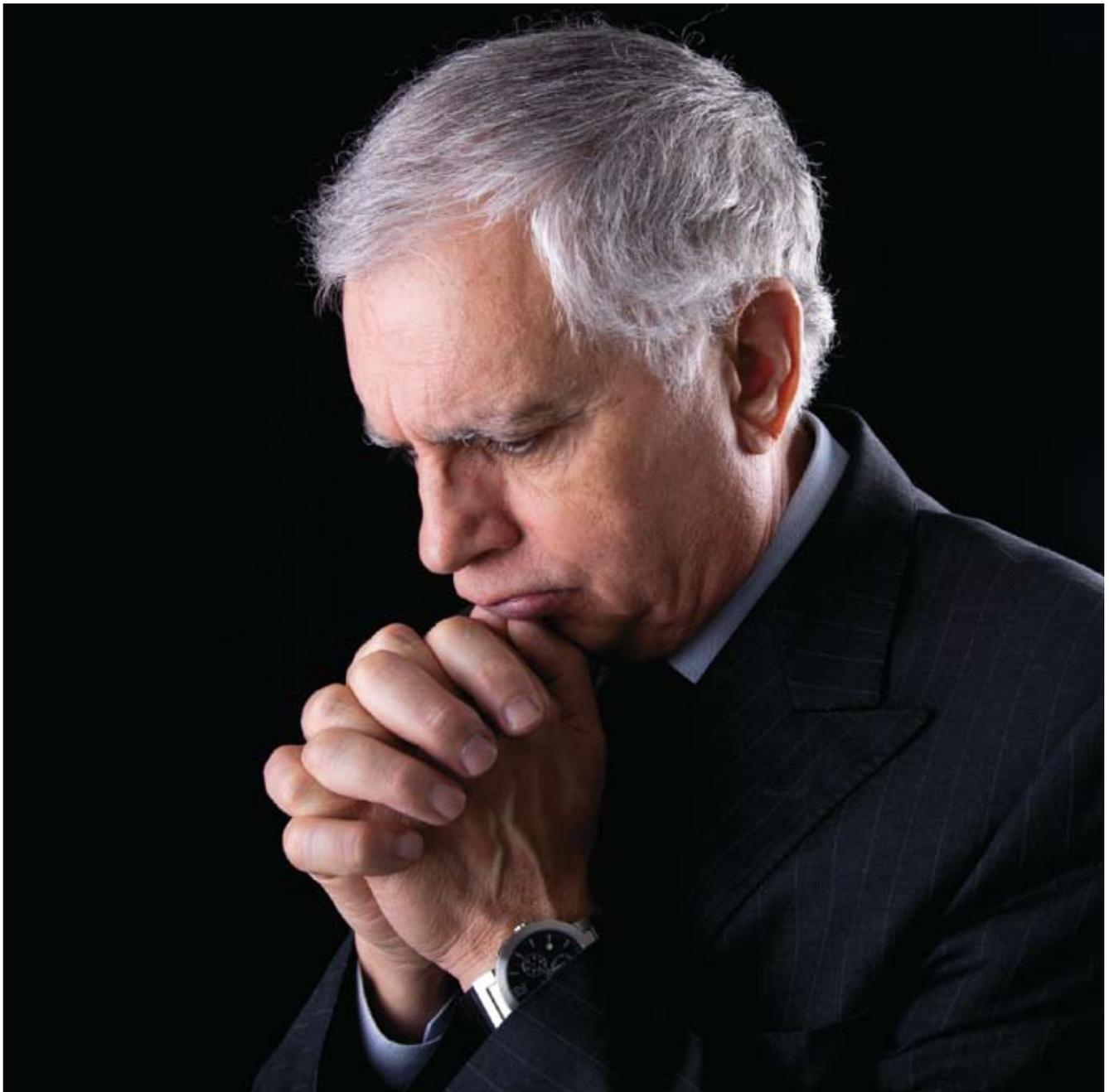


faith in
focus

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Prayer – our relationship with God

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Editorial

As I was contemplating the editorial for this month's issue, it was already the third day after the Christchurch earthquake, and many souls were still missing. As many of you would have seen, there was extended coverage by the media of this most terrible event. To me it was an endless media frenzy, similar to the Pike River Mine disaster. The major TV networks, radio and Internet-based news services all vying for their piece of the action. The news about the devastation went on and on, with images repeated many times over the course of a day or days. The Prime Minister, Mr Key and the Mayor of Christchurch, Mr Bob Parker spoke many times. The former spoke confidently about the indomitable kiwi spirit, and how the city would be rebuilt, etc. This event had captured our attention to such a degree, that the events overseas in the middle east had paled into insignificance.

Something very significant came to my attention. Not once did I hear the Name of God used by anyone, except the Dean of the Christchurch cathedral, and in a profane manner. There was the occasional trite comment about our "prayers" etc. What was poignant to me was that not one of the high-ranking public officials talked about calling upon the Name of the Lord. There was no calling out to Him for His mercy and grace, and to preserve the lives of those still trapped or missing. While the word "prayer" may have been uttered, there seems to have been no prayer at all.

That is what this issue is all about: "Prayer – our relationship with God". And leading off, is a discursive exposition on prayer in the Bible by Mr John Goris. Mr Daniel Wilson writes about "A vital, simple, and practical look at private prayer". Mr Andre Holstlag gives us timeless and valuable pointers for "Leading in prayer". Mr Nathan Trice engages in "Laughing with God at the empty tomb" – a meditation. Mrs Sally Davey goes to Oxford, England to find out that "Manners Maketh Man. Mr Neville and Mrs Soesi Watson review D A Carson's book "A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers". Mr Michael Haykin informs about "The emergence of legal Christian publishing in China: An opportunity for Reformed Christians", and Mr L Anthony Curto shows us how "Egypt and Cush shall praise God", in Missions in focus. The Gleanings pages are again loaded up with easy to find information about people, events, activities and things happening in our churches.

Photo credits: p15 Mrs Sally Davey

Special Request

Did you immigrate to New Zealand in the 1950's? Have you got a story to tell about why you came to NZ and what you found, and the life you experienced? Then why don't you let the rest of the readers hear about your story. I am sure that there are many anecdotes, humorous or serious, which would be interesting for the readership. I look forward to hearing from you. Just remember to try to keep your story to about 1400 words.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. 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.

Laughing with God at the empty tomb

T. Nathan Trice

The resurrection of Jesus was a great victory by our Lord over his enemies. This victory calls for, among other things, laughter! The apostle Paul certainly saw it this way. In his sermon in Acts 13, the apostle sees in the resurrection of Christ the fulfillment of Psalm 2:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." (vss. 1-6)

In response to the efforts of men and demons to thwart his redemptive purposes, God himself *laughed* at his enemies on the day he raised his Son from the dead.

But may we too join in God's triumphant laughter? We certainly may, inasmuch as Christ the King was in his resurrection "restraining and conquering all his *and our* enemies" (Shorter Catechism, Q. 26). In fact, it would seem that the gospel writers included certain details in their accounts of our Lord's death and resurrection in order to provide the people of God with cause for laughter in light of Christ's resurrection. With the empty tomb in mind, one can scarcely read texts like the following without laughing:

Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will

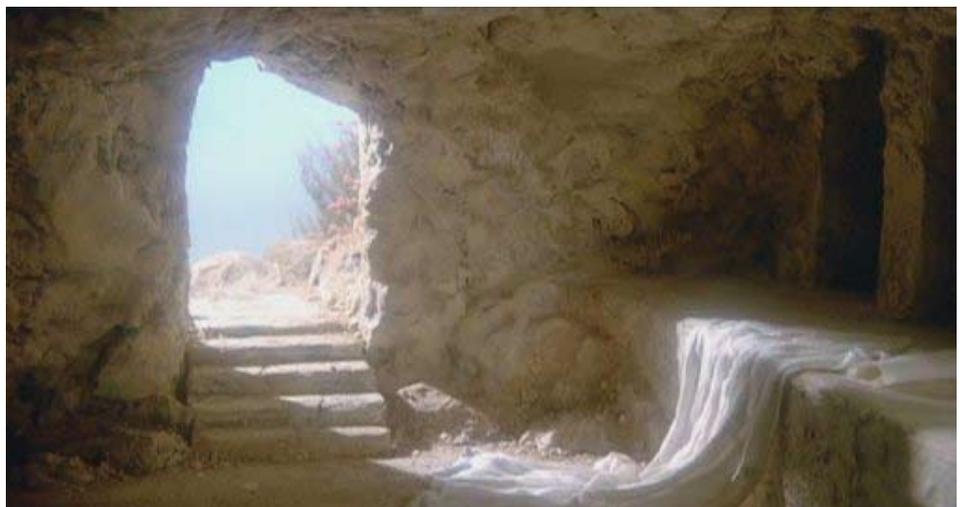
rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard. (Matt. 27:62-66)

In this text, the folly of the Lord's enemies and the futility of their plots against the Lord's anointed provide us with three things to laugh at from our gloriously retrospective vantage point.

In the first place, we can laugh at how our Lord's enemies incriminate themselves before Pilate. The day after our Lord's death and burial, the leaders of the Jews have an unsettling thought: "Suppose one of Jesus' disciples were to steal his body from the tomb, and announce that he had risen from the dead? Then where would we be?" They probably felt especially vulnerable to such a move, knowing that Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, had gained permission from Pilate to take Jesus' body and have it buried in his own tomb.

What could they do to prevent such a fraud? Their only recourse was to appeal to Pilate to secure the tomb against potential raiders from among his disciples. But as they appear before Pilate and make their case for this course of action, they incriminate themselves in the eyes of all of us who rejoice in the Resurrection. They say to Pilate: "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people."

What is fascinating about this testimony by the rulers who opposed Jesus is that it provides us with some of the clearest evidence in Scripture that he quite openly foretold his resurrection from the dead. To be sure, he often did so in veiled terms, such that friend and foe alike were at times unsure of his meaning. In John 2, after our Lord "cleanses" the temple, the Jews ask him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answers them: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Later, during Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, false witnesses – seeming to take Jesus' words very literally – testify that Jesus claimed, "I am able



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to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days" (Matt. 26:61).

But here before Pilate, in order to gain their objective, the enemies of Jesus are willing to be very honest about what they understand Jesus to be saying about himself. They incriminate themselves as those who have fully understood his claim to have power over death. It is indeed laughable that in order to forestall a "resurrection fraud," the enemies of Christ betray a far greater understanding of our Lord's teaching about himself than apparently even some of his own disciples had.

In the second place, *we can laugh at how our Lord's enemies unwittingly foretell his triumph over them.* In their discussion with Pilate, the Jewish leaders say something which, although intended as a slur against Christ, ends up as an unwitting "prophecy" of his glorious future. They speak of Christ as an "impostor," referring to his claim to be the Messiah, which they reject, and they raise suspicion in Pilate's mind that his followers might perpetuate the deception by claiming that he has risen from the dead. They are attempting to play on Pilate's political instincts when they reason, in effect (27:64), "If he was a fraud while alive, and himself claiming to be a Messiah, how much more of a fraud will he be while dead, with his disciples claiming that he is the still-living Messiah!"

Of course, the words of these men are riddled with unbelief and error, yet there is more than a grain of truth in them as well, and a delicious irony for those who rejoice in the Resurrection. From our vantage point nearly two thousand years later, we can see that precisely what they feared has taken place. By means of what they would have called a colossal "hoax," this "dead" Jesus has since that time gained a vast, innumerable following of those who are convinced that he did indeed rise from the dead. The "last fraud" has indeed become far "worse than the first" in a way that surely would have astonished them.

But, of course, the very scope of this supposed deception casts grave doubts upon the story of the rulers. The rise of worldwide Christianity can scarcely be attributed to a clever hoax. But in this we may agree with the enemies of our Lord: our Saviour gained dramatically more followers after his death than he did before it. Because the Resurrection did occur, we can see – with no small amusement – that in the words of the

Jews are an unwitting prediction of zeal for a risen Messiah, spreading like a forest fire out of control.

In the third place, consider how our Lord's enemies devise a futile plan to bind God himself. The Jewish leaders knew how to play on Pilate's fears of Jewish unrest, and how to make a compelling case for Roman intervention in Jewish affairs. Pilate consents to their request, ensuring that there are an appropriate number of soldiers to secure the tomb. This language of "making the tomb secure" is repeated three times in close succession by Matthew in his account: that is what the Jews request (vs. 64), that is what Pilate orders to be done (vs. 65), and that is what is actually done "by sealing the stone and setting a guard" (vs. 66). The seal would likely have been a cord of some kind with an official government seal in wax, the effect of which would have been to forbid anyone from opening the tomb. The stationing of a guard, of course, would have enforced the prohibition.

When the friends of the Resurrection look back upon the extreme measures taken by Christ's enemies to "secure the tomb," there is room for a little hilarity. In retrospect, it is indeed hilarious to think of the enemies of Christ setting themselves so earnestly and with such a show of strength to keep the tomb of our Lord sealed. In their view, it was only necessary to intimidate and thwart the efforts of a few demoralized disciples of Jesus. They did not fathom that they were setting themselves against the omnipotent God of all the earth, whose

redemptive purposes were soon to be focused on the opening of that tomb and the releasing of what it held.

Soon that seal would be broken by the very angel of the Lord as he rolled back the stone, and the armed guards would be lying like dead men in a faint of fright. Surely, to think of the feeble authority of that Roman seal, and the futile strength of those Roman guards, in light of the power that raised Jesus from the dead, rejoices the heart of one who has experienced the benefits of Christ's resurrection: a comparison above all guaranteed to get a laugh!

If, then, "he who sits in the heavens laughs," surely this is an appropriate response of faith by us as well as we contemplate again the resurrection of Christ this Easter season. It may not seem gentlemanly or "sportsmanlike" to our modern sensibilities to laugh over a victory in which we have a stake. But, of course, the contest of the cross was no mere sport between gentlemen. It represented the decisive conflict between an infinitely holy God and his evil and implacable enemies. With the stakes so high, the victory so pure, and the enemy so unworthy, laughter will – for all eternity – be the fitting response for both Christ and his people at the remembrance of his resurrection.

The author is pastor of Matthews OPC in Matthews (Charlotte area), N.C. Reprinted from New Horizons, (March 2005) with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Early this morning (16 Feb), the Reverend J.W. (Bill) Deenick passed from this life into eternity with his Lord. He died peacefully after a fairly sudden decline in his health, and was surrounded by his children, and many grandchildren during his final hours. He was 92 years old.

Rev Deenick was used by God in many ways in building up the Reformed Churches in New Zealand and Australia, particularly as a "pioneer" in NZ. He accepted the call to be the first minister of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, serving the North Island as minister based at Auckland (Avondale) between 1953 and 1962, then served Dee Why, Geelong and Adelaide until his retirement in 1983. He was also instrumental in the progress of the Parent-Controlled Christian School movement, being a founder of the national Christian Parent Controlled Schools (CPCS) movement and its first President. He also helped set up "Trowel and Sword", and was its editor of for many years.

He was a blessing to many, and will be much missed by his ministerial colleagues, his wide network of friends and, of course, by his family.

He will be buried at Healesville Cemetery at 11AM on 21 February. In doing so he rejoins his wife Adriana (Jeanne) who went before him in 1988. The short graveside service will be followed by a Thanksgiving Service at Mt Evelyn Christian Reformed Church at 12 noon.

Prayer – our relationship with God (1)

How do we pray ?

John Goris

Do we pray? Of course we do.

And yet, as 20th century theologian P. T. Forsyth pointed out: “*Our greatest sin is prayerlessness!*” Most of us will acknowledge many shortcomings in the area of prayer. Adolphe Monod, while on his deathbed, listed as one of his deepest regrets the lack of prayer in his life. And this Frenchman had been a powerful preacher in the 55 years the Lord gave him on earth. Not only that, but he was also a faithful pastor and a man of prayer!

His praying was firmly based on the Scriptures. He would say, “The Word of God is *heaven speaking on earth*”, and “prayer according to Scripture is *heaven received within* by the Holy Spirit”. He added, “without prayer the Word is powerless and does not penetrate the heart” (“*Adolphe Monod’s Farewell*”, p.76). He draws our attention to the many servants of God presented in the Scriptures, and considers prayer as their *distinctive* work.

Scripture – our guide to prayer

As *you* read the Scriptures take special note of the prayers of God’s people. In this article we wish to focus on **two of David’s prayers** found in 1 Chronicles (29:10-19, and 17:16-27). However, there are many more prayers of David recorded in Scripture, especially in the Book of Psalms. There, especially, we learn about David’s pain and struggles. In the historical books we read of the many events in David’s life, but in the psalms he utters his deepest frustrations and highest joys. That’s where we get to know the soul-life of this man of God.

As we look at these two prayers in the Book of Chronicles we should bear in mind that this book was written in the struggling times after the exile. It was then that God’s people needed to be reminded of the sure promises of God. These promises included the coming of Messiah of David’s family line, and the significance of temple-worship. The Lord

Jesus calls the temple: *My Father’s house*, and, *A house of prayer*.

What stimulates **us** in our praying? Is it only our particular predicament? It is true, the Lord said, “*Ask and you shall receive!*” Yet prayer is more than asking. It is approaching our heavenly Father and addressing Him as His child. It involves an awareness of Who He is and why we may have such confidence in approaching Him. We can learn something from David who has been **bowled over by God’s grace!** That’s why we see in these prayers three typical components, viz. Adoration – Amazement – Appeal.

Consider the prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10-19.

Take note of the **adoration**.

David is over-awed by the Lord’s greatness and majesty. God’s Name and kingly power are the primary focus of his attention (verses 10-13).

Then notice his **amazement**.

David is stunned about the generosity of God’s people, and that because of God’s wonderful and gracious provision for them (verses 14-17).

Finally note his **appeal**. “Keep the hearts of Thy people loyal to you.” And further, “Keep Solomon, my son, loyal to you.”

Consider also the prayer in 1 Chronicles 17:16-27.

Note that this time David starts with **amazement**. “Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me thus far?” (verses 16-18). And later he adds, “What nation is like Thy people...” (verses 21,22).

Then David blends in the **adoration**: “... O LORD, there is none like Thee, neither is there any God besides Thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears...” (verses 19,20).

Finally again comes the **appeal**. David appeals to the promises of God: “Do as Thou hast spoken ...”

When you think about these prayers you discover there is a similarity with

the prayers of other men and women of God. It reminds us especially of the prayer our Lord taught His disciples. The Lord singles out the prior place of God and His kingdom in prayer, and then He underscores our needs. The order is Thy, Thy, Thy, and then our, our, our ...

The late Prof J H Bavinck used to say, First make God’s business, your business, and then, make your business ... God’s business. In the same sixth chapter of Matthew in which the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray “Our Father Who art in heaven ...”, He goes on to speak about our daily needs/worries, and concludes, “But seek *first* His Kingdom, and His righteousness ...” (vs33).

Abundant examples in Scripture

Do make a point of studying the prayers in the Bible. There are more than we often realise. Note those of Ezra and Nehemiah, also those of Moses and Samuel, and Samuel’s mother, Hannah. Study also the moving prayers of Daniel and Solomon. Or consider the prayers in the New Testament, those of the Lord Jesus (e.g. John 17, Matthew 26), those of Zacharias and Mary, those of Paul in Ephesians (1:15-23; 3:14-21).

Read a Psalm like 119 prayerfully, a section at a time, as a conversation with



“The late Prof J H Bavinck used to say, First make God’s business, your business, and then, make your business ... God’s business.”

the Lord with Whom you may walk from day to day. Pour out your heart to Him (Psalm 62:8), listen when he reassures you. Take time! Notice that “David went in and **sat** before the Lord” (1 Chron. 17:16). He sought the Lord’s presence and poured out his heart.

Prayer is intensely personal, yet also

intentionally communal.

It is joyful, but also tearful. It is bold, and yet humble.

You feel powerless, but you are also driven by a strong hope!

Charles Ringma in “Resist the Powers” quotes Jacques Ellul as saying “Prayer is the assurance of the possibility of God’s

intervention without which there is no hope.

And even more so, prayer is much more than a meaningful “quiet time” with God. Scripture teaches us that the real conflict lying behind world events is spiritual. For that reason Dr Sinclair Ferguson concludes his commentary on the 11th chapter of Daniel by saying, “the Lord was teaching Daniel that the real weapon of the church is prayer. Fail in the work of prayer, and we shall fail to understand this great vision”. How vital prayer is in the big scheme of things! Do we realise this as much as we should?

So let us again give ourselves to prayer, looking beyond David to David’s greater Son. For His is the Name above all other names, the name by which we are saved! (Acts 4:12).

And in utter amazement, pray, praise and petition!

Prayer – our relationship with God (2)

A vital, simple, and practical look at private prayer

Daniel Wilson

In the book *We were Soldiers Once... and Young*, the story is told of a desperate battle which occurred during the Vietnam war. This battle became famous because a battalion of about 500 US soldiers were flown far into North Vietnamese territory to attack a far superior force. Outnumbered at least 3 to 1, the American soldiers were in a fight for their lives. The American battalion only survived because they used their radios to keep in contact with their commanders and support. Had these soldiers relied solely on their own resources, they would have been annihilated. However, by relying on the powerful air support and artillery fire (and continuing to do what they could on the ground) they survived to fight another day. This battle is a wonderful reminder that no soldier fights alone. No soldier can conquer the enemy all by himself like some sort of

Rambo – that is only the stuff of movies! Spiritual warfare is the same. The big difference is that in physical warfare the soldier depends on his fellow soldiers, but in spiritual warfare we rest upon the Lord and His mighty power. As we read in Ephesians 6:10-20, we do not struggle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world. Paul demonstrates this by the armour he gives us. He doesn’t give some 10-step armour and then say, “Now go out there and fight and win.” Instead, the very description of the armour shows our dependence on a power outside ourselves – a dependence upon God. And that dependence is most explicitly shown when Paul commands prayer in verses 18-20. Now my intention is not to explain Ephesians 6 as much as it is to show the vital importance of prayer in every Christian’s life. Prayer is more vital to the Christian than radios, air support and artillery fire

is to the soldier because in prayer, you call on and rest in the power of God instead of yourself.

Since prayer is so important, how do we go about developing a life of prayer? The most fundamental aspect to a life of prayer is a relationship with God. If you do not know Christ as Lord and Saviour, then you will never truly pray. If you **are** a child of God, then you are specially equipped to pray. You have the Holy Spirit living in your heart assisting you and praying for you (Romans 8:26-27). We pray in the power of the Spirit to God the Father through faith in Christ His Son.

A relationship with God

Now you might be thinking, “Of course I have to be a Christian to develop a good prayer life, and I know about the Holy Spirit... but how do I practically develop a habit of prayer?” You must keep your relationship with God in mind when

you pray. I know this sounds obvious, but you have to remember **to Whom** you pray. For example, when we read many manuals and helps for prayer, we are often reminded of the form/structure of prayer. We are reminded of the importance of the various aspects of prayer, and the necessity for praying regularly. Sadly, it is all too easy to get caught up focusing on these aspects of prayer and to neglect the most important thing – that we are praying to our Heavenly Father. We are not speaking to some impersonal force, rather we are speaking to the loving personal Father who paid an infinite price to adopt us. In prayer, we are developing our relationship with our heavenly Father. This is a crucial element that helps us main-

tain a life of prayer; for in prayer, we are not reaching out to some equal for help (some fellow soldier). In battle, soldiers call out specific statements or formulas to call in fire support. You never know who will be on the other side of the line, so the statements have to be uniform across the whole army. Prayer is not that mechanistic. We do not say a specific prayer to achieve a certain result.¹ You see, the knowledge that God the Father is loving and personal leads us to speak to Him as such and not in a mechanical uniform way. This means your prayers should be personal and vibrant like the warm conversation between a father and son who are close (or like the way you might speak to a respected friend).

God as your Father

I have found that this element of desiring to speak to my Heavenly Father was far more helpful in prayer than simply habit alone. For even if you develop the best habit and schedule for prayer and you include all the right aspects and parts of prayer – if you aren't speaking to your Heavenly Father from your heart, then you aren't praying correctly! For while habit and parts of prayer are important, the most important thing is for you to draw close to God in prayer – that only happens when you are speaking to God as your Father – and not in a mechanical way.

So how does this relationship idea help you pray more regularly? Think about any close relationship you have:



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“If you develop the best habit and schedule for prayer and you include all the right aspects and parts of prayer – if you aren't speaking to your Heavenly Father from your heart, then you aren't praying correctly!”

a close friend, your earthly father or mother, perhaps your spouse. When do you want to speak to them? The closer the relationship the more often we talk. You speak with them in the morning, then on various quick occasions throughout the day, and then you probably make time to chat again at night. The same pattern can be practiced in prayer. Take time to begin your day with your Heavenly Father (Psalm 5:2-3²). Then speak to Him in quick or spontaneous times of prayer as possible throughout the day (perhaps praising God quickly during a break at work – Psalm 119:164, or praying in a time of need – Nehemiah 2:4). Then close the day with a more extended time with your Father. Depending on your personality, you might want to have your larger prayer time in the morning or evening – which time you choose is really not important, so long as you are spending time with your Father!

Practically, it is helpful to develop a habit of praying at the same time and place. With sleeping and eating, our bodies and minds work best on a

schedule. Prayer is much the same. If you try to pray where you sleep (lying in bed), the urge to sleep will most likely win out. If you try to pray at a time you normally eat, except in times of fasting, the urge to eat will prove to be a distraction. Keeping a particular time and place in the house (or at work) to pray will help you focus your attention more quickly on speaking to your Father.

Notebooks or journals

Prayer journals and lists can be very useful as well. My parents used little notebooks to keep track of various prayer requests and when the Lord answered those prayers they would record that in the notebook. This proved very encouraging to perseverance in prayer, because they could return to see how and when God had answered specific requests. A notebook or prayer journal can also be used to keep a proper balance between the different parts of prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication).

Personal prayer is vital. Without it, we are likely to forget on whom we

depend for life and salvation. Without prayer, we begin to rest and rely on ourselves to our own hurt. Don't neglect this vital part of the Christian life. Even more importantly, don't neglect your relationship with your Heavenly Father! As you develop a more consistent habit of prayer, rest assured – God will provide the strength that you need. And if this all seems overwhelming, remember that God has already specially equipped you with His Spirit to assist you in prayer. Pray to your Father, through faith in His Son, in the power of the Spirit!

Notes

- 1 The Roman Catholic church teaches this false view of prayer when they order a certain number of "Hail Mary's" or "Our Fathers" as a solution to some spiritual problem.
- 2 Psalm 5:2-3. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. 3 In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

Mr Daniel Wilson is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Nelson.

Prayer – our relationship with God (3)

Leading in prayer

Andre Holtslag

At its simplest, prayer is talking to God. There is a sense, then, that any discussion about prayer that has the potential to complicate matters or create uncertainty can be counterproductive. And yet, while most prayer is private, when we are with others, in Bible study meetings, in prayer meetings, in public gatherings of Christians, or, for some, in worship services, we may be called upon to lead others in prayer. And, if nothing else, our experience tells us that some do this 'well' while others 'struggle'; some bring us closer to heaven, while others leave us confused, suppressing giggles, horrified, or fast asleep!

It seems useful then for us to consider those things that need to be borne in

mind when it comes to leading others in prayer. And to do this we are going to draw heavily on a book that discusses this exact subject. Professor Samuel Miller of Princeton Theological Seminary wrote a book called *Thoughts on Public Prayer*. It was published in 1849 and remains as edifying, instructive, and useful as it was when first written. A book of this vintage does mean, however, that 'text language' had not yet been invented! Instead, Prof. Samuel Miller writes in the 'rich and full' style of the 19th century, which, I trust you will agree, adds a depth and beauty to the subject at hand that is worth our perseverance. What we will do, then, is simply consider portions of his book in the hope that, with discernment, we will be aided in this weighty and joyful responsibility (For the sake of this article,

I have taken the liberty, *in just a very few places*, of abridging or editing the quotes in terms of language and content. I have not, though, omitted any of his points – AH). The four portions from Miller's book that are cited are: Firstly, introductory thoughts, secondly, frequent faults in public prayer, thirdly, characteristics of good public prayer, and fourthly, the best means to obtain excellence in public prayer. Finally, recognising the focus on prayer in public worship that Miller has in view, I conclude with some additional comments and considerations of my own about prayer in settings like Bible studies and prayer meetings.

1. Introductory thoughts

In regards to the best preparation for leading in social, and especially in public

prayer, there are two things worthy of particular notice; the one is what has been called the *spirit*, or *grace* of prayer; the other is what has been denominated the *gift* of prayer.

1. By the *spirit* or *grace* of prayer, is to be understood that truly devout state of mind which corresponds with the nature and design of the exercise. He has the spirit of prayer who engages in that duty with serious, enlightened, cordial sincerity; with that penitence, faith, love, and holy veneration which become a renewed sinner, in drawing near to God to ask for things agreeable to His will. Even if he is intellectually weak, has little knowledge of theological truth, and a very imperfect command of appropriate language, yet if he have a heart filled with love to God, with confidence in the Saviour, and with ardent desires to be conformed to His image, a heart broken and contrite for sin, breathing after holiness, and earnestly desiring the enjoyment of covenant blessings – in a word, a heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells and reigns, that man has the *spirit* of prayer, the *grace* of prayer. Though his words be few, though his utterance be feeble and embarrassed, though his feelings be poured out in sighs and groans, rather than in appropriate language, he may be said to “pray in the spirit” – to pray in such a manner as will never fails to enter into the ears of the “Lord of Sabaoth” (James 5:15, 16, Zech. 12:10; Rom. 8:26; Gal 4:6).

2. By the gift of prayer is to be understood that combination of natural and spiritual qualities which enables any one to lead in prayer in a ready, acceptable, impressive, and edifying manner; that suitableness and scriptural propriety of matter, and that ardour, fluency, and felicity of expression which enable any one so to conduct the devotions of the others, as to carry with him the judgement, the hearts, and the feelings of all whose mouth he is to the throne of grace.

2. Frequent faults in public prayer

1. The over frequent recurrence of favourite words, and set forms of expression, however unexceptionable in themselves. Among these are the constant repetition in every sentence or two, of the names and titles of God; “O God! – Great God! – Our Heavenly Father” – “we pray Thee” – “We beseech Thee,” or the excessive use of the interjection Oh! prefixed to almost every sentence.

2. Hesitation and apparent embarrassment in utterance ... When he pauses, stumbles, recalls, or goes back to correct, he unavoidably gives a pain to every fellow worshiper, and always leaves the impression of a mind less intent, a heart less fervently engaged, than it ought to be.

3. All ungrammatical expressions in prayer – all expressions foreign from English idiom, and bordering on the style of cant (stock phrases) and whining, low and colloquial phrases, ought, of course, to be regarded as blemishes, and to be carefully avoided.

4. The want of *regularity* and *order* is a fault which frequently and greatly

weakness of our faculties, and their tendency to flag, that an exercise of this fervent and exulted character ought not to be long continued.

7. An abundant use of highly figurative language is another blemish in public prayer. All studied refinement of language; all artificial structure of sentences; all affectation of the beauties of rhetoric (the putting on of a prayer ‘voice’ that is unlike the voice normally heard), are out of place in the exercise of right prayer. Too often prayer lacks the unaffected simplicity which ought to characterise it. It has too little of the language of scripture. It is artificial, rhetorical, elaborate, abounding unduly in

“Too great familiarity of language in addressing the High and Holy One is also revolting to pious minds and ought to be sacredly avoided.”

impairs the acceptable and edifying character of public prayers. All public prayer which bears the comprehensive character which belongs to that exercise, is made up of various departments; such as adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. A public prayer entirely missing any one of these departments, would be deemed essentially defective; and a prayer in which the several departments should all be so mixed up together throughout the whole as that they should all go on together in this state of confused mixture, from the beginning to the end, would, doubtless, be considered as very ill judged and untasteful in its structure; nay, as adapted essentially to interfere with the edification of intelligent worshipers. Not that the *same order* should always be maintained.

5. Descending to too much *minuteness of detail* in particular departments of prayer is another fault of unhappy influence in this part of the public service.

6. Closely connected with this fault in public prayer is another, of which we often hear serious complaint. It is that of *excessive length*. This is so common and so crying a fault that it ought to be mentioned with emphasis, and guarded against with special care. Such is the

ornate and studied forms of speech. This is often beautiful. Some greatly admire it and call it an eloquent prayer. But the fervent utterance of the heart is always simple.

8. It is a serious fault in public prayer to introduce allusions to party politics, and especially to indulge in personalities.

9. All the expressions of the *amatory class* are to be carefully avoided in the public devotions of the house of God – Such as “dear Jesus” – “Sweet Jesus” – “Lovely Saviour.” All such language, though flowing from earnestness, and dictated by the best of motives, is unhappy, and produces on the minds of the judicious painful impressions.

10. The practice of indulging in *wit*, *humour*, or *sarcasm* in public prayer, is highly objectionable and ought never to be allowed.

11. The excellence of a public prayer may be marred by introducing into it a large portion of didactic statement, and, either in the language of scripture, or any other language, laying down formal exhibitions of Christian doctrine.

12. Another fault nearly allied to this is worthy of notice: That of studiously introducing those doctrines which are

most offensive to the carnal heart, and which seldom fail to be revolting to our impenitent hearers.

13. Too great *familiarity* of language in addressing the High and Holy One is also revolting to pious minds and ought to be sacredly avoided.

14. There is also such a thing as expressing *unseasonably*, and also as carrying to an *extreme* the professions of humility. An oft heard example of this being, "Lord, assist your servant, one of the most weak and unworthy of men, a very child in spiritual things, in his feeble attempts to open and apply the Scriptures..."

15. Everything approaching to flattery

is a serious fault in public prayer, and ought to be carefully avoided. This can occur when someone prays after another has preached or spoken, for example.

16. The want of appropriateness is another fault often chargeable on public prayer. With some, perhaps an eighth, or a tenth part of what they pray can be considered as applicable to the occasion before them, or as entirely seasonable.

17. The apparent want of reverence that often concludes prayer created by the sense of haste at the end or a less solemn tone or with less fervour and apparent earnestness than the preceding.

18. The last fault is that rapidity and

vehemence of utterance, which are sometimes affected as an expression of deep feeling, and ardent importunity (repeated request). Nothing hasty, nothing rash, nothing which has not been considered and weighed, ought ever to escape from the lips of him who leads others to the throne of grace.

3. Characteristics of good public prayer

1. One of the most essential excellencies in public prayer is that it abounds in the language of the word of God.

a. This language is always right, always safe, and always edifying.

b. It is a language of simplicity, tenderness, and touching eloquence peculiarly adapted to engage and impress the heart.

2. Another excellence of a good public prayer is that it be orderly. It needs a real and perceptible order. Not that it be characterised by formality; not that it be always in the same order; but still that it's several parts of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication should not be jumbled together in careless, inconsiderate mixture; but made to succeed each other in some happy arrangement.

3. A suitable prayer in the public assembly is *dignified* and *general* in its plan, and *comprehensive* in its requests, without descending to too much detail (which is appropriate for private prayer).

4. A good public prayer should be carefully guarded, in all its parts, against undue length.

5. Another excellence of a public prayer is that it be *seasonable* and *appropriate* to the occasion on which it is uttered.

6. It is an important excellence in a public prayer that it include the recognition of so much *gospel truth*, as to be richly instructive to all who join in it, as well as all who listen to it. Truth is the food of the soul. Gospel truth is that on which the Christian lives and grows from day to day.

7. Another important feature of great excellence in public prayer is a *desirable degree of the variety*. The congregation should not be able to anticipate all that the minister will utter in this exercise in each prayer and from week to week.

8. A good practise is to close prayers with a doxology, copied more or less closely, from the word. Remember variety though!

9. A good public prayer ought always



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to include a strongly marked reference to the spread of the gospel, and earnest petitions for the success of the means employed by the church for that purpose.

10. Another consideration worthy of notice here is the manner in which the Most High is addressed in different parts of public prayer. Some will call only on "Almighty God" or "Heavenly Father" or "Lord" again and again and exclusively throughout the prayer, for instance. How much more appropriate, and in accordance with a spiritual taste, would it be, frequently to alter this title, as we pass from one part of prayer to another, recognising the diversity, and the glory of the Divine attributes.

11. A good public prayer should ever be strongly marked with the spirit and the language of hope and confidence.

12. The *prayer after sermon*, which is commonly short, is very often, not only a brief, but a mere general, pointless, and uninteresting effusion, simply imploring a divine blessing on what has been said, equally applicable to every similar occasion, and only adapted to prepare the way for the close of the service. Instead of this, the closing prayer ought to be framed upon the plan of making it, as far as possible, one of the most solemn, appropriate, and impressive parts of the whole service. It ought to be formed upon the plan of taking hold of the conscience and the heart most deeply and effectually, and of uniting as far as possible the most pointed and searching solemnity of application, with the most perfect tenderness and affection of appeal.

13. In regard to the use of the Lord's Prayer in the devotions of the sanctuary, it should be used occasionally rather than in every service and repeatedly.

14. The whole manner of uttering a public prayer should be in accordance with a humble, filial, affectionate, yet reverential spirit, which ought to characterise the prayer itself throughout.

15. Finally, the "Amen" is important! It should be pronounced in that distinct, tender, emphatic manner which indicates a real feeling and earnest desire.

4. The best means to obtain excellence in public prayer

1. None can hope to obtain this unless they abound in closest devotion, and in holy communion with God in secret.

2. Read and study the best books that are written on the subject.

3. Store the mind with the language

and the riches of the word of God.

4. When any providence occurs, in the world, community, or calendar, attend to it in prayer in the most simple, scriptural, and edifying form.

5. Develop a habit of devotional composition. Read and write prayers to the Lord.

a. Days of prayer and fasting are ever important in nurturing a spirit of piety.

Additional considerations

Hopefully then, all that has been said will be of benefit not just to the few who lead us in worship, but also to the many of us who are led in worship, in that our understanding of the importance of leading in prayer and those principles that are relevant to this subject is enhanced. We offer the following points in addition to Miller's principles:

1. Preparation is almost everything!

a. If John Calvin wrote out his prayers, we should not be afraid to do likewise. Praying written prayers does not make us any less 'spiritual' because of it.

b. If not written out in full, at least note the various subjects that you will pray about.

2. Prayers in the rear section of the 1976 Psalter/hymnal, Arthur Bennett's *The Valley of Vision* (a significant and beautiful collection of Puritan prayers), and Terry L. Johnson's *Leading in Worship*, are a wonderful source of inspiration and content for prayer.

3. A more detailed order/list of 'subjects' might be: Praise & confession & thanksgiving, supplications for gospel proclamation and for the Word to do its work among us, supplications on behalf of the church, local, national, and international, supplications on behalf of civil government, supplications on behalf of those being persecuted, supplications on behalf of those in distress/travellers, requests for spiritual and physical blessings, concluding thoughts/doxology/Amen.

4. It is helpful to open your prayer using connections to what has just been read or sung in worship. Use the words or theme of the psalm or hymn preceding, the words of the call to worship, or the text of the Bible passage that has just been read, etc.

5. Listen to yourself on CD/DVD. This is always painful but very helpful in detecting patterns and analysing content.

6. Discuss prayers (be they the minister's or the reading elder's!) in sermon/service evaluation. If we recognise how

important prayer is in the life of the congregation, we should be willing to receive encouragement from one another in this vital area.

However, while many of the above principles are equally relevant to leading in prayer at Bible studies and prayer meetings, the following suggestions are offered as additional encouragement:

1. Bible studies

a. Before the study begins:

i. Begin with adoration.

ii. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give understanding and insight.

iii. Remember those who could not attend.

iv. Pray for other study groups that may also be meeting.

v. Don't 'give away' the whole study in your prayer!

vi. Don't ask someone on the night to open in prayer unless you know they would be willing and are able to do so profitably (Ask those who may not have led in prayer before to do so before the meeting, giving them time to prepare.

b. After the study:

i. Ask for prayer items and write them down so they are not forgotten.

ii. Praise the Lord and thank Him for His Word.

iii. Pray for the Holy Spirit to apply His Word; that we may be 'doers' also, not just hearers.

iv. If two or three lead, agree on what each will pray for.

v. If you pray around the whole group allow those who would prefer not to to just say 'Amen' and move on to the next person.

2. Prayer meetings – At the Reformed Church of Dovedale, we meet for prayer on a Friday evening before our bi-monthly celebrations of the Lord's Supper, and before our afternoon service on the first Sunday of the months between Lord's Supper celebrations. Here we offer the format of our prayer meetings as a suggestion.

a. The one who opens reads a portion of the Bible and then we sing one song.

b. Praying out loud is entirely optional.

c. A list of prayer points that has been pre-prepared is distributed and added to by the group.

- d. We encourage many 'smaller' prayers rather than larger 'catch-all' prayers.
- e. One member is asked to begin the time of prayer and another to close it at a defined time.
- f. The first part of the prayer meetings is spent in prayers of adoration, confession, and thanksgiving.
- g. The leader then reads a second portion of the Bible and we sing again.
- h. Again, one member is asked to open and another to close at a defined time.
- i. This last time of prayer is spent in prayers of supplication.

May our Lord be glorified and we as His people aided in our devotion to Him through these encouragements concerning leading in prayer.

Mr Andre Holtlsag is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Book in focus

A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers

D A Carson, (Baker Books, 1992).

Reviewed by Neville and Soesi Watson (Bishopdale)

D. A. Carson starts this book by asking the question "what is the most urgent need of the Church?" After going through a list of likely answers he says these are symptomatic of a far more serious lack. We urgently need a deeper knowledge of God because we think rather little of what He is like, what He expects, and what He seeks in us. We are not captured by His holiness and His love. His thoughts and words capture too little of our discourse and too few of our priorities. God has made us for Himself and we are answerable to Him.

The stated purpose of this book is to address one small but vital part of knowing God, prayer. Prayer (spiritual,

persistent and biblically minded prayer) is a foundational step in knowing God and one of the demonstrations that we do know God. God's Word must reform our praying and in order to achieve this Carson helps the reader to think through some of Paul's prayers. By doing so we may align our prayer habits to Paul's and learn what to pray for, what arguments to use, what priorities to adopt and what beliefs should shape our prayers.

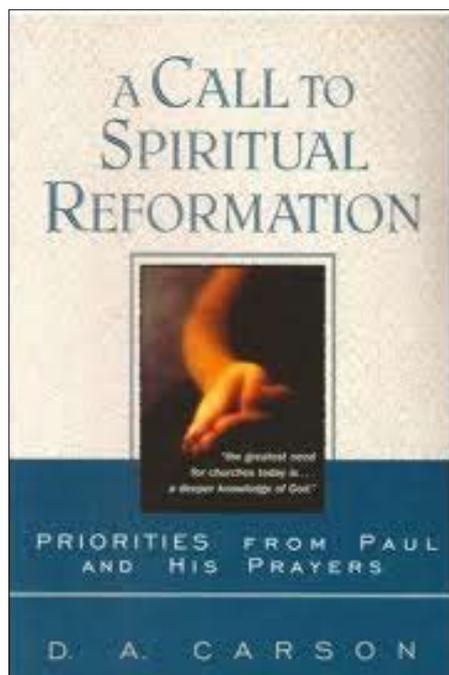
In the 230 pages Carson covers topics such as the framework of prayer, worthy petitions, praying for others, praying for ministry, praying for power, content of a challenging prayer and overcoming hurdles. He also covers difficult topics such as when prayers are not answered; and the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility as it impinges on prayer. Besides these there are many practical points on establishing good prayer habits.

Carson shows that anticipation of the Lord's return is basic to Paul's thought. By contrast, we are losing our anticipation and the world has too much of an impact on us. Can we expect to pray rightly unless we are oriented to the world to come? He also shows the great importance of the link between theology and Paul's prayer life.

The book encourages its readers to think through, in the light of the Scriptures, what it is God wants us to for ask for. When interceding we need to tie as many requests as possible to the Scriptures. Prayer is more effectively passed on by modelling than by formal teaching. For this reason those in any form of spiritual leadership need to work at their public prayers.

In dealing with the subject of prayer, a surprisingly large breadth of topics is touched upon. Below are a few examples:

- In looking at Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians, his thanksgiving is addressed to God, not to the Thessalonians, nevertheless it is cast in such a way as to encourage them. Who do we give thanks to? Carson says "applause in our culture signals approval of the performer. The rules of the entertainment world have subtly slipped into corporate worship and are in danger of destroying it from within."
- In Paul's prayer for the Colossians Carson helpfully explains the meaning of Colossians 1:9 and then shows how this is an urgent need today. The knowledge of God's will is more than knowledge of a certain corpus of doctrine but also of wisdom (tied in Scripture to knowing how to live) and understanding of all kinds (not total but breadth of insight). Paul was concerned over flirtation with syncretism and pluralism because of living in a pagan culture. Carson says "How else will they withstand the pressures of surrounding pagan culture, pressures that are subtle as they are endemic? How else will they think Christianly, and genuinely bring their minds and hearts and conduct into conformity with God's will?" He then goes on to show this wisdom and understanding is an urgent need of our day where some "have chased every fad, scrambled aboard every bandwagon, adopted every gimmick, pursued every encounter with the media." In dealing with all issues Carson keeps a balanced position and in this case he mentions the opposite extreme of rigidly cherishing every tradition simply because it is aged. The reader is exhorted to have meditative and reflective de-



pendence on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

- Part of Paul's prayer for the Philipians is that they "may be able to discern what is best" (Phil. 1:10). Paul's thought is that there are countless decisions in life where it is not a question of right or wrong. What is needed is extraordinary discernment

that helps the Christian perceive how they differ and then make the best possible choice. They are the kinds of choices that cannot be made on the basis of mere law. This discernment springs from a heart transformed by God's grace. In fact, Paul reminds his readers over and over again that everything he has asked for is available

only on the basis of God's grace.

The reader will find helpful discussion (although not exhaustive) on perseverance through difficulties, the mystery and nature of God (existence of evil in the world), forgiveness, unanswered prayers and many other topics. We hope by this brief reflection on the book you may be encouraged to read it.

World in focus

Al Gore admission: Green position based on votes, not science

When it comes to Environmentalism, there is no bigger name than Al Gore: in 2007 he won the Nobel Prize and also an Oscar for his efforts against global warming. His documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, was shown in classrooms around the world.

But this massively influential figure recently admitted to some very self-serving motivations for his "green" position on ethanol.

It is now widely acknowledged that corn-produced ethanol is a disaster. It does nothing for the environment, as its production may emit more carbon dioxide than the gasoline it replaces (from the tractors used to plant and harvest it, to the trucks used to deliver it, to the plants used to process it). Since 40 per cent of US corn production is now going to ethanol, it has also driven up corn prices and consequently the cost of everything from tortillas to meat and chicken too. Ethanol is also so uneconomical the American government has to support it three different ways: with a tax credit that amounts to \$6 billion a year, with a mandate for use (13 billion gallons had to be produced in 2010), and with a tariff to keep out foreign ethanol.

While Gore strongly supported those government ethanol initiatives in the 1990s, this past November Al Gore became one of the latest politicians to acknowledge that corn-based ethanol is a bad idea. But more important than Gore's change of heart was his justification for his original position. As an MSNBC.com headline characterized it: "Al Gore: Votes, not science, led me to back corn ethanol" (Nov. 22, 2010). Gore explained: "One of the reasons I made that mistake is that I paid particu-

lar attention to the farmers in my home state of Tennessee, and I had a certain fondness for the farmers in the state of Iowa because I was about to run for president."

Though the mainstream media treated this as a minor "mea culpa" moment, this is a huge admission. Those who have been influenced by Al Gore would be wise to consider which other of his other "green" positions were also based on self-serving, rather than scientific reasons.

Jon Dykstra, Reformed Perspective

Pope says God behind the Big Bang

The Roman Catholic Church, which once put Erasmus Darwin's evolutionary book *Zoonomia* on its index of forbidden books, has long since capitulated to a similar doctrine. Pope Benedict XVI recently said that while evolution is true, God is its author. He said that the scientific theories on the origin of the universe are not in conflict with "faith" but they cannot explain "the beauty of the world, in its mystery, in its greatness and in its rationality" ("God was behind Big Bang," Reuters, Jan. 6, 2011). The pope "sees no reason why God would not have used a natural evolutionary process in the forming of the human species." This is because the pope doesn't believe the Bible. Not only is Genesis 1-11 plainly written as history rather than poetry or allegory, but Jesus and the apostles authenticated it as history. In Luke 17:26-32, for example, Jesus mentions Noah, the Ark, the Flood, Lot, the destruction of Sodom by fire, and Lot's wife. Elsewhere Jesus mentions the Creation (Mk. 13:19), Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-7), Cain and Abel (Matt. 23:35; Lk. 11:50-51), and Abraham (John 8:39-40). Christ always treats Genesis as history, and it is impossible to honour Him as Lord and

Saviour and disregard His teaching. In Matthew 19:4-5, Christ mentions both "accounts" of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and treats them as history. Charles Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus, preached evolution in his two-volume *Zoonomia*; or, the Laws of Organic Life (1794-96). He believed that an intelligence created the first "living filament," from which all life evolved.

+ *Christian News*

Christian hoteliers in England prosecuted for not renting double rooms to homosexual couples

A 24 January 2011 article in The Christian Institute titled "Homosexuals Try to Crush Christian B&B" reports that Christian Bed & Breakfast owners Peter and Hazelmary Bull of Marazion, Cornwall, England, on 18 January 2011 were ordered by His Hon. Judge Andrew Rutherford to pay UK£3,600 in damages to a homosexual couple who were denied a double room due to the Bull's Christian convictions.

The judge ruled that the Equality Act Regulations concerning sexual relations mandate that civil partnerships must be treated in the same way as marriage. The judge did though give the Bulls permission to appeal, saying that his ruling "does affect the human rights of the defendants to manifest their religion and forces them to act in a manner contrary to their deeply and genuinely held beliefs."

Following the verdict, Mrs Bull has continually received obscene, abusive, and menacing phone calls at her home that she must answer because Mr Bull has been critically ill in a hospital, and Mrs Bull is concerned about missing a legitimate phone call. The Bulls are in danger of losing their home where they operate the B&B due to severe

financial difficulties.

The Bulls' legal defense was funded by The Christian Institute, whose spokesman Mike Judge said: "This ruling is further evidence that equality laws are being used as a sword rather than a shield. Peter and Hazelmary were sued with the full backing of the Government-funded Equality Commission.

Christians are being sidelined. The judge recognises that his decision has a profound impact on the religious liberty of Peter and Hazelmary."

A 27 January 2011 BBC article titled "Gay Pair Refused a Room Take Legal Action" reports that a homosexual couple from Brampton, Cambridge-shire, England, are suing a B&B owner in Cookham, Berkshire, England, for refusing to rent the couple a room due to the B&B owner's Christian convictions.

+ *The Christian Institute*

Controversial document guides plans for UN youth conference

NEW YORK, February 17 (C-FAM) The same controversial agenda that guided the chaotic youth conference last summer in Leon, Mexico will inspire the UN's World Youth Conference, which is now scheduled for this July at UN Headquarters in New York City.

This agenda, laid out in the World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY), promotes youth autonomy and grants them new "rights". One UN legal expert called the document a "Cairo for youth," since it calls on states to assign high priority to providing sexual and reproductive health services, sexual education outside the purview of the parents, and curriculum reforms to eradicate the perpetuation of "traditional female roles."

Lauren Funk

French High Court affirms traditional marriage

PARIS, February 3 (C-FAM) A ruling in the homeland of "égalité" last week found the French prohibition of same-sex marriage is in accord with the French constitution, effectively ruling that there is nothing unequal about upholding the definition of marriage as between man and woman.

The demand for "equality" is the hallmark of most national and international campaigns for homosexual rights, particularly those concerned with same-sex marriage. Discussions at the UN regarding sexual orientation are rife with references to equality and non-discrimination.

Lauren Funk

New UN Agency Chief pledges more financial accountability

NEW YORK, February 3 (C-FAM) The new head of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) admitted ongoing problems with financial accountability while calling for a new push for reproductive health services for youth this week.

The new Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, was appointed as Thoraya Obaid's successor this past November and assumed office in January. Osotimehin comes from Nigeria with a background in medicine and is well known for his sexual and reproductive health advocacy. Pro-life supporters in Nigeria recount his stance against abstinence programs and his support for the abortion drug misoprostol.

By Amanda Pawloski

US policymakers look for ways to cut United Nations funding

WASHINGTON, January 27 (C-FAM) Members of Congress met this week to discuss cutting some US funding of the United Nations until it undertakes "sweeping" reform measures to prevent corruption and allow for voluntary funding.

The US is the single largest donor to the UN, covering nearly a quarter of the organisation's annual operating budget, which does not include the additional funds that the US provides for peace-keeping operations. US lawmakers are pressing for broad spending cuts as they seek to reduce the US budget deficit.

Samantha Singson

Pro-Life movement reaches ascendancy

WASHINGTON, January 27 (C-FAM) Major events in Paris, Washington DC, and San Francisco this past week exemplified the new face of the pro-life movement: young, vocal, and rapidly expanding.

On the heels of a new poll that reaffirmed that a majority of Americans self-identify as pro-life, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators gathered Monday in the nation's capital to protest the 38th anniversary of the US Supreme Court decision that legalised abortion on demand.

Terrence McKeegan, J.D.

Afghan Christian convert from Islam set to be executed for apostasy

The American Family Association has announced that Said Musa, a former Afghan Muslim who became a Chris-

tian eight years ago, is soon to be executed for the Islamic crime of apostasy. A spokesman for the Afghanistan Ministry of Justice was quoted as saying: "The sentence for a convert is death and there is no exception."

As of 20 February 2011, 1461 U.S. military members have been killed in the Afghanistan war officially named "Operation Enduring Freedom".

+ *American Family Association*

Islamic militants confiscate Christian farms in Somalia

Voice of the Martyrs reports that since January 19, members of Al-Shabaab, an Islamic Somali extremist group, have confiscated five farms belonging to Christian converts as well as three farms from Muslims who reportedly attended Bible studies in the cities of Afgoye and Baidawa. The affected families have gone in to hiding. It is reported that the confiscated lands were given to businesspersons who regularly donate to Al-Shabaab. There are also reports of systematic violence against church leaders, desecration of Christian cemeteries and destruction of libraries carried out by the Islamic group who has vowed to cleanse Somalia of any Christian influence. They are also responsible for the deaths of 23 Christians.

WEA Religious Liberty – February, 2011

Violence erupts after sentencing of Christian in Indonesia

Compass Direct News Service reports that Christian leaders in Indonesia faulted the authorities for security breaches that allowed Islamic extremist mobs to attack Antonius Richmond Bawengan – a man convicted of defaming Islam. The mob also attacked the judge who sentenced him as well as two churches and a Christian school. The attack was sparked by dissatisfaction with the five year prison term – the maximum allowed under Indonesia's "blasphemy" law – handed by the judge. Christian leaders condemn the violence but also the state for failing to prevent such violence. CDN reports that the chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released a statement urging Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to bring the perpetrators of the attacks to swift justice.

WEA Religious Liberty – February, 2011

Christian forced to renounce his faith in Afghanistan

Shoab Assadullah, an Afghan Christian,

is faced with the choice of renouncing his faith or a possible 20 year prison sentence. He is being held in a prison in northern Afghanistan since October 2010 under the country's apostasy law. CSW reports that Shoaib Assadullah was arrested on 21 October 2010 after he gave a man a Bible in Mazar-e-Sharif, the fourth largest city in Afghanistan. On

3 January 2011, a judge told Shoaib that if he did not renounce Christ within one week he would be imprisoned for up to 20 years or possibly be sentenced to death. Shoaib refused to deny his faith and has remained faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. The court determined that Shoaib needs to be in prison for another six months, and it is not clear whether

this would be in prison or in hospital, as it is reported that Shoaib was taken to hospital in chains, where doctors stated that he may require hospitalisation as he was speaking incoherently.

CSW reports several other instances of charges against converted Christians under Afghanistan's apostasy law.
WEA Religious Liberty – February, 2011

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Manners Maketh Man

... especially when they begin at home

We all like good manners in other people. Who has not had their heart warmed by a graciously-written note, sent to thank you for a much-appreciated dinner invitation? We all love the friend who drops by, finding us in a mess but looking as if she didn't see it – nothing in her face or her conversation indicates she even noticed it We all appreciate pleases, thank yous and the use of respectful Mr and Mrs on the part of the young. And we all loathe the greedy snatcher who reaches right across us at

the table to grab the best piece of fruit for himself. Let's face it, good manners go a long way to ease the path of social interaction. They make life more pleasant for those with whom we live; and they make it easier for people to love being with us. Lack of manners can make it much harder for a person to like you. I vividly remember an older friend tartly remarking (she had just spent the weekend with an ill-mannered family of children) – "you get a lot of mileage out of manners, you know"!

Some of us tend to view the whole subject of manners a bit cynically. They're just turned on by other people to manipulate you into doing what they want, you might think. Certainly, they're recommended in just this way in many business training programmes. It's true – not having good manners in the work-

place can lose you a promotion – or customers. Corporate etiquette is quite a science – it pays to understand it if you want to go places! Others of us might see good manners as some sort of mysterious code that separates the "in" crowd from those outside it – and be quite turned off the whole subject. To you, they're just a tool of snobbery with which you want nothing to do. Fair enough: those who use manners like that are simply being arrogant, and even cruel. But I'd like to suggest that manners are an important part of the Christian's walk in this world; and that cultivating them at home is a great blessing mothers and fathers can bestow on their children.

Manners in a modern world

I began to think about this subject more



Timeless reminder: The gateway into the Fellows' Garden, New College, Oxford.

particularly in June last year, when an article in *Notebook* magazine by Gretel Killeen caught my eye. Gretel was lamenting the decline of manners in the modern world. Judging by her photo, she's certainly not a grizzly old moaner complaining about the younger generation. No, she's young and with-it ... but the difference between her and the mannerless world she's lamenting is, it seems, that her mother taught her decent manners ... "When I was little we were raised to have 'good manners'. We weren't necessarily happy or interesting, but ... we were polite. This etiquette indoctrination is my earliest memory. It continued fiercely through my childhood and adolescence until manners are now so ingrained in my psyche that I want to punish those who don't possess them ... but ironically I don't do this because I think humiliating people is rude."

Gretel has a pretty good grasp of what good manners look like – her article abounds in examples of both polite behaviour and rudeness. It is good manners, she writes, to ... help the elderly across the street, to say please, thank you and excuse me; to refrain from eating until the last person at the table has been served; and to send a handwritten card rather than an email to someone in deep distress. It is rude, on the other hand, to wear jeans to the opera; to overstay your welcome; to lean across someone; to laugh loudly or push in. But Gretel is a child of the postmodern, relativistic era, and has noticed that what is rude in one culture may be politeness in another. Are manners, then, just a matter of where you grew up, and who your parents were? Somehow, I don't think she wants to say this, exactly – but unbelievers lacking a system of values based on absolute truth always have a problem here. In the end, after asking herself the question – what is rude? Gretel is forced to answer "... I suspect I might think everything's rude unless I'm doing it."¹

This is the conundrum everyone has in an age of do-it-yourself ethics. How do I know if something's right or wrong? It's right if it's right *for me*. Now, we all know that's a very unsatisfying basis for morality; and most unbelievers are uncomfortable with it too, once you start pressing them a little. But where do we Christians start? Vague ideas of manners and politeness aren't sufficient for us, either. What is the basis of a proper code of manners for a Christian? How do we know that our concept of table manners,

social etiquette and conventions for ceremonies like weddings, funerals and the like aren't just mindless tradition or la-di-dah snobbishness? Well, we have to go back to the Bible, don't we, and search for the foundational principles of social conduct. Here we find plenty about the way we should treat each other.

Finding a biblical beginning

Finding the biblical root of good manners is an exercise in the working-out of "good and necessary consequence" (see the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1:6). We do not find a list of specific teachings about politeness in the Bible. But we do find plenty of ground-level principles on which to build a code of manners. Obviously, love is the beginning. If we love our brother, sister or neighbour, we will want to treat them with courtesy, kindness, and gentleness, for instance. Take 1 Peter 3:8, where Peter is summing up a series of instructions on living a godly life in all kinds of relationships. He writes (in the King James translation): "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous..." That last word, courtesy, is translated as "humble in spirit" in the NASB and some other versions, and perhaps helps us get at the root of the idea Peter is conveying. Courtesy, the idea we most often associate with manners, is a desire to put others first. We must put aside our own selfish inclinations – be they laziness, greed, a thirst for honour, privilege or respect – and give preference to others in our lives. What would they like to do? What would they like to eat? What would make them feel welcomed? Quite often, giving them preference will involve giving them things we may have wanted for ourselves (including our time or listening energy) – but the well-mannered person (as guided by biblical principle) gives them up to the other person.

The Bible abounds in examples of gracious, polite, and considerate behaviour. You can see it especially in hospitality. Paul, as a prisoner, was treated "kindly" by the Roman centurion, Julius, at Sidon on his way to Rome (Acts 27:3). Shipwrecked at Malta, Paul was entertained "hospitably" by Publius, the chief man of the island (Acts 28:7). But you can also learn the principles from negative examples. There is the well-known story of "harsh and badly behaved" Nabal, the wealthy husband of Abigail, who famous-

ly declined to offer hospitality to David's men in 1 Samuel 25. He refused to put himself out and pretended not to know David or his men – they were nobodies, unworthy of his notice. That was to cost him his life in the end.²

The application?

Now, if we think all this through at the level of our own everyday lives, certain things about manners become clearer. They are all about putting the other person first. They are all about doing what serves his or her interests. What does this look like, by way of more detailed application? Let's take just one example – perhaps what we tend to think of first: table manners. Many of us see table manners as somewhat weird and esoteric; having to do with strange things like butter knives and mysterious rules about which pieces of cutlery you should use for which course of the meal, and so on. Well, I don't know what things your mother and father taught you, but I thought it may be useful to take some simple examples of table manners, and consider the "others first" principle behind them. As my maternal grandfather once told me when I was little: "My dear, eating is a disgusting habit. Table manners make it bearable."

So, if we're to make eating at the table not only bearable, but an enjoyable experience for those we sit with, what are some things we should and shouldn't do? Let's first consider the negatives. What are some "horrors" to avoid? You could consider **visual horrors**, such as chomping with your mouth open; or shovelling food in so fast that some of it hangs out of your mouth, requiring a few extra shoves to stuff it in. Then there are **audible horrors**, like burping, chewing loudly, or crashing your knife and fork together loudly in mid-air. **Tactile horrors** might include eating with your elbows stuck out so widely that they push your neighbour's arms; or stretching right across in front of someone to grab food further down the table. **Hygiene horrors** would, you think, be obvious – but some don't seem to "get" it, do they? Sticking your knife into your mouth, then a few minutes later using the same instrument to slice yourself more of the communal butter – or sticking it into the jam pot – think how that may affect the on-looker's appetite! Or how about licking all your fingers, shortly before picking up plates, containers, and anything else that other people have to touch? SARS and H1N1 had, I thought, taught

us to know better ... Finally, there are **greedy horrors**, which include thoughtlessly taking the last piece of anything on a plate without first asking who else at the table would like it. Or taking the lion's share of a dish on offer, mindless of how many others have not yet had theirs. And if we went on to consider some positive applications, we could think of things like noticing whether your neighbour needs something, and asking him whether he would like you to pass it. Or offering her food or drink before you serve yourself. A good host makes sure that conversation flows well, that his guests have everything they might need or want, and certainly that no one

is overlooked when it comes to sufficient of everything, or second helpings. Probably you've had very little trouble working out that table manners, like all branches of manners, are based on the principle of consideration of others. And on kindness and generosity. Sometimes good manners simply mean tactful obliviousness of others' bad manners! Gretel Killeen quotes "Anonymous", who succinctly remarked, "Hospitality is making your guests feel at home even if you wish they were."

Naturally, the best place to learn all these kinds of things – both the principles and their applications – is at home. Mother and father are the best teach-

ers of love, consideration, generosity and forbearance. What better way of ensuring your children become kind hosts, gracious guests – and a blessing to be near?

Notes

1 Gretel Killeen, "Manners in a Modern World", *Notebook*, June 2010, pp. 35-9.

2 I am indebted to Dr Michael Flinn for his help with the biblical principles undergirding courtesy

Note: There are many handbooks on manners and etiquette available in print. See, for instance, Glyn Christian, *Table Manners: For High-flyers Who Don't Want Bad Behaviour to Land Them in the Soup* (New Holland Publishers, NZ, 2005), or many brief, informative videos available online on YouTube.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE "QUOTES"

"There is nothing attractive about the gospel to the natural man; the only man who finds the gospel attractive is the man who is convicted of sin." *Oswald Chambers*

"According to the degree of our faith will be our enjoyment of Christ's salvation, our patience in the day of trial, our victory over the world. Unbelief, in short, is the true cause of a thousand spiritual diseases." – *J C Ryle*

"Let us cultivate the spirit of prayer which is even better than the habit of prayer. There may be seeming prayer where there is little devotion. We should begin to pray before we kneel down, and we should not cease when we rise up." *Charles H. Spurgeon*

BIRTHS

Couperus, Natalia Maria-Anna – a daughter born to Joshua and Monique – 1 February (Palmerston North)

De Kock, Ian – a son born to Pieter and Odette – 2 February (Bucklands Beach)

Den Hartigh, Sasha Ruby – a daughter born to Leanne – 22 January (Hamilton)

Loef, Liam Jacob – a son born to Justine and Louise – 29 January (Pukekohe)

Phillips, Ella Marlies – a daughter born to Joshua and Marlies – 27 January (Pukekohe)

Reitsma, Noah Kahu – a son born to Elmer and Bridget – 2 February (Avondale)

van Schalkwyk, Anja – a daughter born to Wouter and Ruiping – 24 January (Wellington)

Viljoen, Hendrik Stephanus – a son born to Fanie and Elisabeth – 2 February (Bishopdale)

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Bucklands Beach: Michael Brooks, Thomas Brooks, Erik Buys, Wikus de Vries, Hendrik Liebenberg, Han Lu (Lily), Hui Siu Was (Ruby) and Liu Honglian (Mary). Lu Shenghao (Gary), Chen Mingli (Michelle Baillie), Lie Lu (Leah) and Mrs Gui Yineng (Irene) were baptised.

Christchurch: Reuben Posthuma.

Masterton: Abigail Cressey, Jessica Hendrikse, Adam and Rosalie Boutcher – Adam and four of their children were baptised.

North Shore: Mitchell Bearman.

Silverstream: Maddie Archbald, Jennifer Donk, Kylie Donk, Stacey Donk, Carl Leenders and Job van der Werff.

Wanganui: Lisa Boessenkool.

WEDDINGS

22 January – Michael van den Engel and Laura Snoek married in Hamilton

12 February – Kereti Peato and Villa Young married in Bucklands Beach

26 February – Steven Voschezang and Ashleigh Kerr married in Te Kauwhata

5 March – Jacob Phillips and Jaimee Frew married in Tauranga

FROM THE PASTOR

Masterton – Peter Kloosterman

The Celebration of Easter is something that should be rich in the praise of God's providence. Providence isn't just about God's power to act. It is about the timing of His redemption. Redemption is a work developed in eternity with eternal consequences, but it occurs at God's appointed time. Deliverance from sins requires that we commit ourselves not only to God's way of salvation, but also to God's time schedule. It occurs not in the nick of time, but the fullness of time. Salvation is accomplished and applied when God says the time is right. This means time and history are also in God's hands. The appointed time of Christ's death and His resurrection is written in God's diary, not man's. The Bible records various plans to destroy Jesus: Herod at His birth; the Jewish leaders when He healed a man on the Sabbath (Jn. 5:18). The Jewish leaders even planned to avoid taking Jesus during the time of Passover (Mt. 26:5). But who can resist the plan of God? Who can

change His appointment? He is directing the events of the world to accomplish His purpose. Understanding salvation means understanding God's plan – not only the method of His bringing salvation, but also His direction of time to accomplish and apply salvation. Every year we can be overwhelmed or oppressed by the busyness of our lives. But praise God that we can know that God's plan unfolds in His perfect time. In the midst of the hurry and scurry of life, He acts when the time is right according to His schedule. Plan on that.

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Buckland's Beach: This morning Luke and Danae Scheepers are with us for the last time prior to their departure to Geelong where Luke will continue his studies at the Reformed Theological College. May the Lord bless and keep

you as you embark on this next stage of your lives. We will continue to surround you with our prayers.

Buckland's Beach informed the Presbytery that Mr Craig van Ecthen's vicariate has been extended to the end of June this year and requests that his preliminary exam be held on 13th May 2011.

Christchurch: We farewell Rev. Crosbie and Sr. Yvonne de Kretser. We thank the Lord for the time you have been with us and the encouragement you have given us. Thank you Crosbie for your pastoral ministry amongst us and we pray that the Lord may continue to guide you both in His service.

From the Rott Family – Greetings to our church family in Christchurch! The Lord has blessed us in our preparation to come to you and allow me to minister in your midst. We will depart the US on 22 February and arrive in Christchurch on 24 February, and, Lord willing,

begin ministry among you, and be able to proclaim God's Word on Sunday, 27 February! Please continue to keep us in your prayers. May the Lord richly bless you all in service to our King!

It has been decided that the installation of Rev. Rott will take place Lord willing during the morning service of Sunday 27 February. Rev R van Wichen will officiate. Afterwards we invite everyone to stay for a Congregational lunch, which will be provided in the hall.

Silverstream: After the morning service we will be saying our official farewell to Iwan, Justine and Ruth Baamann and we will then have lunch in the hall. Please join us there for this time of fellowship.

We give thanks that the Baamanns arrived safely in Canada, in answer to our prayers for travelling mercies.

EDUCATION

Summer School of Theology: We give thanks that this was so well-attended – over 75 registered. Many young people attended and showed an avid interest in going deeper into Reformed theology. Lectures were well-received. The organisers from Palmerston North are hoping to run the school every year from now on.

EVANGELISM

Hastings: We are planning to hold a church open day to promote our church in the Community. We are going to have representatives from each church group. Each group will be, or have been, contacted by the Mission Committee as to their role. Please mark this day on your calendars and come along. We encourage everyone to bring along friends. Please pray that this day will be used by God to spread the gospel in Hawke's Bay. We will be doing a leaflet drop for the open day in the neighbourhood surrounding the church. This will be a good opportunity for some door to door evangelism.

Pukekohe: In the first term of this year we will be running a series of seminars that will consider practical aspects of evangelism using a DVD course called "Just Start Talking". The seminars are intended for the whole congregation. The area Bible studies will begin in the second term.

Wainuiomata: Holiday Bible Club – Tuesday 26th – Friday 29th April 2011, for children aged 5–10 years old. We

Have you been conscious of **God's call** on your life?

Are you praying for the **right place** to serve Him, with your skills and interests?

For the past twelve years, Rev. Kevin Rietveld and his wife Machi have served the Lord faithfully in **Honiara, Solomon Islands**.

These beautiful, tropical islands are three hours flying from Brisbane, but poor and in need of the Gospel of Jesus.

Machi and Kevin have responded to many requests and challenges, such as:

Teaching, distributing aid, co-ordinating visiting teams of helpers and builders, establishing a prison ministry, broadcasting and publishing, sponsoring school students, training church leaders, caring for the disabled, teaching children in hospital etc.

With a regular support team, and a functional, comfortable base, they've found this mission work fulfilling and enriching.

They testify to the numerous blessing they've been privileged to share, and receive in return.

God is good!

It is Kevin's intention to retire as **MISSION DIRECTOR** in late 2012.

The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, through its Solomon Islands Mission Workgroup, is seeking applications, and expressions of interest, and would love to hear from **YOU**.

Enquiries can be made to:

KEVIN RIETVELD in Honiara
email: swim@solomon.co.sb

PETER VAN DER SCHOOR in Tasmania
(Chairman, S.I.M. Workgroup)
email: vanderschoor@tassie.net.au
phone +61 03 6229 3331

are counting down to fun at Operation Space: A close encounter with God's word. In this galactic adventure the children will learn about how God reveals himself through His world and His word.

Wellington: The session is looking for a group of volunteers interested in outreach and evangelism to help facilitate and encourage the congregation in reaching out to those in need of the gospel. No previous experience required, just enthusiasm, a desire to spread God's Word and love to those who need it, or to support those who are already engaged (or want to be engaged) in the great commission Christ gave to His church.

MISSIONS

Bishopdale: After the morning service, Heidi Posthuma and a few of her colleagues have been invited to briefly speak about their work in China and Tibet.

Hastings: After the morning worship service Bianca Saathof plans to give a presentation of her recent visit to the Solomon Islands to see Jair and Laretta Duinkerke in their work as missionaries with the CRCA.

Hamilton: Susan Larsen will speak to us about her work in establishing Bethesda Disability Centre on the SWIM base in the Solomons. Please stay and encourage her in this work.

Palmerston North: Our missionaries in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, Walter and Jeanette Hagoort will be giving a presentation about the Reformed Mission work. This promises to be an interesting evening, to inform and inspire us, so we can pray more effectively for the work.

PRISON MINISTRY

Hastings: The prison ministry teams have the opportunity to proclaim the gospel every Lord's Day throughout January in the Maori Focus Unit. From February the regular pattern of teams ministering on the 2nd and 4th Lord's Day of each month is expected to resume. Please pray for all those involved in this outreach.

Pukekohe: The Session was updated on the work of prison ministry at Spring Hill Correction Facility; those involved are exploring ways of assisting inmates with reintegration.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale: All Sunday School children are invited, along with their parents and

all teachers, to our Discipleship Hour kick-off meeting for 2011. We will meet next Lord's Day to begin a new year of 7 education classes, new teachers, heaps of covenant children, and an exciting God-honoring, Christ-exalting new curriculum. Come sing with us, meet your teachers, hear about what your children will be learning, and be encouraged by the discipleship ministry of the congregation.

Avondale: There is the knock at the door ... the wobbly knees ... the fearful

turning of the doorknob ... you can tell it is someone who is going to introduce themselves from the local Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. What do you do? Lock the door and run? Panic? Or perhaps you are speaking with a neighbour and you ask them if they know God and they say, "yes of course I know "God," we are regular attenders at the Buddhist Temple (or Hindi Temple or Islamic Center) just around the corner from your church in Avondale. "Isn't

You are invited to the

17th Hamilton Easter Convention

22nd-23rd April 2011

Theme:

Our Love Affair with Dutch Flowers Studies in the Doctrines of Grace

Speaker:

REV. JOHN WESTENDORP

Convention Venue:

Hamilton Reformed Church
11 Aberdeen Drive
Dinsdale, Hamilton

Meeting Times:

Fri 3.00 & 7.00 pm
Sat 10.30 am, 1.00 pm & 3.00 pm

Convention addresses:

Friday

3.00pm

Total... ? Are we really so bad?

(Psalm 51:5 & Canons of Dort
III:2,3)

7.00pm

Election with no strings attached

(Ephesians 1:3-6 &
Canons of Dort I:7-10)

Saturday

10.30am

For whom did Christ really die?

(John 10:11 & Canons of Dort II:2,8)

1.00pm

When resistance is futile

(Acts 16:14(b) &
Canons of Dort III&IV:11)

3.00pm

Once saved always saved

(John 10:28 & Canons of Dort V.3,8)



Our guest speaker this year is Australian pastor Rev. John Westendorp.

After working in commerce and industry for ten years John studied at the RTC in Geelong. He served four congregations in the Reformed Churches of Australia before retiring in 2006 to care for his wife, Ali, who was in failing health. After her death at the end of 2007 John spent two four-month spells in Christchurch to help out the Reformed Church in Cornwall Street.

He married Merle in September 2009 and recently came out of retirement to again serve the Toowoomba congregation in Queensland.

John has five married children and twelve grandchildren and is now dad to seven-year old Leah.

John served as editor of the periodical *Trowel and Sword* for seven years.

As our guest speaker John draws on thirty years of experience as a preacher, pastor and teacher.

A bookstall will operate
on Friday and Saturday

Inquiries

Pieter van der Wel
Ph. 07-853 3144

E-mail ecap2011@gmail.com

Bookings:

<http://easterconvention.rcnz.org.nz>

it great" they say, "that we all worship the same God but just with different names?!" What do you do? Quietly nod your head in agreement? Let an awkward silence pass? Have you ever had fears of such an encounter? Would you like to be better equipped; to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15)? Is Jesus really the only way of salvation? What about other religions? How can I identify a cult and false gospels? Join us for the beginning of the adult education year as this term we study "Cults and Other Religions: Is Jesus the ONLY way?"

Dovedale: The dates for Family Camp this year are 25-27 March! Please put

aside this weekend for a time of fellowship and growing closer together as a church family.

Dunedin: There will be a church picnic at Evansdale Glen. People are invited to come along for games, sport and relaxation, with a shared barbecue meal for tea. Many other churches held picnics at the beginning of this year.

North Shore: Our first youth-club event of the year will be a progressive dinner and the theme is the letter T!

Palmerston North: This Friday we will be hosting a trivia night with general knowledge questions and a Bible quiz too. This will be held in the church hall. All ages are welcome.

Pukekohe: A congregational prayer

meeting will be held at the church. We begin the year by thanking God for all his goodness and love to us and by asking for his blessing on all we do through 2011. The meeting will be structured to cover various needs and areas for prayer.

Wainuiomata: Our church Start-Up Day will be held at Days Bay. We hope everyone can come along for a day of Old Fashioned Fun for all.

Wellington: We are going on safari! Dress up for the occasion, get out the binoculars and come join us for a safari adventure. The adventure includes animal spotting, an African dance by imported locals, some traditional African cuisine and a fantastic safari atmosphere.

The emergence of legal Christian publishing in China:

An opportunity for Reformed Christians

Michael Haykin, ed.

One of the more remarkable facts about the history of the church is that some of its most significant events were barely

noticed at the time of their occurrence. Examples are not hard to find. In the early church, for instance, the attention of the most powerful inhabitants of the Roman Empire was focused on the

political and military accomplishments of their day and they gave scant attention to the persecuted band of men called "apostles." Yet two thousand years later it is clear that, by the grace of God, those twelve men had a far more powerful impact than anything the Roman Empire ever accomplished. Again, during the last eight years of Jonathan Edwards' life (1750-58), after he had been expelled from his church by a congregational vote, he labored in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, which at the time was a lonely Indian outpost on the western frontier. Yet it was in Stockbridge that Edwards wrote some of the most important works in the history of the church. Yet again, the most remarkable preacher of the Victorian era, Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92), was converted in 1850, on a snowy morning, in a small Primitive Methodist chapel with only a handful of people in attendance. To this day, only God knows the name of the man who preached that bleak Sunday morning.

It was from these seemingly small, insignificant events that God worked good in mighty ways for untold millions in the generations to come. This should not surprise us. Did not Jesus say that the



Morning Light Christian bookstore in Beijing.

Kingdom of God starts out small – like a mustard seed – and over time becomes a tree of great and lasting significance (Luke 13:18–19)?

Recently, another event has occurred that has gone almost completely unnoticed within the Christian community but has the potential of becoming a major milestone in the history of the church. About the year 2003 it became possible to legally publish some forms of Christian literature in the People's Republic of China. Ten years ago, legal Christian publishing was barely on the radar screen, but today the situation is far different. The demographic and publishing statistics are staggering:

- In the year 1800, 90% of the Christians in the world lived in North America and Europe. Today, about 60% of Christians live in the so-called “two-thirds world” (Africa, Asia, the Middle East). However, Christian publishing in general, and Reformed publishing in particular, has made a weak transition at best to these new regions. The center of gravity for Reformed publishing is still the English language.
- The church in China is 80 to 100 million in size and continues to grow at a rapid rate.
- China's adult literacy rate, between 2003 and 2008, is 93%.
- There are 167,000 bookstores in China.
- 6.3 billion domestically-published books were sold in China in 2007.
- On average, the Chinese read 5 books a year and 1.7 magazines and 7.4 newspapers per month.
- Over the past ten years, more than 200 Christian bookstores have opened throughout China.
- Currently, the *total* number of Christian books in legal circulation in China is approximately 600, using a broad definition of “Christian.” About 50 to 60 new titles are being added each year.
- Of that 600, only about 25 or 30 have a Reformed theme.
- Many of the 600 titles now in print were published by one of the nine China-based Christian publishers that have emerged in the past ten years.

Yet, as amazing as these developments are, they have gone largely unnoticed in the Christian community around the world! Often, the perception outside of China is that Christian publishing of any sort inside China is impossible and thus

it is still necessary to smuggle Bibles and Christian literature. The reality is that the publishing situation today is far different from even just ten years ago. To be sure, the door is not completely open and significant challenges do remain, but remarkable things can be done by working *with* the Chinese publishing houses.

A book with a Beijing issued International Standard Book Number (ISBN) can be sold to anyone, anywhere, in any quantity in China, without any fear of official reprisal. It needs noting that books with foreign ISBN numbers cannot be published or distributed in China. While this movement is still small in size, thirty or forty years down the road it has the potential of being a major milestone in the history of the church. We now have the opportunity to provide legal Christian

wide and one inch deep,” leading to a theologically illiterate church plagued with heresies and immature believers. However, now it is possible to introduce God-honoring books in China that will provide valuable tools for local believers. Church history has shown that God-glorifying church growth often walks hand-in-hand with robust Christian publishing (think of the invention of the printing press and its influence on the Protestant Reformation).

Most amazing of all is that in comparison with traditional evangelical publishers, Reformed publishers have a significant advantage when publishing in China. Currently, the Chinese publishing houses – all under government oversight – tend to give approval more frequently to certain genres of Chris-

“Most amazing of all is that in comparison with traditional evangelical publishers, Reformed publishers have a significant advantage when publishing in China.”

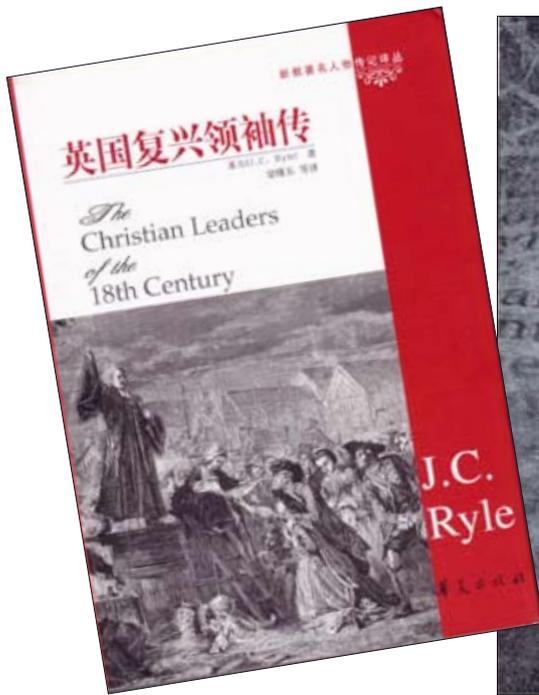
resources in significant numbers to what may be the largest and fastest growing church in the world, but one that currently exists in one of the biggest publishing vacuums of Christian literature in the world.

These changes have enormous implications for the future of the church in China and around the world. What would happen if an additional two or three hundred Reformed titles were added to the six hundred legally published books now in print? Adding this many titles would increase the total number of Christian books in print by approximately 33% to 50%.

A longstanding point of frustration within the church in China is the lack of quality Christian resources. Pastors, lay leaders, seminary teachers and students, and foreign missionaries have few books for evangelistic or discipleship purposes. One of the consequences is that the church tends to be “a mile

tian books than to others. The books most often approved are biographies, old books with historical value (*Pilgrim's Progress, Institutes of the Christian Religion*, e.g.), and marriage and family books. The Reformed community will immediately see the significance of this. How many biographies and old historical books does the Banner of Truth have? How many does the Evangelical Press have? For the past thirty to forty years, Reformed publishers have been publishing these books in great numbers which gives them a very unique advantage in filling the publishing vacuum in China. We can be certain that the vacuum will be filled with something. The key question is: *What* will fill that vacuum? The cults are not silent in China.

Over the past two to three years, several Reformed publishing companies have become aware of this opportunity and a few have been exploring the various publishing options. Two have



Examples of books that are translated and available for sale in China. J.C. Ryle's book "Christian Leaders of the 18th Century", and "Luther the Reformer" by Kittleson.

taken specific steps to legally publish their books. The most notable example is the Banner of Truth. In 2009, Banner signed a multi-book publishing contract to translate and publish their books in China. The biggest challenge for Banner of Truth and the other companies is a lack of funding. While the authors are not privy to the financial details of each company it is clear that their financial resources are very limited. One of the authors has personally approached several Reformed publishers on more than one occasion and when they were informed of the opportunity in China this author repeatedly received the same reply: "We love what is going on in China. We want to be involved but we just do not have the money." The result is that the number of contracts signed and the number of books entering circulation is occurring at a snail's pace. At the same time, other evangelical publishers, some with significant financial resources from the sale of top-selling fiction and self-help titles, have been able to move ahead far more rapidly in China. In fact, they have been the main driving force behind the formation of the initial foundation of Christian publishing in China. This explains why, of the approximately six hundred titles now in circulation, only about twenty-five or thirty are Reformed.

The good news is that several publishers, such as Banner of Truth, Evangelical Press, and Solid Ground Christian

Books each have at least 25 books that will likely pass government censorship in China (i.e. receive a Beijing issued ISBN). Other publishers such as Reformation Heritage Books, Shepherd Press, Inter Varsity Press (UK), P&R, and others, all have titles that will also likely pass censorship. Publishing contracts for these books could be signed tomorrow if funding were available.

For approximately \$1 million USD, fifty to sixty Reformed titles can be translated and published in China. To some, this might sound like a significant amount of money, but when compared to what US churches are spending on building and renovation projects, this is actually a very small figure. According to the U.S. Census Bureau: "Churches in the United States spent about \$7 billion on church buildings in 2009." One to two million dollar building projects are quite common. However, which is more strategic for the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the strengthening of the church worldwide: spending \$1 million dollars building a new church gymnasium or Sunday School wing? Or, using that same million dollars to publish fifty to sixty books in a region that has one of the largest and fastest growing churches in the world, that exists in one of the biggest publishing vacuums of Christian books in the world?

The need of the hour is for men and women in the Reformed community to think globally, to think critically and make

ministry and financial decisions in light of Scripture and the rapidly changing needs of the church worldwide. Christian publishing in China is still very much in its infancy and publishing quality titles now, while the number of legally published books is still quite low, can have an enormous impact on the future direction of the Chinese church. However, if we sit still and do nothing, the non-Reformed titles – which now largely define the market – will continue to shape the future of the church in China. What direction Christian publishing in China ultimately goes in remains to be seen. Either way, we can be sure that it will have a decisive impact of some sort in the days to come.

Happily, concerned Christians around the world can get involved. In the past year, two new opportunities have emerged to help fill the publishing vacuum in China (both of which have 501(c)3 tax exempt status in the US):

The Robert Morrison Project. Established in 2009, the Robert Morrison Project specifically aims to legally publish Reformed literature in China. Over the next five to ten years their goal is to publish 50 titles in China and the first 22 are all from the Banner of Truth Trust. Individuals and churches may sponsor the publication of specific titles. To learn more about this opportunity visit their website (www.robertmorrisonproject.org) or contact them by email (rmp@psmail.net).

Target 25. This project is a ministry of *Desiring God* and their goal is to translate and publish titles by John Piper in 25 key languages around the world. One of those languages is Chinese. To learn more about this project visit their website (www.desiringGod.org/io) or contact them by email (io@desiringgod.org).

Soli Deo Gloria

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Egypt and Cush shall praise God

L. Anthony Curto

What a great joy it is to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior has given to his church the great commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. He has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church as she advances to the nations. He has promised to be with us always and has sent his Holy Spirit to empower and strengthen us in our labors in his behalf. As we see these promises being fulfilled, we rejoice and give him all the glory.

It has been my great joy to be serving as part-time missionary evangelist to the nation of Ethiopia for the OPC since 2000. During these last ten years, I have much cause to be thankful to God for his blessing upon our labors in Ethiopia. From the capital of Addis Ababa to the southern districts of the country, we have seen God do great and mighty things. Souls have been saved; churches have been planted; elders and deacons have been trained; ministers have been ordained. It has been both thrilling and humbling to see what the Lord has done, for we know that this is not the result of our work, but of his work done through us.

I have had the opportunity, both in these pages and in many of our churches, to share the blessing of the Lord as we have labored with our brothers in the Ethiopian Reformed Presbyterian Church (ERPC). Our work continues to go forward. The work is plentiful, and we have only begun to see all that the Lord has planned. My trips into Ethiopia two times a year are full of activity and leave me exhausted, but the Lord continues to supply all we need as we labor for him.

What I really want to write about here is a new door that has been opening for us in the western part of this vast country. In 1918, through the labors of

American Presbyterian missionaries, a church was established called the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Bethel (EECB) in Sayyo-Kelem. This church has gone through many trials and hardships. It survived the Italian invasion of 1936, but in the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 it was placed under the governance of an Ethiopian regime that was hostile to evangelical Christianity. For many years, this church lost its identity and its opportunity to function as the church of Jesus Christ.

But God, who is rich in mercy, turns the best-laid plans of men to naught.

On September 26, 2003, the former congregations of the EECB were granted the opportunity to be recognized once again as an independent church of Jesus Christ. What is really amazing is that this church was reorganized with 140,000 members in seven synods consisting of 38 presbyteries worshiping in 344 congregations! They are primarily made up of the Megenga, Gambele, and Bench tribes, who live along the Ethiopia-Sudan border. They have 90 pastors, 151 co-pastors, and 15 missionary evangelists. As you can see, the field is white for harvest, but the laborers are few.

“It is exciting to see how God has preserved his church as he promised He would!”



People hungry for the Word of God.



Two years ago, these brothers contacted me while I was in Ethiopia and asked if we could help them. They need more ministers, elders, evangelists, and deacons. They have adopted the Westminster Standards as their church's standard and asked if we could work with them in training and evangelism.

I have made two trips into western Ethiopia. In January 2010, I went to the town of Teppe, and in June 2010 to the town of Gambele. I found people hungry for the Word of God, desirous to serve Jesus Christ and see his church built up. Their plea is to come and help them. The area is primitive, like Karamoja in Uganda. It is hard to reach by car, and there are very few accommodations. Yet it is exciting to see how God has preserved his church as he promised he would!



Please pray for these brothers and sisters in the Lord, that God would continue to nurture them and cause this church to be strong in its testimony for him. Pray for me as I seek to be of help to these believers. Pray also for our continuing work with the ERPC. We are not ignorant of Satan's devices, and we know that he would like to destroy this work if he could. We give thanks to God that:

*"Nobles shall come from Egypt;
Cush shall hasten to stretch out
her hands to God."
—Psalm 68:31*

Mr L Anthony Curto is a missionary with the OPC and is known in the RCNZ as a speaker at a Reformation Conference some years back.



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Top: Praising God in Teppe.

Middle: Children with open ears.

Bottom: Meeting for worship in Gambele.