himself, it happened and he was born again.

Now, some people might say, 'this is all very discouraging'. I can't make myself a new creation. I can't do anything myself to turn over that new leaf and have that new spiritual life. That's depressing. How is that supposed to help me? Well, it's supposed to help you by driving you to the one who can make you new – God.

Spurgeon writes, "Do I hear someone complain when I preach on the new birth being from above? 'This will be discouraging.' But from what will it discourage us? It will discourage us from trying to save ourselves, and that is exactly what I want to discourage you from." That's what the new birth discourages us from. From looking to ourselves to save us.

From looking to within, to this earth, to any other person to save us. It causes us to look to the only one who can save us - God the Father, through his son Jesus Christ.

What is the effect

Clearly, when a child is born, there are signs of life. If there are no signs of life, something is desperately wrong. So too with those who are born again, born from above. There are clear signs indicating that spiritual life is present in a person. The strength of these signs differ from person to person, but nonetheless, they are present.

We have already looked at one of these signs. A transformed attitude to Christ is present. A love for him and a delight in him appear and begin to grow in the person who has been born

again. The other clear sign of life is that there are observable changes in person's behaviour as they begin to grow in the likeness of their elder brother Jesus Christ. This is quite important to highlight in our day and age. The idea has become popular that you can love Christ and invite him into your heart, and yet live a life of disobedience to God's commands that is indistinguishable from non-Christians around you. Clearly, if a person is born again, their life will begin to show it.

The Bible teaches that the new birth creates new desires for obedience (1 John 3:9), new love towards brothers and sisters in the faith (John 13:34-35), and a new disposition to serve others (2 Cor 5:15). These are just some of the signs of life that are present in the born again person. These qualities aren't

all there in a perfect measure all of the time. But they are there. They are there along with a desire that others would have what we have.

Edward Studd returned from indigo planting in North India and intended to spend his fortune. His world was all about hunting, cricket, and racehorses. In 1875 he was suddenly converted through the ministry of Dwight Moody. The only thing he then thought about was bringing his friends and family to Christ. His Coachman remarked: 'though there's the same skin, there's a new man inside.' What a beautiful description of the new birth. We've got the same skin, but we're new inside. And it's all of God, and all of his grace, and all to His glory.

Mr Andrew de Vries is a minister in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.

Rebirth: the essential inner transformation (2)

Faith Alone, but not a Lonely Faith

Andre Holtslag

Does Sola Fide ring any bells for you? No, it is not a new brand of dog food! It is a Latin phrase that translates into English as "By Faith Alone". It is one of the five 'Solas' of the Reformation. It summarizes what we read, for example, in Romans 3:28, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." There is not one *single* work or effort or attitude or deed that we contribute to our salvation. Our justification is *entirely* the work of God through Christ, which we receive by faith alone. In fact, one of the most beautiful pictures of justification by faith alone in the Bible is found in Zechariah 3:1-5. There Joshua the High Priest is standing in the presence of the Lord with Satan standing beside him to accuse him. And we are told that Joshua is

"clothed with filthy garments," a metaphor for sin. But God instructs those there to remove Joshua's dirty clothing and to replace it with clean clothing. And in this whole episode, Joshua says and does nothing! He is *passive*. It is God who makes Joshua clean. We are justified (put in the position of being able to say of ourselves that it is just-as-if-I never sinned) by faith alone.

However, while the Bible teaches faith *alone*, it also has much to say about *lonely* faith. As we have seen in Rev. De Vries's article, saving faith in Christ *must* be and *will* be accompanied by a changed life. And we want to see that this is so and what it looks like in two ways: Firstly we will take note of the function and meaning of the word "Therefore" in the Epistles, and secondly we will consider an example of a faith that is not lonely from Acts 19.

"Therefore..."

So first of all, let's note the function and meaning of the word "Therefore" in the epistles. This is far from being an exhaustive list, but most English Bible versions have the word "Therefore" at the beginning or very near to the beginning of the following verses – Romans 12:1; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 2:12; Col. 2:6; Heb. 10:19; 1 Pet. 1:13. And in each case, what we find is that in the preceding verses and chapters, the epistle writer has finished describing our salvation in Christ. If we were to picture salvation as a diamond, the epistle writer is like a master jeweler who has been peering at the beautiful facets of the diamond and describing the variety of colours and shapes that he sees. And he wants us to understand how each of these facets is another part of the brilliant whole that is the diamond of salvation. But taking his cue from the

Lord Jesus, who said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” he cannot end there; he must move from doctrine to duty, or from the believer’s position to the believer’s practice, or from salvation to service, or from grace to gratitude.

Let’s consider Romans 12:1-2 as an example of this. Chapters 1-11 are Paul’s survey of our salvation in Christ. They include a detailed and plain exploration of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. They include verses like Romans 5:1, “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” and Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” and Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” But what we learn from Romans 12:1 is that wonderful truths like these are the foundation/reason/motivation for Christian living. **“Therefore**, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your

mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will (NIV).” And as we continue on in chapters 12-16, we encounter commands like “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves ... Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality ... Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” So, are we saved by practicing hospitality and not getting drunk? No. We are saved by believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. But such a saved person will be eager to practice hospitality and concerned to avoid drunkenness. Saving faith in Christ is never a lonely faith; it is always accompanied by a changed life. And you will see that this is the case with each of the epistle references listed above. So while we have to work hard to teach and defend the doctrine of faith alone, we must work equally hard to teach and defend and demonstrate that there is no such thing as lonely faith. And this

“More and more sins are being added to the list of ‘illnesses’ or ‘personality types’ or ‘addictions’ that a Christian can live with, guilt free.”

is so, in part, because of the function and meaning of the word “Therefore” in the epistles.

An illustration from Acts 19:11-20.

But let’s now consider an example of a faith that is not lonely from Acts 19.



We are told there that

God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,” and that some of the local Jews tried to imitate Paul but with disastrous results. ¹⁷And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Note carefully the order of events: First of all the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled, which is in keeping with the quote above from Romans 10:9, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” So these people were, as we see from verse 18, “believers.” But look where belief led them – to confession and repentance. Because the Holy Spirit was now living within them, they became convicted by the preaching of the Word that there was need for change in their lives. Romans 8:1, as we noted earlier, says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” That is a complete sentence. We may shout a loud ‘Amen!’ when we hear those magnificent words. But a few verses later we also read these words, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (verse 13).” And these words help us to see what is at stake. Matthew 7:13-14 says, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” There is one pathway between salvation and eternal life and it is the narrow pathway of putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit. The believers in Ephesus realized now that they could not confess Jesus as Lord and continue with sinful ways of thinking, talking, and behaving, which in their case included practicing magic arts. And so there was a book

burning session. A piece of silver was a day’s wage for your average worker. In today’s currency then, books worth \$8,000,000 were torched! These books and the thinking and speech and behaviour that went with them were a part of “the deeds of the body” that had to be put to death.

And so, today, for example, if a couple were unmarried but living together before they came to faith in Christ, the right thing for them to do would be to separate from each other until the day of marriage. A person who drove around in unregistered and un-warranted car/s without a driver’s license, as a result of embracing Christ by faith, should come under the conviction of sin in relation to their lawlessness and cease driving until they can do so lawfully. But whereas examples like these might be obvious to many, we hasten to add that the same principle applies equally to sins like unthankfulness, anxiety, frustration, discontentment, pride, selfishness, impatience, irritability, anger, gossip, judgmentalism, and worldiness. Sins like these are also a part of “the deeds of the body” that must be put to death.

We live in a church culture that many have labeled easy-believerism. You just need to believe in Jesus and eternal life is locked in. Don’t let any one tell you that you must do this or that you may not do that – that is legalism! More and more sins are being added to the list of ‘illnesses’ or ‘personality types’ or ‘addictions’ that a Christian can live with, guilt free. I trust you have seen though that such thinking is incompatible with the glorious gospel of salvation in Christ. Charles Wesley’s wonderful hymn, *O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, has this line: “He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free; His blood can make the foulest clean. His blood availed for me.” His choice of the term “canceled sin” is quite deliberate. Because of Christ and His work on the cross, every sin of the believer – past, present, and future – is forgiven (canceled). In God’s eyes it is Just-as-if-I never sinned. But every believer knows the daily reality of ongoing sin. And it is in Christ and from Christ that there is power to break the power of that sin. Is this the Jesus Christ that you believe in? Is this the power that is at work in you? Are you thankful for a justification that is by faith alone but never lonely?

Mr Andre Holtslag is the minister of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

The search is on the moment I can think Identity.....

What is the link as back I look, and forward stare: What’s in the air?

Who then am I and why?

What purpose do I serve on planet earth?

Where do I come from and where headed?

Please tell, What is my destination?

Am I just merely a recycled soul, migrating from one body to another, my body just a coat put on and then discarded? Am I mere molecules of unknown origin and dusty destiny?

Or is the inner and the outer a united whole

that spells out personality?

Is there uniqueness

and design

that bears a signature divine?

Is there a greater mind than mine,

a greater heart I’ve hurt?

Is there a way to know the truth?

It’s urgent: Life’s but curt.

If right is wrong, and wrong is right;

If light is darkness,

darkness light:

then *nothing* would have sense!

So do I live for *nothing*?

Is heaven nothingness?

No rather, it is nothing less than unimaginable bliss!

The bliss

of perfect love

beyond sunset,

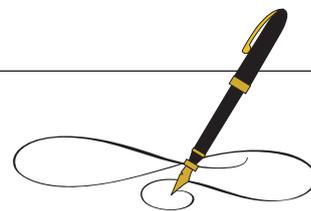
of fascination

when as yet

I’ll face my Great Designer!

John Goris

Wellington, September, 2004



NEIGHBOURS showing mercy

Sometimes we catch sight of a small deed faithfully done by God's people – and it seizes our attention. As it zooms into focus we realise that we've seen one of the myriads of actions God has used to build his church over many centuries.

I had this kind of moment a few weeks ago when I read an article in *Christianity Today* magazine¹. It was written by

Jeremy Weber, a journalist who had recently visited Christians working in Erbil and Athens to help refugees fleeing the troubles in Iraq and Syria. These were local Christians – not believers from wealthy western nations or some multinational aid programme. They were quietly responding to the needs of people appearing on their doorstep.

This story reminded me of Jesus' words in Luke 10 when he was telling the parable of the Good Samaritan to a self-righteous Jewish lawyer. "Who," Jesus asked, "proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer replied "The one who showed him mercy."

The Greek Christians who have been helping their neighbours from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries are not who you might think they are. When we think of the church in Greece, we are inclined to think of the Greek Or-



“There’s nothing flashy or innovative about the ways these Christians are trying to help the refugees. It is simple, kindly hospitality in the name of Christ.”

thodox Church, whose theology and liturgy date back to the times of the early church, but which are not biblically sound. It is this church – the church of the overwhelming majority of Greeks – that you’d expect to have the money, manpower and resources to deal with the 3000-odd refugees arriving in Athens every day late last year, when Weber was there. But no, those helping were evangelical Christians, part of the 40,000-strong Greek Evangelical Alliance, whose members have from time to time had their lives made difficult by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Greek evangelicals have been actively helping refugees for decades. They are still at the forefront of this work, even as the Greek nation suffers a 25% unemployment rate and endures a debt crisis that almost caused the Eurozone to implode. Yet they are helping many poorer than themselves – so desperate, in fact, that they risked the dangerous crossing from Turkey to the island of Lesbos (more than 800 drowned in 2015). Arriving in the area around the port of Piraeus, these refugees outnumber the locals 4 to 1. Buses then take them into Athens, from where they wait for transport that will take them to the border between Greece and Macedonia; and from there into the Balkans and thence to Germany.

The Greek evangelical Christians do all they can to help these desperate refugees on their way. They feed them – journalist Jeremy Weber noticed one food truck, which in one evening was passing out 500 bowls of beef, rice and beans made by church volunteers. Apparently 10 teams from evangelical churches have been feeding 1700 migrants a day in Athens’s three refugee camps. At the time of writing, what had been 3000 migrants a week had become 3000 migrants a day.

Late last year, the leaders of all Greece’s evangelical churches met with the leader of Plision (a Christian aid ministry) and agreed that they would help Christians and non-Christians alike. Christos Nakis, Plision’s leader, explained that “We think our mission as people of God is to help everybody the same. After all, God sends rain the same on the good and the bad”.

Most of the refugees pass on quickly: the Syrians and Iraqis, including the Christians, have enough money to pass through Athens in the same day. But those from Afghanistan have to wait a few days for money from relatives in the

West to arrive before they can move on. These are the ones who stay in Athens’s refugee camps, including that in Galatsi Hall, which was once the Olympic stadium when Greece was the Olympic host in 2004. The Christians volunteer here, providing meals, bedding, and tending to any other physical needs they can help with. There is even an elderly lady who hands out sweets from a shopping trolley. The aim is to “help them feel human” by offering showers, children’s games, recharging their cell phones and even free WiFi. As one Christian puts it, “We have the first opportunity to engage them with the best elements of our faith and culture.”

These Greek Christians want the refugees’ first exposure to the Christian faith to be an authentic one. They want these Muslim migrants to meet Christ in their hour of need – not some distorted representation of him. “I can’t show them a film of Jesus’ life,” one leader told CT, “but bit by bit it will all happen.” A Plision driver told Weber, “If they see Jesus in our face, it is enough.” And perhaps they have. A child’s poem on a wall of drawings in Galatsi camp says: “I was in Iran. I saw a lot of Muslims but I didn’t see [godly people]. When I came to Greece, I saw a lot of non-Muslims. But I saw [godly people].” (It’s interesting that everyone seems innately aware of what godly people look like.)

Significantly, these evangelical Christians know they cannot do everything. They are but one link in a chain of people God uses throughout the universal body of Christ. They trust that God will use Christians in the countries the refugees have been aiming for to bring them the gospel and disciple them. “We look at these people as long-term residents of Europe, and we try to focus on being the best hosts at the entrance.” They are also aware that their own resources are slender due to their country’s financial difficulties; and that their numbers are few. They would like to form partnerships with Christians in other western countries, who could help with physical resources. They also, tellingly, wonder why western Christians are so afraid of Muslim refugees, and so quick to look for ways to shut them out of their communities. “Why are you Christian brothers in the West afraid? We are here on the front lines and are not afraid.”

There’s nothing flashy or innovative about the ways these Christians are trying to help the refugees. It is simple,

“Imagination, energy and commitment are the hallmarks of their efforts. But perhaps what is most inspiring is their awareness of the importance of the moment.”

kindly hospitality in the name of Christ. Imagination, energy and commitment are the hallmarks of their efforts. But perhaps what is most inspiring is their awareness of the importance of the moment. They know that Muslims arriving on the shores of Athens in such dire need have a unique opportunity to see Christ’s compassion. They want the Muslims to see *him*, not some distorted version of him.

In the months since *Christianity Today* visited Athens, many European countries have closed their borders to the refugees and the problem has got more difficult for the Greeks. Only God knows how the situation will be resolved; but we may trust that he will use it to further his kingdom. He can also use the watching, worldwide church to join in prayer that “his kingdom will come.”

Notes

- 1 Jeremy Weber, “God at Work along the Refugee Highway”, *Christianity Today* (March 2016), pp. 26-33. All the specific information in this article comes from Weber’s reporting.

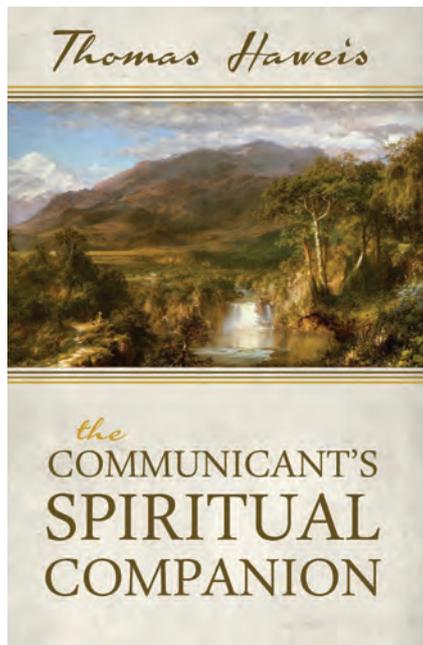
Books in focus

The Communicant's Spiritual Companion

by Thomas Haweis. 1764

Reformation Heritage Books

Reviewed by Prof. J. V. Fesko



Preparing to take the Lord's Supper is an important aspect of the Christian life, but I suspect that many Christians are at a loss as to how to prepare for it. What should they think, pray, or meditate upon as they anticipate taking the Supper? Reformation Heritage Books has republished a little devotional book written by eighteenth-century Anglican minister Thomas Haweis (pronounced Haws). In this book, Haweis presents seven brief chapters, ranging from the nature of a sacrament to the different ways people should prepare to take the Supper. The original context for this book was a Sunday afternoon series of catechetical lectures for congregants, so the book is aimed at the average person, which makes it readable and easily accessible to most in the church.

The book's strengths lie in the depths to which Haweis treats the Supper. He offers a chapter, for example, on the nature of the invitation to the sacred meal. How can Christians neglect an invitation from Christ to sit and share a meal at his table (p.23)? He also offers thoughtful reflection on how Christians should conduct their self-examination. He

encourages the reader to mediate upon the grace of forgiveness in Christ, which should impact our comportment towards others (p.52). In subsequent chapters, Haweis provides suggestions for thoughts during the administration of the Supper and then offers counsel for our conduct after we have received it. There is also a chapter with suggested forms for praying about pride, lust, guilt, temptations, affliction, love for God, charity, fear, humility, and so on. The book closes with a number of edifying meditations on various passages of Scripture.

Such a book can be useful and helpful for Christians who sometimes find themselves at a loss for words or thoughts regarding the Supper. Or perhaps some might find themselves in a rut and go through the same routine before and after the Supper.

I think two caveats are in order, however. First, readers should not take Haweis's book as a list of things that a person should do each and every time he approaches the table. Haweis specifically warns against this (p.55). Rather, this book is a guide and offers counsel, not binding prescriptions. Second, I get the impression that Haweis's church observed the Supper infrequently (quarterly or biannually), which would undoubtedly have led people to make more of their preparation. For Christians who participate in weekly communion, the counsel offered in this book might seem like a tall order. Once again, taken in small bites, this book can offer anyone edifying material for meditation and preparation.

This book was a favorite of former Westminster Seminary California president Robert G. den Dulk. He would undoubtedly be pleased that it has been republished and humbled to know it has been dedicated to his memory.

Keeping Your Cool: A Teen's Survival Guide

by Lou Priolo. P&R

Reviewed by OP pastor's wife

Kelli Clifford

Among difficulties in family relationships, perhaps nothing brings pain quite like angry conversations and attitudes.

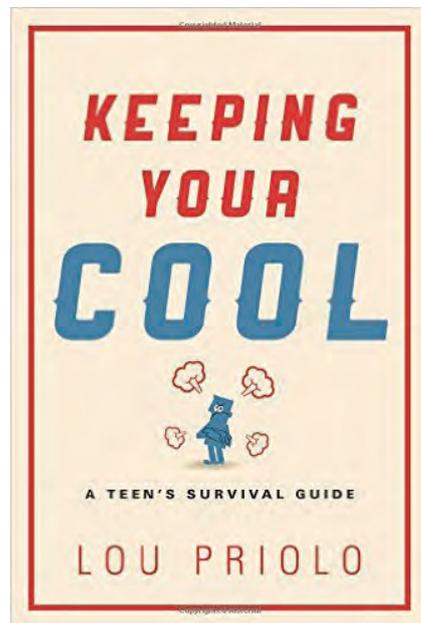
Even in its least harmful form, such as grumpiness or complaining, living with it presents a real challenge. And in our technological and texting age, parents struggle with how to keep lines of communication open with teenagers, much less discuss frustrations with each other.

Enter: *Keeping Your Cool: A Teen's Survival Guide*, by Lou Priolo. Here is a biblically rich, down-to-earth, and highly practical book written to equip teens to understand anger through the lens of Scripture. Priolo communicates with teens in a respectful, positive way, teaching them to glorify God by listening to and speaking with others in a biblical way.

Priolo, an experienced counselor, writes in a clear, conversational style with humor that should disarm even the most skeptical teen from the first pages. He writes gently and matter-of-factly about the sin that causes our anger. He doesn't beat around the bush, but neither does he beat you over the head.

While written for teens, this book would be useful for any believer to provide clarity on biblical forgiveness and reconciliation. And couldn't we all benefit from a refresher course on how to handle conflict, rejection, and offenses?

Priolo clearly maps out a pathway to deal with these issues. He includes journal entries and diagnostic checklists that one may photocopy. (If your teen is really mad, you just might need to buy some new ink cartridges!) On the journal



pages, one answers questions like:

- What patterns do I see to my anger?
- What do I tend to think and do? Clam up, quietly punish, blow my top, blame, despair, etc.?
- What does the Bible say about these actions or attitudes?
- How does the Bible direct me to a better response?

Priolo's case studies and sample answers further clarify how to go about working toward change.

He also provides biblical ways that young adults may respectfully talk to their parents about their (parents') sin against them. Another chapter describes how to make a godly appeal in the face of an unfavorable rule or decision. My own kids especially liked that one!

While these tools can help family dynamics, they will also help people graciously navigate difficult conversations in the future with other authority figures, friends, or a spouse.

Depending on the maturity of the young adult, *Keeping Your Cool* would be suitable for kids twelve years of age or older. It would also generate great discussion in a teen Sunday school, Bible study, or parenting class.

Reviews from New Horizons, February 2016

We Cannot Be Silent

by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
Nelson Books, 2015.

Reviewed by OP pastor Shane Lems.

In the past few years, there have been a number of helpful books on homosexuality written from a conservative Christian perspective. In *We Cannot Be Silent*, Baptist leader Albert Mohler talks about homosexuality, but he also does more: he explains the cultural and historical background of the sexual revolution, which gave birth to the homosexual agenda. In a compelling manner, Mohler says that the seeds of the current homosexual agenda were planted in the nineteenth century, when European intellectuals began to redefine love and sex. The seeds were fertilized in the American sexual revolution of the 1960s, which went hand in hand with a moral revolution. In other words, the current American homosexual agenda has grown so quickly because the American cultural soil has been and is ripe for such growth.

In one interesting section of this book, Mohler highlights the gay agenda from

around thirty years ago. An organized effort was made to remove stereotypes about gays, make them look good, portray them as victims, and argue that gays are born that way. Mohler argues that this agenda, combined with a general lack of morality, has resulted in the sexual mess we find ourselves in today. He even explains how the American judicial system has been involved in this sexual revolution. Readers who are interested in the legal side of this topic will find much to think about in this book.

Mohler notes the huge ramifications of the sexual revolution: it includes the home, children, businesses, schools, sports, the military, voluntary associations, churches, day care centers, government workers, public facilities, and so forth. One of the many reasons Christians should be concerned about the sexual revolution is that it affects every area of our lives. Some may accuse Mohler of using scare tactics in this book, or exaggerating his case, but these are real things about which we need to think!

Mohler doesn't just explain, examine, and criticize America's sexual conundrum. He also provides a brief overview of the Bible's teaching on sex and admits that the church hasn't always done a great job discussing and defending biblical teaching in this area. Mohler gives the church wise advice on how to navigate in our sexually charged culture. There is even a chapter that answers some common questions about homosexuality.

Mohler gives us a lot of information in this book, which is difficult to summarize. It certainly is a great resource to help Christians think biblically and reasonably about this pressing topic. Most Christians

who are looking for a sane voice on sexual morality will appreciate this detailed book.

Gamechangers: Key Figures of the Christian Church

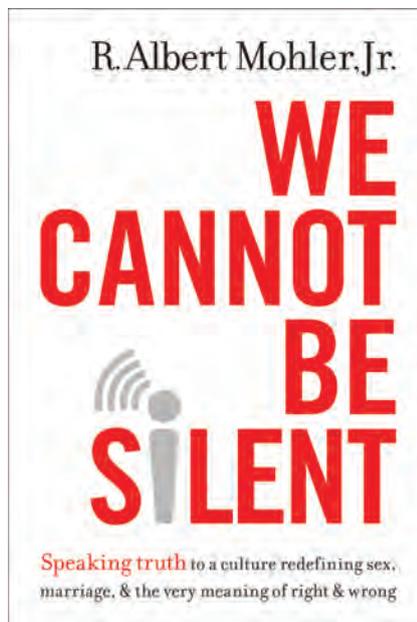
by Robert Letham
Christian Focus, 2015

**Reviewed by Prof. Alan D. Strange.
(Abridged from review in MJT, 2015, vol. 26.)**



Bob Letham brings a wealth of academic and pastoral experience to bear in this gem of a book. Stemming from a series of occasional lectures that he gave when serving as an Orthodox Presbyterian pastor in Wilmington, Delaware, Letham traverses in a brief span (twelve fairly short but meaty chapters) the whole of church history through a select number of figures that the publishers call "Gamechangers."

What particularly marked the ancient church – development of the doctrines of God, Christ, and man – is evident in the seminal figures Letham treats. Athanasius (ca. 295–373) defended the doctrine of the full deity of Christ against Arius and all comers, and properly stood "against the world." Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–391), as one of the three Cappadocian fathers (together with the brothers Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa), also defended the full deity of the Spirit and pioneered a way of thinking about God so as to preserve both the unity and the plurality of the Godhead. Augustine (354–430), as the capstone of the patristic period, recaptured the Pauline definition of predestination and grace so as to set the plate



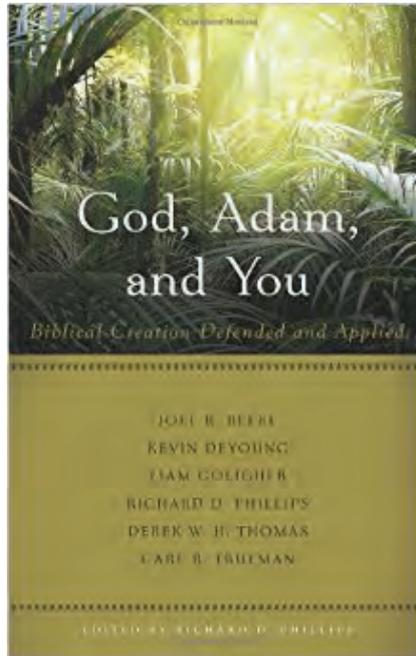
for the rest of church history.

Charles the Great (741–814), or Charlemagne, is the only one treated herein who is not a theologian, though he headed a kingdom that would later develop into the Holy Roman Empire. The stagnancy of this period began giving way by the time of Anselm (1033–1109) and Aquinas (1225–1274). The former developed the doctrine of atonement in a way that it had not been previously (the ancient church having focused more on the person of Christ than his work). The latter developed systematic theology as a whole, with an unfortunate sacramentalism in place of a developed pneumatology.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) discovered that the righteousness that God requires is given freely by him as a gift, received by faith alone. This understanding of definitive forgiveness now (not in the future, after being thoroughly sanctified by purgative fires) led to a Reformation that embraced Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), John Calvin (1509–1564), and many others. Bullinger showed that, even among the Reformed, the approach was not monolithic, as seen in his doctrine of predestination; Calvin, influenced particularly by Bucer of Strasbourg, developed the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in a way that the church had earlier not done.

John Wesley (1703–1791) focused on the Christian life, though embracing perfectionism. J. W. Nevin (1803–1886) sought to recover the balance of a more churchly approach, although one might argue that while he recovered certain needed elements of the Reformation (e.g., Calvin’s Eucharistic emphasis), he did so in an imbalanced way. Similarly, Karl Barth (1886–1968) sought to oppose the immanentism of liberalism with the transcendence of God that he found in several places, including Calvin (though some would argue that he “gave away the store” in the process).

Letham helpfully provides after his treatment of each thinker a short list of both primary and secondary sources for further reading. Each chapter is relatively brief, addressing the life and times of the “gamechanger,” as well as the substance of his work and the impact of his thought. This would be a fine book for a young adult or an adult Christian education class. Exposure to, and understanding of, church history needs to figure more prominently in the church’s program of Christian education. Letham’s book is an excellent entrée into it.



God, Adam, and You: Biblical Creation Defended and Applied
edited by Richard D. Phillips. P&R, 2015

**Reviewed by OP minister
Christian McShaffrey**

When I was converted, I repented of my Darwinian worldview and embraced the historicity of Genesis 1–2. When I entered seminary, one of the most difficult challenges for me was to understand how some of my Reformed brothers could not read Genesis 1–2 as a historical narrative.

An even more difficult challenge then arose (which continues to face Orthodox Presbyterians today): how do we heartily disagree with one another in brotherly love? I have found that the safest and most sanctified approach to brotherly debate is to stay as close to the text of Scripture as possible, and that is exactly what is done in this book.

Its purpose is to defend the “classic” (young earth) view of creation and to demonstrate how this interpretation of the creation account is integrally connected to orthodoxy in other areas like theology, anthropology, hamartiology, Christology, and soteriology.

The book is a compilation of transcribed lectures from six speakers at the 2013 Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. This makes each chapter a self-contained lesson. Some of the chapters are more conversational (incorporating illustrations, anecdotes, and references to pop culture), while others are more exegetical (including references to the Hebrew and Greek text).

The overall result is an engagingly readable book that is suitable for high school students, yet also offers sufficient “meat” to those who are more theologically astute. Many sections also convey the warmth and practicality of a devotional book.

As a brief aside, and thinking of high school students, it is my pastoral opinion that this book should be required reading for every covenant child who attends public school or plans to attend university.

In conclusion, we all know that there is a diversity of opinion within our denomination on the creation account. We are also, I trust, all committed to upholding the truth of Scripture while preserving the unity of the Spirit. All Orthodox Presbyterians should, therefore, read this book.

If you do not subscribe to the classic view of creation, you will, at very least, learn that those who do are not a “cult of obscurantists who refuse to accept what everyone else knows” (p. 101). We do have exegetical and theological grounds for our view.

On the other hand, if you do hold to the classic view, this book will further confirm you in your conviction and also further equip you to show your brothers a better way of understanding God, Adam, and you.

Reviews from New Horizons, March 2016

“When the heart is full of joy, it always allows its joy to escape. It is like the fountain in the marketplace; whenever it is full it runs away in streams, and so soon as it ceases to overflow, you may be quite sure that it has ceased to be full. The only full heart is the overflowing heart.”

Charles H. Spurgeon

Pastor being persecuted by fellow pastors for speaking boldly about Jesus, refusing political correctness

A German pastor is reportedly being persecuted by fellow pastors for preaching boldly about Jesus Christ and “refusing to bend a knee to political correctness.”

Pastor Olaf Latzel preaches at the historic St. Martini Church in Bremen, where the church’s former pastor, Joachim Neander, wrote the great hymn, “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” in 1679, *CBN News* reports.

Latzel’s sermons are known to be direct and bold and would cut no corners when attacking other religions, which could sound mean to some, according to the report.

“I’m only preaching the Gospel in a clear way,” Latzel said. “I think it is my duty to do this preaching in this way for our Lord.”

He claimed that much of Germany today “is covered by profound spiritual darkness,” as are most Western nations.

The chief battle in the German church today, according to him, is over who God is.

Some Christian pastors have reportedly said “Allah and Jesus Christ, the Christian God, is the same god.”

“But if you ask a Muslim, ‘Does your god have a son?’ he would say no!” he continued. “Our (Christian) God has a son; his name is Jesus Christ. So, they are not the same.”

“If you speak out loud and clearly about the truth of the Bible, that there’s only one way to heaven and this way is

Jesus Christ, there is only one God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and there is no other god beside Him, then you have a problem,” he said.

CBN reported that the Bremen pastor has been attacked in the media, investigated by the local government, and even denounced by fellow pastors over what he sees as a spirit of compromise that seems to have swallowed Germany and the German state church.

At least 70 German pastors reportedly gathered in Bremen this year to denounce Latzel behind a banner celebrating “diversity.”

The public prosecutor investigated him for hate speech and then cleared him. The Bremen parliament even passed a resolution against him, the first time a German pastor was condemned by a German parliament since World War II, said the report.

But instead of backing down, Latzel said the attacks reassure him that he is in a “war” between Christ and the devil.

“This is one sign that you are on the right way in your preaching, when you get problems. If you preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and everyone is clapping his hand, then you have a problem.”

He also admitted that while he has been receiving numerous praises through his email for his sermons, he does not want to get a big head.

“I am nothing. I am only a sinner. I am only a tool for Jesus Christ. And when Jesus can use this tool, give any honour to Jesus Christ. I am nothing.”

The pastor who comes from a family with a long military tradition, said he is now paying the price to see Germany’s spiritual revival.

He also lamented that 80 percent of pastors in Germany’s state church have not been reborn, which makes it a “great problem” as they reportedly make their own doctrine.

Shianee Mamanglu-Regala 15 April 2016

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Why Danes are leaving the church in droves

Danish Atheist Society has used a new campaign to encourage members of the Church of Denmark (Folkekirken)

to withdraw, leaving priests concerned about the economic consequences.

Using large advertisements on the sides of buses and through the website *udmeldelse.dk*, which provides short and easy instructions for leaving the church, the Danish Atheist Society (Ateistisk Selskab) appears to be causing an upsurge in withdrawals.

Up to 3,000 people have used the site, which forwards the necessary paperwork directly to parish priests who administer the withdrawals, Anders Stjernholm of Atheist Society told newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad*.

“We are satisfied with results so far,” said Stjernholm. “The bus campaign invites a discussion about faith, while the [website] withdrawal campaign is aimed at the many Danes who have long thought about leaving the church, but have not done so because it is too much trouble.”

The website contains a link through which the necessary paperwork can be completed, which it states will save the average Dane 133,000 kroner in church taxes over their lifetime.

Beyond the eight billion kroner that the Atheist Society says the church receives each year from the state and its members, the group also points to the Church’s involvement in school curricula and the the popular practice of confirming students when they reach the seventh grade as reasons to consider withdrawal.

According to *Kristeligt Dagblad*, priests across Denmark have reported an increase in withdrawals since the campaign began. The parish of Vejlbj near Aarhus, for example, saw 14 withdrawals during the first week of the campaign – far over normal levels and a cause of concern, according to parish priest Lena Kjems.

“We can see that the most common group is men between the ages of 18-25, which particularly affects us as a parish with many students,” Kjems told *Kristeligt Dagblad*.

Thomas Frank, Dean of Viborg Diocese, also told *Kristeligt Viborg* that the campaign was having an effect unlike anything he had seen before.

“Every single withdrawal means something for us as a church. It is concerning that it is so easy these days to click

Back issues of Faith in Focus
can be found on the
RCNZ Home Page
www.rcnz.org.nz

ourselves away from each other online. I have nothing against campaigns that encourage discussions about faith, but providing tools for withdrawal such as Atheist Society's website is, for me, wrong and ill-mannered," said Frank.
THELOCAL.DK

Church of Scotland study concludes people who stop attending church still believe in God

A 26 March 2016 BBC article by John McManus titled "People Who Stop Going to Church 'Still Believe in God'" reports that a study commissioned by the Church of Scotland concludes that two-thirds of those who stop attending weekly church services have a strong personal faith and maintain a belief in God, which is practiced in different ways including gathering in small groups for prayer and discussing theological issues. People's homes, cafes, restaurants and shared activities like walking are common substitutes for church attendance.

+ *Church of Scotland*

Legal opinion supports no boys in girls' toilets at NZ schools

New Zealand's Family First has obtained a legal opinion for schools that says they are not required under the law to have to allow transgender students access to shared toilets, showers and changing rooms, or allow transgender students to participate in sports teams that do not match their biological sex.

The legal opinion examines the Education Act, Bill of Rights Act, Human Rights Act and case law, and says that limiting access to toilets and changing rooms based on sex has long been considered appropriate given the need to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for all students. Limiting participation in sports teams on the basis of sex has also been about providing a safe physical environment particularly in the contexts of sports that involve physical contact and a physical contest of strength.

The legal opinion says that such concerns are prescribed by the national educational guidelines and are legitimate concerns, and that it is "overly simplistic and incorrect to say that schools are required to give transgender students access to shared toilets, showers and changing rooms." The opinion does however acknowledge that schools need

to consider and address the needs of students with gender dysphoria in a reasonable manner. The legal opinion will be sent to all New Zealand schools.

"This opinion is timely and significant. We believe schools are being 'bullied' by government and advocacy groups into adopting 'gender identity' policies around uniforms, toilets, changing rooms, and sports teams. This legal opinion will give important information to Principals who want to act in the best interests of the whole school community without fear of breaching the law," says Bob McCoskrie, National Director of Family First NZ.

"Schools have a duty to protect the privacy, safety, and dignity of all students. The agenda pushed by groups such as the Human Rights Commission, PPTA, AIDS Foundation and Rainbow Youth says that young people have a 'right' to use any toilet that matches their gender identity irrespective of their biological sex, but this fails to consider the welfare of the whole school environment."

"Students have a fundamental right to bodily privacy. What should young girls who are uncomfortable or intimidated by the presence of a male in their bathroom or changing room do, particularly young girls who have been victims of sexual abuse? Is it safe for a young female student to be in an intimate facility with adolescent or older males? We have male and female changing rooms because of biology, not because of 'gender identity'. Separate facilities reflect the fact that boys and girls have bodily differences; they are designed to protect privacy related to our bodies. Is it safe for a boy to be playing in the girls rugby team," says Mr McCoskrie.

As well as the legal opinion, Family First will be sending a suggested "Student Physical Privacy Policy" relating to toilets, changing rooms, and sports teams which schools can consider adopting when considering this issue in their own schools. The suggested policy says that schools must be both respectful of the privacy concerns of all children and sensitive to the diverse needs of individual children, but that no child should be forced into an intimate setting – like a toilet block or a changing room – with another child of the opposite sex. The policy suggests that in special circumstances, the Principal may offer options for alternate facilities, which may be access to a single-stall toilet; access to a unisex toilet; or controlled use of a staff toilet, changing room, or shower.

"This is a common-sense and safe solution for school communities. Students with gender dissatisfaction must be given the very best support we can and handled with love and care, but ignoring biology is not a proper solution. To push the gender agenda in schools is a dangerous step to take," says Mr McCoskrie.

My Christian Daily

Reformation Trust publishes "The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones" by Dr. Steven J. Lawson

From the pulpit at Westminster Chapel in London, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones set a new standard for faithful and passionate preaching, a standard that continues to be relevant today. Lloyd-Jones was a physician by training and had begun a promising career in medicine before sensing an irresistible call to preach. Surrounded by theological liberalism, he began a pulpit ministry that would exert profound influence on both sides of the Atlantic.

The book is available in ePub and MOBI electronic formats for download for US\$7.00 each and in hardbound for US\$12.80 plus shipping.

More information including a sample chapter can be accessed at:
<http://www.ligonier.org/store/the-passionate-preaching-of-martyn-lloyd-jones-hardcover/>

+ *Ligonier Ministries*

The Islamic Mahdi

Excerpt from *The Future According to the Bible* by David Cloud, ISBN 978-1-58318-172-0

Members of both Sunnis and Shiites believe in an Islamic messiah, the Mahdi, who will appear at the end of the world to establish Allah's kingdom on earth.

Both Sunnis and Shiites accept hadiths (writings of Muhammad collected after his death) which predict the coming of a Mahdi who will establish a global caliphate in Allah's name and rule for a period of time (seven, nine, or nineteen years, according to varying interpretations), ridding the world of evil before the day of judgment.

The coming of the Mahdi is believed to coincide with the second coming of Jesus, whom they call Isa, who will join hands with the Mahdi against a false messiah or antichrist.

The Shiites have developed this theology more extensively and emphasize it more forcefully.

As we have seen, “Twelver” Shiites (and Sufis) believe that the 12 Imams who succeeded Muhammad inherited Muhammad’s spiritual perfection and wisdom and are therefore interpreters or trustees of the light of Islam.

They believe that the 12th Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdi, was the prophesied Mahdi. He is believed to have died or otherwise disappeared in AD 941 and to be hidden by God until he will reappear at the end of time. The hiding is called the Occultation. (This is “an event that occurs when one object is hidden by another object that passes between it and the observer,” such as a sun eclipse.)

Other groups of Muslims, such as the Druze, the Mustaali, the Zaidi, and the Nizari, believe in a different Mahdi and are not “Twelvers.”

The Sunnis believe that the Mahdi has not yet been born but will be named Muhammad and will be a descendant of Muhammad.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former president of Iran, has zealous faith in the coming of the Imam Madhi, and Iranian radio has broadcast prophecies of his coming.

“In short, when he reappears, peace, justice and security will overcome oppression and deceit and one global government, the most perfect ever, will be established. ... Another beautiful moment of the Savior’s appearance is the coming down of Prophet Jesus (PBUH) from heaven. Hazrat Mahdi receives him courteously and asks him to lead the prayers. But Jesus says you are more qualified for this than me. We read in the book *Tazkarat ol-Olia*, ‘the Mahdi will come with Jesus, son of Mary, accompanying him.’ This indicates that these two great men complement each other. Imam Mahdi will be the leader while Prophet Jesus will act as his lieutenant in the struggle against oppression and establishment of justice in the world. Jesus had himself given the tidings of the coming of God’s last messenger and will see Muhammad’s ideals materialize in the time of the Mahdi” (“Police Storm Home,” *World-NetDaily*, June 23, 2007).

We see that Islam’s “Jesus” is given a subordinate position in these prophecies.

The following is from the London Telegraph, Jan. 14, 2006:

“As Iran rushes towards confrontation with the world over its nuclear pro-

gramme, the question uppermost in the mind of western leaders is ‘What is moving its President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to such recklessness?’ ... The most remarkable aspect of Mr. Ahmadinejad’s piety is his devotion to the Hidden Imam, the Messiah-like figure of Shia Islam, and the president’s belief that his government must prepare the country for his return. One of the first acts of Mr. Ahmadinejad’s government was to donate about £10 million to the Jamkaran mosque, a popular pilgrimage site where the pious come to drop messages to the Hidden Imam into a holy well. ... A common rumour – denied by the government but widely believed--is that Mr. Ahmadinejad and his cabinet have signed a ‘contract’ pledging themselves to work for the return of the Mahdi and sent it to Jamkaran.”

From time to time, various individuals have claimed to be the Mahdi and have gotten large, enthusiastic followings. One of these was Siyyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi, who was called the Bab (“gate”) and is one of the central figures of the Baha’i. They consider the Bab to have been the Mahdi, Elijah, and John the Baptist. Others who have claimed to be the Mahdi are Muhammad Jaunpuri, founder of the Mahdavia sect, Muhammad Ahmad, founder of the Mahdist state in Sudan in the late 19th century, and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founder of the Ahmadiyya sect.

In this way, we probably see what will happen in the time of the Antichrist, in that either he or his prophet or both will be accepted as the fulfillment of prophecy by Muslims, and they will obey him. [The article’s author is a dispensational, fundamentalist, independent Baptist. Ed.]
+ *Way of Life Literatur*

Eritrean church leaders still in jail 12 years later

Although the tiny East African nation of Eritrea has a population of just 6 million, Eritrea is one of the leading sources of refugees in Europe. There are many reasons for this, but chief among them is a lack of religious freedom.

The Eritrean government outlawed worship outside of Islam and the Orthodox, Evangelical Lutheran and Roman Catholic Church in 2002, driving all other Christian churches underground as they faced varying degrees of restrictions and attacks. Since then, thousands of Christians have been arrested and incarcerated without benefitting from a legal process.

Among them are a number of prominent church leaders arrested in 2004, who remain incarcerated today, almost 12 years later. *World Watch Monitor* spoke with the family of one of these prisoners.

Haile Naigzhi, leader of Eritrea’s Full Gospel Church, was arrested during the early hours of 23 May, 2004. He was taken from his home to Police Station #1 in Asmara, then moved to Wongel Mermera – a dungeon-like prison in Asmara, where he still resides, alongside at least five other prominent church leaders. They have little hope of release any time soon.

For years following Naigzhi’s arrest, his wife and three children (names withheld to protect their identity) waited for his release. In 2013, his wife received credible information that the government wanted to arrest her and the children, so she decided to flee.

As *World Watch Monitor* reported last year, the journey out of Eritrea is fraught with danger. Movement in Eritrea is heavily controlled through an internal travel-pass system and checkpoints; anyone trying to cross the border can be shot on sight. If you make it past those first two hurdles, you reach the desert, exposed to the unforgiving elements and lawless human traffickers. Whatever destination you aim for after that could see you either crossing the Mediterranean on a rickety boat or dodging deportation from African countries with diplomatic and ideological ties to the Eritrean government.

World Watch Monitor cannot divulge the details of the Naigzhi family’s journey, nor where they ended up, but today they are settled in a new country, where they have been granted asylum.

“We feel safer here,” said Naigzhi’s wife. “We are able to freely serve God. I am also happy because the children are in a good school.”

Eritrea is No. 3 on *Open Doors’ 2016 World Watch List*, which ranks the 50 countries in which it is most difficult to live as a Christian. No-one knows for certain how many Christians remain in the elaborate network of incarceration centres in Eritrea. Although there seems to have been a lull in arrests, pressure remains high on Christians and on society in general. Thousands are still intent on fleeing the country, the majority aiming for Europe. Hundreds have died trying.
©2016 *World Watch Monitor* | April 13, 2016
(Abridged)

Everything that is solid melts into air – the new secular worldview (Part 3)

Albert Mohler

Impossible to believe: the endgame of secularism

In his important Massey Lectures delivered in 1991, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor spoke of *The Malaise of Modernity*. The Modern Age, he argued, is marked by two great intellectual moves. The first intellectual move is a pervasive individualism. The second is the reduction of all public discourse to the authority of instrumental reason. The rise of modern individualism came at the cost of rejecting all other moral authorities. “Modern freedom was won by our breaking loose from older moral horizons,” Taylor explains. This required the toppling of all hierarchical authorities and their established moral orders. “People used to see themselves as part of a larger order,” he observed. “Modern freedom came about through the discrediting of such orders.”

The primacy of instrumental reason means the elimination of the old order and its specifically theological and teleological moral order. As Taylor explains:

No doubt sweeping away the old orders has immensely widened the scope of instrumental reason. Once society no longer has a sacred structure, once social arrangements and modes of action are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God, they are in a sense up for grabs. They can be redesigned with their consequences for the happiness or well-being of individuals as our goal.[1]

More recently, Taylor has written the greatest work yet completed on the secular reality of our times. In *A Secular Age*, he describes three successive sets of intellectual conditions. In the first, associated with the Premodern Age of antiquity and the medieval synthesis,

it was *impossible not to believe*. There was simply no intellectual alternative to theism in the West. There was no alternative set of explanations for the world and its operations, or for moral order. All that changed with the arrival of modernity. In the Modern Age it became *possible not to believe*. A secular alternative to Christian theism emerged as a real choice. As a matter of fact, choice now ruled the intellectual field. As Peter Berger famously observed decades ago, this is the “heretical imperative,” the imperative to choose one’s worldview. The third set of intellectual conditions is identified with late modernity and our own intellectual epoch. For most people living in the context of self-conscious late modernity, it is now *impossible to believe*. That means, especially in terms of the intellectual elites and the culture formative sectors of society, theism is not an available worldview – if not personally, then at least culturally.

Significantly, Taylor pinpoints this unbelief as a lack of cognitive commitment to a self-existent, self-revealing God. Secularization is not about rejecting all religion. Taylor urges that people in the current hyper-secularized culture in America often consider themselves to be religious or spiritual. Secularization, according to Taylor, is about belief in a *personal* God, one who holds and exerts authority. He describes the secular age as deeply “cross-pressured” in its personal experience of religion and rejection of the personal authority of God.[2] The issue is binding authority.

Christians are the intellectual outlaws under the current secular conditions. Entering a discussion on the basis of a theistic or theological claim is to break a cardinal rule of late Modernity by moving from a proposition or question to a command and law and authority and to do so in the context of a culture now explicitly secularized, and a culture that either reduces such claims to something below a genuine theistic claim or rejects

“Christians are the intellectual outlaws under the current secular conditions. To believe the truth claims of Christianity is to defy principalities and powers – and to face an intellectual onslaught.”

them to court. Secularization in America has been attended by a moral revolution without precedent and without endgame. The cultural engines of progress driving toward personal autonomy and fulfillment will not stop until the human being is completely self-defining. This progress requires the explicit rejection of Christian morality for the project for human liberation.

The story of the rise of secularism is a stunning intellectual and moral revolution. It defies exaggeration. We must recognize that it is far more pervasive than we might want to believe, for this intellectual revolution

has changed the worldviews of even those who *believe* themselves to be opposed to it. Everything is now reduced to choice, and choice is, as Taylor reminds us, central to the moral project of late modernity, the project of individual *authenticity*.

As he explains this project: "I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. But this notion gives a new importance

to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*." [3]

The pressing question is this: can any sustainable moral order survive this scale of intellectual revolution? We hear in today's intellectual and ideological chorus the refrains of Karl Marx's threat and promise as stated in *The Communist Manifesto*: "All that is solid melts into air." The melting is everywhere around us.

Article citations

- 1 Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, in the CBC Massey Lectures (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1991), 5.
- 2 See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
- 3 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 30.

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The privilege of worship

Cornelis Van Dam

Every Lord's Day, millions of Christians defy their civil authorities and gather together to worship in obedience to the King of kings. Why is it that those in repressive Communist and Islamic regimes risk all to gather together to praise God and listen to his Word?

Why do fewer and fewer people go to church in the free Western world with its rich Christian heritage? Why does there appear to be a developing trend in orthodox Reformed churches, including "our" churches, that fewer are attending the second service? What is going on?

An important part of the answer seems to be that people in anti-Christian regimes may have a greater appreciation for the awesome privilege that gathering with God's people to worship entails.

Worship is meeting God

To worship is to come before God with thanksgiving and praise. "Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song ... Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care" (Ps 95:2, 6-7). If this was true of the old dispensation, how much more today when God has come to his people in the Spirit on the basis of Christ's work of redemption. Small wonder that God's Word enjoins us: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Heb 10:25). This meeting together is described in terms of worship and entering the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus (v 19). Indeed, there is the exhorta-

tion: "Let us draw near to God!" (v. 22)

It is not by chance that when we come together for worship and have expressed our trust and dependency on God, then it is God himself who greets us in his presence through the mouth of his servant, the minister of the gospel. "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:3). And our worship ends by God sending us on our way with that wonderful blessing of Numbers 6. "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." So God puts his Name on his people and blesses them (Num 6:27)! The second service ends just as spectacularly: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14). The entire worship service is conducted in God's presence with the proclamation of his Word as the central focus. So obvious should it be that God is the centre of everything and that he is present in our worship that if an unbeliever should walk in "he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Cor 14:25)

Because of God's presence, one needs to prepare oneself to meet God who is holy. This preparation includes getting our minds ready to meet God. After all, God's holiness stands in stark contrast to our unworthiness and sin and so we can only enter into worship with a contrite heart (cf. Ps 51:17; 6:1-5). Preparing for church also includes making decisions about what to wear so that one is suitably attired both to appear before God

and to be within the holy congregation. Surely nothing but our very best is to be reserved for Sunday dress! Furthermore, nothing in what we wear should detract from the focus that we or our neighbour has on the worship. Once in church, to be silent and in awe of God is most appropriate when waiting for the service to begin (cf. Hab 2:20).

What a privilege that sinful people can appear before God in holy worship! What evidence of his grace and mercy that the way is opened to the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus (Heb 10:19)! Small wonder that millions brave persecution and oppression seeking every opportunity to meet together every Lord's Day in secret, trusting God whom they worship with joy and gratitude.

But in the West, attendance for worship declines and in our own circles we hear the question more frequently:

“Why do fewer and fewer people go to church in the free Western world with its rich Christian heritage?”

“The entire worship service is conducted in God’s presence with the proclamation of his Word as the central focus.”

“Do we have to go to church twice a Sunday? There is no biblical mandate for that so why should we go twice?”

The second service

To say that there is no biblical warrant for a second service is saying too much too quickly. In Old Testament times there was a pattern of morning and evening worship. This is evident from the need to bring offerings to God both at the beginning and end of the day (Num 28:1-10). A Song for the Sabbath, Psalm 92, reflects this pattern when it jubilates: “It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love *in the morning* and your faithfulness *at night* (vv. 1-2; my emphasis). Not surprisingly, the New Testament church also worshipped in the evening of the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

The entire Lord’s Day is to be a holy

day of rest and worship. Having two services dominate the day enhances that characterization and helps make it a reality. These services as it were frame the day and set its tone. The Lord’s Day is a holy day. It is sacred time in which we have the privilege of focusing especially on the Lord and his work for us in Jesus Christ. And what a blessing such a time is! It nurtures our faith and enables us to grow stronger as Christians so that we are better equipped to resist the temptations of the world. By honouring the Lord’s Day we make use of the means of grace: the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments. We need those means to build up our faith so that we can be true to our God for as Christians we live in a very hostile environment. It is not for nothing that those who have been set over us call us to Sunday worship. They know it is necessary for the well-being of our souls (cf. Heb 13:17).

But ultimately answering objections and convincing someone on an intellectual basis that a second service is in line with Scripture is not sufficient. Would a thankful Christian not *want* to worship at every opportunity? Is the Sunday not the *Lord’s Day* and should we not take every opportunity to be in his presence!? Is being satisfied with only one service when two are available not ultimately insulting to the Lord who has loved us in unfathomable ways and wants to meet with his people? Surely neglecting a second opportunity for worship is not a sign of progress but rather of underestimating the privilege and importance of communal worship. This is particularly so when one contrasts this development with the devotion of millions of God’s children who risk much just to attend worship in parts of the world where civil governments prohibit or discourage it.

The real issue

“Why do we have to go to church twice” is the wrong question and shows that the significance of the worship service is not understood. To go to church is a privilege of God’s grace. He addresses us there and gives us his blessing. Would any child of God want to miss such an opportunity? Elsewhere Christians risk much for the privilege. Would we do less? If you have tasted something of God’s grace and mercy in your life, would you really want to miss being in his presence with his congregation to thank, praise, and worship him?!

Furthermore, if Christ so loved the church that he gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25), would we not want to spend as much time as possible with his bride, the church, in worship and so show our love to our Saviour?

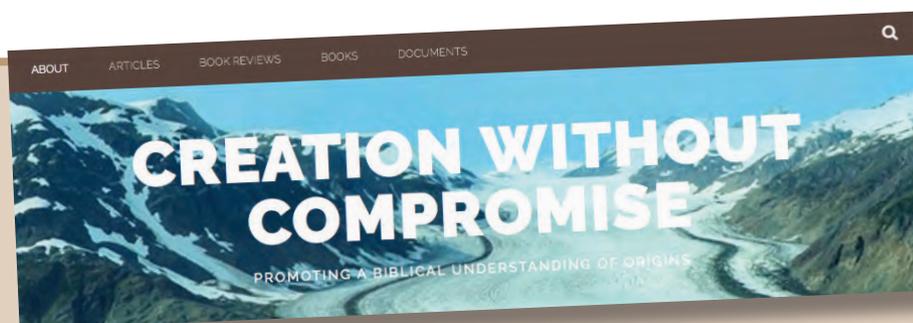
The principle of Isaiah 58 still holds. “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD” (vv. 13-14). The Lord’s Day properly used gives us a foretaste of the eternal joy to come in God’s presence. As our Catechism puts it, we may “so begin in this life the eternal sabbath” (HC, Q/A 103).

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is professor emeritus of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

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CREATION WITHOUT COMPROMISE

are Reformed Christians concerned about the issue of origins in our midst. Through this resource site and blog, they aim to provide support to those who share their concerns. They are committed to the historic Reformed understanding of Genesis and believe that a failure to maintain the



orthodox position not only attacks biblical truth in general, but the gospel of Jesus Christ in particular.

Check it out!

creationwithoutcompromise.com

Institution of the Reformed Church of Whanganui

Hans Vaatstra

The culmination of 25 years church planting work came to fruition on Saturday 2nd April 2016 when the Reformed Church of Whanganui was instituted as the 20th Reformed Church in our federation. One of the speakers passing on congratulations quipped, "it was a long time coming!" Another speaker expressed the thought that it was a "miracle for a Reformed church to institute at all!" It has taken another RCNZ church plant forty-nine years to institute so we thought our efforts were quite speedy by comparison. We were grateful for the many folk who came along to witness this event, for the pastors and representatives from other churches who spoke words of encouragement and for the letters received from the churches.

The Whanganui church began as a small Bible study group consisting of three families in 1991. By the grace of God and under the oversight of the Palmerston North session Whanganui grew to a point where we have a rotation of office bearers, can manage our own church affairs, reach out to our community and take part in the wider assemblies of the church.

In the year of our Lord 2000 the work had grown to the extent where the congregation felt ready to call their first minister, the Rev. Gary Milne, to assist with the work. Gary served the church through to 2006. Following a vacancy of about 4 years a call was extended to the Rev. Hans Vaatstra, who commenced ministry in May of 2010. This call was to be a minister of the mother church (Palmerston North) serving her daughter at Whanganui.

However, the time came when the 'apron strings' needed to be loosed. At a session meeting early in 2015 it was agreed that Whanganui be instituted pending congregational and presbytery approval, a process which was finalised at the November 2015 Wellington Presbytery meeting. At a subsequent Whanganui session meeting the date

was set for institution (2nd April 2016). A little later the Whanganui Reformed Church Trust Board was formed. On the 4th of March we received our registered documents from the New Zealand Companies office.

An exposition of Psalm 87 was an apt focus for the day. Many people ask, "Why have church? Isn't it enough to call myself a Christian, believe in Jesus, and

meet with other believers in our homes? Why not keep it informal? Who needs or even wants an instituted church?" Psalm 87 reminds us that God has established the church, dwells in her, loves the church and will glorify her. Furthermore God has equipped the church to nurture her members with the means of grace, including the preaching of the word, prayer and the sacraments. John



The service for the institution held at Trinity Methodist Church, Wanganui Central.



The moment of institution. Release from Palmerston North session by Rev Michael Flinn and installation of office bearers to form the Whanganui session.



Calvin once referred to the church as the 'mother of believers' saying, "There is no other way to enter life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast and keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off all mortal flesh we become like the angels. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school

until we have been pupils all our lives."

We are thankful to the Lord that He has established a Reformed witness in the city of Whanganui. Our prayer is that God will enable us to serve Him faithfully, serve one another and the community in which he placed us. Soli Deo Gloria!

If ever you are in the area do come



Peter and Elizabeth Mulholland are foundation members.

and visit us. We'd love to see you and you will be made most welcome. If you'd like to know more about us visit our new website. www.whanganuireformedchurch.org.nz.

Leaves galore

Poetic Reflections
by John Goris

This delightful collection of poems by John Goris is a testimony to his love for the beauty of our Creator, and His wonderful tapestry surrounding us. This is poetry about our green environment from a Christian perspective! Through these poems, he reminds us of our God and Saviours' work of creation, redemption, re-creation, preservation and His ongoing eternal plan. This wiro-bound collection of 71 poems, colour images and sketches is a must.

... read ... observe ... and praise him who created every tree and saved his people by the sacrifice of his person as he hung on one of them.

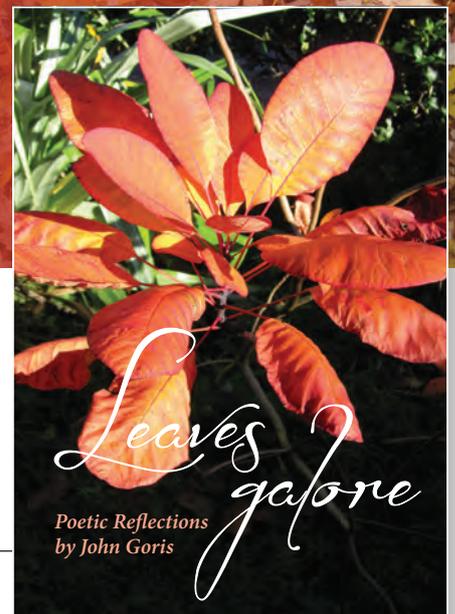
– Dr Joel Nederhood (Retired minister of the Back to God Hour, USA)

These poems ... a great collection full of food for thought!

– Marit Flinn, (Wellington)

*The Wordsmith's craft, he in his sermons hones,
Now bent to write of nature's coloured tones.*

– John Westendorp, Minister Emeritus, Christian Reformed Churches of Australia



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