

faith in **FOCUS**

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Stand up

AND SERVE

– ON BEING A SERVING CHURCH

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Editorial

If you are a little bemused about this month's theme and question: "are we not serving and busy in the Lord's kingdom? Have our churches not been established for some 60 years and made an impact on our communities?" Allow me to briefly explain.

Many years ago, I heard the criticism that we were inclined to raise up the draw-bridge, keep everyone else out, and build safe little church communities. C John Miller, in his book *Evangelism & Your Church* makes a comment "Evangelism, God's first priority for His Word and His church, has become a peripheral activity in the lives of many local congregations. Often it even raises eyebrows as a theologically questionable undertaking because it is so far afield of our usual defensive posture!" (p7). That comment has troubled me ever since. After all, I am always open to discussing the gospel with those who ask me to give an account for the hope that I have in Christ Jesus.

However, it was the idea that maybe our churches are more like fortresses that got me thinking about this theme.

I am well aware, that many churches have evangelism committees designed to motivate the members in the pews. Some have developed programmes and ways of inviting people to Bible studies and worship services. Some are successful, some are not. Some churches have introduced Language Assisted Bible Study programmes to help migrants learn English with mixed success. Then there are the big budget marketing programmes and methods, with the glitz and the glamour, that churches use to attract more numbers. I am certainly not an advocate for that!

My thoughts on this subject which have been fermenting for quite a long time, have brought me to the point where I believe we need to actively be part of our communities, to live the Christ-like life, show compassion rather than be combative, and bear witness to the truth of the gospel, while serving among them.

Our contributors describe a serving church community.

Mr David Waldron compares the fortress with the outward-serving church.

Mr Dirk J van Garderen writes about radical, ordinary hospitality.

OPC member Miss Charisa Dorn writes about her experience in a coffee house.

Mrs Sally Davey shares Mr Kevin DeYoung's thoughts on making an idol of family.

Mr Joshua Flinn investigates the philosophy of human rights.

Cover: Photo by Louis Smit 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 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.

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Fortress Church or Outwardly Serving Church?

David Waldron

‘Solid’, ‘strong’, ‘robust’ are all words which describe a fortress church. These buildings were constructed during the Middle Ages, especially in Southern France and Transylvania (Romania). In addition to being a place of worship, a fortress church was used by the local population as a retreat and defensive refuge against the constant threat of invaders. A fortress church was enclosed by its own fortifications to prevent outsiders getting in.

‘A mighty fortress is our God’, Martin Luther’s paraphrase of Psalm 46, has been called the ‘Battle Hymn of the Reformation’ and beautifully expresses the strength, power and protection of the God in whom we trust. Our Lord is a mighty fortress, but should the church of the Lord Jesus Christ be a like fortress church in her ministry to others?

This article is not about church architecture, but about the attitudes and activities which permeate the leadership and membership of a local church and lead to her being either more outwardly or more inwardly focused. The ‘outwardly serving’ church is interested in and actively engaged with the non-church community in which the Lord has placed her. On the other hand, the ‘fortress’ church focuses almost exclusively on her own members rather than on those who are in spiritual need outside her own ‘walls’.

We’ll begin by looking at four factors which can lead towards a local congregation functioning like a ‘fortress’ church, and then consider four corresponding



factors which characterise an outwardly-serving church.

A ‘fortress’ church has an excessive focus on order

Any wise observer, observing the physical laws by which the universe ordinarily functions and seeing the mighty works of God as revealed in His Word, would conclude that our God is a God of order. The chaos which we see in Creation is the outworking of the effects of sin so that the entire universe is in ‘bondage to corruption’ (Rom 8.21). The church of Christ is to reflect the nature of her divine Saviour and to do all things decently and in good order (1 Cor 14:40).

Fortress Church in Tartlau, Transylvania

by Marion Schneider & Christoph Aistleitner, Wikimedia Commons

The church is also called to have a focus on those with whom her members come into contact from outside the covenant community. The main mechanism for drawing the Gentile nations to the covenant God of Israel in Old Testament times was that of living in such a way that the unbelieving nations were attracted to her.

Her covenant community worship is to be structured and organised, in contrast to the chaotic public corporate ministry of the 1st century church in Corinth (1 Cor 14).

Our Lord Jesus Christ was 'orderly' when He read the Scripture in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20). However when a sinful woman wet his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with oil (Luke 7:36-50), her action was unexpected, shocking, and could accurately be described as 'disorderly'. The Pharisee, in whose house this took place, thought that Jesus was remiss in allowing such a woman to touch her in this way, whereas Christ received her as she was and ministered to her where she was. In His ministry Jesus repeatedly came into contact with the messiness of a fallen world precisely because this was His mission: "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

A 'fortress' church has such an excessive focus on order that she, consciously or unconsciously, builds barricades which prevent the messiness of the broken lives which surround her from impacting on the orderly structures within.

A 'fortress' church has an excessive focus on covenant community

It is very evident from Scripture that the church is called to have an inward focus on her own members. The many 'one another' commands in the Bible clearly teach that we are to be actively engaged in close relationships with our brothers and sisters in the local church¹.

However, the church is also called to have a focus on those with whom her members come into contact from outside the covenant community. The main mechanism for drawing the Gentile nations to the covenant God of Israel in Old Testament times was that of living in such a way that the unbelieving nations were attracted to her (e.g. Isaiah 42.6). Christ affirmed the continuation of this ministry of attraction (e.g. Matt 5:13-16), but added to this the active making of disciples by all His followers as they went about their daily lives (e.g. Matt 28:19-20).

A 'fortress' church has such an excessive focus on her own covenant community that she does not effectively or actively engage with the non-believing community around her with a view to making disciples of all different kinds of people.

A 'fortress' church has an excessive focus on overseas missions

Scripture foretells the 'end-goal' of Christ's gathering of His church; a diverse community composed of people from 'every tribe and language and people and nation' (Rev 5.9).

John Calvin wrote that God "means that the work of this deliverance will be so excellent that it ought to be proclaimed, not in one corner only, but throughout the whole world." Historically and currently Reformed Churches have been particularly faithful in supporting overseas missions. However local missions have not always been pursued with the same level of zeal or had allocated to them similar levels of human and financial resources.

Jesus brought fierce judgement against the Scribes and Pharisees for not being faithful leaders of God's people (Matt 23). They travelled to distant lands to make a single proselyte (Matt 23:15), but were not active in humble obedience on their 'home turf'.

A 'fortress' church has an excessive focus on overseas missions, expending large amounts of financial resource in distant lands. However in comparison she has minimal involvement in local missions which have the aim of making disciples from many different people groups and incorporating them into the local church.

A 'fortress' church has a fear of 'contamination' from outside

The covenant community of God's people are set apart from the unbelieving world as a result of God's saving grace (e.g. Exo 19:6; 1 Pet 2.5). We are called to keep ourselves 'unstained from the world' (James 1.27) as pilgrims passing through a land which is not their home (1 Pet 2.11). However, we are also called to be involved with the unbelieving world so that our good works may be seen (Matt 5:16), our verbal proclamation of the gospel heard by those who are yet lost (1 Pet 2.9) and a gentle, respectful, explanation of the gospel conveyed to those around us (1 Pet 3:15).

A 'fortress' church has a fear of 'contamination' from outside, being overly protective of her members and adopting a 'siege mentality' with a tendency to be isolated from the unbelieving world. Such an approach is excessively defensive, tends to result in little effective evangelism and consequently there is little numerical growth through people

being incorporated into the church who are not from covenant families.

In contrast to the 'fortress' church, the outwardly serving church exhibits very different attitudes and activities.

An outwardly serving church has a willingness to be a somewhat messy church

The leadership and membership of an outwardly serving church recognise that the relationships within their own families and church are at times quite messy, and that despite following Christ they do not 'have it all together' in their own lives as yet². God's people in an outwardly serving church are therefore sympathetic to the struggles and difficulties which those who do not know the Lord are often beset by. They understand that when new believers come into the church community, their lives may not be as orderly as longtime members who have learnt what is expected of them (sadly at times by the social climate of the church rather than by the Word of God).

The outwardly serving church member is willing to experience some disruption to the orderly pattern of their week so that they can meet up with someone they have engaged with at work, during a leisure activity, or through some other providential encounter. Their desire to be faithful in disciple-making is stronger than their desire to have everything in their own schedule ordered according to a tidy plan. This member understands that individual ministry often doesn't function well by rosters and strict timetables.

The outwardly serving church member knows that other Christians, looking for a spiritual home, may well not come from a Reformed Church background and therefore may not have the same Biblical understanding as they do. These wise members are careful to gently explain the truths of the Reformed Confessions from Scripture, having diligently studied the Biblical basis for the teaching of the church with this goal in mind. They are patient, recognizing that those who have not had the privilege of consistent Biblical preaching and teaching over many years, may have somewhat 'messy' theology for quite some time. They might wonder how well-informed the thief on the cross was when he entered the Kingdom of God³, or how well the 3,000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost knew the gospel⁴.

An outwardly serving church has an understanding of the needs of the non-church community

The outwardly serving church member likely comprehends that their local 21st century community may well not be so much a geographical one, as in times past, but is probably much more defined by inter-personal relationships and shared interests. These members seek to cultivate relationships with people outside the church community so that they can share the gospel, once they have built up an understanding of the other person's needs and an appreciation of how Christ meets those needs.

An outwardly serving church has a commitment to local missions

Outwardly serving church members, especially in 21st century New Zealand and other western nations, understand that the mission field is right on their doorstep. Just as the Lord had providentially assembled people from all over the Roman Empire on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in power, so today, the Lord has brought people from all over the world to our own country.

Outwardly serving church leadership recognises that actively engaging in effective home missions work is good stewardship of the financial and human resources with which He has blessed the church.

An outwardly serving church has a confidence in the sovereignty of God

The members of an outwardly serving church do not fear 'contamination' by people of different ethnicities or backgrounds like it seems the foolish Galatians did⁵. They understand that the tie which fundamentally binds us within the church is not our race, background, culture, social status or personal preferences, but Christ Himself⁶.

The outwardly serving church trusts in God's sovereign control of all events and may well think along the lines of the Gaither Vocal Band lyrics:

"A little old Cajun preacher was preachin', reminded me of an old camp meeting, it brought Saint Matthew 4:19 to life. He said, "I catch 'em, God cleans 'em, I bait the hook with the love of the Kingdom, I've been called to be a fisher of men. "I catch 'em, God cleans 'em, heaven knows He saves every soul that believes Him, I reel 'em in and He washes away their sin".

John Calvin wrote that God "means that the work of this deliverance will be so excellent that it ought to be proclaimed, not in one corner only, but throughout the whole world."

The outwardly serving church member understands their calling to be a 'fisher of men' and trusts the Lord to sanctify both themselves and any people He enables them to 'catch'.

Summary

I love our Reformed Churches and it has been my joy and privilege to serve in our covenant communities over the years. I appreciate our commitment to 'contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints'⁷, our careful instruction of our covenant youth and our orderliness of corporate worship.

However, as I reflect upon the contrasting attitudes and activities outlined above, I conclude that we are often more like 'fortress' churches than outwardly serving ones. My hope and prayer is that you, dear reader, and I will be willing to work towards changing this em-

phasis for the greater glory of God and the further extension of His kingdom.

A 'solid', 'strong', 'robust' church is one which keeps her eyes on Christ, practicing the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments and faithfully exercising church discipline⁸. However the church is not strong if she builds fortified structures thinking that with these she can keep those on the inside safe and secure. The strong church is an outwardly serving church which draws others to Jesus so that they may readily enter into the church and find safety and security in Christ alone. He is our Mighty Fortress.

References

¹ e.g. *John* 13:14; *Romans* 12:10,16; 15:14; 1 *Cor* 12:25; *Gal* 5:13; 6:2; *Eph* 4:2, 32; *Phil* 2:3; *Col* 3:13, 16; 1 *Thess* 5:11; *Heb* 10:24,25; *James* 5:16; 1 *Pet* 4:9.

² *Phil* 3.8b-12 "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own"

³ *Luke* 23:43

⁴ *Acts* 2:41

⁵ *Gal* 3.1-9

⁶ *Gal* 3.28-29

⁷ *Jude* 3b

⁸ Belgic Confession Article 29

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On being a serving church

'Radically ordinary hospitality'

Dirk J van Garderen

When an expert in the law of God wanted to test the Lord's orthodoxy and spiritual wisdom, he asked, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' Keep God's Law. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. Love your neighbour as yourself. Do this and you will live – come truly alive forever! That expert wanted to probe a little deeper. After all, he was testing *Jesus*, not himself. Picking up on a point that was the subject of debate among serious Bible students in those days, he asked, 'And who is my neighbour?' The universally known parable of the so-called 'Good Samaritan' follows.¹

Love God and your neighbour. 'Love' is a huge word in this context. It has many synonyms. Think honour, obey, trust and, of course serve. To love is surely to serve wholeheartedly and with delight. However, such loving/serving as disciples is often misunderstood. Recall that time James and John approached the Lord Jesus and asked that they might sit at his right and left in his glory. They wanted to be served. Theirs was a dream of prominence,

glory and honour as people bowed down before them. The Lord's response? '... whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be 'slave' of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.'²

What is it to love/serve? In the parable of the Good Samaritan the love for God and the covenant community is demonstrated by the priest and the Levite. True, both priests and Levites served God and did so on behalf of and as servants of God's people. In today's world, we would see and commend them for being good and faithful servants in and for the church community. Of them it could be said, 'See how they love [serve] one another.'³ That's how it should be. However, that is only part of the equation.

As the parable demonstrates, when it comes to loving/serving 'outsiders' the ante is raised to another level. Our natural, self-preserving tendency is to 'pass by on the other side.' Leave it to someone else who is better qualified. Call in the professionals who are trained and paid specialists who have

a calling to Samaritanism. Sure, we ourselves will serve when/if asked but are reluctant to go out of our way and sacrificially seek out those who are in need. We admire and pat on the back the Samaritan for his obvious goodness but are reluctant to *be* him. It could be costly. It could lead you into messy, nasty situations. It could backfire big time. It could impact negatively on your family and stress out your kids.

But didn't the Lord Jesus say, 'If **anyone** would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.'⁴

Here's a challenge. Get off the fence! Stop procrastinating and trying to rationalise your passing by on the other side!

But what to do? Where to start? We need some practical advice and encouragement. Let me start where it ought to – with *you personally*. The '**anyone**' has *your name, your family, your gifting* printed large upon it. *Anyone* who has surrendered to Christ Jesus as Lord, is defined by him as someone committed to radical, costly, time-consuming, often grimy self-denial. That 'cross' is not simply a heavy load, but a stigma, the symbol of being despised and treated

like dirt – even by the very person you are bending over backwards to help. You have no choice but to take it up! Following Jesus means being in step with his teaching, his example, and ultimately being prepared to make the same sacrifice he made.⁵

At this point I want to introduce you to Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, a former postmodern, radical, lesbian tenured professor of English literature (Syracuse) who, in 1999 became a Christian and member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. In 2012 she published '*The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*.'⁶ An amazing story, as anyone who has read it will tell you! Track it down. It is well written and very relevant within the context of being Reformed in New Zealand.

Last year (2018) Butterfield published another book, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*⁷ subtitled '*Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in our Post-Christian World*.' There is an attention-grabbing phrase! **Radically ordinary hospitality?** Say it aloud! Hear it. Taste it. Mull on it. Above all, picture it.

Prof. Carl R Trueman of Grove City College, in one of a number of blurbs



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Let it be crystal clear that unless and until we accept that the starting point for evangelism, outreach, Christ-imitating service in our community starts with and is based on you and your family opening your home and heart to your neighbour, we are trying to build a house on sand.

about this book, writes: 'One of the hallmarks of the people of God is supposed to be hospitality.... In this book Rosaria Butterfield makes a bold case for **putting hospitality back into the essential rhythm of the church's daily life.** She sets the bar very high – and there is plenty of room for disagreement on some of the proposals and details – but the basic case, that a church is a community marked by hospitality, is powerfully presented and persuasively argued.'⁸

Intrigued? I was. So what is Butterfield on about? She describes radically ordinary hospitality as follows:

'... using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbours, and neighbours family of God. It brings glory to God, serves others and lives out the gospel in word and deed. ... The purpose of radically ordinary hospitality is to build, focus, deepen, and strengthen the family of God, pointing others to a Bible-believing local church, and being earthly and spiritual good to everyone we know.

*When our Christian homes are open, we make transparent to a watching world what Christ is doing with our bodies, our families and our world. When we daily gather with the family of God in organic and open and communal ways and invite those who do not yet know Christ to enter, we accompany one another in suffering. We bear one another's burdens. We show a watching world what fervent prayer sounds like – talking to God, knowing that we are, through the merits of Christ, on good terms with him, and that our daily needs are his concern. When our Christian homes are open, our unsaved neighbours watch us struggle with our own sins – both the sins of our doing and the sin nature with which we wage daily combat.'*⁹

Two things. First and foremost, get hold of this book. Read it, share and discuss it with other members. You will find her story bold, deeply personal and at times even irritating. Maybe you can't do or be who she is, but you will be challenged by her. Just in case your local church is too messy or whatever to start doing this, Butterfield's frank revealing of the huge crisis her local church endured is sobering and challenging!

Secondly, let it be crystal clear that

unless and until we accept that the starting point for evangelism, outreach, Christ-imitating service in our community starts with and is based on you and your family opening your home and heart to your neighbour, we are trying to build a house on sand.

* * *

Becoming and being a serving church is ultimately about fulfilling the Great Commission.¹⁰ Our unbelieving neighbour, whether she realizes it or not, needs the help that only the Lord Jesus Christ provides. The messiness, unfairness, pain and pointlessness of life can only be turned around with God's help. That's the only one way given under heaven among men.

When the expert in the law of God heard the parable of the Samaritan, Jesus asked him, 'Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among robbers?' Embarrassed and no doubt even angry, the expert replied, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said, 'Go and do likewise.'¹¹

In subsequent articles I would like to develop this theme further. Hospitality, especially this 'radically ordinary' variety, must lie at the heart of the way we structure and focus our corporate worship, our teaching programmes, our outreach strategy.

- Real hospitality must be linked to our Sunday worship. The extent to which we are or are not serving our neighbours as well as ourselves in our worship services needs to be explored – urgently. The communities in which we live must be able to see and understand who we worship, why we worship, what and how worship shapes us as God's children. If we want to be of real service to our neighbours, being able to invite them to and involve them in meaningful corporate worship is fundamental.
- Real hospitality must also be linked to our small group activities. Most fundamentally, think here of home groups, Bible-studies, instruction (catechetical) programmes. Newcomers must see how Christians fellowship – warts and all! What that means and will look like also needs to be explored.
- Real hospitality must be linked with the resources of a church community. The activities the Lord Jesus describes in the parable of the sheep and the goats shows God's chosen at work – giving food, drink, hospitality, clothing, help in prison.¹²

Serving our community has **everything** to do with our Sunday worship services. Have you ever stopped to consider that?

That's the topic for the next article

Notes

- 1 Luke 10.25-37
- 2 Mark 10.35-45
- 3 See John 13.35
- 4 Luke 9.23 (emphasis added). Note how the NIV uses the word 'must' to highlight the imperative.
- 5 For an excellent, readable and very practical guide on this subject, I highly recommend Jerram Barrs 'Learning Evangelism from Jesus'

(Crossway, 2009). It is exceptionally readable, down-to-earth and filled with great examples.

If it is not already in your library, get it!

- 6 Butterfield, Rosaria C. *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Crossway, 2012)
- 7 Butterfield, Rosaria C. *The Gospel Comes with a Housekey* (Crossway, 2018)
- 8 See the introductory pages.
- 9 Ibid p 31
- 10 Matthew 28.18-20 (C/f Acts 1.8)
- 11 Luke 10.36,37
- 12 Matthew 25.31-46

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Home Missions in focus

Sharing Christ at a coffee house



Charisa Dorn

While working as a coffee house barista, I gradually learned an important lesson: a barista is more than just a barista. Often, you are the individual that people look forward to seeing every day. Besides arriving for their daily dose of caffeine, customers come to the café to be recognized and acknowledged.

Doing just that became one of my favorite parts of the job. I tried to remember everyone's names and drink orders in order to show them that they were noticed and appreciated. In doing so, I soon realized what an incredible opportunity I had at my job to witness for Christ and demonstrate his love through my work.

Each person who walks through the café door has a unique story. Whether they are struggling with a physical ailment or burdened with family trouble, each person knows pain and suffering to some degree, although we usually can't see it. And each one is made in the image of God. Being mindful of this helped me to remember to be gracious and loving toward everyone I encountered. Though some may think that

Charisa Dorn is a former barista and member of Faith OPC in Long Beach, California.

dealing with others would be a burden, the one-on-one interaction of my barista job was the perfect opportunity to shine Christ's light.

Loving when it's hard

A pivotal way to witness in the workplace is by reacting well when people are not doing the "right" thing – whether it's a coworker treating us poorly or a customer becoming unfairly impatient. It can be difficult to maintain a cheerful countenance and respond with grace, and yet, as Christians, we know that others are watching us.

I experienced this firsthand with an elderly woman who was a regular at our café. Every evening, I struggled with serving her. She would come to get her double-shot half-caf no-foam latte and

job and family, and I assured her that I would be praying for her. From that day on, she came into the store radiating more and more enthusiasm as I'd come around the register and wrap her in a giant hug.

The love for this woman spread to my coworkers. As soon as she would walk through the door, we would shout her name and run to give her a giant group hug. She became one of our favorite customers. She, in turn, spoiled us with chocolates and candy. She told me that the daily trip to the coffee shop was her favorite part of the day because of how special she felt every time she walked in.

As the holidays approached, she even began bringing us dinner at night. One evening she was later than usual



"Through my work at the café, I have learned some valuable lessons."

always seemed to be unhappy, displaying a constant scowl on her face. She barely spoke to us when she came in but only looked down, placed her order, and walked away without making eye contact. I soon realized God had placed a great opportunity right in front of me to make a difference and do what I could to put a smile on her face.

One night, the woman came in after not being around for a few days. When she came up to the register, I greeted her by name, looked her right in the eyes, and beamed, "I am so happy to see you! We've missed seeing you around here!" She looked up at me, and her eyes began to glisten with tears. "You noticed I was gone?" she asked in surprise. I told her that yes, I had, and I asked how she was doing. She began sharing her recent struggles regarding her

and didn't have time to get us food. Instead, she offered to take me out to dinner across the street when my shift was done. Over a meal, I got to know her better and learned about the incredible life she had lived. As we made dinner a more regular event and had more time to talk, I began to understand the numerous heartaches she had suffered.

Without our interaction, this woman would have continued to suffer silently. No one would have known the pain she was carrying. She may not have had anyone to pray for her or even just reach out and give her the hug she needed. God gave me the opportunity to share the gospel and his love to someone who desperately needed the hope found in Christ.

We keep in touch to this day, and I am so grateful to be a part of her life. What a beautiful reminder of how God changes us from the hardened and broken people that we once were, makes us new, and restores us in him!

Lessons learned

Never would I have imagined that my simple job as a barista could be such an opportunity to share Christ's love to those who are hurting. Through my work at the café, I have learned some valuable lessons.

First, we must be careful not to separate our Christian life from our work or school life. They should be one and the same. Even in the most unlikely places, God uses his people to shine through a darkened and depressed culture. Awkward and uncomfortable settings are often the best times to share the peace and comfort found in the gospel. It is the perfect opportunity to be strengthened through God's grace and rely on him for our interactions with others. Because God always has a purpose for the situations he places us in, we can be confident that we will be used by him in that situation – and sometimes in ways that we would never have expected!

Second, my experience as a barista opened my eyes to how many people around us need the gospel. All throughout the world, people are dying without the hope found in Christ.

We often forget that our schools, workplaces, and communities are mission fields in themselves. Whether you are an eighteen-year-old barista, a thirty-year-old mom with toddlers, or a sixty-year-old retired businessman, we each have someone we can think of in our life who desperately needs the hope of the gospel. It is our job to tell them. In Matthew 28, Jesus instructs the disciples:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:18–20)

Third, speaking about God is hard. Often, I feel like it's not the "right time" because it might be too offensive. Or I'm too busy, too stressed, or too tired to make the effort. I tend to think that everyone at school is too busy to listen, or that I could cause conflict if I bring up the gospel at work. None of these are good enough excuses for me not to speak about Christ. If I only share the gospel in church circles, how will the gospel be spread? My self-focused insecurity creates an obstacle to sharing the good news – it gives the devil a foothold, covering my mouth and making me stay quiet.

God gives us one-on-one interactions with people every day who need to be told the good news as much as I need to hear it. Sacrificing time and energy out of our day to share the gospel may seem tedious and awkward, but that sacrifice pales in comparison to the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus paid on the cross. He paid the high price so that we are able to tell everyone the most exciting and life-giving news ever.

As Luke 8:16 says, “No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand,

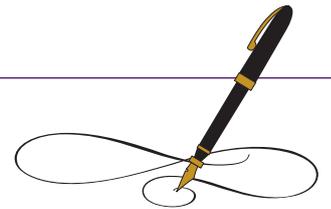
so that those who enter may see the light.” The darkness and sadness of this world is being conquered by the light of Christ’s saving work on the cross, and we should be looking for every opportunity to share it.

The author is member of Faith Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Long Beach, California.

New Horizons, February 2019. Used with permission.

Outward focus

Sally Davey



Are we really in danger of making an idol of the family?

I always appreciate what Kevin DeYoung has to say. I’ve often thought he has a great deal of wisdom for a man his age. In this November 2018 Gospel Coalition post, he reflects on a tweet he had written in the previous week and the reaction it had stimulated. I think he makes an important point, giving everyone in a Christian and family-centred world something worth thinking about. As a family man himself he cannot be accused of throwing rocks from the outside, yet he warns us against neglecting those who do not live in a family situation.

Kevin DeYoung

“One of the acceptable idolatries among evangelical Christians is the idolatry of the family.”

That’s what I tweeted last week. To be honest, I didn’t think much about it. I’ve said similar things in sermons for the past decade, and I’ve tweeted similar things before. But this time – I was later told by friends who track with Twitter more closely than I do – the statement took on a life of its own as this one sentence was liked 1,600 times and bandied about on social media for the next few days. Unknown to me, I was (depending on who you ask) suddenly saying something wonderfully courageous or terribly misguided.

So let me clarify.

As far as I can tell, I first uttered this statement (or something close to it) in a 2010 sermon on Mark 3:31-35 entitled Jesus’s Real Family. The tweet itself



comes from a more recent sermon on the miracle at Cana in Galilee. My point in both cases was that a commitment to family must not come before a commitment to God.

I began the Mark 3 sermon by noting two competing notions of the family in our culture: family as straight jacket (as in the 1998 film *Pleasantville*) or family as center (as in the 2000 film *The Family Man*). In one view, the family keeps you from everything you really want. In the other view, the family promises to give you everything you really want. Jesus promoted neither of these views. There's no doubt the second view is much more common among Christians, and it does overlap with some Christian virtues. But it too gets some crucial things wrong when it comes to the family. I argued back in 2010 (and would argue the same today) that, according to the Bible, the family is good, necessary, and foundational, but not ultimate.

The Mark 3 sermon focused on those two words – “not ultimate” – because that was Jesus's emphasis in verses 31-35. In Jesus's view of the family: family ties don't get you in, family doesn't come first, and God's family is open to all (that is, open to everyone who does the will of God and takes Jesus on his own terms).

There are certainly ways in which speaking of “the idolatry of the family” would be a step in the wrong direction. I'm happily married with (soon) eight children. I am most definitely a family

man (and have a 15-passenger van to prove it). I would never suggest that the real problem in the world today is that parents love their kids too much or that churches are doing too much to support the family or that what really ails our culture are too many high-functioning families. In a world hellbent on redefining marriage and undermining the fundamental importance of the family, Christians would do well to honor and support all those trying to nurture healthy families.

And yet, virtually every pastor in America can tell you stories of churchgoers who have functionally displaced God in favor of the family.

Parents who go missing from church for entire seasons because of Billy's youth soccer league or Sally's burgeoning volleyball career.

Committed Christians who would never dare invite a college student or international over for Thanksgiving or Christmas because “the holidays are for family.”

Longtime members who can't be bothered to serve on Sundays or reach out to visitors because the whole family always gathers at grandma's for lunch.

Kids and grandkids who think they should be accepted into membership or be in line for baptism because their parents and grandparents have been pillars of the church.

Churches that implicitly (or explicitly) communicate that marriage is a necessary step of spiritual maturity.

Christians of all kinds who will jettison their theology of marriage or their convictions about church discipline once their children come out of the closet or embrace other kinds of (unrepentant) sin.

The idolatry of the family can be a real problem, either from the church that ignores singles and gears everything toward married couples with children, or from the individual whose practical commitments underscore the unfortu-

nate reality that blood is usually thicker than theology.

God has given us many gifts in this life. Money is a gift. Sex is a gift. Work is a gift. Athletic ability and musical skill are gifts; so are intelligence and beauty. No one doubts that all of these good things can be idols. Just like the family. The conjugal family – one man and one woman whose covenant union produces offspring – is profoundly good, a neces-

sary and foundational element of God's creational design. But it is not ultimate. At least not if we are defining family as the natural relationships we have by marriage and blood, rather than the supernatural relationships we have by the blood of Christ.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung>

Short story

The Doorkeeper

Meredith's long skirts made an angry swishing sound as she stormed across the palace grounds to the King's residence. The noon-day sun did nothing to improve her mood.

"The King will hear about this," she muttered, wiping the sweat from her forehead. *No one gets away with treating the King's daughter like this.*

When she reached the broad avenue leading up to the palace, she picked up her skirts and began to run. Her gilded slippers padded over the familiar stones. She used to come this way often. The royal children had access to the King whenever they wanted, and when she was younger, Meredith had come every day, as the sun set. The business of the courts would be finished, the palace servants away preparing the evening meal, the halls silent. She would find her father on the back verandah and crawl into his lap and watch the sun paint the bushes and trees in rich, fiery colors.

And they would talk.

About everything.

She would tell him about her day, and he would chuckle at her stories. Then he would

tell her the happenings in the kingdom. He had a marvelous way of explaining difficult things and making them funny and interesting. She would hop off his lap with a deep-down, satisfied feeling as if she had had a long drink of sunshine. She would skip back to the children's quarters with her mind full of grand visions of the kingdom and her place in it.

Now, as she ran past the clipped hedges, Meredith could not remember the last time she had visited her father. She felt a twinge of guilt and her frown deepened.

I've been very busy. Father will be proud of all the things I've been accomplishing. Or would accomplish if my stepsister didn't mess things up.

She slowed to a walk and lifted her hair off her neck. *Besides, I'm getting too big to sit on laps.*

When she climbed up the marble steps and entered the shade of the portico, her body relaxed. The carved wooden door waited in the shadow. She no longer had to stand on tiptoe to reach the lion's head knocker. Lifting the heavy ring, she let it fall once, twice, three

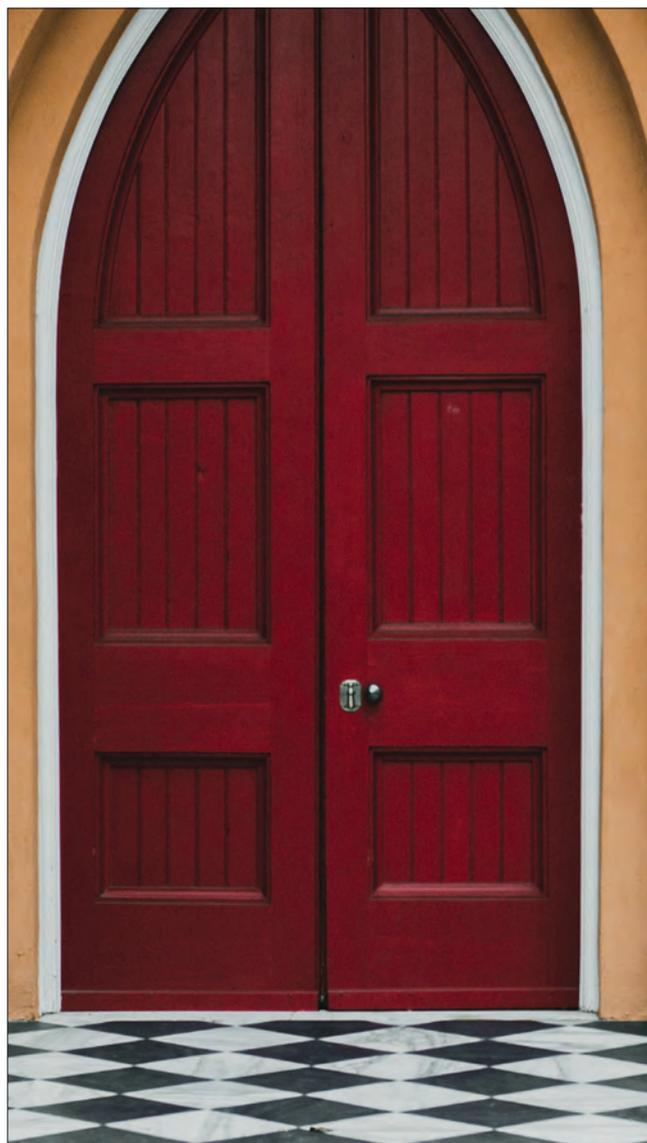


Photo by Taylor Wilcox on Unsplash



Photo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

times. The sound echoed in the marble halls beyond. Meredith stood on one foot and rubbed the sweat off the back of her calf.

A cricket started up its tired song behind her.

What was taking the doorkeeper so long?

Meredith banged on the door again, the hot anger returning. How dare he keep a King's daughter waiting? Her father would hear about this, too. He should get rid of the man. The doorkeeper was ugly, his face so disfigured she shuddered to see him. When she was little, she used to dash past him as

soon as he opened the door.

But today he did not come.

She paced along the portico, past the tall windows and stately pillars, looking for a servant, any servant. She scanned the avenue, the paths, the gardens, but nothing stirred in the heat. As she rounded the corner, she discovered a small building nestled up against the palace. She couldn't remember seeing it before. The door stood ajar.

Ha, she could get in anyway.

She marched up and pushed the door open. The smell of old books and leather and dust stirred in the dark interior.

"Is anyone there?" she demanded.

From the stillness came a quivering voice. "Yes? Who is it?"

"Meredith, the King's daughter!"

A pause.

"You don't sound like a daughter of the King."

What insolence! Meredith strode into the room. Bookshelves lined the walls from floor to ceiling. Stacks of books rose from the floor like stalagmites and lay scattered over every available surface. A soft glow came from the far corner and a faint creaking sound. Meredith stepped gingerly around several columns of books until she found a tiny woman sitting in a large chair. Her hair shone white in the lamplight as she rocked gently back and forth.

Meredith tried to lower her voice. "I am looking for the doorkeeper."

"He is in the King's palace, dearie." The chair creaked steadily.

"He didn't open the door."

"Ah." The rocking motion stopped. The woman leaned forward, her eyes black and sharp. "Perhaps he does not come because there is no room in your heart for a doorkeeper."

Meredith's face flushed. Never in her life had she been spoken to like this. "Opening the door is his job!"

The woman's eyes bored into Meredith's. "Is it?" She paused. "You don't really know who he is, do you? How long have you lived at the palace?"

"I've always lived here. I told you. I'm the King's daughter."

"I don't think I've seen you before."

Meredith rolled her eyes. She needed to talk to the King NOW, and here she was being insulted – "No," she snapped. "I haven't met each servant personally. I'd love to stay and –"

The old woman rose from her chair and turned toward a stack of books as tall as herself, muttering, "Meredith. Meredith. Yes, the name sounds famil-

iar." She lifted several books off a table, scanning the spines. She put them down, frowning. "No, I put the histories in this section." She shuffled around a large desk and stopped in front of a small bookcase. Running her finger along the backs of the books, she murmured, "Meagan, Megs, Melody . . ."

Meredith couldn't breathe. What was this place? What were these books? She glanced toward the door and willed her feet to move – to run – but she seemed to have turned to stone.

"Meredith!" the woman exclaimed. "I knew I had it somewhere. Here you go, dearie: *The Full History of Meredith Kate, born the twenty-third day of February*. That's you isn't it?" She tapped the cover with a gnarled finger. "You should have come sooner. Then you would know."

Suddenly Meredith remembered the letter she received every birthday. An invitation: "Come review the updated contents of your personal history book." All the royal children got one. Meredith did not know of anyone who had actually gone to the Royal Library of Histories.

Now here she stood. And she held in her hand the story of her life. A stab of fear shot through her. She wanted to fling the book away and run from this strange, still room. But she couldn't. She could only stare at the name emblazoned on the cover in beautiful gold lettering. Her name.

In a daze, she let the old woman guide her to the chair. She sank down

into it and ran her fingers over the letters. Abruptly she turned the book over and opened it from the back. The page was blank. She was breathing hard as if she had been running. She turned back a page, and another. Her hand moved slowly but her heart beat faster and faster.

Black letters jumped out at her. Her eyes raced along the page, taking in the words, the images. Every detail of her morning – this morning! – was laid out exactly as it had happened. It was so real, she could see it all again. It was also – True.

It told the truth. Not the way *she* had been planning to tell the King, but the way it really was. Her face burned with shame as her thoughts and actions leaped at her from the page.

With shaking fingers she turned back a page. Yesterday's events unfolded in all their ugly clarity. Tears sprang to her eyes as all her proud fantasies came tumbling down and she saw herself for who she really was. She read on and on, crying as she read, unable to close the book.

On the very first page, she found the truth about her birth: her mother had been a prostitute, her father a criminal, hanged for murder.

"No! I'm the daughter of the King!"

The old woman laid a hand on her arm. "You were adopted."

"I don't understand."

"When you were a baby, your mother tried to kill you. She set fire to the place where you slept. The whole building burned, but he ran in and pulled you

out of the flames."

"Who? The King?"

"No. His son."

"His son?"

The old woman nodded. Her lips moved but Meredith could no longer hear what she was saying. A rushing sound filled her ears. She stood up and the book fell to the floor. She stepped over it and walked to the door. The sun was setting. How long had she been inside?

Somehow she found herself standing in front of the carved wooden door. She stared at the lion's head but could not bring herself to lift the brass ring. Instead, she fell to her knees, and tapped feebly on the wood.

"Please," she whispered, "Please . . ."

The great door swung open and cool air enveloped her. A hand rested on her head.

"Do not weep, little sister," said the doorkeeper. "I have opened the door."

She reached for his hands, his beautiful, scarred hands, and covered them with her tears.

He drew her to her feet. "Come. Our father is waiting."

And she followed him, trembling, into the throne room of the King.

Amanda Poppe

FRC Southern River

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Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

January/February 1982

As television watchers we are often disturbed by the current standards which offend us as we view the programmes presented to us daily. The New Zealand Television Programme Selection Committee held a public hearing in Hamilton recently and invited 400 groups, including 129 churches, to make submissions to the committee. Of the 129 churches only 4 turned up! No wonder that the chairman of that selection committee commented at the sitting, "The poor attendance indicates that people must

be happy with the quality of the television shows they are receiving." We, as Christians, often complain about all the unrighteousness in the nation and yet when we get an opportunity to do something about it, we don't use it. We must therefore conclude that we are forced to put up with all such standards because we allow them.

From the bottom of New Zealand, we read that Dunedin has kept their minister but swapped their manse. Apparently, the old manse was sinking and the roof caving in somehow. They were fortunate to find a buyer who bought

the place "as is, where is." They also replaced the hedge clippers as the old ones had done their work "beyond the call of duty."

At an office bearers' meeting in the Wellington Presbytery, one elder observed, in the presentation of his topic, that after seven churches had been instituted in 1953, the number of churches doubled to fourteen by 1969. However, since 1969, only one church has been instituted (on the North Shore) and one other church petered out for lack of membership (Invercargill).

I also read in the Silverstream bulletin

that their session is planning a new way for the annual breakup of the various organisations. Instead of having several, one for each, they now plan to have one BIG ONE on a farm in Whiteman's Valley. I wonder what the main events of the day will be: the Sunday school kids milking the cows, the women's fellowship ploughing the field, the Bible class stacking hay and the winner of the first prize, stowing a live pig in the boot of his car? I can just imagine the Auckland churches having a breakup at the Museum of Transport and Technology with the catechism class zooming over the city in an old Spitfire!

March

Have you ever noticed when you are on holiday, that your life can sort of slow down to the point where things that normally are fairly trivial, all of a sudden become very important? Things arid happenings which normally are so very ordinary or commonplace can suddenly become the centre of our attention.

Take an ordinary tap. You turn it on and you have water for your coffee, your shower or to flush the toilet. But you go camping in the bush and then you find that there is no tap. And water suddenly becomes a precious commodity and you find that you have to make an effort to get it. That's what happened to us when we went "bush" right at the top of New Zealand, among the pine trees, the Maori

and the sand dunes. To live the simple life was a real treat, although it took us a few days to adjust ourselves to it. But after that, it was a feast, a holiday that gave us permission to enjoy ourselves, to enjoy our surroundings and to enjoy the nearness of God, more so than we ever had imagined.

April 1982

Visitors to Dunedin, if they would call at the First Presbyterian Church of Otago, would find in the foyer a plaque which displays part of a letter from one of the founders of that city with proposals for a Scots church settlement on the South Island. I am sure you will find the inscription most interesting:

SEEKERS AFTER A CITY

"If it still be God's will that we shall succeed in this colony, I persuade myself with His blessing attending us, that we may be instrumental in planting down in these favoured islands a well-ordered God-fearing community that may stand in these remote regions as a sample of the Kingdom of Christ which like a light burning in a dark place, shall bear no indistinct testimony to the Truth."

That was written in 1844. Would we today still express our planning in terms of the above?

Silverstream has finally listened to some sound advice. They are tired of the annual flooding of their church and are

now building a dike around the creek adjacent to their church property. If the worst comes to the worst, there are plenty of little boys to put their fingers in that dike to block the holes.

Wellington got their vicar, Kevin Rietveld, with his wife Machi and their three children. They arrived early in the year and have now settled in, I presume. The New Zealand churches certainly have had their share of vicars in the last few years. It seems that we are a well-manured pasture for the foundations of their future ministry. So long as they remember that old Irish proverb: "A new broom sweeps clean, but the old brush still knows the corners." This is just a small hint not to brush aside the oldies in the church.

I've got a little space left and I might as well fill it up with a story, which Malcolm Muggeridge once mentioned in one of his books. It was at that time in his life when he had some communist leanings and so made a visit to Russia. There he heard the story about that poor peasant who visited Moscow and was so immensely overawed by all those huge blocks of buildings. He was told that it took them twelve years to build these buildings before the revolution but now, under the new regime, took only one year. When the fellow came back to his own village, he tried in vain to convey to his family and friends what he had seen and heard. As much as he tried to explain how quickly those buildings were built, they did not understand him. So, frantically searching for something that they could understand, he came up with the following explanation: "Before the revolution it took us twelve years to till the cemetery, now it takes us only one year."

May

The Christchurch congregation has "bleepers" in the church. Their digital watches buzz at 12 noon and these bleepers seemingly give the creepers to the sleepers. The owners of bleeping watches have been asked to silence them.

Let me close with some food for thought: I read recently in Numbers 8:24-26 that the Levites commenced work at the age of 25 and retired at 50.

Abridged

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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“Human Rights and Wrongs”

What are human rights? And how is a Christian to engage with the debate?

Joshua Flinn

In March of 2017, New Zealand passed the Te Awa Tupua Act making the Whanganui River the first river in the world to be legally recognized as a human being. The Act declares that ‘Te Awa Tupua is a legal person and has all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal person.’

This essentially means that those who harm the river will face the same legal consequences as if they had harmed a human being – why? Because, as a *person*, the river has *rights*.

Crazy? Perhaps. But such principles are now enshrined in law. But how did we get to this point? Is the government right? In order to understand these principles we need to consider what is actually meant by the phrase ‘human rights’.

What are rights?

There’s a lot of confusion globally about how to define ‘human rights’. For example, The Human Rights Commission of New Zealand defines ‘human rights’ as ‘*the basic rights and freedoms that every person in the world should have.*’ The United Nations attempt is that human rights are ‘*rights inherent to all human beings.*’ Helpful, isn’t it, to define a word by using that same word.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is a little more helpful: Rights are entitlements to perform certain actions (or not), or to be in certain states (or not). The author goes on: ‘To accept a set of rights is to approve a distribution of freedom and authority, and so to endorse a certain view of what may, must, and must not be done.’

At first blush, Christians may think that Scripture resonates with this view.



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations becomes the goal of humanity. Unfortunately, men's conception of their greatest good changes (sometimes drastically) between cultures, religions and time-periods. This is why certain countries haven't accepted the UN's declaration as definitive.

In the Old Testament, the standards of 'what may, must, and must not be done' are given definition by the Law (*mishpat*). This term is particularly related to a covenantal relationship; and people are obligated to respond to the covenant with faithfulness (Hos 6:6-8).

A second and broader concept is that related to righteousness (*tzedaq*) which has to do with "the re-establishment of the 'right order' in a fallen world" (Seifrid, 2000). Righteousness then, is both moral and creational – it has to do with ethics (what is right) and entity (who we are). But it also includes practical matters (e.g. Lev 19:35-36)¹, and broader principles of justice (Prov 8:15-16, 22-31).

The New Testament idea of rights comes primarily through the concept of authority and power (*exousia*).² One of the more interesting passages here is in 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul makes an appeal to the church at Corinth. He calls attention to his 'rights' (translated 'power' in the KJV). In doing so, he appeals to the establishment of the Old Testament law as a foundation for determining what 'may, must, and must not be done.'

This may suggest that there is overlap between Scripture's teaching and the world's use of terms, but in fact there is a significant difference in world views between the two: In the Bible there's no principle of entitlement. At no point can we demand of God on the basis of our humanity that we deserve more than we've been given. In fact, the only thing we are truly entitled to is an eternity in hell; everything good that comes to man comes only through grace, not because we can somehow obligate him (HCQA 63).

So, on the one hand, the biblical concept of rights is foundationally different than how the world defines it. How about the other word in the phrase: "human rights"?

What does it mean to be human?

One of the major problems the world faces in defining 'human' is that it has an evolutionary understanding of life; If humanity is always evolving into a higher state, on what basis do you define when a pre-human actually becomes a human? And even if you can do that, on what basis can someone argue that their definition of humanity (biological, philosophical, spiritual, etc) has inherent rights? And is any of it really conclusive?

Many philosophers argue then, that human rights are not so much a way of defining current realities but pursu-

ing our greatest good. As such, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations becomes the goal of humanity. Unfortunately, men's conception of their greatest good changes (sometimes drastically) between cultures, religions and time-periods. This is why certain countries haven't accepted the UN's declaration as definitive.

Ultimately, the issue lies in the fact that the history of mankind is full of examples of the majority getting things seriously wrong. Trying to define what a 'human' is by a democratic process has hardly proven to be an effective way to determine truth.

Scripture gives us a very different approach to what it means to be human.

Firstly, our nature as human beings is that we're 'endowed' with the image of God (Gen 1:27). On this basis, we're intended to reflect his character in our interactions with the rest of creation. For example, we're to be holy as he is holy (1 Pet 1:16) and to show love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). We're also supposed to avoid killing another man because 'God made man in his own image' (Gen 9:6). These aren't rights so much as responsibilities regarding how we treat one another.

Furthermore, God doesn't simply define our existence by creating us in his image, but he blesses us when we conform to our true nature. This is why blessing and obedience are so integrally combined (e.g. Gen 1:28). Our greatest good comes in being who God made us to be; by fulfilling the function he calls us to fulfill.

And this reality underscores the other principle: When humanity seeks to define its highest good aside from God's will, Scripture calls it idolatry. After all, this was Eve's sin – that she determined what was good for herself rather than following God's will. And all men since the Fall have believed they have the authority to do the same (see Rom 1:18-32).

Sadly though, when man seeks to determine what is right from wrong himself, he loses wisdom, righteousness, and the very core of what it means to be an image-bearer of God (Rom 1:16-32). In fact, such men become 'like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed' (2 Pet 2:12-13).

How then can we expect humanity in that state to define itself? And given its blindness and irrationality, how can humanity ascertain what is truly good for itself? Only our Creator can do that; only someone who knows our state per-

fectly can provide a way to restore us and point us back in the right direction.

If we are to pursue humanity's highest good, we must redirect mankind towards its Maker – we must remove ourselves from the throne and bow the knee to our Lord.

So where does that leave us?

A. We need to be careful about our adoption of worldly jargon.

For example, I've heard many Christians defend our 'fundamental right to free speech' as if this is a biblical principle. But this is hardly a biblical concept.

The most common legal interpretation of this right points to two principles: First, that we should have the freedom to say what we like (as long as it doesn't cause harm to someone else); but the other side of the coin is that we shouldn't be forced to say what we don't want to say. (This second point became much more prominent recently when Jordan Peterson argued against the US government's attempts to enforce the use of certain gender pronouns).

Nevertheless, God never provides us with the kind of freedom advocated in this 'fundamental right'. On the one hand, he demands that we refrain from

certain language and topics of conversation (Lev 24:13-16; Eph 4:29). On the other hand, he commands that we must speak about things we may be naturally disinclined to say (Eph 4:15). And, in fact, we must do both these things despite the fact that we will be hated for it (Prov 25:22; Rom 12:20; John 15:18-25). In fact, preaching the gospel to non-Christians is, from the world's perspective, categorically harmful to their well-being.

Defending 'the right to free speech' as if it's fundamental only backs Christians into a corner and actually discourages us to do what God calls us to do in a secular environment. The only legitimate way of appealing to such principles is to use their own weapons against them: "By your own laws I am able to have this freedom". But should such secular rights be stripped from us, we must also stand beside Peter and John, declaring to the world: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

B. Entitlement misunderstands the very nature of our place before God.

Given that God owes us nothing, and given that we can earn nothing from



him, our appropriate response to his grace is thankfulness – both in the good times and the bad. This is why Job can profess: ‘Though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him’ (Job 13:15); and Paul in a Roman jail can say: ‘To live is Christ and to die is gain’ (Phil 1:21).

And because we owe everything to God, we can be content to give things up for the sake of his kingdom. This is why a pure conscience is not a justification to be a stumbling block to those who are weak’ (1 Cor 8:9). This is also why Paul refrains from demanding his God given ‘right’ to earn from his work from the church at Corinth: “Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right (power), but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12).

We must be thankful when God gives us good things and trusting when he takes things away – after all, he works all things, both good and bad, for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28). Who is man to give him counsel? (Isa 40:13).

C. We have a God-given responsibility to uphold what is right.

Despite the fact that we do not have rights as the world seeks to define them, that does not mean that Christianity isn’t

concerned with people’s wellbeing. After all: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6:8). ‘If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar (1 John 4:20).

God has declared what love means in our interactions both with him and with one another. He commands that life should be protected (Gen 9:6); that the needy are to be cared for (Jer 5:28); and that we should ‘bridle our tongue’ (Jas 1:26). We are even called to care for God’s creation (Exo 20:10) rather than abuse it (Rom 8:22-24).

Just because Christianity distances itself from the world’s understanding of entitlement, doesn’t mean it has no sense of responsibility. In fact, Christ’s love compels us to help others – we know love by this, ‘that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers’ (1 John 3:16)

Conclusion

The United Nations declares in the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that ‘the recognition of the inherent dignity and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is

the foundation of freedom. Justice and peace in the world’. But man has no inherent dignity if they evolved out of the muck, let alone a basis for freedom and justice (Isa 59:8).

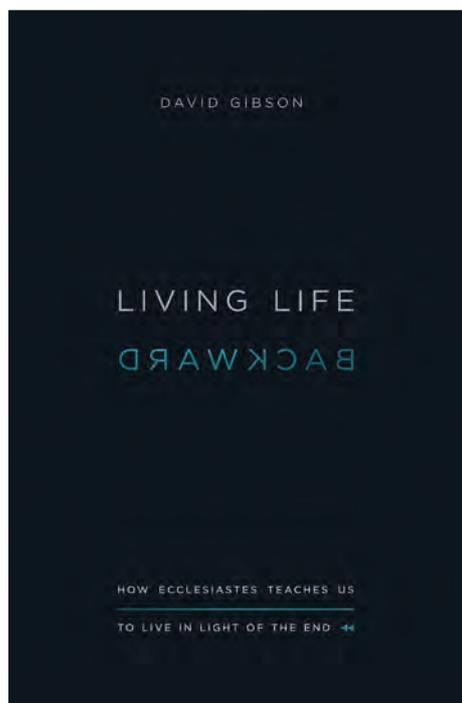
World peace and an end to poverty and pain are not found in neither human sovereignty nor philosophical pragmatism, but in bowing the knee to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is through his work, and the establishment of his kingdom, that humanity will experience freedom, justice and peace (Isa 9:7); only in him will we find rest for our souls (Matt 11:28-30); and only in him will we see a final end to death and pain and tears (Rev 21:4).

Endnotes

- 1 Mishpat translated as ‘judgement’, tzedeq translated as ‘just’.
- 2 Many modern English versions translate this word as ‘rights’ which is unhelpful. This causes the reader to inject their modern idea of legal right (determinative choices or entitlements) into a text which isn’t there.

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

Books in focus



Living Life Backward: How Ecclesiastes Teaches Us to Live in Light of the End

by David Gibson. Crossway, 2017. Paperback, 176 pages, \$13.90 (Amazon)

Reviewed by OP pastor Stephen J. Oharek

Ours is a culture in which many efforts are made to insulate us from the reality of death. Cemeteries are mostly out of sight, and even churches can be reluctant to openly address issues of death and dying. This is part of what makes Living Life Backward such a valuable contribution from author David Gibson, who says he is “convinced that only a proper perspective on death provides the true perspective on life” (11). This insight, Gibson explains, is at the heart of the teaching of Ecclesiastes.

Living Life Backward is one of the

best books I have read in a long time, and it is the best book I have ever read on Ecclesiastes. There are two primary reasons for this.

First, Gibson interprets Ecclesiastes as a consistent stream of positive wisdom. Often, Ecclesiastes is interpreted as a mixture of wisdom and folly that the reader must sort through. As when reading through the alleged wisdom of Job’s friends, the discerning reader of Ecclesiastes must consider the various teachings from “the Preacher” (the author, Eccles. 1:1) and determine in which passages he was experimenting with hedonism or nihilism, and in which passages he had come to his senses and was then faithful to God. However, Gibson takes the approach that all of the book is true and wise, and that the Preacher remained “upright” throughout (Eccles. 12:10). Gibson does not cover every chapter and verse in Ecclesiastes,

but he does provide excellent explanations of most of it, showing how the laments and joys of the Preacher are simply honest, godly responses to living in a broken, sin-stained world.

The second exemplary feature of *Living Life Backward* is the attention it gives to living life in light of death. Gibson notes key themes in Ecclesiastes that relate to this, such as godly enjoyment of the pleasures God gives to his children here, honest bereavement of the losses we suffer during this journey, and reckoning with the impermanence of our achievements. Some readers may find Gibson's words jarring, as he is often brutally honest about the certainty of death – for example, one chapter is titled "One Foot in the Grave"! Having just recently completed an adult Sunday school series on death and dying, I believe that directly addressing the reality of our own mortality is something that, frankly, most of us could use more of. Gibson, a pastor himself, does exactly this. And as he teaches in his book, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes did it first!

Living Life Backward is divided into ten chapters. The "Questions for Discussion or Personal Reflection" at the end of each chapter make it ideal for a group study, though individuals will be blessed and challenged by it as well. Although it is not a scholarly commentary, I would also highly recommend this book to any preacher or teacher who is planning to tackle Ecclesiastes.

New Horizons, June 2018

Uncovering the Theme of Revelation in Romans 1:16–3:26

by Marcus A. Mininger. Mohr Siebeck, 2017. Paperback, 410 pages, \$118.99 (Amazon)

Reviewed by OP minister Danny Olinger

Orthodox Presbyterian minister and Mid-America Reformed Seminary professor Marcus Mininger has contributed an important monograph to the exegetical understanding of Romans 1:16–3:26. Mininger maintains that both the traditional soteriological and revisionist social understandings do not recognize properly the theme of revelation as the key leit-motif of the passage. That's not to say that Paul is indifferent to soteriological or social issues. Rather, Paul's claims about revelation lead to conclusions about soteriology, which has social implications.

The revelation central to the argument ("the topic of revelation does indeed run

like a backbone throughout," 39) concerns the visible display of things that are otherwise invisible. God through various supra-human powers – the power of God, of the Law, and of sin – reveals what is hidden.

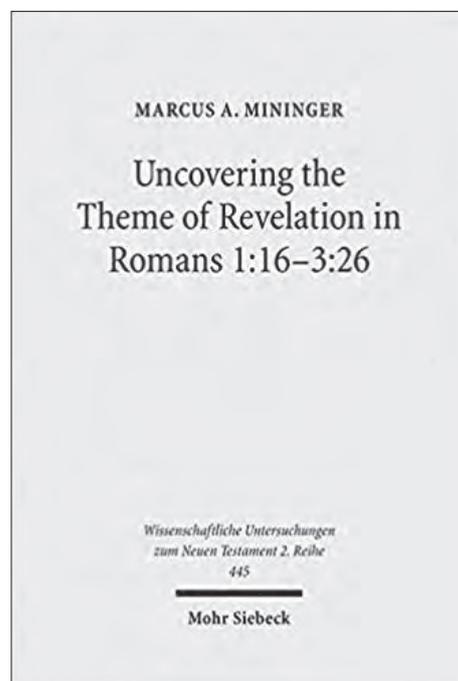
In Romans 1:16, Paul asserts that the gospel is God's power unto salvation for all who believe, both Jew and Greek. Verse 17 describes a present state of affairs in which God's righteousness is now revealed through what he has previously done in and through Christ. "Romans 1:17 describes the revelation of God's righteousness in that which was pre-promised and now has been fulfilled through the redemptive career of God's Son" (97). This revelation is not reducible to the themes of justification by faith, God's saving activity or power, or other themes that are often focused upon, although each is an indispensable part of the gospel.

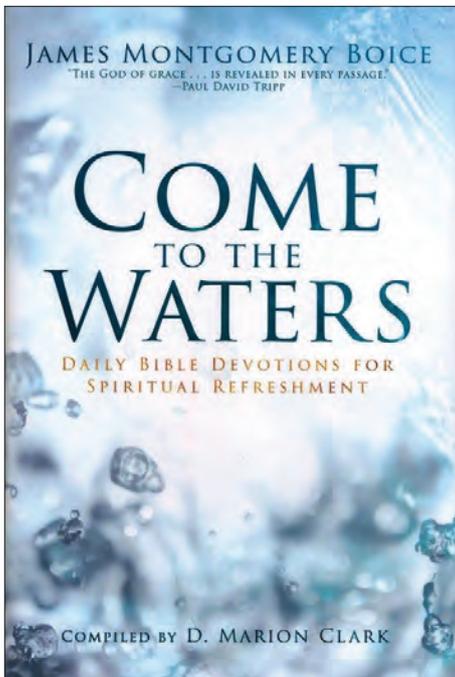
According to Mininger, this pattern of showing what is or is not revealed by God drives Paul's argumentation. Romans 1:18 puts forth the revelation of God's wrath from heaven upon an unrighteous portion of humanity. Romans 1:19–32 tells how God's wrath comes to visible expression upon these truth-suppressors. Paul is not saying in these verses that unrighteousness deserves or leads to judgment, but that God's handing some over is followed by an outpouring of human unrighteousness. Mininger notes that this was the case in Psalm 106. Israel exchanged the glory of God (Ps. 106:20; compare Rom. 1:23) and was handed over by God in wrath (Ps. 106:40–41; compare Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

In Romans 2:15–16, the Law is shown inadequate to be the power of God unto salvation because what is revealed in it cannot affect salvation. This argument continues in Romans 3:9–20. All flesh will not be justified through the works of the Law. That which is invisible, the effects of sin's power, is seen in the Law's domain. "In short, if the situation in the Law looks essentially the same as the situation outside the Law, then the Law is no basis for eschatological distinction and every mouth is indeed shut" (318).

In this reviewer's judgment, Mininger's redemptive-historical reading of the text provides answers that have troubled exegetes, while still affirming key gospel insights. There are a few reservations for the ordinary reader. First, a knowledge of Greek is highly recommended. Second, the cost may be prohibitive.

New Horizons, July 2018





Come to the Waters: Daily Bible Devotions for Spiritual Refreshment

by James Montgomery Boice. P&R, 2017. Hardcover, 400 pages, \$17.00
Reviewed by OP minister Dennis L. Disselkoen

Dr. James Montgomery Boice was the pastor of historic Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for over thirty years. His devotional, *Come to the Waters*, was compiled by D. Marion Clark, who served as executive minister at that church. Material was drawn from Boice's published, unpublished, and unpreached sermons, his articles, and his commentaries. The devotional follows the order of the books of the Bible, giving the reader a sense of the unfolding of revelation. Rather than offer a few verses as a springboard for devotional reflection, Boice's thoughts are tied to longer passages, providing a context for his comments.

Boice uses his knowledge of biblical languages and the finer points of grammar to draw out the desired truth, for example, the meaning of Jacob's name change (1/23); and he points out the exegetical significance of the absence of a definite article in Greek to drive home a theological point (11/4). He is aware of textual variants (7/20). The ESV is used generally, but the KJV and the NIV are cited as well. Boice offers his own translation of Jeremiah 31:18 (7/3).

He displays a rich knowledge of church history and uses little-known stories of the saints to illustrate his points (7/25, 10/18). He cites and contrasts secular philosophy with Bible doctrine and brings that contrast to bear on the applications of the truths he is teaching (9/26). He mentions the work of Shakespeare (8/17); quotes from Greek and Egyptian mythology (8/18, 1/25); and reveals his knowledge of hymnology (5/29).

Though his scholarship is apparent, so is his pastor's heart. Boice leads his readers, as he led his hearers, to Christ. His exhortations reflect Paul's words to Timothy: Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. "Head knowledge is not enough (10/13)." He emphasizes that Christians are in a spiritual battle and should be on alert against Satan (9/20).

His remarks throughout lead to a personal call and challenge. Routinely, the reader will meet with an appeal to turn to Christ and will not read far before

confronting a summons to repent and believe the good news. The reader is directed to actions that conform to biblical thought. There is a constant call to self-examination in light of God's holy Word. At some points, Boice simply provides straightforward advice. His reflections are seasoned with personal anecdotes (11/12) that make familiar passages refreshingly new.

There are fifty-two devotionals on the Psalms, fifty-five on the Synoptics, and thirty-eight on John's Gospel alone, with twenty-one on the book of Romans. There is one devotional on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and 1 Timothy, and surprisingly, only four on Isaiah, but six on Hosea. Omitted are comments on some very well-known Scriptures.

Endnotes for each day's devotional identify the source material used. An index is also included.

Dr. Boice composed a song to which he gave the same title as the book. It is based upon Christ's invitation to come and to drink the water of life freely. The song appears at the conclusion of the daily readings.

I found these devotional readings inspiring, refreshing, and enjoyable. They are valuable also as starting points for preparing studies, sermons, or talks. I would like to have seen a suggested prayer at the end of each day's devotional; devotional thoughts should move one to worship. That aside, I recommend this volume without reservation.

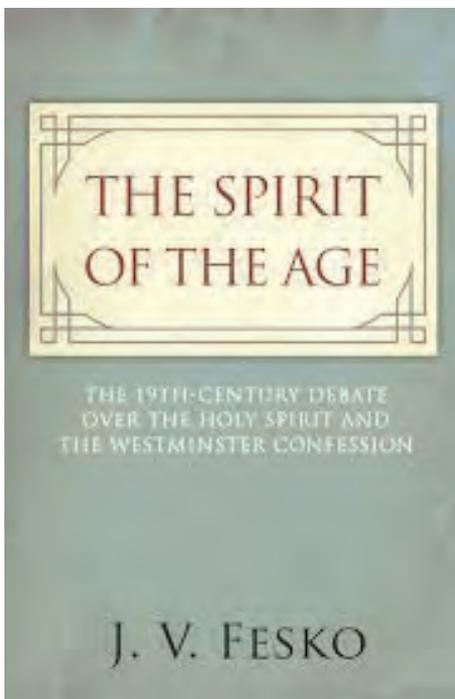
New Horizons, July 2018

The Spirit of the Age: The 19th-Century Debate Over the Holy Spirit and the Westminster Confession

by J. V. Fesko. Reformation Heritage, 2017. Paperback, 144 pages, \$14.00.

Reviewed by OP pastor Joel D. Fick.

I went to seminary a Pentecostal and came out a Presbyterian. Somewhere along the way, I discovered that in 1903 the PCUSA had revised the Westminster Confession of Faith to include a chapter on the Holy Spirit and one on the love of God. I was a little suspicious of these new chapters, because although I didn't know much, I knew that neither the PCA (of which I had become a part) nor the OPC (in which I hoped to one day serve) had adopted this revised version



of the confession. But given my Pentecostal background, I was especially interested in the chapter on the Holy Spirit, and when I read it, I remember thinking "Well, that doesn't seem so bad. What's the big deal?" Why had both the OPC and the PCA rejected these confessional revisions?

In his most recent book, *The Spirit of the Age: The 19th-Century Debate Over the Holy Spirit and the Westminster Confession*, J. V. Fesko shows us what the "big deal" is. He does this by examining these confessional revisions in light of the historical context ("the spirit of the age") and the progressive philosophical impulses that were driving them. The resulting revisions "take on a different meaning depending on who reads them. In the hands of Warfield," who opposed the revisions, "the new chapter on the Holy Spirit largely repeats doctrine already present in the confession. But in the hands of someone like

Briggs or Schaff ... the chapter on the Holy Spirit can be read in a different manner," (96) one that is consistent with their evolutionary view of history.

Over against these post-Enlightenment revisions, Fesko demonstrates the catholicity of the confession by locating it in "the best theology of the church, whether from the church fathers, or theologians of the middle ages" (49).

But while Fesko's sketch of the historical context is well-researched, interesting, and useful, even more useful is his sketch of the confession's thoroughgoing pneumatology with special attention given to its connection with Christology. He ably defends the confession against the charge that the absence of a separate chapter on the Holy Spirit betrays a pneumatological deficiency. Rather: Far from absent, the Westminster Confession presents a richly biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, one from which we have much to learn and would do well

to make our own. (115)

Then, in a wonderful effort to help us make the confession's doctrine of the Holy Spirit "our own," Fesko includes an appendix entitled "The Holy Spirit in the Westminster Standards." In this eminently useful harmony of the standards, Fesko systematically works through the confession, listing every reference to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, together with the Scripture proofs and parallel references in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The appendix itself is worth the price of the book!

So if you've ever read the 1903 revisions to the Westminster Confession and found yourself asking "What's the big deal?" pick up this book by theologian and professor J. V. Fesko and discover that "one of the biggest mirages in the theological wilderness is the idea of progress" (71).

New Horizons, July 2018

Little-known Little Gems

The Message of the Minor Prophets

by JOHN GORIS

For many years John Goris has desired to write a book on the Minor Prophets. In the Lord's providence, he has finally written a useful and readable little book. The Twelve, as they are known to the Hebrews are not well known because their message are somewhat mysterious and at times hard to understand. John adds context with themes and occasions for each prophet. He comments: "The days of the Minor Prophets may seem different from today when Christians are living in a pluralist, post-modern society. However, the human heart has not changed. These Minor Prophets spoke into a very real world, where typical human traits affected the minds and actions of God's people, just as they do today.

We do well to give more thought to these books of the Bible, and discover afresh how relevant the Word of God is".

From each prophet he points us to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Great Prophet, and draws clear lines from these "mighty minors" to the New Testament.

John A. Haverland, R.C.N.Z.

In broad brush strokes the author captures the essence of each of these ancient prophetic writings. I appreciated John linking the message of the Minors to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John Westendorp (Christian Reformed Church Australia)

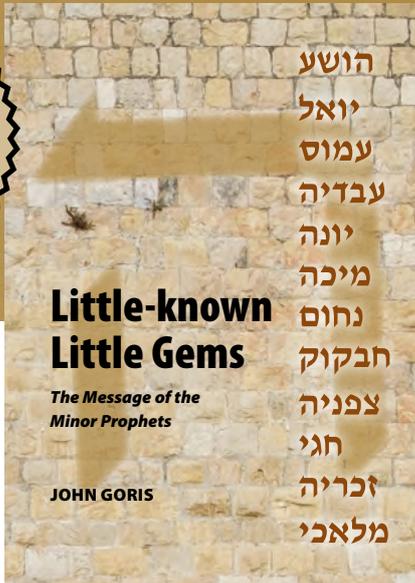
His interpretation is always responsible and even in such a fairly short overview, he has seen things I did not see, always drawing proper and relevant application.

John Rogers, R.C.N.Z.

John Goris's "Little-known Little Gems" guides us through each of the 12 prophets, giving us the theme of each and relating it to our Christian lives today.

Chris Kavanagh, U.K

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