

faith in FOCUS

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***RUNNING A
BETTER RACE***

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Editorial

Our society is obsessed with health, wealth, success, sport and entertainment, just to mention a few of the more obvious obsessions.

Many of us in Reformed Churches are very familiar with the obsession of sports in New Zealand, and the amount of training required for one to reach the zenith of that sport and stay there. So it shouldn't be very difficult for us to understand Paul the Apostle's use of athletic vocabulary in some of his epistles.

It requires effort – physical and mental training, prioritising of time and life commitments and the will to win!

Of course, Paul is not referring to sport or physical running as such. He is using descriptive words which help his readers to understand that there is effort involved in the Christian life and there is a goal to pursue and a course to complete. Toward the end of his life he could write to Timothy "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith ..."(2 Timothy 4:7) He expended, it would seem, maximum effort in the service of the Lord.

I wonder how we compare with that today? I sometimes contemplate, that corporately, as God's people, we may seem to live out our time between profession of faith and our final journey to glory, with very little to show as to our pursuit of holiness, growth in faith and grace, and our knowledge of the Son of God. We seem to be distracted with what is going on in this world, without considering the world to come.

The [A]uthor of the *Letter to the Hebrews* gives us earthly saints an exhortation to persevere, an apt way to finish this comment. ¹"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith ..."(Hebrews 12:1-2)

Our contributors write about running a better race and encourage us to overcome mediocrity.

Mr Ben McDonald encourages us to run the race well.

Mr John Rogers suggests an antidote to spiritual mediocrity.

Mrs Joanna and Mrs Emily Voschezang review books to aide our running.

We share some interesting snippets written by the late D. G. Vanderpyl some decades ago.

Mrs Sally Davey thinks about Christian character in public office.

Mr Wes Bredenhof considers "The doctrine by which the Church stands or falls" in our Reformation Day article.

Mrs Elaine Borger informs us about Voice for Life's peaceful memorial for the voiceless in the grounds of Parliament.

Cover image by Jeremy Lapak on Unsplash.

Apology:

It has been brought to my attention, that in the August issue (vol 45/7, p.3-7), all the reference marks for the notes in Mr John Haverlands article were missing. My apologies to Mr Haverland and our readers.

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 Dort, 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.

Running a better race

Running the race well

Ben McDonald

A marathon is not the sort of event you undertake lightly. If you're like me, it might not be the sort of event you would undertake at all. 42 kilometres is an awful long way to run. And I struggle these days just running down the driveway.

To run a marathon requires stamina and conditioning. You need the right amount of fluid and energy intake. You have to work out what pace to run to ensure you have enough in the tank to finish. It also requires mental preparation. You need to be focused and not lose interest. You need to work out how to push through the pain barrier, to keep going when every part of your body is screaming at you to stop.

The New Testament often refers to the Christian life as a race.¹ It has many obstacles and challenges along the way that need to be overcome. It also requires great endurance to complete it successfully. But you can't run a marathon as if it was a sprint. That isn't going to end well. Running the Christian race requires a strategy. We need to recognise what kind of race this is and implement the strategy to complete it successfully.

The good news is that God has given us the strategy to run well.

What kind of race is this? (Matt 11:28-30)

Every Christian who is weary or exhausted loves Matt 11:28, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And for good reason. The promise of rest appeals most when our life is characterised by constant activity and busyness, which seems to be the norm today. Yet Jesus' idea of rest is to take up his yoke and learn from him (v29).

I visited the Wellington Botanical Gardens recently. It's a really lovely place with many paths and tracks to enjoy. Along these paths are benches and seats for weary walkers. And maybe for all the

turbo-charged cross-fit trainers as well. But along the track of the Christian life, Jesus doesn't give us a bench to rest on. He gives a yoke to take on – *his* yoke. A yoke meant work. It was an instrument of industry and not relaxation. Jesus' yoke gives rest to the soul and work for the body. Taking on his yoke means discipleship, coming to him in repentance and faith, and running the race as a follower of Jesus. He assures that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (v30).



Photo by Mārtiņš Zemlickis on Unsplash

So this race is both a physical race *and* a spiritual race. But, importantly, it is the spiritual that sustains the physical, and not the other way round. A soul that rests in Jesus is enabled and empowered by God's grace to run the race of life as a follower of Jesus, bearing his light and easy yoke. Light and easy, however, sounds more like an advertisement for low-fat yoghurt than a description of our Christian race.

Many of us are well acquainted with

The race becomes light and easy when he is the focus, the source of our strength and the object of our affection. Fix your eyes on Jesus and run well.

the pressures and demands of busy schedules pulling us in different directions. Some of us also know the deep hurts of life as an inescapable reality.

In my vicariate year², I went through a time when I was having trouble getting my sermons done and the pressure was getting to me. I relayed my struggles to a friend, who said: 'You're doing it in your own strength.' I appreciated my brother's concern, but I was puzzled by the explanation. What does it mean to be 'doing it in your own strength.'?

It seemed like a diagnosis (a true one) without a remedy. Maybe even a cliché. Perhaps you've heard it before as well. Why does the Christian life often seem like a heavy burden, rather than light and easy?

You were running well... (Gal 5:7)

Gal 5:7 helps us understand what the race *doesn't* look like. It says, "You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" The Galatian churches had embraced a view of the Christian race that required Gentiles to become like Jews, being circumcised and taking on the old yoke of the Law of Moses in order to be saved.³ Rather than salvation being a free gift of God's grace in Jesus and his death on the cross, received by faith alone, works were added as a necessary condition for earning a righteous standing with God.

Paul argued strenuously that this wasn't the gospel because it nullified God's grace, as though Christ died for nothing.⁴ As pious and godly as the Galatians may have thought themselves to be, they weren't running well because they weren't running the gospel race.

To run well is not merely living a life consistent with the moral standards of God's holiness and a bunch of activity to go with it. It is also running consistently with the gospel we confess. We love the doctrines of grace, rediscovered and proclaimed as a result of the reformation. 'Amazing Grace' resonates when it comes to our salvation and eternal destiny in glory. We are less familiar, however, with how God's grace transforms the race we are running. As a result, the Christian life can seem like an amazing burden. Or, for some, even amazing boredom.

Have you ever heard these protests in your house or in your own mind? "Why do we have to go to church again?" "I'd love to read the Bible more, but I don't have time." "I know we have to love each other, but some people just drive me crazy." "Prayer doesn't work." "No

one ever invites us over to their house, so why should we make the effort to have anyone over?" "I don't have the gift of evangelism."

All of these things are indispensable to the Christian race,⁵ yet they can seem like such a heavy and wearying burden to bear. Our monuments to busyness – our calendar, our diary, our phone – are so full already that anything else just adds more to the 'to do' list. The race becomes a burden because the old patterns of self-trust and self-fulfilment overshadow God's glory and the grace he gives in Jesus. I rely on myself, or I pursue my own course, and become weighed down by both.

What's the alternative?

Running with endurance (Heb 12:1-3)

We often believe the biggest obstacle in this race is outside of us. It's true that the Christian life has many challenges. In a fallen world we can expect opposition, even severe hostility. People will disappoint us and let us down. Sickness and sadness, trial and tragedy visit regularly. The race frequently runs uphill.

The biggest obstacle, however, is not outside of us but within us. Heb 12:1 says: "... let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."

There are two components to running the Christian race with endurance. First, cast aside every weight and sin. Not that I know from experience, but running in high heels seems hazardous. Stilettos clearly aren't designed for athletics.

Sin has the same effect. Sin enslaves and weighs down. The good pleasure and will of God is replaced by the pleasure and will of something else, usually our own. The sins that cling closest though are often the most subtle.

When I worked for a bank in Melbourne, I sometimes carried boxes of documents about a kilometre from our office to the courts. The box would feel light when I began the journey, but the further I went the heavier the box became, or so it seemed. By the end my arms and back ached, and I was always relieved after the box was delivered.

Discontentment, unthankfulness, resentment, bitterness, grumpiness, complaining, pride; these seem light weight compared to murder, adultery, stealing and blasphemy. They're also behaviours and attitudes we tend to justify and tolerate.⁶ But unchecked, they become like

that box of documents, clinging closely within, weighing us down and hindering our progress in the race. They do so because something else has captured our heart and become the focus of the race.

The second component, then, is to look to Jesus. Heb 12:2 continues: "... looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..."

On the bottom of an Olympic size swimming pool are painted lane markers. By focussing on the lane marker the swimmer swims in a straight line. The key to running the Christian race well is this: You are not the focal point of the race. Jesus is.

If Jesus is not the focus of the race, something else will be; our happiness, our contentment, our desires, our appearance, even our own moral performance. The demands of discipleship will grate against our own demands for self-fulfilment. Rather than a light and easy yoke, weariness and faintheartedness results.

Heb 12:3 encourages us, "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

Consider Jesus' love; that he endured both hostility from sinners and the cross for sinners, as well as the joy set before

him. Consider his power and compassion; that he raised the dead, fed the hungry, stilled storms, and healed the sick and afflicted. Consider his holiness and complete obedience which led to his death, though he was innocent. Consider his glory and majesty; that he was raised victorious over sin and death, and now rules at the right hand of God.

Sometimes we weigh ourselves down with our own expectations. Sometimes we think our burdens are imposed on us by those around us or even by God himself. Other times, our demands for self-fulfilment become our priority. We're simply unwilling to deny self, take up a cross and cultivate a Christ-like attitude of humble, loving service.

Consider Jesus.

The focus of the race is the strategy of the race. God's grace enables and empowers us to endure as Jesus is held out to us, that we'd look to him and find our strength in him.

As the hymn goes:

*Run the straight race through God's
good grace,
Lift up thine eyes, and seek his face;
Life with its way before us lies,
Christ is the path and Christ the
prize.⁷*

Summary

No one knows how long their race will be. But however long or short, God has given us the strategy to run it well and endure to the end. He has given himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God's grace enables and empowers us to keep going when everything else screams at us to stop. The race becomes light and easy when he is the focus, the source of our strength and the object of our affection.

Fix your eyes on Jesus and run well.

1 Or a course that someone would run or complete. See: Acts 20:24; 1 Cor 9:24-27; Gal 2:2, 5:7; Phil 2:16; 2 Tim 4:7; & Heb 12:1.

2 Ministry training with another minister.

3 See also Acts 15:1-21, especially verse 10.

4 Gal 2:21

5 Maybe have a look at these verses when you have finished reading this article: Heb 10:25, Ps 19:7-11, Matt 5:43-48, 1 Thes 5:16-18, Rom 12:9-13, Matt 10:32-33.

6 See *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* by Jerry Bridges, for more.

7 SttL #491 Fight the Good Fight.

Mr Ben McDonald is the minister in the Reformed Church of Wellington.

Running a better race

Spiritual mediocrity and its antidote

John Rogers

In his book on Prophecy (by which he means Preaching), the early Puritan, William Perkins, warns ministers not to think too highly of themselves; not to think that they might be exactly the man that, say, a very godless congregation needs or, perhaps, a congregation that has a tendency to theological liberalism. He warns ministers and prospective ministers that "it is very hard for a

man to live much above his people." (From personal experience, I would say that is often difficult enough to live up to some of one's people.) We should all take that as a general principle in life. I do not forget what Jesus said to Peter at the end of John's Gospel, "Never mind John; you follow me." He did not, of course, mean not to mind him absolutely; he was a brother. He meant that it is not to be our concern that the Lord deals somebody else a 'better' lot in life;

our duty is to follow the Lord, whatever 'hand' he deals us. We all need to "desire the sincere milk of the word" (1 Peter 2:2) so as to have the truth of Scripture "deeply rooted" within us (Mark 4:17); so that we can, under God and in Christ, stand on our own two feet in the world and in the church. That is all very true and we should all strive for it. Nevertheless, be humble about your prospects and don't put yourself to any greater test than you need to. "Thou

There are all sorts of subtle — and often enough not so subtle — changes of thought and attitude that have taken place in the past sixty years that have contributed to our present ‘spiritual mediocrity.’

shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” and “Pride cometh before a fall.”

This is certainly part of the reason there is a “general level of spiritual mediocrity” among and within so many Christians today. That quotation is from your editor’s request to me for this article; I don’t disagree with it. An old aunt of mine encouraged me many years ago with a reminder of one of David’s mighty men, spoken of in 2 Samuel 23:11f.: “After him was Shammah, the son Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered into a troop, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils and the people fled from the Philistines. But he took his stand in the midst of the plot, and defended it and struck the Philistines; and the Lord brought about a great victory.” “Having done all,” he simply stood his ground; but he stood his ground when all others fled. That is remarkable and something not so many of us are able to do. For while Scripture and the Lord hold us responsible for our own actions and we must not make excuses, we are nevertheless susceptible to the influence of others around us, including our fellow Christians. As Paul said, “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Hence all the warnings in the book of Proverbs about the company we keep, especially as young people.

The church, and Christians, have always been influenced by the world, even in Old Testament times when Israel was physically separated from the nations round about. It is, therefore, inevitable within the structural and circumstantial changes Jesus brought and in which we live. For we are still, in certain but real senses, part of the world. We are citizens of two kingdoms, the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God. Hence Jesus prayed that the Father not “take us out of the world but keep us from the world” – the world’s thinking, the world’s desires, the world’s philosophies, thought-forms and aims and motivations.

There are all sorts of subtle – and often enough not so subtle – changes of thought and attitude that have taken place in the past sixty years that have contributed to our present ‘spiritual mediocrity.’ But there are also obvious ‘outward’ factors that have played their part and which may be among the first things we need to work against and can work against.

I realise one must be careful with childhood memories; and comparisons with other times. Nevertheless, I remember life in general during my early

childhood being very God-grounded and church-centred. There is a lot of that still among us, for which we can be humbly thankful. But we need to be very watchful. In my parental home, never was family Bible reading missed (and only if dad could not be home did mum lead it); with devotional notes and prayer, including the use of a long missionary prayer list (the Open Brethren sent out many missionaries in those days). But life in general was less pressured. In my family home, we were not obsessed with sport as the world now is – and are we much less? There were not the same opportunities for outside entertainment as there are now. Our economic and financial system puts horrible pressure on the lives of all. When I was a boy a tradesman could own his own home, a reasonable car, and take his family for a couple of weeks’ holiday at the beach once a year on his own, single income. The financial pressures on us all are far greater than they were then. On the other hand, so have our expectations risen – often a great deal. To be satisfied with less and content in the Lord’s providence is not something that comes easily to us.

Within sixty years the world has ‘learned’ how to be much more intrusive. Nobody did this deliberately; nobody had bad motives about it (at least, we don’t need to see it as a conspiracy, even if there are signs it could be growing that way). It arose out of man chipping away at the cultural mandate. As I have already alluded, Sheryl and I were brought up Open Brethren. In those days, Brethren did not believe in an ordained ministry. They “waited on no man;” but “looked to the Lord” to provide (ministry) “as the Holy Spirit led.” (From time to time one wondered, as Martyn Luther’s father wondered once, whether it was the Holy Spirit leading or some other. Indeed, I remember one instance when I was about eleven when the leading elder got up and asked a visiting preacher whether perhaps he had said enough and maybe it was time to draw proceedings to a close.) But for 120 years of Brethren history it more or less worked. I can remember hearing quite gifted and certainly very biblically literate preachers. That degenerated greatly in the 1970’s. What happened about that time that gave rise to this? Before the seventies men went home at nights and read their Bibles and prepared messages to give at Sunday morning worship and at Sunday evening “gospel meetings;”

during the seventies many of even the more gifted ones began to do what everybody else did: they went home and watched TV.

Then in the late 90s the internet doubled us down on the tech revolution, and it has only intensified since. There is one respect in which all technology has never advanced on the first, the discovery of fire: it is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. I'll not even speak of the intrinsically evil matter. But it seems to me there has been a sort of progress in this.

I remember my mother saying two or three decades ago (so it was before the more modern technological developments I speak of above), "The devil has got us all very busy, so we don't have time for the Lord." If we were busy in the early nineties, what are we now? There is more to this busyness than the distraction our communication devices bring. If you look up any long-term inflation chart, you will see that inflation really took off in the 1970s and it has been racing ever since. The average house price was, historically, three and a half times the average salary. Today it is somewhere between eight and ten. So I have great sympathy for people on lower incomes especially. But it affects us all; supplying the basics of life takes a lot more time than it used to for most people. And it does tend to master us. "Oh, that link looks interesting." And a half hour later, we're still just catching up with the news. We are constantly distracted.

About this time, Neil Postman wrote his *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, the thesis of which was that not only has TV done serious damage to our concentration spans, it necessarily turns everything into entertainment. So everything has to be fun, especially education. Well, I have no desire to make life miserable – there is too much of it as it is. But for the life of me, I never could make learning Greek vowel declensions and Hebrew verb conjugations fun. But as a culture, this is where we are; we must not be too serious; we must treat life lightly; we must always be able to see the funny side of things. Actually, a very helpful attribute. But when we are too busy and everything must be amusing, when will we be serious? – and true spirituality is a serious business (always remembering that serious is not synonymous with morose or morbid or dull or ...).

So busyness developed into amusement and has now gone the further step

into trivia. And can there be a greater driver (well, I am guessing here, because I've never used it) of trivia than Twitter? Doesn't the name say it all? The philosophers on Mars Hill could no better dis Paul than by commenting that he was a mere 'seed-picker' – a little bird who picked a seed here and pecked a crumb there and then cobbled it together into some nonsensical "new teaching." Well, we've gone one better; we don't even pick up a seed; all we do is tweet!

Thus we are a shallow culture. I don't fear that it will last. For man is a deep creature. He was made in the image of God. That is about as deep as any created thing could be. And what-



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ever the Psalmist meant when he said, "Deep calls to deep at the sound of thy waterbrooks," at least part of the point would be: a deep problem requires a deep solution; and a deep creature will soon be thirsty on a shallow diet; like the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, onto her sixth draft and still thirsty. But as she said, the well is deep – and the real well was deeper than she knew. "If thou knewest who it was that speaketh with thee, thou wouldst ask him and he would give thee to drink." We will get to the bottom of the pig trough one day and turn back.

But in the meantime, you and I have to live in the midst of these shallow waters, and somehow grow in godliness, seek to be like our master, strive for spiritual maturity (which by definition cannot be trivial or shallow or mediocre) and

... the antidote to spiritual mediocrity: [is] remembering what we were; reflecting on the enormous privilege of what we are; and meditating on how God got us from the one to the other — by the utterly undeserved gift of his only beloved and absolutely righteous and holy Son.

generally seek to be holy as our Father in heaven is holy. How will we do it? Some of the answer is obvious. We have to set priorities. We have to make first things first. For me, that means if I don't set about having my daily Bible reading and prayer time pretty much first thing in the day, it gets hard to fit it in — a bit easier in my now somewhat slower pace of life. But in the full swing of a busy life, you pretty much have to make some rule about it; if not first thing in the morning, then first thing in some other period of the day.

There are plenty of exhortations in the NT letters to this effect; we also have the constant example of the Lord himself, who often took time out to commune with his Father. But as a small caution, we mustn't think that our 'personal relationship' is the most important thing in growing spiritually. That might be the thinking of many evangelical Christians but it is not the thinking of the Bible. It is important. But then read the Psalms and think about what David was longing for in his 'personal devotions' (when the Psalms reflect 'personal devotions'). Paul speaks very clearly of the public ministry of the church being "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect (mature) man, unto a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

But perhaps the more important question is: what will motivate us to do this? — even give us the desire to strive for it? Answer: gratitude and only gratitude. This is what we see the Psalmists and OT saints doing constantly. Thus many of the Psalms simply recount the mighty works of the Lord on behalf of his people; and praise him for them. We too must constantly remind ourselves of what we were without Christ; what we are in Christ; and what God in Christ did to move us from the one state to the other. "God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). So Paul constantly exhorts us to thankfulness. That is the pattern of his letters. First, he speaks of what God has done for us. Then, let us take just Romans for an example, "on account of the mercies of God (which he has just spent eleven chapters describing), present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (12:1) — and while that service will most certainly be spiritu-

al, I still prefer the old translation: "which is your *logikēn* = reasonable service"; in the light of such grace, gratitude and service is the only reasonable response. As he says in 2 Corinthians 5:15; "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him which died for them and rose again." Thus he exhorts us: "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6); "whatsoever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

Constantly he exhorts us to pray with thankfulness. Surely that must be what the letter to Laodicea is also about: remember your first love — that early joy and thankfulness for all that Christ has done for people "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity" (Psalm 51), therefore born "dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That is the antidote to spiritual mediocrity: remembering what we were; reflecting on the enormous privilege of what we are; and meditating on how God got us from the one to the other — by the utterly undeserved gift of his only beloved and absolutely righteous and holy Son.

Mr John Rogers is an emeritus minister and a member of the Reformed Church in Palmerston North.

Running a better race

Book reviews by Joanna and Emily Voschezang

The Pilgrim's Progress

by John Bunyan

When considering the theme of running a better race, there is no book that springs to the mind more quickly than that of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. What better text to consider when we regard our lives as a race that needs to be run with perseverance, pressing on towards the prize that God promises to those who stand firm.

John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison in the late 1660s, and it was first published in 1678. Many may think that a book nearly 350 years old would be impossible to read and have very little to say to our modern society, yet I found that most of the characters he described could, with very little difficulty, be transported into our modern lives and still be just as relevant. While the outward circumstances of our society may now be very different, Bunyan is more concerned with the inner nature of the people he is describing, and that has changed very little over the last 350 years!

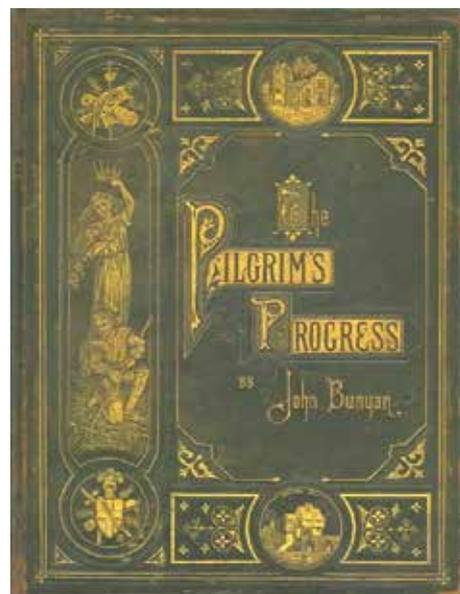
Most of us know Bunyan's story well, but I wonder how many have read it in full, in the original text. I reread this book recently and was struck, on almost every page, by the power of the metaphors used. The vivid nature of the illustrations and the writing skill that Bunyan applies bring his readers into a greater understanding of the nature of grace, the power of Christ and the promise of glory. For those who have only ever read the children's version of this book, or relied on hearing the story second hand, I strongly encourage you to get hold of a copy of the full text and read it for yourself. Let me outline some of the ways in which this amazing book has encouraged me.

We begin in the city of Destruction, with our hero Christian pointed in the direction of salvation by the worthy Evangelist. His way from here on in is plagued with temptations as he attempts to leave everything that holds him back from his journey. He is forced to contend with Obstinate, Pliable, Mr Worldly Wiseman, Simple, Sloth, Presumption, Formalist and Hypocrisy, Timorous and Mistrust,

Talkative, Turn Away, Little Faith, Vain-confidence, Atheist and Ignorance. Each of these characters is written in such a way as to show the dangers of their viewpoints. Mr Worldly Wiseman deceives Christian with his smooth words and honeyed talk, yet his path leads to the grave. Talkative displays the difference between merely talking about our faith and acting it out in our lives. Vain-confidence leads Christian and Hopeful astray, and into the clutches of Giant Despair. Each of these different temptations comes with a warning as to how to avoid it, and an encouragement as to how to stand up against it.

The Pilgrim's Progress, however, is more than a manual for avoiding temptation, it is also a great encouragement of the fellowship to be found in the company of other believers. Christian meets with plenty of help along his way, first from the Evangelist, then Good Will at the Wicket Gate, the Interpreter, Watchful, Discretion, Prudence, Piety, Charity, Faithful and Hopeful. Each of these has a different role to play in encouraging Christian and assisting him on his journey. Evangelist shows the importance of preaching the gospel, while the Interpreter provides Christian with remarkable illustrations and explanations of them to help him grow in his faith. The women at the Palace Beautiful show Christian hospitality, refreshment, uplifting conversation, and equip him with armour for the latter part of his journey. Faithful brings light to Christian in the midst of the Valley of the Shadow of Death and provides him with devoted companionship up until Vanity Fair; after which Christian is joined by Hopeful, who remains by his side for the rest of his journey. The example which Bunyan gives us of godly friendship is a real encouragement to us to seek this sort of friendship for ourselves on our spiritual journey, and to provide this sort of friendship to others also.

The journey that the pilgrim is on tells of the highs and lows of the Christian life, the dangers of temptation, the way in which we often encounter spiritual battle after a period of blessing, the potential for great faith, but also for great despair. It is a joy to read, and I



strongly recommend that you do so in Bunyan's own words:

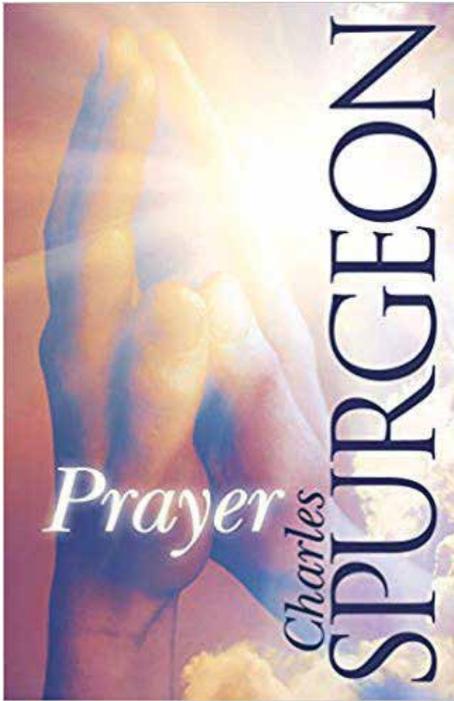
"This book it chalketh out before your eyes
The man that seeks the everlasting prize.
It shows you whence he comes, whither he goes,
What he leaves undone, also what he does;
It also shows you how he runs and runs
Till he unto the gate of glory comes."¹

1 *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan, copyright Barry Horner, New Jersey 1997, Pg 6

Prayer

by Charles Spurgeon

This little book is not so much a 'how to' guide on prayer, or even an exhortation to pray (although it does contain exhortation), it is simply a collection of 26 of Spurgeon's congregational prayers, combined into one book, with an epilogue about the nature and necessity of prayer. It may seem strange to read prayers that were written by someone else, but that is what the Psalms are after all! Spurgeon's prayers contain praise, in-



tercession, thanksgiving, and confession in beautifully worded, easy to read expressions of devotion to God. By reading them you will be encouraged to follow his example in laying bare your heart to our great Creator, you will be comforted by his pastoral concern for his congregation and the wider world, and you will find peace in his trust in our Lord and Saviour.

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” Jeremiah 33:3

Joanna Voschezang

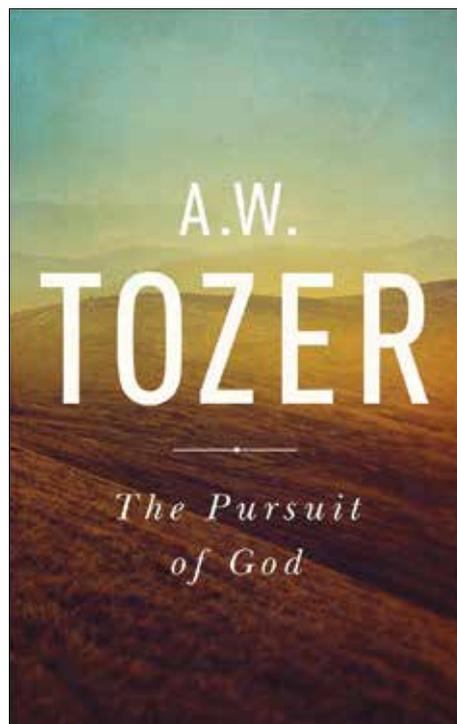
is a member of the Reformed Church in Hamilton

A.W. Tozer
The Pursuit of God

“God wills that we should push into His presence and live our whole life there.” Perhaps Tozer’s words make you feel guilty. Maybe you rush to come up with excuses. You certainly don’t live like that. Such close communion with God sounds wonderful, but is it really possible?

You might throw up your hands and protest that only a hermit could live such a devoted spiritual life. Or your gut reaction might be to do more – more Bible reading, more prayer, or more service in the church. Whether you lean towards despairingly giving up or determinedly working harder, Tozer’s book *The Pursuit of God* is a tool to help you reconnect with the Lord.

Tozer’s premise is simple: while we are not saved by our efforts to pursue God, Scripture shows that He clearly means for us to follow hard after Him and know Him intimately. To the question, “Why do some persons ‘find’ God in a way that others do not?” he answers that the problem is not with God, but with us. The veil of the Temple has been torn asunder and we are free to go to Him, but we don’t care enough to push into His presence. As Tozer writes, “The stiff and wooden quality of our religious lives is a direct result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth.... [Christ] waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain.”



It’s so easy for our faith to turn into a stale, joyless assent to the existence of a distant God. Tozer takes the time to draw our gaze back to our Heavenly Father: to his incredible works in creation, to the power of His Word, to the fact that He longs for us to experience Him as more than just a fact or a character in a book. Tozer is encouraging us, through the Word, to discover the God who spoke the Word, to relish His love and His closeness. He calls us to simply look to God Himself, to remember who He is and why we love Him. As our relationship with God as our Friend and Counsellor grows stronger and deeper, we will find that many of our struggles with sin and with maintaining the spiritual disciplines will begin to sort themselves out.

Tozer was not distinctly Reformed. He totters close to the edge of mysticism at times, and talks about prevenient grace rather than the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. These moments aside – for they are few and far between, and do not detract from the central idea of the book - I found *The Pursuit of God* to be incredibly encouraging and definitely worth adding to your reading list. I wish I had read it years ago.

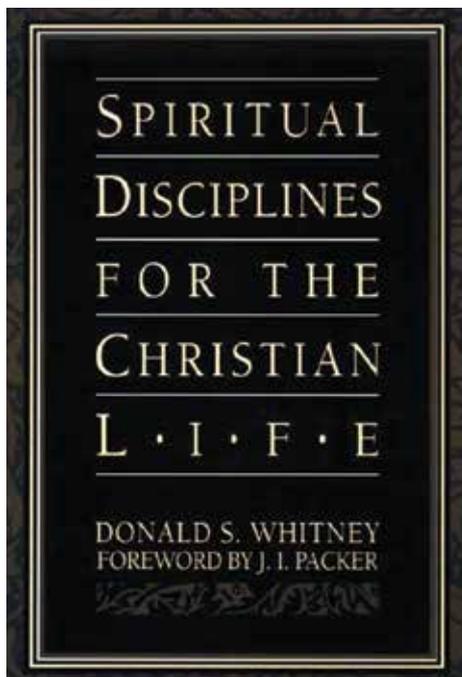
At only 126 pages, this book could be read in a day, but you’d be better off prayerfully reading a chapter at a time. *The Pursuit of God* calls us back to the simplicity at the heart of the Christian faith. It serves as a spiritual wake-up call. Do we really love God Himself? Do we even think it’s possible in this frantic, media-saturated culture to live in close communion with the Lord? If you find yourself in a spiritual rut and want to get back into the race, I would recommend this book as a great way to reset your relationship with your Savior.

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

Donald Whitney

I first read this book twelve years ago on a short term missions trip, and it impacted me so profoundly that I’ve tried to read it every year since. It is easily one of my favorite Christian books, and one that I recommend every believer read.

This book is absolutely saturated with Scripture. The foundation of the book is 1 Timothy 4:7, “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Whitney’s argument is that while we all want to find freedom and joy in our Christian



lives, the way to achieve that freedom is through discipline.

This sounds paradoxical, but he draws us back to the analogy of a world class musician. A skilled musician can pick up his instrument and play beautiful music anytime, anywhere. That freedom to play spontaneously does not come by accident or innate ability. Every world class violinist was once screeching out “Mary Had a Little Lamb” like any other beginner! The reason he now has freedom to play well is that he has disciplined himself to practice day in and day out. In the same way, if we want the freedom to quote Scripture confidently, to share our faith without fear, to see our whole life being shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ, we must practice the spiritual disciplines.

Whitney opens the book with an explanation of why the disciplines are so important, and then lays out for us ten disciplines: Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning. The closing chapter encourages us to persevere in the disciplines even when we feel spiritually dry, or when life feels busy and overwhelming.

There are two things I particularly love about this book. One is that he draws so heavily on the Puritans and other men and women of great faith from the past. The wealth of wisdom and insight they provide is profound. I also love that Whitney gives a lot of practical advice. Each chapter offers concrete suggestions on how to begin putting the discipline into practice, and ends with a section in which Whitney asks probing questions

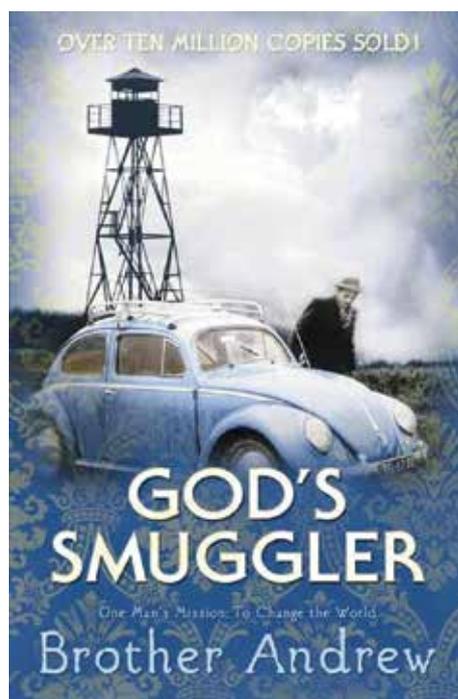
that spur us into action. There is also a study guide available for those who wish to delve deeper.

I recommend you read the second edition of the book, which was released in 2014. This updated edition takes pains to emphasize that the spiritual disciplines are not something we do to make ourselves right with God. While I personally didn’t find much at issue with the older version, I can appreciate the effort to spell out that important truth as clearly as possible.

This is not a book you can pick up and read in a day or two, but don’t let that deter you. It would be a great book to read fortnightly or monthly with a couple of friends, offering each other accountability as you find ways to fit the disciplines into your daily life. Do not be afraid to commit to the spiritual disciplines, for as 1 Timothy 4:8 says, “godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

God’s Smuggler Brother Andrew

Sometimes it’s refreshing to lay aside heavier Christian books and pick up a story in which you can see God’s hand at work in a powerful way. There are so many wonderful missionary biographies that will encourage you to run your race of faith more fervently. If you’re looking for a short, easy but powerful read, I can’t recommend



God’s Smuggler highly enough.

Brother Andrew tells his life story with a quick wit, a conversational tone and a good dose of humour. You’ll be eagerly turning the pages as he recounts his childhood in the Netherlands during the German occupation, the trauma of his military service, his radical surrender to God and the incredible journeys he took to bring the Bible to churches in Communist countries behind the Iron Curtain.

Every missionary story should spur us on to deeper, sacrificial love for God. When we find our faith needs encouragement, reading stories of faithful men and women and the churches they served can really bolster our spirits and our prayer lives. The plight of the churches behind the Iron Curtain reveals how much we take for granted. They had an intense love for God’s Word and went to incredible lengths to meet as God’s people, even at great personal risk. Andrew’s story is also a passionate plea to believers to take God at His word: that He hears their prayers and that He has absolute, unmatched power to answer those prayers in extraordinary ways. How often Brother Andrew snuck dozens, even hundreds, of forbidden Bibles into Communist countries literally right under the noses of the police – and yet his prayers that God would “make seeing eyes blind” were answered time after time!

This book is also an encouragement to trust that God will provide for day to day needs. Much like the well-known George Muller, Brother Andrew prayed persistently that God would provide for his family’s needs, and God moved in mysterious and beautiful ways to see that just the right amount of money or food was provided at just the right time. It is truly humbling and exhilarating to see how God cares for His people. If only we would all pray with such confidence and trust!

Brother Andrew’s life story offers us a dramatic example of what it can mean to totally surrender to God, not haphazardly or half-heartedly, but wholly, with conviction and intention. Although he was crippled, poor and had little formal education, Andrew trusted God’s leading and took dramatic steps of faith. This book is a page-turner, a real life, Gospel-saturated thriller. I pray that it will encourage you to live more boldly for Christ.

Emily Voschezang

is a member of the Reformed Church in Pukekohe.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

December 1980

After a particularly busy time for Jesus and His disciples, Christ said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely spot and rest a while." Well, it is a beautiful afternoon and my wife and I are enjoying a nice, quiet little holiday up North, in a neat little motel on a cliff, overlooking the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean. You see, every now and then we allow ourselves the small luxury of getting away from the routine of our daily lives to escape for a short period of rest and recreation. We have a pile of cassette tapes with us, including a series on pre-marital counselling by Al Martin. Even after almost three decades of married life we both found them beneficial to listen to. No kidding!

To my mind comes an article from The Banner of the CRC of North America, on the matter of constructive openness in marriage. In that article mention was made of an old couple who had just celebrated their 57th wedding anniversary. When at the party, Jo was asked if in all those years he had ever thought of getting a divorce, he responded in quite a classic sort of way. "I can honestly say that in all those 57 years of marriage I never seriously considered divorce; murder, yes, a few times perhaps, but divorce, never." Old Jo must have known for sure how to deal with his marital problems in a creative and positive manner.

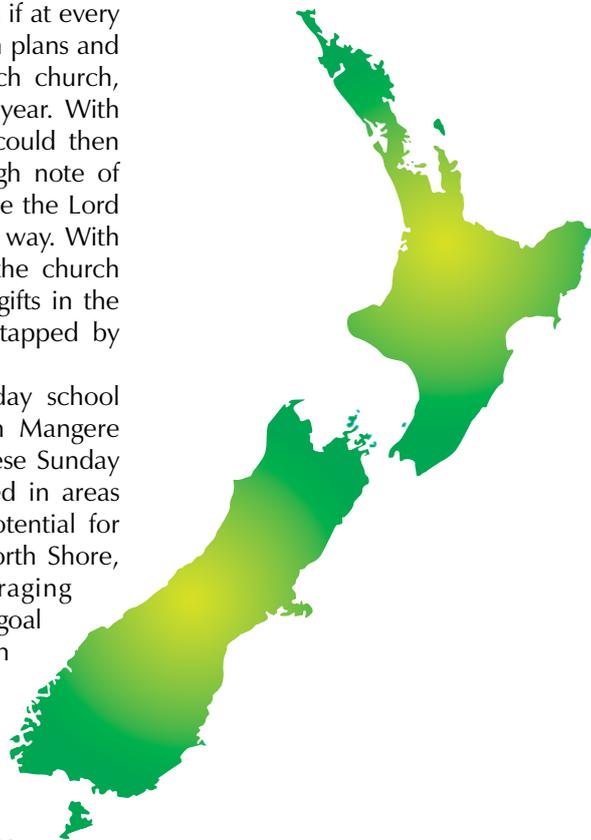
Anyway, I am sitting here, overlooking the mighty Pacific and thinking of some of the activities in our churches that have caught my eye. For instance, I read in the session news of the North Shore church, that the elders reviewed the goals for 1980 and noted that the majority of them had been achieved. Actually, I was there with them when they discussed the 1980 plan, presented by their pastor Richard P. Flinn. Now they are busy preparing their 1981 goals for the church and their plans for outreach and expansion in the neighbourhood. These plans are all part of five and ten year plans on the drawing board for church planting and consolidation. Approval and agreement is also sought from the congregation.

Wouldn't it be a good idea if at every October session meeting such plans and goals were presented, in each church, of what to do the following year. With proper goals, our churches could then enter the new year on a high note of hope and expectation to serve the Lord in a better and more positive way. With proper aims and directives the church could utilise the talents and gifts in the church that are so often untapped by the sessions.

There are two new Sunday school projects under way, in both Mangere and on the North Shore. These Sunday schools have been established in areas with real possibilities and potential for mission outreach. On the North Shore, attendance has been averaging around 50 children and the goal is to establish a new church in that area within a year or so. Winn Are, Peter Wagner or McNair, people who know all about church growth, would certainly commend these ventures of faith. As these fellows say, if you want to grow, you must make sure that the soil is just right for a good crop to grow in.

Looking at the Mangere venture, the soil is perfect; the husband of one of the Sunday school teachers is the caretaker at a local school, and because of this association, the Sunday school teachers have many contacts with the pupils of that school. The school has allowed the use of several classrooms. Some of the teachers are also leaders in local youth clubs. The new Sunday school begins at 9.00 am and runs for an hour to allow the teachers ample time to travel to church for the 11 o'clock service. Average attendance is 50 and over. What a blessing for the Mangere church. There is hope for growth, and a creative opening for talents in the church.

The Avondale church prepared a good quantity of visitor's cards, which they trust, will provide the necessary help and encouragement for visitors to their services. The reverse side is not just blank but can be used by the congregation. Sometimes it happens that the minister and the elders overlook the needs of someone in the congre-



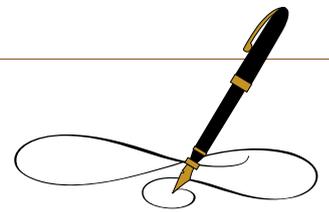
gation who needs help or attention. A little note in the collection bag for the minister will help to draw his attention to these needs in the church.

At a young people's Bible class, the matter of fruits of repentance was discussed. Some said this and some said that, but one bright young man came up with quite a good answer saying, "A 'believing' Christian must consequently also be a 'behaving' Christian." I think he stated it well.

Abridged

Outward focus

Sally Davey



Christian Character in Public Office

We live in a day of considerable political turmoil; when public emotion is being whipped up by populists bent on personal gain; and when the qualities of true statesmanship, once admired by everyone, are in short supply. Even evangelical Christians, now, are prepared to support men of bad character when specific policy gains are dangled as carrots.

That is not to say that we are entirely bereft of good men in government, but they are few and far between. Probably it is time to remind ourselves what good character, Christian character, looks like when serving in public office. There are many passages in Scripture which indicate the important qualities, whether it is Psalm 15 or various narrative passages which show us good men in action. But post-biblical history also provides us with the stories of such character, both in public service and in private life.

I thought it might be helpful to show you what two historians have written about the lives of a couple of England's great Christian statesmen. These are men who achieved much in the service of Christ and their countrymen, and yet who did so without holding the most powerful offices in the land. God gave them unique opportunities, and influence that had much to do with their character. They won respect, and that gave them the influence. Given that neither of these historians are Christians that I know of, what they write is rendered all the more remarkable.

William Wilberforce

My favourite biography of Wilberforce is written by William Hague, a former Conservative Party leader and Foreign Secretary in Prime Minister David Cameron's cabinet. Hague is a fine political biographer, and has written on

William Pitt, Wilberforce's contemporary and friend. The thing that impresses me about Hague's biography is his admiration of Wilberforce's character, and the accuracy with which he makes the connection between Wilberforce's Christian convictions and his actions. Hague recognizes three particular qualities which stood out in Wilberforce: his lovingkindness, his eloquence and his capacity for hard work. Indeed, Wilberforce was indefatigable, and the breadth of the causes he adopted makes the modern politician look distinctly unproductive by comparison. At the very end of his book, summing up Wilberforce's character and contributions, Hague has this to say:

Perhaps most important of all ... is that all his views, some of which are seen as progressive and some as reactionary from the standpoint of a later age, were rooted in a consistent view of the importance of religion, morality and education. Just as the state of slavery was destructive of true religion, morality and any sense of responsibility, so was a state of revolution. The French Revolution had cast aside all Christian heritage and teaching: anything which threatened Britain with the same must therefore be forcefully resisted. Wilberforce did not believe in unlicensed freedom, but rather that liberty could only responsibly be exercised within a strong moral and institutional framework. To him, the existence of slavery and proposals for great domestic upheaval were both obstacles to such a framework, and there was no inconsistency in being an enemy to them simultaneously.

Abolition of the slave trade was



William Wilberforce

In the dark historical landscape of violence, treachery and hate, the life of William Wilberforce stands out as a beacon of light, which the passing of two centuries has scarcely dimmed.”

William Wilberforce’s central tangible achievement, but his belief that the moral strength of society is the foundation of all else made his contribution to history far greater than one Act of Parliament. While disdaining political ambition of the conventional kind, he set out after his conversion on the most ambitious programme of them all, namely to change the entire moral climate of his country and a good deal of the world. His opposition to the slave trade was a mere manifestation of an insistence on the value of Christian principles which, when he gave voice to it, caused any hesitation or indecision to fall away. His son Samuel wrote that Wilberforce ‘said of all his public life he looked back with the greatest pleasure on his religious publication.’ His great vision of moral and spiritual enrichment was what he lived for, whether in defending the institution of marriage, attacking the practices of the slave trade or emphatically defending the Sabbath day. And just as he fought shy of political factionalism, so he steered clear of religious factionalism too: his Christianity was of a unifying, effusive and ecumenical kind ...

Wilberforce was a legislator for almost the whole of his adult life, but central to his beliefs was that laws should be underpinned by a common understanding of ethics and conduct. His ambitious and energetic promotion of his views may have contributed to the changed social conventions that dominated the Victorian age after his death, creating a British society very different from the licentious London against which he had revolted in the 1780s. As one of the ‘Fathers of the Victorians’ his views once again seem dated when seen from the vantage point of the more relaxed morality of later times, but in relation to his basic view that the long-term happiness of a society depends on how individuals behave towards each other, how families hold together, and how leaders keep the trust of the people, who can say with confidence that he was wrong?

Wilberforce’s pursuit of a broad and uplifting vision of society elevates him far above the general ranks of politicians. But the fact

that he managed to live according to his own principles, and constantly reflect his beliefs in his own character, is his crowning glory. It may be easier to disdain money and give much of it away if you inherit a large amount of it, but few people born in that position actually do so. It is easy to think that a Member of Parliament can resist all temptations of seeking high office if he has a great cause as an alternative, but it is still a rare event. Wilberforce exercised a genuine and remarkable self-discipline, and managed to do so while maintaining an optimistic and vivacious disposition. His conduct as a husband, father or elected representative is hard to fault. His generosity to those who came to him in need of help became an outstanding example of the virtues he called for in others. He showed how a political career could be conducted differently, pursuing long-term objectives deeply rooted in certain principles, strengthened in his indifference to holding power by his understanding of its transitory nature. As a result, he defied the axiom that political careers necessarily end in failure, going to his grave fulfilled by the knowledge of what he had helped to do, while those politicians to whom power alone is important decline in their old age into bitterness and despair.

It is the combination of Wilberforce’s achievements and his qualities that mark him out as a figure rare indeed. Judged all round, his achievements were greater than those of most of the occupants of the highest offices in the land. But the reason he is a lasting inspiration rather than a mere notable parliamentarian is that in a long and arduous public life, he showed unyielding reverence for truth, loyalty, integrity and principle as he understood it, setting an example that has stirred the minds of generations who followed. In the dark historical landscape of violence, treachery and hate, the life of William Wilberforce stands out as a beacon of light, which the passing of two centuries has scarcely dimmed.

(William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner*. Harper Perennial, 2008, pp. 513-5)



Anthony Ashley Cooper, Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury

In the generation after Wilberforce, Lord Shaftesbury led an equally remarkable campaign to improve the lot of the poor and needy in rapidly-industrialising Britain. He is famous for legislation ending the use of small boys as chimney sweeps; and labour laws which limited the employment of children and women in factories and coal mines. An evangelical Christian like Wilberforce, he also eschewed political office, maintaining a parliamentary independence that enabled him to speak without fear or favour on any topic. Like Wilberforce he was a loving family man whose personal character bore witness to the Christianity he held dear. His biographer, Georgina Battiscombe, is aware of Shaftesbury's faults – he was not as stable emotionally as Wilberforce – but he was every bit as sensitive, generous, principled, tenacious and hard-working. When recounting the earlier years of Shaftesbury's career as a reformer, Battiscombe quotes a comment by Sir Reginald Coupland. Coupland is describing Wilberforce as the ideal parliamentary spokesman for an unpopular social reform; but she feels that his words apply equally well to Shaftesbury when engaged in the campaign to limit the working day of children to ten hours:

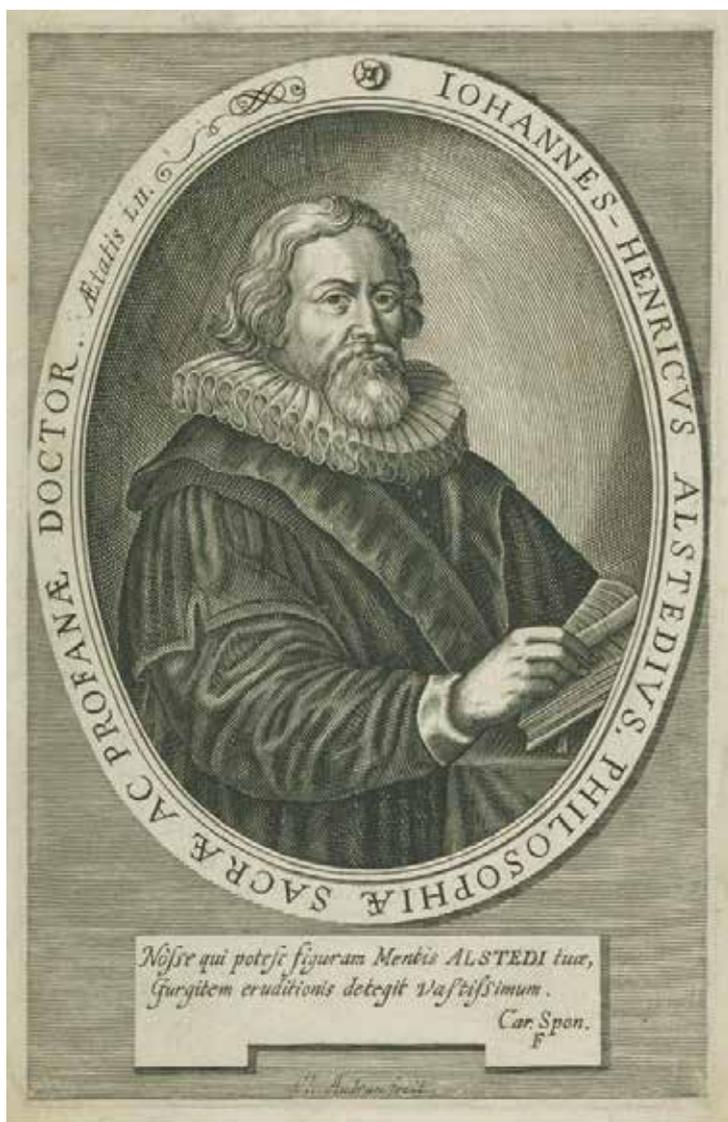
If the country must first be schooled and roused the second step must be to break through the apathy of Parliament... And for this a politician is needed, and a politician endowed with very rare gifts indeed. He must possess, in the first place,

the virtues of a fanatic without his vices. He must be palpably single-minded and unself-seeking. He must be strong enough to face opposition and ridicule, staunch enough to endure obstruction and delay. In season and out of season, he must thrust his cause on Parliament's attention. Yet, somehow or other, Parliament must not be bored. He must not be regarded as the tiresome victim of an idea fixe, well-meaning possibly, but an intolerable nuisance. Somehow or other he must be persistent, yet not unpopular. Secondly, he must possess the intellectual power to grasp an intricate subject, the clarity of mind to deal with a great mass of detailed evidence, the eloquence to expound it lucidly and effectively. He must be able to speak from the same brief a score of times without surfeiting his audience with a hash of stale meat. And he must have a natural delicacy of feeling. He will have terrible things to say; they will form an important part of his case; but in the choice of them and in the manner in which he says them he must avoid the besetting sin of the professional humanitarian. He must never be morbid. He must not seem to take a pleasure in dwelling on the unsavoury vices of his fellow men. He must not pile up the horrors and revel in atrocious detail. He must shock, but not nauseate, the imagination of his hearers. Finally, he must be a man of recognized position in society and politics. It must be impossible to deride him in London drawing-rooms as an obscure crank, a wild man from beyond the pale. And he must have, or by some means obtain a footing in Downing Street. For without at least some shadow of support from Government his task might well prove desperate.

(Sir Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce*, quoted in Georgina Battiscombe, *Shaftesbury: The Great Reformer 1801-1885*, Houghton Mifflin, 1975, pp. 83-4).

It seems to me that these two men both exhibited many of the gifts and graces needed to serve Christ faithfully in the public arena. We could take many useful lessons from their lives and apply them to the needs of public service today. Sometimes we emphasize the Christian graces needed in public life while neglecting the important gifts. At other times we look for abilities but overlook the importance of Christian character. Both are needed, since the lack of ability will result in incompetence; and a want of character will result in just accusations of hypocrisy. Are we looking for the Christian statesmen of tomorrow, and helping them grow in wisdom, courage and humility?

“The doctrine by which the Church stands or falls”



Johann Heinrich Alsted, 1588-1638. German theologian and historian, C.F. Audran.

creative commons

Wes Bredenhof

This is the sixth in a series on famous quotes from church history. We're looking at who said these famous words, in what context, and whether it's biblical.

“Justification is the doctrine by which the Church stands or falls.” This saying is often attributed to Martin Luther. There's no question Luther accorded central importance to justification. However, so did other Reformers. For example, in his Institutes, Calvin famously insists that justification “is the main hinge on which religion turns” (Institutes 3.11.1). However, the exact wording of today's quote comes from neither Luther nor Calvin. Instead, from what I can tell, these exact words come from a later Reformed theologian from Germany, Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638). In his *Theologia Scholastica Didactica* Alsted wrote, “The article of justification is said to be the article by which the Church stands and falls.” From the fact that he wrote “said to be,” it would seem that he was not coining a new aphorism, but simply rehearsing and expounding an already well-known expression.

To understand why Alsted and others made such claims, it is essential to review the basics of this doctrine. Simply put, justification is God's declaration that a sinner is righteous. This declaration is made solely on the basis of the imputed passive and active obedience of Christ. In other words, it is only because Christ's work on the cross (passive obedience) and his perfect life of law-keeping (active obedience) are credited to the sinner. Faith, resting and trusting in Christ, is the sole instrument by which we receive this tremendous treasure. What follows from this declaration of justification is a transformed relationship with God – no longer do we relate to him as a Judge with whom we have a relationship of hostility. Now we relate to him as our Father with whom we have a relationship of deep filial affection. That beautiful relationship is foundational to the Christian life.

Clarifying further, we do not confess that justifica-

tion by itself is the gospel. Nor do we believe that the doctrine of justification exhausts the goodness of the good news. In the Heidelberg Catechism, Reformed churches maintain that the Apostles' Creed summarizes "all that is promised us in the gospel" (QA 22). That obviously goes far beyond justification. The gospel promises us righteousness in Christ to deal with the curse of sin, but it also promises the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit to deal with the power of sin – and more. Nevertheless, justification is the central facet of the gospel diamond. It is of prime importance. Without justification, nothing else in the gospel is of any value to us. This, again, is because of its relational significance. Apart from a relationship of fellowship with God, we are still under the deadly curse.

Is it biblical to say "justification is the article by which the Church stands or falls"? To answer that, we need to turn to Galatians. In the original Galatian context, the Judaizers were preaching a message which included the sinner's great need for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The problem was that they added to that the sinner's own need to perform deeds of righteousness, including following Jewish ceremonial requirements like circumcision. Thus, it was not Christ alone as the basis for our standing with God. This is what the Holy Spirit said through Paul in response to this:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

Those are powerful words! If a different gospel is preached, that preacher should go to hell. If a different gospel is received, the recipient will go to hell. Standing or falling is indeed what's at stake. A church that doesn't get justification correct is in danger of falling into the pits of hell. On the flip side, a church that receives the biblical gospel, including a correct understanding of our righteousness before God, will stand firmly.

In my pastoral experience, I have noticed that justification is often poorly understood amongst many Reformed believers. I have encountered widespread ignorance about the vital role of the active obedience of Christ. I have seen a preconfession textbook (from a Reformed publisher) teaching the erroneous notion that justification is a life-long process rather than an event – a notion which is traditionally found in Roman Catholicism rather than Reformed theology. I have heard countless believers speak of justification as God making us righteous – stripping away the crucial vision of justification as a courtroom declaration. There's the common misconception that justification is merely a verdict of innocence rather than righteousness.

There are those who still believe that as Christians, we relate to God as our Judge and do not see him as our loving Father. There are those in our churches who argue that Christians are not sinners but only saints, failing to come to terms with the biblical concept of imputation. The list could go on. If justification is truly the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, we see ample evidence that pastors and other church leaders have to do better at teaching it. I certainly recommit to doing my part in ensuring that the church I serve will stand with this doctrine.

Mr Wes Bredenhof is the minister in the Free Reformed Church, Launceston, Tasmania.

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A memorial for the voiceless

Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? Proverbs 24:11-12

This verse was instrumental in stirring the hearts of several in The Nelson Reformed Church to get involved in the pro-life organisation Voice for Life. Through my involvement with Voice for Life in the last couple of years, I have become increasingly shocked and saddened at the many thousands of babies that are aborted every year in New Zealand. Over

half a million since the mid 1970's! Such a tragic loss of innocent life, the scale of which has never been seen before.

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

I can only attribute it to God, through the working of the Holy Spirit, that I felt a deep urge and conviction to do something that might help save unborn lives. The idea came to me to form a display of baby booties on Parliament lawn as a

memorial to the number of babies whose lives were taken by abortion. I shared this idea with a few close friends. I prayed about the idea, and then shared the idea at the Voice for Life conference last year. The support of The Booties Project has been absolutely amazing. Hundreds, possibly even thousands of knitters contributed pairs of booties to help form the display. Many women in the Reformed churches got behind the project, as well as some sisters in Christ from the FRCA in Australia! So many people were enthusiastic and glad that they could also play a part in something on a national scale. Our aim was to show Members of Parliament and all New Zealanders the scale of loss of life. After the display, the booties would then be distributed to maternity hospitals around the country to bless mothers of newborn babies.





Pray without ceasing.
1 Thessalonians 5:17

I knew that this was a spiritual battle, that needed to be brought to the LORD in prayer for every aspect and detail. There were so many answers to prayer at every step of the way. The day of the display dawned calm and sunny, in itself an answer to prayer for a mid-winter day in the windy capital. Around 40 supporters came along to help lay out the 13,285 pairs of booties, which represented the lives taken by abortion in 2017. We had an amazing sense of unity as we laid out the booties on Parliament lawn, and then gathered together to sing the National Anthem. I was aware of hundreds of people who were praying leading up to, as well as at the time of the display. There were speeches presented by Voice for Life National president Jacqui de Ruiter, two national MP's and others. Sadly, there is not a single pro-life female Member of Parliament who is willing to make a stand for the value of unborn life. While we experienced God's protection and provision at the time of the display, which are certainly evidences of answer to prayer, we need to continue to pray for

our MP's, that their hearts may be softened to the value and worth of every human life, including the value of every unborn life. The topic of abortion is on the agenda in the coming months, with the push to remove abortion from the Crimes Act and make it only a health issue. This would equate destroying an unborn child to a medical procedure such as destroying an unwanted kidney stone. Potentially, babies would then be able to be aborted right up until birth. We must continue to be fervent in prayer, that this will not happen in our nation. Prayer is also much needed for the women who are facing an unplanned pregnancy, that they might choose life for their baby, and receive the support they need.

Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. 1 John 3:13

Yes the world does hate us. We saw evidence of that in the opposition we had to our peaceful memorial display. They tried to disrupt us, and tried all manner of dirty tricks. We may have felt like sheep going out among the wolves, but we know who our Good Shepherd is. We know that we are standing for what

is true and right and just. We need not feel intimidated. We must not shy away from speaking the truth. We must not fear what man can do to us.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.
Galatians 6:9

The Booties Project display was just one initiative in the Pro-Life cause. We need to keep on getting the message out there to every sector of society, of the value and worth of human life. Life is so precious, and a gift from God. All mankind is made in God's image, including unborn human life. So many, even in the Christian community are completely unaware of the genocidal scale of lives being led away to death year after year here in our country. Every new generation needs to be educated. I encourage you to be informed, be involved. We can all in some way, through prayer, action and attitude show to those around us that life is precious. May God use us for his praise and glory, to save lives.

Elaine Borger



Focus on home

Auckland Presbytery short report — July 2018

The Auckland Presbytery met on Friday 6 July 2018 at the Pukekohe Reformed Church. The Rev Michael Willemse opened with a reading of 1 Cor 1:26-31 (*Christ the wisdom and power of God*) and reminded us all that the advance of the gospel is a story of unlikely heroes and incredible victories. It is no accident that God chooses the weak, the foolish, the things that are not. This is God's deliberate strategy. We were all encouraged to hear that God works through our ordinariness and our weakness. We then sang SttL 393, *I Love Thy Kingdom Lord*. For the first time, all six churches submitted their credentials electronically ahead of time – perhaps a digital first for the RCNZ?

Presbytery took up again a concern raised at the previous meeting regarding younger members leaving the church to worship in churches outside of the RCNZ. Several pastoral concerns were

expressed regarding the difficulties of working through these developments.

The Reformed Church of Pukekohe reported on their limited progress in setting up a committee to oversee the investment of funds from the sale of the Mangere Church Property. They will continue this work.

Article 47 questions were asked of the delegates from North Shore, Pukekohe, and Avondale.

The Reformed Church of North Shore reported the congregation is doing well under the Rev Daniel Wilson's leadership. New visitors are turning up, attendance has increased for evening services, and a recent training course for potential office-bearers was well attended. The brothers request prayer for more elders and for leadership of the church-planting effort to their north.

The Reformed Church of Pukekohe expressed their thankfulness at having found a second pastor, the Rev Graeme Zuidema, so quickly. He has quickly joined their efforts to meet the needs of the growing congregation. They are very grateful for new members who have joined and the blessing of having 100 children under the age of 18, which is also a weighty responsibility. They re-

ported, with sadness, a recent excommunication and expressed their heartfelt desire for repentance and reconciliation.

The Reformed Church of Avondale relayed a number of exciting developments that are keeping the session busy. They recently held a church camp and are planning a holiday club and a new member's class. The Avondale Christian Kindergarten is attracting people from many different backgrounds who desire to see their children learning in a Christian environment. The session has made an effort to promote both morning and evening worship equally and the congregation is responding with increased attendance in evening worship. Deacons are proactive in offering support so families can send their children to the local Christian School. The deacons have also received training from Christians Against Poverty and are looking into serving the community through financial training courses.

Mr Michael Willemse shared several points of interest from the classis notes of the CRCA churches. We were encouraged to see many congregations involved in community and outreach work.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach presented three songs

for approval: *Create In Me a Clean Heart*, by Mary Rice Hopkins & Barrie Gott, *Praises* by Michelle Lodder, and *Cornerstone* by Eric Liljero, Reuben Morgan and Jonas Myrin). All three songs were approved.

The Reformed Church of Pukekohe reported that most members of the Tau-ranga Home Group are attending a local church and, at this stage, have little appetite for planting a church there. The Bible study continues to go well and the Reformed Churches of Hamilton and Pukekohe will continue to encourage them. There was some general discussion on church planting and strategies.

The Reformed Church of Hukanui asked whether other churches had a policy for vetting (i.e. screening) those providing child-care. It was noted that there are resources available from the CRCA churches and that Reformed Church of Pukekohe is currently writing a child safe policy. They were asked to share this document with the other churches when it becomes available.

The church visitation roster for 2018 was noted with the reminder that the annual visits should be conducted prior to the November meeting; which is scheduled for 23 November. The moderator, Rev. Willemse closed the meeting with prayer at 10.35pm.

Reporter: Ryan Sparks

Wellington Presbytery short report – July 2018

The Wellington Presbytery met on Friday and Saturday 6-7 July 2018 at the Reformed Church of Silverstream. The moderator was the Rev Hans Vaatstra.

Here are the highlights from this meeting:

Examination of Vicar David Stares:

This examination proved to be a wonderful blessing to all. Thus, without hesitation or dissent, and with great joy and thankfulness to the Lord, Presbytery sustained all parts of Vicar David Stares' examination, and then declared him eligible for a call in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

From the **reports of the vacant churches**, the good news came that

emeritus the Rev Bill Berends and his wife, Henny (from the Reformed Churches of Australia), would be able to extend their short-term service in the Reformed Church of Foxton a bit longer than first expected – now until mid-September 2018.

Scrutiny of the minutes from the Auckland Presbytery: The Wellington Presbytery was glad to read about the advice given in the Auckland Presbytery's February minutes – advice which comes at a timely moment also for the churches in the Wellington Presbytery – i.e. that, communicant membership ought only to be given to those who hold to the confessions of our churches. This means, among other, that, as long as dear folk hold to Reformed-Baptist views, they can only remain regular (yet much-loved) visitors within an RCNZ congregation.

Change of Synodical Examiners: As Mr Hans Vaatstra's two-year term of serving as synodical examiner had lapsed, the Presbytery appointed the Rev Pieter van Huyssteen in his place.

Upon request of the Reformed Church Hastings, Presbytery had a beneficial discussion on **the practical outworking of articles 93 and 94 of the Church Order** (the articles that give guidelines on how to deal with the transfer of baptised members from one congregation to another). Presbytery's discussion wrestled in particular with the question of the transferring of (and authority over) a non-committing and non-active baptised member. This discussion ended with the twofold advice to: a) adhere closely to wording of articles 93 and 94; and b) to encourage closer inter-session communication.

After a lengthy discussion which weighed up the pros and cons of having a **lighter second examination for vicars** who have done their first examination in the same presbytery, Presbytery decided to maintain the current practice of having a full examination on both occasions.

Pieter van Huyssteen

South Island Presbytery short report – July 2018

The Vice Moderator the Rev David Waldron opened the meeting in the temporary absence of Moderator the Rev Erik Stolte whose flight had been delayed. Elder Ewout Aarsen welcomed the delegates on behalf of the Nelson congregation, and fellow Elder Geraint Philp read a devotion by Handley Moule entitled 'Holy converse in bad times' from his book *Thoughts for the Sundays of the year* (1901). Based on Malachi 3:16, it exhorted us that even in the darkest of times, believers get special encouragement by regularly remembering the goodness of the Lord in frequent conversations with each other. Ewout Aarsen led in prayer.

The meeting welcomed the the Rev. Alan Douma and agreed he should have speaking rights. The two Synodical Examiners were given the same respect. The credentials were read, minutes agreed, some matters arising discussed, including the need for a new Presbytery Clerk, and correspondence reviewed. The Moderator took the chair during this time.

Reformed Church of Dovedale delegates said their congregation is in good heart. There are particular blessings from the number of visitors and the ministry and guidance of the emeritus ministers. Emeritus minister the Rev Bruce Hoyt continues to help immigrants for whom English is not their first language. The congregation still look to the Lord to lead them to their next minister.

The Reformed Church of Nelson gives thanks for a faithful, loving, united congregation and for their new minister-elect Mr Braam Jansen van Rensburg. There have been great blessings in the two month ministry of Professor Bill Berends and the call and commencement of Braam's ministry. There has been increased attention given to financial and prayer support for missions. Falling numbers of children led the Cadets' and Gems' leaders to question whether to continue, but continue they did and the number of children has increased significantly. More helpers and counsellors are needed. There is still a need for more office bearers to share the leadership responsibilities.

The Reformed Church of Oamaru give thanks to God for bringing the Rev. Sjik Bajema to them as their minister. They are seeking to give more attention to missions. Their concerns are the absence of a local Christian school and some disciplinary cases. Other encouragements are the Bible studies and the numbers of young people and young families.

The new Reformed Church of Rangiora reported things are well, with good attendance at both services. Mission interest and support are developing. Others from outside their congregation join them for Bible studies. Being an established congregation has brought blessings and they are holding an election for a second deacon. They recognise they also need to be more outward-looking

The meeting had little information on which to base a discussion about the Overseas Mission Board, but Papua New

Guinea and Vanuatu were mentioned briefly. There was a verbal report from the Mainland Regional Youth Committee and some discussion about whether there was too much competition (in the eyes of our youth) between the RCNZ camps.

In the evening, Mr Braam Jansen van Rensburg preached his sermon on Psalm 63 for his second Presbytery exam. The Presbytery decided the exam would not be sustained. Braam then decided not to continue with the rest of the oral exam.

The Presbytery meeting resumed Saturday morning with a devotion by Ewout Aarsen and the singing of STTL 127. In a more sombre mood, much time and prayer was spent discussing how best to mentor Braam with his preaching. The Synodical examiners added their wise counsel. The Reverends Andrew de Vries and Albert Couperus were asked to act as a sub-committee to provide Braam

with direction and help. The meeting then advised the Nelson session how to proceed. They were advised to install Braam as an elder (the congregation have already voted to call him as teaching-elder) and call him their Minister-Elect. He should continue preaching. The Presbytery said it would assist with ordained ministers to help with the sacraments.

After a break for morning tea, the Committee discussed some matters raised by the congregations. The Moderator closed the meeting and conversations continued over lunch. The delegates felt the weight of discussing some deep and serious matters. Satan still seeks to deceive and divide the faithful, but we give thanks that the Lord has not abandoned us. He is strengthening, equipping and blessing His people every day.

Reporter: Geraint Philp



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World in focus

Amnesty International backs abortion on-demand

By Stefano Gennarini, J.D. | July 12, 2018

NEW YORK, July 13 (C-Fam) Amnesty International will advocate for abortion on-demand as an international human right.

A press release on Amnesty's website describes its new position as calling on States "not just to decriminalize abortion, but to guarantee access to safe and legal abortion in a broad way that fully respects the rights of all women, girls and people who can get pregnant," an apparent reference to women who identify as men or as transgender.

The decision was reached by Amnesty International's General Assembly in Warsaw earlier this month. During the same session the General Assembly also agreed to advocate for legalization of some recreational drug use. The official details of the new positions have yet to be made public.

"We want to make sure we are well placed to fight for the human rights of millions of people whose lives are impacted by how governments criminalize or restrict access to abortion and by the prohibition of drugs," said Tawanda Mutasah, Amnesty International's Senior Director for Law and Policy according to a press release on Amnesty's website.

Mutasah described both drug and abortion legalization as a "compassionate approach from governments to protect the rights of the people who are most at risk."

Amnesty International is a storied human rights organization founded to help free political prisoners behind the Iron curtain during the Cold War. It was founded by Catholic lawyer Peter Benenson in London and enjoyed much Catholic support throughout its history.

After the death of its founder in 2005, like other civil rights organizations in search of a new mission after the fall of the iron curtain, Amnesty International began to support an international human right to abortion in cases of rape, incest, and to save the life of a mother. Until 2007 Amnesty remained officially neutral on abortion even though it opposed the

U.S. Mexico City Policy.

Reports indicate it was Kate Gilmore, formerly Executive Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International, who engineered the change of position in 2007, even though it caused strife within the organization and led many supporters to withdraw their contributions. Gilmore is now the second highest UN human rights official after directing programs for the UN Population Fund.

Gilmore's work came to fruition in recent international debates on abortion. In the Irish referendum and across Latin America, Amnesty International has been perhaps the most visible international organization in favor of depriving children of protections in the womb. Many Amnesty supporters still aren't aware of this.

According to information received by the Friday Fax, pro-life donors to Amnesty International are still unaware of the change to their policy in 2007, let alone their decision last week to advocate for abortion on-demand, though at that time, many Catholics left the organization including Cardinal Renato Martino, longtime Nuncio to the United Nations.

Amnesty made the announcement the same day U.S. President Donald Trump nominated Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, Kavanaugh may tip the court toward overturning the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision which imposed legal abortion on all fifty U.S. states. It is likely that when the previous abortion decision comes before the Court that groups like Amnesty International will argue that abortion is a recognized human right binding on the United States.

Argentina votes to protect women and unborn children from abortion

The Christian Institute

Senators in Argentina have voted against expanding abortion laws, rejecting outside pressure to weaken the current largely pro-life position.

Following the vote, of 38-31, one campaigner said: "It's a joy to see that our society can be based on such an

important principle as the defence of the most defenceless, the child”.

Supporters and opponents of the current law had marched in their thousands before the vote, but afterwards pro-abortion activists started fires and threw missiles at police.

Argentina’s lower house backed the legislation – which would have introduced abortion in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy – after the President called on politicians to consider it.

But it was narrowly defeated in the country’s upper house after a 16-hour debate. Further legislation can only be re-submitted next year.

Camila Duro, a pro-life campaigner, told the BBC: “The message that we wanted to put across is that abortion equals social failure. For a woman to resort to it, many other things need to have failed first.”

And Maria Castillo, who protested outside parliament, said: “Abortion always kills a child and it doesn’t solve the woman’s problem. We believe that this is never the solution.”

Amnesty International had made major efforts to sway politicians, even taking out a full page advert in the New

York Times.

Afterwards it claimed politicians had “missed a historic chance to be leaders on human rights”.

The result means that abortion continues to be allowed in cases of rape

and if there is a danger to the life of the woman.

Officially Argentina also permits abortion when there is risk to the woman’s health, but few of its local provinces have implemented this.

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