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faith in focus

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Bringing Christ to the workplace

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Editorial

I think it would be true to say, that over the last 2,000 years, God's people have in many cases had to work alongside those who are unbelieving, agnostic, atheistic or worshippers of false deities. Today, that certainly is the case, and it still presents many challenges for the Christian.

Some of the challenges faced by the Christian may be the requirement to work on the Lord's Day, or joyfully living the Christian life and communicating our faith to those around us. It is understandable that we want to get along with our colleagues, co-operate in our work, and not wanting to make ourselves *persona non grata*. However, it's not always possible to escape difficulties, because there are times when we may need to make a stand on something, because the glory of the LORD is at stake. And glorifying God in our work is absolutely necessary. Everything about us is to be glorifying to Him.

So, what does that mean? Some Scriptures that spring to mind. "You are the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13ff) "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14ff) "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven". (Matt 5:16) "... not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Ephesians 6:6-7)

Our witness can be positive, joyful and God-honouring, or it can be harmful and drive people away from Christ. Christians have the responsibility and privilege to show Christ to their colleagues, to be letters of commendation as it were, through which the Lord may bring sinners to Himself. What a joy and blessing it should be for us to use every opportunity to be an influence for good to those around us.

Our contributors give us an overview of their vocations and how they as Christians are able by God's grace to contribute in a meaningful and God-honouring way in this secular society.

Mrs Sarah Cressy considers the challenges of speaking of Christ to colleagues.

Mrs Bianca Van Ameyde writes about her work as a nurse at Christchurch Public Hospital.

Miss Mary-Anne Evers brings a Christian perspective to the classroom.

Mrs Sally Davey reflects on how we think about leadership in the contemporary world.

Letters from New Zealand looks at holiday time in our churches back in 1978.

Mr Andre Holtslag reports on the recent RCNZ synod.

Mr Jack Sawyer celebrates the 60th anniversary of sister-church relations between the RCNZ and OPC in his address to our recent synod.

Book review: *What Grieving People Wish You Knew about what really helps (and what really hurts)*, reviewed by Mrs Rebecca Bredenhof; *No Christian Silence on Science: Science from a Christian Perspective* by Margaret Helder. Reviewed by Mr Wes Bredenhof.

Synod images by courtesy of Mr Gerry Leibbrandt.

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.

Bringing Christ to the workplace

I'm a Christian, and ...

Sarah Cressy

In 2013, I was hired as a structural engineer in Christchurch. My typical work involves looking at buildings that were damaged by the 2010-2011 earthquakes and figuring out how to repair them. During one of my first weeks at my job, I heard a story about the office manager, Tom, and Aaron, an employee who had recently left the office. Tom strongly disliked Aaron. Apparently, during a long conversation over beer, Aaron had told Tom that he believed that if Tom didn't believe in Jesus, he wouldn't go to heaven when he died, even if he lived a decent life. Tom stopped talking to Aaron after that night.

When I heard their story, I was taken aback. I don't recall what my response was in that moment, but I have often wondered what Aaron actually said and how he said it. Why were his words so offensive? Was this a case of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, or was the message itself offensive? Was it an issue because a younger guy was telling an older guy how to live his life?

This story demonstrates why talking about Christ with colleagues is challenging. I am afraid to approach the subject because I fear that like Aaron, I may lose friends or damage relationships in the office. However, as Christians, we are called to bear witness to our faith, even if that results in friction with others. After all, Jesus said, "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." (Luke 15:11)

At the same time, we also witness to the world by following Paul's advice in Romans 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Peaceable living suggests that when we share the Gospel, we speak gently, and avoid unnecessary offense where possible. When I do speak to my work friends about being a Christian, I've tried



to keep conversations focused on who Jesus is, rather than talking about heaven and hell. Perhaps this is just the easy way out of tricky conversations, but thus far, I've remained friends with all of the colleagues I've talked to about my faith.

Our witness is not limited to words only. Our actions and attitudes can put the Gospel on display and form the background image for our spoken witness. In Colossians 3, Paul encouraged slaves in the church: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...You are serving the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23-24) We too, as employees under human em-

Sarah Cressy at work as a Structural Engineer.

“Our witness is not limited to words only. Our actions and attitudes can put the Gospel on display and form the background image for our spoken witness.”

ployers, are ultimately serving Christ! This should affect everything from our attitude toward work to how we relate to others to how we do specific tasks.

One specific way I try to reflect Christ in my work is by being honest in all situations, even if the result may be detrimental to my client. I am a structural engineer, and I generally work on earthquake damage assessments. Our typical clients are insurance companies. As you might imagine, there are many opportunities for overstating or understating damage and repairs. On a certain project, I was well aware that it would be advantageous for our client if we considered the building destroyed after the earliest earthquake event. The evidence simply did not match that conclusion, and we wrote our report following the evidence, rather than based on our client’s wishes. I hope that others recognise honesty as an outflowing of my faith, but even if they do not, this is part of how I can serve Christ through my work.

On another occasion, my manager

Sundays.” I’m fairly sure my face went bright red too, and I was terrified of what he would say. My manager, though, replied that it was absolutely fine, and we would finish it Monday. While this is not a shining example of how to be bold in faith, my manager did know from that point on that I am Christian, and not working on Sundays became a starting point in later conversations with colleagues about Christianity.

In Matthew 28:18, we are called by Jesus to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” How do we go about this disciple-making work? Yes, our actions and attitudes point toward the Gospel, but this is where spoken witness is also necessary. I will be the first to admit that speaking about Christ to unbelieving colleagues is difficult for me. I work in a relatively small office, and we all know each other reasonably well. Everyone knows that I am a Christian, and as far as I know, no one is overtly anti-Christian. We still have the same office manager, but he and I are on good terms. I’ve talked to a few people about my faith in detail, mostly when out to lunch or at a dinner party. In those conversations, I was open about the questions I didn’t have answers to, but I expressed my confidence in the Gospel. Most of these conversations were sparked by current events and topics like homosexuality or the refugee crisis, which allowed me to share my views and the biblical basis for them. However, I do struggle to direct conversations toward the Gospel. In the back of my mind, the story I shared at the beginning of this article creeps in. Will I lose my friends? Will they still want to work with me?

God has been working on me slowly, convincing me to be a little bolder. After all, other Christians have faced much worse persecutions for their faith, and that did not stop them from preaching God’s word. The same God who emboldened them strengthens us. In Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested by the authorities for preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem. After their release, their friends prayed, “Sovereign Lord ... grant your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” (Acts 4:24,29) We are told that their prayer was answered, and the believers continued to preach the Gospel under threat of imprisonment. This should be our prayer as well, not only in our workplaces but also in our lives.

Our prayers should also be for the

requested that I come in to the office on a Sunday to wrap up a report. The report was long overdue, and our client was pushing us to get it finished. It was my first month on the job, and I wasn’t sure if I could say no. I remember answering in the smallest of voices, “Actually I’m a Christian, and I don’t work on



hearts of our unbelieving friends. After we have shared the Gospel, only God can work saving faith within the heart. We cannot use the activity of the Holy Spirit as an excuse for our own inactivity, but at the same time, we cannot win people to Christ without the power

of God.

Our actions and attitudes should reflect the good news of the Gospel continually, and we should be bold to speak the word of God. My prayer for the church today is the same as the Christians' prayer in Jerusalem, "Sovereign

Lord ... grant your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness."

**Names have been changed.*

Mrs Sarah Cressy is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Bringing Christ to the workplace

Evangelism in a nursing context

Bianca Van Ameyde

I am a nurse on the Paediatric Surgical Ward at the Christchurch Public Hospital. This ward caters for 1-16 year-olds requiring input from a range of surgical specialties. As an example, I might look after a two-year-old with a lacerated tongue, a five-year-old with a broken arm, and a fifteen-year-old with a perforated appendix. Common tasks include: managing infusions, pain relief, nausea, nutrition and hydration, noting vital signs, dressing wounds, educating parents, referring to others and arranging follow-up care.

I start most workdays with this prayer: *"Father, thank you for the opportunity to go to work today. Please will you help me to work to the best of my ability and for your glory."* This helps me to remember that my work puts me in the privileged position of having opportunity to be a witness for Jesus Christ. God asks me to do good, by His Spirit, so that He might be praised and so that by my conduct others might be won over. As the gospel of Matthew points out, "... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven" (5:16).

My conduct is the most significant aspect of my Christian witness at work. I can choose to employ the help of the Spirit and so be loving when I am tempted to be cross, or display

joy despite being tired, or be patient and gentle when I could be needlessly hurried. My words and demeanour are simply a reflection of my heart and thoughts.

While patients/families come and go, my colleagues are more constant. There is a collegiality between us, as we have a shared experience and mutual respect for each other's professional abilities. It is with my colleagues that I have the best opportunity to testify about Jesus Christ, however, I am not a shining example of an evangelistic nurse; these are some of the real challenges that I have discovered.

Some challenges

Contractually, I am restricted in my ability to be open about my faith. I am bound by The Nursing Council of New Zealand's *Code of Conduct for nurses*. This code describes how nurses are expected to behave; for example, *"Do not impose your political, religious and cultural beliefs on health consumers, and intervene if you see other health team members doing this."*¹ If sharing my faith with patients/families became a habit, it would be seen to be transgressing professional boundaries, becoming over-involved and a task more suitable for a chaplain.

As I am free to be open with my colleagues, there is more opportunity. The challenge lies in moving beyond a professional respect for one another toward a

"Opportunities I might have to speak about the gospel are more often God-given than self-generated. Gospel opportunities are most often brought about by God's providence, rather than my own manipulation of events, and will be obvious when they do come about."



Bianca Van Ameyde at work in the Paediatric Surgical Ward at the Christchurch Public Hospital.

meaningful friendship that might enable them to ask, or me to explain, what Christianity is all about. Name-dropping “church” or “God” or weaving doctrines into conversations reminds people that I am a Christian, but it does little to help them understand the gospel.

An additional challenge is the time that it takes to grow a meaningful friendship. After completing my working week, fulfilling my obligations at home and participating in church activities, it feels like there simply isn’t much time leftover for developing these friendships. I have found that it takes more time than simply sharing a meal, or attending a social function together, to grow a friendship wherein I can discover matters close to the other person’s heart and thereafter have opportunity to speak into their life.

Once I have opportunity, gumption,

nerve and sweaty palms usually accompany my forays into the realm of explaining what things pertaining to life and salvation mean. My own lack of courage and my hesitancy to seize opportunities when they do arise is also an impediment to the word being spread amongst the people in my workplace.

These challenges in no way excuse me from the task that we have been given as Christ’s followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20a). At times I am disheartened by the mediocrity of my Christian witness, but here are some encouragements that other Christians have shared.

Some encouragement

While words or deeds might seem to be ineffective at times, prayer for specific colleagues is something that we can do. We can pray as Paul did for his kinsmen, “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved” (Rom 10:1). Only God has the ability to change a person’s heart, leading them to repentance, belief and salvation. We can pray that He would be merciful to people we know and care for.

Cultivating a relationship with one or two non-Christians is more achievable than feeling obligated to be everyone’s confidant. Simply being a friend, listening and caring about their struggles may open more doors than quick attempts to present a canned gospel presentation. When asked how he typically spent an hour with a non-Christian, Francis Schaeffer famously said: “I would listen for fifty-five minutes, and then, in the last five minutes I would have something to say.”²

While evangelism is a long-term undertaking and finding time to invest in friendships outside of work is a challenge, even quick catch-ups can be helpful. When I spend time with a colleague outside of work, I’m saying to them, “Your friendship is valuable to me.” Taking this time to meet speaks volumes in and of itself, and naturally endears us both to greater openness and honesty.

Opportunities I might have to speak about the gospel are more often God-given than self-generated. Gospel opportunities are most often brought about by God’s providence, rather than my own manipulation of events, and will

be obvious when they do come about.

Encouragement to pray for boldness to speak the word without fear and with the Spirit's help has also been helpful. Jon Bloom suggests this prayer as a help to Christians wishing to be more courageous, "Whatever it takes, Lord, decrease the hold that unbelieving fear has over me and increase my boldness to declare the gospel to everyone you put in my path."³

By God's grace I hope to grow in

my ability to integrate my faith into my work and the relationships that I have with my colleagues. I pray that God will increase my love for those I know who are travelling along the broad way towards a bitter end. I am comforted by the fact that Jesus died for people who consistently let him down, yet he loved them anyway. I hope that by His grace I will rebound from my frequent failures and become increasingly coura-

geous in sharing the good news when I have opportunity.

- 1 <http://www.nursingcouncil.org.nz/Nurses/Code-of-Conduct>
- 2 <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/two-big-reasons-evangelism-isn-t-working>
- 3 <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lord-make-me-more-bold>

Mrs Bianca Van Ameyde is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Bringing Christ to the workplace

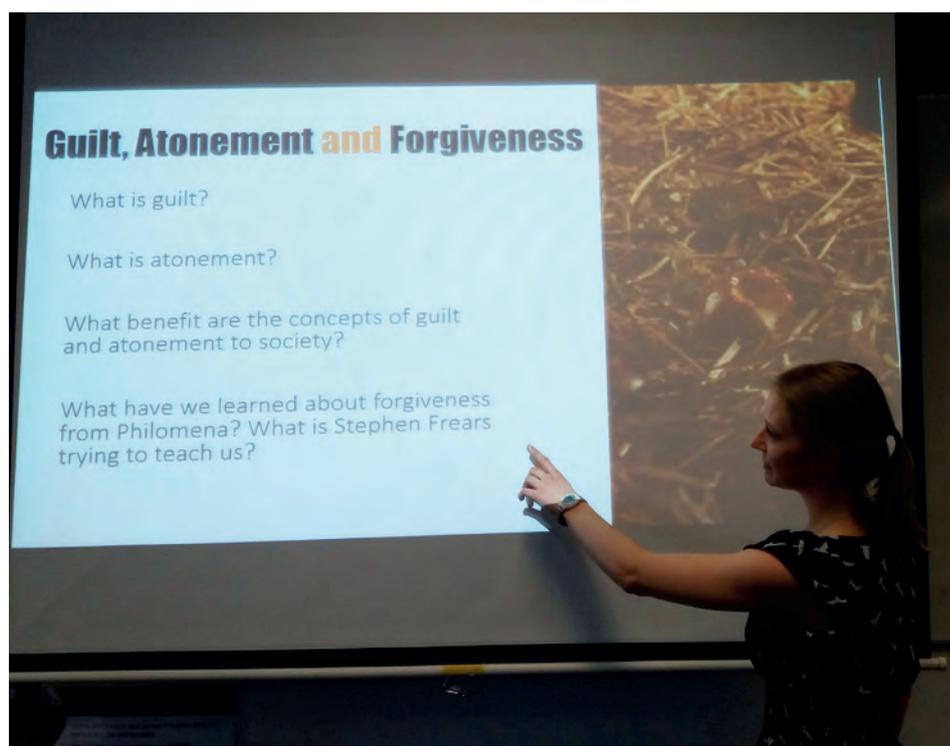
A witness in the classroom

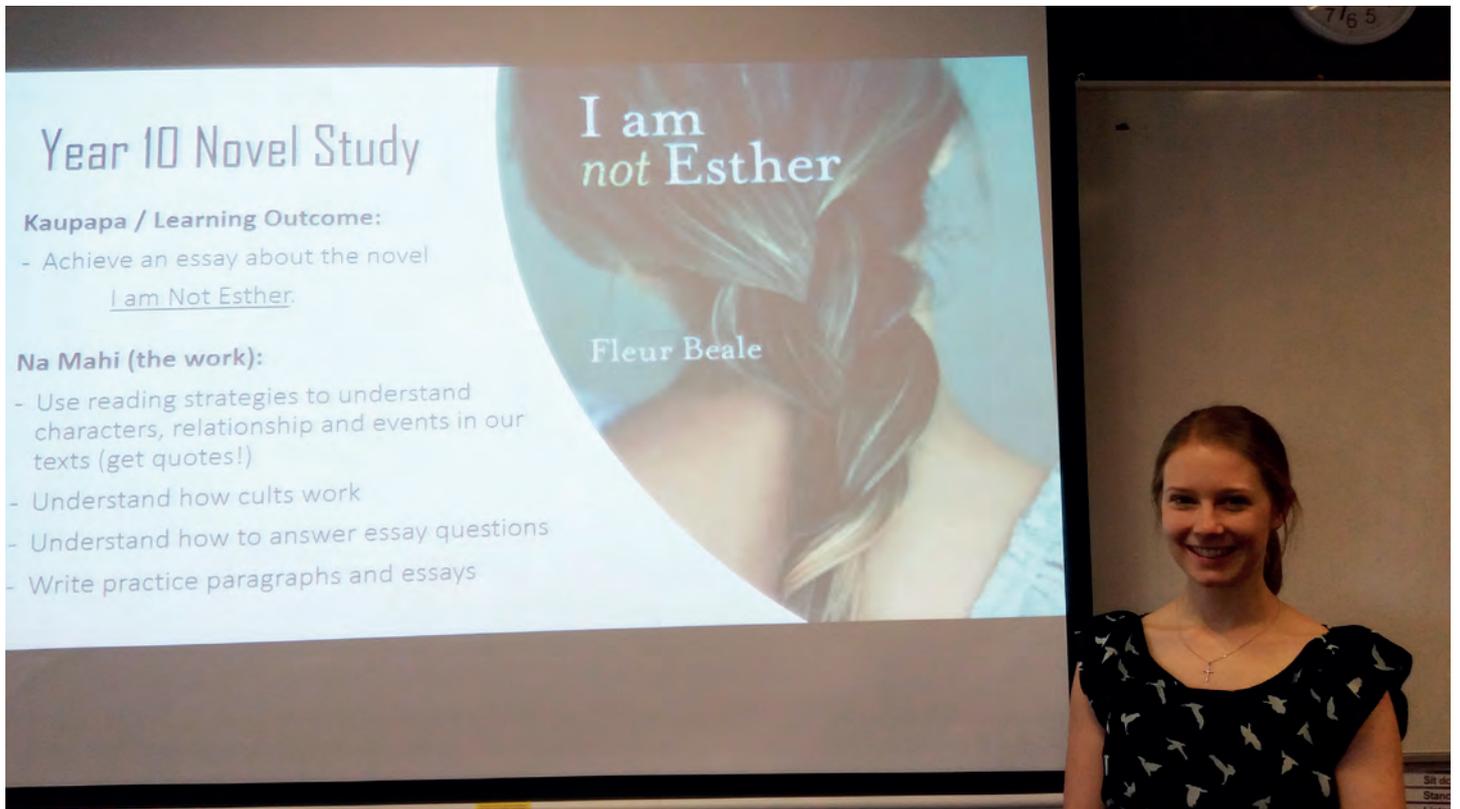
Mary-Anne Evers

An Arts degree is not a stepping stone to a job at McDonalds. In studying Arts you learn to understand how the world works, how the world thinks and why things have happened to make the world the way it is now. Teaching English is trying to get students to engage with these thought processes through studying texts and other English-y things, like doing research, and that horrid horrid assessment (apparently) called a speech. But what good is it if you understand the whole world, but cannot change its soul?

Brrring. The bell goes and I walk into class, smiling at my year 12 girls as I greet them. We've just finished watching *Philomena*, an intriguing film about a Catholic girl who gets pregnant out of wedlock in the 1950s. Nuns forcibly adopt out her son. My students tell me that there is no way she should feel guilty for having sex. My challenge to them is: "She's Catholic though. So for you to say she shouldn't feel guilty is to say she shouldn't be Catholic. Do you want to say that?" Some students stick to their guns, but many accept that as a Catholic, she believes she has sinned and should feel guilty. I've taught them

to think beyond their first reactions, and to consider the logical outcome of their opinions. Earlier in the year our conversation revolved around the character Robert in *Out of Shadows*. He turns a





Mary-Anne Evers at work.

“My obligation to my students, my employer and our government is to educate students in English according to the New Zealand curriculum. My obligation to God is to be a representation of Jesus, who lives in me, wherever I am and in whatever I’m doing.”

blind eye to the racism, bullying and inadequate leadership in his boys’ boarding school in Zimbabwe. That’s a silent bystander. “Alright girls – it’s all good and well to judge Robert and other characters in the book. But what injustices in the world are you ignoring?”

I let it slide when I overhear a few girls chatting amongst themselves. And I’m perfectly happy when one girl drags me into the conversation “you believe in God, ae Miss Evers?”. Yes. Yes, I do. I’m glad that our novel study of *I am not Esther* has become the springboard to this conversation. In the novel, a teenage girl ends up living in a cult. We study cults in general, Gloriavale, the Exclusive Brethren and look at the differences between what these groups believe and what mainstream Christians believe. I get to explain the basics of Christianity, and the few Christian girls in my class also get a voice. We decide that ultimately the problem with a cult is the rigidity of the rules, and absence of thinking for yourself. We also learn not to judge people by what they wear – we don’t know whether or not that is their choice.

It’s Friday last period and my year 11 class is going to be hard to settle. I taught most of these girls last year, so have a good relationship with them. They know that I’m a Christian, and that I go to church every Sunday. They know, that

for me, going into teaching, was following a calling from God. The girls just want to chat, so I strike a bargain – they work solidly for half an hour and then we’ll do “questions”. When I read out the questions the students have written down, it brings us to topics such how should we study for the exams? Why did Minnie in *The Help* take revenge on Miss Hilly? Discussions go deeper and become more heated when we start on topics like what should you do if you like your best friends’ boyfriend? Should you wait for sex till after marriage? They nod encouragingly when I explain the way I think about it.

All of these stories – told with some artistic licence – are snapshots of little bits of myself that I bring to the classroom. They are examples of how I challenge students to think about their worldview, and to introduce them to the basics of something that is so, so important to me – my faith. The big question is – how appropriate is this as a professional in a secular school? I don’t know if I have it completely right, but I have thought about it a lot. I know that I cannot put inappropriate pressure on my students to view things the way I do. If a movie was made of me teaching my class, they’d use a low-angle shot to film me. I’m very aware of the fact that the balance of power leans my way, and I cannot abuse my position of power to influence

students' minds. At the same time, the reality is, I tell my students how stroopwafels are the best kind of biscuits, and sometimes I'll give them a few sentences in my second language – Dutch. I might use examples from immigrant culture to help explain class activities. My lame teacher joke is threatening my students I'm going to confiscate their phones and turn it into fuel for my motorbike (among a myriad of other empty threats. All surprisingly effective). And I wouldn't be an English teacher if I wasn't telling everybody about the latest best book to read. I don't leave my personality at the door when I teach.

My obligation to my students, my employer and our government is to educate students in English according to the New Zealand curriculum. My obligation to God is to be a representation of Jesus,

who lives in me, wherever I am and in whatever I'm doing. I want to be a good example of what a Christian is like. I want to be a role model of the Christian life, and I want to teach students to think critically about their ways of thinking. I do this by choosing texts and activities that can be a springboard to discussions on religion and Christianity. I do this by stepping outside the role of teacher at times, and having a personal conversation with students who are interested in what I think and believe. Ultimately, I hope that my influence might prepare the ground of these peoples' hearts, and that this prepares them for the day that God puts someone in their life who can confidently and appropriately challenge them with the gospel message.

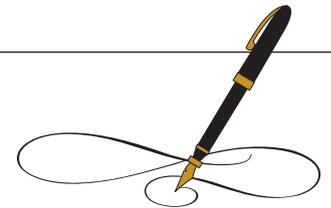
The last note of this song is for you, my audience. Don't simply applaud my

efforts, and forget that this is your job too. All the world's a stage, and you're an actor that plays the part of Christian. All the world's a stage, and there's people watching you. You need to understand your world. You need to understand how people think. You need to understand global issues, and understand your countries' and your churches' history. You need to understand the world of your work. Whether you complete a particular degree at University that exposes you to these issues, or whether you pick up books like Nancy Pearcey's *Total Truth*, this is an essential part of being equipped to change it.

Miss Mary-Anne Evers teaches English at a Christchurch high school and is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Outward focus

Sally Davey



Style, Substance and Leadership

There used to be a saying in our culture that went something like this: "It's what's in the heart that counts." In the context of gift-giving, it's not the packaging of the gift that matters, it's the contents. Or, to be even more exact, it's the loving intent of the giver. How often we treasure a gift, not so much for its looks or what it will do for us, but for the love of the giver that it represents.

This sounds familiar to the Christian, since the Bible has plenty to say about the heart of man, as opposed to his outward appearance. Jesus made many distinctions of this kind when he was speaking about sin in the Sermon on the Mount. We tend to think about sin as outward behaviour: he described sin as something coming from our hearts.

We can see this in the narrative parts

of the Bible, too. For instance, when Samuel was searching for the king who was to replace Saul among Jesse's sons, he found Eliab impressive. But God spoke to him and warned: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7).¹

In the Psalms, we find the same truth represented in poetic form. After his sin with Bathsheba was exposed by Nathan, David lamented his sin against God. In Psalm 51 we have his prayer of repentance. David acknowledges that God is much more interested in the heart than he is in outward displays of compliance: "The sacrifices of God are a broken

"While we can quickly disparage the wider society's propensity to make judgements based on style rather than substance, I think we have to ask ourselves whether we don't in fact fall into the same error in the church — at least at times."

spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (verse 17)

Election lessons

I began writing this in the last week of our recent election campaign. At this stage the outcome is still uncertain, but there were aspects of the race that really grabbed my attention and got me thinking about the related subjects of style, substance and leadership. One thing that was particularly striking was the sudden change in leadership in one of the major parties, which seemed to have a huge impact on the rating of that party by the voters (at least according to opinion polls taken about a month before the election). Like many others, I was surprised that a new leader could have such a big effect. What did this mean?



Part of this, of course, was the result of the media attention given to this new leader, and to her obvious attractions: she is young, good-looking, friendly and articulate. She came across well on television. (She was also a candidate of liberal views, and many in the media prefer that – of this we are all well aware.) But it also said something about what New Zealanders find appealing in a leader – at least temporarily. She was frequently pictured surrounded by big crowds of adoring, enthusiastic children and university students. There was lots of talk about “momentum for change” and “vision and energy” etc.

Then, seemingly, it evaporated. Some serious questions started being asked about taxation, about relative experience,

about whether farmers were really the eco-villains they had been presented as, and so on. The question of whether age and experience really did mean boring and tired started being revisited. And after a week or two the other major party, representing the voice of experience, regained the ascendancy and went on to win a significantly bigger share of the party vote.

What was happening? It seems to me that this was a bit of a case study of style versus substance, and of what we look for in our leaders. It has implications for the choices we make as Christians; and indeed even for the kinds of leadership we look for in the church setting.

It’s a fact of life in our age that people go for what is attractive – and all too often, attractive on a surface level. Though we try to deny it, a good-looking face draws us; and we are inclined to like someone who looks nice, particularly if they have a sympathetic demeanour. Especially important is the ability to project empathy – it gives the impression that the projector likes us, understands us, and will most likely behave well toward us. The people who come across like this are very likely to be popular. But how reliable is popularity as a gauge for good leadership? This is an important question, but it’s one that is not asked often enough. Likeability does not necessarily mean you will prove to be a good leader. It may mean that you are prone to do things which increase your popularity, because you like being popular. It may tempt you to be a manipulator of others, rather than someone who makes wise choices for the good of those others.

It seems to me that we would all be much better off, in whatever sphere of life we are talking about, if we looked at the heart rather than at the outward appearance of a potential leader. We need to know a person properly if we are to discern whether he or she has the capacity to lead well. Sudden and rapid rises in popularity as the result of a few days of television exposure do not inspire confidence in the discernment of those polled. The only way for a potential leader to be found suitable/capable is for that person to be tested, over time, and through a series of trials. When that person is found to have the character that it takes to respond well to such trials and testing, only then can we say that he or she might make a good leader. By their fruits, so to speak, is a person’s character known. Another way

of putting this is that public choices reveal a person's inner moral compass. True character, and thus the state of that person's moral compass, is only known if these choices are consistent, over time.

Like me

Another fallacy which seems to have been revealed by the election campaign is that we are all looking for a leader who is like us. This, naturally, is perpetuated by the media when the commentators speak with the lofty power of assumption that women voters will naturally prefer women in leadership positions; and that young people will only really be energised by youthful leaders. Everyone (it seems) was expecting that a young, "visionary" leader would motivate young people to get out and vote in large numbers.

Perhaps that happened (I have yet to see the polling figures for young people and women), but perhaps, conversely, it didn't. There is a quiet, but insistent thought in my head that keeps suggesting it may also be true – or even more true – that our better selves at times recognise that we need leaders who are wiser, or more experienced – or better – than us. A telling exchange during the campaign impressed me. A reporter suggested to the leader of the incumbent party that he was perhaps a little old, tired and out of touch with young voters. To which he replied: "I know this generation. I brought them up." Indeed. Times six.

Style vs substance in the Church

While we can quickly disparage the wider society's propensity to make judgements based on style rather than substance, I think we have to ask ourselves whether we don't in fact fall into the same error in the church – at least at times.

For instance, how often do we – routinely – assume that a youthful elder, preacher or activity organiser will "relate" more successfully and therefore be a better leader for the younger Christians in our midst than an older person? How often do we assume that a "cool" way of dressing, a knowledge of contemporary music trends, current youth hobbies etc will ensure that a person will be more help to the younger person in the pews? How often do we stop to ask whether a combination of wisdom, years of negotiating trials, and a love for God's people regardless of age might make a person a better leader?

Need I ask whether we are not tempted, sometimes, to make choices for leaders on the basis of likeability? This is especially relevant when the ability to project empathy is considered. I don't know how many times I've heard fellow Christians express enthusiasm for a preacher who has engaged warmly with the congregation through his demeanour, his choices of expression, his efforts to show sympathy for those struggling in various ways, and so on. What I've been waiting for – but have seldom heard – is some comment on the clarity of his biblical exposition, the perception of his application, or the wisdom of his insight into the human heart. I'm not for a minute suggesting that preachers shouldn't be empathetic, of course, but if the empathy is only conveyed as a matter of style, and not as the genuine state of a heart which has known sorrow and loss and experienced the comfort of God (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-7), then we are looking in the wrong place for a leader.

It seems to me that there are obvious and biblical reasons for looking for leaders who are experienced and wise from many years of service to God. It was not for nothing that Isaiah warned in Chapter 3 of his prophecy that being led (astray) by women and youths was God's judgement on Judah. To have ill-chosen people as leaders was a product of carelessness and a lack of sound, mature judgement on the people's part – and they would suffer God's discipline for it. (God did, however, have compassion on those who were being so mistreated by their capricious and thoughtlessly-chosen leaders. See Alex Motyer's commentary on Isaiah 3²).

But there is no reason, given all that we know from the teaching of Scripture, for us to imitate the mistakes of the world in this regard. Let's make sure we emphasize substance over style and choose good leaders – wise, experienced, discerning and mature. Elections can be instructive, but better by far is the word of God himself.

1 I know the text goes on to state that David was good-looking, too; and Hebrews 11:23 states that Moses had been a beautiful baby, but I think it would be fair to say that the general tenor of the Bible teaches us to beware of the snare of good looks.

2 Alex Motyer, *Isaiah* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series, Nottingham, 2009), pp. 63-6.

“Let's make sure we emphasize substance over style and choose good leaders — wise, experienced, discerning and mature. Elections can be instructive, but better by far is the word of God himself.”

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

March 1978

January is a bleak month for the churches when all activities have just about ceased except the Sunday worship services and often attendance at these have dwindled to dismally small numbers. This is surely the time to stand by your minister or reading elder when he gets to the pulpit. A little poem aptly tells the tale of the church on vacation:

*The preacher does better when
you are there;
'Tis hard to preach to an empty
chair.
But your seat is not empty
when you're away
For Satan's imps are there that
day.*

*They make faces at the
preacher's text,
They nudge the folks who are
sitting next.
To show them how much the
Church is down,
And it's all because
YOU'RE OUT OF TOWN.*

The North Islanders again flocked to the annual Family Camp near Cambridge and had a most enjoyable time together. Our main speaker, who also was the devotional director, was the new principal of our Reformed Theological College at Geelong, Professor R. O. Zorn. With his wife they must have felt really at home in our midst. For many years the Rev. Zorn pastored the Hamilton congregation and helped to shape our denomination both at presbytery and synodical level. The main theme of the camp was "The Christian Life" and it was remarkable that right through the week all Bible study groups and evening addresses were very well attended by almost everybody, and that sure is a good indication that the topic and questions for discussion were timely and helpful for our spiritual growth. As a regular family-camper I know what it is like when people hide away in their tents and caravans to dodge the various meetings.

For the last three or four years the camp has been honoured (or plagued;

this depends on your personal outlook) by a group of young church members clad in black leather coats and trousers, on roaring motorbikes. A paddock with plenty of craters outside the camp allows them to dare the devil in all sorts of feats and antics. Their presence has been a constant concern for those who are responsible for the running of Camp and has caused many a division of opinion among the campers. It is now quite obvious that patience is wearing pretty thin with many families. It may be high time that we question the intentions of these youngsters in coming to Camp.

It amazes me that so many parents live under a certain fear of losing their dear Johnny or Suzie when their children threaten to leave home if they are not allowed to "do their own thing". Reflecting on these attitudes, I am reminded of a little wisdom I came across once, viz. "If they threaten you with anything, don't listen to it, because if they wanted to do it to you, they would just do it anyway. But if they threaten, it is because there is a reason why they can't do it right then and there." The moral seems to be then, that there is no reason to be too impressed when youngsters rebel against you and the so-called "establishment".

April

Aren't we sometimes tempted to seek ways and means of getting rich quick, seeking material gains? One of these is the old oft-tried chain letter. I did it once, many, many years ago and was severely rapped over the knuckles by my minister at that time, the Rev. J. W. Deenick.

Recently, I came across a beaut in the CRC magazine, The Banner, and I'd like to pass it on to our readers. It might help you to get a new minister via a chain letter. "If you are unhappy with your minister," says this paper, "simply have your session send a copy of this chain letter to six other churches who are also tired of their minister. Bundle up your minister and send him to the

church at the top of the list in the chain letter. Add the name of your church to the bottom of your letter. Within a week," the paper promises, "you will receive 16,435 ministers and one of them should be a dandy. Have faith in this chain letter for ministers. Do not break this chain." One church did break the chain and they got their own minister back!

This year, 1978, is the silver jubilee for several Reformed Churches in New Zealand. These churches will remember that 25 years ago they established their local congregations and carved the name "Reformed" into the New Zealand scene. I hope that these celebrations will also be a time of sober reflections, particularly when we look at the way our membership has plateaued over the past ten years.

Evangelism still seems to be our neglected stepchild. Recently, the Auckland Presbytery held an elders' conference and had a close look at the pro's and con's of church growth. A careful study of our statistics revealed that birth control seems to have slowed down the biological growth pattern with conversion growth being even less exciting. There has been quite some traffic from one congregation to another, benefiting some congregations at the expense of others, but bringing no gains to the total body of Christ, if I am allowed to put it that way. Would it not be great if in this jubilee year every member would be used by Christ to bring an outsider to faith in Him and into the fold of our Churches. The 1979 Yearbook would then show a 90-degree rise on the statistical graph. What a celebration that would be!

If ever you visit the Christchurch congregation and worship with them, I'll tell you where to find the elders. You'll find them on the 4th row from the front. And don't you dare sit on that row. As their news bulletin advises you: "Please, move on".

Abridged

Report on the 30th Synod of the RCNZ



Andre Holtslag

There were times when it seemed like this was the Synod at Philippi. Devotion after devotion was from the Epistle to the Philippians. However, this really was the Synod at Palmerston North. Around fifty delegates from the RCNZ churches as well as around 20 delegates from other NZ churches or overseas churches were wonderfully cared for, fed, and hosted by the saints at Palmerston North. Thank you!

There were other times when it seemed like this was the Hug Synod (not huge, but hug). Rev. Paul Archbald was appointed, much to his discomfit, the denominational hugger of fraternal delegates. While this occasioned much uproarious laughter on the part of the other delegates, the mirth surrounded what were serious and precious moments as the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Presbyterian Reformed Churches of Australia were formally welcomed into sister church relationships. "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity. (Psalm 133:1)." The Overseas Mission Board will work with the P.R.C.A. to see whether there are possibilities to co-op-

erate with them in their long-standing mission work in Vanuatu.

The synod began with the election of the Moderamen on Saturday afternoon. Rev. David Waldron was chosen as Moderator, Rev. John Haverland as Vice-Moderator, Pieter Van der Wel as First clerk, and John Van Dyk as Second Clerk. They served the synod in a gracious and helpful manner. Especially noteworthy were the numerous times that our Moderator called on us to pause our deliberations to pray for the people and the work that was being discussed. Rev. Aaron Warner preached on 1 Cor. 3:5-17 as part of the customary prayer service on Saturday evening.

Quite curiously, this year being the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it would be accurate to refer to this Synod as the Synod of Indulgences. No one kept an actual count, but I would venture a guess that our Moderator granted delegates somewhere in the region of 30 particular indulgences and even, at one time, a plenary indulgence. These were, however, not of the 'forgiveness of sin' variety, but of the permission to speak or time extension, etc, variety.

Synod was privileged to hear addresses from faculty members of both



Mr Cornel Venema and Mr Leo de Vos speaking at the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation Conference before the 30th triennial synod of the RCNZ began. Mr Venema is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary and fraternal delegate for the United Reformed Churches of North America.





(from left) Messrs Ken Stevenson and Graeme Mitchell (PRCA), Mr Philip Scheepers (RTC), Mr R Dela Fuente Philippine (Reformed Evangelical Association of Churches).

of the theological training institutions that have provided training for students for the ministry in recent years. Dr. Philip Scheepers spoke on behalf of the Reformed Theological College and Dr. Cornel Venema spoke on behalf of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Delegates were encouraged to hear the commitment of both of these institutions to continue to train men for the gospel ministry in a way that honours the Lord, is useful to the churches, and able to speak to the sinful world around us. A new memorandum of understanding between the R.T.C. and the R.C.N.Z. was adopted. A deputy(s) for theological education will (God willing) visit M.A.R.S during the inter-synodical period.

A major item on Synod's agenda was a decision about whether or not to suspend our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated). Two delegates had flown over from the Netherlands and both pled with us not to do this giving an explanation for their recent decision to open up ordination in all offices to women. Synod listened carefully but out of concern for how the Scripture is being mishandled it was decided to suspend our relationship now and to terminate our sister church relationship at our next synod in 2020 if there is no change to the course the R.C.N. has set itself on. On the other side of the 'ecumenical relationships coin,' however, synod was blessed to hear Rev. Dr. Chan introduce the Christian Reformed Churches of Myanmar. This denomination is a growing and active denomination that is very busy in missions and evangelism and church planting in Myanmar.

Other agenda items that occasioned considerable discussion were overtures about establishing a study committee to consider the meaning and usefulness of confessional membership (defeated), freedom to change a local church's name (Synod decided to take no action), and the report of the Church Order Committee (all its recommendations were approved). Confessional membership has to do with agreeing that the creeds and confessions are a faithful summary of the teaching of the Bible. The overture about changing a church's name asked that while a church must identify itself as 'one of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand,' in things like signage and public documents, etc, it could call itself something other than the Reformed Church of _____. For example, it could call itself the Christian Reformed Church of _____ or _____ Reformation church, or Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church of _____.





(from left) Mr Chan Thleng (Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar), Mr A S A de Bruyn (GSKA), Mr M H Oosterhuis (RCN), Mr H Alkema (FRCA).

The Church-order recommendations that received the most attention were a definition of concurrence in matters of church discipline, what the appropriate and orderly ways for a session to act are if it has concerns about the discipline of another church, and the right way that the decision of a broader assembly (Synod/Presbytery) is to be implemented by Presbytery/Session. The National Diaconate Committee brought the matter of timely disaster relief to Synod. New guidelines for responding to disaster situations were approved by Synod. Local deacons will be responsible to initiate an immediate appeal if they consider it appropriate. Funds collected should then be forwarded to

the NDC who will aim to direct them towards the recovery phase through an appropriate Christian church or agency that combine “word and deed” in their work. Other highlights of synod included the opportunity to send a letter of thanks and encouragement to Alan and Odette Douma, and for us to receive a letter of gratitude back from them and have it read out during the synod. Those present will also long remember the daily singing of (mostly) male voices in the praise of God. Typically the evening sessions are where we receive the greetings of the delegates representing our sister churches. Brothers like Rev. Jack Sawyer of the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches of North America and Dr. Cornel Venema of the United Reformed Churches of North America have previously been a part of the R.C.N.Z. so it is a joy and privilege to be with and to hear from these brothers again. All these addresses truly are a reminder of the reality of

confessing and believing that we are a part of the catholic (worldwide/universal) church.

Because Synod completed its agenda a little early, time was allotted for a general discussion about church planting in light of two R.C.N.Z. students at the R.T.C. (Josh Meinsma and Andre Posthuma) having both expressed interest in church planting work. The Bishopdale and Rangiora delegates spoke about the blessings and challenges of the recent church planting work in Rangiora. Various resources of our sister churches (O.P.C. and U.R.C.N.A.) were brought to the attention of the delegates, together with some practical notes about church planting from the Grace Presbyterian Churches.

After agreeing to the offer of the delegates from the Reformed Church of Hukanui to host the next synod (Scheduled for 2020), the 2017 Synod of the RCNZ closed with the reading of





Psalm 131, a short devotion by the Moderator and prayer. I am sure I speak on behalf of the delegates who attended when I say that though synod week is quite tiring, it is also a very special blessing to fellowship in this way with brethren in Christ!
Soli Deo Gloria!

Mr Andre Holtslag is the minister in the Reformed Church of Avondale and was appointed to be the reporter for the Faith in Focus.



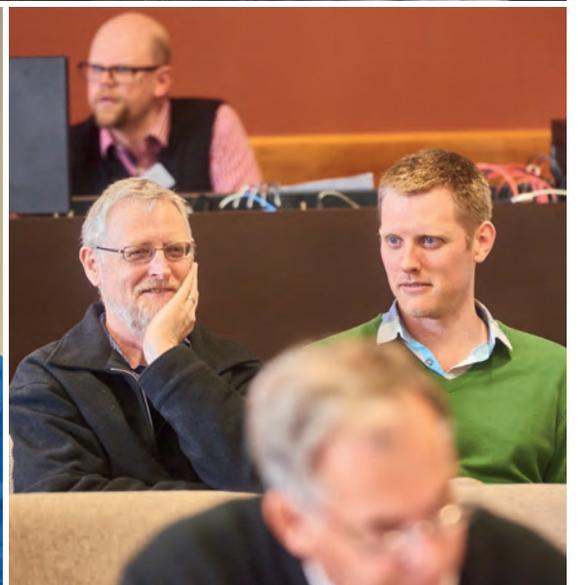


(left) Mr Jack Sawyer (OPC) and Mr Jan de Gelder (CanRef)

(middle right) Mr Ken Stevenson receives a brotherly hug from the Moderator Mr David Waldron.

(middle left) Mr Andre Holtslag sports his Chicago Cubs baseball shirt.

(bottom left) Messrs H Alkema and R Pot (FRCA) and Mr Renier Noppers (CRCA).



Celebrating 60 years as sister churches



the Rev. Jack W. Sawyer addressing the Synod.

Fraternal Address to the 30th Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, meeting September 9-15, 2017 at the Reformed Church of Palmerston North, Palmerston North, New Zealand: Presented on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by the Rev. Jack W. Sawyer, Administrator of the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.

Fathers and brothers, delegates of Synod, fellow fraternal delegates, assembled guests, *those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.*

John Calvin wrote to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in April of 1552 the following:

“Amongst the greatest evils of our century must be counted the fact that the churches are so divided one from another that there is scarcely even a human relationship between us; at all events there is not the shining light of that holy fellowship of the members of Christ, of which many boast in word, but which few seek sincerely indeed. In consequence, because the members are torn apart, the body of the church

lies wounded and bleeding. So far as I have it in my power, if I am thought to be of any service, I shall not be afraid to cross ten seas for this purpose, if that should be necessary.”

Perhaps it is one of the few things I have in common with John Calvin, but in the kind providence of our Lord, having crossed the Pacific ocean 15 times and 8 other seas and oceans, it is my very great privilege to be among you once again in order to bring you earnest and affectionate Christian greetings on behalf of your sister denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We greatly rejoice in your comradeship in the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and thank you for the loyal, longstanding and fruitful bond of love and fellowship that has been sustained between us since 1957. Though we be on the far side of the world from one another, God’s providence has repeatedly brought us together to share ministerial personnel, theological education, missionary work, diaconal service, and ecumenical endeavor, that are, as of this very year, now entering their seventh decade. How grateful we are for God’s goodness in sending us a beloved, chosen sister to aid us, repeatedly lifting our hearts and our arms in the struggle to be faithful in upholding the Reformed faith in these dark days of decline in the Western world, state and church. What joy, and what comfort, there is in celebrating the 60th anniversary of our ecclesiastical fellowship.

Since we last visited your Synod in 2014 the OPC has celebrated the 80th anniversary of her founding on June 11th 1936. In 1935 Prof. J. Gresham Machen, prominent Presbyterian Church leader, Professor of New Testament and founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, was deposed from the ministry of the PCUSA for his refusal to obey unscriptural demands of the hierarchy of the church. This hierarchy in-

sisted on his support for an agenda of unbelief then being promoted at home and on the mission field. In 1936, during the height of the Great Depression, 5000 souls, out of a church of millions, separated themselves, along with those ministers and elders who had been deposed along with Machen. In 1936, in order to return to the Word of the Lord and establish a truly Presbyterian Church, a brave little group convened in Philadelphia as the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of America. (Later being sued by the PCUSA over the use of the name PCA our fathers, having little or no money to contend a lawsuit, surrendered the name PCA and would become the OPC in 1939).

Now, 81 years later, and still preserved in the faith of our fathers, the OPC consists of 17 Presbyteries in the USA and Canada. There are over 300 churches and mission works, of which the median size is between 75-80 members. There are approximately 500 ministers and teachers, 1000 ruling elders, and 800 deacons serving the slightly over 30,000 souls who constitute the communicant and non-communicant membership of the church.

The OPC continues to be vitally committed to the work of worldwide outreach through denominational ministry in foreign missions, home missions, and Christian education.

OPC missionaries have been active on foreign fields from Uruguay to Uganda to Ukraine; from Austria to Ethiopia; from Switzerland to South Africa; from Port au Prince, Haiti to Quebec City; from China to Columbia in South America. The fields are white unto harvest and we request you to continue to work with us and pray for us and our missionaries. And of course, as always we invite you to second your missionaries to our works as you have so often generously done in the past. We have need of short and long term missionaries. Let me add here the greetings of our dear brother, and yours, Mark Bube. He regrets very much being unable to be present at this Synod and sends his greeting.

Home missions also continue to be a priority of our General Assembly and presbyteries; and new congregations have been gathered, organized, and instituted on a regular basis, for which we are most grateful to the Lord. Please have a look at the website of our Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension. The Rev. John Shaw, General Secretary of this committee, is always on

call to help sister churches with his experience and expertise in church planting.

The OPC promotes Christian education through Sunday School curriculum materials produced in partnership with the PCA and Great Commission Publications. A Timothy program exposes high school students to the experience of theological education via a conference hosted at various seminaries that feed our corps of ministers, and yearly expose young men to the possibility of a pastoral life. An intern program supports candidates as they prepare for a call and ordination. A web presence is maintained through the highly utilized ministry of opc.org. Most encouraging is the pending publication of a new Psalter Hymnal in partnership with the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Diaconal Ministry is supported through periodic national diaconal congresses, and, germane to this year's hurricane season, with organized teams who are already working in disaster relief missions to Texas and Florida. Widows and orphans are cared for, as well as retired ministers who face financial shortfalls in later life.

In the area of ecumenicity, we have now ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland Continuing, the Evangelical Reformed Church Westminster Confession in Switzerland and Austria, and the Bible Presbyterian Church. We have a renewed relationship of correspondence with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. This renewal involved the unusual step of our 84th General Assembly issuing an apology to the Christian Reformed Church of Australia for our part in allowing our relationship (established in the 1960s) to lapse in an un-brotherly and in a less than church-orderly way. We express our appreciation to the Rev. Reinier Noppers for seeking us out and pointing us to the forgotten history between our churches. Now we face together the daunting, but hopeful, process of actually getting to know one another again.

On a very positive note, our 85th General Assembly will meet concurrently with the URCNA Synod next June at Wheaton College. The Lord willing, we will hold numerous joint sessions for worship in order to inaugurate our new Trinity Psalter Hymnal. We earnestly hope that you will send a fraternal delegate.

We continue to exercise active membership in the North American Presby-

terian and Reformed Council and the International Conference of Reformed Churches. We were very grateful to find ourselves of one mind with the RCNZ in the unsought and unpleasant task that fell to the OPC in calling for the ICRC to suspend the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands from membership in the Conference. We pray that the Lord will turn the RCN back to the old paths, the faith of their fathers and ours.

Of theological note, the 83rd General Assembly received a study report on the question of the Republication of the Covenant of Works in the Mosaic Covenant, seeking to answer the question of the compatibility of such theological constructs with the Westminster Standards. The need for this arose due to severe controversy in one of our presbyteries.

As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we invite you, our beloved sister, to ponder afresh with us one of the foundational slogans of that age. It also is one worth pondering and preserving: ***ad fontes***. Arguably, without the return to the fountainhead of Scripture and the church fathers like Augustine, there would have been no revival of the other solas of the Reformation. On his death bed the great reformer John Calvin (who, ironically, who had instituted so much biblical change in Geneva), and who was steeped in the original texts of Scripture with a keen knowledge of the Church fathers, urged the leaders of Geneva, ***"not to innovate-we often ask for novelties-not that I desire for myself by ambition what mine remains, and that we retain it without wanting better, but because all change is hazardous and sometimes harmful."*** "The advice of this leader is filled with layer upon layer of wisdom," yes also for the OPC and RCNZ.

Nevertheless, a day came when Geneva itself no longer walked in the footsteps of their own ***great ille theologus***. Even Geneva, ***"the most perfect school of Christ since the apostles"***, left her Reformed birthright. How much more then should we heed Calvin's death bed charge. How much more likely are we to have our lamp stand removed from its place among the churches of Jesus Christ. Often and again we hear the siren call to be relevant and contemporary. We hear, ***ecclesia reformata semper reformanda***, a Reformed Church is always Reforming. Yes indeed, but not by revolution, instead by a fresh application, ***ab initio***, from the first principles of our fathers and our own sincere embrace

of their practice of *ad fontes*. Does not the discerning eye note that history is strewn with churches that did not heed Calvin's dying declamation? God help us to avoid innovation and ask for novelties, remembering that all change is hazardous, and sometimes harmful.

Over 60 years ago, our fathers of blessed memory came to an ecclesiastical scene in New Zealand that was impoverished by innovation. Led by men like the Rev. Bill Deenick, our fathers, looking ahead and seeking to be relevant in a new land and culture, nevertheless returned *ad fontes* to the fountainhead, with the fully self-conscious goal (as the Rev. Deenick wrote to me in 1993) *"of establishing the bona fides of the RCNZ as a faithful, fully confessional Reformed Church."*

The OPC history is exactly parallel to this. We also are a church of secession from the insidious innovations wrought in the early 20th century by modernism in the PCUSA. This separation was necessary in order to return to the Word of God, the Westminster Standards (*"the creed God has taught us in His*

Word"), and Scriptural Church government. Paraphrasing Machen on June 11, 1936, *"the pain of the long years of struggle having melted away... our hearts were filled with joy that at last we were members of a true, Presbyterian church."* This shared historical narrative is no doubt one reason our two churches have meshed so well in so many ways for so many years.

I end with an anecdote from my history, and yours. Over thirty years ago it was my privilege to preach in Hamilton. After my sermon, based on proof texts for Lord's Day 5 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Rev. Alex Scarrow, then in retirement, firmly gripped my hand at the door and said to me passionately, *"that Gospel shall never die."* If rhetorically I may, as one whose life has been defined in so many ways by my place among you, grasp your hands, fathers and brothers, for this fleeting moment, the gospel of our fathers in the RCNZ and OPC, the gospel we have confessed and propagated together for 60 years, shall never die.

Now may the blessed Lord Jesus,

King and Savior, continue to subdue us to himself and his Word, that as fellow pilgrims together on the narrow path that alone leads to life, we may continue hearing and heeding the words of the Prophet: *Stand by the way, and behold, and seek for the ancient paths where the good way is; and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.*

As we celebrate 60 years as sister churches, I close by reading a prayer from C.H. Spurgeon first uttered in 1871. It is, I think, reflective of the loving regard of the OPC for the RCNZ, and I hope your prayer for us:

Lord, keep us all from sin; teach us how to walk circumspectly; enable us to guard our minds against error of doctrine, our hearts against wrong feelings, and our lives against evil actions. Oh, may we never speak unadvisedly with our lips, nor give way to anger. Above all, keep us from covetousness which is idolatry, and from malice which is of the devil. Grant unto us to be full of sweetness and light. May love dwell in us and reign in us. May we look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others. Give us to live for Jesus. There is no life like it. Help us to be Christly men, Christ's men, and may we in all things reflect the light which we receive from Him. Bless our beloved Church, and all its organizations. O God, take care of it. Oh! You make every member of the Church a pastor over others. Let all strive together for the good of all, and so may Your kingdom come among us. And prosper all the churches of Jesus Christ. What we ask for ourselves we seek for them. Let missionaries especially be helped by Your Spirit, and may there come a day in which the minds of men may be better prepared to receive the Gospel, and may Messiah's Kingdom come to the overthrow of her that sits on the Seven Hills and to the eternal waning of Mohammed's moon, to the overthrow of every idol, that Christ alone may reign. Our whole heart comes out in this. Reign, Immanuel, reign; sit on the high throne; ride on Your White Horse; and let the armies of heaven follow You, conquering and to conquer. Come, Lord Jesus; even so, come quickly. Amen and amen.

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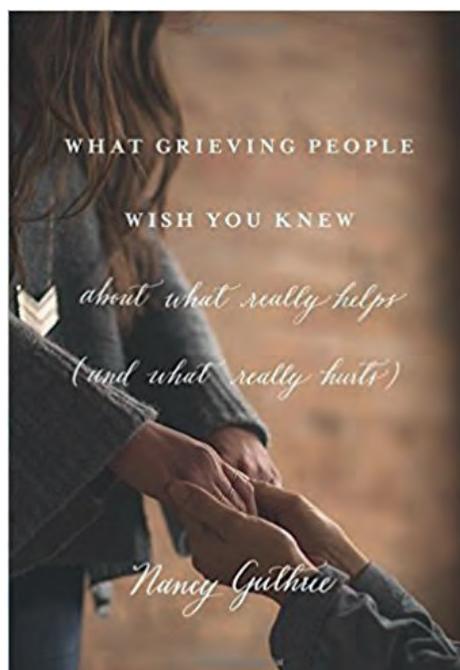
*New Zealand pigeon/
kereru.*
Photo: W Walraven

Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? *Matthew 6:26*

What Grieving People Wish You Knew about what really helps (and what really hurts)

by Nancy Guthrie; 188 pages; Crossway; 2016

reviewed by Rebecca Bredenhof



We have all struggled with what to say to someone who has lost a loved one. Whether it be at the funeral, waiting to give our condolences, or an encounter with the bereaved at the store or at church, it can be challenging to offer words of comfort that don't sound cliché or inadequate to our ears. What can we say that will help this person in their grief and sorrow? Sometimes we are at a loss of how we can best help a friend in their season of grief. Too often, we don't think much past the first few months after a death. But grief is a long and difficult journey, and our brothers and sisters in Christ need us to be there for them in this painful time. Nancy Guthrie has written a practical guide for those who want to help their friends and family members who are grieving.

Guthrie writes on the perspective of someone who has suffered profound loss, as two of her three children died in infancy. She has experienced firsthand the comfort that thoughtful words and caring deeds can bring, but also the well-meant comments that can unin-

tionally hurt. To write this book she questioned many grieving people via an online survey, asking them to provide concrete examples of what others had said or done that helped them in the midst of grief, and throughout the book she shares many of these testimonies.

Guthrie gives straightforward advice on what to say, what not to say, what to do, and what not to do. As you read the chapter "Typical Things People Say" (that miss the mark), you will probably cringe in the realization that you yourself have said some of these things, unaware how insensitive these words may sound to a person raw with grief. "I know just how you feel" is one example. This statement, though well-meaning by trying to establish camaraderie through a similar experience, in essence minimizes the other's loss by suggesting that their grief isn't unique. "You'll be fine" is another comment that sounds encouraging enough at face value, "but what the grieving person hears you saying is that the person who died didn't really matter enough for his or her absence to matter."¹ Ouch.

Or have you ever said "Just call me if you need something"? A grieving person is not going to call. They likely don't even have the head space to know what they need. A more helpful thing to do is figure out what can be done for them and then do it. Tell them that you're going to mow their lawn, pick up their groceries, or help them with their taxes. This is putting into action your love and concern for them in their grief.

Even the simple question of "How are you?" can be a tough question for the bereaved to answer. It makes them feel put on the spot to give what is hopefully an acceptable report of how they are really doing. "The grieving person knows what the questioner most likely wants to hear – that everything is getting better, the world is getting brighter, the darkness is lifting, and the tears are subsiding. But oftentimes that just isn't the way it is, and it can be awkward to be honest about the confusion, listlessness, and loneliness of grief."²

What can we say instead? Guthrie's survey revealed that there are two particular things that grieving people really

want to hear from others, and they are closely connected. First, they love to hear stories, anecdotes, or things that their loved one said or did that were meaningful, and the more specific the better. Second, they want to hear the name of the person who died. "Oh, to hear that person's name. It is like salve to an aching soul, music to a heart that has lost its song."³ So, talk with them about their loved one who has passed on! Tell them about the special thing he did for you, the way she was always so encouraging, or the joke he told that you still laugh about. Don't be uncomfortable about speaking the deceased's name, for hearing it spoken will bring comfort to those who mourn.

Perhaps the most insightful chapter is the one entitled "Assumptions we make that keep us away." Often people unconsciously distance themselves from the grieving for one reason or another – possibly we're unsure of what to do or say, or feel we don't know them

"If I had to boil down the message of this entire book to just two words, these two would probably cover it: show up."

well enough, or maybe we assume that the grieving just want to be left alone. But, as Guthrie writes, "If I had to boil down the message of this entire book to just two words, these two would probably cover it: show up."⁴ She encourages us to put aside any awkwardness we might feel and simply show up, and here again she offers many tangible ways of doing so.

Also really helpful is a section about heaven, briefly summarizing what the Bible teaches about it as well as tackling some common misconceptions. Guthrie brings forward the comfort and hope that believers possess, knowing they will be with Christ when they die. She also cautions not to assume the deceased is

in heaven; in such cases where it seems unlikely she encourages readers to simply offer what they know to be true about God, rather than give false hope by going beyond what the Bible says. While Guthrie's regard for and knowledge of Scripture is evident throughout the book, the notion of covenant seems to be missing in this section on heaven, specifically in regard to the eternal destiny of children who die. But this is a minor imperfection in a beautiful chapter that focuses on the richest comfort we can offer those who are grieving – the resurrection that is yet to come!

This is not an easy read. There is so much raw emotion written on its pages, in the countless examples of real people's experiences of hurt, hope and healing. I found sometimes I had to put this book down for a while because reading about so many individuals' sadness and pain became truly overwhelming. If you are anything like me you will probably shed more than a few tears, but you will also learn a lot, for this book will equip you with skills, words, and ideas "for being a balm of comfort to the grieving people in your world."⁵ I encourage you to read this book if you know someone who is grieving and you want to truly help them, to walk alongside them in their grief. And even if you don't know someone who is grieving right now, some day you will. Reading this book will help you to help them in their time of need. I highly recommend it.

- 1 p.40
- 2 p.55-56
- 3 p.66
- 4 p.69
- 5 p.178

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No Christian Silence on Science: Science from a Christian Perspective

Margaret Helder. Edmonton: Creation Science Association of Alberta, 2016. Softcover, 110 pages.

Reviewed by Wes Bredenhof

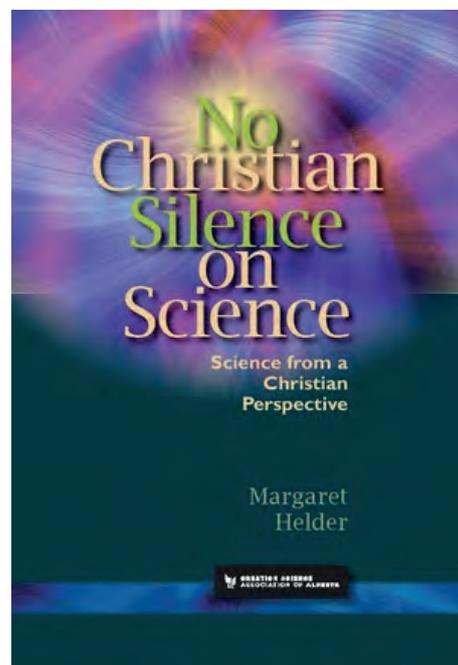
Many people have heroes. Also when it comes to science, there are names held in awe: Galileo, Newton, and yes, for some, Darwin. I have a scientific hero too, but she's not as well-known

as the other scientists I just mentioned. For many years, my scientific hero has been Dr. Margaret Helder, a Canadian botanist and prolific writer. I've always admired not only her faithfulness to biblical truth, but also her courage and passion for that truth. I'm thankful for what God has done through her efforts.

No Christian Silence on Science is a collection of essays illustrating how Christians should think about science. Dr. Helder helps readers recognize that Christians are up against a clash of worldviews. She points out some of the pitfalls that inevitably threaten believers who venture into science. She lays out lessons to be learned from history — for instance, a self-taught naturalist named Philip Henry Gosse. In his opposition to Darwin, Gosse "showed more zeal than common sense" (page 108). Dr. Helder also tackles the question of whether Christians who take the Bible seriously can make any accommodations for biological macro-evolution or geological old-earth positions.

This little book is especially going to be helpful for university students taking advanced science courses. There are sections that are quite technical. I don't have any formal science education beyond high school and an intro physics course in university, so the discussion in chapter 2 about "clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats" (CRISPRs) was a bit beyond my ken. For Christian post-secondary students, chapter 4 is explicitly directed towards equipping them for navigating the academic scientific environment. Not only is there a helpful academic orientation, but also concrete advice. For example, Dr. Helder reminds students that at first glance it may appear that creation-based resources are inadequate for answering the challenges encountered at a secular university. But: "What the student must remember is that there are conservative scholars who support a young earth position, and there are technical documents in this genre as well" (page 85). Seek and ye shall find!

However, I don't want to leave the impression that this book is going to be an impossible read for the non-scientists. There's plenty here that's both accessible and fascinating. Take two of the appendices to chapter 2. One is about the echolocation abilities of bats. The other is about a favourite food of some bats: tiger moths. Some species of bat use sound to locate their prey — and this echolocation system is quite sophis-



ticated. In fact, "some echolocating bats can control the width of the ultrasonic beam which they emit" (page 52). The tiger moth, on the other hand, is able to evade bats 93% of the time. One of the ways it does this is through its own generation of high-pitched sounds. These sounds actually jam the bat's echolocation system. Dr. Helder's conclusion: "This is clearly a matter of programming in the insect brain as well. This creature is clearly designed. Without the hardware, the software would be irrelevant, and vice-versa" (page 56).

If you know a young Christian who's studying science, this book would be a great gift. After all, the author takes the Bible seriously as God's Word and our ultimate authority in life. She also has the scientific expertise to demonstrate how Darwinian explanations of origins are inadequate. That one-two punch makes this book highly recommended.

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