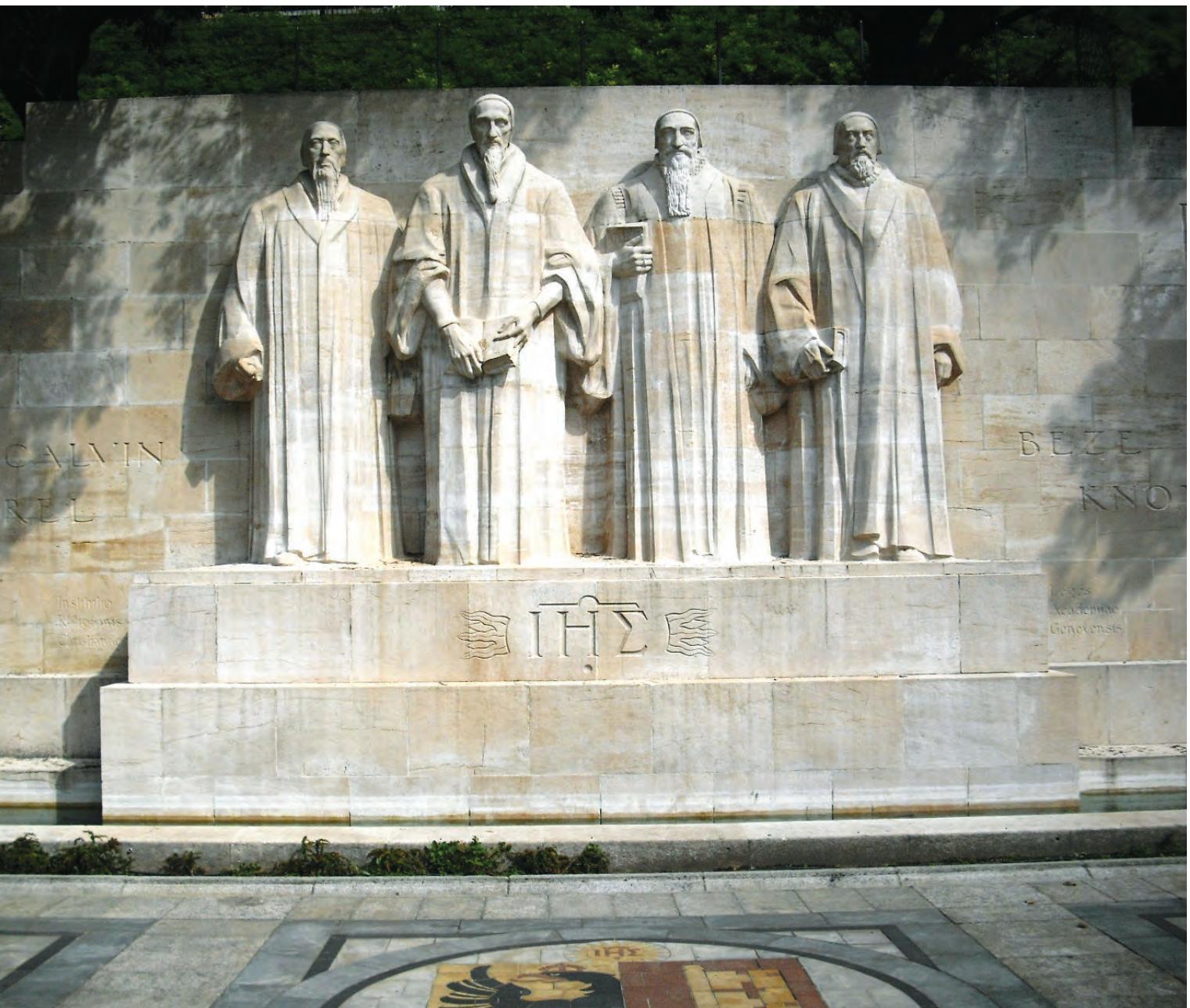


faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
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of New Zealand

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500 years of Reformation

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Editorial

In this issue, we celebrate 500 years of the Protestant Reformation. Many other reformed magazines have been publishing articles about the Reformation for most of this year. However, we have left it to month in which this momentous event took place 500 years ago. As we celebrate, we do not do so to exalt man, but the LORD God, who alone deserves all praise and glory.

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenburg, we could also think about those who lived before him. Notable figures such as John Wycliffe, Jan Hus and Peter Waldo had already made attempts at reforming the Roman Catholic Church, but it was Luther who - at just the right time - began the event which would not be halted, even though the rage of the devil and the malice of man were against it.

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law in order that He would redeem His elect people from every tribe and tongue and nation. We could surmise that, in a similar way, God put it into the hearts of His servants like Luther, to begin a reformation of His church. But it was not an isolated incident without context. All through the Old Testament we read about the unfaithfulness of the church, the state, the priests who were supposed to minister God's grace to His people. We read about serious apostasy and the prophets of God heralding the need for repentance, faith and reformation.

Many prophets were slain or banished for daring to speak the words of Jehovah. In a similar manner, those who were of a mind to start reformation in medieval times were hotly pursued for their faithfulness, many lost their lives for the sake of the true gospel, many also were preserved to serve the King of kings, in order to fulfill His purposes.

If we were to consider how many people contributed to the Reformation, even the most notable names, there would be too many to mention.

In this issue some of the more familiar figures appear, we cannot leave them out. But we have also taken a different approach to the Refomation by asking our contributors to explore less common themes. Many thanks to our contributors for fulfilling the brief, and helping to broaden our understanding of God's work of reformation. To Him be the glory.

Mr John Haverland examines the importance of friendships to the work of the Reformers.

Mr Leo de Vos upholds an age-old biblical truth.

Mr Paul Archbald answers the question: was the Reformation necessary?

Mrs Sally Davey shares some thoughts of a Florida pastor on inviting friends to church.

Letters from New Zealand looks at the Synod of 1977.

Mrs Jenny Waldron reflects on dealing with failure.

Mr Jonathan Van Maren reveals the real story of the "Miracle of Dunkirk".

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. 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.

Friendships among the Reformers

John A Haverland

When I studied as a student for the ministry more than 35 years ago, we were taught that a minister and his wife ought not to have friends in the congregation in which he is serving, as this could provoke jealousy among other members of the congregation. At the time I was very dubious about this advice as I had enjoyed long and steady friendships in my growing-up years in the Christchurch congregation. About ten years after my student days I was called to serve as the minister of the Bishopdale congregation (a prophet called back to his home town) and I served on the session there with men who were, and still are, friends of mine, as well as with new friends I made during those years. It is true that ministers need to be careful about their friendships so they do not cause unnecessary jealousy in the congregation, but we, and our wives, are human beings and are designed by God for relationships and friendships.

Christian friendships are based on our common bonds in Christ and on the fellowship we share with each other because of our union with our Lord. They are also based on our common interest in and concern for the church and kingdom of Christ Jesus. When we get together as friends our conversation often centres on these matters of mutual interest.

Friendships between Christians have helped the cause of Christ all through the history of Israel and the New Testament church. Elijah and Elisha shared a prophetic ministry with those who belonged to the school of the prophets, and the friendship of David and Jonathan is legendary. Jesus was particularly close to Peter, James and John. The apostle Paul shared close friendships with Barnabas,

Silas, Timothy, Titus, and John Mark as they worked together for the spread of the gospel and the establishment of churches in the Roman Empire.

The book of Proverbs reminds us that "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" and many of us can testify to the truth of this in our interactions with our friends. The Proverbs also assure us, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" and many of us have been set right by the concerned rebuke of a close friend (Proverbs 27:17, 6).

The cause of the Reformation was advanced by friendships among many of the Reformers. Martin Luther was used by God to launch the Reformation and was prepared to stand alone against the power, weight and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. As his ideas and writings spread he was helped greatly by friends who encouraged and supported him. John Calvin developed and strengthened the Protestant Reformation through his preaching, teaching and writing. He too had many friends who shared his commitment to the task of reforming the church. This article describes some of the friendships of these two significant reformers.

Luther and Melanchthon: Phillip Melanchthon was Luther's closest friend and most helpful co-worker. These two men were very different and yet most helpful to one another. God in his providence brought them together for the progress of the Reformation and the development of the Protestant faith. Luther possessed warmth and vigour, while Melanchthon had clarity and discretion. Luther provided the energy and Melanchthon the moderating influence - he was known as 'The Quiet Reformer'. Both men loved God and his word and obeyed this word with great devotion throughout their lives. In 1518 at the age of 21

"During the tumultuous decades of the Reformation the leaders of this movement encouraged, comforted and strengthened each other in this great cause. At times they rebuked each other frankly, in love, and out of concern for the truth of the gospel."

Melanchthon was appointed a professor of Greek in the University of Wittenberg. While Luther was hiding in the Wartburg Castle his friend published the first systematic presentation of Luther's ideas under the title *Loci Communes*. Melanchthon was one of the most learned men of the Reformation.

Luther and Frederick: Elector Frederick of Saxony had founded the University of Wittenberg, and Martin Luther was its most famous and popular professor. Frederick did all he could to protect Luther from any harm that the Pope might seek to do him; he was "a faithful, wise and powerful friend".¹

In July 1518 Pope Leo X summoned Luther to appear before him in Rome. The Elector knew that Luther would certainly be going to his death, so used his considerable influence to have the Pope cancel his summons and instead

nuns in a wagon that delivered fish to the convent. Luther tried to find her a husband, but without success. Then, on her suggestion, he married her himself. Later he said he married her to please his father, to upset the pope, to make the angels laugh and the devils weep! Together they had six children and lived in what had been the convent, which was known as the 'Lutherhaus'. It was a happy marriage and Katie, as he called her, sustained him in frequent times of stress. She was a special helper suitable for him, an excellent manager and ran their home with great efficiency. He said, "I would not change Katie for France or for Venice." The epistle to the Galatians was a favourite of his; he called it "my own Epistle, to which I have plighted my troth. It is my Katie von Bora"², which, presumably, was the highest praise he could give!

Martin Luther (1529) by Lucas Cranach the Elder

Portrait of Philip Melanchthon, 1537, by Lucas Cranach the Elder. Oil on panel

Elector Frederick of Saxony. Kurfürst Friedrich Christian von Sachsen (1722-1763)

John Calvin. Portrait attributed to Hans Holbein the Younger.



have Luther appear before the Pope's legate, Cajetan, in Augsburg. Frederick also used his influence with the aged Emperor Maximilian to obtain a safe conduct for Luther.

Luther was again protected by Elector Frederick after the Diet of Worms in April 1521. The evening before he left Worms he had one of his rare meetings with Frederick, who told him of the plans he had made for his safety. So he was not surprised when, on the 4th of May, after he had entered the Elector's territory and was travelling through a forest, a group of masked men on horseback kidnapped him and took him to Wartburg Castle where he remained for 10 months.

Luther married Katherine von Bora on the 13th of June 1525. He was 42 years old, she was 26. With Luther's help, she had escaped with eight other

John Calvin, Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret: Those who knew these men referred to them as the three patriarchs. Farel was 20 years Calvin's senior but he recognized Calvin's superior intellectual ability and, with a rare humility, let Calvin take the lead in theological matters. He had begun the Reformation in Geneva but he recognised that Calvin needed to take it forward. Calvin always treated Farel with kindness, respect and gratitude; there was not a shadow of envy or jealousy between them.

Theodore Beza wrote concerning the "friendship and intimacy" of these three, that "in truth, it was a most pleasing spectacle to see and hear those three distinguished men carrying on the work of God in the church so harmoniously, and with a great variety of gifts."³ Calvin dedicated his commentary on Titus to these two friends and compared

their work in Geneva to that of Paul in Crete. He wrote, "I think there has never been in ordinary life a circle of friends so heartily bound to each other as we have been in our ministry. With both of you I discharged here the office of pastor, and so far from there being any appearance of rivalry, I always seemed to be of one mind with you."⁴ (He wrote this in 1549).

Sadly, in 1561 Viret left Geneva for Southern France and after this there was little contact between the two men. Some speculate that Viret may have been jealous of Theodore Beza, who had been appointed rector of the Academy, which opened in 1559. Calvin also lost contact with Farel when, at the age of 69, his friend decided to marry a 17 year-old girl. Calvin opposed the marriage, refused to attend the wedding, and seldom wrote to him after this.

best of the Protestant commentators on Scripture, "with a singularly acute and remarkably clear judgment... religiously desirous to keep with the simplicity of the Word of God".⁵ He wrote to Bullinger about Bucer, "I shall not at present declare the virtues, both rare and manifold, by which that man is distinguished. I shall only say that I should do a grievous injury to the Church of God were I either to hate or despise him. I make no reference to the personal obligations under which I lie to him. And yet my love and reverence for him are such that I freely admonish him as often as I think fit."⁶ And admonish him he did at times, especially over his view on the Lord's Supper, and what he regarded as Bucer's compromising negotiations with Roman Catholics in an effort to win the reform-minded over to the gospel.

When Calvin returned to Geneva in



Calvin and Bucer: Martin Bucer was an influential Reformer in the city of Strasbourg. Calvin was eighteen years his junior. When Calvin was expelled from Geneva in 1538 he wanted to go to Basel but passed through Strasbourg, where Martin Bucer persuaded him to stay. This was evidence of grace on Bucer's part because, a year before, Calvin had written him a letter in which he berated the older man for being too longwinded in his writing and too soft in his view of Rome. Despite this, Bucer took him under his wing to teach him to be a pastor so he might return to Geneva and resume his work of reform. He took Calvin into his own home, welcomed him into his circle of friends, and spent much time with him in conversation.

Calvin had a high regard for his friend and mentor and believed him to be the

1541 he wrote to Bucer and invited him to admonish and discipline him; to do "what a father is allowed to do with respect to his son."⁷ When Bucer died he was overwhelmed by a feeling of loneliness. About these friends of Calvin, Bruce Gordon wrote, "Farel was a lovable, if frustrating uncle; Bullinger was the close cousin; Melanchthon the good school friend; Beza the son. Bucer was truly the father figure."⁸

Calvin and Melanchthon: These two Reformers met in Frankfurt in 1539 and established a solid and lasting friendship. Melanchthon was 12 years older than Calvin. The younger man treated him with great respect, had a high regard for his knowledge and piety, and regarded him as one of the best of the Bible commentators.

They had many similarities: both were highly intelligent, dedicated to reform in

William Farel. 16th-century painting. In the Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire, Geneva.

Pierre Viret (1511-1571)

Martin Bucer. Oil on panel, The University of Edinburgh Art Collection.

Idelette Calvin. Xavier Würth - Musée des Beaux-Arts de Liège

the church, unselfish and conscientious. Both men devoted their learning to the building up of the church, agreed in all essential doctrines, deplored division in the church, and desired a unity consistent with the truth.

Yet they were also quite different: Melanchthon was modest, gentle, sensitive, elastic, open to new light and willing to compromise, whereas Calvin was firm in conviction and principle, unbending, unyielding, and fearless of consequences and opposed to all compromises.⁹

They were united in their understanding of the doctrines of the Reformation but did not agree on everything. They had a different emphasis on free will and predestination, but Calvin claimed no one could set them in opposition on the basis of this difference. He believed there was room for public disagreement because they had such a high regard for each other. He regretted that they did not live closer to each other and comforted himself with the expectation that they would enjoy their love and friendship in heaven where they would live together forever.¹⁰

Calvin and Luther never met. The blame for this lies partly with Melanchthon, who held back a letter Calvin wrote to the great Reformer fearing that it would anger Luther. In that letter Calvin requested to meet with Luther because he held him in such high regard. He stated that "the Gospel went out from Wittenberg" and addressed him as his "most learned father in the Lord."¹¹ In a letter to Heinrich Bullinger he wrote, "I earnestly desire you to bear in mind in the first place how eminent a man Luther is, and the excellent endowments with which he is gifted, with what strength of mind and resolute constancy, with such great skill, and with what efficiency and power of doctrinal statement he has devoted his whole energy to overthrow the reign of Antichrist, and, at the same time, to spread far and wide the doctrine of salvation."¹² Yet he was critical of his violent temper, his lack of self

control, and his cantankerous nature, and regarded these sins as a danger to the church. Yet he defended the fierceness of the German Reformer, saying this was part of his character and that he was often provoked by evil men.

Calvin and Idelette: During his time in Strasbourg Calvin had a group of friends who looked after him. One of their interests was to find him a wife. Bucer found an appropriate woman but she was not to Calvin's liking, nor was the woman his friend Farel introduced to him. Then he fell in love with Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist, Jean Stordeur, and mother of two children. Stordeur was converted to the Reformed faith under Calvin's ministry but then died of a plague. Calvin visited Idelette as a widow and was attracted by her quiet, modest and gentle character. They were married in August 1540, with Farel conducting the ceremony. Calvin cherished his wife and when they were separated by a plague soon after their honeymoon he wrote that she was "in my thoughts day and night". Her health was not strong and she was often ill and in need of medical care. She died in 1549. Soon after this he wrote, "I am no more than half a man, since God recently took my wife home to himself." Several years later he wrote to a colleague at a French church in Frankfurt who had also lost his wife; "What a terrible injury, what a pain the death of your wife has caused you, and I speak from my own experience. For even now I fully know how difficult it was, seven years now, to deal with such grief."¹³ He described his wife as "the excellent companion of my life" and "the ever faithful assistant of my ministry".¹⁴ It is entirely fitting that we should include his dear wife in this list of his friends.

This article has described some of the friendships of Luther, who lived and worked in Germany, and of Calvin, who lived and worked in Switzerland, but there were other strong friendships in other countries: Cranmer, Latimer and

Ridley encouraged each other in the English Reformation, and Knox and Melville in Scotland.

During the tumultuous decades of the Reformation the leaders of this movement encouraged, comforted and strengthened each other in this great cause. At times they rebuked each other frankly, in love, and out of concern for the truth of the gospel. They worked with a variety of gifts and with strengths in different areas, but were all committed to the reform of the church according to the Word of God.

The friendships of these men helped the cause of the Reformation as they met with each other as often as they could, prayed for each other, exchanged letters, shared their writings, and sought to build the church and glorify God by their united efforts. Together they loved God and the church of Jesus Christ. Their friendships made them better reformers through their mutual encouragement and exhortation.

These men and women are inspiring examples for our work and service in the church of Christ today, 500 years on, as we seek to encourage one another as mutual friends and as fellow servants of the Lord.

Notes

- 1 R B Kuiper, *The Church in History*, p. 170
- 2 Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 5
- 3 Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol 8, p. 213f
- 4 John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, Vol 10, p. 347
- 5 Bruce Gordon, *Calvin*, p. 29 Yale University Press, London, 2009, p. 88
- 6 Gordon, p. 173
- 7 H J Selderhuis, *A Pilgrim's Life*, IVP 2009, p. 86
- 8 Gordon, p. 89
- 9 Schaff, Vol 8, p. 182
- 10 Selderhuis, p. 104
- 11 Selderhuis, p. 105
- 12 Gordon, p. 168
- 13 Selderhuis, p. 172
- 14 Schaff, Vol 8, p. 199

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"Let this be then the conclusion of all together, that we will suffer our goods to be taken away, our name, our life, and all that we have; but the Gospel, our faith, Jesus Christ, we will never suffer to be wrested from us."
Martin Luther

For the Bible tells me so

Leo de Vos

I remember the day my Dad came back from Holland with a big Bible in a leather briefcase. My aunt had purchased the Staten Bible (printed in 1654) in her village just after WWII for one Dutch guilder. I received this gift from my father when I was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1988. I will never forget the gist of his words when he presented this gift at the ceremony: the Bible will always be attacked by Satan who wants to rob us of the truth. He also added that if I was going to be a liberal minister, it would be better that I went back to farming. How true!

Schleiermacher: God's Revelation or man's experience?

The same country that gave birth to the Reformation was also to bring death to the advance of the gospel. No age witnessed a greater attack on the Bible than that of 18th and 19th century Germany by a theologian named Frederick Schleiermacher. If Martin Luther's theology was a major influence in Europe for 300 years, Schleiermacher's theology dominated Germany and influenced Christianity for the next 250 years until now. Luther is the father of the Protestant Reformation; Schleiermacher is the father of modern theology. He was born in 1768 in the home of a pious minister-father in the German Reformed Church (the Reformed Church in the United States traces its roots to this church). Training at the Moravian seminary, Schleiermacher said, "God and immortality disappeared before my doubting eyes." In 1787, he wrote to his grieving father about the crisis of faith in his life:

"I cannot believe that He, who called himself the Son of Man, was

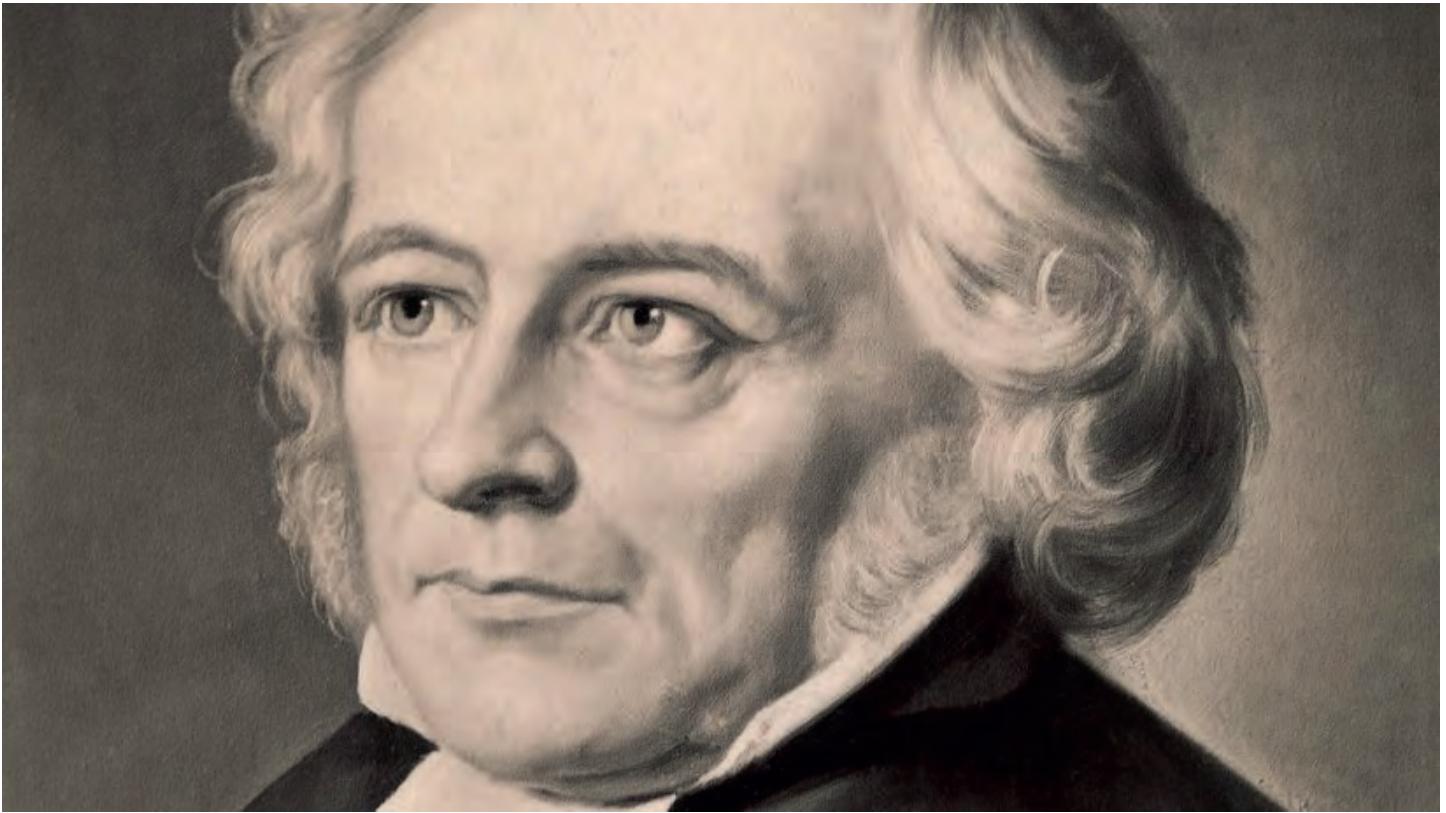
the true, eternal God: I cannot believe that his death was a vicarious atonement, because he never expressly said so Himself; and I cannot believe it to have been necessary because God, who evidently did not create man for perfection, but for the pursuit of it, cannot possibly intend to punish them eternally, because they have not attained it."¹

Now you are thinking, OK, so this minister's son must have ended up teaching history or literature in university or planting corn. No, Schleiermacher graduated from the seminary of Halle and was ordained into the Reformed ministry in Germany. Schleiermacher, whose name literally means *veil maker*, veiled his teaching and preaching by appearing deeply pious and orthodox.² In a fascinating study of how this theology eventually influenced the Billy Graham Crusades, Iain Murray writes of Schleiermacher's theology:

"To have faith ... requires no revealed truths, no authoritative Bible. But how can men discover such truths as Christ's virgin birth, his atoning death and resurrection, of themselves? To this Schleiermacher would reply that, whether these statements are truths or not, they are not necessary to evangelical devotion."³

So, for Schleiermacher Christianity is not first of all about what the Bible teaches (divine revelation), but it is about how we experience what we think and feel about Christianity (human experience). In Schleiermacher's teaching, doctrine is not important; feeling is. Questions of orthodox belief were thus instantly reduced to matters of secondary

"What I find alarming is that the evangelical church, while giving lip service to the Bible, has latched onto Schleiermacher's sentiments. So much of the evangelical church is substituting authoritative preaching for gimmicks."



Frederick Schleiermacher

moment; not what we *think* but what we experience is the important thing.⁴

We could summarize Schleiermacher's theology with words from the popular hymn, *I Serve a Risen Saviour*:

*You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.*

Now I believe that the author of this hymn had no intention of popularizing bad theology, but this line echoes the sentiments of Schleiermacher exactly. What I find alarming is that the evangelical church, while giving lip service to the Bible, has latched onto Schleiermacher's sentiments.⁵ So much of the evangelical church is substituting authoritative preaching for gimmicks. So much of the evangelical Christian experience is about one's personal relationship to Jesus. Can we really have a personal relationship to Jesus without loving and studying his Word? You ask me how I know He lives, that he is risen? I know this, because this is what the Holy Spirit reveals in Scripture. A far more accurate hymn is:

*Jesus loves me this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.*

Schleiermacher in recent history

Schleiermacher's ideas spread through the mainline denominations from Europe to the United States as rapidly as gorse

spread through New Zealand. When Gresham Machen left the Presbyterian Church USA, to later form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, he was leaving a denomination which had been deeply influenced by modernism. Most readers should know that the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand also followed Schleiermacher's theology to its detriment. Ministers who publicly denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ and taught the same were brought to trial in the 1960s, but were defended and even promoted.

I am thankful for having been baptised and nourished in the Christian Reformed Church of Winnipeg Manitoba, the same church where my mother had been baptised 28 years earlier and remains a member today. However, when I was 28 I accepted a call to a church which belonged to group of churches that had left the Christian Reformed Church. Why? Because the Christian Reformed Churches that I left was losing their way. A study on hermeneutics began to cast doubt on the authority of God's Word. Professors and preachers were questioning whether Adam was a real man; whether Adam was created directly by God or was the result of an evolutionary process. In Calvin College my astronomy class, although highly interesting and informative, was often introduced by using Carl Sagan's clips of Cosmos. This church began to ordain women to

the offices of deacon, elder and minister. Today this same church is struggling with issues of whether to accept homosexuality as a lifestyle which pleases God. So what happened? Slowly the respect for the authority of God's Word was eroding. What people think and feel had become more important than what God reveals. In his grace, God called a larger group out of the CRC, which has since merged with my former denomination.⁶ This denomination is the United Reformed Churches of North America. Because these churches have returned to the authority of God's Word and preaches it enthusiastically and faithfully, this denomination is growing. It is fascinating to see many from Pentecostal and evangelical backgrounds coming into these churches excited to learn the Reformed faith.

Recently the RCN (Reformed Churches of the Netherlands) approved the opening of all offices, deacon, elder and minister to women. Because of this stand, the RCNZ's relationship with these churches is under increasing strain. Why do we take this so seriously? Was I justified in leaving the CRC in 1988 for similar reasons? Does this stand on women in office justify our breaking long and treasured relationships? I have asked myself this question more than once.

But my answer is an unequivocal, Yes! To many, women-in-office might seem to be a trivial matter. However, at the heart of this debate is the question: what does the Bible say? If the Bible's forbidding of women to hold office in the church is bound by culture, then what else is bound by culture? Most people today do not believe in resurrections. Is the Bible bound to cultural expectations when it demonstrates the glory of God and power of Christ in raising Lazarus? The resurrection power and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith. When we become the judges of what to whittle away from the authority of Scripture, we will end up going down a slippery slope and losing all Biblical authority.

Schleiermacher: the antidote to liberalism: preaching with authority

I have often pondered, what are the first signs that a church is going down the wrong path? From my experience and reading of history, a clear symptom is that the preaching of God's Word is no longer central or valued.⁷ Of course much of this depends upon the preacher and his own priorities. God reveals his

truth in his Word; he also reveals that he wants his truth to be communicated through lively preaching. It was the Bible in the vernacular, powerfully preached in the church, that brought about the Reformation. If we lose faith in the revealed Word of God we will not preach it as the voice of Christ speaking through us. If preaching declines from being central to our worship services, we will slowly starve. Preaching is the means of grace by which God calls his people to faith, and nourishes their faith. He also strengthens our weak faith through the sacraments. In Reformed theology, we call the preaching and the sacraments *the means of grace*. Think of it this way: in Hamilton along a kilometer stretch of Greenwood Street there are at least 5 hamburger joints. If you are looking for a healthy means of growth, you likely would not stop at those places too often (excepting the best milkshakes in NZ at Carl's Junior)! As a healthy means of growth those fast food places will give you a quick fix, but will not sustain you. There are many churches offering quick fix, feel-good kinds of meals and treats, but you will not grow. The Lord knows that we need a steady diet of nourishing preaching that is brought with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. So what is the draw card? God promised to build his church through lively preaching. Don't lose faith in that means of grace!

When churches are losing faith in the preaching of God's Word they begin to supplement it by bringing more amusement into worship services. Albert Mohler writes:

"Though most evangelicals mention the preaching of the Word as a necessary customary part of worship, the prevailing model of worship in evangelical churches is increasingly defined by music, along with innovations such as drama and video presentations. When the preaching of the Word retreats, a host of entertaining innovations will take its place. Traditional norms of worship are now subordinated to a demand for relevance and creativity. A media-driven culture of images has replaced the word-centered culture that gave birth to the Reformation churches. In some sense, the image-driven culture of modern evangelicism is an embrace of the very practices rejected by the Reformers in their quest for true biblical worship."⁸

Will we as RCNZ churches still be preaching two biblically-grounded sermons each Lord's Day in 50 years? Will our grandchildren be singing to their children "Jesus Loves me this I know, For the Bible tells me so"?

(Endnotes)

- 1 Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994). 4.
- 2 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (vol. 6; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007).
- 3 Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*. 7.
- 4 Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*. 8.
- 5 Andy Stanley, a minister, is the son of the popular TV Baptist preacher, Charles Stanley. Andy Stanley has attempted to do what Schleiermacher also attempted. He wants to retain some level of orthodoxy but does not want to teach this from the Bible. For more on this see: R. Albert Mohler Jr., *For the Bible Tells Me So: Biblical Authority Denied ... Again* (2016); available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2016/09/26/bible-tells-biblical-authority-denied/>.
- 6 In 2008, the Federation of Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches met in Synod in Nobleton, Ontario, to discuss an overture to accept the invitation extended to the federation to enter into federative union with the URCNA on the basis of three Forms of Unity and the Church Order. The invitation to the OCRC was made by Synod Schererville (2007) and subsequently ratified by a majority of the consistories of the URCNA, as required by the Church Order.
- 7 When attending Mid-America Reformed Seminary, our class attended a Classis meeting of the CRCNA in 1987. Mr. Dale Grotenhuis, composer and choir director at Dordt College, made an alarming speech. He stated that on choir tours he had attended many CRCNA churches. Sadly, he related that he heard very little solid preaching on these tours. As you can imagine, the CRCNA ministers at this meeting were not impressed!
- 8 R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Antidote to Anemic Worship," *Tabletalk* 41(2017). 68.

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“Was Reformation necessary?”

Paul Archbald

Was the Reformation necessary? There is an element of speculation in weighing up the factors that led to the Reformation in the 16th century. But we can say that it was necessary because God, in His Providence, willed it so. We cannot be certain of all His reasons – though we can say that He has promised that He will preserve a faithful church until the Lord Jesus returns. It is that truth that requires that there always be a process of reforming: “The Reformed Church is always reforming.”

Reformation was necessary because of the state of the medieval church:
The Medieval Church, dominated by Rome, was corrupt in doctrine and

practice. In terms of moral decline, the church often operated with bribes, the sale of ecclesiastical positions (simony), and the conferring of positions to relatives (nepotism). Some of the popes, archbishops and bishops lived immoral lives, fathering illegitimate children by multiple mistresses, committing adultery and incest and other gross sins. Rivals were sometimes imprisoned or assassinated. At times, there were even two or three rival popes. Leaders often ignored their duties in the areas placed under their charge (absenteeism). They often lived in luxury obtained by church-taxes, or financed their contributions to art and architecture by indulgences – making money out of people’s fear of purgatory and hell.

Then there were the doctrinal issues.

One of the long-standing problems was the belief that the bishop of Rome (the pope) has supreme authority over the church, if not the secular authorities as well. The attempt by some of the popes to dominate secular rulers resulted in some spectacular power-struggles, such as the 11th century altercation between Pope Gregory VII and the emperor, Henry IV. This involved the question of “Lay Investiture”: can laymen (like kings) appoint church leaders? Pope Gregory claimed that only popes could invest or depose church leaders – and depose emperors, as well. The emperor, Henry IV, was outraged. He defied the pope and appointed a bishop in Milan. Gregory deposed and excommunicated Henry. The German nobles then rebelled against Henry. In 1077, Henry waited 3



Panorama of St Peter's Square in the Vatican City, François Malan. commons.wikimedia.org

days on his knees in the snow, outside the castle where the pope was staying. The pope forgave Henry, but would not restore him to the throne. Civil war broke out, and Henry was victorious. He then put an anti-pope, Clement II, on the papal throne. Pope Gregory fled and soon died.

The idea of papal infallibility was also being put forward by some of the popes in the Middle Ages – although it did not become official church dogma until later. This doctrinal error was supported by Thomas Aquinas, among others.

Another area where Roman theology cried out for reformation was that of the sacraments. The church insisted on seven of them – baptism, mass, penance, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, and last rites. This system enabled the church to control the lives of its members to a high degree: members had to keep coming to the priest – from birth, to marriage, to death, and in between.

There were also other errors connected with specific “sacraments.” The *ex opere operato* idea prevailed: that one would receive the blessing promised by the sacrament simply by partaking of it, barring extraordinary effort to block its effect. A baptized infant would automatically have its original sin washed away. The blessings of the Mass, likewise, would be automatically received.

In connection with the Mass, it was believed that the bread was miraculously transformed, as to its inner sub-

stance, into the body of Christ, and the wine into His blood; while retaining the outward appearance of bread and wine – the doctrine of *transubstantiation*. This derives from ancient Greek philosophy, which regarded things of this world as possessing an outward, physical appearance, as well as an inner, immaterial substance.

As the Heidelberg Catechism points out (Lord’s Day 30), the Roman Catholic mass also undermines the once-for-all nature of Christ’s death on the cross (Hebrews 7:27 etc.). The Roman doctrine required the re-offering of Christ’s body by the priest at the altar, for God’s people to have their sins fully forgiven. Moreover, since Christ was believed to be physically present in the blessed bread and wine, these elements should be worshipped. The wine was withheld from ordinary members, in case a drop of Christ’s blood should be spilled. The Heidelberg Catechism rightly calls this a “condemnable idolatry.”

The idea of penance probably began very early in the church’s history, as a means of testing whether a sinner’s repentance was sincere. From that, it grew into a system of punishments set by the church, regarded as sacramental.

In the 13th century, the notion of a “treasury of merit” was proposed: the super-abundant merit of Christ, combined with the excess merit of the deeds of the most holy saints (such as the martyrs), could be drawn on by the

“The Reformation brought a return to the great “alones” of the Bible – Scripture alone; grace alone; faith alone; Christ alone; and God’s glory alone.”



"The Reformed Church is always reforming – always striving, with God's help, to get back to the Bible. That is, perhaps, the most important thing we can learn from the Reformation: to take our stand on the Word of God, even if that stand comes at great cost."

church to reduce the penance required of other sinners. This could also be used to reduce the time a soul spent in purgatory, even for someone who had already died. The church's promise of a reduction of temporal punishment for sin was called an *indulgence*.

The Middle Ages saw the doctrine of purgatory become entrenched. According to this doctrine, some departed believers undergo a final cleansing by fire, involving suffering in an intermediate state before they may enter heaven. In the Middle Ages, indulgences to reduce time in purgatory became very popular. The church sold them, or gave them in return for acts of service to the church – such as making donations, participating in crusades or undertaking a pilgrimage. The sale of indulgences brought in much revenue for the church, which some of the popes used to fund great artistic and architectural projects – such as the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, in the early 16th century.

It was the vigorous salesmanship of the Dominican friar, John Tetzel, offering indulgences to free the souls of the departed from purgatory, that provoked Martin Luther to begin his opposition to the system – the nailing of his "95 Theses" on the castle door at Wittenberg. Tetzel cried, "As soon as the money in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory's fire springs." Luther questioned why the pope, who was supposed to love all men, could not grant free indulgences to all – if he had that power at all – rather than charging for the benefit. An excellent question, but one that angered the pope.

A further issue that had its origin in the early church: the worship of Mary (Mariolatry) and the saints; and the veneration of "relics." People often made pilgrimages to Rome or other places where famous relics were kept. They would make offerings to gain benefits from the relics. This kind of "religious tourism," combined with relic sales and counterfeiting, made it a big business!

The worship of Mary also finds its roots in the early church, the doctrinal disputes about the Trinity and the two Natures of Christ. The term "Mother of God" was sometimes used by those who wanted to defend the divinity of Christ. This term was officially endorsed by the Council of Ephesus in 431. After that, religious art depicting Mary increasingly presented her as the Queen of Heaven, sitting on a throne, in royal finery, surrounded by a halo. Increasingly, prayers

and veneration were directed to her.

The Reformation would also challenge the typical three-fold Monastic vow, which required poverty, chastity and unquestioning obedience to the abbot. Similarly, the priest and other church leaders were required to remain unmarried. Such extreme asceticism arose from combining the anti-material philosophy of some of the ancient Greeks, with the Biblical warnings against worldliness. However, this attempt to strive for greater piety actually increased temptation in many ways, and became a great burden – one from which the Reformation would set many free.

Something must also be said about the doctrines of grace. In the 5th century, the hugely influential church father, Augustine of Hippo, opposed the British monk Pelagius. Pelagius had taught that man did not suffer from original sin. Adam was just a bad example. Man's will was free to choose God without prior grace and help from God. Against this, Augustine taught what we now call the "Five Points of Calvinism" (TULIP). In 418, the Council of Carthage supported Augustine's views, and condemned Pelagius. The church remained largely faithful to the biblical teaching on man's sin and God's grace for some time – though there was some fluctuation on these matters in the ensuing centuries. The "Augustinian" view was gradually watered down. Man was seen as weakened by sin and in need of God's grace – but still able to make the initial move towards God, without God's prior grace. Augustine's view of predestination and irresistible grace were weakened, allowing man some measure of co-operation between himself and God in the works of regeneration and justification.

Related to that, the Reformation brought a return to the great "alones" of the Bible – Scripture alone; grace alone; faith alone; Christ alone; and God's glory alone. These "alones" were set over against the Roman Catholic supplementing of biblical authority with the church's opinion; of God's grace in Christ with man's deeds.

Widespread reformation occurred when God, in his providence, used the religious, cultural and historical situation of the 16th century to bring the church back to the Bible:
From ancient times, there had been attempts to reform the moral corruption of the church: The Monastic Movement; some reforming popes; and later, move-

ments like Christian Humanism and The Brethren of the Common Life. However, these movements sought to work within the Roman Church. They also tended to be more concerned about the moral abuses than the doctrinal deviation.

From ancient times, there had also been those who sought to address the doctrinal deviation. The Lord raised up men with clear insight into the theological issues around the sacraments, the doctrines of grace, the worship of Mary and the saints, indulgences and the government of the church. Many of them were strict Augustinians, concerned about the drift away from Augustine's teachings – the German monk Gottschalk, and his supporters – sometimes called the "9th Century Predestinarians"; Thomas Bradwardine in England and Gregory of Rimini in Italy, in the 14th century. Others went further in their opposition, and suffered greater persecution: Peter Waldo and the Waldensians in northern Italy in the 12th century; John Wycliffe and the Lollards in England in the 14th century; and John Hus and the Hussites in Bohemia in the 14th/15th century. The strongest reforming voices in this group have become known as "Proto-Reformers." Their strong voices helped prepare Europe for the Reformation, they did not yet spark widespread reformation. The time was not quite ripe.

What changed? Well, several factors have been suggested – circumstances the Lord used to spread the biblical insights of Augustine and others, make them more popular, and separate a faithful remnant from an apostate church. These factors include: the shift in power from the Mediterranean to North-Western Europe, along with a growing sense of nationalism – the regions farther from Rome wanted more independence from Rome; the decay of feudalism and of the Holy Roman Empire – creating an openness to new systems of thought; the increase of exploration and discovery, also opening people to the possibility of other changes. In addition, of course, there was widespread disillusionment because of the church's corruption. The teachings of the Proto-Reformers appealed to intellectuals in many of the universities, so that Luther's views found fertile ground in which to grow. We must also take into consideration the great gifts of the Reformers like Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others. These men were able to show that their teachings were biblical. They were generally able to overcome the arguments of their opponents in public

debate. Moreover, the invention of the printing press at this time enabled their ideas to be circulated as never before.

We should also note that this was an age in which people tended to be very "black and white." The Reformers did not mince words. They were sure that their views were biblical, and they were prepared to die for it. On the other hand, the Roman Church was convinced they were wrong, and ready to kill them for it. Some of the Reformers would perhaps have preferred to remain in the Roman Church. Luther's 95 Theses were originally written in Latin for scholarly debate within the church. However, the violent reaction made it impossible for these men to work within the Roman Church.

What would have happened if there had been no Protestant Reformation in the 16th century? That is, of course, also a matter of speculation. Would the Roman Church have continued to dominate, with perhaps the occasional protest from small groups of Augustinians? Would the corruption of the church have continued, resulting in a greater reaction against Christianity in society as a whole, with a resultant turning to secular humanism on an even greater scale than what we are seeing at present around the world? It is difficult to answer these questions with any certainty.

Certainly, however, world history has been very much affected by the spread of Protestantism. Think of the new world – North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand included. Reformed churches have spread throughout the world, influencing both individuals and cultures. Protestantism, especially Calvinism, has been closely associated with the "Biblical work ethic." It has been suggested that the spread of the Reformation has contributed to the economic growth and consequent power of some of these nations – most notably, England, Germany and the U.S. It has also been suggested that the rise of democracy is connected to the Reformed view of church and secular government. Some have pointed out the number of scientists who have been Protestant – men who were no longer tied to the old Aristotelian cosmology that had been accepted as dogma by the Roman Catholic Church.

While some of those suggestions are, perhaps, debatable, we should above all be thankful that there are now true and faithful churches all over the world. This is undoubtedly owing to the Reformation. Wherever we travel, it is usually possible to find a church where the

Word of God is faithfully preached, and superstition and idolatry eschewed. Even those Evangelical churches that are not Reformed have been influenced and affected by the Reformation, having picked up ideas that were preached by both Proto-Reformers and Reformers.

At the same time, even if the Lord had not brought about reformation in the 16th century, He might have brought about all the developments we see around us today, by some other means. Personally, however, I don't have much time for theories of alternative worlds or histories – there is only God's plan, and what has resulted from it – the world we see around us. For that, we should be deeply thankful. We should be thankful for the fact that biblical doctrine has been preserved and applied, with the richness of Scripture brought out increasingly over the ages by faithful men whom God has raised up. We should be thankful that abuses within the church have been corrected. The Reformation has played a big role in these developments.

It may also be worth thinking about the courage and conviction of those who, like Luther, said "Here I stand" on the teaching of God's Word. We live in a very tolerant age. Would the Reformation have occurred if things had come to a head in the 21st century, instead of the 16th? It is easier to imagine our stance today being more easy-going and pragmatic: "Well, we don't fully agree with the Roman doctrine; but we have more in common than not; we wouldn't want to split a church over it; we will simply have to 'agree to disagree.'" Perhaps the Reformers were too strong at times in their reactions and their insults. But it is worth considering whether we are too soft. Reformation is worth fighting for, and worth fighting to maintain. "The Reformed Church is always reforming" – always striving, with God's help, to get back to the Bible. That is, perhaps, the most important thing we can learn from the Reformation: to take our stand on the Word of God, even if that stand comes at great cost.

Mr Paul Archbald is the minister in the Reformed Church of Silverstream.

Books in focus

The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance – Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters.
Sinclair B. Ferguson
Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016.
256 Pages.

If I could be Pope Leo X for one day, I would require that every minister and vicar in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand read this book and then read it again! Reading this book is like drinking pure spring water on a hot, dry day; it flows with the pure grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't let the first 40 pages put you off. Here Ferguson analyses an 18th century issue in the Church of Scotland called the marrow controversy. The essence of this controversy was whether the gospel should be offered freely or with conditions. For example, should preaching emphasize repentance as a condition that must be met in the sinner before saving grace can be received? Please read this book for the answer to this question!

Satan, always trying to have us lose sight of Christ, tries to unbalance us so that we fall into the errors of either legalism or antinomianism. Or we prescribe one as the antidote to the other. Ferguson, with keen spiritual insight, clarifies that legalism and antinomianism are, in fact, non-identical twins that emerge from the same womb (p.84). This unbalancing already began in the Garden of Eden where "Eve's rejection of God's law (antinomianism) was in fact the fruit of her distorted view of (legalism)" (p. 84). The cure for both errors can be found only through our union by faith with the person of Jesus Christ.

Ferguson makes this point crystal clear by having the reader look closely at the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*. We all know that the younger brother was a rebel against God; he declares rebellion against the law and does life his way! He is the antinomian. But what about the other son, the elder brother? The older brother has ticked all the right boxes of Christian behavior, but is a slave. In fact, his words to his father give this away: "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

"Yet, you never gave me a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends" (NIV, Luke 15:25 *emphasis mine*).

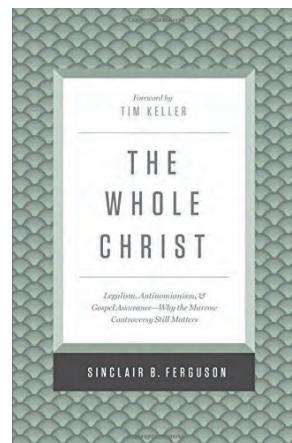
What Jesus unmasks here is a legalistic heart, one that has imbibed the poison of Eden. Such a heart sees the Lord as a slave master and not as a gracious Father, as restrictive rather than generous (p.107). No wonder Ferguson says that we might call this parable, "The parable of the Free Grace Savior" (p.105).

The climax or punch line to this parable comes at the end as Ferguson explains: "That being the case the alarming message here is that the spirit of the elder brother, being the legalist, is more likely to be found near the father's house than in the pig farm – or in concrete terms, in the congregation and among the faithful. And sometimes (only sometimes?), it appears in the pulpit and in the heart of the pastor" (p. 107-108).

From his own proven, pastoral experience the author describes this spirit as a "tincture" that can characterize a ministry. The tincture of a person filled with generous grace or slaving legalism is quickly felt by others and also infectious.

The last two chapters provide one of the best treatments of faith and assurance that I have ever read. Is there a contradiction between the Westminster Confession and John Calvin about assurance of salvation? Both affirm that all saving faith contains the seed of assurance. Calvin describes faith as often mixed with some doubt: "We cannot imagine an uncertainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety.... Believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief.... He who, struggling with his own weakness, presses toward faith in his moments of anxiety is already in large part victorious" (as quoted in Ferguson p 193).

One enemy to our enjoyment of assurance of faith is that we have a.... "native tendency to drift from the fact that our salvation is all of grace" (p. 199). Our lack of assurance is often caused by looking to our own obedience and faith, more than to Christ alone. When we begin to grow as Christians we reason that our own performance is why God has been gracious to us. Another enemy

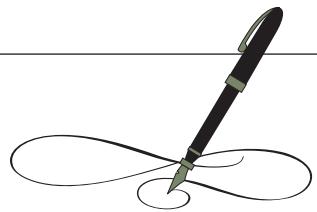


that militates against our enjoyment of assurance is that we fail to recognize the riches of our justification by faith. The only righteousness by which we are declared righteous is Jesus Christ's righteousness. In fact, we are regarded as righteous before the Father as Christ himself. (See HC, Lord's Day 23 LdV). "When faith thus grasps the reality of this inheritance, then Christ himself looms large. This is the key to the enjoyment of assurance precisely because assurance is our assurance that he is a great Savior and that he is ours." (p. 200)

The author probes various reasons why believers struggle with assurance of faith. Writing with pastoral wisdom and care, Ferguson understands that some believers are indeed wired differently than others. "Thus there are different strands that together make up the complex harmony that is Christian assurance. Actual assurance has a psychological as well as a theological dimension" (p. 211).

If you are looking for a challenging summer read, I highly recommend this book. However, let the reader understand that it is not for the light-hearted; it is a challenging book to read as it is succinct and contains extensive footnotes. However, this book is about the gospel of Christ; a careful study of this book will deepen one's love for Christ and strengthen one's assurance in Christ.

I have now read this book twice; once on my own and then with a colleague. I have found it to be the most important book I have ever read in my own ministry. It has helped me personally to drink more deeply of Christ's life-giving grace; it has helped me in times of depression and struggle with assurance of salvation to look to Christ again and again. *Pastor Leo de Vos, Reformed Church of Hukanui*



Are They Coming?



We are often under the impression that evangelism equates with inviting someone along to worship. But does it? I've always had significant doubts about that idea. Yesterday, I read something which puts some of the reasons a lot more succinctly than I could have. Here is Dean, a pastor from Florida, in his own words:

They Ain't Comin'

by Dean Inserra

I truly feel bad for a pastor who believes that if his church simply changes the style of its worship service, unbelievers are going to start coming on Sunday morning. For many, this has and continues to be a type of strategy to get non-Christians to church. While I am all for seeing unbelievers come to hear the gospel and just the thought of it excites me, I have never understood the logic behind efforts to attract those who are non-Christians to come to a church service.

I fear that the church is setting herself up for disappointment when this is the vision that is cast. Personally, I don't know an unbeliever who is likely to attend a church service, with very occa-

sional exceptions. These would be after a tragedy — when many claimed Christian faith after the events of 9/11/01 — or on Mother's Day, because it would "mean so much to Nana." Unbelievers aren't coming for any of the reasons churches think they might.

Why would an unbeliever come to church because there is free coffee? He can drive through the Starbucks line, pay \$3.00, and be home within 15 minutes.

What about great branding and social media? I have some difficult news to break to you: unbelievers in your community probably aren't following your church on social media.

The pastor is really funny? So is YouTube.

All these efforts and creative ideas are perfectly designed, unintentionally, to attract people who hop around from church to church, looking for the flavor of the month. The efforts, resources of time and money, and overall planning of the church's outreach is often well-suited to reach the disgruntled or bored Christian next door, which is not the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. If we are going to faithfully reach the lost in our communities through the local church, we need to start by reminding ourselves the basic truth that church people go to churches, and unbelievers generally do not. Taking that into account, where I serve, we really want unbelievers to come. So we have an entire strategy built around reaching our own members. If people love their church, they will want their non-Christian friends to join them.

People come to church on the arm of a trusted friend because of a relationship and an invitation. Rather than trying to attract unbelievers with elements and efforts they will never even know exist, we try to reach our own members by creating a church they actually want to be part of themselves. I'm not going to invite a non-Christian friend I've been investing in for months or years to a

church service I secretly wish I didn't have to attend.

"Isn't the Great Commission reason enough?" one might ask. Actually, the Great Commission is the very reason why I would not bring a friend to a church service that lacks gospel-centered preaching, devalues excellence, has a mediocre children's ministry, bad coffee, and unfriendly people. My friend is going to give church one shot, and I'm going to do everything in my power to ensure the overall experience is positive, praying the Holy Spirit convicts and the conversations we've had will deepen because he's come to church with me.

At my church, our strategy to reach our own people consists of two elements that are not spoken or advertised, but rather practiced and valued. We call it the "double promise."

Promise 1: No disclaimer on the drive to church.

I don't want our church members to have to give a string of "Oh, by the way," disclaimers on their way to church with a friend. Maybe you've heard, or given, some of these:

Oh by the way, the pastor is very political, but he means well. Oh by the way, I know you are introverted, but they ask new people to stand up and be recognized. Oh by the way, there is this lady who sings, and she is awful, but her husband is the guy in charge of the music.

By valuing excellence and being intentional in how we do church, we eliminate the need to give disclaimers, and also uphold the second part of the double-promise.

Promise 2: No apologies on the drive

home.

In the same way, we never want church members to feel the need to apologize because of something unnecessarily offensive that happened during the service.

"I'm so sorry, he has never made a joke about gay people." "I'm so sorry, the children's ministry security has never been this lax." "I'm so sorry, our pastor has never shown so little compassion on that issue."

When you bring someone to church, it is a big deal. The invitation was not random. The person's agreement to come was not random. Most likely, there have been months of conversations and time spent together to earn your friend's trust and invite him or her. And when he or she comes, you are entrusting your church with that person. [I think Dean means "you are trusting your church with that person".] The double promise is not showy or attractional; it is a culture created to ensure church members that we aren't going to ruin all the missional effort they have put into relationships.

The church where I serve as lead pastor is made up of people who are passionate about getting unbelievers to come to our Sunday gatherings. We do not believe it is the end goal, but we absolutely and unapologetically push our church members to bring their friends to church, and we value it when they come. If we stopped making this a priority, our church members would wonder if we had lost our way. By the Lord's kindness to us, we have seen tremendous results from the efforts to bring unbelievers to church and allow them to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The double

promise is essential for us, because if an unbeliever is going to join us on a Sunday morning, it isn't because he or she heard our band is awesome or the pastor is relatable. It is because a friend who loves the church and cannot wait for the opportunity to bring others invited that person. This is the true way in which we leverage a Sunday service for the unbeliever.

Dean Inserra is Pastor of City Church, Tallahassee, Florida.

<http://deaninserra.com/they-aint-comin/>

Comment in closing

I think Dean is absolutely right in identifying friendship as the clincher which makes a visit to church worthwhile to the person not yet believing. It is the friendship which enables all needed explanations to be made, and for further encouragement and instruction to be given. But much depends on the part played by the rest of the church. When we bring an unbelieving friend to church we are relying on our fellow members to behave well: to be friendly and welcoming (without being overwhelming), and to be generous and understanding, recognising that this person is not yet a Christian, and so not expecting "Christian" responses from them. Are we ready for this? S.D.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

October 1977

Synod 1977 is history again. Somewhere else in this issue, I presume, there will be a good article to tell the world what decisions were made at that Synod. Allow me in this letter to make some remarks in general. As Stated Clerk I was allocated a little niche in the room with all my odds and ends to assist the Moderamen. At arms length were two

fraternal delegates from overseas. One was Dr J.H. Kromminga who helped us, unintentionally I think, to change the sister church relationship we had with the Christian Reformed Church in North America into one of "correspondence" church relationship, as we were not too keen to add a third category in inter-church relationships called "Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (which category, by the way, had been created by

the CRC themselves).

The other fraternal delegate was the Rev. W.F. van Brussel who represented the Reformed Churches of Australia. It was a great pleasure to have him and his wife in our midst. After his maiden-speech, in which he conveyed the greetings from the churches in Kangaroo land, the Rev. Ken Campbell gave the appropriate "address-in-reply". Ken remarked that Australia must be the land

of the giants if the fraternal delegates were fair examples of the inhabitants of that continent. However, Rev. Campbell also wondered why those ministers who came to New Zealand from Australia and settled in our denomination are more of a Davidian stature. And so he concluded, that these pastors must have been the rejects of their Australian counterparts.

And what did we get out of those meetings at Synod? Sometimes one may hear a remark that all one gets out of certain meetings is full ashtrays. But that cannot be said of our Synod meetings. Oh no! In the first place, there was no smoking and secondly, well, I would suggest that you read the official report.

It may interest you to read about some statistical data. Of the thirty-two overtures, seven were adopted and five

were defeated; no action was taken on eight and twelve were passed on to the study committees. And as far as the time factor was concerned, of the thirty-two overtures, nineteen of them were dealt with within fifteen minutes, ten within half an hour and the longest time was an hour and a quarter for a discussion on an overture. I won't bore you with how long it took to deal with the reports. The shortest was five minutes and the longest two whole hours; that was not bad going.

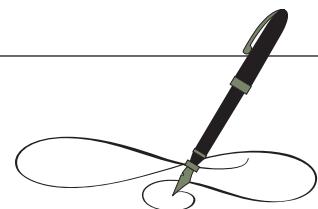
In his closing remarks the Moderator, the Rev. G.I. Williamson, concluded that there has been progress in our churches here in New Zealand. There is less division today than there was twelve years ago. It is also a fact that our New Zealand experiment has been a glorious

one. We are the only church that he knows of in the whole world, that has deliberately set its face like flint in the direction of a deliberate blending of the two streams, Presbyterian and Reformed. This is evident in the fact that we are the only church in the world that has both the Continental and the Scottish or Presbyterian Confessions, and in the Synodical records of our church way back at the beginning, we deliberately determined to evaluate these two traditions and go back to Scripture to test them, and to take that which is right and good. It is still therefore, in G.I.'s eyes, the most exciting denomination in the Reformed world to be in and he, G.I., is happier than ever to be part of it.

Abridged

Feminine focus

Jenny Waldron



Living with failure

This isn't a very popular thing to say these days, but people fail! You fail, I fail, we all fail, and yet we live in a world where success is seen as best and failure as something less than desirable. Social media enable people to show their "wonderful, amazing, fulfilling" lives to the world and to keep other, less savoury, aspects to themselves. Schools often perpetuate this myth of success at all costs by offering "participation" certificates and "not achieved" marks. Many, misguidedly, think that students' self-esteem will be crushed if they think they have failed. Some time ago, I took my children along to the local swimming pool for lessons. At the end of the term, the students were all presented with "Participation Certificates". My children knew they had participated because they had jumped into the pool each week, and I knew they had participated because I had dutifully sat through each lesson! All the students received certificates – even those who still could not swim –

but it was all ok because they received a certificate!

We all live with failure. Elite athletes constantly live with failure – to reach their personal best, to beat the world record, to win against the other competitors. We also, in our daily lives, live with failure; from failing to take the rubbish bins out on the right day to not getting to work on time, to burning the dinner, there are a myriad of failures that can and do happen every day. It is ok to live with failure, because it can spur us on to try and cease failing.

In our spiritual lives, failure lurks around every corner. It is a result of sin entering the world. We do not, and cannot, live up to God's standard. God's Law is perfect and yet, over and over we fail to keep it. In all this failure, who are we looking at? Ourselves! When we look at ourselves, and our continual failures, it can feel like change is impossible.

We fail to keep our tempers, to not nag our husbands, to not have covetous

"When we take our focus off Him[Jesus] and back onto ourselves all we see is failure, but when we look at Jesus we see perfection and total obedience."



"Before you open your mouth to put your husband "right" or to retaliate or to say something that is bitter and angry, close your mouth, and capture your every thought."

thoughts every time the junk mail comes, to not steal time from our employers by checking *Facebook* on company time or having longer than allowed coffee breaks. We hate our brother or sister, or we gossip or tell lies. We can become down-hearted and condemned because we always seem to fail to keep God's law, to lead a perfect life to the point that some give up and say "what's the point?"

The point is Jesus Christ! He is, or at least should be, our focus. Our primary focus. He is the one who is perfect and who obeyed every one of His Father's laws, perfectly. When we take our focus off Him and back onto ourselves all we see is failure, but when we look at Jesus we see perfection and total obedience. When we truly look at ourselves, we can see why we deserve the death sentence because we could not and cannot and never will be able to fully obey each of God's commandments. We are doomed to failure whenever we try. However, Jesus, the perfect son of God, was raised in a sinful family. He obeyed his sinful earthly parents, loved his half-siblings perfectly even though they were not perfect, and he grew in wisdom and stature in favour with God and man.¹

Jesus Christ then went on to do the most difficult thing he could possibly do. He died for our sins and failures so that we don't have to pay the penalty of death.² He did it because he loved us first. When we acknowledge our debt to God for doing all this for us, we can then know that, even though we continue to sin and fail, He will forgive us as we turn to Him and trust Him for all that we need. Yes, we are likely to fail again and again in all sorts of areas in our lives, but God is Love. He loves us and He wants us to be more and more like Christ, and He gave us His Word, not to condemn us but to show us the way, not to be failures but to be conquerors.

The Apostle Paul describes this struggle for a Christian, between wanting to do what is right but not doing what is right, because sin still dwells within us.³ For example, we know we are to be kind and gentle, and yet we find ourselves halfway through an angry tirade before we wonder how we got there, or we know we are to love one another but we find we have been avoiding a certain person at church because of something they said, instead of talking to them about it.

Marriage: If we are married, we can

feel like our marriage is a total failure. If your relationship with your husband isn't what you thought it would or should be, focus on God. Don't look at your husband and list all the things about him you don't like. Look to God. God has joined the two of you together, and He is, ultimately, the only one we can, and must, turn to for strength, wisdom and courage and fulfillment. He is there in the good times and the bad, in the easy days and the difficult, ready to guide and help you if you ask. Before you open your mouth to put your husband "right" or to retaliate or to say something that is bitter and angry, close your mouth, and capture your every thought.⁴ If you fail to be submissive, pray for help. If you feel you have "lost your love", pray that God would rekindle your love for your husband. Failure in marriage will probably come at some stage(s) because you, a sinner, are married to a sinner, but pray that the Lord will draw you close to Himself, and help and strengthen your marriage. God can take a marriage that is broken and seemingly hopeless and change it into something that will give glory to Him and is a loving, wholesome relationship.

Parenting: Parents often feel that they fail their children, especially in getting them to obey, to be kind, to share their toys or when they make choices as adults that are sinful.

Pray for yourself as a parent (and together as mother and father). Parenting requires a huge amount of wisdom and sometimes it may feel like we haven't a clue how to address a particular problem, but God knows. Trust in Him. The Bible has a lot to say about parenting and how we are to act as Christians.⁵ Don't provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.⁶ If your children are

older and have left home, still pray for them, especially if they are not following the Lord. While there is life, there is hope. It is not by works we are saved, not our own, nor can we do works so that our children are saved. It is purely a work of God. There is no formula (all parents and children are different) but if you, as a parent, focus on your own spiritual walk with the Lord, trusting in Him then He will work His good purposes in and through you.

One other important area of parenting is the failure to put your marriage first; not the children nor your career nor hobbies. When children see that your marriage is good and loving, they, too, will feel secure and loved. It will flow down to the children. (We often see this when we are angry at our husband, we are then angry at the children, but the reverse is true too, love and compassion and kindness in our relationship with our husband, flow down as well.) Make time for yourselves away from the children, daily, weekly and yearly. Remember you have a name and it's not "Mum!"

Pray for your children every day. Honestly and fervently. This means really knowing them and what's going on in their lives.

Working: No matter what line of work you are in, whether it is accountant, customer service, scientist, housewife, mother, nurse, manager or whatever it may be, you can fail to do our work as to the Lord.⁷ Don't grumble about the work, but work cheerfully and quickly. Don't fret or worry about your work but commit it to God. Don't waste time but use it wisely and honorably.⁸

Devotions: This is an area where we often experience failure; regularly spending time reading our Bibles and praying. We are not to condemn ourselves or beat ourselves up about it. That

only demotivates us and sends us into a downward spiral of "can't do it properly, so I might as well not try at all". Rather, God forgives us (again and again) if we repent (again and again). It can be a matter of "girding up your loins" and trying again (and again). It may be that you need to find a time and place that suits your routine and time in life. These things change and what may have worked last year doesn't anymore. Reassess your life and habits and pace of life and make time to spend with the Lord, daily. Praying throughout the day is good, but we also need to be fed by His Word regularly.

Failure is part of the fallen world we live in but we don't need to dwell on failure. God, in His infinite love for us, enabled us to be in relationship with Him, and He sent the Holy Spirit to help us to mature and grow to be like Jesus Christ. When we fail we are not to condemn ourselves (or others) as there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, but we acknowledge our failure and we are to turn our eyes and hearts toward our Lord and Saviour. We can be thankful for our failures, not so that sin can abound more and more, but because we can use it as an opportunity to focus on Christ's perfectness, and to make changes in our attitudes and thoughts. There is so much more to the Christian life than getting a participation certificate. It is about becoming more and more like Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

1 Luke 2:52

2 Rom 3:10-26

3 Rom 7:15-25

4 2 Cor 5:10

5 E.g. Col 3:12-15

6 Eph 6:4

7 Eph 6:5-8

8 Eph 5:15-16

"... a man will be justified by faith when, excluded from righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it, appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous ..."
John Calvin

The real story of the “Miracle of Dunkirk”



“A call was put out for rescuers to fetch their boys home, and the response again was overwhelming: Over 800 vessels, many of them yachts, merchant marine ships, and small fishing boats, heeded the call while those at home prayed for their safety.”

Jonathon Van Maren

It was on May 23, 1940, that King George VI put out the proclamation, requesting that the following Sunday, May 26, would be a National Day of Prayer. Britain was facing a crisis that threatened her very existence: Adolf Hitler’s Nazi lightning war had smashed through Belgium and France, driving the Allied armies back and trapping them on the beach at Dunkirk. More than 350,000 men, strafed by German planes, waited for destruction or rescue. Many of Britain’s military leaders thought it hopeless: the war was over, and the Nazi savages marching under the banner of the twisted cross would reign over Europe.

On the evening of Saturday, May 25, the order was given to evacuate as many troops from the Dunkirk beach as possible, and a call was put out for rescuers. The following morning, the churches were overflowing with men and women begging the Almighty to save their sons, their brothers, and their husbands. Long lineups stretched out the doors of the cathedrals and down the street. A crowd

gathered at Westminster Abbey. A call was put out for rescuers to fetch their boys home, and the response again was overwhelming: Over 800 vessels, many of them yachts, merchant marine ships, and small fishing boats, heeded the call while those at home prayed for their safety.

It was then that what became known as the “Miracle of Dunkirk” occurred. Historians debate to this day why the Axis Powers paused in their advance on the beaches, but their delay was just what the rescuers needed. Over 338,000 men were loaded from the Dunkirk beaches onto ships of every size over the next three days, and ferried across the English Channel to safety. On June 2, the Dean of St. Paul’s was the first to refer to the massive evacuation as the “Miracle of Dunkirk” – as many pointed out, God had answered those pleading for His intervention by granting the rescuers a calm, quiet Channel and high mists and fog, which interfered with the ability of Nazi fighter planes to strafe the ships bearing their men home. These conditions allowed a

rescue of epic proportions to take place.

It was later that people heard about another story of the Dunkirk rescues. Just as the trapped British soldiers on the beach seemed sure that they would be destroyed or captured by the oncoming Nazis, a British naval officer cabled three simple words to London: "But if not."

Those three words tell us volumes about what it means to still be in possession of a Christian culture – they were derived from Daniel 3:17-18, the King James Version – which most Britons still heard in church and was still considered the pinnacle achievement of the English language. Those three words were spoken by the three brave friends of Daniel as they faced the scorching furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, willing to be burned rather than serve an idol.

"Our God whom we serve," they told him, "is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, let it be known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

But if not. The British officer who sent those words to his superior fully expected them to understand where they came

from in Scripture and what they would mean. God was yet able to deliver the British from what seemed a certain fate, but if not they would resist the Nazis with all their might. In three words, we get a glimpse of what a culture – derived from the word "cultus" or centre – actually looks like. That three seemingly innocuous words would be immediately recognized and their meaning understood shows again how far we are from there to here.

Even now, ironically, the story has become somewhat watered-down. I noticed that one Christian organization blogged about the story of the three words "And if not," presumably from some other version of the Bible and an inaccurate rendering of the story which entirely misses the very British cultural significance of it. It is for this reason that even virulent atheists like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, men who scorn prayer and deride Scripture, defend the King James Version as a masterpiece.

It is so foreign to us to read of a nation of men and women so literate in Scripture that three words could convey so much, especially in our post-Christian and in many ways post-cultur-

al West. There is no set of values that holds us together any longer. There is no centre, no set of principles that our nations can rally around. The Bible is despised as hate speech and spurned as fairy tales rather than relied on as a source of wisdom and encouragement. Today, as barbarians again shed blood on the streets of Europe, the sons and daughters of those who saw the Miracle of Dunkirk ask not for a day of prayer, but demand that we remain prayerless.

But the Miracle of Dunkirk offers encouragement once again. Undeserving people can turn, pray, and beg – and God can yet do unspeakably amazing things. Throughout history, He has intervened in response to prayer, again and again. Those who have eyes to see can see this. It is something to remember. Our nations may have changed, and our cultures may have collapsed. But He remains the same.

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"God had answered those pleading for His intervention by granting the rescuers a calm, quiet Channel and high mists and fog, which interfered with the ability of Nazi fighter planes to strafe the ships bearing their men home. These conditions allowed a rescue of epic proportions to take place."



Front cover image:
Reformation Wall in Geneva,
Switzerland. From left to right:
Guillaume Farel, Johannes Calvin,
Théodore de Bèze, John Knox.
Ruth Nguyen at Vietnamese Wikipedia

Back cover image:
Reformationsdenkmal mit Farel, Calvin,
Bèze und Knox in Genf
<http://www.picswiss.ch/Genf/CE-05-02.html>. Author, Roland Zumbühl – www.picswiss.ch.