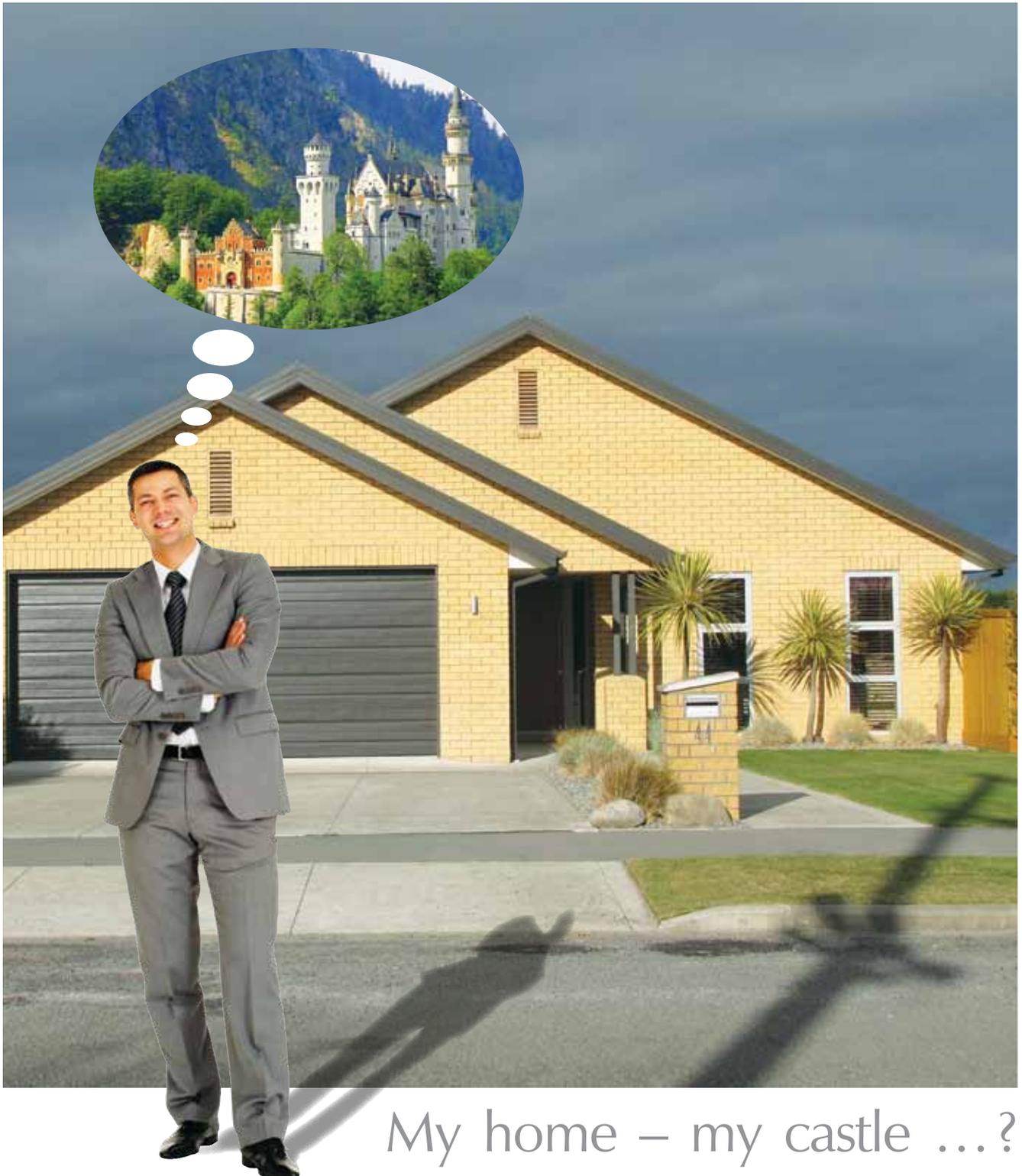


faith in
focus

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My home – my castle ...?

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Editorial

I am going to take it for granted that you all know the old saying, “my home – my castle”. The origin of this saying is a bit of a mystery, but it does evoke certain ideas about our homes and how we perceive or even live in them.

How do you live in your home? Is it that castle that you drive into and raise up the draw-bridge to keep all others out? Or is it a castle that is open to all and where everyone who enters it may find refuge?

The former is a place where the self-indulgent and house-proud dwell. They don't care about the company of others and if they do, it is usually only people who are of the same ilk who visit. On the other hand, there is the home whose owner is winsome, generous and inviting not only to friends, but to strangers too. In both cases, each home may be beautiful inside and out, but, what is more important is the way the occupants live in them and use them – for themselves only, or, for others too.

It can be quite interesting when you look at this whole subject of “my house – my castle”. Our contributors itshare with us some very interesting and valuable insights. I am sure you will be challenged.

Mr Peter Moelker observes how idolatrous we can all be when it comes to our homes and possessions.

Mrs Esther Smith writes about her home from a woman's point of view, where she has an open-door-policy – using her home for the edification of others.

Mr John Haverland reflects personally and biblically about the homes he and his family have lived in.

Mrs Sally Davey takes a cue from *NZ House & Garden* and three women and their homes.

Mr Paul Archbald looks at 1 Cor. 6:1-10 on legal disputes between brethren.

Mrs Harriet Haverland keeps us up to date with news from our churches in the Gleanings column.

Mr Paul Viggiano reviews *Politics According to the Bible*, by Wayne Grudem; Mr James Scott, managing editor of *New Horizons*, reviews *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, by John M. Frame; Mr Andrew H. Selle reviews *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story*, by D. A. Carson.

Mr John van Dyk reviews “Angels & Aristocrats Art Exhibition”.

Mrs Marjorie Korvemaker, a certified biblical counsellor asks the question “Who do we worship with our dress?”.

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Images; p2 Mr Peter Moelker; p6 Mrs Esther Smith; p8 photostock / Free-DigitalPhotos.net; p11 Mrs Sally Davey; p13,14 en.wikipedia.org; p19-21 Dunedin Public Art Gallery; p22 photostock / FreeDigitalPhotos.net; p23 Crestock.com

Faith is not an achievement; it is a gift. Yet it comes only through the hearing and study of the Word.
Martin Luther

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.

My home – my castle ...? (1)

My home, my idol?

I confess. When we still lived in North America, every time I returned to the city of my birth I would inevitably, almost against my own will, be drawn back to the same practice. No matter how many years passed, no matter where I was visiting in the area, no matter who I had with me in the car, I couldn't seem to escape from doing it. I would get in our car and drive down the English Settlement Road, my mind being filled with childhood memories, and re-live the past. I would remember walking to the bus stop down this road; I would remember the path that led to a classmate's home heading through the trees; I would remember the neighbor who lived in a bus and seemed to have an odd but large collection of beer cans (don't ask!); I would remember the dog that would terrify me on the way home from school; and then – there it was ... same as always, the border of the property, the swing in the tree with ropes getting more frayed, the run-down garage, and the house where I was born and grew up. The last time I went by, shortly after the death of my mother last year, I even stopped in on the neighbours and current owners of the property to ask if I could just walk around the property. The home is now a pile of rubble, long since torn down and left a heap of wood, glass, and concrete – a playground for critters. And yet, every time I have been in the area, I felt a desire to drive by. Like I said, I confess. I missed my home.

Although, perhaps, I am in good company. It was Homer who wrote in the *Odyssey* of the hero Odysseus and his determined quest to return home. On being tempted by Calypso to give up his return with the taunt, "you still desire your old home?" Odysseus replied, "It is true, each day I long for home, long for the sight of home." Have you ever "longed for home?" Even before Pliny the Elder gave us the famous words "home is where the heart is," mankind has had a fascination with and a love for home and all that the word "home" means. Perhaps the word "home" means

much to you as well and brings to mind many different thoughts: eating a family meal together around the table, bedtime stories with mom or dad, times of worship, bible study, and prayer, a place where you are always welcome, a place you long to be. But is it possible for our home to become an idol? Is it possible to love our home too much? Is it possible to lose sight of God's provision, gift, and the purpose of our home? Have you ever longed for a "better" home? A bigger home? A flashier home? How can we know if our home has become an idol? I would like to suggest a few biblical principles that will help us determine whether or not our home has become an idol of the heart.

A culture of discontent

The Auckland Home Show has been held annually since 1978. It drew almost 50,000 visitors in 2011 and will be held again in early September. By all appearances, Aucklanders (and perhaps New Zealanders in general)

are quite concerned about their homes. The average value of the homes owned by visitors to the Show was around \$630,000. About 2/3 of those visiting the Show were actively planning a building or renovation project with an average budget of \$75,000, though a good percentage (40 percent) were planning a project of under \$25,000. What were people most interested in? No surprise there perhaps: kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor & gardening products. 97 percent of those who attended the Show said one of the important reasons they came was to get "new ideas and inspiration for my home," 94 percent said they wanted "to see the latest ... products," and 87 percent were looking for "expert advice." New ideas, latest products, and expert advice. Are these things on your mind as you walk through your home? Should they be?

The Bible tells us: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have"(Heb.13:5), "godliness with contentment is great



Peter Moelker's family home.

gain”(1 Tim.6:6), “the fear of the Lord leads to life: then one rests content”(Pr.19:23). The apostle Paul spoke of his learning to be content “whatever the circumstances” and “in any and every situation”(Phil.4:11,12). Though the Bible speaks repeatedly of the one who fears the Lord, knows the Lord, and rests in the Lord as the one who lives a contented life no matter what the circumstances, we must recognise that we are living in a culture which encourages us to be discontent in any and every situation. To be discontent is to be dissatisfied, unhappy, restless, always craving and desiring something more,

had wrapped them up for presentation at her party. The time arrived for the opening of gifts and this little girl (perhaps 5 or 6 years old), came with eyes wide with anticipation to receive the gift from “Oma.” Well, this little girl opened the gift and as soon as she saw what was inside she ... burst into tears! I mean, she wailed. It was all her mother could do to console her poor child. This gift, of course, was not what she wanted. The painstaking work of Oma notwithstanding, there would be no “thank you” for this gift.

Thanklessness is the characteristic in the Bible of those who deny the Creator

and the good things of man’s invention (outdoor toilets anyone?). Televisions that no longer break your back when you need to move them, microwaves that can heat up some leftovers so that dinner is ready sooner, a carpet that does not smell of mould, a fresh coat of paint, a new roof so that the water stops dripping through the ceiling onto the little’s pillow, and a clean and orderly home are not to be despised. But whatever the size, location, or monetary value of our home, if we lack thankfulness to God, all the “improvements” in the world won’t change the state of our heart. Not only are we called to be content with the home the Lord has provided to us, we are to be thankful for the home He has provided. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 tells us that we are to “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Lord’s Day 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that prayer is “the chief part of the thankfulness which God requires of us.” Thankfulness is to characterise the thoughts, heart, and service of the Christian believer. In all our thinking and saving and planning and buying, we are to be thankful for what the Lord has provided. If our thinking about our home is in any way fuelled by an unthankful heart, we know the plague of ingratitude has crept into our soul.

Recapturing a sense of purpose

I will never forget my first (and only!) encounter with an interior designer. I was working for a household moving company during a summer in student days. It was a great job. New place of work every day, new people to meet, new challenges (how are we going to get this piano or freezer out of *this* doorway!), and the occasional free piece of furniture. Yes, that’s right, I said *free*. Occasionally, a person moving house would simply tell us to leave something on the truck. One time, as we were moving a couple into a home in a suburb of Toronto, Canada, we were told that as we brought furniture into the house, an interior designer would tell us where to place the item. The amazing (and at times amusing) reality of the situation was that the husband and wife were both standing in the house and making suggestions of where things might go only to be corrected and overruled by the interior designer! One time, I was carrying in a beautifully carved wooden coffee table and had taken one step into the lounge only to be told immediately

“To be discontent is to be dissatisfied, unhappy, restless, always craving and desiring something more, something different, something else, whether it be a bigger bedroom, a newer toaster, a softer carpet, a larger oven, a brighter television, a faster computer, and on it goes.”

something different, something else, whether it be a bigger bedroom, a newer toaster, a softer carpet, a larger oven, a brighter television, a faster computer, and on it goes. None of these things, in themselves, are sinful, but whenever I feel dissatisfied with what the Lord has provided, I know that discontent fever has made its way into my heart. When I am frustrated and angry about the home the Lord has blessed me with, I am not content with what God has provided.

The plague of ingratitude

I will never forget the particular time I was visiting some relatives with my mother on the occasion of a birthday of one of my mother’s granddaughters. My mother had painstakingly crocheted some slippers for this granddaughter and

His rightful worship (Rom.1:21). Though ten lepers are cleansed only one returns to give thanks to the Lord (Luke 17:16). In fact, one of the signs of the terrible godlessness of the last days described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:3 is not only that men will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God but that they will be “ungrateful.” Do we realise how terrible the sin of ungratefulness really is? To have a thankless heart in the face of such abundance as surrounds us in New Zealand is inexcusable. No doubt, there are always things that need to be done and could be improved in our homes. Families grow larger, children grow older, and yes, it is nice to be able to enjoy the fruits of man’s fulfilling the cultural mandate. The Bible does not suggest that we reject the good things of this creation

by the interior designer – “take that back to the truck.” Apparently, this was one item that would not fit in the grand design. I couldn’t help thinking upon leaving that home: who was planning to live there? The couple or the interior designer!? What was this home for anyway? To live in or to put on display? After all, it was the famous cartoonist, Charles Schulz, who said, “decorate your home. It gives the illusion that your life is more interesting than it really is.” We often suffer from a lack of perspective and a clear sense of purpose when it comes to our homes. Have you ever sat back and asked yourself the question: “what is my home really for?”

What is its purpose? A place to store our stuff? A museum to be shown to select guests? A fast food restaurant to prepare quick meals for those who hurriedly pass through? What is the *purpose* of my home? The Bible tells us that our homes are to be places where children are instructed in the Law of the Lord (Deut.6:7, 11:19), where the righteous experience the Lord’s blessing (Prov.3:33), where Christians fellowship and worship God together (Acts 2:46), and where others are invited in to enjoy that same blessing of the Lord (Acts 16:15, 18:26, Romans 12:13, 16:23, 1 Peter 4:9, 3 John 1:8). If your home is your idol, you will have lost sight of its

purpose, to be, as all things created by the Lord, an instrument to be used for His glory. Rather than our home being an idol of our heart, we must be content with the Lord’s provision, grateful for the gift of a home He has already given, and convinced that the purpose of our home is not to please neighbours, but to please God in using this gift like any other – as in instrument for His glory, as the place where Christ is honored and worshiped as King.

Mr Peter Moelker is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Avondale.

My home – my castle ...? (2)

“My home, your castle”

Esther Smith

“Go´sć w Dom, Bóg w Dom” is Polish and means “Guest in house, God in house”. “Mi Casa es su casa” is a Spanish saying which means “My house is your house”. Both these phrases invoke ideas of a culture of using homes for hospitality. What phrase are we most familiar with when it comes to our homes? Is it “My home, my castle”? As Christians is this the attitude we should have towards our homes? Should our homes be a fortress for ourselves and our family, to be used solely for our own gratification and pleasure? In a culture where it is not (or is at least no longer) the norm, how are we to go about using our homes to obey God’s command to “practise hospitality”?

Personally, I find such questions somewhat overwhelming. I don’t feel that using my home for hospitality is particularly my “gifting”. I was not raised in a home where hospitality was modelled or taught in this way. I am still very much a learner. However, Scripture does tell all believers to “practise hospitality” (Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9). It is not only the task of the chosen few who are good and well-practised at it. So let’s deal with some excuses for not using our homes to practise hospitality¹:

- “I’m not confident”. The thought of entertaining may intimidate you, probably because you are trying to measure up to someone else’s standards or style. But here we see the difference between entertaining and hospitality. Karen Mains writes in *Open Heart, Open Home*², “*Entertaining says, ‘I want to impress you with my beautiful home, my clever decorating, my gourmet cooking.’ Hospitality, however, seeks to minister. It says, ‘This home is not mine. It is truly a gift from my Master. I am His servant, and I use it as He desires. Hospitality does not try to impress but to serve.’* Hospitality is not about what others think of us, but what we think of others and our desire to bring glory to God. If you’re not feeling confident to take the bull by the horns and plan a neighbourhood feast, figure out what you are good at. I like to think I make a nice cup of tea, and I usually have some biscuits in my pantry, so what is to stop me having someone over to share these blessings with me?
- “My home is not [insert adjective] enough”. Big? Tidy? Modern? Whatever you insert, if this is your excuse then you don’t understand what hospitality is. Hospitality is not about

waiting to share what you hope to have, it is about sharing what you have now. Taking the example of the early believers, they “were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.” (Acts 4:32). Also, have you thought of the possibility that some struggling mum walking in to your house may feel a sense of relief that you too have a few (or more than) toys strewn carefully across your lounge? Putting on airs is counterproductive. People who feel inferior are not likely to want to share their life’s struggles with you. There is much value in aiming to keep an orderly home, but perfection is not required in order for your home to be hospitable.

- “I don’t have time”. Simply, if we want to follow God’s command to practise hospitality we will make time to do so. Be creative. There is no prescription about the time of day, or number of courses served, or the state of your house. Work with what you’ve got.

The fact that the above excuses are familiar to many of us suggests that the problem is not with the preparation of our homes, but with the preparation of

our hearts. Like all good things in the Christian faith, hospitality begins with prayer. Prayer for attitude, for strength of character, opportunity, sincerity and love. Hospitality is a natural extension of the attitude of love we are to strive for. It is a practical way to love others.

How then are we to consider our homes with regard to hospitality? Pat Ennis³ suggests our home is to be a *place of refuge* and a *centre for evangelism*. What does this mean for those to whom we are to practise hospitality: our family, our Christian brothers and sisters, and strangers to the gospel?

We begin with our family. Those who live with us know exactly what we are like and to them is our greatest witness to the work of God in our life. We are to make time for them, be thoughtful towards them, and aim to make our home a place of refuge for them – a place of rest, protection and godly counsel. Edith Schaffer⁴ describes

a family as *“a door that has hinges and a lock. The hinges should be well-oiled to swing the door open during certain times, but the lock should be firm enough to let people know that the family needs to be alone part of the time, just to be a family ... In the same way, the family to be shared can also be in a state of just being raw, scattered ingredients of a family, which need time to become the ‘bread’ which could be helpful to the hungry on needing the reality of a family to share. The kneading and moulding and mixing and blending are things which go on throughout a lifetime of putting family together, but if a certain amount of togetherness of the ingredients has not taken place, there is nothing at all to share, and the one seeking help comes to an ‘empty table.’”* When it comes to hospitality wisdom is required to balance the biblical mandate to practise hospitality with the priority of meeting the needs of a family. While we don't want

our house to be a fortress, and we can trust our family is safely in God's hands, the “wife of noble character” (Proverbs 31:10ff) looks to the needs of her dependants as well as extending her hands to the needy. She does this in such a way that leads her husband and children to call her blessed. Lisa Tatlock⁵ gives a helpful set of principles when it comes to practising hospitality with a family, these include:

- 1 Remember there are seasons in life. The way you practise hospitality may be different when you are single compared to when you have a young family, for example. Different, not non-existent.
- 2 Husband and wife should work together to establish how the family will practice hospitality.
- 3 Include your children.
- 4 Treat your family “as good as guests”.
- 5 Use discretion as to who you have in your home and when.

Once hospitality in the context of our family situation has been established, hospitality towards others becomes a natural extension of what we are practising in our homes. Our homes will hopefully then become a place of refuge and a centre for evangelism to those outside our family: our Christian brothers and sisters and our friends, wider family and acquaintances who have not accepted Christ as their Lord.

Entertainment/hospitality

Considering now our Christian brothers and sisters. How are we best to practise hospitality towards them? Here I think it is important to remind ourselves again of the difference between entertaining and hospitality. Once we have been involved in a church for a while we naturally meet people with whom we have things in common, we enjoy their company, we get along with them well. It is easy to invite these people into our home, and this is good. We can give each other much encouragement in this setting if we are intentional about doing so. However, we need to be careful that this is not the extent of our “hospitality” within the church. The word translated as “hospitality” in the New Testament literally means “love of strangers”⁶. I don't feel therefore that because we have our friends over for dinner regularly we can claim that we practise hospitality. We need to cast our net wider than those we get along with or know well in order for our home to

“Hopefully the way you interact with people within your home speaks volumes to them about the love of God displayed through the work of His Son.”



begin to be used more fully for God's glory within the church. Jerram Barrs⁷ points out that Jesus puts this bluntly in Luke 14:12-14:

"When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

A place of refuge

For our home to be a place of refuge for our Christian brothers and sisters we need to assess again the attitudes of our hearts and our willingness to open ourselves to the struggles and needs of those within the body of Christ. We need to consider carefully how we can make our homes a place where those coming in feel Christ's love and comfort through us.

Our final group of people to whom we are to practise hospitality is our friends, wider family and acquaintances (which include people you may have just met!) who have not accepted Christ as their Lord. Here our home is still a place of refuge, but it is also a centre of evangelism. A Christian home is a tool that can be used powerfully by God to draw people towards Him. I say this with conviction and from experience because this is predominantly the tool God used to bring me to know Him – praise be!

A young school friend of mine took her job seriously and evangelised me gently and lovingly. I would go and stay in her home and I experienced the peace and love of Christ through her, her parents and siblings. What a joy and challenge to me to have been set this example. I pray that God may use our home in this way too. I would like our home to be a place my children feel comfortable bringing their friends, a place where their friends are comfortable and experience the love and peace of Christ that they may or may not be experiencing in their own homes.

Hospitality a command

Most of us are surrounded by non-Christians. A gesture of friendship like inviting them around for a meal or a cup of tea while their children play with yours is in my experience usually much appreciated, particularly if they are experiencing a time of hardship. This is one way of living out God's commands to *"live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us"* (1 Peter 2:12) and *"be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."* (Colossians 4:5,6). There are all sorts of things people can tell about you from your home and the way you behave in it. Hopefully the way

you interact with people within your home speaks volumes to them about the love of God displayed through the work of His Son.

We are instructed by God to practise hospitality. All we have is given to us by God and is to be used for His glory. Our hearts and homes therefore need to be prepared to be used for His purposes: as places of refuge for all where his love is manifest, and as centres of evangelism where His word is freely shared. May we all be less inclined to say "my home, my castle" and more inclined to pray to our loving Father "my home, *your* castle".

Notes

- 1 Although I am well able to think of my own excuses, I have utilised heavily those presented in Cairns, J. (1988) *Welcome, Stranger: Welcome, Friend*, Gospel Publishing House.
- 2 Mains, K. (2002) *Open Heart, Open Home*, IVP Books, p 29.
- 3 Ennis, P. And Tatlock, L. (2007) *Practicing Hospitality: The Joy of Serving Others*, Crossway.
- 4 Schaffer, E. (1975) *What is a Family?*, Baker Book House, pp 183,184.
- 5 Ennis, P. And Tatlock, L. (2007) *Practicing Hospitality: The Joy of Serving Others*, Crossway.
- 6 Cairns, J. (1988) *Welcome, Stranger: Welcome, Friend*, Gospel Publishing House.
- 7 Barrs, J. (2001) *The Heart of Evangelism*, Crossway.

Mrs Esther Smith is a member of the Reformed Church of Christchurch. She is married to Titus and they have three young children.

My home – my castle ...? (3)

Our homes – personal and biblical reflections

John A. Haverland

The editors of *Faith In Focus* have asked me to write about the physical homes we live in. I want to begin with some personal reflection on the houses our family lived in as I was growing up and those my wife and I have lived in during our

30 years of marriage, and then reflect on some of the biblical references to homes and what we can learn from those.

Personal reflections

Some people live in the same house for 30 or 40 years. That is unusual and was certainly not true of us as we

were growing up. Our family moved regularly because my father enjoyed renovating a home; then, when he ran out of projects on the house he would build a boat. When that was completed he would sell the house, and the boat, and buy another project! We did that exact pattern twice over and then

he decided to build a new house.

All this had the disadvantage that various parts of the house were often in a state of reconstruction. The advantage, however, was that my brothers and I learnt a great deal about construction, renovations and woodwork (It is perhaps no surprise that my two brothers became civil engineers – construction must be in the genes!)

My wife and I bought our first home while serving in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach. It was a small three bedroom, weatherboard house in Howick. We bought it on a government scheme of low interest for three years. It was a joy to be in our own home. It needed a lot of renovation. I was able to put into practice all that I had learnt from my father. Various members in Bucklands Beach lent me a hand either with advice or with practical help, and my parents

regularly came up from Christchurch so my father could assist with some major projects. It was very satisfying to be able to make our home more beautiful and livable and suitable for the needs of our family. Many of you as readers will have experienced this same satisfaction.

From there we moved to Bishopdale where we lived in the manse for the next 13 years, right next door to the church. The manse is a Fraemohs home, built entirely out of wood. All the internal walls and ceilings are polyurethaned pine, giving the house a warm and cosy feel and making it very practical for a family. It is also well built for the sun. Being in a house owned by the church meant that I could not do major renovations! The Board of Management, however, was quite happy for me to potter around on maintenance matters, which I enjoyed.

Moving to Pukekohe gave us the

opportunity to build our own home. Our son William had just completed an apprenticeship as a joiner, so Harriet and William designed her 'dream' kitchen, which he constructed and installed, as well as making the cabinetry for the bathroom and en-suite. We were able to design a home with my study positioned next to the driveway, making it easily accessible for people coming to see me. Our home also has a large lounge suitable for big groups of people - ideal for session socials, Bible study groups and having people over.

While our children were all at home all the rooms were full, but now that our family is emptying out, we have rooms to spare, making it easier to have people stay, and to offer hospitality to those passing through.

Biblical themes/ lessons

People in the Bible lived in a great variety of homes. Abraham lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob (Heb 11:9). They were nomadic and their homes were transportable, and temporary. The writer of Hebrews informs us that Abraham "was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). The people of Israel lived in more permanent homes during their 430 years in Egypt, but then, like Abraham, lived in tents during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. During those years the Lord looked after them; they did not lack anything – their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell (Deut 2:7; 8:4). After that Joshua led them in the conquest of the land of Canaan. Before they set out on that conquest Moses promised that God would give them "a land with large flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide", and warned them, "be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Deut 6:10ff). To help them remember their tent-dwelling years in the desert God instituted the annual Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths); every year they were to live in booths for seven days as a reminder of God's past and present provision for their needs. Sadly, they did forget the Lord and after many warnings from the prophets God eventually forced them out of their homes and their land in the exile under Assyria (722 BC) and in the exile under Babylon (in 587 BC).

In this New Covenant we do not celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, but we



must remember the spiritual truth that God wanted to impress on the people of Israel, that is, that God has provided for all our needs, including giving us a roof over our heads, and that he will continue to look after us.

None of us live in tents (except when we go on holidays). We live in houses built of permanent materials. Yet, we need the perspective of the patriarchs whose earthly dwellings were temporary but who looked forward with faith to their eternal home in heaven. Jesus assured his disciples that there was plenty of room for them (and us) in heaven; "In my Father's house are many

manded the people of Israel to look after widows, orphans and strangers. In the New Testament we read that Jesus was often invited into people's homes and some, such as Mary, Martha and Lazarus were most generous in having him (and his disciples!) eat and stay with them. During his Galilean ministry Jesus stayed in a house in one of the seaside villages around the Sea of Galilee; this was place where he could meet with his disciples and teach them (Matthew 13: 1, 36). John's dear friend Gaius was commended for the hospitality he showed to other Christians, even though they were strangers to him (3 John 5ff). Our

and roofed with colour steel. When it is completed the rooms will be filled with furniture and furnishings, pictures and paintings, ornaments and artifacts, things sentimental and historical, modern and traditional. The wise men of Israel drew a spiritual lesson from our physical homes. They wrote;

*"By wisdom a house is built,
and through understanding it is
established;
through knowledge its rooms are
filled
with rare and beautiful treasures."*
(Proverbs 24:3f)

“We need to learn to be content with the home we have. There will always be someone with a bigger and better house.”

rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Our Lord reinforced this in the last book of the Bible with the vision he gave to John of our glorious home in the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. A loud voice from the throne declared; "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself shall be among them and be their God" (Rev 21:2f). These promises are an encouragement not to hold too tightly to the things of this world – our houses and holiday homes and furniture – but to remember that all who follow Christ will receive an inheritance in the new heaven and the new earth, an eternal home with God.

Homes in biblical times were also places of service and hospitality. Abraham invited three strangers to stay and have a meal with him and was generous in his hospitality (Gen 18:1ff). A widow in Zarephath of Sidon looked after the prophet Elijah for a long time (1 Kings 17). A Shunammite woman and her husband often invited the prophet Elisha for meals and provided a small furnished room for him in their house so he could stay with them whenever he passed by (2 Kings 4:9f). God com-

manded the people of Israel to look after widows, orphans and strangers. In the New Testament we read that Jesus was often invited into people's homes and some, such as Mary, Martha and Lazarus were most generous in having him (and his disciples!) eat and stay with them. During his Galilean ministry Jesus stayed in a house in one of the seaside villages around the Sea of Galilee; this was place where he could meet with his disciples and teach them (Matthew 13: 1, 36). John's dear friend Gaius was commended for the hospitality he showed to other Christians, even though they were strangers to him (3 John 5ff). Our

homes can be well used for a ministry of hospitality, an avenue of service that Esther Smith has developed in another article. Houses are homes to be lived in, not show homes to be admired nor idols to be worshipped. No matter where you live, the primary object is to serve God, and to use our houses as instruments to that end.

We also need to learn to be content with the home we have. There will always be someone with a bigger and better house. Recently we heard of a man who arrived home after a day of work and was happy to be home again in his familiar surroundings. He settled into his chair and began to read a magazine; as he read he became more and more discontented with his own home. His garden looked overgrown, the furniture shabby and the carpet worn. The magazine he was reading was *Better Homes and Gardens!* Magazines like these can give us good ideas for our own home, but they can also encourage jealousy and envy, sins we need to guard against. Remember the 10th commandment: You shall not covet your neighbour's house!

As I write this a new house is being built next door to us. At present they are laying the foundation. After this it will be framed up with timber, clad with bricks

A godly home is established on understanding – on a knowledge of God and his Word. It is built by wisdom, that is, the fear of the Lord, a love and reverence for God. It is furnished with a growing knowledge of the truth of God applied to every area of life in the home – to the love between a husband and wife, the relationship of parents and children, to the books we read, the DVDs we buy, the programme we watch, the games we play, the messages we post on Facebook, and the conversations we have with others. Our homes are to be filled with "rare and beautiful treasures" – with faith, hope and love, with righteousness and justice, kindness and mercy, compassion and sensitivity, honesty and truth, gentleness and grace.

My wife and I have lived in a variety of houses – old and new, renovated and rental. However, the houses we have lived in are secondary to *how* we have lived in them. Regardless of the house, we have sought to establish our home and family on the truth of God's Word and consistent biblical values. Our houses change but God's truth is unchanging. Psalm 127 warns us; "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain." And Proverbs 24:3 says, "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established." Is this true of your house and home?

Mr John Haverland is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Cues from the World (No.5)

Three New Zealand women and their houses

Our houses (usually) reveal a lot about us. They are, after all, the sum of our personal choices as to size, style, location, colour schemes and furnishings. While I admit that some of us don't have lots of choice when it comes to the house we live in, we generally can, over the years, change things here and there to make them better suit our tastes and preferences. Houses do reflect people's personalities. Henry James made this observation through the worldly-wise Madame Merle in his novel, *Portrait of a Lady*:

When you've lived as long as I you'll see that every human being has his shell and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? Where does it end?

It overflows into everything that belongs to us – and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for things! One's self – for other people – is one's expression of one's self, and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps – these things are all expressive.¹

That was written in 1881. But the principle is timeless – when we visit other people in their houses we can acquire valuable insight into their thinking – windows into their souls, so to speak. This can be very helpful when we are hoping to explain Christ in a way that makes sense to them.

I imagine that most of us read *NZ House and Garden* from time to time. Which one of us isn't interested in home decoration, and doesn't have a few back issues lying around somewhere? I certainly do; and as I read I can't help

noticing that you can learn a lot about the women whose homes are being depicted in *House and Garden* articles. Let's take a look at three of them, as described in the May 2012 issue.

Melanie

Melanie Heald lives with her husband David and two children in rural Matangi, just out of Hamilton. Their house is a Californian bungalow, which they have lovingly restored to its former 1920s glory. Christchurch readers will be familiar with these houses – there are many in Fendalton, Merivale and St Albans – with wooden weatherboard cladding, lead-light windows, interior wood panelling, and sometimes extra decorative features on verandahs, front porches and the like. ("Los Angeles:" at 110 Fendalton Rd is one of the more famous and best-kept).

Melanie is a florist, which explains her love of colour and texture – she has been responsible for the colour schemes, choice of textiles and the general "look" of many of the rooms. She also has a history degree, which perhaps explains the reading room – a small library with comfortable chairs and bookshelves – set apart for the quiet enjoyment of reading. David, an accountant, has been responsible for the meticulousness of the restoration. He has spent long hours searching for just the right fittings, authentic glass and wood panelling. Their garden is beautiful. They are very much a family who loves their house, and enjoy being together. They've worked hard, and their home gives them a great deal of pleasure.

Justine

Justine Smyth divides her year between two homes, together with husband Paul and their seven-year-old daughter. From the photos, I would guess she is in her forties. This family lacks for nothing, it would seem. Their winter home has a



You can learn a lot from a careful reading of *NZ House & Garden*.

glorious view over Lake Hayes, near Queenstown. Their summer home is right on the beach at Milford, on Auckland's North Shore, and commands a wonderful view of Rangitoto Island. It was the magnificent settings which attracted her to these houses; but they are also internally magnificent. Both houses are very new, and are equipped with the most expensive and luxurious of fittings and furnishings. There are gleaming Italian marble tiles on the floors, and custom-made tables and doors imported from Mexico. The writer of the article frequently notes that Justine and Paul "had to have" this or that, and that "everything in the house had to be new and perfect for it". This is standard language for *House and Garden* articles, I admit; but it does suggest Justine Smyth is wealthy, successful, and has discriminating taste.

Justine is successful. She and Paul both commute to various board meetings in Auckland when they are in Queenstown for the ski season: Justine is chair of the New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation. They entertain in Auckland, and they have guests to stay for skiing in winter. Their lives are busy and Justine admits to being "lucky".

Shonagh

Shonagh Koea is a novelist, living and writing in her small house in a quiet, secluded back section in Bayswater on Auckland's North Shore. There are no photos of the outside (which I suspect is somewhat unprepossessing); but inside it is a complete treasure-trove of lovely furniture, paintings, china ornaments and all sorts of special things Shonagh has collected over the past thirty or forty years. You get the feeling, from reading the article and looking at the photographs, that each item in this house has some special association or memory for its owner.

Shonagh's house seems to have two main functions for her. First, it is a place to enjoy personal treasures, such as the 1870 burr walnut boudoir grand piano and the 1840s colonial chair covered in black silk tapestry. She has depicted her treasures as "props" in her novels – personal possessions serving as physical symbols of her characters' inner beings.

The second, and most important thing about her house is that it is her refuge from the world. Shonagh is clearly a private person – even a loner. This is fairly typical for writers, who need extended periods of solitude to develop

their thoughts. She is quite open about this, and at the end of the article she states that if there was one thing "I could do differently" it would be "To have been much less accessible to people a long time ago when my husband died [in 1987] and I began to live by myself. Then my privacies would have been less broached." And the most important thing to her? "Privacy and quietness."

Bringing the gospel to women like these

If we view these women's homes as windows into their hearts – because their

surroundings have been shaped by the choices they have made – then surely we have gained some clues as to how we might bring the gospel of Christ to women like these? I think there is no doubt of this.

But it is all too easy to be intimidated by the woman with the *House & Garden* home. The impression of wealth, tidiness, and the perfection of taste, colour, style and attention to detail can make the owner of such homes appear depressingly out of reach. How could I (considering *my* humble circumstances) ever say anything *she*



A California bungalow.



"Los Angeles" at 110 Fendalton Rd, in Christchurch.

would think worth listening to?

What should we do? First, consider their probably great spiritual need. And second, remind ourselves that in Christ we have the greatest possession that can be had in this life. We need to think of the ways we can share him.

Melanie is probably the easiest to get to know. Young, with an “ordinary” occupation (florist) and two cute small children, she is like many of us. To be sure, her house is exquisite and desirable, but it is, nevertheless, a *family* house. She says she has guests, and that she enjoys pottering in the garden. Possibly you may meet a Melanie at her florist’s shop and talk with her. Her children may be at school with yours – or perhaps, even, your husband may get to know hers through work. You may have a shared interest. Sometimes conversation about family matters reveals concerns or uncertainties about life. A Christian can easily develop a friendship that leads to the sharing of gospel truth concerning marriage, family and the use of our homes.

Justine, while definitely *unlike* most of us (“not many [of you] were wise ... not many powerful” – 1 Cor. 1:26) is nevertheless a type of person who frequently has gaps in her aura of success. One doesn’t need Einsteinian insight to realise that people in their middle years who have quite young

children may well have sad histories with a broken relationship or two behind them. Material success does not insulate one from relationship failures; and at such points a kind Christian cleaning lady or work secretary or tradesman may well have an opportunity to say something about Christ, sin and redemption. Also, consider her chairmanship of the breast cancer foundation: she may well be involved because a relative died from the disease; or she may have interest in the suffering of others. A Christian in her life could easily build on this in a conversation about the compassion of Christ. Above all, don’t be put off by her fabulous houses. Keep the eternal realities in mind!

We have already noted that Shonagh loves privacy and seclusion. Her home is indeed her castle. How, then, might a Christian intrude? It seems to me important not to be clumsy with the Shonaghs of this world. It would be very easy to be a complete pest as far as she is concerned – possibly by subjecting her to endless, mindless conversation about nothing. People like writers who are alone with their thoughts a lot find vacuous chitter-chatter very trying. If you should find yourself to be the neighbour, or hairdresser or doctor of such a person, try boning up on what might interest her. A good place to start would be to read

some of her books, then talk with her about them. I read one the other day, and I found it very revealing. Its main character was a woman who had suffered manipulation and selfish treatment at the hands of a worthless man. She was desperately trying to escape from his attempts to re-ensnare her. Apparently most of her novels are about women trying to escape into solitude. What does that tell us? Sometimes people need quiet, unobtrusive acts of kindness that are not obviously aimed at intense, reciprocated “involvement”. Simply being quietly “there” in the background, and being sparing and wise in your conversation, may lead, over time, to curiosity; and to being called on in time of need. Be prepared to cast your bread upon the waters in this way.

Above all, don’t be intimidated by the owners of these gorgeous houses. Remember that the King of Glory became flesh and lived among women like these. He himself had “no place to lay his head” but he mixed with many who certainly did. And since his earthly poverty did nothing to prevent him speaking straight to the heart of their *spiritual* poverty, perhaps we can find ways to do likewise.

Notes

1 Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Everyman’s Library, 1991), pp. 204-5.

Taking a brother to Court

1 Cor. 6:1-10 on legal disputes between brethren

Paul Archbald

Introduction

Christian people often have disputes with one another. Sometimes a point is reached where those disputes need to be settled with the help of a third party – either by mediation or arbitration. From the time of the NT on, there has been disagreement among Christians as to when the state’s judicial system should become involved. Should the church judge the dispute, or should the matter be referred to the civil authorities? 1 Corinthians 6:1-10 clearly addresses the issue, but there has been

disagreement on the interpretation and application of this passage. We offer here an analysis of this text in an attempt to clear up some of the confusion on the issue. This will potentially have application to a number of situations that are unfortunately rather common in the church: disputes over land and property in the event of church schism; and litigation by brother against brother.

Old Testament background

It is clear from Ex. 18 that the leaders of the Old Testament church were expected to hear disputes between brethren, to “judge between a man and his neighbour and make known the statutes of God

and His laws” (verse 16). On Jethro’s advice, this role was extended. Moses was to be assisted by elders. The elders would judge the minor disputes, while Moses would hear the major disputes – if necessary, bringing the matter before the Lord and returning to the people with His statutes and laws. Later, the elders would also hear major matters in the city-gates – for example, in dealing with a rebellious son (Dt. 21:19).

This role of hearing disputes was continued by the judges. The sons of Israel came to Deborah for judgement, as she sat under her palm tree in the hill country of Ephraim (Judges 4:5). In later times, kings also judged various disputes.

Absalom, a would-be king, would stand beside the way to the gate to hear any suit or cause before his father could render judgement (2 Samuel 15:1-6). Solomon “administered justice” with the great gift of wisdom bestowed upon him by the Lord (1 Kings 3). As Gordon Wenham points out in his *Law and the Legal System in the Old Testament*, under Jehoshaphat that system became even more organised, with Jerusalem functioning as a kind of central court of appeals (2 Chronicles 19:8ff).

In this theocratic situation all disputes could be dealt with within the covenant community. More than that, it was the Lord’s intention that all disputes be settled within the covenant community, rather than by Gentiles who did not know Him or His laws. The more the Jews became aware of their distinctiveness over against the nations, the more they developed an aversion to seeking resolution of disputes by Gentile authorities. That is not to deny that there were often sinful elements in the Jewish attitude towards Gentiles – as the Lord Jesus later pointed out.

When God’s people were under the yoke of Gentile nations, however, another principle comes in to play. Since the Lord, in His providence, appoints all authority, obedience is owed to foreign rulers who temporarily govern the OT saints. One does not have to look far to see the deference with which Esther, Daniel, and Nehemiah treated their respective foreign rulers. In such cases, the dynamics of Romans 13 are already seen to be at play in the OT. Of course, as we also see, with Daniel, the OT saints knew they must still “obey God rather than men” where obedience to the state would lead to sin.

Another important issue that we must consider in dealing with the OT data is the distinction between criminal and civil law. Wenham points out that this is not a sharp distinction in the OT. After all, Israel was a theocracy, in which all of life was to be lived under God’s rule. Sin was involved every time a law was infringed, whatever the character of that law. Nevertheless, Wenham sees some type of civil/criminal distinction reflected in the penalties: wrongdoing demanding monetary compensation corresponding roughly to civil law; wrongdoing requiring death, exile or corporal punishment corresponding roughly to criminal law. In the civil law, the focus lies more on the offended party seeking justice. In the case of criminal law, there is more

emphasis on the role of judges, indeed the whole community, seeking justice.

New Testament background

In the NT era, Israel was under Roman occupation. The Romans allowed Jews throughout the Empire to operate their usual court system to some extent – at the level of civil justice. Charles Hodge mentions that these courts were involved in the settling of property disputes (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 6:1). More serious crimes were to be brought before the Roman authorities. For this reason, Christ could not be executed by the Jewish authorities – Pilate had to hear the case. This situation is more akin to the subjection of Israel to foreign nations in the OT.



But as we know, the Lord brought further judgement upon the nation of Israel. The theocracy came to an end. The church dispersed among the nations is now the focus, not a theocratic nation. God’s people are commanded to obey the civil authorities whom God establishes in the nations (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). These authorities are given the “sword,” to bring wrath on the one who practises evil. They have jurisdiction in the areas of criminal and civil law. With the exception of laws that would require us to sin against God’s law, the government’s laws in both the civil and criminal sphere must be obeyed. The church must not try to usurp the government’s role in this, for example by attempting to use (or prevent) the “sword.” This is especially important when dealing with criminal matters. When dealing with serious crimes, it is not for the church to decide whether the sword is required or not. That is the government’s call.

Significant criminal behaviour of church members should be reported so that the governing authorities can carry out their mandate, having made their own evaluation of the situation.

Two exceptions are suggested. First, where the state has criminalised behaviour that is clearly commanded by God’s Word. For example, we would not encourage Christians to report their brethren for *godly* discipline of their children – even though this might be considered assault in some countries.

Second, there may be some situations where a crime has technically been committed, but at a very trivial level so far as the authorities are concerned. For example, a youthful visitor might be caught stealing from the cookie jar

in your house. No doubt this should be dealt with, but not necessarily by calling the police!

Analysis of 1 Corinthians 6:1-10

Keeping the above background in mind, we turn to look at 1 Corinthians 6:1-10. Here the apostle Paul warns the Corinthians against an improper use of the law-courts of the nations. Parallels exist to both OT situations: avoiding situations where people outside of the covenant community are called upon to judge God’s people; and recognising the authority of unbelieving authorities over the church. A number of observations can be made about this passage:

- The lawsuits discouraged here fall into the category of civil law rather than criminal law. The situation is one where a believer has a case against his brother (verse 1). Lenski, *Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, 6:1, argues that the verb implies going

to law on one's own behalf. It involves the "smallest law courts" (verse 2), a term that indicates the petty courts of the time. Verse 8 sums up the nature of the cases in view here. A brother feels he has been "wronged or defrauded" – some debt is not repaid, some property not returned. These suits concern the more trivial "matters of this life" (verse 3), rather than criminal matters. Of course, there may be situations of a criminal nature where both the state and the church will try the case, each in its own way.

- The apostle has in mind more than just mediation. The case is to be "judged" (verses 2-3). A wise brother is to "decide" between his brethren (verse 5). The language implies arbitration within the church, rendering a decision, a settlement.
- The apostle is doing more than just indicating a preference – there is a prescription implied. The apostle asks, "Does any of you...dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?" (verse 1). This implies a lack of shame, a bold presumptuousness. "Any one of you" implies this is a general rule in cases of this nature. The form of the conditional sentence in verse 4 ("If you have law courts...do you...?") implies a situation that should not arise. Verse 7, "Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you" or "altogether a failure" shows the apostle's complete disapproval. The fact that Paul views this kind of litigation as morally wrong is also seen in verse 8: "You yourselves wrong and defraud...even to your brethren." Paul says this is to their shame (verse 5). The language is too strong to be mere advice.
- A number of arguments are used against lawsuits in these cases. The

church is competent to judge such matters, since we will even judge the world and the angels – how much more the matters of this life, especially in such trivial cases? On the other hand, the Corinthians seem to prefer to have their cases judged by unbelievers, who are of no account in the church, who do not know right from wrong as the believer does. It is also a bad witness ("and that before unbelievers," verse 6). In fact, it is bad to have to go to law at all against a brother – it is already a loss. According to Lenski it is a loss of dignity, honour, Christian fellowship and love. Calvin adds that it slights a brother to hand him over to unbelievers (*Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 6:1). R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (p. 537), observes that the counsel to Christians to avoid the courts against one another presupposes the requirement of justice tempered with forbearance in personal relationships. It is therefore better to be wronged and defrauded than to act wrongly in this area. The suffering of wrong without seeking redress is, after all, Christ's way (F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, 6:7).

- The warning against lawsuits between brethren as we find it in 1 Corinthians 6 does not cover every imaginable situation that might be classified as a civil case by today's standards. Calvin argues that sometimes "by force of circumstances" a believer will find himself involved in a lawsuit before the civil authorities. If, for example, one aspect of the case has resulted in charges being laid, it is legitimate to proceed with the case. Calvin interprets 1 Corinthians 6 to mean that

we should not bring lawsuits against brethren *where another remedy is possible*. If the law of the land requires us to bring a matter before the courts, and we can do so without sinning, we should obey. Otherwise we risk detracting from the state's God-given authority. Calvin also allows that there may be cases where we can proceed without doing any damage to the love of our brother. However, he feels that this is unlikely to be the case.

Conclusion

The two most common situations where this principle could be applied would be: claims by one brother that another has defrauded him of something rightfully his; and property disputes between churches involved in schism. The tendency is to feel that we are morally obligated to bring charges before the state due to the immoral or unethical behaviour of the other party. The other party will often deny any wrong-doing, or even have counter-claims.

In response to that, note that the apostle Paul was also talking specifically about claims of fraudulent behaviour. He does not say that in such cases we must see that justice is done and restitution made, by hook or by crook – if you will forgive the pun. He says that we should first seek a remedy within the church, where that is possible. If it is not possible because circumstances overtake us or the law of the land requires it, we must face the civil authorities. Even then we must do our utmost to avoid bringing the gospel into disrepute or damaging the love of our brother.

So long as there is no criminal behaviour on the part of our brother – or the other church in the case of schism – it is better to suffer wrong and be defrauded, rather than to hinder the cause of the gospel and the love of brethren. As to the brother's unethical or immoral behaviour, God will judge that – either in the short term, through the courts of the church, or at length on the last day. As to any loss of money or other property, that is worth far less than the Name of Christ and the fellowship of the saints. Remember this: that if Christ had demanded *His* rights, none of us would be where we are today.

Mr Paul Archbald is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Silverstream.



The Court of Appeal in Wellington.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

BIRTHS

Duinkerke, Jacob Nathaniel Steven – a son born to Ruven and Anneke – May 28th (Bucklands Beach)

Dykstra, Ava-Jane – a daughter born to Ricky and Cindy – June 2nd (Foxton)

Macdonald, Lucas Vaughan – a son born to Steven and Angela – June 11th (Bishopdale)

Prinsloo, Emma Elizabeth – a daughter born to Hannes and Mariette – May 15th (Bishopdale)

Reyneke, Charlotte Rose – a daughter born to Paul and Nikke – May 29th (Bucklands Beach)

Schmidt, Nikolai – a son born to Richard and Jasmyn – May 9th (Wellington)

Voschezang, Grace Kerr – a daughter born to Steve & Ashleigh – June 19th (Hamilton)

Slothouber, Guido Pieter – a son born to Jack and Renate Slothouber – (Silverstream)

Termaat, Eva Marjolein – a daughter born to Jonathan and Renee – June 3rd (Hukanui)

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

Bishopdale: Alisha Moot, Jasmine Moot, Sam Vanderpyl, Bryce Janssen and Ben Vannoort.

Hukanui: Adrian Wisse

WEDDINGS

23 June – Michael Posthuma and Hannah Willemse were married in Hamilton

30 June – Manie Bruwer and Abigail Cressy were married in Carterton

DEATHS

Bylsma, Arie – aged 87 years – May 20th (Pukekohe)

Gjaltema, Jan Pier (John) – aged 84 years – June 16th (Avondale)

Gorter, Wiebe – aged 98 years – June 19th (Christchurch)

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Vicar Erik Stolte, having served his vicariate in Pukekohe, received calls from the Reformed Churches of Hukanui and Dunedin. He accepted the call of the Reformed Church of Dunedin, and together with his wife Georgina and their children will be moving there in early August.

Our current and prospective students for the ministry are:

Luke Scheepers from Bucklands Beach who completes his study this year.

Graeme Zuidema from Bishopdale who is currently doing an internship in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale and will begin at the RTC in 2013.

Josh Flinn from the North Shore who will begin at MARS in July 2013.

Albert Couperus from Palmerston North who will begin at MARS (Mid-America Reformed Seminary) in July. Couperus Farewell Party – You and family are all invited to our Farewell Party in Wanganui. It will be a potluck dinner. Hope to see you all there!

MISSIONS

Rev Barry and Mrs Anne James will give a presentation on their last “tour of duty” with pictures and stories from Mbale, Uganda. This will be held in the Silverstream church. Please come along one and all for what we expect will be an interesting and engaging night.

PRISON MINISTRY

NZ Prison Statistics and CBI: The total prison population in NZ, including those in remand, was 8581 at 31 Jan 2012. There are more than 470 active students doing the CBI studies. CBI has reached more than 1300 prisoners since it started in NZ in 2006. There are 84 instructors marking lessons. Please pray for the CBI ministry in the NZ prisons and beyond.

Hamilton: Andrew Dickson is serving the Lord by working with released prisoners. As this ministry develops any financial support you may wish to give can be made direct to the church bank account (See church directory for details) or through offerings marked “Prison Care Ministries” in the Sunday collection.

DENOMINATIONAL

Annual Men’s Study Day The Presbytery of Auckland organises a special ‘Men’s Study Day’ for all the men (young and old) in our presbytery. This year the host church is Bucklands Beach. Topic: We are asking all men to see the 2011 movie, ‘COURAGEOUS’ before that meeting and will have a number of sessions discussing some of the issues raised in this movie – seminar style. Looking forward to a memorable day!

Ministers and Wives Conference: We had a wonderful week in Wellington at the Ministers and Wives Conference. It was a most blessed and refreshing time. The devotions were led by Rev. Dr. Peter Brain, a recently retired Anglican Bishop from Armidale in Western Australia. He has authored a book called *Going the Distance*, which is about persevering in the ministry. He spoke to us about the challenges and blessings and responsibilities of ministry and did so with a pastoral heart, a wonderful sense of humour, and an obvious love for the Shepherd of souls. His talks were just as helpful for our wives. The fellowship was stimulating and the camaraderie heartening. This was the first time that we stayed at Silverstream Retreat, near Upper Hutt. We give thanks to the Lord for the time had together. The fellowship over the week enriched the whole experience. We are grateful for the provision the denomination makes for such a conference every three years and are already looking forward to the next one!

Cadets/Calvinettes/GEMS (Silverstream)

Following the last Cadet/Calvinette/GEMS Executive meeting, the decision has been made to formally change the name of Calvinettes to GEMS (Girls Everywhere Meeting their Saviour). The reason for this is that the Calvinette resource material has not been available for quite some time now, as overseas the movement has already changed from Calvinettes to GEMS. There has been much discussion over many executive meetings and various options have been explored. The main argument against adopting the GEMS material has been the quality of the Badges available (not enough Bible based Badges). With the release of the current GEMS guidebook all of those issues have been addressed, and the Executive felt it was now time to change.

What this now means is that the Calvinettes will now be called GEMS.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Bishopdale: "Soup for the Soul" soup kitchen has been up and running every Monday night for the last month on the corner of Kilmore and Madras streets. We have had a good number of people arriving (about 15) and they are more than happy to help us set up and get ready. At 7pm we start handing out Neil's hearty "mongrel soup," bread, hot drinks followed by some yummy baking. It has been a great opportunity to have a chat and get to know some of the people, and it's encouraging to see many of them coming on a regular basis. Many of them have expressed their thankfulness for the food and conversation and are eager to hear a bit about our church too. Your prayers for this outreach are valued greatly!

CLASSES & COURSES

Christchurch: Parenting Seminar: We will be going through the video series, *The Case for Kids*, at the pastor's house.

Dovedale: After the Sermon: Evaluating and Responding to the Preached Word. Many church-goers listen to between 50 and 100 sermons a year. Most pastors spend 10 to 20 hours preparing each one of them. The Bible places huge emphasis on the importance of preaching. So with all this time, energy and weight placed on preaching, it makes

sense to think a bit about what we do with the sermons we've heard. How do you evaluate a sermon? What determines whether it was good, bad or indifferent? How can you maximise your response to a sermon? How should you respond to the preacher, whether you like his message or not? What do you do after the sermon? Dr Murray Capill will give a seminar on this topic at the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Dovedale: It has been encouraging to hear at our district meetings how many of you have been interacting with people about Christianity and the gospel. Some of these people may be criticizing, others are 'tolerant', and some are questioning and interested. Keep on praying for these non-Christian friends and for each other. Continue to take and make opportunities to display your Christian life and to speak of Jesus and the hope that he offers. We are planning to hold another Christianity Explored course from mid-July, which will give an excellent opportunity to present the gospel of Mark to your unbelieving friends. If you would like more information, you can go to www.christianityexplored.org to find out more so you can tell your friends what it is all about.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale: The youth group had a "B-themed" progressive dinner – We enjoyed fish and chicken soups and pate crackers for entrée, along with a Bible-reading at the van den Burgs. We then

rushed to the Heeringas' for some of the largest plates of nachos any of us have seen (served on 2 tables resourcefully extended by a cupboard door!). We were next welcomed into the Mailata home for banana splits with generous sprinklings of lollies, nuts and sauces which we then washed down with coffee, tea, milo and coke at Brett and Ali's. We had a fantastic and blessed night and would like to thank all who volunteered to host us. We thank you for your hospitality and fellowship. We also apologise for the banana skins, plates, cups and possibly ringing ear-drums we left in our wake! Much love, Bond, Best-man, Ben, Ben, Ben, Brett, Brett, Bruce, Barbie, Bride, Bowie, Blue-berry, Brilliant-Baby-sitter, Bikie, Bar-tender, Buccaneer and Burglar.

Bucklands Beach: Fundraising evening for KRUPA – There will be a special Indian Dinner followed by a fun evening that will also include an auction. The Social Committee is looking for donated items for the auction. Tickets for this event are \$15.00 per person or a family ticket (for children 12 and under) is \$35.00.

Christchurch: Start dusting off your talents for the Annual Cornwall Street Talent Evening! When: Saturday 14 July 2012 Where: To be advised Why: To bless others with your God-given abilities.

Christchurch Churches: Howzat! Combined Youth Group Indoor Sports Evening – It is time to put the collective churches to the challenge at Howzat Indoor Sports! Bring \$10 and some friends. There will be indoor football and indoor netball tournaments with prizes for the winning teams and the best players.

Christchurch: Winter Camp is Coming! Hey all! Winter Camp is coming up! We're giving you guys plenty of notice so no excuses for not coming along and helping to make it an awesome weekend! We're heading up to Lake Lyndon Lodge for some fun in the snow.

Dovedale: Many of us enjoyed the privilege of gathering to hear and to sing with the Christian Chamber Choir last Sunday evening here at the church. The music covered the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, and included some instrumental soloists. The choir desire to sing to the glory of God and to be a witness in what they sing. May the Lord bless this desire.

Foxton: We are planning another 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?' evening for the church family. Please note if you

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are wishing to participate as a guest, but are unable or uncomfortable with driving in the evenings, arrangements can be made for you to be picked up and dropped off. Just make a note of it on your form.

Hamilton: F.L.A.M.E Youth present a fun night on the ice Friday the 25th of May. Bring along some friends and enjoy the company of friends and others from the Auckland Presbytery Youth. The cost is \$10 per person from 7:30-10:30pm at Botany Paradise Ice Skating.

Masterton: As a result of a discussion amongst several ladies, we observed that we do not have many social activities at present, and we are planning to change that. Whenever a month has 5 Fridays, we will organise a social event for the congregation. We will call this a Fifth Friday Fellowship. Lord willing, the dates for the year from May 2012 to May 2013 are: June 29, August 31, November 30, March 29 and May 31. So that these dates do not clash with other events, you can mark your calendar now and keep this in mind already.

Pukekohe: Friendship Dinner to Farewell the Meyers: Everyone is invited to Dinner and Dessert at the church – Food will be provided. Costume Challenge – Come dressed as your place of origin (town, country, city ...). There will be prizes for the best dressed individual and family.

Silverstream: Medieval Day. Hear ye, Hear ye, Let it be known that the committee of Silverstream requests the kind and noble presence of all the bold young knights and fair maidens to the Meadow in the Land of Leenders for a Medieval Day! We beseech thee to dress in medieval attire, though this is not required. Feasting and merriment will be had by all and prizes aplenty. Good sporting spirit, creativity, and a measly \$10 dollars will be needed. The date is the 7th of July so RSVP by the 24th of June to any of the Knights of the Round Table (The Committee of Silverstream).

Waiunuiomata: All ladies are invited to come along for a movie night to be held at the local Wainuiomata cinema. The ambience is lovely, the screen is enormous, the seating is great – what more do

we need? The film will be “Courageous” (from the makers of “FireProof”) “*Four men, one calling: To serve and protect. When tragedy strikes home, these men are left wrestling with their hopes, their fears, their faith, and their fathering*”. All ladies are welcome and encouraged to come along. After the movie we will be going to Frances’ house for coffee and a chat.

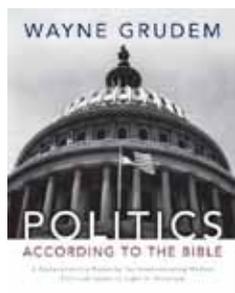
Wellington: Just to confirm again that the From The Organ Bench notifications have ceased, unless rekindled by someone else – one never knows. However, before the old organist disappears for good, a final thank you from him for all the good wishes, contributions and donations I have received not only past Friday but since as well. A heartfelt gratia agere plena, it was an unforgettable experience for sure, the choir was just outstanding. Not only that, it was extraordinary cum singularise in gradus extremus. Dominus Tecum, Vobiscum! A. Snoek.

Focus on books

Politics According to the Bible

by Wayne Grudem.

Reviewed by OP minister Paul Viggiano.



If you wonder how front-page news relates to the Christian faith, Wayne Grudem’s *Politics According to the Bible* might be a good book for your nightstand. Grudem offers a gentle, albeit firm, admonition for Christians to embrace their responsibility to bring God’s law to bear upon the culture in which they live.

Grudem offers a panoramic sketch of the many issues tearing America away from its foundational biblical values. The book is long, but the first four chapters

(123 pages) contain his main arguments. These arguments address the irrationality of disenfranchising religious convictions from the political arena and the false dichotomy in the claim that Christians should “do evangelism, not politics.”

God, according to Grudem, intended the Bible to give guidance to every area of life – including government and politics. He then offers an impressive historical résumé of how Christian influence has led to the outlawing of such atrocities as “infanticide, child abandonment, abortion in the Roman Empire, human sacrifice, pedophilia, polygamy, the burning alive of widows, etc.”

Grudem adds that “passing good laws and having good government will never be enough to change a society.” He recognises the centrality of the cross of Christ as the answer to the human dilemma. However, the earth belongs to a God who knows best how it should be governed – and has revealed such information in Scripture. Grudem then devotes over 400 pages to applying Scripture to a wide range of issues.

The hotbed issues of abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and gay marriage are handled early and forcefully. Then there are brief, yet instructive opinions on pornography, school vouchers, private property, taxes, health care, the environment, national defense, the CIA, just war, foreign aid, cap and trade, affirmative action, public education, global warming, etc. Grudem has done his homework and handles these topics from an informed perspective. It’s very educational, yet there are some concerns.

Grudem’s blurring of the law and the gospel is disconcerting. “Preaching the ‘whole Gospel,’” Grudem suggests, “must also include preaching what the Bible says about civil government.” He doesn’t maintain a strong law/gospel distinction. He writes of “a distinct realm of ‘things that belong to God,’” implying that there are things outside that realm – a position unthinkable for a Christian, and one that Grudem elsewhere contradicts.

Whether Jesus is reigning or will reign is up for grabs from chapter to chapter,

and although Grudem is refreshingly optimistic about the success of the gospel, his final pages suggest a future time of signs and wonders; clearly he is not a cessationist. He also denies the valid use of the Law of Moses as a model for God's standard of justice or general equity. For a book about politics and the Bible that address the topic most specifically is disappointing.

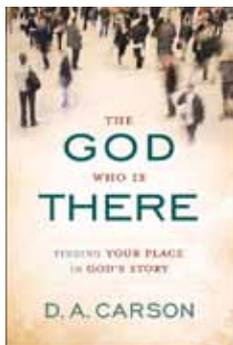
Nonetheless, the book is very informative and a valuable resource to bring Christians up to speed on contemporary issues.

New Horizons, February 2012

The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story

by D. A. Carson.

Reviewed by OP minister Andrew H. Selle.



In this engaging Bible survey, a top-flight scholar attempts to reach an educated but biblically illiterate audience with the gospel. "If you know nothing at all about what the Bible says, the book you are now holding in your hands is for you" – a bold claim tempered by: "This book is not for everyone." Indeed, the tiny print with no illustrations requires an earnest seeker.

As to content, there is much to commend. Each of the fourteen chapters focuses upon God's self-revelation in the unfolding history of redemption from Genesis ("The God Who Made Everything") to Revelation ("The God Who Triumphs"). The entire Bible is God's own evangelistic tract. In a manner that is both comprehensible and persuasive, Carson begins by summarising the vital doctrines of creation and sin rooted in real history, confronting post-modern skeptics with an alternative, God-centered worldview. The chapters on the Incarnation (in the Prophets and the Gospels), the new birth (in John 3), and the wrath of God (in the Revelation) are outstanding.

The book has its flaws, however. Although it ably explains Christ's passive obedience at the cross, it is oddly vague about his active obedience – that perfect righteousness which is the ground of our justification, imputed to believers and received solely by the instrument of faith. And in an otherwise excellent section about the love of God, the author muddies the water by suggesting a type of divine love toward believers that is conditional upon their own obedience. Having drunk from the wells of classic Reformed theology, the author would do better to use its classic formulations about Christ's completed work and the gracious benefits for those who are united with him.

In summary, I highly recommend this book for its intended audience, but it will be most effective when supplemented by such material as David Powlison's brilliant booklet, "God's Love: Better Than Unconditional" (P&R Publishing, 2001), G. I. Williamson's doctrinal study guides, and Tim Keller's works. Also, Carson's book follows closely a lecture series that can be downloaded free here, provid-

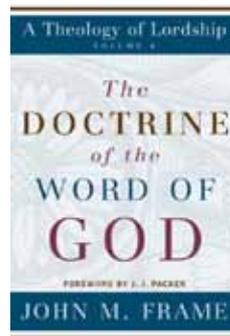
ing a springboard for believers and their "seeker" friends to hear the Word and discuss it together. That's the most effective means of evangelism!

New Horizons, February 2012

The Doctrine of the Word of God

by John M. Frame.

Reviewed by James W. Scott, managing editor of New Horizons.



The fourth and probably final volume of John Frame's series, *A Theology of Lordship*, has now been published: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. This is an important work, but it is not as monumental as its number of pages might suggest. The latter half of the book consists of seventeen appendixes, which are short pieces (including book reviews), mostly published previously, on the general subject of the book.

The main portion of the book (pp. 1-334) was developed over a long career of seminary teaching. It sets forth the rich teaching of Scripture about God's speech (especially in Scripture), and is replete with Bible references.

Frame treats his subject in forty-six chapters, but chapters averaging seven or eight pages cannot say much. Frame himself states that this introductory volume is "a more concise version of

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what I had originally hoped to write," a mere "summary" with "relatively few citations of historical and current writers," which (health permitting) he may expand in successive editions or supplement with "an additional book or two" on the subject (pp. xxvii–xxviii, 7). Nonetheless, it is a valuable treatment of biblical teaching, with Reformed moorings and a solid commitment to the authority of Scripture.

"My main thesis," Frame says, "is that God's word, in all its qualities and aspects, is a personal communication from him to us" (p. 3). His book is an exposition and defense (from Scripture) of this "personal-word model." This sounds self-evident to the Christian believer, but will evoke disdain from much of the academic world. But Frame recognises that God's communication is "supernatural all the way through," and that only

the Holy Spirit can "bring persuasion" to his position (p. 7).

Not surprisingly, Frame brings his triperspectivalism to this volume – though it figures less prominently than in earlier volumes in this series. For example, he looks at liberal views of revelation from "my three perspectives, normative, situational, and existential" (p. 21). There is some usefulness to such an approach, but it can lead to some artificial analysis. Thus, he "takes some liberties with the traditional list" of the attributes of Scripture "to align" them with "God's lordship attributes of control, authority, and presence" (p. 201) – admittedly "stretching the scheme slightly" (p. 210).

His equating of the word of God with God (p. 48) is, in my judgment, mistaken, based on superficial exegesis of John 1:1 and other passages. If the biblical text is the word

of God, and thus God, shouldn't we fall down and worship our Bibles? Frame of course says no (p. 67), but why not? It is likewise imprecise to speak of God's word as an "attribute" of God (as on p. 71 and elsewhere).

For the most part, though, Frame propounds, in his own way, traditional Reformed doctrine. He has excellent chapters, for example, on "The Inerrancy of Scripture," "The Phenomena of Scripture," and "Assurance."

Frame's writing is clear, almost conversational, being neither pedantic nor pretentious, and always engaging. One need not be a professional theologian, or even a seminary student, to think along with him. I have some disagreements with him, but I would nonetheless recommend this book to people interested in studying the full breadth of the doctrine of the word of God.

New Horizons, February 2012

Angels & Aristocrats Art Exhibition: *a review*

John van Dyk

It's interesting when visiting church people in their homes to see what's been put up as decoration on the walls. Posters, photographs, a few stanzas of pious or pithy verse, or sometimes a painting or two. It seems to me that, over the years, there has been a decline in the hanging of artwork on the domestic front. No doubt the ready availability of lower-cost alternatives has been a major factor. Perhaps the painted medium – even in reproduction – has become unaffordable. Perhaps it has become regarded as a relic of a bygone age.

Prompting reflection on the place of art in our nation's history and culture is an exhibition of early European art which opened recently at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Entitled "Angels & Aristocrats", the exhibition brings together a very fine selection of eighty pre-1820 works from public collections in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Wanganui. Curated by Mary Kisler of the Auckland Art Gallery, the show is on tour and will, in time, move on to Wellington and Auckland.

Our country's art stock

It must be noted that, compared with the great art museums of Europe, our collections are rather meagre. No chance in New Zealand of walking into a room hung with paintings - all of which are by Leonardo da Vinci or Peter Paul



Cuyp: River Scene with a Ferry Boat
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Rubens. In fact you won't find even one of their pictures in this country, let alone works by such luminaries as Caravaggio, Holbein, Raphael, Titian or Velasquez. Visiting "Angels & Aristocrats" you won't see works by the pre-eminent Dutch artists Rembrandt or Vermeer, but you will see fine examples by the next lower rank of their countrymen. Meindert Hobbema's *Wooded Landscape with Peasants on a Path and an Angler at a Stream*, for instance, is an exquisitely detailed work with cleverly wrought interplay of light and shade. Aelbert Cuyp's *River Scene with a Ferry Boat* is much more compelling than its title suggests and is characteristically set against a dramatic, towering sky.

Yet the show is not without a smattering of



Berckheyde: Interior of St Bavo, Haarlem
Dunedin Public Art Gallery

big-name artists. Reni, Breughel, Claude Lorrain, Millet (famed for *The Gleaners*), Turner, Constable, Reynolds and Gainsborough are all represented, as are a number of other significant painters whose names will be more familiar to art devotees.

Ways to approach art

We can very easily gain an impression that art is for those who are well educated or cultured or affluent. When we hear art and its illustrious creators spoken of in near-reverential tones, when we hear pictures described and interpreted in minute detail, it's easy to form an exalted view

of art, especially the art of former times. It is our loss, then, if we can't approach art in a straightforward way, ready to see the pictures through our own eyes and to draw our own conclusions.

After all, during the period from which "Angels & Aristocrats" is drawn, art was created not so much to be displayed in galleries, but for more everyday purposes. In the early Renaissance, churches commissioned artists to produce images, often in the form of altarpieces, to serve as visual aids for the common people who were largely illiterate (more about that later). As painting practice developed, portraits were commissioned to permanently record a loved one's image as a visual reminder, either in their absence or after their death. Similarly, landscapes became available, for those who could afford them, and they documented the surroundings in which the buyers lived or they were sold to those undertaking the European 'grand tour' as mementos of their experience.

If you're not accustomed to visiting your local art gallery I would suggest a number of different levels on which you can view and appreciate the works on show.

The pictures can be viewed simply as historical artefacts. Stand in front of a painting and marvel that it was executed as long as 500 years ago and survives intact in remarkably good condition. Admire the workmanship that went into the construction of the frame, the preparation of canvas and paints and see if you can notice changes or improvements in the materials between pictures over time.

Paintings are also historical records. Portraits will show how the sitters dressed and adorned themselves in their time. Landscapes will depict town or country as it was. Even when an artist looked back to earlier times, in painting biblical, mythological or historical scenes, we have a record of how those events were imagined in the artist's day.

Spend some time looking at the techniques employed. Has the artist made clever use of the light or perspective or colour? Is the painting finely detailed or does it have a more broad-brush approach? Is it similar in style to other works by the same artist, or works by artists of the same nationality or era? In a portrait, how well have the subject's face and hands been captured. Does the portrait successfully convey a sense of the sitter's personality?

The most usual way of viewing a painting is to consider its subject. Who or what does the image portray? What is the first thing your eye is drawn to? The second, the third? Is the way the picture has been composed fresh and lively? Does it grab your attention, or is it more of a visual cliché? Are there lines of sight along which your eye naturally travels? Are there smaller details that echo, augment or provide contrast to the main subject? Sometimes symbolic elements are present and these usually need a trained eye to

identify and interpret. The label displayed alongside an artwork is often helpful in drawing the viewer's attention to and explaining these details.

Religious works

A substantial section of "Angels & Aristocrats" is given over to religious works of which most would have been executed for patrons with Church of Rome connections. Nearly half of these works contain depictions of Christ, mostly at his nativity or with the Madonna, but also as a grown man. Such portrayals are problematic for the Christian. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 35 states, "God cannot and may not be visibly portrayed in any way." And in discussing the use of images as teaching aids it goes on to say: "He wants his people instructed by the living preaching of his Word." Much care, then, is needed in how, if at all, we interact with images of Christ. It is difficult to understand how physical representations of Christ could ever be helpful devotionally. Our Saviour is not on earth in bodily form; he is in heaven. However, with us he is present spiritually. So we must seek to develop a spiritual relationship with him. The divinely-established means of grace we have been given (reading and preaching of the Word, prayer, sung praise, sacraments) are singularly effective aids in developing such a relationship. By comparison, looking at pictures seems rather a poor, even meaningless, alternative.

A religious work in quite a different vein is *Interior of St Bavo, Haarlem*, a 1670 work by Job Berckheyde. It is unique, not only in the exhibition but also in the country's collections, in its response to the outlawing of traditional religious imagery in Protestant Holland after the Reformation.¹ Part of the inside of a very large church is depicted, we see great soaring arches and solid pillars, but the vantage point is from a side chapel. Here a peasant couple, the woman nursing her infant child, have taken shelter in a secluded spot along with a group of middle-class young ladies who, having gathered around a rug, are occupied in some kind of game. The church itself, once a gothic cathedral, has been stripped bare of religious imagery. In this form the building becomes a much more adequate visual metaphor for the spiritual church universal, consisting as it does of all kinds of people. The mundane activity of those depicted helps the viewer to break down the mistaken divide between sacred and secular.

Everyday scenes

In addition to sections on religious works, landscapes and portraits the exhibition has a section focusing more on scenes of everyday life. Here are sumptuous still lifes, an enormous Breughel village scene, and my personal favourite: Gerard Dou's 1653 work, *The Physician*. We are shown a consultation in which a doctor has a sample provided by his female patient which he holds

to the light to determine whether she is with child. There are some wonderful colour contrasts, telling expressions and fascinating objects that have been beautifully captured in this painting. It is said that Dou would scrupulously wait for the dust to settle before he began work, that his fine brushwork was achieved with the aid of a magnifying glass and that he would spend days on a single detail.



Dou: *The Physician*
Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

There are many other superb paintings that I could mention. It is rare indeed to see so many complementary works exhibited together and a wonderful opportunity to see the best works held by other cities. Do visit the exhibition if you can. I highly recommend it. You might even want to shell out a few dollars for a print to hang on your living room wall. "Angels & Aristocrats" is showing at Dunedin Public Art Gallery until 16 September, then at Te Papa in Wellington from 13 October and arrives at Auckland Art Gallery in February 2013.

Notes

¹ Mary Kisler, *Angels & Aristocrats: Early European Art in New Zealand Public Collections*, 2010

Mr John van Dyk is a member of the Reformed Church of Dunedin and is a software developer.

Who do we worship with our dress?

Marjorie Korvemaker

As I sat in church last Sunday, I was struck by how some of the women in church were dressed. Yes, I must admit I was distracted. Then I played a game in my mind; what would it look like in here if men dressed as women did? Men would be wearing tight cargo shorts with their underwear showing, muscle shirts, and flip flops. We would see lots of hairy backs, hairy chests, and thighs. We would see muscled arms and legs.

I thought, "This is a sensitive topic. It's not my problem. As far as it depends on me ... live in harmony with one another. Bringing this up would not bring harmony. I am responsible for me. Just mind my own business." I began to think

of some adjustments I should make to my wardrobe.

When I got home I shared my thoughts with my husband. I was very surprised to hear him say that he was struck by the same observation in church. As he collected the offering he also noticed that wardrobe choices seem to be getting smaller and modest dress seems to be less the norm.

This week I was counseling a young couple and the husband asked me if it was sin to leave church because the temptation to lust was too great for him. His wife said, "Maybe close your eyes. Who cares if people think you are sleeping?" I asked him if he could look down at his Bible and take notes. He and his wife both said, "No" at the same time. If he looked down he would see the

woman beside him who was sporting a skirt that displayed half her thigh. He confessed that it wasn't just the skin but how tight the clothes were too.

I've counseled men (with their wives) who struggle with the sin of pornography. In the beginning sessions they would share how the Internet and TV are some of the places where they find great temptation. As they learn to overcome these temptations that we know the world throws at them, the place where they are now tempted the most is in church. In church! The one place in the world where a man ought to be able escape being tempted to lust is the very place where these men are tempted to fall.

Our family went to The Petrolia Discovery for a Saturday afternoon in June. It's an outdoor museum which recreates the oil fields and related buildings of the 1860s in the Petrolia and Oil Springs area. As we stepped out of the van the smell of oil permeated our nostrils. Half way through our tour I realised that this would be a very dangerous place for a smoker with a strong desire to light up a cigarette. Since our group was quite small I asked our guide if this was so. He told me that is why they have signs posted everywhere stating, "Do Not Smoke." Since smoking is not a temptation I face I was oblivious to the signs. However, it would be very dangerous! If a person were to light a match at the museum they could literally blow the whole place up! It wouldn't matter that they didn't intend to blow the place up or that they didn't know that the place would blow up; the harm done would be the same.

I believe many women do not mean to harm their brothers in Christ. Many women want to follow fashion. We want to look good. Looking good makes us feel good. We like feeling good. I also know some women do intend to attract the attention of men who may be sitting beside them in church. Others have told me that they are not responsible for how men respond to what they wear. Essentially they are saying that they are not their brothers' keeper. They argue "Why should a woman have to change

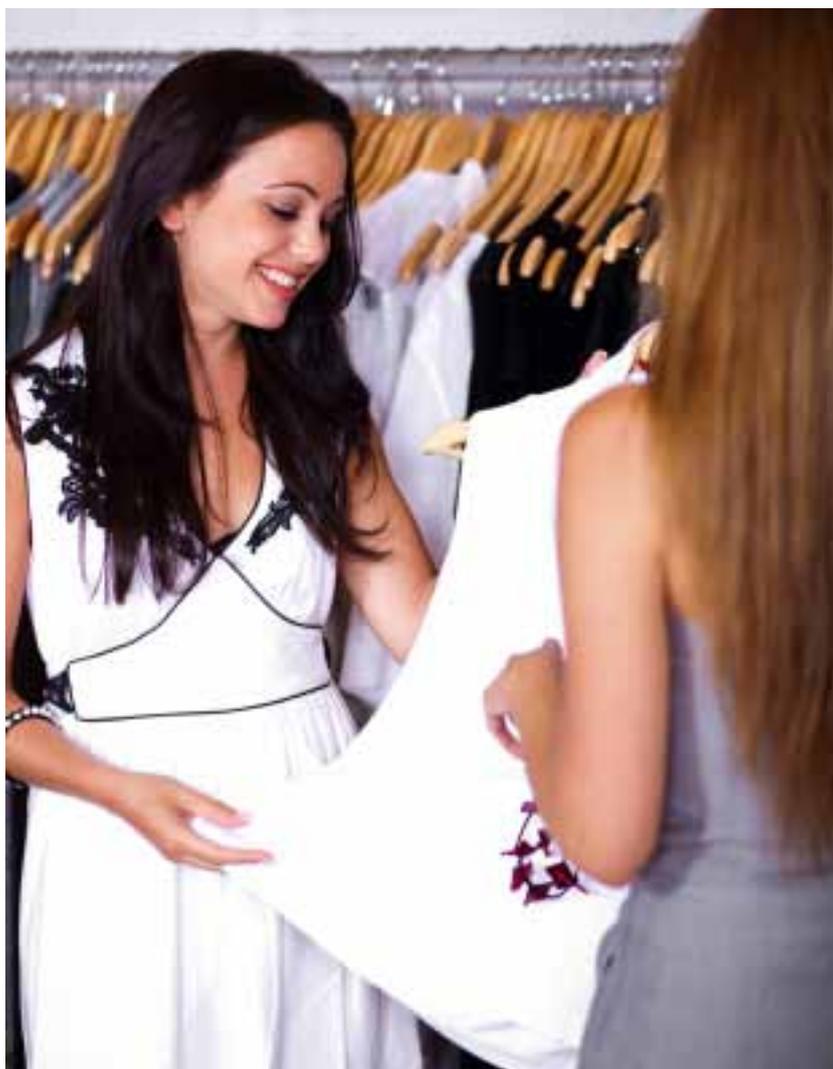


Image: photostock / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

her clothes because a man can't control his lusts?"

It is true; men are responsible for their own actions. In James 1:14, 15 it says "each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." As women, however, we are fully responsible for what we choose to wear.

I'd like to think that if most women knew the danger they were putting their fellow worshippers in, they would not dress the way they do. Who are these fellow worshippers? They are our husbands, brothers, sons, and grandpas. Yes, I said grandpas. Just because a man ages that does not mean he loses that desire.

I thought about the counsellor who asked if he should not go to church if he found the temptations there too great for him. What would be the ideal answer here? It would be ideal if the temptations were not so common in our churches. How do you make rules on this sort of thing? The Bible does not say thou should not wear short, tight, low-cut dresses, with our bra straps showing, or pants so tight that

God gave us his Spirit to help us know that this is not modest. "Likewise women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self control ... with what is proper for women who profess godliness-with good works" (1 Tim 2:9-10). If men can be fully clothed in church why can't women?

Where do we start? We need to take out all the emotional attachment that

comes with how we dress (and believe me this is an emotional issue) and get back to the truth. Who are we worshipping with our dress?

Husbands and dads this is your responsibility. You need to provide leadership. You need to set a godly standard for how the women in your household dress. As men you competent to know what will attract your brother's eye because you are aware of how dress affects you.

As mums and grandmas you are the role model. Don't expect your girls to dress appropriately for church if your own style is immodest. If your husband tells you or your daughter that what you are wearing is a problem, you are to submit to him. He is your head. Trust him. He sees things differently. Just like the "Do Not Smoke" signs at the museum that I was missing, as women we may be missing signs that our husbands or dads were created to see.

I'd like to place ourselves in the mirror of Romans 14:19-21. "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

Marjorie Korvemaker is a certified biblical counsellor. Clarion (vol 60, No. 18) August 2011.





Ministers and Wives Conference at Silverstream Retreat, 2012.