

faith in FOCUS

Volume 45/8 September 2018



**Apologetics,
evangelism and the
university student**

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Editorial

apologetics
plural noun [treated as singular or plural]
reasoned arguments or writings in justification of
something, typically a theory or religious doctrine.

In Reformed circles, apologetics can be referred to as a defence of the faith.

In my own experience, apologetics and evangelism seem to go together as a hand in a glove. Often a presentation of the gospel will lead to the necessity of defending the facts of what you propose. In the postmodern age in which we live there is an ever-increasing need to defend the truth by giving a good account of the hope that lives in us.

At a recent presentation in our church, Dr Martin Williams defended the narrative of Genesis in a biblical and logical manner, demonstrating how the proponents of theistic evolution destroy the entire creation and gospel message all the way through to Jesus' substitutionary atonement on the cross. In my view, it was a classic example of apologetics – defending the truth as it is presented in the Scriptures, and demonstrating the problems associated with the errors of evolutionary thought, while presenting the gospel.

Of course, it stands to reason that such a presentation to those who believe the Scriptures wholeheartedly is not onerous. However, it is a different matter when you are at university or another school of learning. You straight away come up against rampant unbelief and opposing world views as well as other systems of belief. As a student, you need to know your Scriptures and understand the worldviews that you engage, so that you can reason against them and help open the door to present the truth about Jesus Christ, Who is the Truth, and to do so in love for the unbelieving person who bears the image of his or her Creator.

Our contributors as past university students, present the theory and the practice of apologetics and evangelism.

Mr David Stares explains ways to remove the barriers to faith in Christ.

Mr James Hyslop writes about the practical side of apologetics and evangelism.

Mrs Sally Davey shares some thoughts on Christian character in the world of public debate.

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

Report on the recent synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.
Profile of Vicar David Stares.

Mr Josh Flinn looks at the secret sickness of pornography addiction.

Letter to the editor about gender ideology.

Mr Jon Dykstra considers a fine-tuned universe via a lunar eclipse.

An update on the RCNZ website woes.

Cover image by Becca Tapert on Unsplash.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

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Apologetics in theory and practice

David Stares

Well, what is apologetics? It gets its name from the Greek word *apologia*, which means ‘a speech of defense.’ This term appears in a number of New Testament passages, and is particularly associated with the work of Paul (Phil. 1:7,16). In his ministry, Paul was frequently making the case for Christ, trying to convince both Jews and Gentiles to repent and turn to Jesus. Today, the term ‘apologetics’ means making arguments in

defense of the Christian faith.

I think it’s fair to say that each one of us wishes that we were experts in apologetics. We think that if only we could be ready for every possible argument and present the gospel perfectly, then we would feel more confident to enter into those difficult conversations with unbelievers. Perhaps we even feel a little bit guilty that we don’t have these apologetic conversations more often.

At a basic level, there is a responsibility for every Christian to be ready and able



Photo by Ali Morshedlou on Unsplash

The greatest insight of the Presuppositionalist apologist is that there are no neutral facts. So long as there is a human being looking at something, it is coloured by human perspective. This even includes logic, which many think is a neutral ground for discussion. Our presuppositions (foundational beliefs) always affect how we see things.

to “make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). This is not a command to be an expert in apologetics. Every Christian should be able to explain their *own* hope: salvation in Christ (Lord’s Day 1).

Apologetics involves more than this basic requirement, it seeks to use various arguments to remove doubts and intellectual roadblocks to faith in Jesus.

Apologetics is helpful in our evangelism. We are commanded by Jesus to spread the gospel (Matt 28:19-20), and we want to see people come to faith. Being able to convince people of the rationality and truth of the claims of Scripture can buttress this endeavor. Certainly, we do not have the power to change hearts, only God can do that. Only God can take what is foolishness to the world and make it seem believable (1 Cor. 1:18). However, apologetics serves our evangelism because God uses good arguments to convince people of his truth.

With this in mind, the question is: Which arguments are the most effective for the purpose of apologetics? Part of the difficulty in putting apologetics into practice is that there are multiple schools of thought on which method is most effective to engage our modern culture. Three of the main approaches are Classical, Evidentialist, and Presuppositionalist schools, and all of these find advocates within conservative Reformed circles.¹

Classical apologetics is famously advocated for by men like R.C. Sproul and William Lane Craig. What is distinctive about their approach is that they use a *two step* process in working towards an acceptance of the gospel message. They argue that one cannot begin discussing Jesus and his work until someone already accepts the possibility of the divine. So, they typically begin by arguing for the existence of God.

This can be done by a number of arguments. One is the *ontological argument*, which argues that when we think of God, he must be defined as the greatest of all beings, and that the greatest being must exist in reality. Therefore God must really exist. Another argument is the *kalam cosmological argument*, which argues that, because everything is caused by something else, and the universe can’t be eternal, the universe must have a first cause, namely, God. A third argument is the *teleological* or *design argument*, which makes use of the or-

derliness of the universe as evidence of the presence of an intelligent designer. All of these and more are used by the Classical apologist to establish the existence of God.

The benefit of this approach is that once the listener accepts the existence of God in general terms, they are primed to hear the explanation of the God of the Bible. Even more, they will have no objection to the miracles found in the Scriptures, and particularly the miracle of the resurrection. Following this method, the arguments for God’s existence provide the foundation for telling someone about Jesus.

In contrast to the *two step* approach of the Classical apologist, the Evidentialist tries to accomplish the same goal in *one step*. This approach is advocated for by men like Lee Strobel and John Montgomery. Rather than beginning with the existence of God, they begin with the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus, showing how the only satisfying explanation of those events is a supernatural one. Basically, if you can convince someone of the resurrection, much of the rest of the Christian faith falls naturally into place!

The Evidentialist is seeking to prove two main points: 1) that Jesus actually died and 2) that he was seen alive after his death. In proving the historicity of Jesus’ *death*, they will appeal to the biblical and secular accounts of his crucifixion.

First of all, Jesus died because the cross was designed to kill its victim. Even if Jesus had survived the cross, being buried for three days instead of receiving medical care would have ensured his death. Plus, if Jesus really had not died, he would not have reappeared days later in good health. These are the sorts of arguments which establish Jesus’ death as an historical fact.

In the second place, there is also much testimony that Jesus was seen again after his death, a fact that can only be attributed to *resurrection*. We can see this in the emotional transformation of his followers. They went from hopelessness in Jesus’ defeat, to a willingness to die for him. Sightings of Jesus were also reported by many people in many circumstances, and not only to those who were emotionally primed to see him, making hallucination a weak explanation. The apostles also made the resurrection of Jesus a foundational doctrine in their writings, which would be very unlikely if they knew it to be a hoax.

Ultimately, the Evidentialists make the case that there are no satisfactory explanations for the resurrection other than the one offered in Scripture. With this case having succeeded, the Evidentialist will have succeeded in convincing the listener of the most miraculous and central tenet of the Christian faith. Then, a plethora of doctrines, Scripture included, can be built on this foundation.

A third method of doing apologetics is called Presuppositionalism. This method is espoused by theologians like Cornelius Van Til and Gordon Clark. The greatest insight of the Presuppositionalist apologist is that there are no neutral facts. So long as there is a human being looking at something, it is coloured by human perspective. This even includes logic, which many think is a neutral ground for discussion. Our presuppositions (foundational beliefs) always affect how we see things.

The tactic of the Presuppositionalist is to get to the core foundational assumptions that a person may have. This includes the fact that people naturally think that the universe is a rational and comprehensible place to live. Everyone knows this, because God has placed it in them, but they suppress it (Rom. 1:18-20). How can they claim the world is rational without a creator who created things in a rational form? People assume that the laws of physics and mathematics are relatively constant, but how can this be the case in a world that has only appeared out of a random conglomeration of time, matter and chance? How can they make any moral claim without an objective moral law?

According to the Presuppositionalist, the problem is that the non-Christian has borrowed concepts from the Christian worldview that don't belong to them. An atheist worldview cannot provide a

basis for logic, predictability, morality or a host of other things. Christians get these from God.

Thus, the Presuppositionalist will seek to point out these inconsistencies to their conversation partner. The goal is to persuade them to accept the inconsistency of their own worldview and repent of their suppression of God's truth. If it is only the God of the Bible who can make the world make sense, then their new worldview must accept the word of God in Scripture. The benefit of this view is that if the hearer is convinced, they are drawn to accept the authority of God's revelation and all that it teaches.

So, which school should we follow? What is tricky about deciding between the schools of apologetics is that Christians agree with each of their conclusions. None of us would deny the existence of God, nor the evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus, nor the need to have Christian presuppositions and worldview. The truth of these things is not in question for most of us, and there is much to be learned from each school of thought. But the question of apologetics is: what is the best way for you to lead someone to Jesus?

I think that first of all you need to know yourself. Which arguments do you understand most clearly? Which arguments convince you and bolster your faith? It might be the ontological argument, creation science, or the law of non-contradiction. Whatever you find interesting and helpful for yourself is certainly a good place to begin. These will be the arguments that you understand the best and this will cause you to speak with the most persuasive passion.

But second, you need to know the person you're speaking to. This is where we need to be willing to leave our own favourite subjects behind. What will con-

vince them to turn to Jesus? What questions are they asking? Perhaps they are more philosophical and will find the classical proofs challenging and convincing. Perhaps they are at a crisis of worldviews and need to be presented with one that will account for what they know about the world. Perhaps they think more concretely and need the facts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Get to know the person you want to speak to and find an argument that will convince them.

But remember, our evangelistic task does not begin or end with arguments. Peter tells us that "by doing good we may silence the ignorance of foolish people" (1 Pet. 2:15). If our arguments are the only thing in us that preach Jesus, then we should not expect our evangelism to take root. Evangelism is much more than shooting philosophical darts at another person. It requires love. The love to tell them the truth about their situation, and the love to help them get out of it. The love to be there as they struggle with God's word. The love to welcome them into our homes week after week. The love to encourage them as they struggle to cast off the old man and put on the new. The love to keep pointing them to Jesus as their discipleship remains halting and sputtering. Evangelism is a full-orbed commitment to show Jesus to another person, and apologetics is a helpful tool in that glorious work.

¹ For the source of much of the following, and a more in-depth study, see Cowan, Stanley N., editor. *Five Views on Apologetics*. Zondervan, 2000.

Mr David Stares is the Vicar at the Reformed Church of Silverstream. At the time of writing, David had passed his preliminary examination and was declared eligible for call.

“Spiritual growth consists most in the growth of the root, which is out of sight. The more we depend on Christ, and draw sap and virtue from him, the more we act in religion from a principle, and the more steadfast and resolved we are in it.” Matthew Henry

Apologetic conversations

James Hyslop

For a wide range of reasons University is often a time of questioning, searching, and seeking to establish identity. For the first time many students are no longer living at home, no longer bound to their previous group of friends or the lifestyle of their parents, and so it is an often-exciting time of change and decisions. For these reasons university students pose a unique opportunity, under the sovereignty of God, for evangelism and gospel engagement. In this article I want to talk a little bit about what it was like for me as a Christian at University before discussing what it might look like

for university students to be faithful in engaging in apologetics and evangelism.

I attended the University of Otago from 2013 to 2015 and completed a Bachelor of Arts majoring in History as well as previously spending one year at the Otago Polytechnic. For one year of this I was in a Hall of Residence and the rest of the time I was either flatting or living with my wife Amy after we got married. Probably the biggest thing that surprised me in the various gospel conversations I had with other students was how interested people were in talking to a Christian. Especially in my year at the Hall of residence (in which there were 2-3 of us Christians among

about 150 students), I was amazed at how many students had never had any meaningful conversation with a Christian before. Students were actually really interested in what Christians believe and why. The other thing that struck me was how hostile some other people were. I did a couple of courses in philosophy, and in my very first lecture the professor showed from logic that an all-loving, all knowing, and all-powerful God (by which he meant the Christian God) was an impossibility in a world which has evil and suffering. Likewise, I remember a number of conversations where the student I was talking to was absolutely convinced that Christianity had been de-



Photo by Alexis Brown on Unsplash

cisively disproved by science, and that all Christians were hypocrites.¹

Being a history major meant that there was no set course for my degree and so every class was with a different group of people. This meant that you didn't naturally get to know any other students from your courses unless you were previously friends with them. People generally sat by themselves and came just before class and left straight after class. As opposed to some other degrees, like some of the sciences, there were no group projects and even tutorials tended to be quite impersonal. This meant that it was actually quite hard to get to know people and share the gospel with them as a Christian. What I attempted to do was to get to know and have a gospel conversation with one person every semester. Sometimes it led to really helpful conversations while other times not so much.

What does it look like to be faithful to Christ at University and to engage people with the gospel? Here are a few guiding principles and suggestions that I think are helpful.

Firstly, *the most helpful context for gospel conversations is relationship.*² In the recent *Faith and Belief* survey done in New Zealand it was contended that the most significant attraction for non-Christians to Christianity was seeing people who live out a genuine faith.³ In our culture trust and relationship are closely connected. What this means is that students will seldom open up with people they don't already know and trust. In one-off conversations people are willing to chat about the problem of evil, or the existence of God but they might not tell you about their fear that they are not good enough for God or about that Christian that hurt them years ago. I often found in one-off gospel conversations that either people didn't actually want to hear the answers to their questions or that the conversations stayed quite impersonal. In contrast, in gospel conversations with people I considered friends and had a relationship with, there was a far greater level of sincerity and depth to the conversations. This was because the other person knew I cared about them and at least tried to live out what I said. Evangelism is a long-term commitment to invest in a relationship, to pray tirelessly, and to speak the gospel over and over again, patiently and persistently.⁴ And so this means that if we are going to be faithful in evangelism and apologetics we need to invest in relation-

ships with non-Christians. We need to intentionally allow non-Christians to be part of our lives. Maybe that looks like doing that group project with some of the people you don't know that well in your class rather than always your Christian friends. Maybe it looks like going out for coffee or inviting your non-Christian friends when you go for a walk with your Christian friends or inviting them to watch that game of rugby.

Secondly, *we need to learn to 'chat' our faith and learn to listen.* People need both the careful articulation of what we believe and why, and the regular unplanned mentions of our faith that show Christ is relevant to all of life. This 'chatting' might be as simple as the way we talk about what we did in the weekend, how we are dealing with a specific issue in our lives (like the stress of assignments), or why we are going to Bible study tonight. 'Chatting' our faith both shows that Christ is central to all of life and can often lead to more intentional gospel conversations.

When we do have intentional gospel conversations it is important that we ask questions and listen to the questions behind the question. What I mean is, that often the reason for an apologetic question is at least as important as the question. Our tendency can often be to be too quick to speak and too slow to listen. Especially if we know the answer to a tricky question we can jump in with our tidy answer before we know exactly what people are asking and more importantly why they are asking it. For example, the way we would answer one person who struggled with the intellectual problem of evil and the way we would answer someone whose parent has just died and also asked about the problem of evil would be and should be vastly different. If we give the grieving student an impersonal intellectual answer we miss the point completely. For the grieving student the question is not really why is there suffering but why did God, if he exists, let my dad die and why does it hurt so much?⁵ In evangelism we are trying to meet people where they are at - whether struggling intellectually, emotionally, or ethically - and to show that Christ alone is the true need and only answer. So, learn to ask - why has this person asked this question? What is the question behind the question?

Thirdly, *people's questions deserve good answers.* The simple reality of trying to share the gospel at University is that people know less and less about Chris-

If we are going to be faithful in evangelism and apologetics we need to invest in relationships with non-Christians. We need to intentionally allow non-Christians to be part of our lives.

tianity and have been educated to view the world through a literally godless lens. I remember being surprised in one of my history classes that one of the other students had never even heard of a pew or pulpit. All of this means, that people will and do have genuine questions to be asked which deserve answers. This is where apologetics especially comes in and is incredibly important. People genuinely do wonder how Christianity can be true if science seems to support evolution, or what proof we have to trust the Bible, or why suffering exists if a good God is in control, or even more pertinently these days, why God and the Bible seem to take such a negative and 'bigoted' view on homosexuality and transgender issues. The important thing here is learning to listen well and answer carefully. The wonderful reality is that there are comprehensive and persuasive answers to these questions. God's word is sufficient. So instead of being quick to give a two-sentence answer this might mean that sometimes we need to say 'that's a really good question and I will have to think about it a bit and do some research but I would

love to get back to you on it next time we catch up.' People's questions matter and deserve answers.

Fourthly, *with prayerful discretion use apologetic questions as a doorway to Christ.* It is important when having these conversations about apologetic questions that God's ultimate answer and revelation is Jesus Christ. Apologetics is not evangelism but is a natural door into evangelism. This means that in any conversation we want to be drawing the conversation to Christ. So, if it's about suffering we could show that God became man and shared in our suffering and so he understands what it is to suffer. Or if it's about God's existence we could talk about how God enters into human history in the person of Christ. Likewise, if it is about homosexuality we could talk about how Jesus interacted with people whose lifestyle he disagreed with and that it was anything but bigoted. We need to take the time and effort to answer people's questions with the understanding that while they are looking for an answer they need a Saviour.

Finally, *we need to introduce non-*

Christians into the Christian community. In John 17:23 Jesus prays to his Father for believers that "they may be perfectly one, so that the world might know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." The Christian community of unity of love is what Francis Schaeffer called the final apologetic and is the ultimate proof of the authenticity of Christ's claims. This means that evangelism or apologetics should never be a purely individualistic endeavour. While many of the gospel conversations will be one on one, we need to find contexts for our non-Christian friends to see the gospel at work in the midst of God's people. This means getting to know one another's non-Christian friends and allowing them to see how Christians relate. Maybe it looks like inviting a non-Christian for dinner at your Christian flat, or inviting a fellow-student when you go for a walk with your Christian friends or just hang out. Maybe it could look like inviting a non-Christian to a church social like a quiz night, or along to your Bible study or deciding as a Bible study to run *Christianity Explored*. However we do it, we need to introduce the people we are trying to evangelise to the Christian community where God is seen.

The Bible is clear, that we are all called to spread the gospel where God has placed us. It is a call for ordinary Christians, who don't have all the answers and can be scared, to try to trust that God will use our feeble efforts in his eternal purpose of gathering a people for his Son. So take a risk and trust that God is in control and that he delights to use our frail attempts for his glory.

Notes

- 1 In Rico Tice's book *Honest Evangelism* he says that the two increasing responses to the gospel are hostility and hunger and this seems like a pretty good analysis of the University scene.
- 2 While I think it is the most helpful this doesn't mean at all that it is the only way or that there is no place for spontaneous gospel conversations.
- 3 See the downloadable report on <https://faithand-beliefstudynz.org>, page 18.
- 4 Tice, *Honest Evangelism*, 88.
- 5 It is really interesting to think about the way Jesus answered people's questions and did exactly this. He heard the question and need behind the question and spoke to people where they were at. See for example John 4 and Jesus' fascinating dialogue with the Samaritan woman.

Mr James Hyslop is currently studying at Reformed Theological College in preparation for ministry in the RCNZ.

The battle for the students' minds

... an inspiring address for parents and teachers who are serious about their task as reformed educators

Presented by Rev C Vermeulen

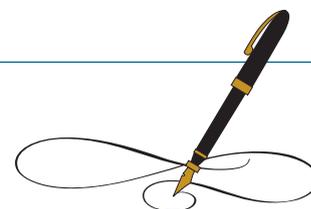
If you are a teacher or a parent with children attending a reformed school, then 'The battle for the students' minds' is essential viewing for you. It is available for download from:

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/childs mind>

To cover expenses relating to professional recording, editing and publication, you can rent it for a single viewing for \$2 or you can download it and add it to your library for \$6.30.

The Office of Reformed Education supports the John Calvin Schools in Australia in their mission to educate the children connected to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.





Softened Hearts

Generally speaking, bringing the gospel of Christ to people involves talking with them. The gospel consists of truths that need to be explained and sometimes defended. However, there are a few exceptions, when remaining silent is a wiser course of action. Victor Atallah, known to most of us as the general director of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship, illustrates this kind of exception in the following account of an incident observed by him in an airport. Victor is an experienced Christian, well-used to explaining the Christian faith to Muslims. But what he writes here (in the June 2018 issue of MERF News) is well worth heeding. The Christians in the background of Victor's story demonstrate that, on occasion, acts of love, rather than arguing the point, are the need of the hour.

Victor Atallah

A few months ago, I was sitting in an airport departure lounge waiting to board a delayed flight when a party of five came and sat down nearby. I only overheard one of their names, Ahmed. He accompanied two couples. Apparently returning from or going to some social or business event, they were early for a flight at the adjacent gate. Unaware that anybody around understood their Arabic language, they engaged in a lively discussion of impressions and observations of the city of Boston.

"There are so many church buildings in the city... some of them are really attractive..." said one of the ladies.

The other agreed and added, *"They looked like the beautiful churches I saw in Europe."*

Ahmed quickly interjected: *"Sooner or later they will all be converted to mosques like in Europe!"* This led to a very heated, loud and sometimes angry interchange.

The second lady immediately interrupted him in a very irate tone: *"I surely hope not. Stop your fanatical religious imaginings. At anytime, I prefer churches to mosques."*

Ahmed, visibly upset by her remark, replied, *"Life in America seems to have weakened your loyalty to Islam. I hope that your husband is taking a note of this. Thank God my wife and children have not been impacted by the American decadent life of unbelief."*

She turned to her husband with a look of bewilderment. Her husband spoke calmly and pointedly, *"Ahmed, it is surprising that after eleven years in America you seem to have become even more fanatical in your religious view."*

The husband of the first lady added, *"Do you want us to demand of our wives what you demand of yours?"*

His wife angrily said, *"I am not going to pretend to be religious and put on a head-covering (hijab) like your wife."*

The second lady stated, *"Our husbands will never ask us to do that; and you actually want beautiful churches to become mosques! That would be sad."*

Her husband agreed and added, *"Last year a Christian business partner invited me to attend church with him at Christmas. I will never forget that lovely experience even though the church building was not that beautiful..."*. He spoke of remembering that the message was about Jesus (Issa) and peace for humanity. He went on to speak of enjoying the Christmas songs and how people seemed happy and friendly.

The first lady turned to fanatical Ahmed and told him about their friendly and kind new Christian neighbours who attend church every Sunday. She said *"They are religious but are not fanatical... I certainly have no desire for them to become Muslims."*

Her husband added how much he appreciates their warmth, *"...They are really kind people and seemed to be a very happy family... I hope we get to know them better..."*.

Winsome Evangelism

I thought about joining in the ongoing tense discussion, but concluded it would be counterproductive as Ahmed seemed despondent and unresponsive. Then I considered handing them the small Arabic New Testament with Psalms I was carrying; but it would have also been unwise under the circumstances. Instead I committed the five to prayer. I noted down the intriguing Arabic conversation, their faces etched in my memory. They represented two different kinds of Muslim immigrants to the West. The interchange showed why quiet one-on-one friendship evangelism is most wise.

I thought about the impact of the Christian businessman who invited his Muslim friend to a Christmas service and that of the Christian family who moved in next door to the other Muslim family and thanked God. The two testimonies of

observant Muslims left fanatical Ahmed speechless. He did not have the opportunity to argue with a Christian, attacking the Bible and glorifying his Koran.

It illustrated afresh two principles. First, not all Muslims are fanatical or close-minded. Second, self-giving friendship with Muslims is far more effective than arguments and counter-arguments. Involving myself in the heated discussion would have been most helpful to Ahmed, providing him with the opportunity to shift the discussion to an aggressive defense of his religion.

Self-giving

In MERF's media ministries in Arabic, Farsi and other languages, we have learned this lesson – never engage in defending the gospel, just share it – the gospel embodies God's powerful and self-giving grace in Christ and is not about man-centered religious arguments. Muslims who do not even care to defend their religion, the Koran or their prophet, Mohamed, are not interested in religious debate.

Friendship with Muslim immigrants or refugees by Western Christians does

not need much knowledge of Islam or its multiple branches. Sensitivity not to serve pork and politeness to accept different customs is enough. Simple loving gestures provide great opportunities for patient gospel witness over time. Ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who effectually calls sinners to follow Christ through God's Word.

This article is reprinted with permission from the June 2018 issue of MERF News and the author Mr Victor Atallah.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

September 1980

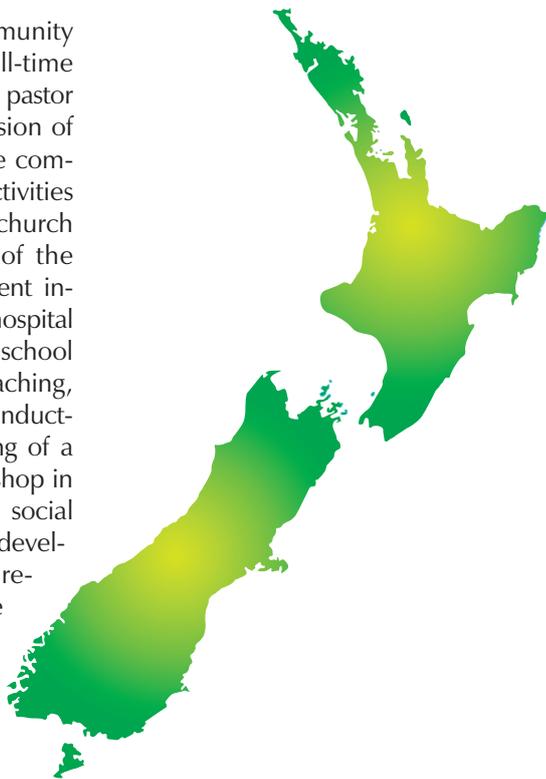
Some of our ministers have become so petrol cost (and health) conscious that they are doing their pastoral rounds on 10 speed racing bikes. Rev. G. I. Williamson has disciplined himself to at least one hour's run on his racing bike and Hone Phillips meditates and prepares his sermons while cycling around his parish. They reckon that this activity gives them increased efficiency and stamina and makes them split-second winners to bring home the trophies. We're proud of them! Keep it up and maybe some more of the pulpit force will man these street-eaters for their day to day transport. And what a delight it would be for all the church treasurers if they could see a sharp drop in the car expense account!

Our churches in Australia and New Zealand should have a closer look at this work in the Philippines. What about sending one or two of our young graduates to that mission field as observers for half year or so and learn how the CRC works on their mission field over there. I am quite positive that they have a message for our churches in dealing with spiritual and numerical growth of our congregations. We can't say that the situations in Australia and New Zealand are very different from the Philippines

A good example of growth is a church less than a mile from our church in Mangere. Twelve years ago a few families and children with a dedicated pastor purchased an old house with some extra

land and started the Shiloh Community Church. A committed group of full-time staff and voluntary workers and a pastor with vision for progress and extension of the message of Christ to the whole community prepares the ongoing activities each day of the week. In that church community work is a vital part of the overall programme and involvement includes such avenues as home and hospital visiting, initiation of college and school programmes, Bible in schools teaching, budgeting advice, financial aid, conducting marriage seminars, the running of a second hand trading post, a bookshop in the main centre, liaison with the social service agencies where necessary, developments towards mobilising and re-directing the unemployed into the work force. Emphasis has always been placed on outreach activities and especially the young people share the Good News via street meetings and at their bookshop and information centre where they meet for prayer and coffee ministry. Right through South Auckland they have now established small outposts for movie outreach and fellowship gatherings. This is indeed a rolling stone which gathers no moss, a church where each member learns to lit in and function in the community, who have God as their goal with the good of the others at heart.

Would you want your church to be like that? Of course you would! Maybe we need to start somewhere at the top of the shelf. As Jay Adams points out in



his booklet *Your Place in the Counsellings Revolution* where in the last chapter he says: "Well, the problem is that some pastors have become involved in many things that they have no business doing, and have failed to do the things that they ought to do." Organisation in the New Testament was structured in order to do two things: to allow the pastor to become a pastor and teacher (and nothing else) and to allow the entire congregation to exercise their gifts in mutual ministry to

one another and to the world around them, and to assist the pastor in his work. It is all found in concise form in Ephesians 4:11,12 but is worked out in detail in many other places. Let me quote those two verses for you: "God gave some... to be pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for their work of ministry." That is the New Testament picture. What about our picture here? We may have to start with a full-scale shift of responsibilities. Let's catch the vision for the pastorate and for the congregation and let us start to grow again.

October

October I am privileged to receive all, or rather, most of the local church newsletters, to help me to fill this page every month. Although very little of it is suitable for wider publication in *Trowel & Sword*, it often does give a good picture of the life of each church. An interesting exercise over the last few months, for instance, revealed what the weekly offerings of each church were. With the use of the membership figures in the Yearbook and my little electronic calculator, I found out that the tithes and offerings varied greatly. As a matter of fact, the giving in the collection is in inverse ratio to the size of the congregation. The smaller the church, the larger the giving and the larger the church the smaller the giving! In actual figures, one of the smallest churches pays, on average, almost \$20 per week per family or unit, while one of the largest churches collects an average of \$6 per unit.

November

As part of a cross-cultural study, I recently attended an overnight visit to a marae, an enclosed ground used as a meeting place by Maori. We all slept on the floor in the meeting house and went through the cultural and traditional motions of the Maori as they met together. For hours we had to listen to speeches

in both Maori and English.

When I was asked to give a speech in reply to one of the Maori elders, gave part of my address in Dutch. Although not understood, it was much appreciated. They recognised the presence of another culture in their midst. These Elders were respectable old men with flowing beards and big bellies. I was jealous of their beards.

Talking about elders, it reminds me of an article sometime ago in the now abandoned elders magazine *Give Yourself to Reading* where Rev. Deenick wrote about how old or how young one has to be in order to be an elder, and then discussed the problems of placing the responsibility of the eldership on young men in the congregation. Now, when I looked at these venerable old Maori elders and the respect they received from their people, I could not help reflecting, for a moment, on another aspect of the life in our churches. And that is that, more often than not, members in our churches are not willing to accept the men in their congregations, whom they have elected to the office of elder, for what they are in that capacity;

It always amazes, and hurts me too, when I see people (intentionally or not, I don't know) rush with their non-theological problems to their pastors who have just graduated from the College and are still in their twenties or early thirties, while by-passing some fine, mature, older elders of their church. This is not a personal gripe (I feel that I am sometimes more of a Pinocchio anyway) but I have seen it happen so often. Is it some sort of familiarity that breeds contempt for the elderly brothers in their church? Is it that some people see in their minister too much of the old witch doctor with his totem pole, who, with a bit of mystical cleverness can solve all their problems? And that elder of the church doesn't have to know everything; after all, he is only good old Tom or Harry!

In the Avondale church there is good growth in the Cadet and Calvinette movement. At present they have 45 girls and over 30 boys, and they are really

very grateful for the zeal and enthusiasm shown by the leaders and counselors, and the youngsters.

Wellington Presbytery has been going through a bit (a fair bit, they would say in Wellington) of a lean time as far as ministerial power is concerned. With Rev. Bill Kroon of the Wellington church off duty due to ill health and Rev. G.I. Williamson on furlough in the US, of the six churches in that presbytery, only Palmerston North and Hastings have a regular minister in the pulpit. However, at the time of writing this letter, timings are looking a bit brighter again, Rev. Williamson has returned from the States and a new minister has arrived, also from the States, shared by both Wainuiomata and Nelson together.

Last Synod decided that in future a minister cannot be ordained or installed without the unanimous consent of the Synodical examiners from the two outside presbyteries, and the examination must take place at least one month prior to the date of installation. In the past, examination and installation all took place in a matter of 48 hours; and the possibility of an unsustained examination was never entertained by the calling church in their enthusiasm to speed up the process of "owning" their pastor as quickly as possible.

The Auckland Presbytery has seen a flurry of church visitations among their churches. Each church scrutinises the other with 79 questions. Actually, a good exercise prior to such church visitation would be for each church to discuss the church visitation questionnaire at the midweek Bible classes. It could be quite a soul-searching exercise and expose the strengths and weaknesses of the session to the congregation.

Finally, our churches had the pleasure of a visit by Alex Munro, a missionary from New Zealand and attached to the Christian Reformed Church Overseas Missions, working in the Philippines. It was a thrilling story he gave us of the church planting efforts in that country being greatly blessed by the Lord.

Abridged

"Our lives are illustrations of heavenly goodness, parables of divine wisdom, poems of sacred thought, and records of infinite love; happy are we whose lives are such tales." C H Spurgeon



Delegates and fraternal delegates attending the FRCA synod. Images courtesy of Mr Henry Hamelink

Report on the Free Reformed Churches of Australia Synod Bunbury, 2018

P. Archbald

Synod Bunbury was convened by the Bunbury FRCA, but held in Southern River church, since the facilities of the former were too small. Bunbury is a town about 170 km south of Perth. Southern River is a suburb of Perth. The church lies in a gated area, surrounded by scrub, in a new housing development area, about 30 km south-east of the Perth cbd.

The synod lasted 7 days, from June 18-26, generally running from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm – except when committees needed time to meet. Rev. A Souman was elected as chairman – a task which he performed very ably.

As expected, the hospitality was friendly and generous. The FRCA certainly knows how to put on a synod!

The tone of the meeting was good, displaying a high degree of unity. Compared to previous synods, more work was done by committees. Wherever opinions were divided, committees were given a mandate to come up with proposals that would meld the various views as much as possible. This can save time debating matters on the floor of synod. In my opinion, however, it carries the risk of committee influence overshadowing local church influence. We also use committees in our synods, but we do so more sparingly.

Relationship with the RCNZ

There were three appeals against the decision of the previous Synod Baldivis to accept our offer of a sister-relationship. These appeals were all by individuals,

rather than by consistories (sessions) or classes. The appeals were all ruled inadmissible, because they had not followed the usual route of being passed on by consistory to classis to synod; and they did not provide new grounds.

Both the deputies report and an overture from one of the churches called for ongoing monitoring of the RCNZ's relationships with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia and the Reformed Theological College. This was accepted by the synod. The vote on the deputies' recommendation to remain sisters passed 16 to 1, by my count. This vote reflects a strong commitment to the sister-relationship on the part of the FRCA – a commitment that is being demonstrated in many practical ways (pulpit swaps, member transfers, mission work in PNG, to mention a few).

The synod also mandated attention to the emeritation problem. At present, our two federations have very different systems for supporting retired ministers. These two systems do not mesh well together. In particular, an older minister serving the last few years of his active ministry in the RCNZ, could be significantly disadvantaged in the financial sense. The FRCA synod mandated their deputies and emeritus committee to work with us on this problem. Our last synod issued a similar mandate from this end.

Relationship with the RCN

The Dutch “mother church” of the FRCA – the RCN – sent two delegates to synod Bunbury. Synod decided early in the meeting that these two delegates would not be asked to stand to signify their agreement with the confessions – since the previous FRCA synod had suspended the sister-church relationship. This meant that the fraternal delegates were no longer regarded as “advisors” to the synod and were therefore not required to stand.

The delegates were permitted to deliver a fraternal speech, as well as an explanation of their decisions on women in office. The explanation made it clear that the RCN has not repented of their decision to allow women in office, or of the way of reading the Bible that grants too much input to the culture of the day – then and now. This made the decision very straightforward and unanimous: to end the sister-church relationship. Our churches have suspended the relationship with the RCN for the same reasons. This was a sad development for us, but

even more so for the FRCA as it deals with its “mother.”

Relationship with the GKN (Gereformeerde Kerken Nederlands) and DGK (De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederlands)

These two small federations are break-aways from the RCN – because of the issues mentioned above. Both are seeking a relationship with the FRCA. Only the DGK sent delegates to Synod Bunbury.

The FRCA is not ready to enter a sister-relationship, for two reasons: the two churches, which we might expect to unite, do not appear to be moving closer together; and the DGK has a sister-relationship with a church that seceded from the Canadian Reformed Churches – which is still a sister-church of the FRCA. Apparently the DGK is reviewing the Abbotsford situation, along with their own attitude to churches that hold to the Westminster standards. Hopefully, these matters can be resolved in such a way that faithful Reformed churches can reach a fuller expression of unity.

Relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches:

This is probably the FRCA's closest sister, and also a sister of the RCNZ.

Relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

Here, too, the sister-relationship is very close. The FRCA has, and has had, a few ministers from South Africa.

The recent FRCSA synod received an overture asking their churches to

(right) RCNZ delegate to the FRCA synod, Mr Paul Archbald.



investigate a sister-relationship with our churches. The overture was declined, but only due to practicalities. One of those practicalities is that the churches there are not in a strong financial position. They remain convinced that we are true and faithful churches, but are not in a position to do more than that at present.

Relationship with the EPCA and SPCA

The FRCA is establishing contact with these two small Australian churches, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Southern Presbyterian Church. They originated in Launceston, Tasmania, as the result of a church-split. The divisions had to do with whether or not there is such a thing as “common grace” (God’s non-saving love towards all His creatures, including the reprobate); and whether we can speak of a “free offer” of the Gospel. By the “free offer” of the Gospel we mean that God honestly offers salvation to “whosoever” will believe. Those who take the contrary position often regard this view as contradicting the decree of God, according to which only the elect will be enabled to believe.

Relationship with the URCNA

The FRCA decided to investigate the possibility of a sister-church relationship with the URCNA.

Relationship with the OPC

Jack Sawyer was present at the FRCA synod and spoke eloquently of the OPC’s fight against Liberalism, of their mission work, as well as their warm relationships with the Canadian Reformed, URC and RCNZ. The synod voted to establish contact with the OPC.

Other Relationships

The FRCA has other relationships with a number of Asian churches (in Korea, Singapore and Indonesia). A lot of effort has been put into helping three Indonesian church federations, one of which is a sister-church of the FRCA.

ICRC

One of the Deputies’ reports recommended sending observers to the next ICRC meeting, especially because it is to be held in Australia. This was ruled out of order, because it came from the deputies, not from the churches. There appeared to be some concern about the effect (even) sending observers would have among the members of the FRCA

churches. I expect this matter will come back on the agenda in the future.

Australian Book of Praise

The FRCA has been moving for some time in the direction of having their own “Australian” Book of Praise. This affects the Canadian churches as well, since at present the FRCA uses the Canadian Book of Praise. The FRCA is to go ahead with their own book, but it will vary very little from the Canadian book, at least initially. There is some variation in liturgical forms between the two countries. These will be incorporated. However, the songs will remain much the same. The 19 new hymns from the Book of Praise will all be included, though some have expressed concern about the wording of some of these hymns, along with the gradual increase in the number of hymns.

An Australian Seminary

Synod was split three ways, between those who wanted a seminary in Australia as soon as possible; those who wanted one in the medium to long term; and those who did not want one at all. Like the question of an Australian Book of Praise, this matter was seen as an indication that the FRCA is “coming of age.” It is not a reflection of dissatisfaction with their Canadian sister. The committee appointed to bring the various views together proposed that the FRCA should move towards establishing its own seminary, but carefully, over a longer period of time. The first step will involve clarifying the vision and strategy for it.

One of the interesting aspects of the committee’s recommendations, was the acceptance of the view that this seminary should aim to serve others than just the FRCA. They included the RCNZ in their vision, in the hope that such a seminary might benefit our churches as well.

Confessions and CO

One of the classes sent two requests for revision of Confessions – re Art. 30 of the Belgic Confession of Faith and LD 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The BCF 30 request was that the Confession now read that the office-bearers be “as a council,” instead of “form the council of the church.”

The other revision was of much more significance. The Classis asked for LD 38 to return to the original wording: “That I, especially on the Sabbath, that is on the day of rest, diligently attend the church...” The current version does not overtly refer to the Sabbath.

Both requests for revision were rejected, perhaps because it was felt that the changes were too minor to justify a new edition of the Book of Praise. There were also questions about whether the grounds for revision were sufficiently spelled out in the overtures. While that is quite understandable, their current translation of LD 38 does lend itself more readily to the view that the Lord’s Day is not a “Christian Sabbath” (WCF 21:7). The view that the Lord’s Day is not a Sabbath is now common in the RCN. Adding the word “Sabbath” to the answer to Q103 could help protect the church against attacks on the doctrine of the Lord’s Day – though strictly speaking, it should not really be necessary, since the *question* already makes this link between the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day: “What is God’s will for us in the fourth commandment?” The fourth commandment calls on us to “remember the Sabbath Day.” The answer of the LD 38 spells out how we do that. Sometimes it is necessary to spell things out even more clearly, when they come under attack. Thankfully, the Lord’s Day does not appear to be under attack in the FRCA!

Who Can Chair Consistory Meetings

There was considerable discussion on whether a minister has to chair consistory meetings, or whether another office-bearer can do so. Synod added the term, “as a rule,” meaning “ordinarily” – that wonderful word that features quite a lot in our decisions here in New Zealand. “As a rule” the minister will chair the meetings – out of respect for his calling and training – but there can be exceptions.

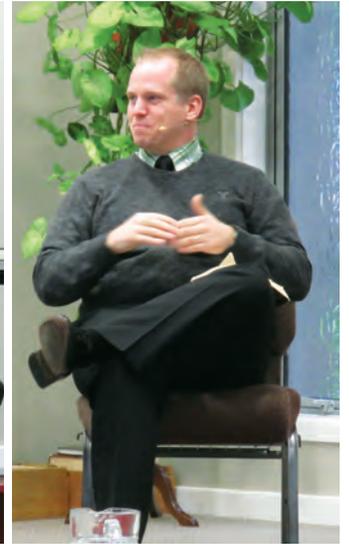
National Days of Prayer

The FRCA has felt the need to call their churches to prayer over the way in which society in Australia moves farther away from the Gospel. Synod discussed the nature and running of such occasions.

Conclusion

This is not a complete summary of all the decisions made at synod Bunbury – I have selected some matters that might be of more interest here. But I trust it will help us to become more familiar with one of our newer sisters. The relationship between our two federations is growing warmer. As it does so, may it be that we are able to help each other to remain faithful to the Lord of the Church.

Vicar David Stares sustains preliminary examination



Vicar David Stares sustained his preliminary examination before the Wellington Presbytery in June and was declared eligible for call. Since that time there have been expressions of interest which have led David and Emma to visit with some congregations in our churches.

(top right) Vicar David Stares preaching the assigned text at this examination.

(middle) The Rev's van Huyssteen, Warner and Vaatstra examining David Stares.

(bottom) David Stares during question time.





David and Emma Stares

My name is David Stares. For the last year or so my wife Emma and I have been at the Reformed Church of Silverstream, where I have been serving as a Vicar.

I was born and raised in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, and when I was in my early teens our whole family moved to Wainuiomata for 2 years (2002-2004) where my Dad taught at the local Reformed Christian school. During that time I met my wife, Emma, who was born and raised in Lower Hutt. I returned to Canada, but dated long distance with Emma for a number of years. In 2008, Emma came on exchange to Brock University, where I was already studying for a BA in Philosophy. Then, after her one-year exchange ended, I took a year off school and spent 2010 in Dunedin where Emma was studying at Otago University. We were engaged that year.

We got married back in Ontario, and both continued to study at Brock University, me finishing my BA, and Emma beginning her graduate studies in Chemistry. After I graduated I began working full-time at an online bookselling warehouse. It was during this time that my calling to ministry was solidified. I had felt for a long time that I was called to the ministry, and I had expressed this to my elders and pastor along the way. However, it was conversations with a few

pastor-friends who opened up Scripture to me in a powerful way that lit the fire to send me to seminary. Thankfully, my session and pastor were fully in support of this decision.

For my education I attended Westminster Seminary in California (WSCal) for a three-year M.Div. degree. During my three years there, Emma completed her Ph.D. and was hired as a research chemist at UCSD. This was a time of immense trial and immense growth. We enjoyed ourselves very much and this time also confirmed my call to the ministry.

Our intent had been to remain in the URC in which I was raised, until about halfway through my studies when Emma and I returned to New Zealand to visit her family for Christmas. While here, I exhorted at the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata. This began the process of the Lord bringing us back to New Zealand permanently! As I neared the end of my studies, in contact with the Deputies for Students for the Ministry, the Lord seemed to be opening door after door to return to the RCNZ, a place that we were very excited to go!

Since beginning the vicariate we have not regretted our return for a single moment, not only because we love the nation, but because of all the lovely people we have met in churches across the country. The Lord is doing powerful things in New Zealand, and we are thankful that He has placed us here to be a part of that!

As far as our personal interests go, I have been watching and playing rugby since living in Wainuiomata, and have even been managing to keep up with the NHL since I left North America! Emma likes playing piano and reading and has recently taken up running. We both enjoy board games and are embracing a newfound love of tramping. We look forward to what the Lord has in store for us here in the RCNZ!



In July, Dr Martin Williams, toured throughout our churches presenting the gospel by defending the historical narrative of the early chapters of Genesis. He demonstrated biblically and logically, how evolutionary theory, especially theistic evolution destroys the message and hope of the gospel, especially the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. The opportunity to ask questions yielded yet more really good information for those who attended the meetings. In Silverstream, we had members of the public attend and had opportunity to converse with them over coffee and tea. The presentation concluded with interesting facts about dinosaurs and man's knowledge of them through the ages.

'PORNOGRAPHY — a secret sickness'

How does a Christian interact with those who struggle with sexual temptation and addiction?

Many of you may not have struggled with sexual temptation. Nevertheless, since the development of the internet, pornography use has become increasingly prolific worldwide. This article is intended to personally engage with those who struggle, while also imparting information about the problem to those who don't. Our secular society is hard at work trying to pollute what God has created to be beautiful; we must stand against her.

Joshua Flinn

I wonder, dear reader, how I should address you. My natural inclination is to treat you as a casual observer of other people's sin – to speak on such a topic from a distance, giving you interesting information so you'll be able to help your friend if the topic comes up. That's safer for me, and it's less unsettling for you. Sadly though, most of the things I have read tell me that I'm on much safer ground to assume that you also struggle with sex addiction.

As soon as I use that term, you're likely to shrink back – after all, you don't think of yourself as a sex addict; it sounds too extreme. In reality, however, it's generally accepted that sex addiction broadly includes all those who are habitually drawn to sexually stimulating material. There's a compulsion within you to repeat that behaviour; this means that at some point the sex addict always seems to return like a dog to their vomit (Prov 26:11). If you can't seem to shake the habit of falling into such a temptation, by definition you're a sex addict.

Sadly, your environment doesn't help you escape the temptation. The vast majority of people in our society under the age of thirty view porn and other behaviour associated with it as healthy; as a normal part of sexual expression; as a valuable educational tool. It's no surprise then that most recent studies also show that porn use is almost universal among adolescents with access to the internet. Sadly, the problem doesn't disappear as you get older.

Historically, you may have felt isolated and lonely in your struggle, but these days you probably have friends

who encourage you in your addiction. Pornographic content is ever more accessible in popular adult movies or TV programs – Game of Thrones, Fifty Shades, and most action movies. Even on your drive home billboards advertising lingerie tempt you to linger lustfully.

Sadly, becoming a Christian is no quick-fix: In one study (McDowel & Cusick, 2016) it was reported that only 3% of Christian men and 13% of Christian women have never viewed pornography. Read that again... It seems almost impossible to avoid even if you want to.

The world will try to convince you that most people can use porn and respond with no negative repercussions; yet even if this were true, pragmatism has never been a convincing basis for ethics. As Christians, we're clearly taught that God takes sexual sin very seriously (Rom 1:18-32). Even 'casual porn users' are still committing sin and damaging their relationship with God.

Sadly, sexual sin seldom stays static; like the black hole of heroin, porn seems to suck everything in; your life revolves around it and nothing else seems to satisfy.

What's wrong with me?

Well dear reader, I hope you're not discouraged when I tell you that your primary problem isn't porn addiction. It may seem that way, but your problem is actually much deeper; and porn is your preferred solution.

You're trying to use porn as a saviour who can solve your problems and fulfil your innermost needs. Even non-Christian psychologists speak about this concept: "For the addict, the sexual experience is the source of nurturing, focus

of energy, and origin of excitement. It is the remedy for pain and anxiety, the reward for success and the means for maintaining emotional balance” (Carnes, 2001). Porn makes you feel loved, excited, intoxicated; it provides a thrilling high that makes normal life pale in comparison. There’s no long-term commitment and there’s seemingly no consequences. But although it promises so much, your problems still remain.

You were designed to find fulfillment in real relationships. God made you in his image; that means in part that you were made for community – for companionship (Gen 2:19-24). And yet,

historical baggage; you may have been abused or struggled with your parents divorcing; perhaps you were raised in a family which participated in other addictive practices (such as drug use or alcoholism).

And yet, without detracting one bit from how difficult your background may have been, you’re responsible for your own actions. The environment God places you in, is there to train you in righteousness, not to give you an excuse to sin (Heb 12:5-11). Blaming your spouse or your parents or your workplace privacy (or even God!) for your sinfulness isn’t a legitimate excuse.



Photo by Courtney Clayton on Unsplash

because of the Fall, you struggle to find fulfillment in relationships. Sin broke the unity and closeness of Adam and Eve – and they became ashamed of their nakedness (Gen 3:10).

Because of the Fall, you (and therefore your relationships) are corrupt and fallen (Psa 53:3); this is the reason you struggle to find the level of intimacy you crave and were created for. Other people don’t show you love the way you want them to, especially because you yourself aren’t perfect. Real relationships are hard and real life isn’t adventurous or full enough to satiate your endless cravings. To add to that, it’s likely that you have

You should find it interesting then, that your preferred solution to the struggles you have, has been to repeat Adam’s sin; in an attempt to defend himself he isolated himself from his wife and the one who provided her: ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’ (Gen 3:12). Amnon (King David’s son) did the same when he used his sister Tamar to satiate his sexual desires and then cast her out as nothing, saying to his servants: “Put this woman out of my presence and bolt the door after her” (2 Sam 13:17).

By its very nature, pornography objectifies those it portrays, and works to

Your problem is two-fold:
you're a fallen, broken,
human being, and you're
looking for help in all the
wrong places.

persuade you that they aren't real people – they're simply tools to make you feel better. In this way, your uncontrolled sexual desire acts to strip them of their humanity. But those women are sisters and daughters and mothers; those men are brothers and sons and fathers.

And ironically, every one of the relationships we've been made for on earth, even if they require effort, are designed intentionally to point us toward an even greater relationship: "Spiritual desire is the drive that God put in us from the beginning, for total satisfaction, for home, for heaven ... and it just got displaced into the wrong object" (Rohr, 2013). God isn't simply an alternative to what the world has to offer – he's your Creator, your Redeemer, your Friend – and true joy is found in doing things his way, not yours.

Biblically, when you look for your highest joy outside of God, you commit idolatry. And this isn't simply a problem because he commands against it; it's a problem because whatever we replace God with is unable to save or satisfy, and simply drives us deeper into despair; by partaking in porn, you're feeding a beast that will eventually consume you.

And so, your problem is two-fold: you're a fallen, broken, human being, and you're looking for help in all the wrong places.

So, what do I do?!

Find support

The first thing to recognize is that you need help. Sex-addiction, by its very nature, is self-centered and isolating. Don't kid yourself that your other addicted friends mean you have support. Addicts often congregate to one another ... that doesn't mean they know what's good for themselves. You need help from someone who is trustworthy and will have your best interests at heart.

And so, the first person you need to talk to is Jesus Christ. You can do this right now in prayer. You can pour out your heart to him and know that he hears you. And before you think you're too messed up, you need to recognize you're exactly the kind of person Christ came to save: He didn't come to save the well, but the sick. In fact, not one of the people in the Bible had it all together; the gospel went to prostitutes, tax-collectors (thieves), lepers and murderers. Our saviour called out to the broken and the lost and said: "Come to

me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28-29).

Turn to your God in prayer and repent of your sins. He tells us that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (John 1:9); he will hear your prayer and will never leave you nor forsake you (Deut 31:6).

But you'll also need to find someone else to confess to and hold you accountable. It's likely that you're so used to trying to eliminate this problem yourself that you've forgotten the blessing God intended for you in the church. The rest of us (also broken, weak, sinful human beings in need of grace) are called to build you up and point you to Christ in your need. Your isolation is turning away one of the primary means of grace God has given you in your life – you've already proven you can't do it alone; a decent support network is crucially important ... Not convinced? Look up the following: (John 13:34-35; Galatians 5:13; 6:2; Ephesians 4:2, 32; 1 Peter 4:8-10).

Work out your triggers.

Are you most tempted when you're Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired? During your triumphs or disappointments? When you're under pressure? Find the reasons you go to porn and work out how you can lessen their hold on you.

Change your routine and environment

So much of addiction is habitual; you need to work out ways to limit your options and set up some boundaries. This could be as simple as exchanging your smart phone for a dumb phone, installing Covenant Eyes on your devices, leaving your laptop at work, and putting a time-limit on your showers (set an alarm).

Find what works and stick with it. Remember that once the "syringe" is in your hand it's too late. Make sure you have boundaries two or three steps beforehand.

Find ways to stop lying to yourself

The life of a sex addict is saturated in deceit – and most of those lies you direct at yourself in an attempt to make you feel better. To put it bluntly – you can't trust yourself. You need to soak in the truth – set up daily habits of prayer and Bible reading and ask your accountability partner to help you with this. It's

amazing how God helps provide strength when you start the day with good things.

Paul reminds us to do this in Philippians 4:4-9. All too often we forget that in Christ we don't simply receive freedom from sin – that would simply mean that the gospel is a form of sin-management. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, 'the pursuit of purity is not about the suppression of our lust but about reorienting our life to a larger goal.' Find good material which reminds you of the bigger picture of God's goodness and kindness to you in Christ Jesus.

Don't forget about your spouse

If you're not married, don't think you've avoided this problem. Lord willing, you're going to be eventually blessed with someone to marry – and if you intend to have a healthy relationship you should be open with your future spouse. How else are you supposed to be united so closely that it's as if you were one flesh? (Gen 2:24).

But if you're already married, you'll need to eventually confess to your

spouse. Proverbs says that "the man of integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out" (Prov 10:9). When you have nothing to hide, you have strength and security, and you're never going to get there without openness.

You also need to recognize that your spouse hasn't been unaffected by your sin. They'll need help – try to make it as easy for them as possible: Even after you've confessed, strive to be humble in your repentance when you fall again (don't make her ask) – be proactive about giving her information; and refuse to be defensive when she speaks out of her hurt.

Closing remarks

To quote Matt Dobschuetz who runs *Pornfree Radio*, "trying to sell a porn-free life to a person who loves porn is like trying to sell sand to a guy in the desert". Reading this article isn't going to solve your problem and handing this article to someone who you know has the problem won't solve theirs.

Nevertheless, I have prayed as I wrote this article that the Holy Spirit will still prompt you to get help: If this is a struggle of yours, I urge you now to repent of your sin. You may think you're hiding well, but God knows everything (Psa 33:13-19).

Christ is the only solution for your brokenness, your hurt, your pain. He finds those who are lost and is a firm foundation for those who are insecure. If you place your faith in him he stands before God's throne as your advocate and defender; if you truly trust in him, the Holy Spirit will never stop working in your heart to purify you from all unrighteousness. Turn from your sin and run to the only one who can save you; there is still hope for your soul.

Mr Joshua Flinn is the minister of the Reformed Church of New Plymouth, which is a church plant of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Letter to the editor

Gender ideology

Dear brothers and sisters of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope you are enjoying the mercies of our God.

I write briefly to draw your attention to an issue that is gaining strength in South America and which may affect us here in New Zealand at some point in the future. I was very upset to learn recently that the Chilean parliament has passed a law allowing adults to change their name and gender without undergoing any surgery or hormone treatments. Furthermore, a mixed commission that defends the human rights of sexual minorities has made the resolution to extend this right to those under the age of 18. Even children, new-born to 14 years of age, may make a registry change of their name and gender if they wish. If parents oppose the child's desire to change gender, the state will

take charge of the case and the parents will lose the preferential right over their own children. Good parenting is now being treated as abuse.

This particular aspect of gender ideology is not as well-known in Europe or New Zealand, but the underlying philosophy is already widely accepted. In recent years, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have been speaking out about euthanasia, and we need to be equally vocal and active in explaining the dangers of gender ideology!

The modern gender ideology is a pagan philosophy which denies science and basic biology. It promotes a radical feminist and homosexual agenda to devalue the biblical ideas of family, sexual purity and morality. Many who adopt this ideology manipulate language to make aberrant behaviour acceptable to the mainstream culture. They seek to naturalize homosexual behaviour even in children. One of the most dangerous elements of this ideology is that gender change is being accepted as a human

right. If a country adopts this view, then any parents who seek to teach their children that gender is not fluid or changeable will be seen as denying the human rights of their children! Gender ideology has infiltrated politics, public education, many forms of media, and even sectors of the broader church. This is a frontal attack on the family and biblical morality. Therefore, this is nothing less than a frontal attack on the gospel and church of Jesus Christ.

Please read about and study these issues. Prepare yourself to speak out against this false ideology in the workplace, community and church. We dare not remain silent in the face of this great danger! It is time to raise our voice and inform our congregations and communities of the dangers of gender ideology. God help us to do so with grace and respect.

Claudio Navea
North Shore Reformed Church

God is visible to any who will see

Jon Dykstra

Our universe, if just slightly different, would never have been able to support life. For example, a proton's mass is 1,837 times greater than that of an electron, but it carries a positive charge that is exactly equal to that of the electron's negative charge. How very strange that the two, so different in size, would yet be perfectly matched in charge! If they weren't paired just so, then the vast array of elements could never have formed and life could never have existed.

This is but one example of the fine-tuning that so troubles atheists that they've resorted to "what if" stories to explain it away. Yes, they acknowledge, the universe is too finely tuned to have come about just by chance...if we'd had only one role of the dice to get here. But what if this wasn't the only universe? What if there were billions and trillions and gazillions of universes out there somewhere? What if we could stack the odds in our favor by supposing as many universes as we might need? Then it wouldn't seem so very improbable that at least one of these might be suited to life...right?

And these same atheists will mock Christians because we speak of faith!

There is no evidence of these other universes. None at all. So on what basis do they propose this theory? Because they need it to be true. The only case that can be made for it is that the alternative is too terrible for them to consider – that a Fine-Tuner brought the balance, order, and wonder to our universe.

Atheists can be clever, but God won't leave them with any excuse. As Psalm 19 explains the heavens declare His glory. Want to explain away fine-tuning by postulating a multiverse? Well, then answer this: why would the Sun just happen to be 400 times bigger than our moon and also 400 times further away?

This precise pairing means that the moon and sun appear to be the same size in our sky. This allows us, during a solar eclipse, to study the Sun's corona



in a way that we just can't any other time and wouldn't ever be able to if the two celestial bodies weren't sized just so. As the moon passes in front of the Sun only the corona is still visible – flaring fire crowning the moon in the dark daytime sky. Yes, dear atheist, we are not only in a universe impossibly finely tuned for life, but implausibly suited for us to study our own Sun.

Why would that be?

The multiverse doesn't explain it. There is no reason that the one universe in which all the dice rolled just right for life would also be the same universe in which we'd be gifted with a moon that was sized exactly right to study our own Sun.

Atheists have no explanation.

But we do. We know our God created

A shot of a solar eclipse blotting out the sun, exhibiting a fiery corona.

Photo by Karen Kayser on Unsplash

us as the very pinnacle of His creation (Psalm 8:3-9, Genesis 1:26-28) and that our purpose is to glorify Him. So it isn't surprising to us that God would so arrange things that the size of the sizing of the moon enables us to study our Sun – God is showing us His wonders!

This article was first published in the May 2016 edition of Reformed Perspective. Used with permission.

New RCNZ website on the way

Earlier in the year, the RCNZ website crashed, not once, but twice, and then limped along for a time. At the time of writing it was operational again.

The National Publishing Committee was aware that some work needed to be done even before the site broke. It was the sudden, but not totally unexpected crash that prompted us to some serious action.

As a result it was decided that the website would be redesigned and purpose-built for the RCNZ only. *Faith in Focus* in time will have its own website.

The idea behind the magazine having its own website is to make it more visible to a wider audience. It is anticipated that all the old issues will still be available, and there will be a blog in which we can put the latest articles or have someone write on topical issues of the day.

I am really looking forward to them both. **Ed.**

Una Sancta

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

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