

faith in **focus**

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What
makes for a
truly good
Samaritan?

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Editorial

Some years back, everyone understood what it meant when someone was referred to as a Good Samaritan. Generally, it was a person who would come to someone’s rescue and help them out of difficulty. So, to be labelled as a good Samaritan is obviously a good thing.

However, when we look at the biblical and historical context of the term Samaritan, we see something different.

Samaritans were despised by the Jews. Historical data seems to differ as to their origins. But in the first century, the Jews might insult someone by calling them a Samaritan, as they did in the case of when Jesus made claims about himself in John 8:48, *The Jews answered him, “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”*

It was understood that their worship was syncretistic and therefore impure, just another reason for them to be abhorred by the Jews.

You can imagine the surprise of those who liked to justify themselves at the parable about the fellow travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Upstanding members of the religious community passed by someone in dire need, possibly because they didn’t want to end up being ceremonially unclean after touching what they might have thought to be a corpse. It seems they really didn’t even give the victim a second look, and continued on by.

So often in his parables and teaching, Jesus would speak of things that to many seemed to be left-field. The thought of a despised and spurned person coming to the rescue of a Jew, and caring for him at cost to himself, would have been quite striking to your first-century Jew.

In our day, the term Good Samaritan is used in a positive context, and by many, even though they may not know of its origins.

Our contributors write about what makes for a truly good Samaritan, which I feel is truly thought-provoking.

Mr Michael Willemse considers a journey from law to grace.

Mr Andre Holtslag looks at an unlikely convert and what brought her to faith.

Mrs Sally Davey introduces a post by Russell Moore reminding us that God saves unlikely-looking people.

Mr Joshua Flinn writes about spiritism and our Saviour’s sufficiency.

Mr Jon Dykstra (editor of Reformed Perspective) helps us with qualities to look for in those wishing to date our daughters.

The National Diaconate provide a report from ACCESS in Madurai District, India.

Book reviews are: *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming of Age Crisis – and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance*, by Ben Sasse; *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture*, by William Edgar; *The Majesty on High: Introduction to the Kingdom of God in the New Testament*, by S. M. Baugh.

Focus on home includes gleanings, a presbytery report and pictures on the ordination of Mr Graeme Zuidema.

COVER IMAGE: *The Good Samaritan* by Rembrandt (1630).

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What makes for a truly good Samaritan?

The Good Samaritan — a journey from law to grace

Michael Willemse

One of the biggest challenges for Christians who have grown up in the church and have been raised on Bible stories from infancy is to hear them in the way the original audience did. Many Bible accounts are so familiar to us, that we never really stop to think them through. Jesus' parable of The Good Samaritan is a case in point. The term "Good Samaritan" has found its way into the English language as a way to refer to someone who helps strangers without being asked and with no desire for reward. We might come a little closer to the mark if we think of a "Good Samaritan" as someone who sees everyone as their neighbour. But, even then, we have scarcely begun to understand this parable and its radical message. So, what was Jesus' point in this parable and how does he want us to live in response to it?

In order to understand this parable (Luke 10:25-37), we need to understand the context in which Jesus told it. The parable was prompted by two questions asked of Jesus by an expert in Jewish law. The first was aimed at testing Jesus' orthodoxy – "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus, always less concerned with winning the argument and more concerned with winning the heart, turned the question back on him "You're the expert in the law, what do you think?" In response, the lawyer, to his credit, gets right to the heart of the matter by going to the two greatest commandments "Love the Lord with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" and "Love your



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neighbour as yourself." Jesus' response is straightforward, "You're right. Do that and you will live."

Jesus is not avoiding the lawyer's question. The lawyer has asked for a way to *earn* entry into eternal life and Jesus has given it to him "All you need to do is love God wholeheartedly and perfectly and love your neighbour as much as you love yourself." No problem!

The lawyer feels the impossibility of such an all-encompassing command and immediately seeks to do what we do – to interpret the command in a way which makes it achievable. God wouldn't ask

us to do the impossible so there must be some limits, mustn't there? Interestingly, the lawyer does not seek to limit the first and more searching of the two commands. He likely assumed that keeping the OT laws and ceremonies meant that he could put a tick next to that one. So, he asked a second question designed to limit the second command – “And who is my neighbour?” It is this second question which prompts Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The story is deceptively simple. A

dren. It'd be better for someone else to help them.” “I wouldn't even know where to start with someone like that. Better give them a miss.” “They probably hate Christians anyway ...” Like these religious leaders (those in this lawyer's circle of friends), we often look for ways not to help rather than ways to engage.

Like many of Jesus' parables, the story takes a surprising turn at this point. Jesus' listeners would be expecting a third person to come down the road and help, probably a regular Jew

to the man?”) – to love your neighbour as yourself. But the parable also answers his question directly by showing that my neighbour is anyone God places on my path (sometimes literally!) I am my brother's keeper!

Jesus finishes by saying to the lawyer “Go and do likewise.” You can almost hear him respond “But that's impossible! Who can love as recklessly, indiscriminately and sacrificially as that? Jesus, you have just made the law impossible to keep!” And that really is Jesus' point. God's law is impossible to keep. There is nothing we can *do* to inherit eternal life. No one can meet God's perfect standard. No one can love him with all their heart and soul or love their neighbour as they love themselves. We are the man lying on the road, caked in our own blood, hopeless and helpless – desperately in need of a good Samaritan who will pour himself out for our sake. Jesus is the good Samaritan – hated by those he came to save (John 8:48; Romans 5:10) – who laid down his life for us. There is nothing we can do to inherit eternal life. The only way to obtain it is as a free gift of grace purchased in Jesus' blood.

Loving God and loving our neighbour are a response to the way that God has first loved us. They are not a way to earn eternal life but a fruit of having received it. Only those who have experienced God's grace in Jesus can begin to show that grace to others. That is what it means for us to be good Samaritans – to be agents of God's grace to those he places on our paths – whoever they are (no excuses!). Those who have received God's grace become channels through whom that grace flows to others. His grace moves us to “take pity” on others, made in his image, whoever they may be and to give ourselves for them.

Rev. Andre Holtslag's article has some great thoughts on where to start but let me leave you with some questions. Who has God placed on your path that you have disqualified as a neighbour? Another way to say this might be, “Who has God placed on your path that you find it hard / impossible to love?” How might you begin to be an instrument of God's grace to them? How would Jesus, **the** Good Samaritan, respond to them? (Luke 15:1-7 might be helpful here.) Ask God to help you love them as he has loved you.

Mr Michael Willemse is the minister in the Hamilton Reformed Church.

“Only those who have experienced God's grace in Jesus can begin to show that grace to others. That is what it means for us to be good Samaritans — to be agents of God's grace to those he places on our paths — whoever they are (no excuses!).”

man was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho – a dangerous road notorious for the thieves who would waylay unsuspecting people travelling alone. Sure enough, this traveller is robbed, stripped of his clothes and left for dead. We do not know whether this man was a Jew or not and neither can those who come after him tell from the bloodied form lying on the road. That is part of Jesus' point – the man is a nobody with no discernible ties to anyone. Sometime after, first a priest and then a Levite (we might say a pastor and a deacon) pass. It seems that these men apply the lawyer's “who is my neighbour?” test and, finding the man wanting, continue on their way.

It is worth pausing at this point in the parable because this is an easy trap for us to fall into. It is easy to come up with lots of plausible reasons for not stepping outside of our comfort zone to help people: “I don't know them from a bar of soap. They could take me for a ride.” “They knew the risks, they should have been more careful.” “Aren't we supposed to do good to fellow believers first? There must be a needy believer somewhere ...” “They look a bit devious and shady to me, better to ‘bless them and pass them by.’” “Someone like that could be a bad influence on my chil-

(or even an expert in the law?) The last thing they would expect would be a Samaritan. The hostility between Jews and Samaritans was such that a self-respecting Jew would probably rather die than be helped by a Samaritan! Not only is the man a Samaritan, but he comes to the aid of a man who is more than likely a sworn enemy of the Samaritans (he was coming from Jerusalem after all.) Even before he crosses the road, we are told that “he took pity on the man.” Instead of looking for reasons to avoid him, his heart goes out to him with care and compassion. Heedless of the risk to himself (the robbers might be lurking nearby), he crosses the road and tends to the man. He pours precious oil and wine on the man's wounds, binds them with bandages made from his own clothing (the man had none), places the man on his own donkey and takes him to an inn where he personally tends to him throughout the night. Then he pays enough to cover the man's accommodation for a couple of months and promises to pay more if that is not enough. This is extravagant care at great personal inconvenience and cost!

Notice that Jesus answers the lawyer's question “Who **is** my neighbour?” by showing what it means **to be** a neighbour (“Which of these was a neighbour

What makes for a truly good Samaritan?

A lesson in Good-Samaritanship from some unlikely converts

Andre Holtslag

Let's agree that being a 'Good Samaritan' is a desirable thing. After all, Jesus did tell the man who came with the original question, "Go and do likewise." That being said, however, not many of us will find wounded Jews on the road to Jericho that we can patch up at our own expense. So what might Good-Samaritanship look like in New Zealand in 2018?

Well, there are bound to be all sorts of situations and people that would benefit from Good-Samaritanship. One that has profoundly impacted me is the story of Rosaria Butterfield. I think it is worth considering because it is very timely and relevant to our situation as believers in New Zealand. It also intersects with the parable in a number of remarkable ways. So I will start by telling you Rosaria's story and the Good Samaritans that the Lord brought into her life, and then about Rosaria's efforts to be a Good Samaritan.

Before we begin with Rosaria's story, however, when Jesus finished telling the Parable, He asked the expert in the law which of the three had been a neighbour? His answer was, "The one who had mercy on him." Those words are very important for the whole matter of Good-Samaritanship. Ephesians 4:32 says to believers, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." It is



because we have been shown grace and mercy in the Lord Jesus, miserable, undeserving, wretched sinners that we are, that we must be eager to show mercy to others who may be physically and/or spiritually miserable.

So with that reality in view, back to the story of Rosaria Butterfield (If you want it in full, get hold of her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. My quotes in this next section come from this book). Rosaria was a 36 year-old tenured professor at an American university. She was in a lesbian relationship. She was very active in the gay

Rosaria Butterfield
rosariabutterfield.com

community, including Thursday night open-home dinners for gay, lesbian, and transgender people. She was at the forefront of advocacy for same-sex rights at the university, she delivered the keynote talk at a gay pride march, and she lectured at Harvard University on gay and lesbian studies.

Are you seeing parallels with the parable, yet? She was the type of person targeted by “Christians” in the USA who were part of the “God Hates Fags” movement (the priest?). But while we might find them distasteful and objectionable, as you have read this description of Rosaria, how are you thinking about her? Like the Levite would have, perhaps?

Rosaria lectured in 19th century English literature. She was a serious scholar. She wanted to understand the Bible and Christianity. As she began this ‘project,’ she wrote an article in a local paper criticizing the Promise-Keepers movement for its gender politics. She received lots of mail in response: hate mail and fan mail. One letter, though, didn’t fit in either category. It was a letter from Pastor Ken Smith of Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church. He questioned her interpretations, her basis for calling something wrong, and her presuppositions; he asked her to defend her propositions. In Rosaria’s words, “He invited me to think in ways I hadn’t before.” And he politely invited her to call him to discuss these ideas more fully. A week later she did and he invited her to dinner with himself and his wife, Floy. In other words, he practiced hospitality – not the ‘I invite church-member-with-same-interests-as-me to my place for lunch on Sunday and you invite me to your place in four weeks’ type of hospitality, but the love of *strangers* (this is what the literal translation of the Greek word we translate as hospitality means) type of hospitality.

Rosaria says that before meeting Ken and Floy Smith, her impression of Christians was that they were bad thinkers, because they were sheltered from the world’s big problems (social injustice/environmental concerns/animal welfare), and bad readers (they used the Bible to stop conversation and thought, not deepen it). She says,

Here is one of the deepest ways Christians scared me: the lesbian community was home and home felt safe and secure; the people that I knew the best and cared

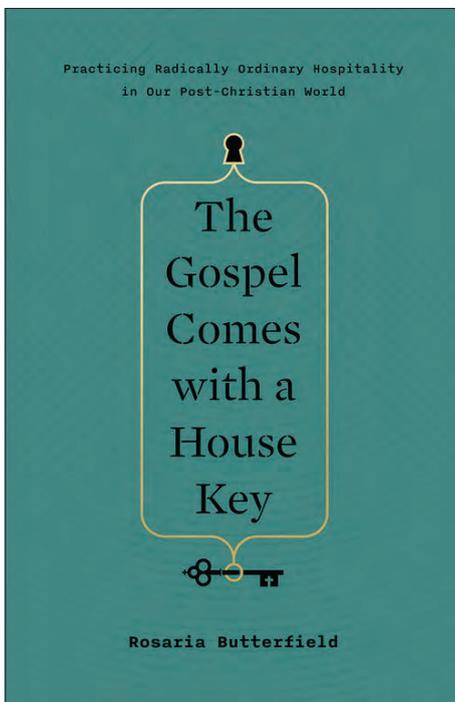
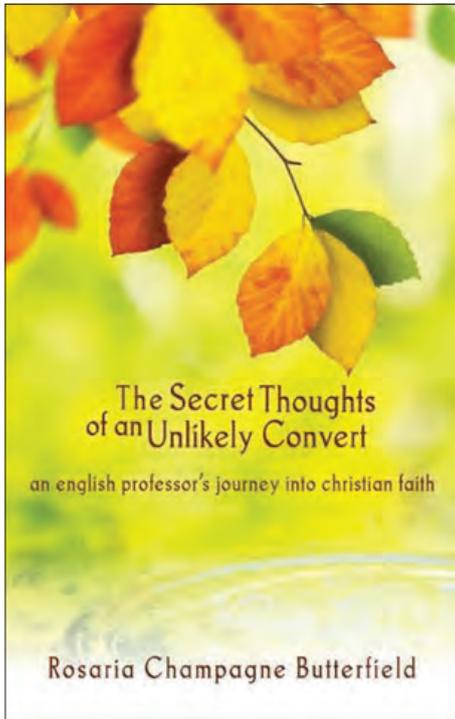
about were in that community; and finally, the lesbian community was accepting and welcoming while the Christian community appeared (and too often is) exclusive, judgmental, scornful, and afraid of diversity.

That first dinner with Ken and Floy made a deep impression on Rosaria. For starters, in no sense was she made to feel like the BIG sinner. In fact, she was struck by Ken’s prayer that included confession of his own sins. She also said she had never heard anyone pray to God “as if God cared, as if God listened, and as if God answered.” She appreciated their discussions. They did not share the gospel. They did not invite her to church. It would be two years of meeting Ken and Floy, and reading the Bible before she set foot in their church. During that time, Ken and Floy met Rosaria’s friends and came to her dinner parties. Another thing that made a deep impression on Rosaria was that she saw how they fed and housed and counselled lots of different people (There it is again – hospitality!!!)

You will have to get Rosaria’s book and read it yourself to discover all of the other events on the pathway to her conversion. It was February 14, 1999, as Rosaria describes it, that she “emerged from the bed of [her] lesbian lover and an hour later was sitting in a pew at Syracuse RP church.” She says this not to be lurid but to give us some idea of just how much change was needed and how much of her life and thinking she had to ‘let go’ as she repented and trusted in the Lord Jesus!

Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. But He was pleased to use the Good-Samaritan hospitality of Ken and Floy for someone who many “Christians” would hate and avoid.

Now, fast forward a few years. Rosaria is now married to Kent Butterfield. They have children. They live in Durham, North Carolina. Kent is Pastor of their local RP congregation. Their neighbour is Hank. Hank is something of a recluse whose only companion is a Pitbull named Tank who roamed the street without collar or tags (again, if you want this story in full, get hold of Rosaria’s new book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*)!! The Butterfields went over, pressed the doorbell, gave Hank their contact information, introduced him to their kids and dogs, and waited for him to do the good neighbourly thing and



reciprocate. Hank removed his doorbell so no one else would bother him! Well, you might be thinking, there are several good reasons to ignore a person. Remember, though, that that is what the Priest and the Levite did.

So how do you show hospitality to someone who does not want it? Well it began when Tank ran away. Rather than think, “good riddance...!” the Butterfield’s recognized how much Tank meant to Hank so they offered to help search for him and post lost dog notices, an offer Hank gladly received. Their ten year-old daughter told Hank that she was praying for him and Tank every night. Finally, Tank was found, safe and well. Then the two families became dog-walking buddies. For the first year of their friendship, their front yard was as close as Hank would come to their house, but during their walks, they found out that he suffered from severe depression, PTSD, ADHD, and social anxiety. It was only in the second year that he joined them for Thanksgiving and Christmas meals and met other members of their church family.

It was sometime later that Hank’s house was raided, because it was a meth-lab, and Hank went to prison. Conservative “Christians” in the area were ‘not surprised,’ and had always thought him a ‘bad-apple,’ etc. But friends from the RP church that had met Hank visited him in jail and sent him letters and books. As Rosaria says,

God’s providence preordained that Hank would spend holidays with the Christians who open arms wide and claim him. Where else would my meth-addicted neighbour meet his church family, apart from our table? Where would I have met my church family, apart from Ken and Floy’s table?

One of Hank’s letters to Rosaria’s children said, “Please pray that God will give me more grace to get through today. I want to get out so that we can take our dog walks together. Your brother in Christ, Mr Hank.”

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to answer this question from the expert in the law: “Who is my neighbour?” His answer was intended to widen the perspective of the expert in the law. One lesson from the accounts of Rosaria and Hank is that your neighbour is your neighbour. Humanly speaking, the likelihood of their walking into a church is slim, but the likelihood of

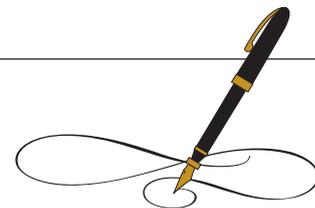
their being willing to have a meal at your house is high. One way to put Good-Samaritanism into practice is through hospitality. Look at how the Lord used it with Rosaria and Hank! Maybe the Lord will be pleased to have your neighbour

meet their future church family around your dinner table.

Mr Andre Holtslag is the minister in the Avondale Reformed Church.

Outward focus

Sally Davey



Russell Moore asks “Where is the Next Billy Graham?”

I recently came across this February post by Russell Moore, President of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, the public-policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention in the U.S. While what he says is not new, he says it very well, and it is worth repeating — and heeding.

“As a child, I remember being in church and seeing a man sitting in front of me, with his arm resting on the pew. The arm was covered with a large tattoo of a woman who was, well, let’s just say she didn’t fit what we would consider biblical standards of modesty in her attire. This was not in a “relevant” urban church, mind you, but in the most stereotypically “hellfire and brimstone,” King James Version-quoting, gospel hymn-singing southern revivalist church you could imagine. I couldn’t believe I was seeing this, in my church. I was simultaneously thrilled (when else does one get to see naked women in church?) and outraged (how dare anyone do that in my church?). So I nudged my grandmother and pointed, as if to say, “Can you believe this?”

I wonder how many people don’t listen to our gospel message because they assume they don’t “look” like the kind of people who would be Christians.

My grandmother leaned down and whispered. I expected her to share my outrage (though not my secret titillation). She was, after all, a pastor’s widow with strict moral standards who had once washed my mouth out with soap because I had said “Gosh,” which was, of course, to her just a rebranded way to take the Lord’s name in vain. But

that side of her didn't show up in that moment. She whispered, "Yes, honey, He doesn't know the Lord yet, and he's had a hard life, with drink and drugs and all. But his wife had been trying to get him to come to church for a long time, and we've all been praying for him. He's not trying to be ugly to anybody. He just doesn't know Jesus yet."

I'll never forget that word "yet." With that one word she turned my imagination on its head. She put before me the possibility that this hardened ex-military man with the naked woman tattoo might one day be my brother-in-Christ. And, in time, he was. I suppose as time went on this new Christian started to see that his tattoo was potentially a stumbling block to others, because I started to see it less and less as he started to wear long sleeves

see more people in our pews and in our pulpits with tattoos, and that ought to change our public witness. Now, what I do not mean by this is that we need more Christians to tattoo crosses or the Apostles Creed or the sinner's prayer across their arms and necks. That's not a sign of gospel awakening. It's just, at best personal fashion, and, at worst, more marketing in an already over-marketed American Christian subculture.

Tattoos don't mean what they used to. They don't signify necessarily, by a long shot, the kind of "tough" image they used to. But sometimes they do. There are people around us with markings of blood-drenched skulls, or of profane sexual boasts or of threats to violence. Some demonstrate fearsomeness. Some are pagan, or even occult.



to church. Some of the other kids in the church said that (since tattoo removal technology wasn't much of a thing then) that he had added a bikini to her, and then later a one-piece bathing suit. For all I know, he may have died with her in a plaid pantsuit and a briefcase. I guess this man started to see that tattoo as emblematic of an old life he'd left behind. He didn't need a tattooed pastor (and in that church, he never had one). But he did need a church that didn't see his tattoo as evidence of a life gone too far, of someone too rowdy to be loved with the call to repentance and faith.

I don't like tattoos, and I can't emphasize this enough (especially if you're one of my children, one day, reading this). But if the Spirit starts moving with velocity in this country, our churches will

As I see them in the streets around me I am chastened by how rarely my first thoughts are rooted in my grandmother's wisdom. Again, not everyone with tattoos is an unbeliever or has lived a hard life. But I wonder how many people don't listen to our gospel message because they assume they don't "look" like the kind of people who would be Christians—namely shiny, happy Republicans. And, shamefully, how many times do we filter out our gospel preaching and our social witness to people who would, upon baptism, be able to pose nicely for our ministry advertisements? How often do we assume the good news of Christ is a message just like a political campaign or a commercial brand, targeted toward a demographic of a certain kind of buyer?

That was precisely Jesus' point in his

story of the two sons. He turned to the religious establishment and said, shockingly, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matt. 21:31). That was Jesus’ point from his sermon in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, throughout his public ministry, and right to his dying moments, pardoning a repentant terrorist. Jesus was building his church with those who seemed to have wrecked their lives forever: prostitutes, Roman collaborators, outcasts with infectious diseases, demon-possessed grave-dwellers, and on and on. If we’re really carrying forward his message, this means there are going to be people listening whose very bodies may carry messages contradictory of the Word of God. So did our hearts and psyches. The young woman with the “Legal Abortion Without Apology” tattoo or the old man with the Hell’s Angel marking, they may wonder, as they feel the pull of the gospel, “How can I enter with this visible reminder on me of my past?” That’s not a new question. That’s the question we all had to ask, regardless of how “respectable” we looked when we came to Christ: “Deep is the stain that we cannot hide? What can avail to wash it away?”

Jesus will build his church, with us or without us. But if we are going to be faithful to him, we must share his mission. This means we don’t just talk about lost people; we talk to them. And we don’t talk to them as enlightened life-coaches promising an improved future, but as crucified sinners offering a new birth. The hope for the future is not that Christianity will be seen as more respectable or more influential in the sectors of American power. The hope for the future is churches filled with people who never thought they fit the image of “Christian.” We’ll see that the markings on the flesh, whatever they are, count for nothing, but that what counts is a new creation (Gal. 6:15). We’ve come not to call just those who look like whatever Christians are supposed to look like, but the whole world. If the church is powered by the gospel, then the Body of Christ has tattoos.

That reality ought to crucify our dour, gloomy, curmudgeonly pessimism. Our fretfulness is evidence of defeatism, a sign of wavering belief in the promises of Jesus himself. That’s what the elderly theologian taught me, as I stood there and wrung my hands over the pragmatism, the hucksterism, the liberalizing ten-

dencies I saw in the Christianity around me, and wondered, “Does gospel Christianity have a future in this country at all?” He looked at me as though I were crazy. Of course gospel Christianity had, and has, a future. But the gospel Christians who will lead it, may well still be pagans. He was right. Christianity is not like politics, rife with the dynasties of ruling families. God builds his church a different way.

The next Billy Graham might be drunk right now. The next Jonathan Edwards might be the man driving in front of you with the Darwin Fish bumper decal. The next Charles Wesley might currently be a misogynistic, profanity-spewing hip-hop artist. The next Charles Spurgeon might be managing an abortion clinic today. The next Mother Teresa might be a heroin-addicted porn star this week. The next Augustine of Hippo might be a sexually promiscuous cult member right now, just like, come to think of it, the first Augustine of Hippo was.

But the Spirit of God can turn all that around. And seems to delight to do so. The new birth doesn’t just transform lives, creating repentance and faith; it also provides new leadership to the church, and fulfills Jesus’ promise to gift his church with everything needed for her onward march through space and time (Eph. 4:8-16). After all, while Phillip was leading the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ, Saul of Tarsus was still a murderer. And that happens over and over again, as God raises up leaders who seem to come out of nowhere, with shady pasts and uncertain futures. And none of us would be here, apart from them.¹

¹ This article is adapted from my book *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*, a version of this post originally ran in October of 2015. <https://www.russellmoore.com/2018/02/26/where-is-the-next-billy-graham/>

Moore is, of course, quite right: things are not always as they seem to us. God may have a useful future in his kingdom for that unlikely-looking sinner in our midst. Don’t be tempted to disdain him. Don’t shun her. Be alive to the possibility that this person, made in God’s image — though as yet rejecting him — may one day be your brother or sister in Christ.

You may have found various assumptions in Moore’s article quite American — his references to a self-satisfied evangelical culture don’t accurately describe New Zealand, where the evangelical world is small and has little political clout. And yet, we can still be guilty of failing to reach out to the person who does not look like one of us in our comfortable church group. This is a simple and obvious point, but it’s one which, from time to time, bears repeating.

I was somewhat amused at the short lament of a church organist —
“too loud, too soft, too fast, too slow!” Ed.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

November 1979

"Mannerism," my neighbour fumed, "has gone to the pack. Gone are the days of good breeding and courtesy." And he listed a fistful of habits which, in his time, were the norm of the day. What about wiping your feet before entering a home; making sure that a burp does not escape notice and let a bit of wind escape noiselessly in company; suppress one's desire to pick one's nose, discreetly hide a yawn behind the back of one's hand, being gallant by letting the ladies go first; strain oneself not to make all those funny little noises when spooning one's soup or interrupting someone who is addressing you. These were just a few on his list of annoyances of living in today's world. But I do remember annoying some of my peers in the days of my youth, so much so that when we as kids entered adolescence, not only was the Bible read at the evening meal but also a chapter from Dale Carnegie's book *How to make Friends and Influence People*. Even a few pages of a big volume of *Madame Etiquette* were read. We used to have lots of hilarity and fun practising all this on each another.

This week I got some interesting mail from Holland. It is good to have some friends there who are willing to send you bits and pieces of literature which are still of interest to some of us exiles. The last parcel I received contained a book called *One Hundred Years Anti-Revolutionary Party* in which a contribution is made to the Christian Democratic political thought over the past century. There is also a speech by Dr Abraham Kuyper, made in 1889 in memory of the centenary of the French revolution. All very interesting reading in my retirement.

Malcolm Muggeridge went to Calvin College and with his usual barbed wit expressed his pessimism about our fantasy-ridden culture. According to him, future generations delving into our videotaped remains, will be deciphering a religion of consumption performed in supermarket temples, with choirs of music in the background and a liturgy of salesmanship to accompany this worship. And then they will watch us leaving our sacrifices at the checkout counters. When

you read what he has to say, it becomes quite obvious that he hates TV. It is his ultimate belief that despite sincere non-commercial efforts to use television for evangelising, "The words of truth that were brought into life by incarnation cannot fit this medium."

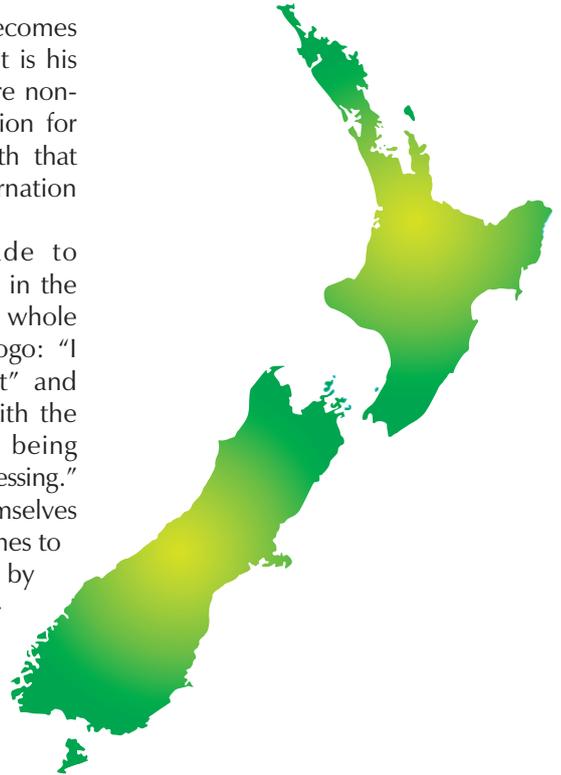
An attempt has been made to promote the work of evangelism in the Auckland Presbytery during the whole month of October, under the logo: "I know THE WAY... if you're lost" and using special bumper stickers with the motto, "Church members are being trained in the art of personal witnessing."

Elders can sometimes get themselves into quite a quandary when it comes to delinquency in church attendance by members of the congregation. Although the Church Order states that the Session shall call the congregation to worship twice on the Lord's Day, the Heidelberg catechism is quite specific here on this matter when it tells us in Q&A103 what God requires from us in the fourth commandment, which is "That we must rest from our daily work and must worship and serve God." Now, one of our sessions has made a ruling that attendance at all public worship of Almighty God upon the Lord's Day is mandatory, except for providential hindrances. Where providential hindrance is claimed to occur on a regular basis, then dispensation must be sought from the session. I concur.

December

"A true church is an outpost of the Kingdom of God, placed in a particular place in the world, to bear witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ." Or negatively, it has been stated as follows: "Any church that does not recognise the basic purposes for its existence is in jeopardy of its life."

The 1979 Yearbook which we have just received in the mail before the close of the year, tells quite a tale with its graphs of gains and losses for both of our denominations in the Southern Hemisphere. It is high time that the top



echelon of our churches get their priorities right again. It is a pity that our Church Order is much too vague in this area. The Christian Reformed Church is much more specific when they state in Art. 73: "In obedience to Christ's Great Commission, the churches must bring the Gospel to all men at home and abroad, in order to lead them into fellowship with Christ and His Church. In fulfilling this mandate each session shall stimulate the membership of the congregation to be witnesses for Christ in word and deed and to support the work of home and foreign missions by their interests, prayers and gifts. Each church shall bring the Gospel to unbelievers in its own community. This task shall be sponsored and governed by the session."

Could there be something wrong with our image, within the church and without in the community. Analysing the productivity of our church courts, it may surprise us that the best part of 90% is spent on interests, which are often of an administrative or self-contained nature. If you don't believe me, I suggest that you pick up any Acts of

Synod and throw all the decisions into appropriate little bags. You will find that there is plenty of room in the bag for Outreach while those, say on Emeriti of Ministers, Gravamen or Hymnbooks are filled to overflowing. We then see that our self-image is quite inadequate and that we have to do something to remove such pressures which are hindering our progress and effectiveness as a witnessing church.

Maybe our church courts need to spend some considerable time on determining the kinds of ministries which will help to remove the inadequacies that exist in our self-image. A pastor in the Christian Reformed Church posed this question: "If our particular local church

were to disappear overnight, would it even be missed by the community?" Not a bad question, is it!

We get lots of religious hawkers at our door, and all of them belong to some sect or cult. Very confusing for my growing family at times. I came across a neat little identikit of a cultist which is worth copying and sticking on the inside of your backdoor. This identikit gives five identifying characteristics:

- The approach of cult members, whether in soliciting funds or in recruiting members, tends to be misleading;
- Their method of recruitment and conversion seeks to incapacitate a person from the free exercise of will,

intellect and emotions;

- The process involves dramatic alienation from one's family;
- Each cult has a messianic type of leader who claims to have received a new, ultimate and final revelation from God;
- Cult members often consider themselves to be the only true, good, people and they
- perceive others as evil.

Well, if cult members perceive us as evil, so does the income-tax man. According to a prominent tax collector there is no difference at all between Christians and non-Christians when it comes to dodging their due taxes.

Abridged

Spiritism and our Saviour's Sufficiency

How should a Christian view the occult?

Joshua Flinn

Real life witchery

The International Pagan Federation (IPF) 'officially' defines a pagan as: 'A follower of a polytheistic (multiple gods) or pantheistic (everything is god) nature-worshipping religion.'¹ In 2013, our national census recorded over 5000 self-identified Pagans living in New Zealand; this group included animists, druids, pantheists, Satanists and Spiritualists. And really, This is just the tip of the occultic iceberg.

Interestingly, the IPF also reports three principles which govern all Pagans: 1. A love for and a kinship with nature. 2. A positive morality, in which the individual their harmony with the world and its communities; and 3. The recognition of the divine' (Personally, I'm not sure why the government would place Satanists in this category).

It's not surprising, therefore, that liberal media sites like stuff.co.nz and

nzherald.co.nz have enjoyed returning to this topic on a regular basis. Almost all of their articles present paganism and its various strands as a synonym for green-earth-ology and a pursuit of the love of all things. After all, the witches' public mission-statement is: "Do what you will, as long as it harms none". And when push comes to shove, what they're doing must be harmless because science has disproved the supernatural... hasn't it?

Despite the prolific propaganda in our society, however, something about the "witches-are-just-herbalists" campaign doesn't sit comfortably. Like the Israelites and their household gods, non-Christian society worships science and rationalism in public and yet they keep their idol of supernaturalism hidden under their bed.

Every man and his dog know what tarot cards and ouija boards are; star charts are common lunch-time newspaper reading; dream-catchers are available at two-dollar-stores and some local dairies; and most people in our society

"Certainly, New Zealand's 'household god' won't let it forget about her."



Photo by Michal Lomza on Unsplash

have a sneaking suspicion that (just maybe!) police should hire psychic detectives to help them solve crime. Guardian angels (definitely!) exist, as does a better place once you die. People can get their chakra balanced or get their spiritual health audited with an electropsychometer (Scientology).

Think these are practices of the minority? I encourage you to research the policies of many of our local NZ hospitals... non-Christian support staff are required to provide care for people 'spiritually' (not religiously!) as they struggle with physical and emotional change.

Certainly, New Zealand's 'household god' won't let it forget about her. Our society regularly receives reminders about the supernatural. In 2007 a woman in Wainuiomata was drowned during a ritualistic procedure to remove a makutu (curse). Five family members were convicted of manslaughter. In 2013 there was a troubled business owner in Botany who believed his new restaurant was demonically possessed. In 2015, a four-year-old girl was killed by her mother who claimed that both she and her daughter had been possessed by unclean spirits. This list could also go on.

Ironically, as 21st century Christians, we tend to join with the skeptics: we place such stories in one or more of three boxes: 'Box One: It's Just a Bit of Harmless Fun – Who Am I to Judge?'; 'Box Two: They're Faking It – It's Not Real!'; or 'Box Three: Looks Like There's Something Wrong With Their Brain, The Poor Chap'.

A fourth box

All this furore seems strange to us, sitting in our lazy-boys reading the *Faith in Focus* with a cup of coffee close to hand. Yet men like Martin Luther and John Calvin were adamant that witches were real and that their 'job' entailed much more than providing recipes for herbal thick-shakes. Luther even declared in a sermon in 1526: 'I want to be the first to put fire to them'. He threw his coffee cup at the devil! What gives?

Enter Box Four: 'God Treats It Seriously and I'm With Him'. And how do we find out what God's perspective on the whole kerfuffle is? We go to his Word and do some research! What do we find? Quite a lot actually. The first clarity we gain is in relation to definitions. There are two major branches

highlighted in scripture (although there is overlap): Divination and Magic.

A diviner attempts to gain supernatural 'hidden' knowledge through earthly means. Some diviners read the movement of oil in a cup (hydromancy), possibly what Joseph was referring to in Genesis 44:5. Others studied the stars with the belief that they reflected the divine will (astrology). Still others read piles of sticks (rhabdomancy) in the belief that wood had a direct link with life (e.g. Ezek 21:21). This category would also include those who predicted the future (oracles or soothsayers) and those who interpreted omens (seers). You may also remember Balaam (Num 22:4-7) who appears to have read liver and entrails and studied bird flight (augury). Some sorcerers in Paul's day were also closely linked with poison and drug use (the Greek word for sorcery is *pharmakeia*) because sorcerers would use drugs to conjure occult power.

The other major branch is that of magic. In contrast to diviners, magicians attempted to use supernatural power to manipulate earthly situations and objects. Magic worked on the belief that the natural and supernatural (spiritual) realms overlapped. This led to the idea that two objects which appeared similar could influence each other (e.g. Mandrakes and fertility – see Gen 30:14-17) and that a witch or magician could use a hair (for example), to cast a curse on its former owner (Voodoo).

But magic was also associated closely with harnessing demonic powers and reaching into the realm of death. The witch of Endor was such a practitioner (1 Sam 28). The woman was able to commune with Samuel's spirit (Psychics and Spiritists). She also affirmed the existence of those who raise the dead (Necromancy) in 1 Samuel 28:9. She may have offered Saul a meal following her witchery, but her ilk was often associated with child sacrifice (Deut 32:17; 2 Chron 33:6).

The reality of life for Israel was that God placed them in the middle of nations who practiced divination, magic and witchcraft. But even while they were in the world, they were not to be of it. These practices were forbidden because they led people away from God. And they are just as abominable in the New Testament: When Simon the Magus sought to buy the ability to control the Holy Spirit he was severely rebuked by Peter (Acts 8:20-23). Later, Paul pronounced Elymas the magician to

be a 'son of the devil' and struck him with blindness (Acts 13:6ff).

The Christian conundrum

Despite the strong language, however, the people of God were not without their performers of great wonders. The prophets gained respect among the people (rightly or wrongly) because the miracles they performed were more powerful than what pagan magicians could achieve. Consider the accounts of Moses, Daniel, Elijah and Elisha; 'their' powers were supernaturally extraordinary! The same can be observed in the ministry of the apostles: Paul heals a crippled man and the town of Lystra thought he and Barnabas were Hermes and Zeus (Acts 14:8-18). Handkerchiefs are brushed against Paul and are then able to be used to heal disease and cast out evil spirits (Acts 19:11). The other apostles did similar great works and wonders. It's no surprise that Simon the Magus became a little confused.

The conundrum coalesces further when we recognise that the God-given practices of the Israelites often seemed to mirror some occultist practices: the casting of lots (Cleromancy) was practiced in pagan nations as divination (Est 3:7) and yet God sanctioned it when done in faith. On another occasion he instituted the practice of 'divination by ordeal', where someone who would normally get hurt by a particular activity doesn't get hurt and is, therefore, pronounced innocent (Num 5:11-28).

The truth about miraculous activity

The distinct difference between the activity of the world and the activity of the church, however, is that the church submits to the direction of God. She must never attempt to manipulate God or force him to conform to her desires. God's people are directed to pray for his help, not to help themselves; they're commanded to search for God's guidance in the Scriptures, not the stars or something's intestines; they're called to trust in the sufficiency of God's revelation, and not to demand more than he's willing to give.

The risk is that we make the same mistake that King Saul, Simon Magus, the sons of Sceva (alongside so many others) did: we pursue a power which enables us to gain control over our own existence; to put an end to pain in our own time; to gain clarity in the midst of our confusion; to seek further visible, supernatural confirmation of God's atten-

"The miraculous activity in the gospels and Acts reflects the same supernatural warfare that was on display in the Old Testament; it trumpets forth a powerful message: 'an idol has no real existence,' and 'there is no God but one'"

tion. This kind of thinking ultimately culminates in a return to Eve's sin, nodding along to the Devil as he whispers: "you can be like God if you only take control for yourself."

Ultimately then, the question facing us is one of trust: Do we trust that God is actually working all things together for the good of those who love him as he's said? (Rom 8:28). Do we trust him that Scripture is sufficient (2 Tim 3:16)? Do we trust him that not a hair on our head is harmed without his will (Luke 21:18)? Are we content with his providence? His timing? Or do we demand more security? Do we need to wrestle back control of our lives because he isn't doing a satisfactory job?

No matter what time or culture you live in, seeking guidance from dead loved ones or earth spirits, trusting in the heart of the tarot cards, balancing chakra, pursuing the tenants of feng shui or Ayurveda, and seeking spiritual guidance from the stars, are all abominations to the Lord. And yet, the heart of the sin is the breaking of the first commandment: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind.'

The miraculous activity in the gospels and Acts reflects the same supernatural warfare that was on display in the Old Testament; it trumpets forth a powerful message: 'an idol has no real existence,' and 'there is no God but one' (1 Cor 8:4). This will probably sit uncomfortably with many of us, but the only reason the witch was able to raise Samuel's spirit was because God enabled her to

do so. The only reason that Pharaoh's magicians were able to turn their staffs into snakes was because God allowed it. The Devil himself answers to our sovereign, all-powerful God (Job 1-2; 1 Cor 5:5). Our world does not exist in a dualistic and eternal struggle between light and dark; there is no yin and yang and no karma. God is in sovereign control of all things.

Just as the book of Daniel resoundingly proves the supremacy of God over earthly 'wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers', so too does Christ prove the supremacy of God as he exercises control over earthly things. His miraculous activity pointed to his lordship over all things and that his words and teaching were true. Likewise, Mark explains that the miracles the apostles performed were the Lord's confirmation that the message they brought about him was trustworthy (Mark 16:20). Two thousand years later, we also need to learn this lesson of trust.

The challenging reality is that men are not only fallen, they're finite; there's much we'll never understand. Christianity doesn't provide answers to every question – as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than your ways, and his thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:8-9). And, quite frankly, the only reason we know anything is because of God's grace.

Another hard truth is that each and every one of those healed miraculously in Scripture are long dead and gone. Their temporary alleviation of their suf-

fering was not an end to itself; instead it pointed to the future rest for those who follow him in faith. Faith in Christ doesn't simply heal us from leprosy one day, just so we can die of cancer the following day. Instead, faith in Christ secures us an eternal inheritance and a permanent rest without pain, tears, loss, or death. God tells us that his word (2 Tim 3:16-17) and his grace (2 Cor 12:9) is sufficient for us. Contrary to the Devil's deceitful whispers we have no true need that is not fully met in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amazingly, as the Holy Spirit changed hearts in the New Testament, people began to relinquish control of their lives back to God. They had no further need of magic. Once they had beheld the power of the Spirit to heal and drive out demons, those who practiced magical arts burned their books (Acts 19:19). Personal experience of the 'magical' and miraculous miracles of the Bible can be considered rubbish alongside the surpassing worth of personally knowing Christ Jesus our Lord (Phil 3:8). Despite our confusion and fears, our Father in heaven knows our every weakness; even through our pain he loves us and cares for us. He is worthy of our faith and trust.

1 www.paganfederation.org/what-is-paganism/

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Letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

With interest I read the article "Friendship with the World?" in Faith in Focus 45/1 by Ryan Sparks. While Rev Sparks raises some valid points I was left pondering if this article is in line with sound biblical teaching. For brevity's sake I will not discuss every detail of Rev Sparks's article, but at least I would like to point out some weaknesses of his article and add a few points which I deem to be important when considering this topic.

Inconsistencies in Rev Sparks's Article

Definition of "friendship"

The meaning of "friendship" can be quite broad. Rev Sparks uses the word "friendship" with vastly different meanings throughout his article. In places it is used in the sense of a bond of affection. In other places it is simply used as a synonym for helping another person. The latter meaning does not fit this word's use in e.g. James 4:4 and such varied use of a key term in the article can easily

confuse the reader. A definition of the term "friendship" and its usage would have been very helpful to understand Rev Sparks better. Throughout this letter I am going to use the term "friendship" in its stronger sense of a mutual bond of affection.

Friendship for the sake of friendship

Rev Sparks proposes that we should be friends with unbelievers for the sake of friendship. He even suggests that the Lord was friend with sinners just for the sake of friendship. He is backing this

suggestions with Mk 2:17 *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* However, this verse clearly states that Christ has come to **call** sinners, and not to befriend them. The Lord therefore had the very clear purpose of changing those sinners, not just to befriend them and leave them as they were. All examples that Rev Sparks gives throughout his article show that the Lord did **not** join these sinners in their sinful ways whatsoever – He rather met them for just one purpose, namely that He could say: *Today salvation has come to this house* (Lk 19:9).

The Lord's friendship with sinners

When we state that the Lord was a friend of sinners – as precious as this truth is – we need to consider two things:

- i. This statement never came out of His own mouth – His adversaries reproached Him with such a slanderous statement.
- ii. The Lord Himself is the **only one** who can touch something unclean without defiling Himself, as the thing or person that He touches becomes clean instantly. This is not so for us. As we consider this unique attribute of Christ we must realize that we reach certain limits when trying to imitate our Lord. These limits are not only inherent to our nature but also prescribed in the Word of God.

Seeming contradiction between the written Word of God and the Incarnate Word of God

Rev Sparks plays out his interpreted practice of the Lord against a clear warning in James 4:4 *Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

Playing out the Incarnate Word of God (Jesus Christ) against the Written Word of God (the Bible) will most definitely lead to serious error as these two are one in essence and character (Rev 19:13; Jn 1:14).

Omissions in Rev Sparks's Article

The Christian's priority

As the name suggests already, the Christians' priority should be Christ and nothing else. They should flee sin and any fellowship with sin; They should

rather be holy as God is holy (*Flee from the midst of Babylon* Jer 51:6; *Flee sexual immorality* 1Cor 6:18; *Flee from idolatry* 1 Cor 10:14; *Flee also youthful lusts* 2 Tim 2:22). James addresses those who want to be a friend of this world as adulterers and adulteresses – showing that we can either be bound to this world or be bound to Christ. We cannot serve two masters.

The unequal yoke

2 Corinthians 6:14 warns us: *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?* The obvious answer to all those rhetorical questions is: None. How then can I be friend with an unbeliever if we have **nothing** in common? How does this friendship look like in practice if I never join my "friend's" sinful ways?

The good fight

1 Timothy 6:12 reads: *Fight the good fight of faith.* The greater the opposites, the greater the fight. Based on 2 Cor 6:14 the opposites could not be any greater. The opposites have not grown smaller over the centuries. Where is the fight? Are we actually still fighting the good fight of faith or have we capitulated and accepted the world with its snares as one of us whom we tolerate and even try to befriend?

The people of Israel in Canaan

God warned the people of Israel in Joshua 23:7 *You shall not serve them [the gods of the Canaanites] nor bow down to them.* This warning is not just a theoretical idea, he shows them how to put it into practice (v11-13) *Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations [...] know for certain that [...] they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land.* Befriending the people of Canaan in any way would have been their certain doom as it would have turned their hearts away from God. Are we not doomed likewise if we harbour sympathy in our hearts with the principles of this world, such as the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life? Now, if the people we surround ourselves with are driven by exactly those three desires, how can we ever keep those thoughts

and desires out of our own heart?

King Solomon

This was also King Solomon's problem. He surrounded himself with foreign wives. Were those wives not the result of his friendship with people who did not belong to God? Was there a problem with it? *His wives turned away his heart after other Gods* (1 Kings 11:4). What a serious consequence! His friendship with people of this world led him to embrace the principles of this world.

Abraham and Lot

Lot chose to dwell in Sodom, even though the people of Sodom were wicked in the eyes of the Lord. When the angels urged Lot to flee, he hesitated to flee out of Sodom and nearly perished himself, had not the angels driven him out. But God saved righteous Lot out of Sodom. The reason for it? Gen 19:29: *God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow.* It was Abraham, the Hebrew, whom God remembered. The one who was unknown in Sodom and had no friends in Sodom. But Abraham knew God. Lot might have had friends in Sodom and he certainly had family there, but his relationship with God was wanting. Where were all his great riches, his servants, his herds, and even his wife when he arrived in safety? Where was the influence that he had had in Sodom's gate? Through his friendship with the people of Sodom he had jeopardized his own life and, moreover, he was complicit in the death of his wife and his daughters' severe immorality.

Conclusion

Although much more could be said about this topic I think we have already provided sufficient evidence to draw a conclusion. To use Rev Sparks's own words I would therefore conclude that **friendship with people in this world is impossible without friendship with the principles of this world.** Let us therefore take heed lest we become God's enemies by ignoring or reinterpreting His warning: *Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

**Friedlieb Lorenz
Dunedin**

Marriable Men

by Jon Dykstra



Photo by Patrick Fore on Unsplash

Qualities Dads should be looking for in anyone who wants to date our daughters

Here's a topic that's best to get to too early rather than too late – what sort of men should our daughters marry?

Dads are going to have a lot of input in this decision, one way or another. If we actively try to influence our daughters – by example, through conversation, and by requiring interested young men to talk to us first – we'll point them to a certain sort of man. And if we don't talk about what makes a man marriable, if we aren't a good example of a godly man and good husband, and if we have no role in our daughter's dating life, then we'll point them to another sort of man.

What kind of man *do* we want for our daughters? The answer is simple when we keep the description broad: a man who loves the Lord, and will be

a good leader to his wife and children, who's hardworking, and also active in his church.

But what does this type of man look like as a boy? If our daughters are dating, and getting married young, they'll unavoidably have a "work in progress." That's a description that fits all of us – sanctification is a lifelong process – but which is even more true for a boy/man in his late teens who hasn't yet shouldered the responsibilities of providing for himself, let alone a family. It's hard, at this point, to take the measure of the man he will become. How do we evaluate potential suitors when there isn't a lot of track record to look back on?

We need to find out how they react to light and to leadership.

1. Light

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” – John 3:19-21

Does a young man love the light?

This is a characteristic that is easy for us dads to check up on. It’s as simple as asking his parents if they know where he is on Friday and Saturday nights. Does he think it’s no big deal to tell his parents where he will be? Or does he want to keep what he’s up to a mystery? Does he have a problem with having his parents around when friends come over? Or has he introduced all his friends to them? When he goes out to other friends’ houses does his group pick homes where parents are home? Or do they want their privacy?

Many young men in our congregations are planning or attending events that take place late at night and far away from parental or any other type of supervision. They may not have a specific intent to get drunk or do other foolishness, but by fleeing from the light they’ve created the opportunity. A teen who tells his parents that it is none of their business where he is going is a boy who loves the dark.

Another question to ask: does he have monitoring software on his computer – Covenant Eyes, for example – and would he be willing to show the reports to you? Would he be happy to let you know where he’s been on the Internet? This would be a young man who is unafraid of, and loves the Light.

2. Leaders

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... – Ephesians 5:25

There’s a reason that young women are attracted to “bad boys.” When the other young men they know are doing nothing all that bad, and nothing at all remarkable then an arrogant kid who doesn’t care what anyone thinks can look like leadership material. He, at least, is not lukewarm. But this is the last man we would want to marry our daughters. His “leadership” recognizes no authority but his own. In contrast God tells us that as heads to our wives we are called to serve, imitating Christ. Godly men don’t dominate their wives; they die for them.

So how can dads spot this sort of servant leadership in young men? It shows itself in big ways and little.

In a church service, does he hold the songbook for his sister? Or does he have his hands in his pocket while his sister holds it for him? Does he sing? Or is he too cool (too lukewarm) to praise God with enthusiasm?

How does he treat his mom? If he treats her with respect – if he readily submits to authority – that is a good sign that he can be entrusted with authority. If he treats his mother shamefully, yelling at her, and ignoring what she asks, every young lady should beware! If he’s a terror to someone placed over him, we don’t need to guess how he will treat those under his authority.

Another question to consider: did he take the servant-leader role in the relationship right from the beginning? In any boy-girl dynamic, someone has to be the first to say “I like you” and with that comes the very real risk of being the *only* one to say it. When that happens, it stings. So was this boy willing to stick his neck out for your daughter? Was he willing to risk looking the fool, so she wouldn’t have to? Or did he wait

for her to take the lead and ask *him* out?

How does he take correction? Any boy who dates our daughter is going to be, at best, a godly man partly formed. While we are all works in progress, not all of us recognize this – arrogant young men think themselves beyond the need of correction. If a potential suitor bristles at any suggestion from his elders, or if he’s unwilling to apologize when he’s wrong, then he is definitely the wrong sort for our daughters. We instead want the young man who, as we read in Proverbs 15:32, “heeds correction [and] gains understanding.”

CONCLUSION

Young men hoping to get married are aspiring to a leadership role. But while marriage makes a man a leader, it won’t magically make him a good one.

Fortunately leadership is a skill that can be learned, and love of the Light, something we can grow in. So fathers shouldn’t be expecting perfection. But we also shouldn’t settle for lukewarm. It’s one thing for a young man to not yet be the leader he could be, and something else entirely for him to not be aspiring to this role or preparing for it. It’s one thing for a young man to not be seeking the Light as consistently or vigorously as he should, and another for him to be fleeing from it.

Fathers, we want our daughters to marry young men who love the Lord, and want honor Him in their roles as husband, father and elder. Let’s be sure then, that we teach them to look for true leaders who love the light.

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“The church is to proclaim the gospel ... It must open God’s word so clearly and convincingly that the people of God gathered in worship are moved to act obediently as a community of believers in the other areas of life.” C H Spurgeon

ACCESS

(Advanced Children's Christian Education Support Services)



ACCESS is a National Diaconate Committee-supported work based in the north of Madurai District, India. ACCESS is an after-school programme for village children to support them with their schoolwork and give them life skills. NDC supports 50-60 tuition centres that teach from 5-7pm weekdays and on Saturdays. Around 30 children are taught at each centre, approximately 1500 children altogether.

The tuition programme includes:

1. School homework support
2. Health, nutrition and hygiene instruction
3. Social interactions with the children using stories, songs, dances and games

Programme goals:

1. Retain 100% of children enrolled in school to complete their education
2. To facilitate an active role for parents to monitor their children, and protect them from harm
3. To provide opportunities for Christian character formation through mentoring
4. To empower and nurture children by means of the Gospel

Children that come to the classes are attending school; they are aged 6-14 years. Before this programme started children were dropping out of school as they were unable to cope with the academic work. Most children's parents are illiterate, seasonal agricultural workers, living a hand to mouth existence. Parents are working in the fields all day, and are not able help their children with their schoolwork. Initially the project raised awareness of the importance of an education. Now all the village children are enrolled in school. Tuition teachers have worked hard to build relationships with the school teachers. Now that the marginalized children are attending school and showing good academic progress, the teachers are supportive of the work ACCESS does. The best measure of success is the great reduction in school drop-outs.

The ACCESS tutors visit the parents to encourage them to leave their kids in school, and to help them access government schemes providing uniforms, books, lunch at school etc. The tutors are school graduates and they receive regular training, especially around sharing the Gospel with the children sensitively and wisely. (India is a predominately Hindu nation,



and the fourth-worst country in the world for religious violence).

The NDC has supported this ministry run by Rosy and Paulus Samuel for ten years. The official briefing for ACCESS is "To teach and instruct within and as an expression of a Christian worldview." This is because the word 'evangelism' is viewed with suspicion as being unpatriotic.

At the recent RCNZ Church Camp we

raised money to buy new furniture for the school children. Please pray for the Tuition tutors and for Rosy and Samuel as they lead this life-changing and community-changing work.

These photos show the humble beginnings of ACCESS, meeting outside the schools, then to using the classrooms, and now with new school furniture.

Ordination for Pukekohe's second minister

The 11th March 2018 was a blessed day for Pukekohe Reformed Church. On that day Graeme Zuidema was officially ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. He will serve in the Pukekohe Reformed Church as a second pastor alongside the Rev. John Haverland.

Graeme and Amanda with their children Sarah and Joshua are settling into the Pukekohe Reformed Church. On the day of Graeme's ordination many people who have been involved in the Zuidema's lives came to share the day with them, family from Australia and New Zealand, friends from near and far and pastors who have taught and encouraged them.

These photos give a snippet of some of these moments.





(top left) Special day for the Rev. John Zuidema and his wife Trudi (Graeme's parents). They also brought greetings from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia.

(top centre) The Rev. Leo DeVos was Graeme's supervising pastor while Graeme did his vicariate in the Reformed Church of Hukanui.

(top right) Elder Dirk Holtslag from the Reformed Church of Foxton pointed out that it was at their church Graeme and Amanda (van Echten) met for the first time.

(middle right) The Rev. Andrew deVries and his wife Christina also came to share the special day as Graeme and Amanda were part of the Bishopdale Reformed Church for many years.

(right) Elder Fred Braam and his wife Marguerite from



Bishopdale Reformed Church brought greetings.

The Zuidemas and Haverlands having a coffee together. Now the real work begins!

Books in focus

The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming of Age Crisis – and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance

by Ben Sasse

St. Martin's, 2017. Hardcover, 320 pages, \$14.76 (Amazon)

**Reviewed by OP minister
Donald M. Poundstone**

Senator Ben Sasse (R-NE), husband and father of three as well as a committed Reformed Christian, has written a wonderful book. While serving as a college president before his election to public office three years ago, Mr. Sasse discovered that many students remained immature youths well into their twenties and beyond. He conceived this book to address the widespread problem, in the words of the volume's subtitle, of *Our Coming-of-Age Crisis – and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance*.

Along the way the senator treats such topics as the need to help our children resist peer pressure, learn the value and satisfaction of hard work, develop the habit of reading widely and critically, and get by with less stuff. The chapter on the benefits of travel and the discovery of unfamiliar places and cultures (as opposed to mere "tourism") is alone worth the price of the book. (But that's true of other chapters, too.)

Readers will quickly learn that Sasse

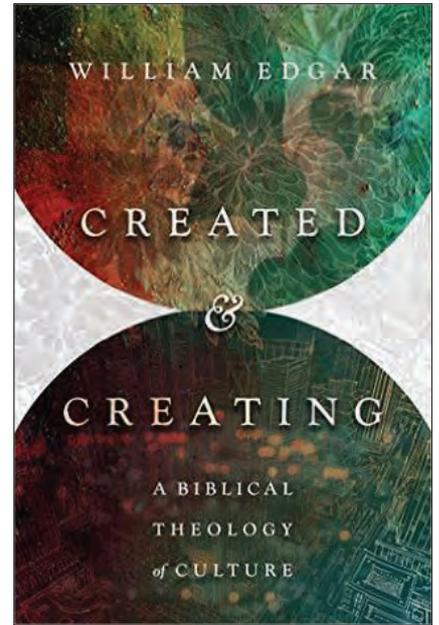
doesn't blame either American young people or their parents – as least not exclusively – for the mess we're in. No, our current situation stems from a variety of widespread societal and cultural developments. Increasing national wealth and shifting attitudes toward child-rearing and the role of schooling contribute to an extended period of casual adolescence, including troublesome delays of marriage and moving out of Mom and Dad's home.

The book is filled with engaging accounts of the author's experiences while growing up as the son of a wrestling and football coach in a small Nebraska town, and the wisdom he and his wife, Melissa, have learned and practiced in the rearing of their own children. While the book is not a heavily religious or in-your-face Christian tract, the Sasses offer numerous specific and helpful suggestions for childhood reading and activities designed to produce independent, responsible, and mature young adults.

Senator Sasse doesn't employ a useful phrase (see the next sentence) and barely hints at a major source of resistance to his analysis and prescriptions. The ancient Romans used the phrase "bread and circuses." Members of the ruling class realized that assuring adequate food and entertainment (especially violent spectacles) was an effective way to keep common folk docile and content with their lot as subjects. Americans are in the process of perfecting this strategy. Many of our political, academic, and other leaders seem satisfied to guarantee that we all have plenty of cheap fast-food and drink, a smartphone, and endless supplies of popular entertainment as the surest road to maintaining public order and their own positions of power. The late social critic Neil Postman, occasionally referenced in Sasse's book, warned us over thirty years ago of this danger in his classic volume *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

Sasse's book is highly recommended to the readers of *New Horizons*, especially to newlyweds and the parents of young children. You won't be disappointed!

New Horizons, March 2018



Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture

by William Edgar

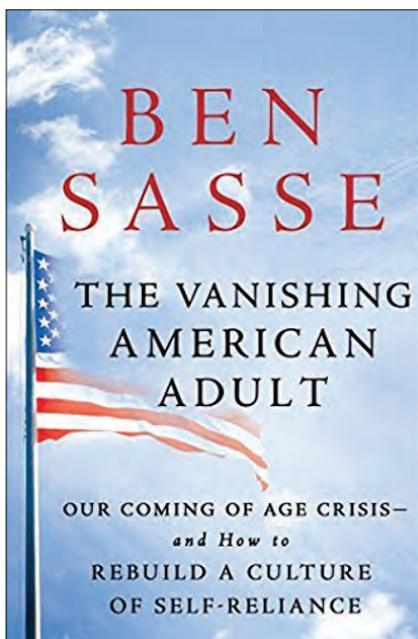
IVP Academic, 2016. Paperback, 272 pages, list price \$17.94 (Amazon)

**Reviewed by OP pastor
Cliff L. Blair**

In this volume, Dr. William Edgar advocates that "the Bible teaches that cultural engagement before the living God is, along with worship, the fundamental calling for the human race" (87). His book has three sections of roughly equal size.

In the introduction and first section, he examines the idea of culture from the etymology of the word to a survey of nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural studies. It is abundantly apparent that Edgar has thought long and read broadly and deeply on his subject. These will be the most challenging chapters for the non-scholar, but they are in no way impenetrable.

He surveys Christian views, looking at Niebuhr, Eliot, Lewis, Kuyper, Schilder, Schaeffer, and others. C.S. Lewis seems to present something of a conundrum. He spent his life engaging with culture as a professor, critic, and author, and yet he often seemed to gently disparage its significance. Edgar summarizes Lewis's perspective: "Culture is a storehouse of



the best sub-Christian values, much as the soul is close to the spirit. Culture, then, may be preparation for grace, or even a road away from it, but it cannot be confused with grace" (62). He opines that Lewis "was rather too skeptical about the New Testament's apparent diminishing of culture" (63). One senses him willing Lewis to fit his mold.

In the latter two sections, Edgar engages with Scripture. The second section addresses passages that seem most problematic to a thesis of cultural transformation: those emphasizing the division of church and world, the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of men. He gives a second reading of these texts, seeking to show that they are not insuperable obstacles to his position.

The third section is a more positive case for cultural engagement. He begins in Genesis where God charges mankind to multiply and subdue the earth. He reads here a cultural mandate to respond "to the divine call to enjoy and develop the world that God has generously given to his image-bearers" (176). He goes on

to argue that the Fall has not removed this mandate. Indeed, redemption is not properly understood unless it has a cultural expression.

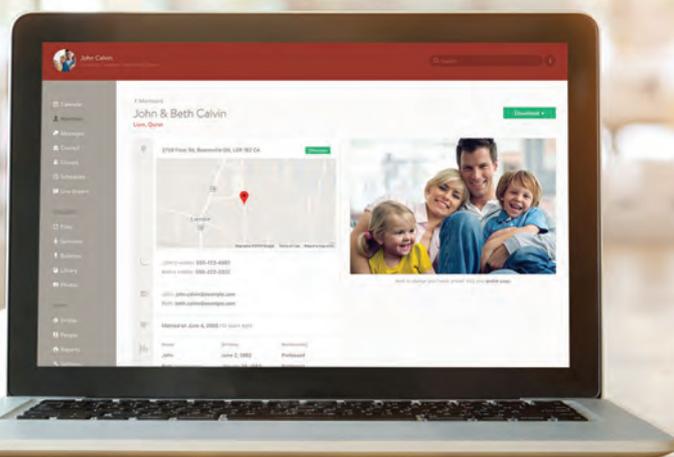
There is much to think on in this book, but the shadow of a false dichotomy hangs over it: we are pressed to choose between a simple evangelism that merely saves souls with no thought of culture (beyond a suspicious hostility) or making cultural transformation the mission of the church. A helpful alternative seems to go unconsidered: we carry out the church's unique mission of proclaiming the life-giving gospel, wholly alive to the truth that as people are transformed, culture must follow as an effect but not a goal. Or to quote Lewis's admonition from *Mere Christianity*: "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. ... Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither."

New Horizons, March 2018

"If ministers wish to do any good, let them labour to form Christ, not to form themselves, in their hearers."

John Calvin

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