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faith in FOCUS

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Editorial

I estimate that I have heard some 4,100 sermons spanning a period of 41 years or so. I remember the Rev. Haverland commented on his 30th anniversary in the ministry that he had preached 3,000 sermons during those first 30 years of his career. That is a lot of sermons and a lot of preaching and hearing.

“How do you hear or better still, listen to a sermon?”

Over the years I have heard quite a few varied responses – some of them go like this: “we’ve heard that all before, why do we need to hear it again?” “I didn’t like that sermon. Didn’t get much out of it. I didn’t agree with him one bit!” “He got it all wrong. I am not going to listen to that type of preaching!” “The preacher needs to go to Toastmasters to learn public speaking.” “The preacher repeated himself.” “I don’t like his preaching.” “I don’t like the preacher! Rather than listen to him, I just read my Bible.” I have even come across people who got themselves so worked up over one small remark, that they missed the whole point of the sermon. Sound familiar? Have you ever been to someone’s home for lunch on a Sunday where they have roast minister on the menu? It might sound humorous, but this sort of thing happens!

There have been times when I encouraged people to listen to the content of what is preached and not how it is delivered. And believe me, I say the same thing to myself.

An important matter to consider is what we are doing in worship. Do we have receptive hearts and minds? Was there due preparation before we came to worship, or were we in such a flurry because of the kids, or an argument with our spouse that we are ill-prepared to engage in dialogue with our faithful God and Saviour? Or, do we just have a bad attitude toward preaching and worship? It matters! Who is the One we worship? He is Almighty and worthy of the very best we bring.

Spare a thought for the man in your pulpit, who quite often goes up there in fear and trembling to proclaim the Word of the LORD. Does he only get your respect when he thunders from the pulpit, or preaches things that you agree with, or will you “... accept [his preaching] not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” (1 Thess 2:13) And spare a thought for the elder who needs to fill the pulpit because the minister fell sick the day before. How many times have I heard: “not another reading service!”

The Lord in His grace has ordained preaching (whether by a minister or elder) for His glory and for the building up of the body of the church, that we would all grow in maturity in Christ. So, let us “guard our steps as we go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools ...”(Eccl 5:1)

Many thanks to our contributors for their insight into preaching and hearing. S.D.G.

Featured in this issue:

Mr John Haverland informs about the purpose of the preaching.

Miss Michaela Couperus considers attitudes to preaching.

Mrs Helena O’Neill investigates the conscientious hearing of the Word in obedience to God, with understanding, faith and reverence.

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

NB: In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

JOHN A HAVERLAND

What is preaching?

Introduction

It is a privilege to write the opening article in this issue on preaching. The first book I ever read on this subject was when I was 17 years old. It was by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones and is titled “Preaching and Preachers”. This made a great impression on me and I have re-read this book a few times. In our denomination the writing and preaching of sermons is the largest part of a minister’s work each week. If I include my preaching as a student and as a pastor I have been preaching for 43 years. Even after all this time I am still nervous before the service and very conscious of my need for the help of the Holy Spirit.

I did my training for the ministry at the Reformed Theological College from 1979 to 1981. During these years the RTC was in a period of transition. Alex Barkley taught me homiletics in my first year, which was his last year of teaching before his retirement.¹ In the second year we had two senior relief lecturers from the USA – Jansema and Anthony Hoekema. In my third year Keith Warren began his first year at the college, teaching homiletics and pastoral care. The variety of lecturers meant I learnt something from each one of them, but I missed hearing a solid theology of preaching.²

After I had been a pastor for about ten years I had an opportunity to study for a Doctor of Ministry degree through Westminster Seminary in Escondido California.³ At the beginning of the course I attended lectures on campus for a month. Dr Joseph Pipa taught us a thorough theology of preaching. This course, and others during that month, gave me a strong conviction about the authority of the preached word and the centrality of preaching in the church.

What is preaching?

It will be useful to begin with a definition: “Preaching is the explanation and exposition of a passage of the Scriptures, in the power of the Holy Spirit, applied in a manner that demonstrates its relevance to

the life and situation of the listeners.”⁴

John Calvin wrote, “... among the many noble endowments with which God has adorned the human race, one of the most remarkable is, that he deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to his service, making his own voice to be heard in them.”⁵ God speaks through preaching as ministers faithfully expound and apply his word. The task of preaching is to make the Scriptures plain to the hearers so they understand its meaning and to apply the word of God so that those who hear understand what they must do in response.

The entire Bible centres on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament predicts him, points forward to him, and longs for him. The New Testament records his birth, life, death and resurrection on earth, and his glorious reign in heaven. Every sermon ought to point us to the person or work of the Lord Jesus in some way or other.⁶

The Bible contains many types of literature (or genres), such as narrative, history, poetry, psalms, proverbs, prophecy, gospels, letters, and apocalyptic literature (e.g. Zechariah and Revelation). Whatever the genre, the purpose of preaching is to communicate the truth of that particular passage and to apply it to the hearers. This brings us to our next question.

What is preaching supposed to achieve?

Having explained the text of the Bible the minister must also apply this to the minds, hearts and lives of his hearers. Sometimes this application comes at the end of the sermon. More often preachers are applying the words of the text all through the sermon. Sometimes this application will be a call to repentance and faith; the preacher will aim at teaching the truth of the Bible, convicting his hearers of their sin and unbelief, and calling them to faith in Jesus Christ. At other times the preacher will encourage and exhort Christians to

“Preaching is the explanation and exposition of a passage of the Scriptures, in the power of the Holy Spirit, applied in a manner that demonstrates its relevance to the life and situation of the listeners.”

live godly and holy lives. From other texts the preacher will explain the mystery of God's great plan of salvation so that all those listening may marvel at the grace of God and praise him in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

Ultimately, understanding the Bible and applying it to our hearts is the work of the Holy Spirit. A minister may preach with much clarity and conviction but it is the Holy Spirit alone who can convict and change people's hearts and lives. This is why preparation and preaching must be soaked in prayer. "What we do in the pulpit is based not only upon the prayers we say during the service; rather it must be the prayers of the whole week that sustain the preacher."⁷

As you listen to sermons you need to make every effort to pay close attention to the reading and preaching of God's word. It helps to get a good night's sleep on Saturday night! Before the service begins turn off your phone and be sure your teenage children do the same. There are enough distractions in the service itself without having your phone competing for your attention with beeps and vibrations!

I preach more sermons than I listen to, but when I listen to a sermon I always take notes as this helps me concentrate and remember what I have heard. Not everyone is a note-taker; if you are I commend this

to you; if you are not you need some system for keeping your focus on the spoken word.

As parents and grandparents we need to supervise our children and grandchildren during worship and encourage them to pay attention. When they are very young they could draw a picture about the service or sermon (I've seen some unflattering but rather amusing pictures drawn of me by various children, usually focused on my bald head!). As children get older they can record the main points of the sermon. At home over the meal or in the afternoon or evening ask them what they remember of the sermon and how it applies to their lives. Keeping up this practice will encourage them to listen.

As preachers we need to be aware of the wide spread of ages and levels of spiritual maturity of those present in worship. We want children to understand the gospel, and we want mature believers to grasp more of the length and breadth of the love of Christ (Eph 3:18). To achieve these goals our preaching must be clear, well structured and to the point. The Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, J C Ryle is a fine example of excellent communication with short words and sentences, and the Baptist preacher C H Spurgeon is a great model of the use of illustrations in sermons that shed light on the truth. As we visit our members and those who are new in the church we

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will be aware of what is going on in their minds, lives and families, and this too will help us apply the truth of God's word to our hearers.

But many question even the validity of preaching in our present age.

Is preaching relevant today?

Many people would answer this question with a resounding, No! Many both inside and outside the church have lost confidence in preaching and regard it as outdated and inefficient. In times past people had their criticisms about sermons, complaining they were dull, boring or unrelated to the point of the text. These criticisms, however, were aimed at the *kind* of sermon preached; today we hear criticism of the sermon as a *means of communication*.

These objections have escalated with the advance of technology, especially television, computers, the internet and smart phones. Modern communication and the world-wide-web offer high-tech competition to preachers. Today it seems unlikely that one person standing alone and speaking from an ancient book could possibly have any effect on this story-saturated, image-driven society.

Not only has modern technology raised people's expectations, it has also lowered their concentration and their ability to assimilate information. Television, with its rapidly changing images, frequent commercial breaks, and its orientation to entertainment has not encouraged serious listening or mental discipline. This has been exacerbated by the pervasive use of texting, Instagram, Tik Tok, and other social media platforms. When people have become so accustomed to brief segments how will they listen to a sermon for twenty or thirty minutes?

Many church leaders have responded by steering the church in a similar direction. If we are going to attract an audience, they argue, we must present the service in an entertaining manner. However, there is a great danger in this: rather than ensuring that the church service is driven by the truth of the Bible it is allowing the 'audience' to drive the service – the service is 'seeker-friendly' rather than God-centred. The primary concern is to find a message and a style that will attract listeners ('seekers') and hold them. In this setting, style all too easily becomes more important than substance; truth gives way to impression.

If all this were not enough contemporary communicators and educators question

the whole concept of preaching, telling us that mono-directional communication is ineffective. In the current climate of opinion preaching is a dinosaur in a computer age.

Preach the word

There is, however, compelling biblical, historical and practical evidence in favour of preaching. It is a biblical (and therefore an effective) means of conveying the gospel message, even in this post Christian age.⁸

Just before his ascension Jesus commissioned his disciples, as representatives of the church of all ages and places, with the task of being his ambassadors; "...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47). In his instructions to Timothy the Apostle Paul noted that there are elders of the church who are set aside especially for the work of "preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17). Timothy himself was a *teaching* elder. Paul urged him to concentrate his attention on preaching: "Command and teach these things ... Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:11,13). "I give you this charge: Preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2).⁹

With his usual insight Calvin notes that "God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors."¹⁰ "Paul shows by these words that this human ministry which God uses to govern the church is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body ... Whoever, therefore, either is trying to abolish this order of which we speak and this kind of government, or discounts it as not necessary, is striving for the undoing or rather the ruin and destruction of the church. For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth."¹¹

Conclusion

Underlying all powerful and effective preaching is the foundation of a biblical theology of preaching. We who preach must believe that the proclamation of the word of God has the power to save the lost and bring them from darkness to light,

from error to truth, from bondage to freedom, and then to help them grow to maturity in their faith and obedience in their lives. Through the preaching of his word the Lord will convert those he has chosen for salvation, opening their hearts to respond to the gospel message and building up those who believe to maturity in their faith (Eph 1:4; (Acts 16:14; Eph 4:11-13). God has promised that his word will be powerful and effective;

"It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

References

- 1 Homiletics is the study of writing and delivering sermons
- 2 I have had the privilege of being a Deputy for Students for the Ministry for three decades and had the opportunity of making an annual visit to the RTC. For the past two decades Dr Murray Capill has been teaching preaching to our students and has taught this with great skill and conviction.
- 3 This was made possible by the generosity of an American Christian couple who had visited New Zealand and were concerned about the lack of Reformed and Presbyterian preaching. They established a scholarship for pastor's to train at Westminster and I was able to make use of this. I had the privilege of meeting this couple while I was at Westminster.
- 4 John A Haverland, *Feed my Sheep – Preaching the Gospel in a Postmodern New Zealand Society*; Grace & Truth Publications, 2000 (available online) p. 12
- 5 John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol 2; ed. John T. McNeill, The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXI; Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, Book IV, i.5
- 6 This is a subject all on its own and would take another article to explain. Indeed, entire books have been written on this topic.
- 7 Quote from Hans Asmussen, *The Ministers Prayer Book*; Edited by John W Doberstein; Collins, London, 1964; p. 297
- 8 In his book *A Churchless Faith* (2000) Alan Jamieson wrote, "New Zealand is arguably at the forefront of the western world's move into an increasingly post-Christian, post-modern, post-church culture." His claim is supported by statistics New Zealand. In the 2013 census 41.9% of New Zealanders identified themselves as having 'No religious affiliation'. In the 2018 census this increased to 48.2%
- 9 The centrality of preaching in the early church is illustrated in that the New Testament has thirty words to describe preaching.
- 10 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; IV i 5, p. 1017
- 11 *ibid*; IV iii 2, p. 1055

Mr John Haverland is the minister of the Reformed Church in Pukekohe.

MICHAELA COUPERUS

Word proclamation confronting attitudes

What do we do when we don't like our Pastor's style of teaching? How do we prepare our hearts to listen to a preacher who's not a talented speaker? Every preacher has a different way of speaking, a different style, and different strengths. We all also have different styles or preferences that we are used to. When a pastor doesn't meet that style or cater to our preferences, our attitudes towards them may shift, and worship can change.

To have a proper discussion on the various attitudes we have towards preachers and their preaching, we first have to define and establish the purpose of the word of

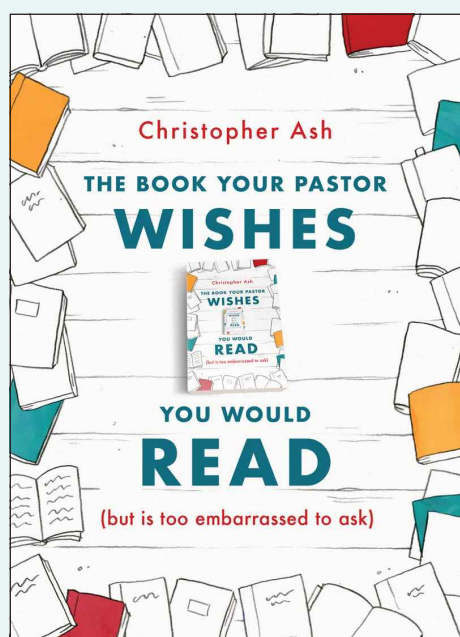
God as it is given by the preacher on a Sunday. This can be summed up in the words of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The sermon's purpose is the same as the purpose of Scripture, to challenge, grow and correct us so that we may be able to go out into the week fully equipped to serve God and share his word in our lives. The minister preaches the word of God with the help of the Holy Spirit so that we, through the Holy Spirit, may be more equipped to go out into the week growing more and more like Christ. While this is a simplified overview of the purpose of a pastor and his sermons it is important to keep it in the back of our minds as we assess our attitudes toward preachers and their preaching.

"His style just doesn't do it for me." "I don't like the way he preaches." Both of these are common statements that I have heard others say and also sentiments I have been guilty of expressing myself. Are these statements valid? What should our attitude be towards a pastor whose style we don't like? I want to emphasize that in addressing these comments I am assuming that the preaching is Christ-centred, so it is a style problem rather than a theological problem. Paul addresses in some form these questions in 1 Corinthians 2:1-8, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech and wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." Paul, as far as we know, was not the most eloquent preacher, in fact, someone fell out of a window as a result of falling asleep while he was preaching.¹ Paul points out that the point of a sermon is

Christ and not his lofty speech or wisdom. While thinking about this question of style and eloquence of a preacher I was challenged by whether I valued being entertained on a Sunday more than I valued the word of God. This is not to say that we can't give feedback to our preachers but I wonder if we think about the message we are giving our pastors first. In our responses and criticisms of our preachers are we telling them that the style and charisma of their preaching are more important than the word itself? Are we placing a greater emphasis on the style of preaching than the word of God? In arguing that eloquence and style prevent us from being able to hear and listen to God's word we undermine the power of the Holy Spirit and his ability to use a pastor to apply the word to our hearts. It is also worth keeping in mind that different preachers have different gifts. While they all are called to preach the word regularly, some pastors are more gifted in eloquence and oration while others can preach but have stronger gifting in areas such as pastoral care. Encourage the gifts that your pastor has and encourage him also in areas that perhaps don't come as naturally to him. Christopher Ash states in his book, *The Book Your Pastor Wishes You Would Read*, that we have two different options in our response to a sermon or a pastor whose preaching doesn't meet our style or eloquence desires. We can either have a session of "Roast Pastor" where we criticize everything that's wrong about the preacher and his preaching. Or we can choose the harder option which is to open our hearts and find something within the sermon that we can apply to our lives and use to grow in our faith.

Attitude to worship

"I just didn't feel challenged today. The sermon didn't seem to apply to me, so I



didn't really get anything out of it." This is another common phrase that I have heard said in church circles. There are some valid concerns in this statement if taken at the surface level. As seen previously we are meant to walk away from worship further equipped to go out into the world as ambassadors for Christ. If a sermon has no element of the gospel in it and therefore no reminder of our sin and Christ's sacrifice, that is a very real concern and should be taken up with the pastor and leadership of the church. However, in a lot of cases, I think the attitude behind this statement is quite opposite to being genuinely concerned with the lack of Christ in a sermon. Often these kinds of statements are backed with a sense of selfishness, an attitude of 'what can I get out of the sermon, how can I benefit from the service, and what's in it for me'. Within this attitude of selfishness is a heart not coming to worship with openness. On the contrary, this attitude is one that thinks only of what I can get out of worship. We should be coming to church every Sunday willing to hear the gospel, regardless of whether it's a specific message that challenges us or whether it is a refresher that reminds us of how much we need a saviour. Also acknowledging that we don't only come to church for ourselves, we also come to bless and encourage our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Having discussed some of the negative attitudes we can have toward pastors and their preaching, how can we ensure that we come to worship on a Sunday with open hearts willing to sit under the word of God? However, before going into a list of suggestions I think it is important to acknowledge that we aren't perfect, and neither is our pastor. We all are sinners, and all are going to have days where we fall short and come to worship on a Sunday with the wrong attitude, unwilling to sit under the word of God. Also, the sermon is not the sole purpose of our meeting on a Sunday, therefore even if the sermon happens to fall short in our eyes, we can still be encouraged and challenged through fellowship with one another. In light of all this, what are some steps we can take to prepare ourselves to sit under God's word with an open and willing attitude? Here are some steps we can take:

Pray for your pastor. Pastors need prayer all of the time but specifically leading up to a Sunday. Pray that God might apply the text that they are preparing, and pray that they might be

guided by the Holy Spirit to preach the truth. Pray that they wouldn't be prideful in their preaching and most of all pray for protection. The devil likes to attack the pastor and their family. Pray also for pastor's wives as they support their husbands in their ministry and also play a large part in keeping the pastor accountable. Praying for our pastors also helps us to view them as humans who are sinners just like us and need prayer just like us.

Secondly, pray for your own heart. Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your heart to be willing to hear what the pastor has to say. Pray that you might have a gracious heart so that if there is a valid concern that you have, you may be able to address it with grace. Pray that God might show you your sinful attitudes towards a pastor and his preaching and replace them with godly ones.

Thirdly, read the passage that is being preached before Sunday. Talk about it in family devotions, and pray about it. This allows you to get your brain thinking and open to the passage, it is also an encouragement to children as it provides a familiarity that will hopefully encourage them to listen more closely to the sermon.

Come to worship well-rested. This is not an easy habit to get into as Saturday is often one of the few days we get off during the week, however, tiredness does not often encourage a positive and open attitude.

Be there! Show up!² It is encouraging to our pastors when we turn up on a Sunday as we are physically able. Also, when you do show up, keep your Bible open during the sermon. Not only is it encouraging to the pastor when we are actively looking at the text it is also important. We need to follow the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:1, who "received the word with all eagerness examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were true." The Bereans were eager to hear the word and were actively checking what the pastor said against Scripture.

Encourage your pastors and get to know them. Encouraging the pastor is part of our responsibility as Christians just as encouraging any believer in Christ. Christopher Ash encourages listeners to thank the pastor not only for things that they agreed with but also for things that were challenging or hard to hear.³ Pastors rarely hear positive

We should be coming to church every Sunday willing to hear the gospel, regardless of whether it's a specific message that challenges us or whether it is a refresher that reminds us of how much we need a saviour. Also acknowledging that we don't only come to church for ourselves, we also come to bless and encourage our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

feedback and it is greatly encouraging for them to be told that God is using their words to challenge and grow people. Encouraging our pastors also helps us as listeners to have a more positive attitude towards a pastor and their preaching as we think about the many ways in which they serve and encourage us. Lastly read Christopher Ash's book, *The Book Your Pastor Wishes You Would Read: (But Is Too Embarrassed to Ask)*, a lot of the steps mentioned here are inspired by the points in his book, and provide great insight into how we can support our pastors whether we like their style or not.

We are all sinners, our pastors included. There are times when the phrases above enter our minds and cross our hearts, there are days when we come to church with the wrong attitude. There are also going to be times when the pastor that we currently have doesn't preach in the way we would like. However, through the help of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, we can strive to correct these wrong attitudes and seek every week to be further equipped to go out into the world. I would like to end with the words of Psalm 100, which provides a beautiful picture of what our attitude toward worship and the word of God should be.

"Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and
we are his people and the sheep of
his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations."

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Footnotes

- 1 'Acts 20 ESV – Paul in Macedonia and Greece – After – Bible Gateway', accessed 14 December 2022, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%20&version=ESV>.
- 2 Christopher Ash, *Listen up!: A Practical Guide to Listening to Sermons* (The Good Book Company, 2009).
- 3 Christopher Ash, *The Book Your Pastor Wishes You Would Read: (But Is Too Embarrassed to Ask)* (The Good Book Company, 2019).

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The National Publishing Committee has a surplus of 214 Forms and Confessions booklets.

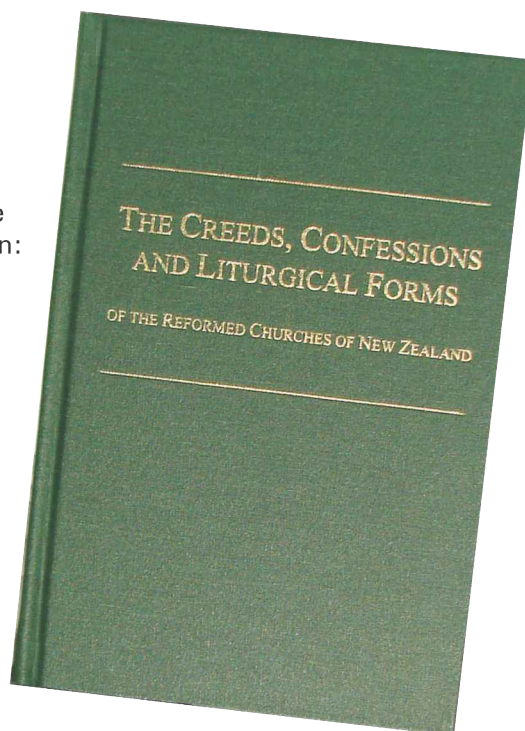
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HELENA O'NEILL

Be an ACTIVE listener

The Westminster Confession of Faith Article 21:5 says “sound preaching and conscientious hearing of the Word in obedience to God, with understanding, faith and reverence” should be elements of our worship. But what does this mean for us in a worship setting and what is the difference between hearing and listening? This article touches on some practical applications around how to prepare ourselves for better listening as we hear God’s word.

The importance of listening

It’s easy to think that listening to a sermon is a passive activity. But it’s not. It should be a very active process. The Gospel Coalition nicely sums up the importance of listening: *“After the parable of the sower, Jesus says: ‘Consider carefully how you listen’ (Luke 8:18). He says if we listen in one way, we will be given more, but if we listen in another way, even what we think we have will be taken from us. It’s a life-and-death business, listening to sermons”*.¹

Hearing, listening, and the human brain

Hearing in itself is a passive activity. Anyone with normally functioning ear and brain activities will involuntarily hear sounds of a certain intensity. However, we do exercise control over the attention given to the sounds we hear. The person who lives beside a train track may say they never hear the trains. They do in fact hear them, but their nervous system is so accustomed to the sound they can choose to tune it out subconsciously. This is possible because that person controls their thought processes and can choose whether or not to listen.

We all know that it’s relatively easy to employ selective hearing if we’re thinking about something else, ultimately tuning out sounds around us. Even when we really try to listen to someone, our minds often wander despite our good intentions, making it easy to miss much of what was said.

The physiological reason our minds wander, even when we try to listen, is because the human brain is capable of processing words at a much higher speed than a person is able to speak. The average rate of speech for an English speaker is about 150 words per minute (although this varies between countries/regions and ages); the brain can process about 800 words per minute. While a speaker’s words enter our brains at a slow speed, we continue to think at high speed.

So, we have plenty of time to absorb the words we hear and still think of other things at the same time. At first, we can absorb everything the other person is saying, despite our private mental sidetracks. Unless we make a conscious effort to continue to listen, our distractions tend to take over. Before we know it we’ve missed some of what is being said because we were consumed by our own thoughts.²

Active or reflective listening

What is active listening? American psychologists Carl Rogers and Richard Farson coined the term “active listening” in 1957 in a paper of the same title. It’s the practice of preparing to listen, observing what verbal and non-verbal messages are being sent, and then providing appropriate feedback for the sake of showing attentiveness to the message being presented. The overall goal of active listening is to eliminate any misunderstandings and establish clear communication of thoughts and ideas between the speaker and listener. Sometimes it’s referred to as reflective listening.

There are three main steps in this process: comprehension, retaining, and responding. Comprehension is a shared meaning between parties in communication; attentiveness is key. Careful attention should be paid to repeated parts of the message being communicated — repetition is a storytelling skill often used in the Bible, and one we are all familiar with. The second step, retaining, is essential to the active listening process because the information

Attentive listening will pick up on non-verbal cues such as tone, inflection, gestures, and facial expressions which provide the listener further insight into what the speaker is trying to convey. The amount of information retained always increases when the listener is attentive; information is best retained in adults if the adult has experience in what is being said and when visual contact with the speaker is maintained.

retained when a person is involved in the listening process is how meaning is extracted from words. You're more likely to remember what's been said if you are attentive and comprehend the message shared by your minister or pastor. Finally, responding is characterised by paraphrasing, clarifying, and then summarising.

Active listening in a worship setting

That's all well and good if you're a counsellor or practising a bit of self-help, but how can we apply this to corporate worship? As I mentioned earlier, we're already familiar with some of the tools used by our preachers because we see them used in the Bible. I previously mentioned repetition as a key tool in both written and spoken word, but we also need to attentively listen for emphasis as the preacher highlights a key point. Attentive listening will pick up on non-verbal cues such as tone, inflection, gestures, and facial expressions which provide the listener further insight into what the speaker is trying to convey. The amount of information retained always increases when the listener is attentive; information is best

retained in adults if the adult has experience in what is being said and when visual contact with the speaker is maintained. Our preachers know this and will usually include a few key anecdotes to make the topic relatable when looking at our own lives. When it comes to responding to preaching, we can do this in a variety of ways. Some like to take notes and summarise the key points of the sermon, while others respond by paraphrasing in their own words when discussing with others.

James 1:19-25 (ESV)

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Learn to listen. Be teachable. Have an open heart to God's word. Sometimes we can think we have heard it all and switch off. But we don't come to church to be entertained. We always have something



new to learn from the Bible, we need to listen and be quick to examine His word. For the conscientious hearing of the Word, we must set aside temptation and distraction and ask God to open our hearts. Sometimes we come to church with a heart and mind full of distractions: You may have had an argument with a spouse, family member, friend, or flat-mate on the drive or walk to church and your emotions overwhelm you. Or you may feel overwhelmed by problems in your life. Taking a moment to turn to the Lord in prayer, pouring out your sins and cares while also asking for help to concentrate can make a big difference to how well we listen during worship.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Be honest with your sins and struggles. Open your Bible and memorise God's word in your hearts and minds. We come to hear, to worship, and to obey. After the Sunday sermon, think about some way in which you will obey the preached word. Write it down. Tell someone what it is. It may be something to start doing or to stop doing. It may be words to speak or to stop speaking. Grow in your faith by actively listening to the word of God, and living his commands.

Be fully engaged

In an article on worship, R.C. Sproul says that one of the principles learned from the Old Testament is this: the whole person is to be engaged in the experience of worship.

"Certainly, the minds, hearts, and souls of the worshipers are to be engaged, but when we come to worship on Sunday morning, we do not come as disembodied minds, hearts, or souls. None of our experiences are purely intellectual, emo-

*tional, or spiritual. The experience of human life also involves physical aspects. This means that all five senses are involved in the experience of living. We are creatures who live life not merely with our minds, hearts, and souls, but with our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch."*³

So let us engage our whole selves when we come to worship God, incorporating active listening as we seek to be conscientious in our hearing of the Word in obedience to God, with understanding, faith and reverence.

Practical tips

- Read the Bible on a daily basis to develop in you a healthy appetite for God's word.
- Pray that God would make your heart open and receptive to His word.
- Pray for the preachers.
- Prepare everything for Sunday on Saturday (set out clothes, set the breakfast table etc).
- Get enough sleep.
- Don't be late (easier said than done!). Aim to be in church 10 minutes prior to the service.
- Put your cellphone on silent or turn it off before the service.
- During the sermon, follow through the text in your Bible.
- Take notes if you find it helps you concentrate.

References

- 1 <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-ways-to-become-a-better-sermon-listener/>
- 2 <https://www.speakeasyinc.com/hearing-vs-listening/>
- 3 <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/sight-place-and-the-presence-of-god>

Mrs Helena O'Neill is a member of the Reformed Church in Pukekohe.



The Free Reformed School Association (Tas) Inc. invites applications for the following positions:

TEACHERS

Urgently require Secondary and Primary teachers for 2023

Full-Time, Part-Time, 12-month or 6-month appointments accepted

At JCS, our vision is to be a *strongly connected* community of learners, deeply committed to our faith and to continual growth, nurturing individuals to be their best in the service of God and to His glory.

We are looking to add enthusiastic, committed teachers to our team for the 2023 school year. Due to growing class sizes we need additional, suitably qualified, teachers. Applications for full-time and part-time employment welcome, with 6-month or 12-month appointments considered.

John Calvin School currently has over 120 students from Kinder to Grade 10 with an average combined class size of 19. We are a well-resourced school, located in Launceston, a beautiful city in the north of Tasmania, a breathtaking part of God's creation. (<https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/>)

Applicants must be a member of the Free Reformed Church of Australia or any of her sister churches, be able to be registered to teach in Tasmania and be registered to work with vulnerable people.

Conditions and salary are based on the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020.

Expressions of interest for future positions, full-time or part-time, are welcome.

For application forms, see the school website (www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment).

Forward completed applications to the Business Manager:

- E-mail: wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au
- Address: PO Box 89, Launceston 7250, Tasmania, Australia.

For more information, contact the Principal, Mr Daniel Coote

- E-mail: cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au

Dear Sir,

I am writing to request a formal withdrawal and apology for the inclusion of an article in the December 2022 *Faith in Focus*. The article, entitled *Cardinal Muller: Bill Gates and George Soros stand for 'diabolic' New World Order* was republished from *LifeSiteNews* and details an interview with German Catholic, Cardinal Gerhard Muller.

The article made several unevidenced, spurious, and inflammatory claims. These include that Bill Gates and George Soros are actively and secretly trying to usher in the New World Order (a shadowy cabal intent on implementing a totalitarian world government); that Gates' charitable contributions are designed to undermine democratically-elected governments; that Gates' and Soros' contributions could be achieved by any normal student in their first semester; and that any person who names these ideas "conspiracy theories" is a "mentally debilitated anti-fascist who conducts their 'fight against the right' with Nazi methods, i.e., intimidation and threatening violence...".

Gates is a self-described globalist. He believes that connected economies allow for the better transmission of ideas and IT, improve product prices and innovation, lift living standards and create better health and wealth outcomes, especially for developing countries. Although the merits of his globalist agenda can be debated, there is no evidence that Gates is seeking a global totalitarian government or is connected to any supposed New World Order. Any suggestion that he is linked to a New World Order appears to come from anti-vaccine proponents who believe Gates' vaccine development and distribution is a means for controlling and tracking populations of people.

Gates' charitable donations amount to over \$50 billion. His foundation funds a variety of causes, particularly focussing on disease, poverty, climate change and access to healthcare and education. His work in vaccine development and distribution has him credited with reducing polio cases by 99 percent since 1988 and saving around 18 million children from paralysis. (I'm not sure what your first semester at university

was like, but I considered myself to be a "normal student" and I certainly couldn't rival this contribution.) I do agree with critics who consider that philanthropy on this scale can potentially wield disproportionate power on the global stage, but I am not convinced as Catholic Cardinal George Muller is, that these charitable efforts are designed to destabilise democracies and increase dependence on Gates (I assume the Catholic Cardinal is suggesting this would reduce the barriers to ushering in Gates' global totalitarian government.).

Gates is used to having spurious and slanderous claims levelled at him by people like Catholic Cardinal George Muller. He believes that these have arisen because of the combination of his efforts in combatting a frightening viral pandemic coupled with the rise of social media. In his own words, "Nobody would have predicted that I... would be so prominent in these really evil theories. I hope it goes away."

Christians have every right to be wary and vigilant about global powers, movements, and ideologies. But we are commanded to deal in what is "true", and to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God... to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." If we are to authentically and usefully heed this command we should be starting from a position of evidence and employing serious consideration. I am not particularly a Gates fan. Gates is not the Messiah that will save "a world turned upside down". But some of his policies will be gospel-affirming and some of his policies will not. This article, based as it is in speculation and defamation and arguing that any opponent countering its claims is a mentally debilitated Nazi, does not aid this debate.

In Christ,

Esther Zorn-de Reus

Editors' response

Dear Esther Zorn-de Reus

Thank you for your letter Re: *Cardinal Müller: Bill Gates and George Soros stand for 'diabolic' New World Order* article. As you correctly noted this was an interview with the German Catholic, Cardinal Gerhard Müller and it was republished from *LifeSiteNews* and appeared in the December 2022 issue (Vol 49/11).

While you may not agree with the contents of the article, and you are free not to, the article was not speculative nor defamatory. The contents were Cardinal Müller's opinion alone and it was stated as such. Simply put, it is just reportage.

The news article was appropriately included in the section *World in focus* which is comprised of a variety of news items from around the world, even including the opinions of other church leaders whom we may or may not like, and other contentious issues which currently feature regularly in a wide range of news feeds and opinion pieces.

Neither are the articles or opinions in this column to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, nor that of the editor.

While I defend your right and the right of others to express your/their disagreement with the opinion/news piece, I do not agree that the request for a formal withdrawal and apology is necessary.

Your's in Him by grace
Walter Walraven

Mid-America and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

DR. CORNELIS VENEMA & JAE KIM

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" says the apostle in Romans 10:15, quoting the prophet Isaiah. Over the past 40 years, Mid-America Reformed Seminary has been in the business of making beautiful, so to speak, the feet of those who desire to labour in and for the church of Jesus Christ, found in all corners of the world, by training them to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. A good number of the feet that have entered and walked about the grounds of this institution have come all the way from "Down Under," where they have walked the beaches, hiked the hills, and strolled the streets of one of the most beautiful countries in the world – New Zealand.

Mid-America has enjoyed a steady stream of "Kiwi" students over the years. Some graduates have also moved to New Zealand for the first time, seeking to serve in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). Eight alumni are currently serving as ministers in the RCNZ – the Revs. Leo de Vos, Peter Kloosterman, Andre Holtslag, Erik Stolte, Albert Couperus, Aaron Warner, Joshua Flinn, and Nathaniel Rademaker – making up over a third of the ministers there. Mid-America's student body comes predominantly from the United States and Canada, but it may surprise some that New Zealand students rank third among the countries from which Mid-America's students have come.

Mid-America's longstanding ties to the RCNZ go back to Dr. Venema's childhood

when his father served the RCNZ in the pioneer days of the federation. When the newly-formed RCNZ contacted the Christian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, requesting that these denominations send English-speaking ministers to help them in the 1950s, Dr. Venema's father answered the call. He served churches of the RCNZ in Dunedin on the South Island and Buckland's Beach on the North Island. Due to the influence of ministers from both the CRC and the OPC, the RCNZ is a unique Reformed

Mr Andre Holtslag (right) and Mrs Anita Holtslag (left) with Jae and Jinny and Judah Kim in the USA.



federation representing an amalgam of Reformed and Presbyterian influences. For example, the RCNZ holds to four confessional standards (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession of Faith) and uses the nomenclature of “session,” “presbytery,” and “synod” for its narrower and broader assemblies. When Dr. Venema attended the Synod of the RCNZ in 2017, he noted that the presence of RCNZ students at Mid-America was one of the unexpected joys of God’s providence during his time at the seminary.


This past October, we had the pleasure of welcoming back on campus Rev. Andre Holtslag ('07) and his wife Anita, joining

Rev. Daniel Wilson of the RCNZ and his wife, Raewyn. The purpose of their visit was to meet with RCNZ student Jae Kim as “deputies for students to the ministry” to discuss his spiritual life and well-being, his academic progress, his relationship with his fellow students, faculty, and local congregation, and to address any needs or concerns. Such on-campus visits typically occur once during each RCNZ student’s time at Mid-America. They are part of assessing students’ suitability for ministry and making preliminary arrangements for a vicariate, a year-long internship in one of the NZ congregations after graduation. Jae is in his senior year of the Master of Divinity program. He plans to return to NZ with his wife Jinny and their son Judah upon

graduation in 2023 to begin a vicariate. This visit was an encouraging and refreshing time for the Kims, who have been away from home for the last two years.

In addition to spending time with the Kims, Revs. Wilson and Holtslag sat in on classes, each brought a chapel message each to the seminary community, and met with the faculty to discuss Jae’s progress and matters relating to the RCNZ and its ongoing relationship with Mid-America. Through their visit and interest in the work of Mid-America, we were reminded tangibly of our partnership with churches throughout the world, including those in New Zealand, in preparing our students to make disciples from among all nations.

Friday, December 9, 2022



Anniversary

2023 marks **70 years** since our churches (by God’s grace) became the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

To commemorate this milestone, *Faith in Focus* will be producing an anniversary issue for July this year, Lord willing. We would be interested in receiving articles/memories about some of the events that have helped shape our churches over this time. You may want to submit your own personal reflections on the life and times of your particular congregation or photos that could be of interest (with captions please so we know who’s who!).

If you are, or have been a minister, elder or deacon in our churches you too are welcome to send us your story. We hope to receive a wide variety of material to cover this 70 year timeframe, so thank you in advance for your contributions.

All copy must be with the editor by early May 2023.

Send by email to the editor: walterwalraven@icloud.com
or hard copy to: **W Walraven. 6 Valintine Place, Strandon, New Plymouth, 4312.**

Kinsman Redeemer

QUENTIN B. FALKENA

Pawn shops, foreclosures, and bankruptcy highlight the reality of financial crisis that people experience in our day. Have you ever needed financial assistance? Maybe you have asked a family member to help pay your credit-card bill, student loan, or mortgage payment. Or maybe a family member has asked you to help pay off a debt.

The need for financial help is a useful way to introduce the idea of the kinsman redeemer. In short, a kinsman redeemer is a relative who, at his own expense, pays off the debts of another. But this theme points beyond finances, because our greatest need is not for someone to pay off financial debts – however great that need might be – but for someone to redeem us from the debt our sins have incurred. This is how the Old Testament idea of the kinsman redeemer bears on our understanding of redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The idea of a kinsman redeemer is laid out in the Levitical laws, displayed by men such as Boaz and Jeremiah, and fulfilled by Jesus, who paid for our sins with His precious blood.

Instructions for a kinsman redeemer are given in Leviticus 25, in close connection to the Year of Jubilee, when debts are forgiven, family land is returned, and prisoners are set free. If an Israelite went into debt, he might have to sell his inherited land or perhaps even sell himself into slavery. If this were to happen, a close relative would pay the price to redeem the land and/or buy him out of slavery (the closer the family relation, the greater the obligation to act as a kinsman redeemer). The cost of redemption was calculated proportionately to the Year of Jubilee.

In the book of Ruth, the obligations of a kinsman redeemer play out in a real-life scenario. Naomi's husband and sons had died in Moab, and after many years Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem. Boaz is a near kinsman and is honored to be asked to act as the redeemer, but there is a closer

relative who has the first right. When the closer kinsman declines because the cost of redemption and marrying Ruth would put his own estate at risk, Boaz, at great cost to himself, pays the price to redeem the land and takes Ruth as his wife.

This theme surfaces again in the life of the prophet Jeremiah. In response to Jeremiah's complaint, God says, "I will . . . redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless" (Jer. 15:21). Later, Jeremiah himself becomes another important example of a kinsman redeemer when he pays the redemption price for his cousin's land (32:6–15), giving hope for the future.

This brief overview from Leviticus, Ruth, and Jeremiah paints the picture to help us see and understand our own need for redemption. Because of our sins, the cost of this redemption is remarkably high, but the Lord Jesus Christ paid this price in full. We see that clearly in a brief survey of the following New Testament passages.

Early in His earthly ministry Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. He read these words from Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. . . . He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives . . . to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19). Jesus was making a reference to the Year of Jubilee and to His own work of redemption when He said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).

The Apostles properly understood Jesus' saving work along the lines of redemption. In Galatians 3:13, Paul says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Peter also speaks of the redemption that Jesus accomplished, emphasizing the high price that was paid. We read in 1 Peter 1:18–19, "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

The New Testament emphasizes that we are spiritual debtors. The only acceptable price for the debt of our sin is the precious blood of Jesus. When that price was paid, the debt was canceled and sinners were set free. What is remarkable is that the incarnate Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (Heb. 2:11). He really

is our kinsman redeemer. Praise God for such a great redemption.

Dr. Quentin B. Falkena is pastor of Cornerstone Christian Church in Medford, Ore.

Resistance

CHRISTINA R. FOX

One of the results of the pandemic is that I now have a gym in my basement. Over the course of these many months, my teenage sons added various workout machines and equipment to what used to be a playroom. There's now a bench, free weights, a pull-up bar, and a squat rack, all to help them in their strength training.

As anyone who works out can tell you, resistance is necessary for developing muscles; they grow and strengthen as they push against a force or weight. Resistance training – pushing, lifting, and pulling objects – helps the body stay healthy and strong.

This is true for our spiritual lives as well. Yet while we readily understand the need for resistance in our physical health, we aren't so quick to accept its role in our spiritual lives. At least, I don't. I prefer my days to go smoothly and as planned. I don't want to encounter any challenges or obstacles in my path. I resist what is uncomfortable or hard.

Yet the Bible teaches that hardship is like those weights now stacked in my basement; it serves to strengthen us in the faith. Whether it's the daily inconveniences and interruptions that frustrate us or the painful losses, conflicts, and temptations we face, hardship provides opportunities for us to grow in faith and depend on the Lord's grace and provision. The hard days that push and pull and stretch us serve a greater purpose: to transform us into the image of Christ.

Paul wrote that suffering and hardship develops character in believers:

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom. 5:3–5)

Suffering isn't good in itself; it is often the result of sin and evil. But God uses what is not good to produce Christlike character in us.

This means that we need a future perspective on our struggles. We must look beyond the here and now and to what God will accomplish through our trials. As an athlete pushes through the pain, knowing that it results in increased strength and endurance and a medal at the finish line, we keep our gaze set on eternity, when we will be perfected at the day of Christ Jesus. Peter encourages us:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes

though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6–7)

Resistance plays an important role in our spiritual lives. When we face hardship, may we respond in joy, knowing that it shapes us into the image of Christ.

Christina R. Fox is a counselor, retreat speaker, and author of several books, including A Holy Fear and Like Our Father: How God Parents Us and Why That Matters for Our Parenting.

Focus on faith

LETTERS OF JOHN NEWTON



Dear Miss Medhurst,

The best advice I can send, or the best wish for you – is that you may have an abiding and experimental sense of those words of the apostle which are just now upon my mind, “*Looking unto Jesus!*” **The duty, the privilege, the safety, the unspeakable happiness, of a believer – are all comprised in that one sentence!** Let us first pray that the eyes of our faith and understanding may be opened and strengthened; and then let us fix our whole gaze upon Him!

But HOW are we to behold Him? I answer, in the *looking-glass of His written Word!* There He is represented to us in a variety of views. The wicked world can see no form nor loveliness in the portraiture He has given of Himself. Yet blessed be God,

there are those who can “behold His glory as the glory of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth!” And while they behold it – they find themselves “changed into His image, from glory to glory,” by the transforming influence of the Spirit.

In vain do we use our *reasonings* and *arguments* and *resolutions* – to beat down our sins and corruptions, and to silence our fears; but a *believing view of Jesus* does the business!

When *heavy trials* in life are appointed to us, and we are called to give up, or perhaps to pluck out, a *right eye* – it is an easy matter for a bystander to say “Be comforted;” and it is as *useless* as easy; but a view of Jesus by faith comes home to the point.

When we can fix our thoughts upon Him, as laying aside all His honors, and submitting for our sakes to *drink off the bitter cup of the wrath of God to the very dregs*; and when we further consider that He who thus suffered for our sins, knows and sympathizes with all our weaknesses; that He is now the Supreme Disposer of all that concerns us; that He numbers the very hairs of our heads; appoints every trial we meet with in number, weight, and measure; and will allow nothing to befall us but what shall contribute to our good – this view, I say, is a *medicine* suited to the disease, and powerfully reconciles us to every cross!

When Jesus is upon our thoughts, either in His humbled – or His exalted state; either as bleeding on the cross – or as worshiped by all the host of Heaven; then we can ask the apostle’s question with a befitting disdain, “Shall we continue in *sin* that grace may abound? God forbid!”

What! shall I sin against my Lord, my Love, my Friend – who once died for my sins, and now lives and reigns on my behalf! What! shall I sin against my Redeemer who supports, and leads, and guides, and feeds me every day? God forbid! No! I would rather wish for a thousand *hands* and *eyes* and *feet* and *tongues* – for ten thousand *lives* – that I might devote them *all* to His blessed service!

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith!” Hebrews 12:2

Uganda rejects inclusion of LGBT agenda, abortion in proposed trade agreement with EU

Jean Mondoro

Thu Nov 3, 2022 – 2:15 pm EDT

MAPUTO CITY, Mozambique (*LifeSite-News*) — A member of the Ugandan parliament has opposed the pro-LGBT and abortion provisions that may be included in an updated trade agreement between the European Union and many countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific.

Thomas Tayebwa, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament in Uganda, spoke on behalf of his country at the African, Caribbean, and Pacific-European Union (ACP-EU) summit earlier this week about the unnecessary addition of clauses which support the LGBT agenda and abortion in the revised Cotonou Agreement.

"We are a society that is not ready for homosexuality, and we are a society that is not ready for abortion," Tayebwa said at the summit. "We are not yet a society that has lost the moral compass. As Africa, we believe that the institution of the family is the core of whatever we are doing."

The ACP-EU Partnership Agreement being discussed at the October 29 – November 2 summit is an updated version of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, which was signed over 20 years ago and is used for "governing trade and economic relations between the EU and all 48 Sub-Saharan countries in Africa, 16 Caribbean countries and 15 Pacific countries," according to a press release.

"We have discovered that with the Post Cotonou agreement, there are hidden clauses concerning human rights," Tayebwa said. "Clauses to do with sexuality, promotion of LGBT/homosexuality, and clauses to do with abortion. The EU is demanding that we take a certain route; they should also know the character of our society."

According to the same press release,



the "ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly [JPA] was created to bring together the elected representatives of European Parliament and the elected representatives of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific states that have signed the Cotonou Agreement."

Meeting just twice a year, the organization focuses on addressing human rights issues, democracy, and "the common values of humanity."

Although this is the most recent incident, this is not the first time that Uganda or another African country has taken a stand against the LGBT agenda and push for the "right" to abortion which is increasingly permeating the western world.

In October, Uganda publicly refuted a statement from the United Nations that abortion is a "human right." A total of 33 African nations rejected the organization's call for all of its members to provide "access to safe abortion" within their borders.

Additionally, Kenya enforced laws in September which ban the marketing and broadcasting of any movies featuring LGBT content. The country also warned women to avoid a Chinese birth control pill in circulation, which is illegal as well as dangerous.

<https://www.lifesitenews.com/author/jeanmondoro/>

*Deputy Speaker of Ugandan Parliament
Thomas Tayebwa*

Opposition Growing to Woke Gender Policies at UN

By Stefano Gennarini, J.D. |
November 25, 2022

NEW YORK, November 25 (C-Fam). Sixty-two countries revolted against the European Union, the Biden government, and other powerful Western countries on Wednesday in the UN General Assembly. The countries attempted to remove controversial language on abortion, homosexuality, and transgenderism in a resolution on women and development. Their attempt failed but the vote showed there is no consensus at the United Nations on these issues.

Progressive Western powers and the woke UN bureaucracy want the world to

think that these issues are settled and non-controversial at the international level. Increasingly, countries from Africa and elsewhere are showing they are not acceptable, as they did in the Second Committee of the General Assembly this week.

Traditional countries accused the West of caring more about controversial social issues instead of funding policies to help women escape poverty and hunger.

"We forgot the very millions of women not able today, November 24, to have a single meal for themselves, a single meal for their kids, a single glass of water for themselves, a single glass of water for their kid," said a delegate from Cameroon tersely

violence, comprehensive sexuality education, and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination." These are very controversial terms in UN negotiations that are not internationally agreed by all countries.

Cameroon was one of sixty-two traditional countries that voted against keeping "multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination" in the resolution. The term of art for intersectional gender policies, commonly known as "woke", is pushed by Western countries to add homosexual and transgender issues as cross-cutting concerns in all UN policies.

He accused Western countries of turning the UN into a divisive "elitist academia" and focusing on a Western "individualistic human right agenda" instead of universally agreed development priorities.

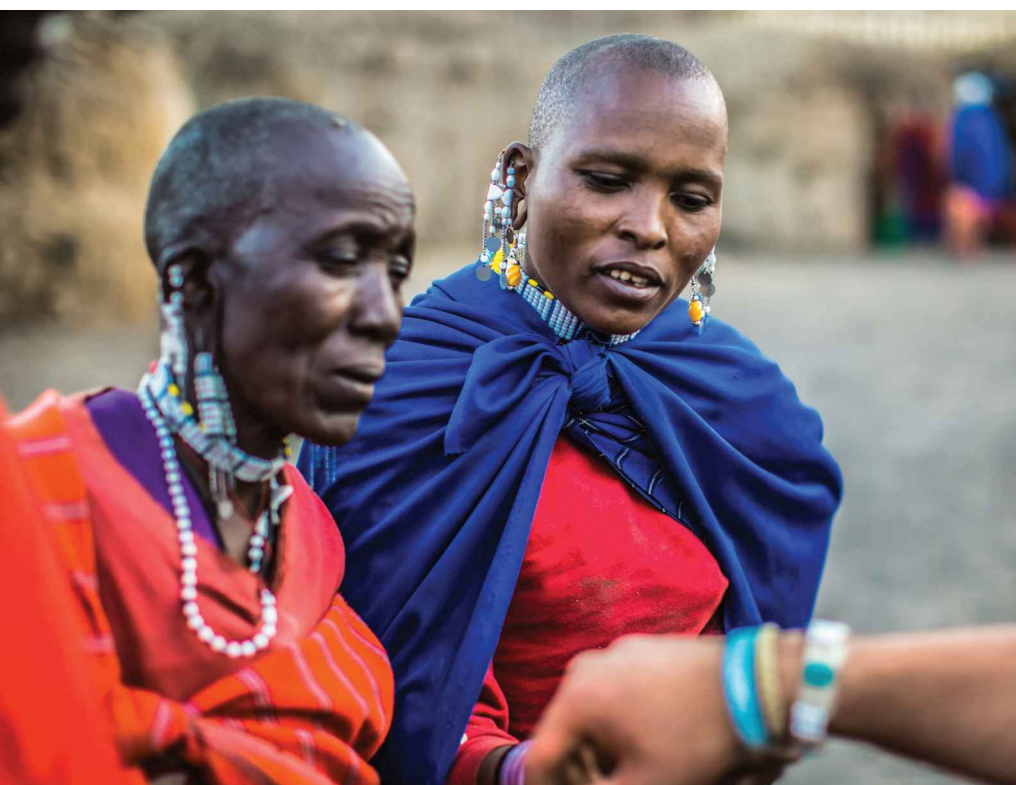
While traditional countries were ultimately unsuccessful in removing the controversial language, the strong show of support from one third of UN member states showed that opposition to intersectional gender policies has intensified at the United Nations. This, despite pressure from the Biden administration and the European Union.

Several delegates echoed Cameroon's statement, including Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iraq, Nigeria, speaking on behalf of Algeria, Ethiopia, Malaysia, Iran, Niger, Sudan, Senegal, Syria, and others.

Opposition to gender ideology has been steadily growing at the United Nations as more countries become aware of the implications of adding language about "multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination" in UN resolutions.

UN agencies implement the term as requiring the promotion of acceptance for homosexuality and transgender issues. For example, a checklist of the UN human rights office for the UN system's work to protect minorities systematically adds LGBT concerns to UN programming under the heading "Multiple, Compounded and Intersecting Discrimination." The agency for women, UN Women, also has an Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit that promotes sexual orientation and gender identity under the same rubric.

Twenty-one countries objected to the term when it was first used in the annual resolution on women and development. Since then, it has been added in many UN resolutions about women's issues over the objections of traditional countries. This year, for the first time traditional countries have proposed amendments to remove the term from resolutions in the third committee and the second committee of the General



during the adoption of the resolution.

He said UN agencies routinely tell poor countries that Western governments have only made money available for "sexual rights and comprehensive sexuality education" and "women and girls in all their diversity."

The delegate was visibly frustrated that negotiations on the resolution were too focused on controversial social issues.

Instead of debating "financing for building resilience, infrastructures, vocational schools, STEM, means for women economic empowerment" he said, "we spent more energy debating how many references to have on gender-based

Pakistan: Christians continue to face blasphemy convictions and violent attacks

While Pakistan celebrates 75 years of independence, the Christian minority continues to face discrimination, harassment and violence because of their faith.

On 8 August, a Catholic man was killed and three teenagers injured when two gunmen on motorbikes opened fire in a Christian colony in the town of Mastung, 45kms south of Quetta, central west Pakistan. The victim, Wilson Masih, was the brother of Hendry Masih, a Christian member of Pakistan's Parliament who was killed by his bodyguard in Quetta in 2014.

Blasphemy

On 4 July Ashfaq Masih, 34, a Christian bicycle mechanic from the Green Town neighborhood in Lahore in northeast Pakistan, was sentenced to death for blasphemy during an argument with a customer, Muhammad Irfan.

Irfan had asked Masih to not charge him for a bicycle repair because he was a follower of Sufi and its saints but the mechanic had "rejected his request, saying he only followed Jesus and wasn't interested in Irfan's religious status as a Muslim," Masih's attorney, Riaz Anjum, told *Morning Star News*. Masih was then arrested and charged with disrespecting the Prophet Muhammad.

The bicycle shop owner denies the charges and believes the case against him is based on a conspiracy between his landlord Muhammad Ashfaq and Muhammad Naveed who owns a bicycle repair shop nearby. Both men had harassed Masih in the past and "Masih believes [they] conspired to implicate him in a blasphemy case using Irfan," Anjum said.

In another blasphemy case, on 8 June, the Lahore High Court upheld the death sentence of two Christian brothers who were found guilty in 2018 of posting blasphemous content on the internet. Qaiser and Amoon Ayub have maintained they are innocent. The two brothers have been in prison since 2011 and now say they will take their case to the Supreme Court.

While blasphemy is punishable by death in Pakistan, and many have been convicted under these laws, no-one has ever been executed for it.

Increase

The central-western region of the country, bordering Afghanistan, has seen an uptick in violence in recent months caused by separatist groups and Islamist militants.

Meanwhile, despite the acquittal from the death penalty of Asia Bibi by the Supreme Court in 2019, the number of blasphemy cases involving Christians has also been on the rise, according to the country report by religious freedom charity *Open Doors*. "The blasphemy laws are well known for being used for settling personal scores, making personal gains or for satisfying grudges one neighbor may have against another," it said.

+ By World Watch Monitor Pakistan
August 22, 2022

Algeria

The family is the source of greatest pressure for Christians in Algeria, most of whom are converts from Muslim backgrounds. Pressure also comes from the law. A 2006 law, forbidding public assembly for purposes of practising a faith other than Islam, has created a more restrictive environment for Christians. This affects most Christian places of worship, except for Catholic churches and one Protestant church. In addition, Islamist movements such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb are increasingly making their presence felt.

Since November 2017 at least 6 churches have been closed and several others received letters ordering them to stop their activities because they did not have the license required by a 2006 law that regulates non-Muslim worship.

Most EPA churches have been challenged on this matter, said MEC, but those who applied for permits all had been ignored, making it impossible for them to adhere to the regulations.

In May 2018, the EPA called on the Algerian government to stop its harassment of churches and individual Christians, and to treat them equally as per the constitution.

Afghanistan

It is illegal to be anything other than a Muslim in Afghanistan, a tribal society where leaving Islam is seen as a betrayal of the tribe. Christians who are discovered

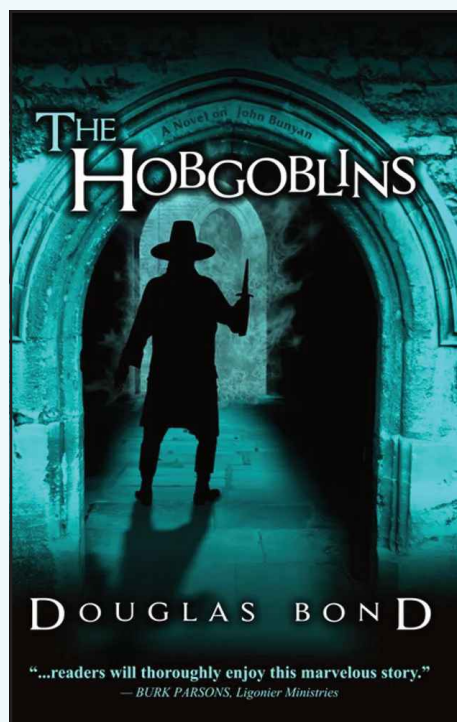
may be sent to a psychiatric hospital, on the grounds that no sane person would leave Islam. Baptism is a crime punishable by death. Radical Islamic militants, such as the Islamic State group (new on the scene) or the Taliban, are expanding their control and rule over more than 40% of the country already.

Azerbaijan

Open Doors describes the oil-rich former Soviet republic as "the country with the most sophisticated and intelligent dictatorship". Religious freedom is enshrined in the Constitution, but constrained by the regular tightening of policies and regulations governing religious activity. Successive rounds of re-registration have diminished the number of qualified Baptist Union congregations from ten to zero. While the government burnishes its freedom credentials before international audiences, at home its agents infiltrate church congregations. It reviews all religious publications. Mission work by foreigners is outlawed.

Bahrain

This tiny, mainly Shia country is relatively tolerant, compared to many of its Arab neighbours, and its Constitution provides for religious freedom. A large number of expatriate Christians work and live in Bahrain and are relatively free to practise their faith in private, but evangelising Muslims is illegal. Christians from a Muslim background also face pressure from family members, community leaders and government officials. Bahrain is very influenced by the politics of neighbouring Saudi Arabia.



The Hobgoblins: a novel on John Bunyan

by Douglas Bond 2020 / 268 pages

Reviewed by Jon Dykstra

There are people who carry out such heinous acts and live such immoral lives that we'd think, surely they could never be saved. And in 17th-century England, many would have thought that about the young John Bunyan. Yes, this is the same Bunyan who penned the most famous Christian allegory in history, *Pilgrim's Progress*. But the man he became is not how he began.

In Bond's remarkable *Hobgoblins*, we are transported back to Bunyan's early years. His friend Harry Wylie is the narrator, and was one of Bunyan's partners-in-crime, however unwilling. Wylie witnessed firsthand Bunyan's immoral lifestyle: from stealing boats to blasphemous tirades, Wylie was there for it all.

It was no doubt a shock for Wylie to watch this same man move from an unsaved blasphemer to:

- a fledgling Christian who was utterly convinced that his past sinful life disqualified him from God's saving grace.
- a despairing Christian convinced that his wife's death was a punishment from God.
- a comforted Christian realizing that Christ's blood covers all.
- a bold preacher spreading the Good News
- a pastor imprisoned for spreading the true Gospel

Bunyan had many opportunities to gain his freedom by promising the authorities he'd stop preaching, but each time Bunyan refused. This refusal resulted in over a decade in prison apart from his wife and four young children. Would we have the same convictions?

Although the author does a terrific job weaving a cohesive narrative of Bunyan's life, readers should note this is a fictionalized history. The major events are true but much of the narrative has been imagined to allow this story to be told.

I really enjoyed this book. Bunyan's life is a reminder to all Christians that however heinous or wicked someone may be, they are not beyond the saving power of Christ.

Bunyan, however unworthy he may have thought himself to be, was one of Christ's lost sheep that was found and returned to the fold.

The Betrayal: A novel on John Calvin

by Douglas Bond

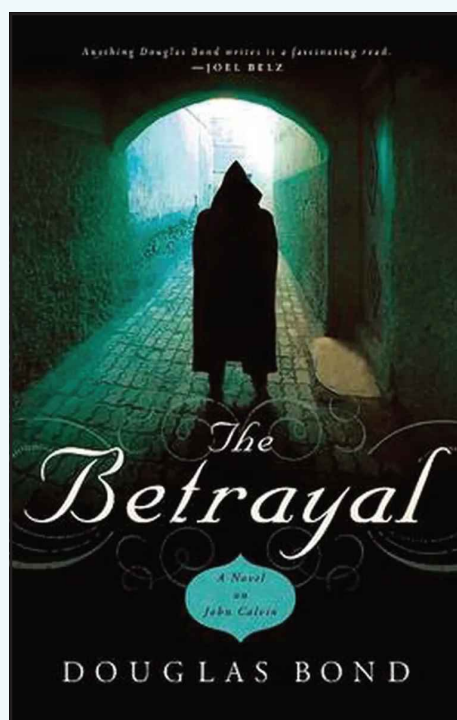
383 pages / 2009

Reviewed by Jon Dykstra

If you want to get an understanding of the times Calvin lived in, this novel is better than any biography. Douglas Bond immerses readers in the day-to-day details of living in France in the 1500s by telling Calvin's story through the eyes of a life-long, entirely fictional, companion named Jean-Louis.

Jean-Louis is born in the same village as Calvin, and for a time goes to the same school. But while Calvin's intellectual gifts set him apart early, Jean-Louis is an average fellow living an ordinary, though rather brutal existence. Like many in the 16th century, he loses his whole family and his livelihood to the Plague. Left without a home or money, he falls back on his one extraordinary ability: Jean-Louis can lie without shame or qualm of conscience. It is this "talent" that gets him close to Calvin again, securing a job serving the Reformer. And it is this trait that allows him to act the role of loyal servant even as he vows to work against God's servant.

This is a fascinating read, but one that takes some effort. Though Bond is known as a teen fiction author, the weighty theological dialogues interspersed throughout *The Betrayal* make this a novel best suited for adult Calvin enthusiasts. It is available at Christianbooks.com and has also been translated into Dutch as *Het verraad*.



National March for Life — Wellington

The National March for Life was held in Wellington on 3 December 2022. It was a beautiful day with ideal conditions for marching to Parliament promoting a culture of life and love rather than our society's culture of death.

It appeared that there may have been approximately 1,000 to 3,000 marchers, although it is hard to know exactly. Nonetheless, it appeared to be a good turnout by many people ranging from young to senior's and very cross-cultural and very Christian in its representation. People came from all over the country, even the pastor from the North Shore Reformed Church. From what I saw, there appeared to be a healthy presence of reformed folk from our churches.

Predictably, the opposition (Pro-Choice) were well organised, took the high-ground and proceeded to march illegally in front of our group in order to prevent us from reaching the Parliament. Thankfully, their efforts were stymied by the Police who kept things moving.

What was evident to all, is that the *March for Life* group appeared to be about 20 times the size of those in opposition. It reminds me of what Elisha said to his servant "... those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 2 Kings 6:16

It was certainly a meeting of light and darkness. I thought it was ironic that one of the opposition held a sign, "GO HOME FASCISTS! So, it would seem that the March for Life is a threat to those who wish to maintain a culture of death by allowing the unborn, the silent and those who cannot speak for themselves, to be murdered with the sanction of the State.

All in all, it was peaceful enough and the point was made to many watching up and down Lambton Quay, that abortion is wrong and that this march will continue into the future.

The organizations marching were Voice for Life, Family First, Family Life International and Focus on the Family.

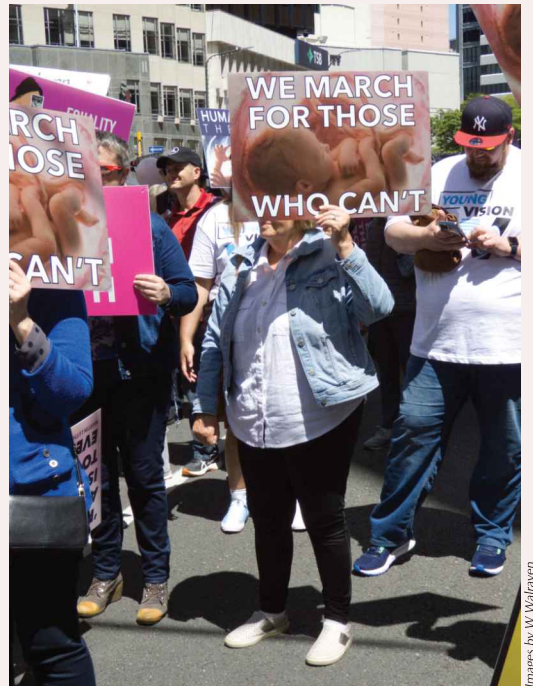
Ed.



The March for Life getting ready to march up Lambton Quay in Wellington.



The march approaching the cenotaph where opposition was given before we entered the grounds of Parliament.



Images by W. Wellaven



Voice for Life President, Kate Cormack.



Bob McCosckrie of Family First

