

UNITY, Liberty, Charity

*“In Essentials Unity,
In Non-Essentials Liberty,
In All Things Charity”*

Contents

The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) – learning from history	3
Biblical tolerance in a post-modern world	8
Outward focus The coming of the Gospel to our Pacific neighbours	12
What has happened to mutual discipline?	15
Letter to the editor	17
Letters from New Zealand	18
Books in focus	21

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Editorial

Article 29 of our church order deals with compliance on matters of conscience, and states: *Assemblies may not compel compliance on the part of a minority in matters of conscience not clearly defined in the Word of God and the Forms of Unity.*

In his commentary, the late Dick Vanderpyl writes the following:

The principle has already been established in article 27 of this Church Order, that decisions at ecclesiastical assemblies must be reached only upon due consideration and whenever possible by common consent. And it is definitely not satisfactory to have small majorities in policy-making decisions. We should seek to convince one another from God's Word and persuade each other with arguments in harmony with our confessions. To seek true unity of purpose we should aim for as much unanimity as possible.

Such decisions are regarded as settled and binding, unless it is proved that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. Attempts must then be made to revise or nullify such decisions.

However, article 29, under consideration now, makes it clear that no assembly may force a minority to comply with a decision when it is a matter of conscience not clearly defined in God's Word and the Confessions.

There are questions of faith and piety when an assembly should hesitate to vote. Such matters should not be regulated by a 'thus saith the majority' but by a 'thus saith the Lord'. All endeavours should be made to bring all to agreement as much as possible.

In essential things we seek unity,

In non-essential things we leave liberty,

In all things we pursue charity.

Mr Vanderpyl's comments are a fitting introduction to our theme "Unity, Liberty, Charity". Our contributors look at history and contemporary settings as we consider the ramifications of this saying for the life of the church.

Mr John Haverland exhorts us to learn the lessons of unity, liberty, charity.

Mr Paul Archbald investigates the issue of tolerance in our times.

Mrs Sally Davey introduces some of the story of the coming of Christianity to the Pacific Islands.

We share some amusing and serious snippets as written by the late D. G. Vanderpyl some decades ago.

What has happened to mutual discipline and Why still read the Ten Commandments? – articles from *Una Sancta*.

Crossroads Prison Ministries newsletter for June 2018.

Did Abraham really exist? A satirical look at 'biblical' criticism.

Book reviews are: *It Has Not Yet Appeared What We Shall Be: A Reconsideration of the Imago Dei in Light of Those with Severe Cognitive Disabilities* by George C. Hammond, reviewed by OP pastor Philip T. Proctor; *Faith, Hope, Love: The Christ-Centered Way to Grow in Grace* by Mark Jones, reviewed by Ryan M. McGraw; *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* by Cornelis P. Venema, reviewed by OP pastor D. Patrick Ramsey.

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.

The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) – LEARNING FROM HISTORY

John Haverland

In these opening articles we are considering the motto, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.” This saying originated in Germany during a period of terrible conflict known as The Thirty Years’ War. If the truth of this saying had been appreciated and applied by all sides, religiously and politically, much misery

would have been avoided and millions of lives would have been spared.

In this opening article I will explain the historical context of the war and its devastating effects on Germany. The war was very complex, so I will only summarise its causes and course. God can bring good out of evil, and he did so in these awful years with the writing of great hymns in those terrible times, with a healthier perspective on the relation-

Battle of Rocroi (1643), Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau (1964–). commons.wikimedia.org





Frederick V of the Palatinate
en.wikipedia.org

ship between church and state, and with a better understanding of the meaning and application of tolerance.

100 years on

Last year Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout the world celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation began in Germany in October 1517 with the objections of the German Augustinian monk Martin Luther against the sale of indulgences. His ideas and writings spread rapidly through Germany and the rest of Europe. As time went on divisions emerged within Lutheranism. These were evident between Martin Luther and Phillip Melanchthon over matters of free will, the place of good works, and the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Shortly before Melanchthon's death, which occurred on 19 April 1560, he expressed his willingness to depart from this life that he might escape "the rage of the theologians". The more moderate Lutherans, the Philippists, began to turn to Calvinism with the result that it spread into Lutheran territories during the second half of the 16th century.

Protestantism in Germany reached its

maximum territorial advance in 1566. In the middle of the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church began its Counter Reformation. Pope Paul III called a Church Council that first met in 1545 in Trent, in northern Italy. These councils cleaned up many of the moral abuses of the clergy, and clarified and reasserted traditional Roman Catholic doctrines. This strengthened the Roman Catholic Church in Germany.

In the first half of the 16th century there was much tension and conflict between the Lutherans and the Romans Catholics. This was resolved in part in 1555 with the Peace of Augsburg, but the relationship between Protestants and Catholics was constantly strained, and this Peace gave no protection for Calvinism in the Holy Roman Empire. As the Calvinists became stronger in the Lutheran territories this became a more pressing issue.

Phase 1

Herbert Fisher introduced his account of the Thirty Years' War with these words; "There are moments in the history of peoples when a variety of causes combine to produce a dangerous inflammation of the public mind. The centenary year of the Protestant Reformation (1617) was such a moment." Germany was in a bad state: businesses were struggling, the country was becoming impoverished, intellectual life was going backwards, and the witchcraft delusion was at its worst between 1580 and 1620.

In 1619 Ferdinand II became the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and king of Bohemia. He had been educated as a Jesuit and was a strenuous advocate of the Counter Reformation. His election brought simmering religious tensions to boiling point. In 1618 anti-Protestant religious violence had broken out. The Bohemian nobles, who were mostly Protestant, appealed to the Emperor for protection and for a guarantee of their religious liberties. When Ferdinand did not confirm these they rose in revolt.

Fisher provides a perceptive and scathing assessment of Ferdinand II writing that he "was the first pupil of a Jesuit college to mount the imperial throne, and his intelligence, narrowed, embittered and directed by Jesuit teaching, was governed by a single passion and a single purpose. He hated protestants and determined to uproot them from his dominions by a resolute course of persecution...he succeeded in his object of 'liquidating' the heretics and of bringing all the religious and intellectual life

of his realm under the iron rule of the Jesuit order. But the price was terrific ... few men so honest, pious, and consistent have brought upon the world so great an avalanche of misery."

In 1619 the Bohemian nobles deposed Ferdinand II as their king and offered the crown to the Calvinist ruler of the Palatinate, Frederick V. The Palatinate was one of the major German states, and the birthplace of the Heidelberg Catechism. His acceptance of this offer sparked off fighting between Calvinists and Catholics all over Germany.

Phase 2

After 16 years of bitter warfare peace was made in Prague on 15th June 1635. Most of Protestant Germany agreed with this. But just when it seemed that peace was in sight, the war entered a new phase, losing its original religious character and becoming largely secular and political. As a result the war continued on as savagely as ever for another thirteen years. The war had begun as a religious struggle with political overtones and ended as a political struggle with religious overtones.

During this second half of the war the German Lutherans, the Danes, the Swedes, and even the Catholic French became involved, each pursuing their own interests, but fighting their battles on German soil. "There was little of religion, but there was an intolerable amount of marching and countermarching, of sieges and sacks, arson, murder, and of all the horrors which savage and starving mercenary troops are able to inflict upon a helpless population."

Peace at last

"At last, after infinite negotiation, the *Peace of Westphalia* was made on October 27 1648." This peace was hammered out in a series of conferences in the German province of Westphalia between 1643-1648. Political agreements were made and a religious settlement guaranteed equal rights between the Lutherans, Calvinists, and the Catholics. No one was really satisfied with the outcome but they were all tired of the war.

"The war left Germany culturally, politically, economically and physically devastated." Williston Walker expands on this assessment stating the war was "an unmitigated and frightful evil. The land has been ploughed from end to end for a generation by lawless and plundering armies. Population had fallen from sixteen millions to less than six. Fields were waste. Commerce and manufacturing destroyed. Above all, intellectual life had stagnated, morals had been roughened and corrupted, and religion grievously maimed. A century after its close the devastating consequences had not been made good."

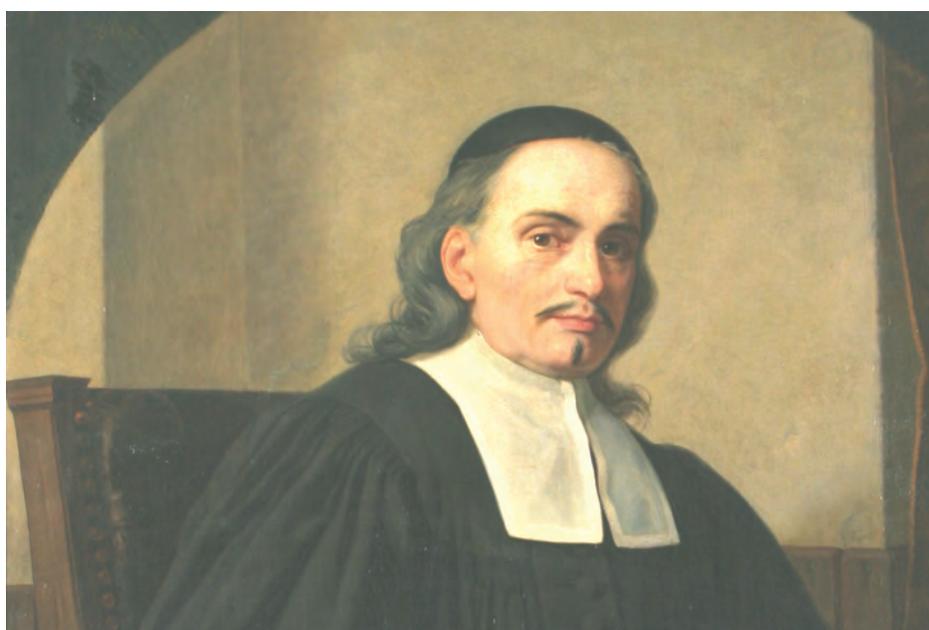
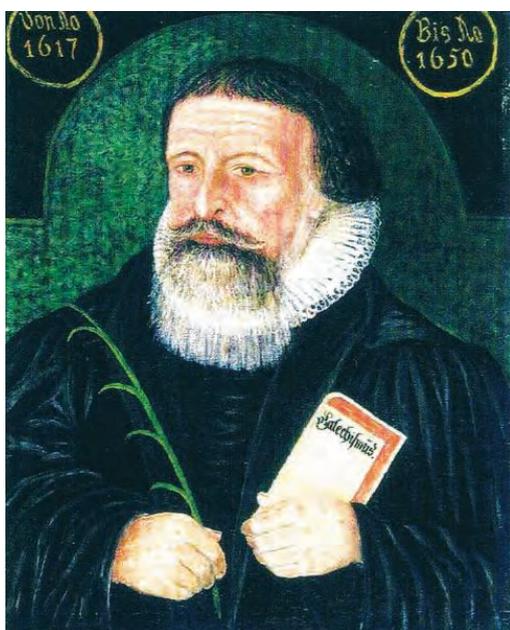
This peace marked the end of the so-called "wars of religion". In many ways the war was all for nothing as the Peace of Westphalia returned Germany to the religious situation of 1529, 120 years earlier! "All the bloodshed and misery had brought the religious settlement full circle in that tormented land."

Good out of evil

Martin Rinkart was a German Lutheran pastor during the horrors of this war. He ministered in his native town of

(left) Martin Rinkart, 1586,
http://www.heiligenlexikon.de/BiographienM/Martin_Rinkart.html

(right) Paul Gerhardt, 1607 – 1676,
<https://www.stadtmuseum.de/veranstaltungen/paul-gerhardt-zum-geburtstag> (cropped)



In the 21st century postmodern people have reacted against the extremism of the past few centuries, but the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. Now the most prized virtue of our postmodern age is “tolerance”.

Eilenberg. The town was walled and so offered some protection for its residents. As a result it overflowed with refugees, but the overpopulation in the town caused widespread famine and disease. Rinkart opened his home to refugees and victims of the war, even though he often had difficulty providing food and clothing for his own family. His sacrificial love to those around him was a demonstration of the love of Christ. During the plague of 1637 Rinkart officiated at over 4000 funerals, including that of his wife. At the height of the plague he was the only remaining pastor and conducted as many as 40 to 50 funerals per day.

In spite of these incredible demands on his ministry he wrote many theological works and over sixty hymns. The best known of these is “Now thank we all our God”. After Luther’s hymn, “A mighty fortress”, Rinkart’s hymn has been the next most widely used in German churches. It is often called the national hymn of Germany because it has been sung on many occasions of national thanksgiving. The translation by Catherine Winkworth in 1858 has made it popular in English-speaking countries.

Another famous Lutheran pastor and hymn writer of this time was Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). Three of his hymns are included in *Sing to the Lord*, “O Lord, how shall I meet you” (227), “All my heart this night rejoices” (246), and “Commit whatever grieves you” (506). Knowing something of the circumstances which prompted the writing of such hymns enhances our singing of them and our appreciation of the communion of the saints through the ages.

In all things charity

The Thirty Years’ War drove the people of Germany towards the ideal of toleration in matters of religion and conscience. Phillip Schaff wrote that it was during the horrors of this war “that a prophetic voice whispered to future generations the watchword of Christian peacemakers, which was unheeded in a century of intolerance, and forgotten in a century of indifference, but resounds with increased force in a century of revival and reunion” [i.e. the 19th century].

This “voice” was that of a Lutheran scholar, Rupertus Meldenius, who, in 1628 wrote a tract appealing for peace in the church. He warned that by making so much controversy about the truth they were in danger of losing the truth itself. He distinguished between teachings that were necessary and those which were

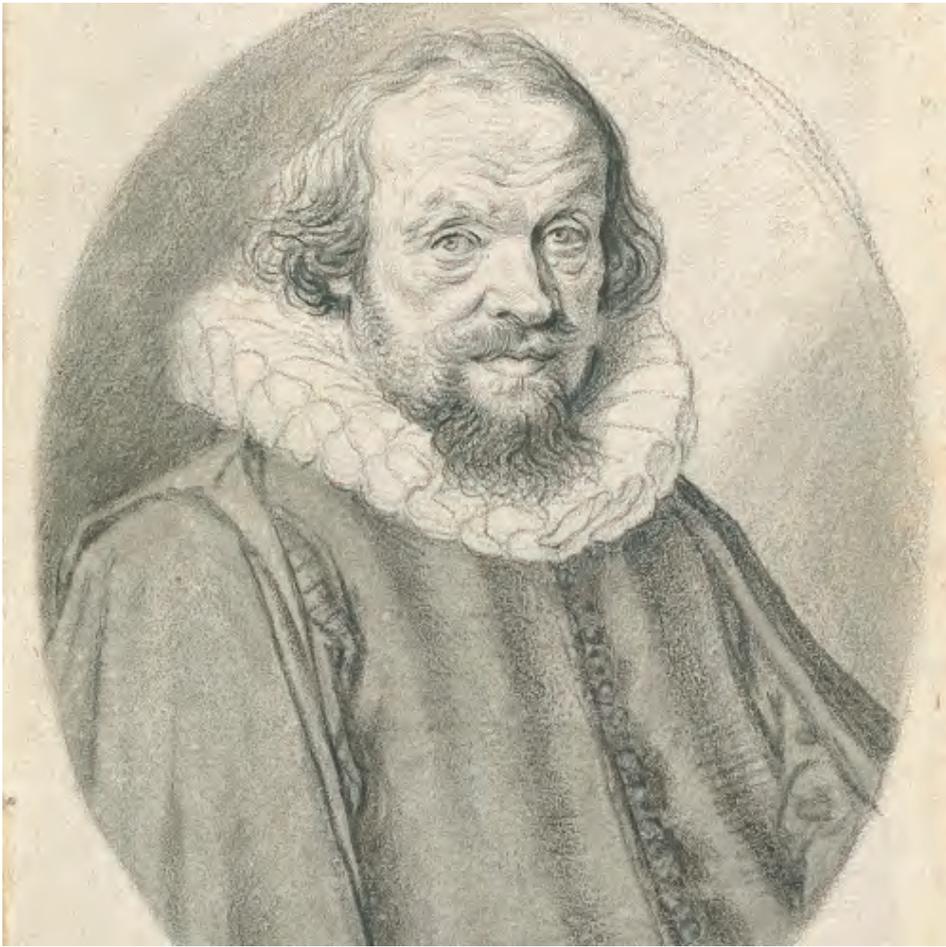
not necessary and appealed that Christians hold to the necessary truths; “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.” Against the background of the Thirty Years’ War he rightly urged that wars of religion ought not to be fought with swords and spears, but with an open debate and an earnest desire to unite around the essential truths of the Word of God.

Fifty years later, in 1679, the Puritan divine Richard Baxter wrote a book and quoted this saying of Meldenius, urging his contemporaries to apply this in their own religious debates. Baxter urged this against the background of the English Civil War, which was a series of three armed conflicts and political manoeuvring between Parliamentarians (“Roundheads”) and Royalists (“Cavaliers”) in the years 1642 to 1651. These wars were primarily fought over the manner of England’s government, but overlapped with conflicts between the High Anglicans, the English Puritans, and the Scottish Covenanters. These troubles were finally resolved in 1689 with the Act of Toleration.

Jesus warned his disciples, and us, that “wars and rumours of wars” will characterise this entire age between his first and second comings; “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt 24:6f). This was evident in the conflicts of the 19th century, and the two World Wars of the 20th century. The rise of fascism in Nazi Germany, and of Communism in China in the middle of last century, have graphically illustrated the depth of human depravity and how far evil men will go to pursue their own ends.

In the 21st century postmodern people have reacted against the extremism of the past few centuries, but the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. Now the most prized virtue of our postmodern age is “tolerance”. We are urged to tolerate every person and every idea regardless of race or ethnicity, colour or creed, or whatever sexual preference and lifestyle a person may choose.

As I write this the New Zealand Human Rights Commission is proposing a ban on “disharmonious speech”. Paul Moon, Professor of History at Auckland University of Technology, warns that this proposed free-speech ban would only apply to the sort of disharmonious comments that are “targeted at the religion and beliefs of ethnic minority communities” in New Zealand (he is quoting the words of the commission). This means



Rupertus Meldenius, Lucas Kilian (possibly), 1590-1635 – Rijksmuseum.

that people could say whatever they like about Christianity. He comments, "Surely the commission, and the rest of us, would be far better off adhering to the maxim of the Czech theologian Jan Hus: "Love the truth; let others have their truth, and the truth will prevail"."

In a time when there are voices condemning all debate and any criticism as "hate speech" we need to promote a climate where we allow people to disagree with each other and where there is a right tolerance and a healthy debate about the truth. Voltaire was quoted as saying, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Don Carson doubts the origin of this quote but affirms its truth; we must "preserve the right to say that something is right or wrong without becoming mean and nasty.... We are going to have to recapture the high ground of bold declaration of truth mingled with courtesy."

We do not want to go back to the persecution practised by the various religious groups during the time of the Reformation, nor do we want to repeat the misery of the Thirty Years' War. Wars of religions and of philosophies must not be fought with tanks and fighter jets, nor

with bombs and machine guns, nor with draconian legislation designed to silence debate, but with pen and paper, with sermons and speeches, with dialogue and debates. We want to promote a climate and culture of a right tolerance which encourages honest discussion and open debate.

One of our hymns expresses true Christian warfare as follows,

*Lead on O King eternal, till sin's
fierce war shall cease,
and holiness shall whisper the sweet
amen of peace;
for not with sword's loud clashing,
or roll of stirring drums,
with deeds of love and mercy the
heavenly kingdom comes.*

In our present age we have much to learn and apply from the saying of Meldenius, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity."

Notes

- 1 Williston Walker, *The History of the Christian Church*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1970, p. 390
- 2 The Council of Trent met in three sessions from 1545-47, 1551-52 and 1562-63
- 3 HAL Fisher, *A History of Europe Vol. 1*, Fontana, Glasgow, 1935, p. 620

- 4 Walker, p. 392
- 5 Fisher, p. 618
- 6 T Dowley (ed), *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity*, Eerdmans, 1977, p. 421
- 7 Fisher. P. 630
- 8 Walker. P. 396
- 9 Eerdmans, p. 422
- 10 Walker, p. 396
- 11 Eerdmans, p. 422
- 12 Kenneth W Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories*, Kregal Publications, Grand Rapids, 1982, p. 173. This hymn is included in *Sing to the Lord*, 365.
- 13 Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol 7, Hendrikson Publishers, Massachusetts, 1888, p. 650
- 14 Paul Moon, www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article, 4 June 2018
- 15 Don Carson, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-new-tolerance-must-crumble-says-don-carson>
- 16 *Sing to the Lord*, "Lead on O King Eternal", 473 stanza 2

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You can read the opinion of Mr Paul Moon: "Human Rights move endangers our free speech" at the following link: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c_id=466&objectid=12063987



Photo by Walter Walraven on Unsplash

Biblical tolerance in a post-modern world

P N Archbald

Introduction

We are all familiar with the way “tolerance” works in our post-modern society. It’s an “Animal Farm” toleration: all views and practices are equally tolerable, but some views are more tolerable than others. As in Orwell’s book, “Animal Farm,” this distinction is then used to justify persecuting those who are “less equal.”

Christians are in danger from this philosophy. Make no mistake about it, the church has always been subject to influence from the philosophy of the day – in our case, Post-Modernism. Post-Modernism is generally against dogma, against absolutes, and against creeds and confessions. It is more interested in the “journey.” You never step in the same river twice etc.

As a result, many church-goers around the world are becoming open to new ideas – ideas that are not only absent from the Bible, but even contrary to

it. Even some who call themselves Reformed are now open to women in office, same-sex marriage, and gender-blurring. At the local level, churches are throwing aside their historic positions and confessions, and uniting on a lowest-common-denominator approach. This is often rationalized by appealing to “unity in essentials.”

In addition to that, there are many older folk who have seen bitter doctrinal divisions within their churches, who simply do not wish to go through that again. Even when they know that some-

thing is going seriously wrong in their denomination, they are loathe to speak up, in case they would cause another split. They, too, might appeal to the saying “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.”

It is clear from this that while this well-known saying can be used in a proper, Biblical manner, it is also open to misapplication. It all depends on what one means by it.

What are “Essentials”?

I sometimes hear it said in our churches that the “essentials” of the Christian faith are summed up in the Apostles’ Creed. And so they are. But the reason why other creeds and confessions were later added is that sinners have a nasty habit of using language in an equivocal manner: using, for example, Biblical or credal words, but meaning something else entirely. As Humpty Dumpty said to Alice, “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.” Alice protests, asking “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” replied Humpty, “Which is to be master – that’s all.” Lewis Carroll might have been predicting Post-Modernism. But then, the problem was troubling the church long before Post-Modernism came on the scene.

What, then, do we *mean* when we confess the Apostles’ Creed? Note how the Heidelberg Catechism spends a lot of time explaining how we understand each article of the Apostles’ Creed. It does so with ample proof-texting from the Scripture. It is that understanding of those articles that is essential, not just the words themselves, as some kind of empty vessel into which we can pour whatever meaning we wish. If we were to look only to the words, then we could argue that we have essential unity with Roman Catholicism, for Rome accepts the Apostles’ Creed too. If the Reformers had taken that approach, the Reformation might never have taken place. The phrase, “in essentials unity” can be used well, but it becomes very dangerous if we use it as another way of saying, “No creed but Christ.” The same is true of the term, “salvation issues,” which can be used broadly to mean mere verbal assent to the Apostles’ Creed; or, it can be used with a good understanding of what the Bible teaches about the importance of doctrine.

As we think about “essentials,” we can approach this from another angle:

By asking, “To, or for *what* is a doctrine essential?” You might say, “For unity, of course.” But there are different levels of unity: unity in Christ, confessional unity, ecclesiastical unity, unity in some particular cause. I want to suggest several different aspects of this word “essential,” in the hope that it will help us to see what kind of unity we can apply in each case.

First of all, there are doctrines that are absolutely essential to salvation. One cannot be a Christian without holding to these truths. For example, John writes, “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (1 Jn. 4:2-3). Then in 4:15, he adds that “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” Confessing that Christ is both human and divine is essential to salvation. Even then, we have to ask about meaning. Jehovah’s Witnesses agree that Jesus is the (or “a”) son of God. But they do not believe that He is God the Son.

There are some doctrines that are not explicitly in the Apostles’ Creed, but were still regarded as “essential” by the Reformers. For example, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In the Book of Galatians, the apostle implies that a legalistic, works-righteousness approach to salvation is “accursed” (1:8).

Secondly, there are doctrines that play a significant role in the system of Biblical teaching. Change them, and the system will become warped. The effect, then, will encompass more than just the original doctrinal deviation – if those who listen are consistent. Perhaps one might hold one such error and still be saved; but enormous damage can be done to God’s people if these kinds of errors go unchecked. Such doctrines are “essential,” not necessarily for salvation, but for maintaining faithfulness to the teaching of God’s Word. Moreover, errors in some such areas may lead on to exclusion from God’s Kingdom – especially where the “logic” of the original error is followed through consistently. That is the nature of systematic theology: warp one part, and you will probably affect another. For example, what may seem like relatively small errors regarding the doctrine of creation, may lead one to listen more and more to modern science, and to doubt the veracity of God’s Word. Errors with respect to the doctrine of creation may also lead to errors in other areas, such as the roles of men and women in home

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Neither charity nor humility, however, require us to play down significant departures from God's Word. If this were not so, then we would have to conclude that the Bible is at times uncharitable.

and church; marriage and divorce; even the Gospel itself.

Perhaps that explains why the New Testament reacts so strongly to errors that we might regard as "secondary." See, for example, 1 Corinthians 14:37-38, where the apostle states that those who disagree with what he writes, "he is not recognized." This is very strong language, considering that he has been writing about the role of women in the church and the danger of Neo-Pentecostalism. Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 3,6 and 14, the readers are to keep aloof from/not associate with anyone who rejects the oral teaching of the apostles or who leads an unruly life. Church discipline was exercised on more than just those who rejected the truths that we might place in the "absolutely essential for salvation" category. We must not forget that even a secondary doctrine is still a doctrine taught by the Holy Spirit, for God's glory and our good.

In our circles, we have accepted that the Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions delineate the first 2 categories – those truths we must hold to, either because one cannot be a Christian without them; or, in order to

remain faithful as churches. There may, of course, be some additional issues that we need to address decisively because of modern developments. But generally, the Creeds and Confessions give a good summary of what should be "non-negotiable" to us.

What is "Liberty"?

A Third category might be considered: areas of doctrine where we have not been able to agree on the truth. For example, there is, no doubt, one right way to construe the doctrine of the last things; nevertheless, there is plenty of disagreement on the interpretation of apocalyptic literature – even in Reformed circles. So far as tolerance is concerned, I would put this category together with "indifferent matters," those issues where the Lord finds acceptable more than one approach. It is in these two last categories that we should allow the greatest liberty: in the one case, because we're not completely sure what the Lord wants; and in the other, because we are sure He is pleased with both approaches.

It is also good to keep in mind that the amount of liberty we are willing to allow might depend on the sphere



Photo by Sharon McCutcheon on Unsplash

in which we are operating. Ideally, I would argue, government should encourage only the true religion. Trouble is, if government is given the right to decide what is true religion and what is not, it will frequently make a wrong decision. The boundary between the two spheres of State and Church will then almost certainly then become muddled. For that reason, I would argue for religious toleration in society – not because I believe in pluralism as a philosophy, but because I want to see the government’s power kept within proper bounds. We can seek to persuade followers of other religions, the cults and sects, Romanism and erring Protestants. But we should not use force to suppress them. The government is armed with the “sword” for suppressing evil, but Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36). He therefore prevents His disciples from defending Him with swords. Our weapons are Word and Spirit, with prayer.

By means of God’s Word, we make it clear that those whose freedom we defend in society – their freedom to worship whom they wish in the manner they wish – nevertheless have no defense before God if they worship the lie or pursue error. To take this line is to recognize that God graciously gives sinners the freedom of time for repentance.

What is “Unity”

The different levels I have argued for in “essentials” points, I believe, to different levels of unity.

First, there is unity in Christ, which all true Christians share, whatever church they are in. There may be differences in doctrine that are significant, and which we cannot afford to let go. But I would be very cautious about proclaiming someone an unbeliever, unless they hold to some doctrine of which the Bible says, “Those who believe this do not know God.”

On this matter, BCF 29 has a helpful paragraph on the “marks of Christians.” Note that it lists different criteria than the marks of the true *church*. Of course, these criteria do not mean any true Christian is perfect in this life – as the BCF acknowledges. WCF 25:5 adds that this is also the case with true churches: no true church is completely pure in this life. As we decide how to treat others who claim to know Christ and other federations, we strive to remember our own weaknesses, while simultaneously maintaining our vows and upholding the Reformed understanding of the

Bible. Where we see a mixture of true doctrine, and errors that are not in that “essential for salvation” category, but still very important for obedience and faithfulness, I maintain that we must leave it to God to judge. It is not for us to consign such people to hell. Nor is for us to make light of errors that the Bible takes seriously.

Because we do not wish to make light of significant errors, our churches maintain a fairly cautious approach to inter-church relations. We hold dear the truths brought back to light by the Reformation. We have sworn to uphold these truths. Churches that hold to the same truths can become sister-churches. Churches that differ significantly on Confessional matters we either refuse to have anything to do with, or relate to in a different way. We do so to uphold our vows and to discourage our churches from tolerating errors that should not be tolerated.

There are, however, other ways in which we may co-operate, even with those with whom we could not unite ecclesiastically. We may join with Roman Catholics in speaking up against abortion, with other Protestants against pornography, or gender-neutralization. We may support organizations that distribute Bibles or seek to help persecuted Christians, even though they may not be Reformed. The level of co-operation must be decided on the basis of the activity involved, along with the nature of the errors held.

At the same time, we must be careful to maintain our own integrity as those who stand on the Biblical truth summarized in our Confessions. This is where we are at some risk, I believe. We are small in number in this country. Most people around us do not believe many of the things we do – even when they claim to be Christians. It is easy to feel, “Who do we think we are to insist we are right and they are wrong? What makes us think we have it all right?” If we cease to know who we are, or why have a separate existence as churches, then how much longer will we be able to give a witness to the truths the Reformation re-discovered? Loss of identity has probably been a big factor in the demise of many churches that used to be Reformed e.g., in the Netherlands. They have united themselves out of existence.

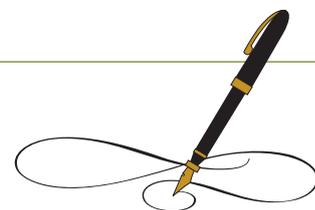
What is “Charity”?

Finally, I want to argue that “charity” is a virtue that cuts across all these cate-

gories and all these levels. “Charity” includes such things as: thinking the best of others, rather than the worst; acting and speaking graciously to others, even if we must disagree. With the Lord’s help, we should be able to manage that, whichever category of disagreement we are dealing with. Hence we can agree with the end of the saying, “in all things charity.” The same is true of humility, which should govern our view of ourselves, over against all others with whom we disagree. Keep in mind what the BCF says about the weaknesses of the true Christian as well as what the WCF says about the weaknesses of the true church!

Neither charity nor humility, however, require us to play down significant departures from God’s Word. If this were not so, then we would have to conclude that the Bible is at times uncharitable. Consider, for example, Titus 1:13-14, 3:10-11. Are these words uncharitable, or lacking in humility? Not at all! The apostles were committed to holding to all God said. Not only what He said about love, charity, and humility; but also what He said about truth and error. That is a balance for which we must strive, if we wish to continue as a faithful witness in the years ahead. Too far to one side, and we could end in sectarianism; too far the other side, and we invite loss of identity.

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



The coming of the Gospel to our Pacific neighbours

... accounts of native peoples of the region, along with their pitiful spiritual plight, aroused among Christians a deep desire to bring them the truth of Jesus Christ. Here were peoples mired in cannibalism, in polygamy, in animist religion and its dark, fearful view of the world.

The nineteenth century saw a wonderful expansion of the gospel, all around the globe. Nowhere was this more true than among the Pacific Islands, some of our closest neighbours today. Probably, though, you have heard little of this exciting story. You may live down the road from a Samoan or Tongan church and be unaware of how these churches began, back home on these islands. Perhaps you've taken a winter holiday in Fiji or Tahiti, without realizing you've stepped into the scenes of amazing chapters in church history. I didn't know much about the churches of the Pacific, so I recently decided to do a little research. What I learned has greatly encouraged me.

We have all heard about the British missionaries who came to New Zealand in the first few decades of the nineteenth century and established churches among the Maori people. But did you know that missionary work in the Pacific Islands predated the work in New Zealand; and that the churches established there endure to this day? Just a few weeks ago, an unbelieving friend told of a holiday she and her husband had taken in Rarotonga. They attended a service at a church there, because they'd heard the singing was extraordinary. This is just one indication of how the witness to Christ in these islands has endured.

Here, then, is a brief and roughly chronological introduction to the coming of the gospel to the main island groups of the South Pacific.

Where did the idea come from?

The travels of Yorkshireman, Captain James Cook, in the Pacific in the 1770s had profound effects. When he and

the others who sailed with him wrote accounts of their travels, their writings aroused enormous interest. To the world of Georgian England the Pacific Islands were exotic, and fascinating. Their flora and fauna were much admired, first in the drawings of naturalists like Sir Joseph Banks, who had accompanied Cook, and then, after specimens were brought home, in the country house conservatories of the wealthy.

But more than this, their accounts of native peoples of the region, along with their pitiful spiritual plight, aroused among Christians a deep desire to bring them the truth of Jesus Christ. Here were peoples mired in cannibalism, in polygamy, in animist religion and its dark, fearful view of the world. William Carey thought of going to these islands before finally heading to India.

Interest in taking the gospel to newly-discovered regions grew quickly among Anglican and other evangelical Christians. Despite the slow speed of communication in the late eighteenth century, people wrote letters, talked, and planned. Missionary societies were formed, and were some of the more successful interdenominational organisations in those days. One of the first of these was the London Missionary Society. Established by Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, it was a truly ecumenical evangelistic body, Reformed in character from its beginning in 1795. (Originally it was named the Missionary Society; from 1818 it was called the London Missionary Society).

Tahiti

The LMS was one of the great promot-

ers of missions in the South Pacific. By late 1796 the Society had bought a small ship, the *Duff*, and a Captain James Wilson offered to sail it with a group of 17 missionaries and crew. They landed in Tahiti in early 1797. The missionaries, who were charged with making friendships with the natives and learning their language, faced all sorts of problems brought by other Europeans. They had given the Tahitians firearms, and introduced diseases to which the natives had no immunity. The natives believed the diseases were retribution from their gods, and were suspicious of the missionaries. Eight of the missionaries left on the next British ship to arrive in Tahiti.

When the *Duff* returned to Britain it was sent straight back to Tahiti with 30 more missionaries. Sadly, however, a French privateer captured the ship and landed its prisoners in Montevideo and sold her. This was a huge loss to the LMS, but they pressed on, undaunted. Eventually their efforts spread the gospel around the world.

By about 1815 the tide had turned in Tahiti. The dominant chief had accepted the gospel, and the rest of the population followed. The Bible was translated into Tahitian, and a new code of laws based on Christian principles was written with the help of the missionaries. Though French rule of the islands meant Roman Catholicism was later encouraged, there were also French Protestants who settled there. By the end of the 19th century about three-fifths of the population of Tahiti were Protestant.

Rarotonga

In 1823 LMS missionary John Williams discovered the island of Aitutaki and started outreach to the people of Rarotonga. In later years he took two Tahitian Christians with him to Rarotonga, and used them as intermediaries to convince local chiefs of the need to believe the gospel.

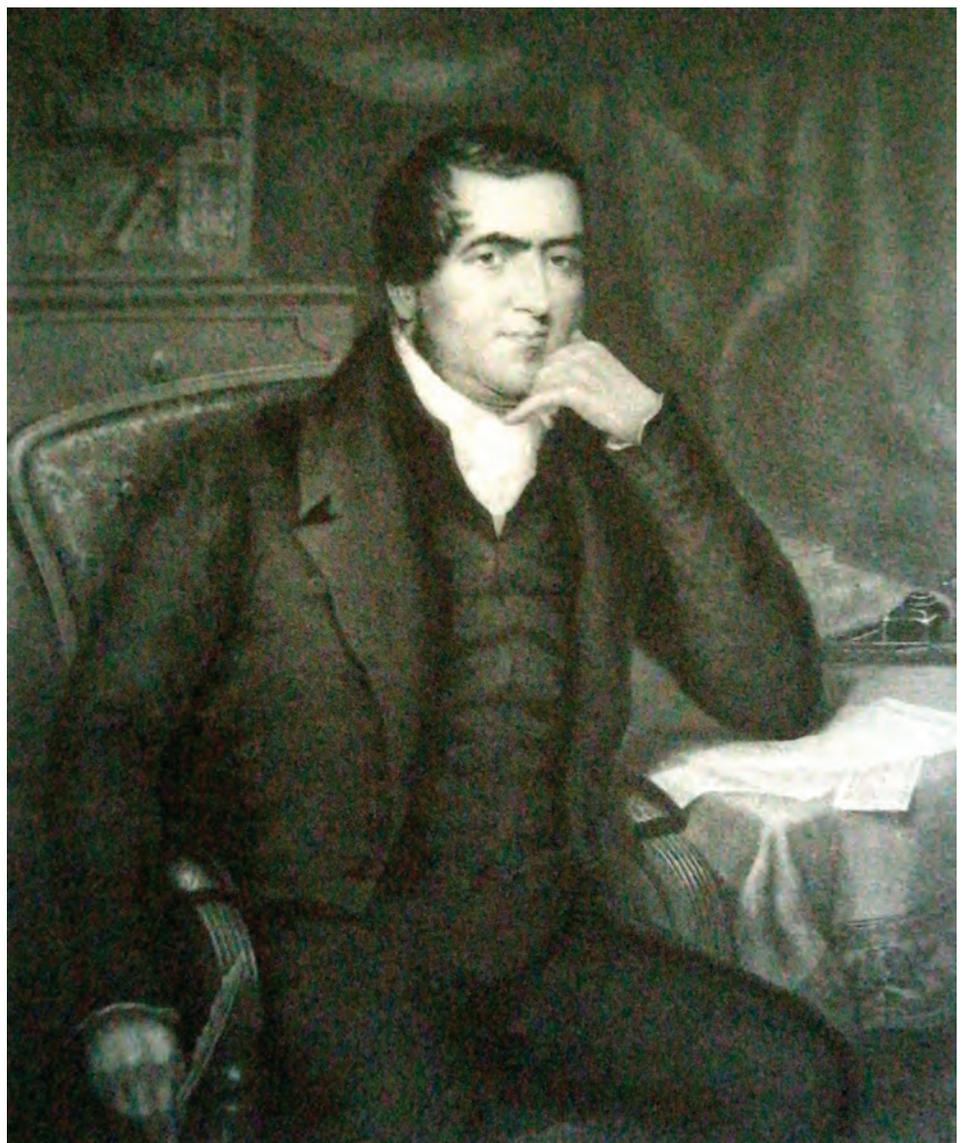


Samoa

LMS missionaries arrived in Samoa in 1830, accompanied by missionary teachers from Tahiti and the Cook Islands and a Samoan couple from Tonga. The LMS missionaries arrived at a time of fierce warfare and fighting between local chiefs. The population were tired of the violence and bloodshed, and the missionaries received a warm reception. Once the paramount chief Malietoa Vainu'upo accepted the gospel, his relatives and followers followed suit. The same happened when Tui-Manu'a, the sovereign ruler of the Manu'a islands also embraced the LMS emissary. The Kingdom of Manu'a became a LMS and Congregational stronghold. Within a few years, virtually the whole of Samoa was converted to Christianity. Their work led to the founding of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa. A theological college was established in 1844, and Samoan missionaries have since been active in many countries.

(right) John Williams (1796-1839), by George Baxter, 1843

(left) Institution at Malua, Samoa (LMS, 1869, p.14)



Tonga

It was Methodist missionaries who began the work and established churches here. A mass conversion occurred here in the 1830s. There was weeping for sins, public confession, and much celebration of the joy of forgiveness. (The descriptions sound reminiscent of the scenes of Whitefield's and Wesley's preaching in England in the 1740s). In 1839 a code of laws based on Christian ethics was enacted; and by the 1880s the majority of the population were Methodist Christians. This church was tied to the state, and ultimately severed its tie with the Methodist church in New South Wales, its parent church.

The New Hebrides/Vanuatu

Captain Cook discovered these islands in 1774 and named them the New Hebrides (Vanuatu, after independence in 1980). Among the early missionaries visiting the islands was John Williams, who had been active in taking the gospel to both Rarotonga and Samoa. In 1839, tragically, he was killed and his body apparently eaten by cannibals on the New Hebridean island of Erromango while preaching the gospel to them. His wife and their son Samuel returned to England, but the fact that his death did nothing to deter missionaries from work in the New Hebrides is by itself a testimony to the amazing story of 19th century missions.

Early European traders and planters had treated the native people badly, taking advantage of the immorality of the pagan culture, introducing firearms and alcohol, and even placing sick Europeans among the natives in order to spread measles, with fatal effect. They also took native people as indentured labour (known as "blackbirding") a practice that reduced the local population dramatically, with effects to the present day.

Christians in Britain were horrified at the stories of these practices and their effects, and this further stimulated a desire to bring these people the gospel.

The LMS was first to send missionaries to the New Hebrides. John Geddie, a Canadian Presbyterian of Scottish heritage, founded the New Hebrides Mission as an outreach of the LMS with a station on the island of Aneitum. He learned the dialect and quickly began preaching in it.

Better-known than Geddie was John Paton, sent by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1848. His reports soon confirmed the tales of brutality by Europeans, between islanders (including cannibalism), and of the taking of indentured labourers for other places he estimated 77,000 had been carried away). Paton labored for the rest of his life in the New Hebrides, even after the deaths of his wife and son. In the 1860s he travelled to both Australia and New Zealand, promoting the work of missions among Presbyterians in both countries (the Otago Free Church assisted the work). He also travelled to The U.S. and Canada in the 1880s to raise funds and arouse interest. After his death, members of his family continue to serve in the New Hebrides; some were still there as late as 1970. As reported by James McGoldrick in his book, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches: A Global History*, God blessed the work greatly:

"... a marvelous transformation of the culture occurred in the New Hebrides. Peoples who had been polytheists, idolators, and cannibals became devoted Christians. Motivated by faith in God's sovereignty and concern for lost sinners, these missionaries of the Reformed faith planted churches that remain as monuments to the courage and sacrificial character of their founders. Today about fifty-seven thousand islanders adhere to the Presbyterian Church".

Fiji

The Methodists were also instrumental in bringing the gospel to Fiji. The Melanesian population was declining during the nineteenth century, and Indian indentured labourers were being brought to the islands. The mission was success-

ful among the native Fijians, but not so much among the Indians. Eventually the large majority of Fijians became Methodists, and the work included the reduction of the language to written form, the translation of the Bible into Fijian, and the recruitment and training of indigenous ministers.

Conclusions

As has been seen, Protestant churches from Britain and the future Commonwealth countries played a key role in the spread of the gospel and the founding of churches in the islands of the South Pacific. It is significant, and encouraging, that men and women from a range of Protestant denominations served together in this work. These missionaries were courageous and committed, and not a few gave their lives for Christ.

What we should also remember is that many of the faithful Christians who took the gospel around the islands of the Pacific were not Europeans but native converts to Christ. Partly because they did not write books that English-speaking people read, their lives and labours are unknown to us – but not, of course to Christ. Though they may have been buried in unmarked graves in far-flung islands they are not forgotten by him, and perhaps we will hear their stories in heaven.

Notes

1 James E. MCGOLDRICK, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches: A Global History* (Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, 2012), pp. 536-7

Other sources for this article include Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Zondervan 1969 ed), Vol. III, Chapter XXII and various Wikipedia entries on the London Missionary Society, the Christian Congregational Church of Samoa, etc. I have not mentioned the Anglican Melanesian Mission, whose first bishop, John Coleridge Patteson, was also a martyr, but have focused on the LMS work, which was the main driver of missionary activity in the South Pacific at this time.

“The Sabbath was made for man. It was made for man’s benefit and happiness. It was for the good of his body, the good of his mind, and the good of his soul. It was given to him as ...a blessing, and not as a burden.” J C Ryle

What has happened to mutual discipline?

This topic came up at a recent meeting of our Men's Bible Study Society. We were discussing Article 32 of the Belgic Confession of Faith dealing with "The Order and Discipline of the Church" and we were using Rev. Dr. Wes Bredenhof's excellent little booklet called "The Beautiful Bride of Christ" as our outline guide.

Our club has several members who are either serving or have served previously in Consistory, and the question was asked, "Can you remember a time when two or three members of the Congregation came to Consistory with concerns about a fellow member with whom they had followed the path prescribed by Matthew 18?"

Well, I confess this question had me

scratching my head. Over the many years that I have been privileged to serve in Consistory, I cannot remember one incident where this actually happened. This was equally true for the other elders present. Yes, there were times when a member had come to us and insisted that Consistory should be doing something about brother so and so because he was committing terrible sins.

But invariably when the brother concerned was asked whether he had approached the erring brother himself with his concerns, the response had been, "That's your job!" And so, the ward elder was called in to investigate the matter but almost inevitably "the stable gate was wide open, and the horse had bolted."



Photo by rawpixel on Unsplash

Blessed is that
Congregation where the
members don't adopt
Cain's saying, "Am I my
brother's keeper?"

It would seem that the subject of mutual discipline is a difficult one in our circles. I must add that I have experienced some of our young people showing loving concern over one of their peers who was going astray and reaching out to him in an effort to draw him back, but rarely did they then follow the path of Matthew 18 and continue the process with the support of other members.

Seldom do they pluck up enough courage to "dob him in" to Consistory after their warnings went unheeded.

Why is it that there seems to be such a reluctance on our part to exercise mutual discipline in accordance with Scriptural principles? Are we perhaps affected by the typically Australian way of thinking that you don't "dob in" your mates? Or is it all too hard? Is discipline still seen as an act of love?

A bit of self-examination might be helpful here. I asked myself how I would react if, for example, another member approached me and informed me that he was concerned about my spiritual welfare because he had seen me several times in the company of a certain young woman of doubtful repute. If this was untrue, I would obviously do whatever I could to assure him that his concern was misplaced, that he must have mistaken me for someone else and that there was absolutely no truth in his allegation. But if this was true, would I be likely to angrily

deny it, or throw back at him that he should mind his own business, or point out haughtily that people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, or even threaten him that if he dared to spread that story I would know where to find him?

Would it be likely that I would openly acknowledge and confess my wrong-doing and even express appreciation for his loving concern? Not likely?

Flipping the coin and assuming the position of someone who was witnessing a brother walking the broad road that leads to destruction, what would I do? Would I shrug my shoulders and tell myself that this was nothing to do with me? Would I comment to my neighbour that I was not surprised that this brother would go astray seeing what sort of a family he came from? Would I confront him and tell him in no uncertain terms what I thought of Church members who denied the faith and followed the sinful desires of their heart and that he should repent, or he would go to hell?

Or would I pray for wisdom, guidance and discretion to be able to, "admonish the brother with affection" and to plead with God for his conversion?

And then also find and receive the strength to do so?

The way Nathan the prophet approached David with the story of the rich man stealing the lamb of the poor man and so enabling David to clearly see the enormity of his guilt is a powerful lesson in how to confront a sinner with compassion and grace.

Are we able to do that?

Make no mistake about it, mutual discipline is hard! And part of the reason is that our sinful nature doesn't take it too kindly when our sins are pointed out to us.

So, we cringe at the thought of what the response might well be if we should dare to confront someone with their sin. And we are afraid. And we console ourselves by justifying our inaction by telling ourselves that it's the Consistory's job to exercise discipline and they should be taking a closer interest in their members and be more aware of what they are getting up to. But in the process, we would be showing a remarkable lack of love for our fellow member and possibly contributing to his eternal destruction!

In his booklet (2013, p.13), Rev Bredenhof has this to say:

"Let me urge you again to follow Christ's Word in Matthew 18. If a brother or sister is sinning in some way,

Why still read the Ten Commandments?

Pastor W. Bredenhof addresses this question in his regular King's Bridge column titled "From the Pastor's Study". Reading the Ten Commandments in the morning worship service is a historic practice going back to the Reformation. But there are churches who claim to be reformed that have dropped the practice, or question why it continues to be done.

By way of conclusion the short article leaves readers with a couple of key points. The first is a call to remember that our public worship is a meeting with the thrice-holy God, who left Isaiah awe struck with fear (*Woe is me, for I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips ...* Isaiah 6). If we could perceive the full reality of what that means, would we be glib and casual about coming into God's presence?

The second point reminds us to always remember how prone we are to minimize, rationalize, deny, and forget our sinfulness. We would rather be told: "Peace, peace", when there is no peace (Jeremiah 6:14). We would rather have prophets prophesying smooth things (Isaiah 30:10). The law of God is like a mirror giving us our weekly reality check. It gives us that ever-needful reminder that, even as Christians, we are in constant need of God's mercy.

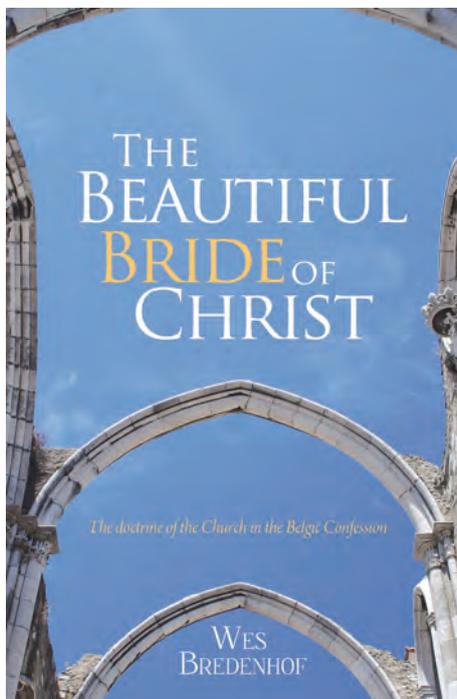
Una Sancta, (vol 65, no 9), June 2018. Used with permission.

if they are clearly living in sin, then you need to lovingly confront him or her. You need to speak privately together, and you need to show the brother or sister the error of their ways from the Word of God. If it takes several times, then that's what it takes.

If they won't listen after several attempts, then take one or two others. Make more attempts. If that fails too, then the matter must be reported to the elders of your consistory or session. But whatever you do, do not turn a blind eye to sin. Not in your own life, and not in the lives of your brothers and sisters. It may be easy to do that, but it is not right and it's not loving.

Make no mistake about it, discipline is hard and it's uncomfortable. We typically want to avoid conflict and flare-ups. The values of our culture can stand in the way of biblical church discipline. We want to be nice people. Yet sometimes it's necessary to say hard things for the love of our brother and sister. Sometimes the right things to do are the hardest, but they are the best and most pleasing in the eyes of God. Discipline is one of those things."

Blessed is that Consistory where discipline cases are only brought to their



attention after having been repeatedly dealt with by concerned, loving fellow believers. Blessed is that Congregation where the members don't adopt Cain's saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" But where instead, they are alert to each other's physical as well as spiritual needs and are concerned that none should be

left behind; where each one of us "looks out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phill.2:4).

The Communion of Saints is not just to be confessed with words, but also practiced in deeds that clearly demonstrate that all members use their gifts "readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members." (HC Q&A 55) And sure, that "readily and cheerfully" might sometimes also be hesitantly and with much trepidation when it relates to mutual discipline, but when we understand the full and rich significance of being members of the Body of Christ, then we also understand that every member of that Body is precious, and then all members will strive to do everything possible to ensure no members are lost.

Lack of interest in "fringe dwelling members" or "passing the buck", or even fear is no excuse – it's the Body of Christ that is at stake!

GW van der Wal, is a member in the Albany Free Reformed Church.

Una Sancta, (vol 65, no 9), June 2018. Used with permission.

Letter to the editor

Dear Sir,

Your contributor, Mr Ryan Sparks, wrote a well-reasoned, and rightfully impassioned plea for us to love sinners enough to befriend them and win them for the Lord Jesus. Without genuine friendship love is an empty shell. Saying this in no way contradicts the Solas, or God's sovereign, saving work.

Mr Spark's critics' arguments lack nuance (Letters in *Faith in Focus*), and argue against the love which results in evangelistic zeal. It seems to me that a number of Scriptures are misunderstood and misapplied by the critics. The thing is that we are all image-bearers of God, believer and unbeliever alike. We should enjoy the company of fellow image-bearers, when they're not up to no good. And the discrimination shown to those who are up to no good is to be more

stringent with those who believe than those who don't. Who other than God knows, this side of the grave, which unbelievers are going to believe and who isn't anyway?

No, love for sinners is to be genuine, sincere and generous. It is definitely one of the key *raison d'être* of His church – if not the key one considering that He is wonderfully glorified when sinners come to repentance. Love toward sinners by saved sinners is what God in Christ normatively uses as the conduit for the truth, in the saving of sinners and in coaxing people to live for Him.

Whilst some areas of church life are commendably strong in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, in my opinion, many would agree that evangelism is one of the areas in which we are weaker. It is really unhelpful for us

to be "finding" excuses to not be about the Lord Jesus' Great Commission given us at the end of His life on earth (Matt 28:18-20). If your correspondents' ideas prevail largely unchallenged, how discouraging is that to good young blokes in our circles who have a heart for the lost?

Yours,
Paul Davey

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

July 1980

The post-war years have seen a lot of changes in the implementation of catechetical instruction in the Reformed Churches around the world. To my knowledge, it was the minister and the minister only who instructed the junior members of the church by means of catechism and Bible study classes. The Church Order is quite clear – the instruction shall be given by the minister of the Word. One synod long ago, had made it quite clear that catechetical instruction is on a par with the preaching of the Word, and stated that it is no less important. It belongs integrally to the work of the minister. Another synod, also quite some time ago, stated that whenever it was feasible, the work of catechetical instruction should be done by the pastor of the church and that, if need be, the session should free him of less important labours, as the greatest need of any church is the spiritual instruction of its future generation.

All that has vastly changed now. Instead of classes during the week, most of the churches have now changed to the Sunday for the instruction of the youth. And it is not only the elders who help the pastors but many able members of the church now assist him in this important work. Most of the reasons for this change are of a practical nature. Distance often made it difficult to get the youth to the church centre during the week. Other activities and looming exams disrupt the routine of regular instructions.

This change seems to be quite universal. The Mormon Church hierarchy directed their 10,000 congregations throughout the world to stop the busy schedule of midweek meetings and have them all streamlined into a single three-hour time block on Sundays so freeing up many hours of time for family-centred activities. They hope that in this way they will significantly contribute to some energy savings. Energy used in lighting and heating thousands of chapels – two new ones are completed every day of the year – (so they say) – and in transporting countless members to those chapels.

In Europe some larger churches have

joined a computerised registration and administration service. They have all become tabulated “paper members.” If you are on the church roll but seldom, if ever, attend any meetings, they will gladly register you on the “passive” membership roll. Someone suggested inventing some miracle drug to get such passive members active again. That’s nothing new under the sun. Moses had two stone tablets that could cure all the world’s ills!

Most of us have been raised with the good old custom of praying before and after each meal. The prayer before the meal has always been one of “saying grace,” a prayer of thanksgiving for all the blessings from the Lord; for a new day, health, food and drink. But the prayer after the meal is a not a general custom among our fellow Christians in this country. This second prayer is also a prayer of thanksgiving for food and drink received, as well as a response to the reading of God’s Word. We may think this is a nice cultural custom. Some of our young members of the church seem to be dropping this custom, probably with the attitude of “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Unfortunately, this is not a matter of integration at all but rather an act of assimilation to prevailing customs. When this is discussed, it is then argued that it is not commanded in God’s Word. Well, it may surprise you as it did me when I found out what God said in Deut. 8:10ff “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God.” So, let us continue this good scriptural practice.

I came across a great little advertisement by a small group who were seeking a pastor. This is what they asked for in the ad: “Pastor needed for group of 15 young adults, hungry for the Reformed faith. None over 35 years old, with a group of young children from three to nine years. Rent free place of worship. Eleven wage earners. Tremendous elder and deacon potential among the men, with the possibility of starting a second church about 30km away. The pastor must have understanding of charismatic theology, as well as being firmly against it. Must be willing to start a Reformed



church, working as an associate with the pastor of first Reformed Church. Must have a car, be willing to work long, hard hours. Demanding but very challenging work. Please call right away. Job opening immediate. See ...

August

The nomination and calling of a minister by a church can be quite a traumatic experience, to say the least. Lists of possible candidates are prepared, names scrapped and others added. Should we look at other denominational pastures or stay loyal to the “products” from our own College in Geelong? The oldies in the church want an older, more mature man and the youngsters make it known that a young minister would be their choice. The session ponders and makes enquiries and the congregation gets restless. Everybody realises that this is a crucial time in the history of their own church.

While they had a minister, they had to live with him and when a new pastor arrives, the church will have to live with

that one too for the next x number of years. But that time in between when the church's eye roves over the face of the earth, searching for their new shepherd, is exciting for some, but anxious for others. Will the final choice by election be the right one? Should the majority vote be half plus one or should the session look for a larger majority? What about the blank ballots; some rules state that blank votes are to be deducted from the total. But what if a large number of blank ballots are handed in? That could be an indication that neither of the presented duo is acceptable by a large part of the congregation.

One of our churches just recently elected a man from overseas. An enthusiastic phone call was made the next day, to inform the pastor that he had been chosen by the congregation to serve their church. A young son at the other end picked up the phone and was quite surprised to hear that the

call came from far away New Zealand. "Where is your dad?" the question was asked. "Oh," came the answer, "Dad's at a farewell dinner at the church, he accepted a call to another church about six weeks ago." "You're joking," came the exclamation from this end of the earth. But no, it was the truth and that was the end of that chapter and experience. The church could start all over again, right from square one.

At each synod, comments may be heard from our overseas fraternal delegates on the way in which our synod controls the debates and voting. Most find it too mechanical, like running a machine, or even too systematic. They feel that it lacks human relations where people count more than the number of votes on all the issues. But if they lived among us and knew the people, they would understand that in the decision making process and in the day to day control of the organisation there is a com-

bination of several types of structures. Of course, much depends on the personality of the moderator, he can be aggressive, domineering and directive, but he could also be a person with a sensitive personality and be non-directive.

I've seen moderators who were quite happy to let the voting control the meetings. "As long as there is a majority of half plus one, that's okay and let's get on with the next item on the agenda." I remember many years ago, one moderator who would not rest until he was sure that every delegate understood what the motion to be voted on was all about, and he was not satisfied until a near unanimous vote had been taken. That was his expression of unity at Synod.

Well, as the old saying goes, letter writers ought to be as smart as the average washing machine. After it spins dry, it shuts off automatically.

Abridged



**CROSSROADS PRISON
MINISTRIES NEW ZEALAND
NEWSLETTER
JUNE 2018**

In the last few months we have received a number of letters from students sharing personal information about the brokenness in their lives. In Isaiah Chapter 61:1 it is written of our Lord Jesus that He will "preach good news to the poor ... bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners ..." Reminding us again to bring God's Word to those

in prison, so they may know the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

During 2017 we were made aware of the impact this ministry is having among those who have contact with prisoners in a secular setting. Quite a number of our students shared that they heard about Crossroads from Corrections Officers and also from those involved with restorative justice. Case Managers have also been in touch with us to confirm if students are enrolled and encourage them to complete the Course they are doing. Even a Court Judge acknowledged the "new strength and faith" in the life of one of our students. Apparently a week earlier the Judge indicated this student would still spend another 12 months in custody. The student shares in his letter to us "But on the day in court he suddenly and unexpectedly decided to reduce the time from 12 months to 2 and a half months. Off course I know God made this happen and I thank Him every day. I know He has great new plans for me. I am so blessed and grateful for your studies and prayers over the past 7 months. God changes lives and has changed mine."

We are making progress in the process of changing the name of Crossroad Bible Institute to Crossroads Prison Ministries. We hope to have this change in place in NZ in the next few months. We will

inform you of the specific changes as they are arise.

Some statistics to share with you: In December 2016 the total prison population in NZ was 9914. In December 2017 this figure was 10,394 – an increase of 480, nearly 5%.

At the end of March 2018 we had 705 students enrolled/actively doing the Bible Studies. Compared to the end of March 2017 where we had 567 students. This shows an increase of nearly 25%. We give thanks to the Lord for this growth.

At the end of March 2018 our income was \$24,193.00 while our expenses were \$28,580.00 – a shortfall of \$4,387.00. Compared to the end of March 2017 when our income was \$33,581.00 and our expenses were \$28,152.00 showing a drop in income of more than \$9,300.00. We pray this will change in the current financial year.

During 2017 three Instructor Training sessions were held – in Hamilton, Dunedin and in Hastings. I'm thankful that most of these trainees (70%) are now part of the team and reviewing lessons.

We are very grateful to all those who faithfully support this ministry by reviewing lessons and writing letters of encouragement to the students. Also thank you to all those who faithfully uphold us in prayer and support us financially.

Here are a few of the many student responses we receive. One student writes: "Thank you for the encouragement on my journey and for sending me the lessons. It helps me to get to know God. I really look forward to my lessons. People think that doing a Course about drugs or crime is going to help me change. I've done numerous amounts of Courses from the Courts to try and make me change and nothing, well no major changes anyway. When I started studying the Word of God miraculous things have changed in me in a short amount of time that I thought were near impossible. Thank you for your support and look forward to hearing from you soon. God bless."

Another student doing the Manga Messiah (MM) Course shares: "thank you so much for being able to learn about Jesus. I would like to thank everyone that goes that extra mile. The Instructors even go out of their way to personally write to us and answer our questions. When I get released I would like to know how I can donate or help support you."

A student wrote in his MM Lesson: "Just want to share this with you guys. I am reading the Bible from the beginning. May God bless all the Instructors at Crossroads. My body might be alone in jail but I know God and a lot of people are walking this road with me and thank you for all the support you have given me. Without you I would be truly lonely and empty! God bless you all."

While doing the GTB Course a student writes: "I am really enjoying this Course and always look forward to the next booklet. The more you read the Bible the more you find out about God and Jesus Christ. Every time I re-read a chapter in the Bible I am getting a deeper meaning. This might sound strange, but I know that if I was not sent to prison for my crime, I would not have had the time to study the Bible. God does have a plan for me. I fully trust in God and I am willing to work with His plan. In God I trust."

After completing GTB students are sent a questionnaire. When asked to share their response after reading the corrected lessons a student writes: "It's like an answered prayer. Frankly I feel like break dancing each time I receive back the instructors letters it makes me think like there is somebody out there who still cares and is praying for me. Keep up the good work. Thanks a million."

A student shares: "Just want to say to Crossroads a big thank you for the support you have given to us. Thank you for the feedback and also for the prayers from all of you – very much appreciated and I am very grateful. Thanks for these great (GTB) lessons."

After completing GTB a student writes: "I am blessed beyond words to have your support in my season of healing and love every letter I get from the team. I look forward to the next time I hear

from you and am excited about getting my first certificate. God bless you all."

Another student shares the following after completing GTB. "Hi Friends, Happy happy, joy joy, what a privilege to receive your very kind and thoughtful feedback about my lessons. I feel so good in my soul and heart that God's power and Spirit is in me. What a blessing. I am looking forward to my next exciting Course – Survey of the Bible. Thanks be to God, He gives me the courage and guidance to follow Him. God bless you all."

We received the following letter from a student: "Dear team, Thank you for all the letters of encouragement and support I receive from your organisation. I am humbled and grateful. I would like to make a donation to show my appreciation and to help your organisation to help others in need. You have made a positive impact upon me. Praise the Lord."

Please continue to pray for the ministry of Crossroads NZ specifically asking the Lord to work in the heart of someone who could help in the office each week. Also uphold the students in prayer as they seek to follow the Lord in very difficult circumstances.

If you would like further information you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, PO Box 11005, HASTINGS 4158

We ought especially to hold to this general doctrine: that, in order to prevent religion from either perishing or declining among us, we should diligently frequent the sacred meetings, and make use of those external aids which can promote the worship of God. J Calvin

Books in focus

It Has Not Yet Appeared What We Shall Be: A Reconsideration of the Imago Dei in Light of Those with Severe Cognitive Disabilities

by George C. Hammond
P&R Reformed Academic
Dissertations, 2017. Paperback, 336
pages, \$40.00.

Reviewed by OP pastor Philip T. Proctor

How do we understand the doctrine of humanity made in God's image? How does our *imago Dei* doctrine encompass those with profound cognitive disability? Pastor Hammond writes of his seminary studies, "a thought occurred to me that filled me with horror: *My daughter does not bear the image of God ... If the imago Dei is to be found substantively in those things which separate us from animals such as language and intellect; if it is to be found functionally in the ability to exert dominion over the environment and other creatures; or if it is to be found relationally in creating and maintaining intricate human relationships, then it was evident that Rebecca's life did not fit these criteria*" (2).

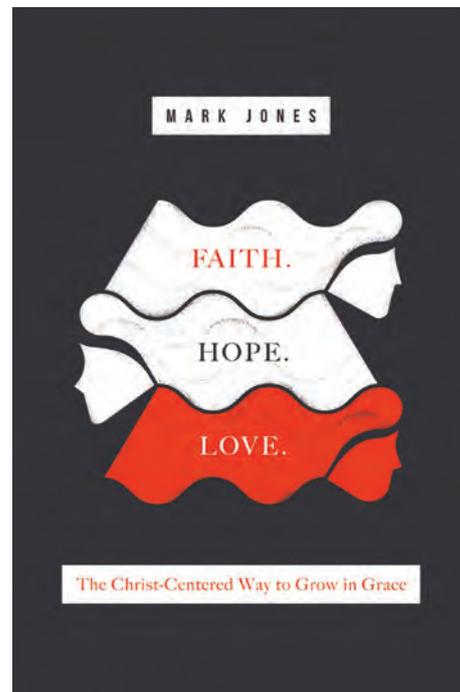
We tend to include the profoundly cognitively disabled in the definition of *imago Dei* by exception, which

leads to some frightening conclusions. In the first chapter, "The Problem and Its Setting," the historical understanding of what it means to be *human* – to bear the image of God – is traced from the Patristic period through the Reformation to the modern disabilities rights movement. In words that sound chillingly Third Reich-ish, the modern and respected scholar Peter Singer is quoted: "If we can put aside these emotionally moving but strictly irrelevant aspects of the killing of a baby [the idea that they are created in God's image], we can see that the grounds for not killing persons do not apply to newborn infants" (48). Singer's criteria for the value of human life (consciousness, capacity for interaction, ability to express desire for continued living, etc.) provide the grounds for not merely abortion but for killing the "unhuman" from a wider range. Reacting to this view, Hammond writes at the close of the first chapter, "the church needs a basis for valuing and protecting [the cognitively disabled] that transcends a compassion born of mere sentiment and emotion" (48).

Moving from historical formulations of the *imago Dei*, to modern "disability theologians," to exegetical treatment of key passages, Pastor Hammond then offers a holistic definition. In the final section, he gives practical guidance to seminary professors and pastors for teaching and modeling the truth that those with profound cognitive disabilities are as fully made in God's image as any of us.

Through Pastor Hammond, his daughter Rebecca speaks and teaches the church. This work provides genuinely fresh insight into a problem that, prior to reading it, I hadn't really considered. While reading, I was challenged and moved by the rigorous academic work that is displayed and the warm father's heart that is so clearly evident. After reading it, I warmly commend this book to the church as a whole.

New Horizons, April 2018



Faith, Hope, Love: The Christ-Centered Way to Grow in Grace

by Mark Jones. Crossway, 2017.
Paperback, 287 pages, \$15.59.

Reviewed by Prof. Ryan M. McGraw.

Many Christians recognize that faith, hope, and love are important. It is difficult to read the New Testament without encountering them all. However, few today connect faith, hope, and love as did our forefathers in the early and medieval church. The fact that they went together in the Apostle Paul's mind should be enough to alert us to the fact that we may be missing something vital.

Mark Jones seeks to revive the so-called "theological virtues" of faith, hope, and love in this thought-provoking and heart-stirring volume. Jones's writings are marked by theological balance, Christ-exalting content, and devotional warmth. This book is no exception, and readers of all levels of Christian maturity will both enjoy it and profit from it.

The book treats faith, hope, and love in catechetical form. Following the catechetical tradition of the Christian church, each chapter expounds a question related to its subject. The end of the book includes a list of all fifty-seven questions, comprising a complete

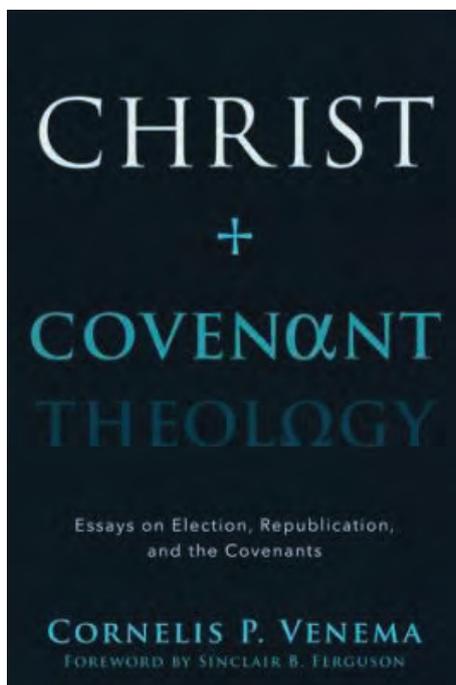


catechism on faith, hope, and love. The themes tying the entire book together are the preeminence of Christ in Christian theology and life, as well as communion with the triune God. He treats a wide range of issues such as the habits and acts of saving faith, the relevance of hope to persecution and suffering, and Christ embodying the Ten Commandments as the rule of love. Jones's book is full of careful and deep reflection on Scripture, addressing his readers with wisdom and pastoral sensitivity throughout.

Many features of this book stand out. These include the detailed description of how Adam broke all Ten Commandments in his Fall into sin (163–65) and the glorious inverse parallel in the life of Christ as he loved and kept all of them (168–70). Jones leads his readers to meditate on the majesty of Christ in keeping the law for his people in a way that moves beyond superficial theological epithets. This is precisely the kind of thinking that the church needs so desperately in every generation. He tenderly addresses parents and children alike in their duties toward God in union with Christ by the Spirit. He also maintains the important conceptual distinction between faith and love (175), seeing faith as the principle of love without confusing faith and faithfulness. He also does not avoid hard issues that face Christians today, especially in the area of prevalent sexual sins that many shy away from addressing (217).

These features, and many others, remind us why Jones is always worth reading. He succinctly addresses the key issues of Christian faith and life in a positive and encouraging way. *Faith, Hope, and Love* is compelling and edifying. It connects us to the piety of the church in all ages through the lens of Reformed theology. Most importantly, it drives us back to three key biblical virtues that belong together and are together in the Bible. Reading this book will show you why these virtues were so important to the Apostle Paul and why believers should treasure them today.

New Horizons, April 2018



Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants

by Cornelis P. Venema. P&R, 2017. Paperback, 504 pages, \$18.50.

Reviewed by OP pastor D. Patrick Ramsey.

As the subtitle suggests, this new book by Cornelis Venema, president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, is not an overview of covenant theology but a collection of previously published essays related to covenant theology. Most of the essays have been significantly revised and focus on issues that have been at the center of substantial debate and controversy among Reformed churches in North America for the past two decades.

The book is divided into three sections. The topic of the first section is bi-covenantalism: the position that there are two general covenants between God and human beings, a pre-Fall covenant of works and a post-Fall covenant of grace. In the first chapter, Venema defends the covenant of works in light of recent criticisms. In the last two chapters, Venema provides a careful evaluation and critique of the doctrine of republication (the idea that the Mosaic covenant is in some sense a covenant of works) as it is espoused in the 2009 book of collected essays *The Law Is Not of Faith*.

This section will be of particular interest to readers of *New Horizons* for a number of reasons. First, Venema aptly defends the teaching of the Westminster Standards on the covenant of works.

Second, Venema interacts with a number of past and present members of the OPC, including John Murray, Meredith Kline, David VanDrunen, Bryan Estelle, and John Fesko. Third, he skillfully guides the reader through the issue of republication, which, due to its controversial nature in the OPC, was the topic of a recent general assembly committee study report.

The second section of the book deals with the relationship between covenant and election. This is a very important issue in covenant theology and failure to understand it properly results in a number of problems. In fact, as he argues later in the book, several errors of what is known as Federal Vision theology stem from improperly relating covenant to election. Although the chapters in this section are mostly historical in nature (studies on Bavinck and the Canons of Dort), they are quite helpful in thinking through various issues pertaining to this topic, including the salvation of the children of believers who die in infancy. The last chapter in this section does a terrific job of demonstrating how covenant theology supports paedobaptism.

The third section of the book focuses on recent controversies. The first three chapters are a critical evaluation of the Federal Vision against the background of the Three Forms of Unity. The final chapter is a critique of N. T. Wright's interpretation of Romans 5:12–21.

In the introduction, Venema states that his aim in the individual chapters and in the book as a whole was "to defend what might be termed a consensus opinion on these issues." This reviewer, at least, believes that he has achieved his aim. He defends the consensus opinion on the covenant of works, the Mosaic covenant, the relationship between election and covenant, justification, the law, and salvation.

The writing style is somewhat dry. The book is also repetitive at times due to its anthological nature and the author's penchant for rehearsing the position he is criticizing even after he has provided a comprehensive summary. Nonetheless, the book is quite good overall. If you are interested in the topics addressed in this book, then I recommend it to you as a reliable guide.

New Horizons, May 2018

Read in the West

Over the last six months the *Faith in Focus* readership has increased, with members of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia subscribing to the magazine. This boost in subscriptions has brought the total number of magazines read to 1107, with 1040 printed here, 32 printed in Australia and 35 subscriptions by pdf.

It is encouraging that our brethren in Australia are reading *Faith in Focus*, which affords them opportunity to become a little more familiar with us.

I am thankful for the enthusiasm of Mr Sebastian Bolhuis of the Bunbury FRCA, in organising and distributing both the printed and electronic versions of the magazine.

On another note, members of the RCNZ may now subscribe to the Free Reformed magazine *Una Sancta*, which in turn enables us to become familiar with the FRCA.

I receive a copy of this magazine, and use some of their articles and book

reviews from time-to-time. I would heartily recommend our members subscribing to *Una Sancta* as a good supplement to their reading diet.

For information see the advert on this page.

Ed.

Una Sancta

Digital subscription to *Una Sancta*, the family magazine of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, is available for **\$10/year (AUD)**.

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