

# faith in FOCUS

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## THE LAW IN OUR LITURGY

# Contents

"Who reads the Law anyway?"	3
The imprinting of the Law	5
On being a serving church Sunday worship and serving the community	9
Letters from New Zealand	11
Outward focus The Tidying Phenomenon	13
Easter meditation The Resurrection Touch	16
Focus on home Gleanings	20
Letter to the editor	20
Books in focus	22

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# Editorial

Mr Daniel Wilson, in his article "Who reads the Law anyway?", raises an interesting point about the place of the Law in the liturgy of our Reformed Churches. At first glance the heading of his article seems a touch ironic, even rhetorical. However, as you go on to read his article you will find that is not the case. There is diversity among reformation churches on this matter.

In the continental tradition, it seems that the 10 Commandments were read or pronounced in the worship service each Lord's Day. I remember in my previous congregation, that for the pronouncement of the Law, the congregation would stand, the minister would raise his hand (as in the blessing) and would pronounce the Law verbatim from memory. As a young Christian, I thought that was awesome. In another federation that I was in, which subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith, I cannot remember the commandments being read too often at all.

Is it imperative that the Law be an element in our liturgy? Should it be read every week, every second week or maybe once a month and/or using alternative readings from the New Testament? In D.G. Vanderpyl's book *Reformed Liturgy* (1989), the liturgy for the morning service seems to indicate that the use of the Law is indeed a part of our worship for the public confession of sin. Vanderpyl comments:

"The reading of God's Law is something unique to the Reformed (Calvinistic) Churches. It was John Calvin who introduced the reading of the Law of God as a regular element in worship .... God's Law is read during the morning service, before the first prayer .... The Law of God may be seen as the Constitution of the Covenant which God imposed upon His people. This element of the worship is one that comes from the Lord to His people" (p27).

In our own federation there is a variation of practice too. Although I have a view about this, it is not my place to be dogmatic one way or the other. There is no specific commandment that states "you shall ...". It seems there is liberty in regard to frequency and to what is read in regard to the Law and confession of sin.

Our contributors certainly give us all something to think about, and as Reformed Churches, we are not alone when it comes to having a view on the reading of the Law in the worship service.

Mr Daniel Wilson raises a big question.

Mr Paul Archbald impresses the practice upon us

Mr Dirk van Garderen informs about another aspect of being a serving church.

The late Dick Vanderpyl wrote about some interesting historical facts.

Mrs Sally Davey comments on the tidying-up phenomenon.

In our Easter meditation, Mr D. Patrick Ramsey writes about *The Resurrection Touch*.

Letter to the editor is a response to the *Missions in focus* article about John Chau's death at the Sentinel Islands.

Cover: Photo by Brody Childs on *Unsplash*.

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# “Who reads the Law anyway?”

**Daniel Wilson**

Depending on which congregation you attend within the RCNZ, many of you will have spoken to a visitor to the Reformed Churches who asked about why we read the law or have a time of confession in our services. At the very least, you have probably asked questions about this practice yourself, or you have heard someone in our churches who did! It can be a strange practice at times when we compare our services to those of other churches .... So, Who does Read the Law in Worship?

I was able to do a little research in the past couple of weeks, with some help from one of the young men in the church. Between us, we were able to examine more than 2 dozen churches or federations/denominations regarding

their practice in relation to reading any form of the Law and specifically the 10 commandments.

What we found was interesting. We found conservative Gospel preaching churches on both sides of the question. There were of course those churches of the Dutch or “continental” vein of Reformed theology which had a much more frequent use of the Law in Worship. Many of these churches would follow the order of worship from the Synod of Dordt. However, there were quite a few churches that had a call to confession of some sort, but without regular use of the 10 commandments per se (although they might be used from time to time). There were even a number who did not have a call to confession at all. The majority of the Baptist churches did not have a full call to confession, and thus they rarely



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The next time you hear the reading of the Law (and in particular the 10 commandments), remember what a rare and blessed thing it is to be confronted every week with your ongoing need for Jesus Christ! For the good news of Christ means nothing to us sinners apart from the bad news of our inability to please God!

if ever read the 10 commandments in worship. The majority of the charismatic or Pentecostal churches likewise had no call to confession and no regular use for the Law (or any summary of the Law) in their liturgy. Some Anglicans had a call to confession, but the Law was not a major element in their service order. Perhaps one of the most striking things is that some of our sister churches (and churches in the ICRC) would not read the 10 commandments very often either – for a variety of reasons – although most of our sister churches do have this practice. In our context and tradition, the Law and a time of confession is so much a part of our culture, that we naturally ask, “Why wouldn’t a church read the Law?”

Sadly, for many churches today, they do not wish to focus on sin, repentance and confession. Therefore, calling people’s attention to the Law or leading people in confession is out of line with their goals for worship. For other churches, they do focus on confession and repentance, but they seek to keep that element of worship varied by using any number of passages of Scripture which teach believers their responsibilities to the Lord. In the tradition in which I grew up in the USA, churches that were capital ‘R’ Reformed (and Presbyterian) would not always read the 10 commandments for this reason. Some very conservative Presbyterians would refuse to read the Law regularly based on the regulative principle of worship; ie God never commands us to read the Law in every worship service, therefore, if we require that – we are adding to God’s commands! God has certainly commanded us to read the Word of God, to preach the Word, to sing and to pray ... but He has not mandated the weekly use of the Law.

**NOW – BEFORE YOU STOP READING... I am not arguing to stop reading the Law!** Please read Pastor Archbald’s wonderfully instructive article which lays out the great reasons and biblical precedents for using God’s Law in worship for God’s glory and our good! I have not dug into specific verses and texts in this article because my brother has done been so thorough already. My intent is not to denigrate or diminish the reading of the Law, but merely to explain the variety of practice in both biblical and unbiblical churches in our day. If you were to attend a random church in NZ or another country, you may or may not find the reading of the Law or

even a call to confession in the worship service. What you must understand is that there may be Bible-based reasoning behind that omission! We cannot have a knee-jerk reaction to the omission of the Law from worship, because there are good and bad reasons to do so.

Having come from a Presbyterian background, I had not heard the Law read in worship nearly as often in the USA as I heard it in New Zealand (even though many of our sister churches in North America from a continental background would be almost identical to our practice). As an outsider, I was initially challenged to explore this slight variation to the order of worship with which I had grown up. My wife was challenged in the same way when she moved to the USA to study for a time. We both had to go back to the core principles of worship in the Word, and we both ended up finding that the Lord’s church is bigger than simply what one family of churches practices! I have grown to love the greater emphasis on the Law and the Psalms which I found in our NZ churches, and I have incorporated the 10 commandments much more frequently in my own orders of service than I ever would have done as a pastor back home. I count it a blessing to have come into a church with such a rich tradition of utilizing the Word of God in word, song and prayer. This practice sets us apart from other churches, but not in a superior or “more-godly” way. This is a helpful tradition which is useful for holding us close to Christ and teaching us to be more open with one another about our sin! It is too easy to try to find fault with our distinctives, when we should be looking for how these distinctives are an encouragement and a blessing!

The next time you hear the reading of the Law (and in particular the 10 commandments), remember what a rare and blessed thing it is to be confronted every week with your ongoing need for Jesus Christ! For the good news of Christ means nothing to us sinners apart from the bad news of our inability to please God! Revel in that weekly reminder of God’s holiness, and when others ask you about this practice – be quick to be humble in explaining why the Law is such a blessing!

*Mr Daniel Wilson is the minister in the Reformed Church in the North Shore, Auckland.*

# The imprinting of the Law

**Paul N. Archbald**

## **Introduction:**

Reformed churches of the “continental” variety have traditionally included the reading of the Law of God in their worship services – especially the summary of the Law from Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5. The regular reading of the Law does not seem to have held such a prominent place in Presbyterian or Puritan circles.

It is not uncommon to hear some criticism of this practice in our churches. Some argue that hearing the Law read from the same passages each week encourages our members to “switch off.” Not all who say this are wanting the Law to be removed, but would like to see more variety in the selection of passages that tell us how the Lord wishes His people to live. Others, however, argue against the appropriateness of regular reading of any parts of the Law in our worship services. They feel that it is too “legalistic” or too “Old Testamentish.” Visitors who attend our services sometimes make the same comment.

To address these concerns, we will look at how the Bible itself uses the Law, including the summary of the Law in the 10 Commandments; and how the Law has been used in the church throughout history. I will use the term “Law” for the Law-in-general and “10 Commandments” or Decalogue” when referring to Ex. 20/Dt. 5 in particular.

## **The Law in the Old Testament**

It is not difficult to demonstrate the importance of Law in the Old Testament. Moreover, it is easy to show the prime place within that Law that is occupied by the 10 Commandments. Some laws were given before Israel reached Sinai,

but the summary of all the abiding principles takes centre-stage when Moses goes up Mt. Sinai. It is the first set of laws given there – though more follow. It is accompanied by great theophanies. It is only the 10 commandments that are written on stone, by the “finger of God” (Dt. 9:1) i.e., by a direct, supernatural operation.

It is important to see this also in the context of the “cutting” of a covenant. Ex. 19:5 shows that the Law given at Sinai was set in that covenant context.



<http://preacherboy316pt2.blogspot.com>

The key point about Calvin's emphasis on the reading of the Law appears to be its necessity for the proper confession of sin — an essential part of his liturgy. This is the point that caused the reading of the 10 commandments to be given its place in the order of worship developed by the synod of Dort.

The two tablets of the 10 commandments are called “the tablets of the covenant” (Dt. 9:9 and 11). This covenant made Israel into a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6 with 1 Pet. 2:4ff). It is for this reason that the “Book of the Law” or “Book of the Covenant” – the Decalogue - is placed in the Ark of the Covenant (Dt. 10:5; 31:23-27).

This also explains why the Law played such a prominent part in revival in Israel. The people needed to be continually renewed in the covenant. They therefore needed to hear the covenant-law again and again – to point out their sins, to help them to see the need to cry out to God for mercy and to remind them of how He required them to live. So we find this Law being read to the whole nation every time they are on the brink of some new phase in God's redemptive plan; or whenever they are in dire need of covenant-renewal (Dt. 1:1ff; 1 Sam. 10:25; 2Kgs. 23:1-3; Neh. 8:1-9:3, 13:1).

Then there is the emphasis placed in the Old Testament upon learning God's Law, remembering it and meditating upon it – “Hear ... that you may learn them and observe them carefully” (Dt. 5:1; Josh. 1:8). Jehoshaphat even sent out officials and Levites to read the Law throughout Judah (2 Chron. 17:7-9). Dt. 6:4ff shows that God's Law was to surround every man, woman and child in Israel, in their homes and work-life, as well as in the life of the covenant-community as a whole. Memorization formed a key part of Biblical education among the Jews. But that approach did not derive from their culture: they learned it from God's Word. Repetition to aid memorization is being de-emphasized in modern Western education. When the church follows suit, it is learning from the culture not the Bible.

It is worth noting that this same emphasis on Law permeates the Psalms, the Songs God Himself gave the Church for their corporate worship. If you look at all the times law-words occur in the Psalms – words like “laws, commandments, statutes, precepts and judgements,” it totals nearly 1,400! Ps. 119:97, for example, exclaims, “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” The point is often made that if we are to meditate on God's Law every day, how can we complain that it is read once a week when we gather for worship?

### **The Law in the New Testament**

We must also consider the place of the Law in the New Testament. For some

might argue that the role of the Law has changed radically in the new covenant. If that is so, we might not want to read it or preach about it so often.

When we consider things that are commanded in the Old Testament, it is not enough to observe that the New Testament does not repeat them. All God's commandments remain in force until He says that something has changed. But in any case, the New Testament is not silent about the Law – including the Decalogue.

When Jesus began His preaching ministry, one of the first things He preached about was the Law. In the Sermon on the Mount, He stated that He had come to fulfil the Law, but not to abolish it (Mt. 5:17). He then demonstrates that He has not abolished it by showing the radical depth of God's Law. He does so using three of the 10 Commandments (the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>) and the summary of the “second table” of the Law, “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

If you want to, you can search the New Testament to find the references to the other commandments. All 10 are discussed and all 10 are shown to remain in force. Moreover, Jer. 31:33 foretold that the new covenant would be marked by this, that all God's people would have the Law put on their hearts.

It is true that the New Testament also talks about the fact that the Christian is not under law but under grace (Rom. 5:14; Gal. 5:18 etc). However, when the New Testament talks about not being under the Law, it can mean that in one of several senses: we are not under the Law as a way of earning merit and saving ourselves by our law-keeping; we are no longer under the *ceremonial* law of the Old Testament; we are no longer governed by *myriad* laws – as were the old covenant people as “minors”; and we are not under the *penalty* of the Law when set free by Christ. But we are under the abiding principles, which are to be radically applied with help from the Holy Spirit, as an expression of our gratitude for the work of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 7:19, 9:21; Gal. 6:15-16; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; 1 Jn. 5:2-3). Most of the Epistles of the New Testament include plenty of applications of God's laws, expressed as either commands or exhortations. If it is inappropriate for us to bring God's Law to our attention in our worship services, then we are talking about avoiding a huge percentage of the Bible!

## The Law in worship throughout church history

Up until AD 70, many Christians tried to keep worshipping in the synagogues, as well as holding their own services. The custom in the synagogues was to read the 10 commandments as well as the Prophets, and to have lessons taken from the Law. After AD 70, the liturgies of the ancient church do not seem to have singled out the Law for special mention. However, over time, the Medieval Church did begin to place more and more emphasis on the Eucharist. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, liturgical reform was sorely needed – to restore the emphasis on the ministry of the Word.

Various liturgies were drawn up during the Reformation. There were some variations in these, but there is no doubt that Calvin's orders of worship were influential. Calvin did not insist on the reading of the 10 commandments in every single service, though he did use it regularly – including in the Lord's Supper celebration. John Knox tried to introduce Calvin's order of worship in Scotland, but resistance to Genevan influence there meant that Knox had to make compromises in this area.

The key point about Calvin's emphasis on the reading of the Law appears to be its necessity for the proper confession of sin – an essential part of his liturgy. This is the point that caused the reading of the 10 commandments to be given its place in the order of worship developed by the synod of Dort. From there it has come down to the various Reformed churches around the world today – or at least for those that have not left their Reformed roots behind. For that reason, you can find that the reading of Ex. 20 or Dt. 5 is placed in D. Vanderpyl's Church Order Commentary of the RCNZ, under the heading of "confession of sins."

In the "Four Forms of Unity," the typical "three uses of the Law" shine through: to show us our sinfulness and therefore our need of Christ; to restrain evil; and to give us a "rule of gratitude." It can hardly be argued that such uses make the Law irrelevant to the Gospel, or to the Reformed doctrine of worship.

Why, then, was there an emphasis on the reading of the 10 commandments to aid confession of sins, rather than on the "rule of gratitude"? The Reformers certainly had a balanced approach to the Law in their system of theology. I would suggest that Calvin and Dort were not starting with the question,

"Where should we read the 10 commandments?" Rather, there was a recognition that worship needed to begin with humility before God, an awareness of our sins and of our need to cry to God for help. The question was therefore, "How can we best encourage the confession of sins?"

## The Law in worship today

Based on what we have found, I would like to give a number of reasons why the Law should be read and preached about regularly in worship services:

When we are reminded of our sin, we are humbled: it is vitally important that we come into God's Presence with that humility.

A worship service is to encourage constant covenant-renewal: the Law plays a big part in covenant-renewal, though it must be coupled with the proclamation of grace.

Much of the Scripture is taken up with Law, in both Testaments: worship should uphold and utilize the whole counsel of God.

The Law's "three uses" are tied closely to the Gospel. This is how we learn of our need for Christ, why He had to suffer and die as He did, and how we should then live. If we neglect the Law, we will find it harder to see our need of Christ; our sin may be restrained less; and our reason for gratitude to God may become less clear to us; and even if we are grateful, we may become less aware of precisely *how* the Lord wants us to demonstrate that gratitude. When the Law is read in our services, I would suggest that it be accompanied by varied explanations of why we read the Law, bringing in the "Three uses" in varied ways. We can also vary where we place the Law – before the confession of sin, to show us our need of Christ; or after the sermon, to stress grateful obedience. However, I do believe that it is better to place it early more often than not, to encourage the right attitude to worship from the start.

The typical Reformed order of worship has a carefully constructed flow to it, with the reading of the Law placed where it is for a definite reason: in the *votum* we confess our need for God's help as we worship ("Our help is in the Name of the Lord ..."). That help is promised in the salutation ("Grace be to you and peace ..."). Soon after that, we read the Law to explain why we need His grace and help – our sins are exposed. Again we read a passage proclaiming God's gra-

**"Every Sunday the voice of God from Mt. Sinai must echo in the assembly of believers. This is the only way in which the ten commandments is imprinted on the hearts and minds of believers in such an impressive way that it becomes part of their consciousness and becomes an inseparable part of their moral awareness."**

cious promises in Christ. Then we come before the Lord in prayer, confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. The greatest length of time is then spent explaining in the sermon how the work of the Lord Jesus assures us of that forgiveness. We leave, at the end, with God's blessing upon us. Remove the reading of the Law, and that scheme is weakened.

I would also like to explain why the reading of the Decalogue, in particular, should be retained – if not every week, then at least very regularly. First, remember, the 10 commandments give us a summary of *all* the abiding principles of the Law. We can supplement that with other passages that apply one or more of these basic principles. But it is only with the “10 words” that we are confronted with our systematic failure to obey God's *entire* Law; our need for

Christ *at every point*; and our calling to express our gratitude *at every point*. No other passage in the Bible can do that as effectively.

Second, in terms of the restraint of sin, there is something memorable and pithy about the 10 commandments. If they are drummed into us, it is more likely that these are the very things that will jump into our minds when faced with temptation. That is not to say that God's laws are all we need to resist sin. We also need to have the positive reasons for obedience imprinted on our minds: the grace of God, the promises of Scripture, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we bring the proclamation of God's grace in a memorable way, alongside the 10 commandments, then we answer the charge that reading the Law is legalistic.

As to the charge that “familiarity breeds contempt,” we cannot deny the risk. But it is the same risk we face at several points of our worship services: with the Apostles' Creed; the vatum and salutation; the Benediction; and even with the very familiar formulations of the Gospel we hear so often in sermons. At the end of the day, the best solution is not to dispense with the familiar, but to ask the Lord to protect us from complacency and to meditate on what we know as well as on the less familiar parts of the Bible.

I want to conclude with a quote from Abraham Kuyper's “Our Worship” (p. 131). I do not end with this quote to suggest that we should only read the Law as an aid to confession. Kuyper himself was in favour of sometimes reading it after the sermon, to encourage grateful obedience. But I do want to stress how important the Law is – especially the 10 commandments - for approaching worship in the right spirit, with humility, in the awareness of God's holiness and our sinfulness. Kuyper writes: “Every Sunday the voice of God from Mt. Sinai must echo in the assembly of believers. This is the only way in which the ten commandments is imprinted on the hearts and minds of believers in such an impressive way that it becomes part of their consciousness and becomes an inseparable part of their moral awareness.”

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

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“The Gospel, in short,  
is an offer of food to  
the hungry, of joy to  
the mourner, of a home  
to the outcast, of a  
loving friend to the  
lost. It is glad tidings.  
God offers, through His  
dear Son, to be at one  
with sinful man. Let us  
not forget this.”

J C Ryle



*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”  
Prov 1:7*

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# Sunday worship and serving the community

Dirk J van Garderen

What do our worship services have to do with serving the community around us? **Everything!!**

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus calls us to be the ‘*salt of the earth*’ and ‘*the light of the world*.’ That light is not to be put under a basket (kept private!) but placed on a stand in order to give light to the **whole house**. ‘*In the same way, let your light shine before others [outsiders] that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*’<sup>1</sup> Who are the ‘earth’, ‘world’, the ‘whole house’, the ‘others’ that the Lord has in mind here? It’s those *neighbours* mentioned in the second great commandment.<sup>2</sup> It is the *community* in which you live and where our church building is situated.

Should worship services consciously and deliberately focussed on being salt and light for our unbelieving neighbours? We believe that we are a covenant community caring for, nurturing and protecting one another. Family first!

Surely that’s OK? Aren’t our Sunday worship services all about feeding the flock, encouraging, exhorting, teaching and strengthening the members and children who are God’s household? Isn’t corporate worship all about serving *one another*? Most certainly. That must not be compromised or diluted.

At the same time, we speak of *public* worship – worship out in the open, set on a hill, placed on a lampstand. It is very much there for our neighbours (the public!) to see, hear and taste. As disciples and servants of the Lord Jesus our lives have been transformed. The love

of Christ controls us. We are new creations. The old has passed away and the new has come.<sup>3</sup> We live this out not just as individuals and as families, but most supremely as a *congregation* – the household of faith.<sup>4</sup> That become visible most powerfully when gathered together for corporate worship on the Lord’s Day! Nowhere does the salt show its saltiness, the light shine more brightly than in public worship.

The trouble is that what *should be* and what *is* often don’t match. Our worship services tend to be very ‘in house’ in their focus. All too often people report that *if* we bring a neighbour to church, we have good reason to fear that they will not have a clue as to what is going on, it passes them by like a proverbial ship in the night. They are put off rather than encouraged. The language and the rituals of worship are completely outside of our neighbours’ experience.

To make this concrete, think here of various churches which have amazing projects that aim at serving the communities in which they live. Soup kitchens, Christian counselling services, pregnancy help programmes, homes for drug addicts, those who are alcohol dependent, those chronically in debt. All of these are praiseworthy community focused serving projects that meet real needs. But what is the greatest need of those homeless people, those mothers-to-be, drug addicts, etc.? Is it not forgiveness, healing and the renewal of their *hearts*? That’s the root of the problem, where real restoration begins. In Christ alone their help is found!

Where better to hear and experience the Gospel than in our corporate

Nowhere does the salt show its saltiness, the light shine more brightly than in public worship.



Photo by Rob Schulz on Unsplash

worship? Suppose that your neighbour has come to that point that he begins to seek the Lord. He wants to begin to take those first wobbly steps towards becoming a Christian. Where do you start? Surely you take them to and confront them with that place where the light of the Gospel shines most brilliantly? Ask them to join you on Sundays when you gather with God's family for worship.

**'But they're not ready for that.'** How many times have you heard, said or felt exactly that?

I recently asked someone who was deeply involved in a programme to help recovering alcoholic and drug addicted men what would happen if he started taking those who were genuinely seeking to follow Christ to his local Reformed church. 'Won't work,' he said. Reasons? He pointed out that these folks wouldn't fit because his church would not be able or suitable to accommodate

them. He was right! And that's exactly the problem, the tragedy really. Something is wrong somewhere, somehow. Something needs to change.

### **A warning or caveat**

What must *not* change are the biblical ground-rules that regulate the very essence of worship in spirit and in truth.<sup>5</sup> Worship is forever on God's terms, focused on his will. God is meeting with his chosen people. Think of it as a dialogue between him and us. The elements of worship are indispensable, not negotiable. It is all about adoration, confession, assurance, instruction, correction, encouragement must be expressed through corporate prayer, Scripture reading, preaching, praise (singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs), celebration of the sacraments and free-will giving. Our traditional liturgies are, in my view, indispensable.<sup>6</sup>

So, within those parameters, what can and must be done? What needs to change?

To come to grips with this, try experiencing our corporate worship from the perspective of someone who comes to church for the first time. Your friend feels out of place, the odd one out. All these people know one another like a family or members of a special interest club. *'I don't belong here! What are they doing? Why are they all looking at me?'*

There's more. Rather than listen primarily to what that man on the pulpit is saying, your friend is 'people watching'. He is looking on – watching you involve yourself in worship, when you pray, sing and respond to what the preacher is saying. You are being evaluated. Are you for real? Do you really mean it when you sing about God's Father-love, Christ's death on the cross, your love for your brothers and sisters?

The way you worship speaks louder and much more directly and clearly than the minister's sermon. People whose worship is half-hearted, sleepy, ho-hum and even silent when they are supposed to be singing, shout louder than any pulpit-thumping minister.

Could it be that one reason we are often reluctant to invite our neighbours to our worship services be our own half-hearted involvement? Next time you worship, take an honest measure of the message you proclaim by the way you involve yourself in worshipping God as you listen, pray and sing. Also, take a look beside you, especially at the younger ones who, to be perfectly

candid, often seem to have little interest in prayer and singing, let alone involved listening. Fidgeting with eyes wide open, 'singing' with tightly sealed lips, and doodling instead of making notes.

As a rule, when your neighbour sees and experiences that our worship, our interaction with the Lord and his people is real for you that he will begin to take notice of what you are listening to. If you are seen to be genuine when you pray, sing, make every effort to absorb the message and obviously believe it to be life-giving and life-changing, you provide every reason to them to start listening to and trying to understand what is being said and going on.

But surely the preacher has a huge role in communicating the gospel to your neighbour. You bet he does. It is not just the words he speaks, but also his heart that is on public display. The words of his mouth must come directly from what lives in his heart as he reads, explains, brings to life and applies the Word of God. Yes, he must forever be aware of the language he uses. In house jargon, with which so many of us feel comfortable, has no real place on the pulpit. The language, word choice he uses must be dignified but also contemporary and able to be understood even by 'outsiders'. Yes, let it be directed to the household of faith – but never in a way that is incomprehensible to a first-time attender at church. Never forget that the message from the pulpit is for everyone – a light not just for the en-

lightened, but for those who are still walking in great darkness, too.

In sum, what we need is to realize that our corporate worship is or should be the most powerful testimony to the presence, mercy, grace and love of our triune God to the community in which we live as neighbours with unbelievers. What we do on Sundays as Christ's body is the light of the world, a light that is designed to bring glory to God to the uttermost ends of the earth. Worship in spirit and truth supremely demonstrates God living with and among his people. Nothing is quite like it! It's not the only place But it is most certainly a way of serving the community in which we live that has no equal.

It does not end when the minister pronounces the blessing. What we do as God's people in Christ at the end of the service and during the mid-week activities builds on and flows out of our public worship. How and when this serves the community in which the Lord has placed us will be our focus next time.

#### Notes

- 1 Matthew 5.13-16.
- 2 Luke 10.28. etc.
- 3 II Corinthians 5.14,17.
- 4 Galatians 6.10
- 5 John 4.24. (See also Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96.)
- 6 See for example Belgic Confession Arts 28,29.

*Mr Dirk J van Garderen is an emeritus minister and member of the Reformed Church in Bishopton.*

**In sum, what we need is to realize that our corporate worship is or should be the most powerful testimony to the presence, mercy, grace and love of our triune God to the community in which we live as neighbours with unbelievers.**

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## Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

### June 1982

Just recently, in a conversation with some newcomers to Auckland city, the discussion centred around the choice of churches for worship and membership. There was an apparent desire to only seek fellowship in the largest of the local Reformed churches. It looks to me, on reflection, that for some people it is impact that counts, more than anything else. The large church has impact, the neighbourhood knows of your existence, the community is aware of your presence and most people know the

location of that church.

But these people are not aware of the fact that the smaller church also has advantages, such as greater intimacy. Every one knows each other by their first name and most seem to relate to one another as members of one large family. Though lesser known in the community than the larger church, the warmth enjoyed by the members of such a church could be almost unlimited. And it is thus that some people are making their choice.

I think that both intimacy and impact are desirable. The larger church can develop intimacy by means of strong

district Bible study groups; the Christchurch churches are a good example of that. The smaller churches should not neglect their impact on the community either. The North Shore church sets a good example by using various means such as the news media, tape library and regular conferences to get the message across in their community. The message is not "either the one or the other", but to major on both impact and intimacy.

While on the subject of intimacy, something struck me as I leafed through the newsletters that I receive. Most of our ministers call their "rooms

and rambles" through the congregation: "From the Manse", and I've often thought, "Why don't they come to the point and say straight out: "From Headquarters." Lately, I have seen a real nice one, very intimate indeed, if I may say so (thank you). The Wainuiomata church bulletin calls it "Church Family." That sort of intimacy really made an impact on me when I read it.

Splitting up congregations and severing old ties between smaller churches where there has been a sharing of a minister is in the air at present and quite contagious. April seems to have been the magical date. Auckland did it in ages past, Silverstream followed later on, the North Shore took the step a few years ago and now Christchurch parted in two and then (however) arranged for a partnership between both halves. Tokoroa and Kerepehi decided to each go their separate ways and develop their own identity within their communities. And if I read between the lines correctly, thoughts of separate identities for Palmerston North and Foxton are slowly crystallising, given time and patience.

I have a feeling, and there is nothing Rogerian in that, that we are on the threshold of a new era in the life of our denomination, with a new emphasis on expansion and extension. Challenging goals are being set by a number of our churches. Chains of complacency and drudgery are being shaken off. Our churches do have the sure Word of God, so let us sound the trumpet again.

All news bulletins report a good attendance of their churches' annual congregational meetings and there seems to be a keenness to discuss topics of short and long range interests in the local church.

Let me close on a lighter note this time. An attractive young lady whose career necessitates a good deal of travelling, was once asked if she was ever bothered by uninvited male attention. "Never," she answered. "I just say three words and immediately I am left alone." And what are these three words? She smiles and asks them. "Are you saved?"

## July

At last it happened. An attempt on the life of a session has been made. Was it before or after the annual congregational meeting? I don't know! Some sessions have suppers in the second half of their meetings but this one has

a smorgasbord during the preliminaries of their meetings, (starting time is 5.30 pm). Anyway, according to an eyewitness, viz. the church treasurer who came an hour later to present his report and thus missed his share of the good feed, he witnessed an incredible feat of speed-breaking records of session members rushing out of the session room towards the bushes, in agony. Some did repeats of up to half a dozen times. The deacon's stomach was the only hardy one and resisted right to the end of the meeting by refusing to give up what the others couldn't keep down. However, I have been told that he lost a day's pay, as he seemed to have suffered most miserably during the night, so his wife told a good friend. I have also been told that the event has been recorded in the minutes of that session meeting of the North Shore church. A suggestion was made to appoint a Royal Commission of Inquiry to investigate the cause which led to the attempted poisoning of the leaders of that church, but the Biblical warrant to forgive one's enemies 70 times 7 quashed that idea. Well, that sure was a crisis meeting!

Another church also has crisis meetings but these are of a different nature. In the Hamilton church, a group of members run a Crisis Counselling organisation to reach out into the community to those who are distressed one way or another. It is a telephone service with follow-up work and this activity has been greatly blessed by the Lord. The counselors meet regularly for training to improve their skills and to meet in prayer with the Lord. They also have the help of Christian doctors, a solicitor and a hospital chaplain for referrals. At their meetings they learn how to answer the phone when a crisis call comes in, and how to listen reflectively and offer hope, presenting an opportunity for a new beginning in Christ.

The Australian churches don't know how fortunate and blessed they are with their Christian schools. New Zealand is still in the throes of trying to get their feet off the ground in selling the idea of the need for Christian education. In Hamilton the School Association plans to open a school shortly and the church has unanimously given its wholehearted support by underwriting the establishment costs of the school for at least the first twelve months.

In Wellington, a group of young people got together to talk about the needs of the schooling of their young

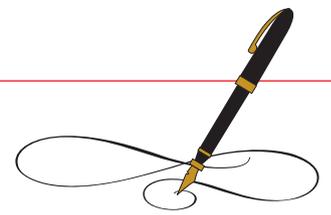
children in the church. The outcome of the meeting was a decision to have a Christian primary school to serve the city area of Wellington, commencing from February next year. The Committee Triumvirate has now started to make preliminary investigations into possible building facilities which must, of course, be as accessible as possible to anybody who wants to avail themselves of it. Knowing Wellington myself, with all its hills and valleys, that won't be so easy.

While this issue is being read, the elders of the Wellington Presbytery have had their study-conference where the Revs. Oppelaar and Flinn were invited to speak on the subject of Mission Outreach at Home and Abroad. Both speakers are qualified to speak in their specific areas of interest, as Rev. Opelaar is our missionary in Taiwan and Rev. Flinn's desire is to make New Zealand a Reformed Presbyterian country.

I read that one of the Christian Reformed Churches in the United States decided on a new procedure for the election of office bearers. The first steps are identical to those followed normally, members of the congregation submit names to the session and then session decides on a list of names twice the number of office bearers needed. The names are then announced together with the date of the election. At the congregational meeting a motion is passed to approve the entire slate of nominees. But then comes the crunch, instead of filling in ballots, the congregation will watch, how, after prayers have been offered, the names of the elected office bearers are picked at random, or as the church believes, by the direction of the Holy Spirit.

In closing my letter for this issue, let me end it on a positive note in this present time of high inflation, nil growth and rising unemployment. Even if unemployment reaches as high as 10 per cent of the work force, there is still 90 per cent who DO have work.

## Abridged



# The Tidying Phenomenon



Marie Kondo  
[www.thenational.ae/arts-culture](http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture)

If you are interested in home-related matters (and who isn't?), you will probably be aware of a recurring theme in books, magazines and websites such as *Houzz*: tidying. You will have seen articles on clutter, downsizing, storage and the likes. What has given rise to this big focus on mess, and the need for order?

Several things, it seems to me. The first is that there really *is* an untidiness problem. Many of us realise this, and are uncomfortable with our levels of clutter. We dream of order and calm in our homes, and have an underlying hunch that if only we could get control of our mess we'd have better control of our lives.

The second is the writing of many books and articles about decluttering and tidying routines. There are many systems around for getting your home

and office cleared of unnecessary "stuff" – and for keeping them orderly and attractive places to be. The sales of these books, and the number of visitors to these websites indicate a big appetite for help in these matters.

Thirdly, the minimalist trend in home décor has been dictating a clean, uncluttered look in home interiors for some years now. Kitchen benches covered in appliances, walls full of memorabilia, and hallways encumbered with multiple storage units are out of the question in homes devoted to minimalist style. It is simply no longer the done thing to keep everything you or your family ever owned.

Enter Marie Kondo, the queen of decluttering. I confess I had never heard her name until seeing some articles on her system of tidying up a few weeks

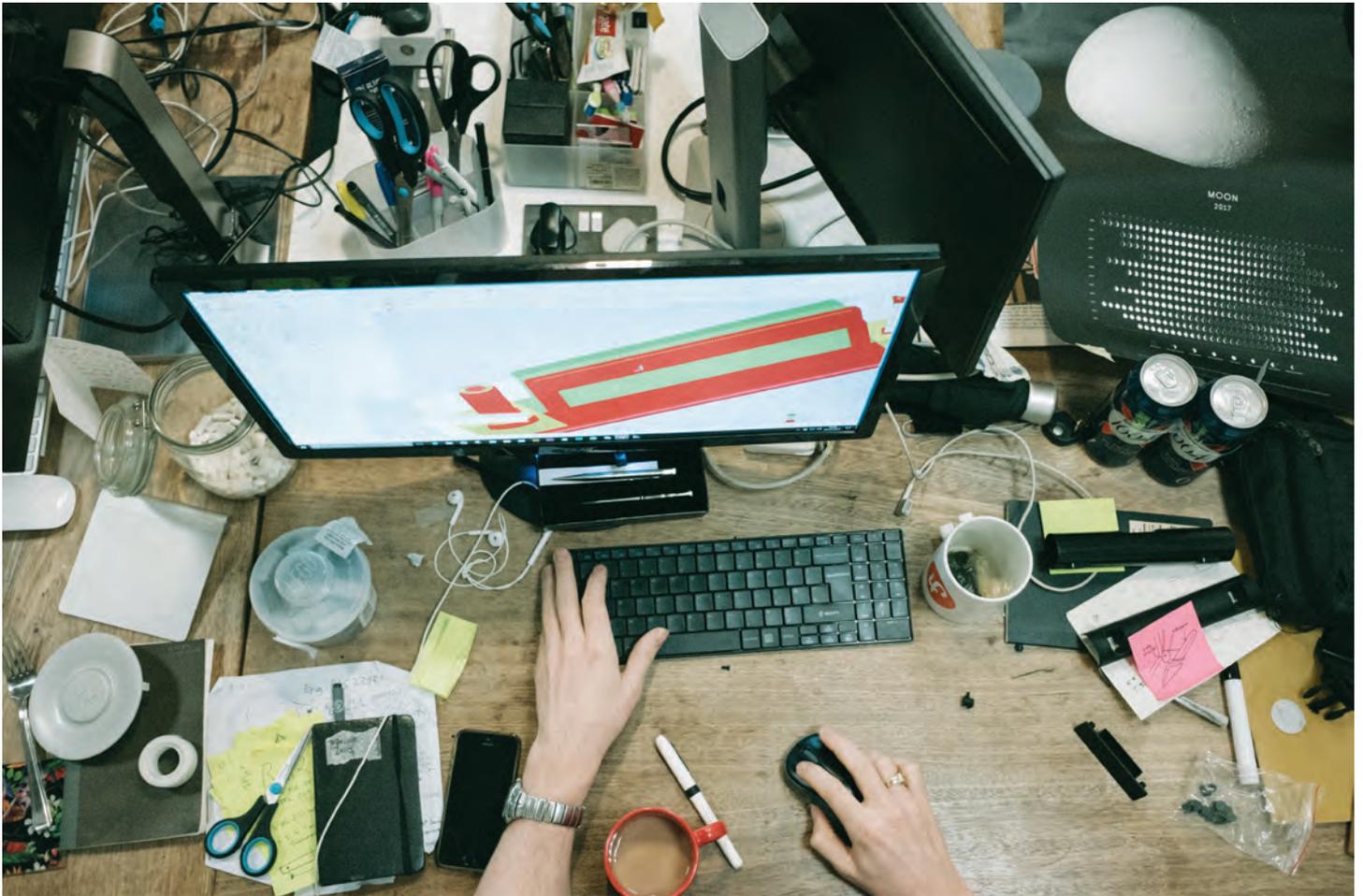


Photo by Robert Bye on Unsplash

ago. It seemed there was a considerable back story to these articles, and I soon discovered she has become an internet sensation over the past few years. Her books have sold millions of copies, and she has appeared in numerous television shows as well as in her own Netflix series.

She is Japanese; a former Shinto shrine maiden who has been fascinated with the subject of tidying since she was a small child. After school and university she ended up establishing a tidying consultancy, offering clients advice in decluttering and organizing their homes and offices. It has been very successful. She is a sweet and very personable lady. One can see in the video clips online a gentle, friendly presence who guides her clients rather than ordering them about. She may urge the necessity of reducing possessions; but it is they who make the decisions.

One of the interesting things about Kondo's system is the extent to which it draws on Shinto philosophy. On entering someone's home she bows and prays. She advocates setting up shrines on the top of your bookshelf. She greets her home when she returns each day; and interacts with inanimate objects such

as items of clothing, thanking them for the work they do for her. She is quietly respectful in dealing with clients and their possessions, but very firm about the necessity of getting rid of things we do not need. It probably makes her system appear exotic to westerners, evoking a hidden Asian key to tidiness that we secular westerners may have missed somewhere.

Marie Kondo's "life-changing magic of tidying up" (the title of one of her books) is actually quite simple. First, you sort your possessions, category by category, beginning with clothes. She gets her clients to bring all their clothes, from every part of their home, into one place. Then they must handle each item, and decide whether to discard or keep it. After clothes come books, then paper, followed by miscellaneous items (electrical appliances, coins, makeup, etc) and finally sentimental and personal items, which are the hardest to sort.

The key to making all these choices is the question: "does this spark joy?" Do I love it? Does it delight me to wear this dress, read this book, use this machine, etc etc? If not, thank it for its usefulness (even if it is a skirt which has taught me,

by the fact that I've never worn it, what *does not* suit me) and discard.

Then, you put your remaining things away. Each item needs a home. If it doesn't have one, you will forever be chasing piles of stuff from place to place around your house, and it will never be tidy. Marie advocates simplicity, though. There should be enough room in your existing cupboards. Place your clothes efficiently (she explains how), and *don't* waste money on expensive storage systems. They will only encourage you to keep more stuff than you need. The important thing is that, because you are keeping only half, quarter of maybe only 20% of your former possessions, it will fit.

The result, inevitably, is bag after bag of discarded possessions to go to thrift shops or the tip. Marie claims that the average number per person is around 40 or 50 40-litre rubbish bags. This, to me, was quite astounding. Either people's homes are full of overstuffed cupboards and heaps more things than we can ever use – or Marie is encouraging her clients to be wasteful and rash in throwing so many things away. Which is it? (Christians have an interest in thrift, order and living simply, so it's something worth considering).

My first thought is that we probably do have way too much stuff. The global marketplace has produced an enormous superabundance of cheap, readymade goods. There are plenty of companies who offer us ridiculously inexpensive imported products, tempting consumers to buy way more than they need, and to buy things for themselves and their children that don't last long or that they will lose interest in very quickly. In the U.S., huge discount stores offer teeshirts and underwear in packs of 6, for instance – so the people in Marie's Youtube videos sometimes find they have 60 teeshirts or 100 socks when they collect them up in their living rooms and sort them. We can all probably think of similar collections we have loaded into our wardrobes and cupboards. So many things are so cheap, and so easy to obtain – things that previous generations either had to pay more of their disposable income for, or make themselves.

What, then, should we do? One obvious answer is to buy less, and to be more careful in choosing what we buy. Like many have said, buy once and buy right: usually meaning, pay more and get good quality. Another answer is to avoid wandering through shops, or looking around online, when we don't actually

need anything. It could mean learning what types of clothes actually suit us, so that we make better choices when it comes to actually buying. Purchasing less often, and more wisely, will certainly help keep clutter to a minimum. It will probably also mean that we value and enjoy what we have more.

But my second thought is disquiet at certain parts of the Kondo philosophy. We do need to keep some things; and maybe more of some things she would advocate discarding. Like books. Marie suggests that people need to keep only 30 books each, since we tend to read a book once, and never look at it again. Now that may be true of certain novels or books on current affairs which quickly cease to be relevant. But reference books? Good books on biblical truth or ways to live the Christian life faithfully? Surely not. We will re-read such books and refer to them time and again, quite likely lending them to others in the hope that their usefulness will be multiplied. Books may be friends, who have helped shape us and make us into the Christians we have become.

I also find it virtually impossible to give up gifts that friends and family have given me. Each gift represents the giver's love and thoughtfulness, and I'm reminded of that person each time I use it. It would seem like a heartless act of ingratitude to dispose of it, and I almost never do. Marie, how could I?

Family momentos are also important, because they connect us with our heritage, with the people who have helped shape our thinking, and our outlook on life. I wouldn't want to be without the photographs of my great-grandparents, their scrapbooks, degree diplomas, their books or some of their other special possessions. In the interest of decluttering I could reduce the number of family "treasures" I have, but the way I see it I'm a caretaker for future generations of my family. If I threw out a photo album or sold certain items of furniture I might be losing something which later on may be very special to a great-niece or nephew. Who am I to deprive them of the opportunity to enjoy it? One generation can easily wipe out the material heritage – with all its important associations – of their descendants. It's then gone, irreplaceably.

I have seen the importance of keeping things, sometimes in situations where families have been under terrible stress, eg having to flee in time of war. When people are more important than things,

**There are plenty of companies who offer us ridiculously inexpensive imported products, tempting consumers to buy way more than they need, and to buy things for themselves and their children that don't last long or that they will lose interest in very quickly.**

it would be understandable to leave everything but your children behind. Is there anything worth saving, when you must catch the last train out of town with only minutes to spare? Perhaps yes. I was once shown a photo of an orphaned family, which incredibly, had survived multiple, frantic trips around the Soviet Union in the ten-year period of chaos and bloodshed before, during and after World War Two. This photo is all that family had left from those times. It still brings joy to the descendants of one of those children today, even on the other side of the world. It was definitely worth saving.

The urge to be tidy is understandable, and commendable. Christians can and should be orderly, since that is a reflection of God's own character. And yes, things are only things, and there is a sense in which it will all burn one day. But the pursuit of order can go too far if it fails to distinguish between tidying, and reckless destruction of what is really valuable.

# The Resurrection Touch

**D. Patrick Ramsey**

In Greek mythology, a king named Midas was given by the gods a gift of much wealth: whatever he touched turned to gold. His gift came to be called the Midas touch, or the golden touch. In a similar way, we could say

that Jesus has the “resurrection touch.”

Jesus has come and has conquered sin and death by his own death and resurrection, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Whatever Jesus touches is given life—and not just life, but resurrection life, because he has power over death.



## Universal, cruel, and deserved

To understand and appreciate resurrection, however, we must first understand and confront death. There wouldn't be a need for, let alone a possibility of, resurrection without the prior reality of death. Death is the necessary and inevitable counterpart to resurrection. Indeed, our Lord's resurrection shines brilliantly against the dark background of death.

The seventeenth-century English poet John Donne famously wrote, "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." In his day, the church bell rang at funerals to mark a recent decease. By saying that the bell tolls for "thee," the living, breathing reader, Donne is noting that the bell's ring is a reminder and confirmation of the reader's end, as well as the deceased's. Death is universal. Until the Lord returns, "it is appointed for man to die" (Heb. 9:27).

Besides being universal, death is cruel. The Bible calls it our enemy. It is the great destroyer. Death rips the soul from the body and disintegrates it, returning the body to dust. Death wreaks havoc on relationships. It tears us from our loved ones and our loved ones from us. A husband is left without his wife, a daughter without a mother, a father without a son, and a man without his best friend. Worst of all, death, in its most significant form, eternally separates all who are outside of Christ from the presence and blessing of God.

The harshness and cold reality of death was not ignored by our Lord. In John 11, death is knocking at the door for Lazarus, whom Jesus loved. Lazarus's sisters, Mary and Martha, quickly send word to Jesus so that he might come and heal his dear friend and their beloved brother. But they are too late or rather, Jesus is too late. By the time he arrives, Lazarus has already been dead four days.

Martha and Mary are overcome with grief and sorrow. When she discovers that Jesus had come, Mary runs to him, weeping. Jesus himself weeps.

This scene of grief over death has played itself out again and again throughout the centuries. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, a nineteenth-century Presbyterian pastor, wrote a similar account about his daughter, Marion Louisa Palmer, a godly young woman who died from tuberculosis at the age of seventeen. As she was lying on her bed suffocating, Palmer picked up her "skeleton frame" in his arms, while she made one last "cry of distress ... one despairing look ... one feeble clutch of the thin fingers

at the neck of her dress." Her mother, utterly heartbroken, burst out, "Oh, my God!" Marion died in her father's arms. (B. M. Palmer, *The Broken Home*, Reformed Academic Press).

More recently, Frank A. James III, president of Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania, wrote a poignant article about the grief he experienced over the death of his brother Kelly. He describes the news of his brother's mountain-climbing accident as "a blow to the solar plexus, knocking the breath out of me." But that was nothing compared to what happened when he told the news to the family. The heartache he felt was beyond anything he had previously experienced, and the weeping he heard was something he hoped to never hear again ("In the Shadow of Mount Hood," ChristianityToday.com, September 2010). Death is cruel.

Death is also deserved. Death is punishment for our rebellion against God: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). God did not make us in his image to live a short while and then die. Death is not natural or "just the way things are." It is not unfair or bad luck. We all die because we are all guilty and have done things worthy of death. God returns us to dust and brings us to an end because of our sins (Ps. 90:3–8).

Death is universal, cruel, and deserved. It is therefore a stark and constant reminder that all is not well in this world, and that all is not well with us. But it's not the end of the story. The rest is wonderfully glimpsed in John 11, when death barged into a home in Bethany.

## Resurrection life

When a grief-stricken Martha confronts Jesus over the death of Lazarus, he tells her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26). Jesus is making the bold claim that he possesses in himself resurrection life. This life is not the same thing as simply being raised from the dead. Lazarus was raised from the dead only to one day die again, but resurrection life is life that *overcomes* death in all of its forms. It is the life Jesus described to Martha. It is eternal life with an immortal and incorruptible body. This is the kind of life Jesus possesses in himself and the kind he gives to his people.

Resurrection life was not something Jesus possessed from the beginning. He had to work for it. He had to be de-

The gift of eternal life, however, is not like a one-way ticket that we can hand out to people. Jesus *himself* — not a piece of paper, not a set of words — is the resurrection. Life is found in him. You need to be joined to Jesus . . . in order to share in his resurrection. And the means by which we are united to Christ is faith. That is why the Scriptures repeatedly state that you need to *believe* in Jesus in order to have eternal life.

Although Jesus has administered the final blow to death, it has yet to be put under his feet. One day in the future it will be, and then death shall be no more. But in the meantime, we walk by faith and not by sight. We wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies.

livered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). He had to die for our sins and be raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3–4). He had to conquer death by his own death and resurrection. Now that he has risen victoriously over death, the Bible says that Jesus holds the keys to Hades and death (Rev. 1:18). He is the resurrection and the life.

Jesus, of course, didn't become resurrection life merely for himself. He died and rose again so that we might have resurrection life in him. This is why Jesus says repeatedly that he came down from heaven to give eternal life (for example, John 6:38–40). "The wages of sin is death, *but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 6:23, emphasis added).

The gift of eternal life, however, is not like a one-way ticket that we can hand out to people. Jesus *himself* – not a piece of paper, not a set of words – is the resurrection. Life is found in him. You need to be joined to Jesus, like a woman is joined to a man in marriage, in order to share in his resurrection. You need to be "in Christ," to use a favorite expression of Paul's.

And the means by which we are united to Christ is faith. That is why the Scriptures repeatedly state that you need to *believe* in Jesus in order to have eternal life. In fact, believers have eternal life the moment they believe. Jesus says that believers have passed from death to life: "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24).

#### **Why must we still die?**

If this is true, we are bound to ask, "Why do believers die?" Since our sins have been put away and we have been given resurrection life, why must we still die? The answer is that although we have received eternal life, we have yet to experience that life in its fullness. In one sense, we who believe have already been raised from the dead to eternal life, and in another sense, we are yet waiting for that resurrection.

Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:16: "Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." Our inner self has been raised from the dead and is being daily renewed. Our hearts of stone have been removed, and we have been given hearts of flesh. We have been born again by the Spirit, and we are being sanctified

by the Spirit. Our outer self, however, has not been raised. Our bodies are decaying, and we will die. We must suffer the curse of sin in that limited sense. But though we die, it is not to our condemnation. At death we enter the presence of the Lord in heaven and remain there with him until the final day when our bodies will be resurrected to eternal glory and honor.

Thus, our resurrection takes place in two stages: inner resurrection in this life, outer at judgment day. This is why Jesus can say: "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26). Our inner self does not die and shall never die. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But our outer self will die though it, too, shall be raised in the future: "Though he die, yet shall he live."

Although Jesus has administered the final blow to death, it has yet to be put under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25–26). One day in the future it will be, and then death shall be no more. But in the meantime, we walk by faith and not by sight. We wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). We, through the Spirit, by faith, "eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5:5). And when death does come and take away our loved ones in the Lord, we grieve, but we do not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). We grieve with a hope that does not disappoint, because Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

*The author is pastor of Nashua OPC in Edinburg, Pennsylvania.*

*New Horizons, April 2018.*



## A Gardener's Lament

We weed away  
pretending  
the job will soon be done:  
But oh, the task's  
unending ...  
weeds come back one by one.

No fertiliser  
needed  
No watering  
no care  
and weeds need  
not be weeded  
a fact  
so rare

Ah!  
Thrust those thorns and thistles  
undo their patchwork quilt  
that mars all vegetation  
afflicting it with guilt

Oh!  
What wreath of thorns to crown Him  
His visage strangely marred  
because this good creation  
by sin had sore been scarred  
.....

Steps forth the Mighty Conqu'ror  
Into the new-born lent  
And Mary saw the Gardener:  
No longer in lament!

*Wellington, December 2004/February 2009*

*Genesis 3:17,18; Mark 15:17; Isaiah 53;  
Luke 23:43; John 20:11-18*

*From Leaves Galore – poetic reflections by  
John Goris*

## Letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

Although the February 2019 Faith in Focus article on John Chau leveled many accurate criticisms of John Chau and his mission to the Sentinelese, including the lack of preparation, questions regarding his call, and the Sentinelese' hostility to all outsiders, the elephant in the room remained unaddressed.

Instead of criticising or defending Mr Chau, we need to instead focus on why the world forces this people group to remain as a stone age culture. The

concept of the noble savage is alive and well in modern anthropology, and instead of finding caring ways of providing trade, growth, and health to the Sentinel Islanders, we instead preserve them as a relic of how we once lived.

Satan is keeping these islanders in darkness, not only through their own hostility to outsiders, but also through groups like the United Nations and the Indian Government, who seek to keep these people sealed in splendid isolation. This is what Christians should be railing

against - a government and society that seeks to freeze a society in time because they remind them of "the good old days".

Where the gospel went, from Armenia to Aotearoa, the revelation of the gospel was followed very closely with the written language - the gateway to trade and civilisation. From there grows wealth, security, decreased mortality, and so forth. Why should we withhold this from anyone?

**Peter Chapman, New Plymouth**



### **CROSSROADS PRISON MINISTRIES NEW ZEALAND NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2019**

"Hallo, I was wondering if I was able to do your Bible study Courses. My friend (a Crossroads student) has asked me to write to you. I am looking for something positive to do while I am in prison and he has shown me that this Course (Manga Messiah) has changed him from thinking bad to thinking good about life. I am 19 years old and I want to change from being a bad person to a positive person. My friend is going to be leaving prison soon and he told me that he has a friend that he trusts and His name is Jesus and He helped him a lot since he's been in prison. I was wondering if you could sign me on your Course so I can learn about Him too. Thanks for reading my letter." We received this letter in December 2018. This student is currently working on Manga Messiah (MM) Lesson 4.

"One year ago (2017) I lost everything to sin – my kids were taken from me, my missus cursed me, came to prison for crimes I committed and then my Mum passed away. All these calamities all at once crushed me completely. My conversion to my Christian faith was overwhelmingly radical. Never have I experienced in all my life God's love. A love so pure it healed me instantly. For the first time ever in my life I felt peace, the peace of God and so Jesus is my Saviour and Lord of my life now and forever. I despise sin because of what it did in destroying everything around me in my life. Yet from my sinful life I was saved and now I serve God, God Al-

mighty who can do all things. There is nothing God cannot do. I know who I am – a child of God chosen to serve, to praise and honour, and to worship God Almighty, Lord of my life. I believe my Mum is with the Lord. She was a Christian. I also believe God will turn what I made bad into good and restore to me my family. God's ways are mysterious. But I know God does good for those that love Him hands down. Hallelujah Praise God." This student also shared: "I needn't worry about anything but give all my cares and worries to Him. If I am tempted in any way God makes a way out for me and He does. If I am offended by anyone in anyway the Holy Spirit reminds me of who I am now, that old me is gone, not to return to the life of sin again. What's hard is not knowing how my family thinks about me now I'm a born again Christian. I haven't seen them for a while, a whole year yet my prayers go out to them every day hoping, believing God will save them to."

This student completed Great Truths (GTB) and is now doing Survey of the Bible. I received a lesson from him today (January) he gave some feedback on the questionnaire we send to the students after completing GTB. When asked to express his feelings after looking over the corrected lessons and reading the comments and letter he replied. "It is very encouraging to see all correct answers but also to know if anything is wrong, it will be corrected and come back with a positive message. I myself have now

learned to write letters of encouragement to my family, sharing my testimony to hope in God's grace. He may open their eyes to take delight in the Lord. I also write to many brothers who I have met on my journey. I keep in touch via mail to see how their walk with the Lord is progressing." When asked if we can improve the Crossroads program he replies: "Keep doing what the Lord has called you to do Brothers and Sisters that this hope we have in God can be expressed through the power of the Holy Spirit to be ambassadors for our heavenly Father that through Christ the love of God will shine through us into the world into dark places. Hallelujah hands down, hands up Praise the Lord. Amen." Wow! Amazing grace!

The following are some of the comments I received from different Chaplains in 2018.

"While you may feel that you are running a basic Bible study, for the men you are a voice of encouragement, an opportunity for change in their behaviour and especially an opportunity in the way that they see themselves and the way that God sees them. Change feels within their reach."

"Can you send us more enrolment forms for Manga Messiah and Begin the Journey please. Also, how are you doing for volunteers for marking/responding to the completed studies? Is this something we could promote or help to recruit from among our volunteers and supporting churches?"

"Thanks again for all that you do for us here at the Prison. I know that the Crossroads Courses have a very real impact on the faith and life of the men doing the studies."

My heartfelt thanks to those who faithfully uphold the work of Crossroads in their prayers. I very much appreciate your ongoing support for we know the Lord hears our prayers.

Also thank you so much to all those who have given donations to the work of Crossroads in NZ. I am very grateful for your expressions of love and support for the men and women in prison. We also received a donation of \$100 from a very grateful Tier 2 student in prison. This is a huge amount to give. You might think he would prefer to spend it on phone cards or stamps to stay in touch with his family who live overseas and cannot afford to give him money.

I am very grateful to all the Instructors for encouraging the students in their faith and keeping them in their prayers. Your

letters mean so much to the students. The following comments from students speak for themselves. In a Christmas card we just received a student writes: "I cannot thank you enough for being there for me and my family. I pray that God bless you richly in your ministry. Many thanks for your caring heart. God bless."

Another student wrote: "I thank you for the letter. I wasn't sure of that essay in Question 2 how to answer it but that it makes perfect sense how you explained it to me. I am really grateful for all the work that you put into this. And I pray the Lord will grant you the knowledge, motivation, energy and the finances to carry on the great work for as long as I'm alive. Amen."

A student writes: "I love my path with God. We have started up our own Christian Choir group here in jail. We have about 9 guys in our unit now and on Sunday we go to church and sing out our heart to our Father. Our Bible

*We give thanks to the Lord for His faithfulness towards our parents,  
grandparents and great-grandparents*

## **Adriaan & Feikje Posthuma**

as they celebrate

### **65 Years of Marriage**

10 April 1954 – 10 April 2019



Frances and the late Derrick Watson  
Tony and Robyn  
John and Marielle  
Rosalind and Derek Cressy  
Hillary and Diana  
Winston and Kristina  
Graham and Alice  
Raymond and Monique

43 Grandchildren  
and  
46 Great grandchildren

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and  
I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 23:6

study class is growing and growing every week. I love God and my life is finally turning around for me. I am doing 10 and a half years. Thank you for your letters. May Jesus shine his light on you for helping us to become strong in the knowledge of our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Look forward to hearing from you. God bless."

"The personal letters are nothing short of incredibly inspiring – thank you!"

I will provide more detailed statistics in the next newsletter. However in the period from July 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 to December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018 we received 221 new enrolments.

Please continue to pray for the ministry of Crossroads NZ specifically asking

the Lord for strength, wisdom and guidance as we seek to reach out to those in prison with the truth of God's Word and the love of God's people.

**If you would like further information you can contact us at [cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz](mailto:cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz) or write to Crossroads Prison Ministries, PO Box 11005, HASTINGS 4156.**

## Books in focus

### ***The Gospel Comes with a House Key***

by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield. Crossway, 2018. Hardcover, 240 pages, \$16.84 (Amazon).

**Reviewed by OP member Rebecca Sodergren.**

This book challenges Christians to practice "radically ordinary hospitality." What is that?

It's "using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God" (40). It's making "sacrifices that hurt so that others can be served and maybe even saved. We are called to die. Nothing less" (42).

Mingling theology and practical teaching with stories from her family's daily life, Butterfield shows how her home has become a place where neighbors with diverse viewpoints can meet together, where those who are struggling can find refuge, where needs are met so that others may see the love of Jesus. But it's not always pretty.

The central narrative is the story of Hank, the reclusive neighbor who bit by bit opens up to Butterfield and her children as they walk their dogs together. When Hank and his girlfriend, Aimee, are arrested and imprisoned for running a meth lab, neighbors begin looking askance at the Butterfields: How could they be friends with such unsavory characters?

The Butterfields do what they always do: call a potluck. Neighbors come to vent their anger, share their fear, process the distress together. The Butterfields also write to Hank and Aimee, who come to Jesus in desperation and neediness.

There's a lot of desperation in this book. "Radically ordinary hospitality"

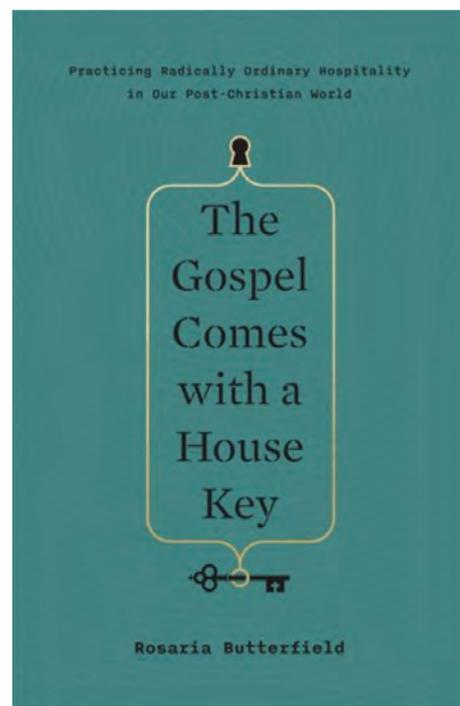
isn't just inviting people over for dinner. It's making time for people at their neediest: when their cat is dying, when grad school stresses them almost to collapse, when they're temporarily blind after eye surgery, and even when they're on their deathbeds.

Butterfield's mother's mental health issues had wracked their relationship, yet Butterfield saw her mother come to faith during her final days. But even this required a sort of "hospitality": Butterfield had to make the time to move into the hospice center 24/7 to live with her mother, sing psalms to her, and make herself available as her mother processed her own dying.

"Radically ordinary hospitality" comes at a cost. One must make time for people, and that means not having as much time for other things, like moneymaking and solitude. It means loving people who criticize you even while they drink up the last of your coffee. It means not regarding your home as your fortress. It means denying yourself and taking up your cross.

This book is beautiful because Butterfield knows how to tell a story. She knits us to Hank, and to the troubled teens her family adopts, and to Butterfield's stepfather, who also comes to know Jesus in his final days. She depicts the striking contrast between the chaos of her upbringing amid alcohol and mental illness, when no Christian neighbors helped, and the loveliness of her own home, where Christ meets the needs of many.

But I suspect the author would agree: No amount of beautiful writing will be worthwhile unless it makes us change. This book is a plea to the church. We must make radically ordinary hospitality a way of life, one daily decision at a time. *New Horizons, November 2018*



# Faith in Focus website live

By the time you receive this issue of *Faith in Focus*, the new website for the magazine will be up and running, Lord willing.

You will notice the appearance of the site is similar to the RCNZ site in colour, with links to resources such as the RCNZ, Reformed Perspective and Pro Ecclesia Books. *Featured Articles* is new, and will highlight articles of special interest, current affairs or themes. What is still the same, is the ability to access 187 magazines from 17 volumes of past issues, on your computer, tablet or phone. You will still be able to send emails to the editor via the new link *Get In Touch*.

I anticipate *Faith in Focus* will become more visible and accessible to a wider audience, within New Zealand and further afield.

Many thanks to Mr Seth Zorn, owner of *Tailgunner* (<http://www.tailgunner.co.nz/>) for designing both websites and overcoming software issues encountered. Many thanks to Mr Bryan Hoyt of *Brush Technology* ([brush.co.nz](http://brush.co.nz/)) for his assistance with those software issues.

Soli Deo Gloria. **Ed.**

## Una Sancta

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

Contact Sharon Heerema  
[admin@unasancta.com.au](mailto:admin@unasancta.com.au)



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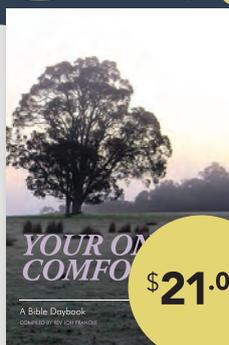
# Daily Readers

Pro Ecclesia Bookshop is run by a number of volunteers from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Our aim is to provide reformed literature to members of our Churches and sister churches as well as to anyone interested to the honour and Glory of God.

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