

faith in **focus**

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The BIG OE

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Editorial

Young Kiwi men and women have a reputation for being ardent travellers and love to go off on the "Big OE", otherwise known as "overseas experience". Wherever you go in the world, more often than not, you will meet up with a young person from New Zealand. It seems they have the travel bug. They want to see and experience other parts of the world and quite often spend a year or two, or more away from home.

The travel bug, has bitten some of the young people in our churches, too. There are those who have gone off for an extended holiday, moved to another country for work or study or both. Some come back, some don't.

Going overseas can be a very positive and uplifting experience, giving the traveller first-hand experience to new cultures, some of which have thousands of years of history and the buildings to show for it. And for the Christian it certainly gives renewed insight into the fact that there are churches in other countries with whom we may have a kindred spirit.

So you might ask, where can you find a faithful church where you can worship in Spirit and truth? Depending on where you go, or want to go, you can seek advice from people who have been there before, or you can do some homework yourself with the use of the internet and find out where the most faithful church is located near to where you want to go.

It's really a matter of making good choices.

Our contributors write about their experiences overseas and give some sound advice for the young and not so young Christian who have a bit of a travel bug.

Mr John Haverland writes about the bigger picture in respect to travelling.

Mr Ben and Mrs Franci Hoyt tell about their stay in the "Big Apple", called New York.

Mr James Williams reports on his study opportunity overseas.

Mr Robert Vosslander shares the experiences of him and his spouse Andrea in their travels.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt converses with her son about Saturday morning soccer.

Mr Harry Antonides provides a second installment on what happens to truth in an age of delusion.

Crossroad Bible Institute provides a news update.

Mrs Harriet Haverland and her team of "gleaners" keep us up to date on news from the churches, with a report from the OMB.

Mr David Gordon (a minister in the PCA) reviews *Alone Together: The Great Irony of Modern Communication: A Review Article*, by Sherry Turkle. Mr Greg Hoadley reviews *Dangerous Calling: Confronting The Unique Challenges Of Pastoral Ministry*, by Paul Tripp.

Mr Herman Borger gives advice on useful applications for your tablet.

Mr John Shaw looks at fear of man and God's sovereignty in evangelism.

Images: p1, main image Mrs Sally Davey; double decker bus by Mr Ben Hoyt; p5-6 Mr Ben Hoyt, p7-8 Mr James Williams.

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.

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

God's international plan of salvation

John A Haverland

Personal experiences

My wife and I recently celebrated our 31st wedding anniversary. Over 31 years ago, we married in Melbourne soon after I had completed my study at the Reformed Theological College. A few months after our wedding we moved to Grand Rapids in Michigan, USA, where I had been accepted to study for a Master of Theology degree at Calvin Seminary. During that year we attended the Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church, located near the centre of the city. We also worshipped at a number of other Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed churches. There were aspects of worship that we appreciated; and other features we did not, but overall our time in those churches was spiritually enriching and provided us with many opportunities for wonderful fellowship with other Christians.

Some of our children have followed in our footsteps. Early in their marriage, our oldest son William and his wife Rachel lived in London for about 18 months on their own OE; working and holidaying. During that year-and-a-half they attended an Anglican Church in Wimbledon (near the famous tennis stadium!). Harriet and I visited them and worshipped at their church for two Sundays and attended a mid-week Bible study with them. William and Rachel profited spiritually from their time in that church, in part because they were away from the familiarity of their own church and so had to stand on their own spiritual feet. The Anglican liturgy is reformed, but is different from our liturgy that originated from John Calvin; this made them think more carefully about the worship service and the meaning of the various aspects of the service. They were also helped in a good measure by the interest of the minister of the church and his wife who were friendly, keen and reformed, which shows the good effect a caring pastor can have, even on those who are only

in the church for a relatively short time.

Our second son Michael, with his wife Larissa, are presently living and working in Brisbane, where they attend the Westside Christian Reformed Church. On the one hand there are aspects of worship that are different from our Reformed Churches of New Zealand, especially in the music. On the other hand, they have been helped spiritually by the daily email devotions of their pastor and have been challenged by the evangelistic zeal of the congregation.

I could add testimonies like these

from the experiences of some of the members of the Pukekohe Reformed Church, and this issue of *Faith in Focus* has personal accounts from others in the RCNZ. All of us who have travelled, either in New Zealand or overseas, have a story to tell about meeting, talking and worshipping with other Christians. Typically we return home thankful to be back in our own congregation, and that is how it should be; but this does not take away from the privilege of being able to travel and the enriching experience of meeting and fellowshiping with

“Travelling can make us aware of the catholicity of the church of Jesus Christ – with all the cultural diversity that goes along with that.”



Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Christians in other churches. Often it is instructive to hear the truth of God's word preached by a different person and expressed from another angle. It is a privilege to meet other sincere, godly and mature Christians. Visiting other churches for worship also makes us aware of how important it is to be friendly and welcoming to visitors, and how uncomfortable it is to be standing in a crowded foyer or outside the building with no one to speak to!

Travelling can make us aware of the catholicity of the church of Jesus Christ – that the church of Christ is universal and worldwide, with all the cultural diversity that goes along with that. The church in New Zealand is very small; seeing the extent of the church in America, or Africa or China makes us aware that the body of Christ is large, strong and alive in other parts of the world. A visit to North America, for instance, allows us to see the strength of faithful Presbyterian and Reformed denominations; this is a great encouragement to us in New Zealand where the Reformed faith is a tiny minority of the wider church. (Grand Rapids, in Michigan, is known as the "Jerusalem" of the Reformed churches!)

Attending worship in other churches is not always a positive experience; sometimes we are disappointed because the service is irreverent, or because the Scriptures are not read or preached, or because the sermon was shallow or even heretical, or because the people were unfriendly. When you are about to travel it is helpful to ask others for recommendations on where to go, or to do your own research by looking up church websites in that town or city. Information about other churches has never been more accessible.

God's plan of salvation

The ease of modern air travel makes it possible for us to travel all over the world, and many of us do! As I have pointed out, there is much to learn and appreciate in meeting other believers, not the least of which is a wider perspective on God's plan for the nation. As we study the Scriptures we see that it was God's purpose that the good news of his salvation would extend throughout the world and that people of all nations would come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the rest of this article I want to explore this plan of salvation more closely.

God's plan began with all the people of the world, but those early inhabitants

were sinful and rebellious. God judged them in the world wide flood, saving only Noah and his family. People again multiplied, but once again become proud and rebellious. God again judged them by confusing their languages at Babel and forcing them to spread out from there. From these scattered peoples God chose one man, Abram, selecting him to be the father of the nation of Israel. Through the rest of the Old Covenant period God focused his plan of salvation on this nation. The good news of God's salvation also included other people, such as Job, Melchizedek of Salem, Ruth from Moab, Rahab from Jericho and Naaman the Syrian; but primarily God worked out his plan of salvation through his chosen people Israel.

However, the Old Covenant looked forward to the time when "all peoples on earth would be blessed" through Israel. This is what God promised to Abraham when he first called him saying:

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:3)

Israel was already supposed to be a blessing in that Old Covenant period. God wanted them to be a light to the Gentiles, directing them to himself, as Lord and Saviour. Sadly, Israel failed miserably in that task and often behaved more badly than the pagan nations around her.

The failure of Israel to live up to the demands of God's covenant highlighted the need for the Messiah, the Christ, who came in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4f). Thus, at the right time, God sent his One and Only Son as the Christ, the Anointed One, to be our true Prophet, Priest and King. He was the "seed" promised to Abraham (Gal 3:16). He was the fulfillment of all God's promises throughout the entire Old Testament; "No matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor 1:20). After Jesus had completed his work of salvation through his life of obedience, his teaching, suffering, death and resurrection, he ascended into heaven and then sent his Spirit to his people as he had promised.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) is the New Testament answer to what happened at Babel (Gen 11:1-9). At Babel God *confused* the languages of the people; at

Pentecost he gave *the gift* of languages. After Babel God *narrowed* the scope of his plan of salvation; at Pentecost he *broadened* the scope of salvation to again embrace all the peoples of the world. Pentecost marks the beginning of the New Testament church of Jesus Christ.

The church, however, already existed in the Old Testament, as we see in Isaac's blessing of his son Jacob, where he stated that God would make him become "a community of peoples" (Gen 28:3). The scholars who translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek translated this Hebrew word with the Greek word "ekklesia", which is also translated as "church" in our English versions. The "community of peoples" promised to the Old Testament patriarchs has become the church of the New Testament. There are over 100 references to "ekklesia" in the New Testament. Most of these refer to local churches – the church in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Rome; but the same word also refers to the universal church, to the church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. The church is visibly evident in local congregations; but it is worldwide in its scope. God's plan of salvation is for all the nations; he wants the good news about Jesus to go out to all peoples.

This is one of the great themes of Luke's two books, his gospel and the book of Acts – that Jesus is the Saviour of the world – he came for rich and poor, for Jews and Gentiles. Near the beginning of his gospel Luke quoted from Isaiah 40:5; "And all mankind will see God's salvation" (Luke 3:6). He went on to describe how Jesus showed compassion for those who were despised in that society – women and children, the poor, the sick, the sinful and the outcast. Near the beginning of Acts, Luke recorded Peter's quotation from Joel; "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." (Acts 2:17) "All flesh" included Jews and Gentiles; the good news about Jesus was for the whole world.

The New Testament church was slow to grasp that this gospel about Jesus Christ was to be preached to all the nations; the Jewish Christians wanted to restrict it to their own people. To change their perspective the Lord communicated directly to the apostle Peter in a vision of a large sheet coming down from heaven full of unclean animals. Three times a voice said; "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15). The meaning of this vision became clear to Peter when he was called to go and

visit the Roman centurion Cornelius and his relatives and close friends. After Peter heard what he had to say he responded: "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34f). The Holy Spirit confirmed that God accepts believers in Jesus Christ from all peoples by coming on all these Gentiles who heard Peter's message, as he had come on the Samaritans who heard the message about Jesus from Phillip (Acts 10:44ff; 8:14ff). The second half of the book of Acts is an account of how the apostle Paul preached the gospel to the Jew first, but also to the Gentiles; and

the ways many of them came to believe.

My wife and I were reminded of the worldwide penetration of the gospel when we went on a Contiki bus tour of Europe directly after our time of study at Calvin Seminary. On that tour, there were ten Christians from Singapore, with whom we enjoyed fellowship and worship. Having been in North America for nine months it was wonderful to meet Christians from an entirely different culture, but believers who shared the same faith in Christ and who sought to serve God. Meeting them reminded us that the good news about Jesus has spread far and wide and has reached many cultures and peoples.

All through the centuries the Christian church has sought to preach Jesus Christ "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We make efforts to do that in our communities, towns and cities, but also in other nations of the world, using every legitimate means available to us. The full effect of this will be revealed in heaven when all the saints gather before the throne of God and sing to Jesus; "... with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Rev 5:9)

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

The BIG OE (2)

New York, New York

Ben and Franci Hoyt

When we were planning a two-year working trip to the United States, New York City wasn't exactly first on the list. It's not that we'd ruled it out; it's just that we didn't think we'd like living in a dense, vertical metropolis. Also, Ben was looking for work as a software developer, not a Wall St banker.

But as it turns out, New York has a lot to offer besides jobs in finance, and it's a great place to live despite (and partly because of) its population density.

We calculated that on average, New York is 40 times as dense as Christchurch, our home town. In the case of our family of four living on a sixth-of-an-acre section in Christchurch, in New York that would multiply out to 160 people on the same size property – in other words, a tall apartment building. New Zealanders build *out*. New Yorkers build *up*. (And sometimes down.)

Well, we didn't know anyone in New York. Not a soul. So our aim was to settle in and get involved with a local church as soon as possible. Having now been there and done that, we highly recommend this approach. This is particularly true if you're single. In a big city, there are millions of people, including thousands of lonely people. Would all those

people still be lonely if they jumped into a church, boots and all?

We'd heard about Redeemer Presbyterian, pastored by Tim Keller – it's a great church with a lot to offer, but we thought we'd get lost in the sea of people at their 2000-strong morning services. We also tried a much smaller Redeemer church plant, but we felt that attending a church where everyone was the same as you was a bad idea (and

especially odd in the "diversity capital of the world"). Almost everyone there was white, in their early thirties, and had one or two kids. We thought we'd be a little *too* comfortable.

Andre Holtslag had recommended Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (MeRF), pastored by Paul Murphy. Sure enough, the first Sunday we worshipped there, we knew it was home. A whole mixture of people welcomed us, and it felt like



Ben and Franci Hoyt with their children with New York in the background.



“In a city like New York, you see everything.”

family from day one. Don't underestimate the power of welcoming strangers to your church!

But what was really strange about MeRF was the contrast between what we found familiar and what we didn't. On the one hand, the worship style and preaching was about as close to the RCNZ's as you can get, right down to using the same blue Psalter Hymnal.

However, in every other way, MeRF was different. First, it was roughly a third white, a third black, and a third Hispanic (people from Spanish-speaking cultures). There were a mixture of older folk, singles, and families. There were the wealthy and the poor. There were long-time Christians, and there were many new to Christ. There was even one Dutch person (a very lovely woman). Almost none were from a Reformed background originally.

In short, we found it really refreshing to worship in the way we were used to, but with a group of totally different people. We were challenged by the strong, biblical preaching, and at the same time encouraged by what Reformed teaching can give to a diverse and broken world. Let's not be embarrassed by our tradition. Our Reformation heritage has a lot to offer – but if we keep it to ourselves, what good is that?

As a family, we really enjoy giving hospitality. So we had plenty of people over to our little apartment. This was a bit counter-cultural in itself, as the done

thing in New York is to take people out for a meal at a restaurant. However, having people in our home meant we could bless others with our food, around our table, in our home. Many of the MeRF folk hadn't been raised in Christian families, so it was a real encouragement to them to see Christian home life. Our home life is far from perfect, but you don't need to have it all together before you start sharing with others.

One thing we were conscious of was not to long for home. It's easy to do, but neither does it help. We knew our time in New York was temporary, so we wanted to experience a lot in our two years there. But we also wanted to make real friends, and not fall into the trap of not getting to know anyone deeply because “we're only here for two years”. We loved worshipping with God's people on the other side of the world. We've experienced that living overseas for a time can be a refreshing thing. But as we found out, you need to be involved. You need to get to know people.

Due to the circumstances, folks at MeRF were more flexible about church buildings, worship times, church lunches, etc. Very few churches in New York can afford their own buildings, so we rented. And every so often, we'd have to pack up and move – we worshipped in four different locations in our two years there. When we were borrowing another church's building, we had to drastically reschedule our service times. Were there

long debates, letters to session, and committees formed to discuss the best outcome? Nope, people just chipped in and did what they needed to cheerfully.

In a city like New York, you see everything. Mothers screaming at their kids on the subway, lipstick-wearing guys in dresses, lesbians smooching, ruthless pursuit of money and power, workaholicism, rudeness, homelessness, loneliness, and the list goes on. And some of this naturally spills over into the church. So there are more challenges, but many more opportunities. After all, the church is for sinners. Shouldn't we cultivate an atmosphere where sinners want to be, and where grace is found?

An overseas trip can bless both the adventurers and the hosts. If your church is hosting an overseas visitor, welcome them truly. And if you're the traveller, get into a church, not only because it's the “right thing to do”, but because you can bless and be blessed.

1 To read a bit more about MeRF and see some photos, browse to HYPERLINK “<http://tinyurl.com/churchnyc>”

2 If you like photos, there are many more photos of our time in New York at our blog, AliensInTheApple.com – click on the “NYC” category on the right-hand menu, or browse through the archives from June 2010.

Ben and Franci Hoyt are best friends who coincidentally got married on the same day, eight years ago. Between the two of them, they enjoy travelling, cooking, programming, and their three daughters. They attend Dovedale Reformed Church in Christchurch.

Thinking about your O.E.!

James Williams

Introduction

For the last nine months, I have been studying abroad on the East Coast of the United States and have been learning what it takes to live away from home in the very literal sense of the word! I was given the opportunity to attend graduate school at Yale University in New Haven, about two hours up the coast from New York along the Metro North Railroad, studying towards a PhD in Applied Mathematics. I have been blessed and challenged by the experiences and opportunities that God has provided, and after returning to New Zealand's winter for the "summer holidays" it is reassuring to reflect on these nine months and see the hand of God guiding me through every trial.

Leaving

I was quite worried to be leaving New Zealand, my friends, my family, my wonderful girlfriend, and the comfort of fa-

miliarity in exchange for a new country, a new culture, and a new time zone, and leading up to the actual departure I would have benefited a lot from trusting in God a little more! I was not only moving out of the country but I was moving out of home as well which made the change even more extreme! Even though I was confident that the Lord would look after me in my travels and help me to adjust as well, there was part of me that wanted to cling to my comfort zone and hide from the hard work that would be required.

Arriving

I had been put in contact with the Westminster OPC church up in Hamden through the Daveys and the local Pastor Jonathan Holst and as the Eshelmans were passing through on holiday when I arrived they stopped for a few days to help me get around and get to church in the morning! I have been very blessed to have such a welcoming and faithful congregation to worship, fellowship, and grow with over these nine months,

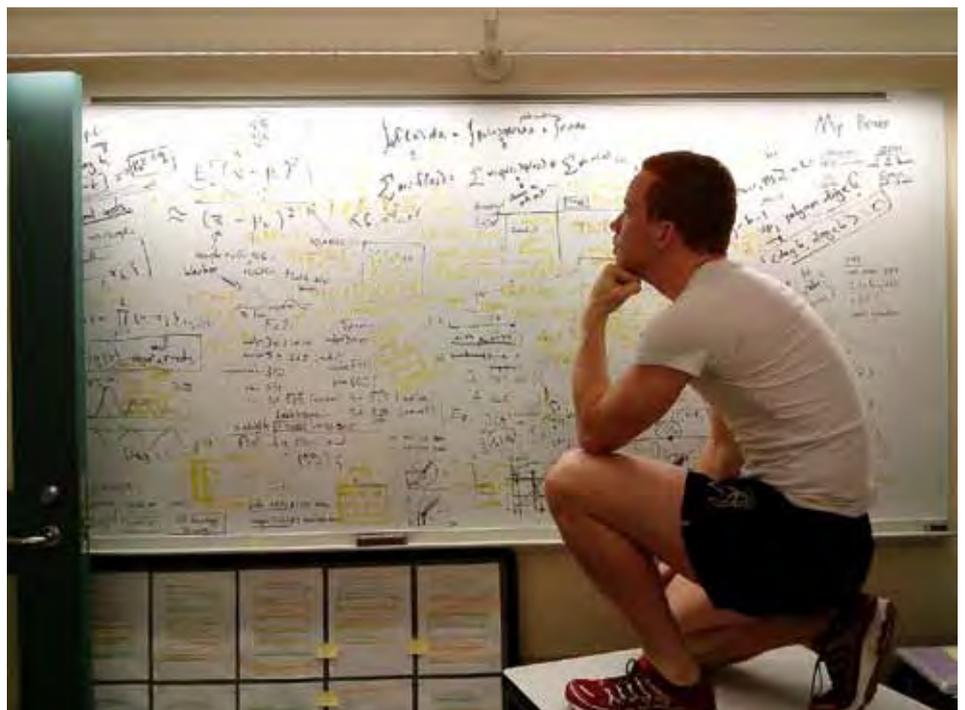
and without some of the close friendships that have developed it would have been much more difficult to overcome the almost daily challenges. In general, I would argue that the most difficult challenge was the isolation of living and studying alone.

Living

My apartment is at the upper limit of the Yale campus and is actually part of the Divinity School where some of my friends from church are studying. I found this quite useful, as they were my ride to church after the first weekend. God had opened the door to this church from the very start! I took a while to find my way around both culturally and socially, and my first supermarket shopping trip was about three hours long to give me enough time to actually read every label. I have a large apartment with a living room and a kitchen as well, and my office is exactly one mile down the hill which makes it convenient to walk everywhere and avoid owning a car at all.



Hanging out at Sleeping Giant with Jordan Burke, one of my friends who is studying at the Divinity School.



Thinking – photo of the whiteboard in my office before qualifying exams.

“Maintaining my relationship with God under a heavy workload was the most important thing that I learned over the last nine months.”

Studying

Before leaving, I was quite worried about what studying at graduate school would be like in general and I was preparing myself for the worst! I was surprised to find that even though the workload was even more than expected, most of us are actually at about the same level. I really appreciate the emphasis on a collaborative academic environment and I learnt more in the last year than I learnt during most of my undergraduate degree! Most of the graduate programmes in the United States involve two years of courses and three years of research dependent on passing qualifying exams. My first year has gone well, and I am looking forward to starting again after the holidays!

Challenges

I found “being in the world but not of the world” often at the front of my mind, living in a secular and liberal community that is religious on the surface and yet compromising to the world. New Haven was at the heart of the Puritan and Reformed movement in the early 18th century, with Yale being one of the first colleges training ministers during the first awakening, and even though there are still many churches in name the doctrine can be somewhat hit and miss! Keeping to the straight and narrow as a young male student with time to spare and endless ways to spend it requires testing everything against the Word of God and holding on to what is good.

Choices

I spent most of my time studying and teaching, being at graduate school, but I was also involved with the graduate school vocal group and part of a small crossfit group as well. I found that being careful to use my time in productive ways and planning my commitments helped to avoid wasting time in unprofitable pursuits and to make the most of the opportunities that God had blessed me with! I have really appreciated having some activities to break up the week and give me an excuse to hang out with friends as the weekends were sometimes very far apart! Having friends around for dinner was also a very good way to build those friendships into something useful!

Spiritual

Despite the importance of building local friends, keeping up with my family and my patient girlfriend was a constant source of spiritual encouragement as we kept up our weekly Bible studies and challenged each other to be disciplined in our prayer and personal devotions as well. Maintaining that discipline and my relationship with God under a heavy workload was the most important thing that I learned over the last nine months, and even though it required constant effort it also reaped constant reward! I am blessed to have found a kindred spirit in Hans Anderson, one of the men in the church who shares both my interests and struggles, and his mentoring has been very helpful!

Conclusion

I have been keeping a blog as well, and you can read about some of my experiences in more detail at myyaleblog.wordpress.com if you are interested. I am really enjoying being back in New Zealand for the next three months, but I am still looking forward to returning to the United States to continue the adventure! Praise God for every opportunity that we have, big and small!

Mr James Williams is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale in Christchurch and is studying towards a PhD in Applied Mathematics at Yale University in New Haven, CT. He has just finished his first year of studies and has four more ahead, and he is currently back in New Zealand for the duration of the summer holidays in the US.



NASCAR – on set with Hans Anderson, who works at ESPN.

Travelling lessons

R Vosslander

St Augustine had it right: we are restless. The enduring popularity of overseas holidays and travelogues – from the writings of Homer, through Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, to Bryson’s latest volume – confirms this. We have been a travelling species since Eden, never at home in this world, constantly looking beyond the horizon in search of knowledge, resources, refuge, or even just that New Zealand rite of passage: the Big OE.

While this restlessness is a consequence of the fall, it is not in itself sinful, but can lead to rich blessing. Time spent overseas can broaden and strengthen us in our faith. We live in the good world that God created, and confess a holy catholic church comprising people from every people and tribe and tongue and nation who are redeemed by Jesus’ blood and who desire to serve him, and travel can help us to see what we confess.

My wife Andy and I both come from restless stock; our parents were part of the Dutch post-war Diaspora that sought its livelihood elsewhere. While we ourselves have no ambition to emigrate, travel has been a fringe benefit of the further study that we, as a childless couple, have been blessed to undertake. We have benefited from our time spent overseas, and our Christian walk has been enriched in each place we have lived.

Geelong

We first ventured abroad after two years of marriage, spending a year at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong for Andy to undertake further teacher training, while I worked part-time and also studied. We are thankful for the knowledge we gained from our time there – I still use Prof McEwan’s basic approach to exegesis in my lectures: ask two questions of a text – What? and So what? But perhaps more important were two lessons learnt at worship. The first was the blessing of open-hearted hospitable Christians when you arrive at a church where you know no one. Hardly a Sunday went by when we were not invited for lunch.

The second lesson was that difference is not necessarily error. Until we are faced with differences it is all too easy to “know” the answers without realising that the question is still open (or even that there is a question). We are no different from Christ’s disciples (cf. Mark 9:38-41; Acts 10); faced with the unfamiliar we were forced to the Scriptures as we thought things through for ourselves. Is this unsettling? For sure. Is this good? Well, Paul seemed to think so (see Acts 17:10-11!).

Philadelphia

Thirteen years later we spent three months in Philadelphia as part of Andy’s post-grad studies in education. A friend

who had completed her doctoral studies there commended Tenth Presbyterian church to us. Providentially, a teacher at the school where we were based also worshipped there and invited us along.

The first Sunday we arrived in time for the (all-age) Sunday School, which takes place at the same time as the first morning worship service. The service is then repeated after refreshments, making it possible for a person to attend both Sunday School and morning worship. As the Sunday School class commenced we heard the organ and an exquisite classical brass quintet accompany the singing in the auditorium above us. As music lovers, we relished the quality of the music, and the joy of hearing God-honouring liturgical music actually sung by the well-trained and rehearsed church choirs as part of the worship. Excellence characterised the worship and life of the congregation.

Tenth offered a variety of Sunday School classes. While I attended a series of seminars led by Jonathan Edwards’ scholars to mark his 200th birthday (complete with birthday cake on the actual day!), Andy joined a class intended for women. Driving home from church, Andy expressed amazement at the women’s intelligent and practical grasp of the Scriptures. Over time she learnt that several held higher degrees in theology, were committed to the biblical



Downtown Boston from Logan International Airport. Y.Sawa, <http://en.wikipedia.org/>

“Travel should remind us that our restlessness will never be satisfied until and unless we find our rest in God. And we will not finally experience this until we reach the Celestial city when our travelling days are done.”

faith, and sought to serve God in their careers and homes. Not only was this inspiring, it provided the basis for a theological Bible Study for women that Andy ran upon our return to New Zealand.

Boston

My post-graduate studies led to our most recent overseas sojourn. In 2008 we left NZ for a year in the beautiful New England city of Boston. There we found a home away from home at Park Street Church. Since Boston is very much a university town (think Harvard and MIT) it attracts graduate students from all over the world, and our church reflected this. As at Tenth, the teaching and worship were excellent – a particular highlight was the congregational singing of Handel’s Hallelujah chorus on Easter Sunday, accompanied by the church choir and orchestra – a Christian Baroque music lover’s heaven!

What remains with us from our time

there was a comment that the church tried to keep the main thing the main thing – the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In a congregation of all ages, where strangers from over 50 nationalities met week by week, this simple truth underpinned a trans-national and even trans-denominational unity. It also reminded us of a comment made to us by a godly elderly saint at the Brethren church we attended while undertaking teacher training in Tauranga. When we mentioned to him that we were not Brethren, he retorted, “Not brethren? There are four names found in the Bible for Christians, and ‘brethren’ is one of them; if you’re a Christian, you’re brethren!” Amen!

In both Boston and Philadelphia we also discovered that the vitality and warmth of Christian fellowship is not determined by church size. We enjoyed warm fellowship at both places where over 1,500 people worshiped each week, but once attended a very conservative

church where only five were present and were not even offered a chair, let alone a hymn book. Nor is theological orthodoxy a guarantee of Christian fellowship, as we sadly discovered during a brief stay in Holland

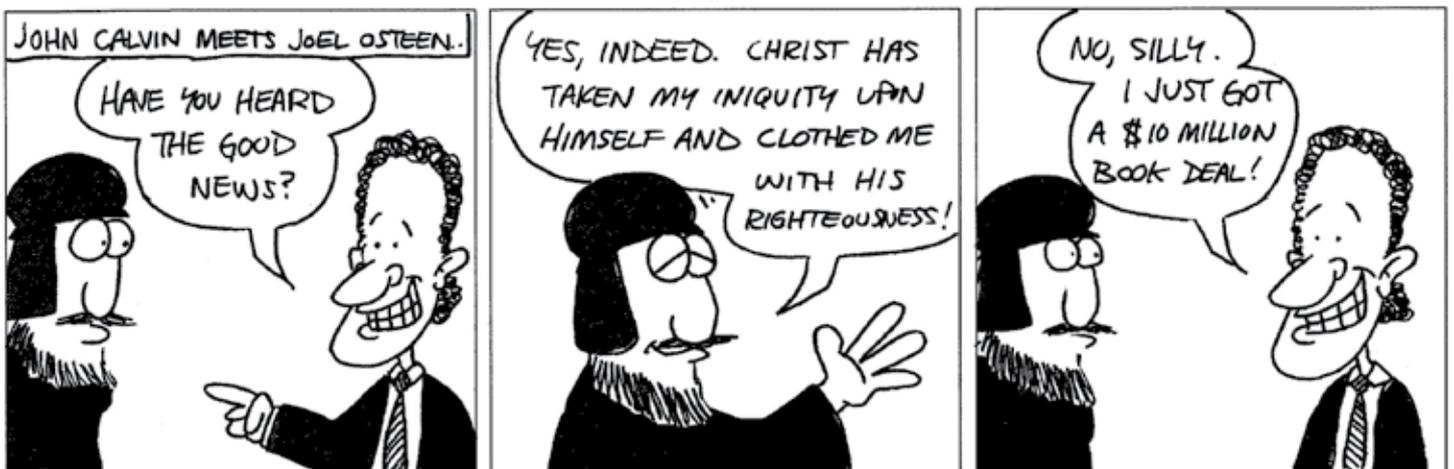
Summary

Travel enriches lives. It can also enrich our spiritual lives as we encounter the unknown or strange and are forced to think and rethink what we have always, but perhaps unthinkingly, thought and practised. Travel provides an opportunity to experience our confession that there is one holy catholic church that consists of all those throughout the world who confess Christ. It gives us an opportunity to let our previously unknown brothers and sisters be a blessing to us, and also us to them. As we leave behind (for a time) the issues and responsibilities of home we may be refreshed as we see the vitality of God’s work elsewhere; we may also be driven to renewed prayer and greater patience as we see that all churches, like we ourselves, are imperfect spiritual works-in-progress. Travel can shake us out of our self-satisfaction and motivate us to learn more about our Lord and to serve him better. Travel, like all of life’s experiences, will change us.

But perhaps most importantly, travel should remind us that our restlessness will never be satisfied until and unless we find our rest in God. And we will not finally experience this until we reach the Celestial city when our travelling days are done.

Mr Rob Vosslander, lectures in accounting and taxation at the University of Canterbury.

Marty and John by Nathan Ketchen



Feminine focus

Veronica Hoyt

Conversations with our children: *Saturday morning soccer*

I am a little late for my son's soccer game. I'd dropped him off for the pre-game warm-up, and then run an urgent errand before returning. It is now twenty minutes into the game. The sky is overcast. Rain is imminent. It is already drizzling. The wind bites. It is cold.

It takes but a glance to figure out that all is not well on the field. The Red Team is hyped up. They seem to be everywhere, charging after the ball, and the Green Team's goal keeper is kept busy.

The Green Team (my son's), on the other hand, lags behind the super-keen Reds. No-one is running. They all walk somewhere behind the action, or stand and watch. Every now and again, someone lopes for the ball and gives it a lethargic kick, anywhere.

The Green Team's parents stand on the sideline, some muttering, others yelling frustrated instructions.

I'm told that the score is three-nil.

There's no need to ask which team leads.

Half-time

Ten minutes later the half-time whistle blows.

The coach gathers his Green Team around him. He tells them he's not bothered about the score, but he is disappointed about their performance as a team. They're not running after the ball. They are not working together, and some of them are downright angry with other team members. They are not putting pressure on the Reds. The contribution of some of the Greens is zero. He's not naming anyone, but he knows who they are.

He states it all firmly, but, on the whole, kindly.

He asks if they remember the previous week's game. Oh, yes! That was a great game. It felt good to win, to work together, and to keep that ball away from the other team. But that was last week. This week is different.

As he returns to the field, my son comes up to me, shoulders down. "I'm not doing very well today, Mum." I suspect that he thinks he's one of those the coach isn't naming, but knows about.

What do I say? How do I respond?

Is this my opportunity? I don't have the helpfully raucous soccer-mum voice to give my instructions from the sideline during the game. But I now have a thirty-second opportunity to do my bit. Do I tell him that his attitude is bad, that he gave up crucial opportunities to run after the ball and put some pressure on the other team, that I saw him just standing around, a spectator rather than a participant? Do I tell him that he's letting down his team? Indeed, that he is embarrassing *me*, his mother? (For the record, he doesn't. This has been a struggle for me, but the Lord has taught me that I should not live vicariously through my son, but that's a topic for another article).

Is this is my chance to tell him what for, and then thrust him back on the

field? I choose not to.

Standing in front of me is a dejected, cold eleven-year-old, who is under pressure and in a situation he'd rather not be in.

I consider that this is not a time to scold, or, worse, to berate, valid though the criticism might be.

This is a moment when I need to demonstrate the grace that God has shown me. This is an opportunity to show mercy in order to encourage, to build him up rather than to make him feel worse.

"I didn't play well," he repeats.

"No," I reply gently, acknowledging his fault. "I saw that. Well, it's only half-way through the game. There's time left to put into practice what Martin has been teaching you in your training times. Serve your team as well as you can. Encourage them. Don't worry about the outcome. Just keep up your focus [on the game], and do your best."

I give him a hug, and he returns to the field.



Full-time

He is goal keeper in this half. The Red Team, no doubt boosted by their success, continue to out-manoeuvre their opponents, although the Greens do put them under more pressure. My son works very hard in the goal posts.

The score at the end of the game is seven-nil. My son comes to me. I give him a smile and a hug, and tell him he did a great job in this half of the game.

The coach, too, is happier with the team and tells them so. The player-of-the-day award goes to someone who did not give up and who, equally importantly, actively encouraged his team mates to keep going.

We talk about the game on the way home.

We don't focus on losing the game. We've talked about winning and losing previously. We know that the game's outcome is in the hands of the Lord. We can thank him for a win, but the score is of secondary importance. We teach that to our son in other ways, too. He knows that although test results – or whether he is better than his mates at

school (or not) – are, to some degree, his responsibility, they are, ultimately, God's domain.

So we don't mention the loss. No commiseration is necessary. We do talk, however, about *how* we get to the finish line. Do we give up when the score is three-nil? Or when our team mates are, literally, not playing the game? Or do we blame the conditions for our lack lustre performance – the weather, for example, or a previous injury?

We discuss that *how* we play a game of soccer is important in serving Jesus on that particular day, but is also part of training for life. We are learning not to give up, but to keep trying at as well as we are able in the circumstances that God has given. Conditions might not be ideal. The weather might be freezing. The other team might be better. Our left ankle might ache. However, since we've committed ourselves to it, we need to participate in this activity diligently and cheerfully. When we do that, we honour the Lord. It also means that we can bless others. When we give up, it means that our team loses a member. When we

keep up, we help and support it.

We also talk about prayer. We include the soccer game in our after-breakfast prayer at home, before the game. I point out that he can also pray while he plays. A short prayer such as: "Lord, I'm struggling to focus. I just want to give up. Please help me not to" will be heard and answered. God's grace and love, given through His son, our Lord Jesus, is unlimited and generous, extending to a dejected eleven-year-old outplayed in drizzling, cold conditions on a muddy Christchurch soccer field.

God will always help us in our moments of weakness. He is completely trustworthy. As parents, we should do no less for our children in their moment of need.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt finds her primary joy in Jesus, her Saviour and Lord. She is happily married to Berwyn, and is mother of one son, Emlyn. She worships at the Reformed Church of Dovedale, in Christchurch.

What happens to truth in an age of delusion? (PART 2)

Harry Antonides

"This, so I have argued, is the primary project of our counter culture: to proclaim a new heaven and a new earth..." (Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition, 1969, p. 240)

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3: 4-5)

"When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11: 3)

The Countercultural Revolution of the 1960s lives on

Don't you have the feeling some times that we live in a world that has gone mad? Who can make sense out of all the conflicting messages that bombard us every day? A lot of the news is about human ignorance, corruption, incompetence and creeping lawlessness in the Western democracies. Farther out in the rest of the world, dozens of minor and major wars are being fought, bringing with it bloodshed, starvation and soul-destroying deprivation. North Korea, where the people are living under one of the most cruel and murderous dictatorships, has managed to become a nuclear armed state. Meanwhile, radical Islamists have declared war on the free West, and Islamic Iran is moving closer to obtain-

ing nuclear weapons while threatening to destroy the state of Israel.

Not a few people have told me that they no longer want to listen to or read the news because they find it too depressing. I think that most of us can empathise with such a feeling. But should we withdraw from society and live in our own small world that for most of us in the free West is often still quite comfortable and pleasant – especially compared to the rest of the world? I do not think so.

In this article I want to deal with the movement that has had a revolutionary effect on the Western world, especially the United States. We are facing radical changes in the way people believe and behave. From a Christian point of view, that is most visible in the way our culture



has become de-Christianised. The whole world of “values” and habits has been turned on its head. I think that the term revolution is in order, because it involves a determined rejection of long-standing traditions, beliefs and habits.

The seeds of destruction

To understand what is happening in our time, we need to go back and take a careful look at the happenings in the U.S. during the wild and riotous 1960s. The Sixties was the decade when the seeds for radical change were sown with far-reaching repercussions for decades to come. That was the time when the existing culture (the “Establishment”) was declared to be oppressive and antihuman, in need of being dispatched to the junkyard of history.

Whoever lived through that decade will still have vivid memories of the pictures displaying huge protest marches in the major cities and other public demonstrations. Some of those were peaceful in calling for an end to the injustice suffered by black Americans. Martin Luther King, a clergyman and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement, insisted that protests be peaceful. His fearless and eloquent leadership did much to end racial segregation, at least in law if not always in practice. He became famous

for his 1963 speech “I have a Dream,” which was a riveting plea for justice and brotherhood.

Other leaders in the 1960s revolution took a different tack and chose the way of violence and intimidation. The Black Panthers, Students for a Democratic Society, and the Weather Underground were violent and criminal organisations. A short list of the upheavals and calls for radical change included many student protests involving strikes and occupation of university buildings; the sexual revolution, with its devastating impact on the family; increasing drug use; anti-Vietnam war protests; riots, lootings and burning cities; the Woodstock youth festival in the summer of 1969.

The Beatles, a four-man rock band burst on to the world stage in the early 1960s, benefiting from and contributing to the cultural revolution then underway. They became an international sensation, attracting huge, adoring crowds to their many performances. One of the band members, John Lennon, boasted to a British reporter: “Christianity will go....It will vanish and shrink....We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first, rock ‘n’ roll or Christianity.”

Three of the most terrifying and unforgettable crimes were the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963,

that of his brother Robert, and Martin Luther King in 1968.

It seemed to many that the curse of chaos and lawlessness would never end. But gradually life settled into a less chaotic routine, and the revolution seemed to have spent all its energy. But it hadn’t. It merely went underground where the foundation blocks of society were replaced with inferior sandy imitations. That was accomplished by many rebels of the 1960s who ended up as university professors, leaders in education, the arts, the media and entertainment. (That’s the story for my next instalment.)

The 1960s call to revolution was not superficial but affected the very foundations of society, that is, religion, morality and the many social institutions. The late Irving Kristol (1920-2009) in 1994 wrote an essay entitled “Countercultures” in which he stated that the 1960s counterculture was “certainly one of the most significant events in the last half century of Western civilisation. It is reshaping our educational systems, our arts, our forms of entertainment, our sexual conventions, our moral codes.”

Kristol pointed out that this movement is *against* culture; not one that wants to reform and renew the culture but one that comes with an “avowed hostility” to culture itself in the minds of intellectuals, professors, and artists. Kristol sug-

“The success of the cultural revolution is not in the destruction of buildings and toppled governments but in “shattered values” and in “spiritual deformations” that affect every aspect of life.”

gested that culture and art are merged into a new self-consciousness, and a new sense of mission that was “secular, humanistic, and redemptory.” He continued: “All traditional ties with religion were severed. The sacred was now to be found in ‘culture’ and ‘art’ where ‘creative geniuses’ ... were in the future to give meaning to our lives and sustenance to our aspirations.”

In other words, there is no transcendent order or purpose for human life. It’s up to us to create that for ourselves. This is an old story that never ends well. In the following I will deal with some more details of The Sixties revolution, as analyzed in Roger Kimball’s *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (2000). This book helps us understand the profound significance of Kristol’s definition.

A damage report

Kimball writes that in pondering the state

of American cultural life he concludes that it has suffered “some ghastly accident that has left it afloat but rudderless, physically intact, its ‘moral center’ a shambles.” He goes on to say that the cause of this “disaster” is like a protracted and spiritually convulsive detonation – “one that trembled with gathering force through North America and Western Europe from the mid-1950s through the early 1970s and tore apart, perhaps irrevocably, the moral and intellectual fabric of our society.”

The author explains that his purpose in writing *The Long March* is to explore the effects of the cultural revolution, which he calls “part cultural history, part spiritual damage report.” Above all, he stresses that the impact of the Sixties revolution is not only a passing event easily forgotten, but it continues “to reverberate throughout our culture.” He writes:

“It lives on in our values and habits, in our tastes, pleasures, and as-

*pirations. It lives on especially in our educational and cultural institutions, and in the degraded pop culture that permeates our lives like a corrosive fog. Looking afresh at the architects of America’s cultural revolution, **The Long March** provides a series of cautionary tales, an annotated guidebook of wrong turns, dead ends, and unacknowledged spiritual hazards.” (5)*

Although the 1960s revolution in America was accompanied by plenty of violence and destruction, Kimball thinks that the kind of radical upheaval of the French and Russian revolutions is almost unthinkable in America. Here the efforts to transform society have been channeled into cultural and moral life. Thus the success of the cultural revolution is not in the destruction of buildings and toppled governments but in “shattered values” and in what the author calls the “spiritual deformations” that affect every aspect of life.

I am not assured that the likes of the French and Russian revolutions will not occur in America, for the efforts to radically transform society may well lead to the chaos and hatreds of civil war. It has happened before. Here I am thinking of Abraham Lincoln’s warning he issued in 1838:

“At what point, then, is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all times, or die by suicide.”





Perhaps the most destructive feature of the revolution is the movement for sexual “liberation,” which often turned into outright debauchery, closely allied to the “mainstreaming of the drug culture and its attendant pathologies.” Kimball argues that the two are related because “both are expressions of the narcissistic hedonism that was an important ingredient of the counterculture from its development in the 1950s.”

The idealization of youth played a major role in the counterculture. This has not only led to the spread of the adolescent values and passions, but to the “eclipse” of adult virtues like circumspection, responsibility, and restraint. Kimball asserts that the most far-reaching and destructive effect has been the “simultaneous glorifications and degradation of popular culture.” Even the most vacuous products of that culture are included in the subjects for the college curriculum, as the character of popular culture itself becomes ever more “vulgar, vicious and degrading.”

In addition to the general coarsening effect of life, Kimball writes that this triumph of vulgarity has helped to create the twin banes of political correctness and radical multiculturalism. Abandoning the intrinsic standards of achievement has created a “value vacuum” in which “everything is sucked through the sieve of politics and the ideology of victimhood.”

Another feature of the counterculture is its ideological commitment to the radical Left. That’s why its proponents believe that the existing society is corrupt and must be destroyed so that a new one can be built on the ruins of the old. Hence the call for the long march through the institutions so that society is reduced to a mass of individuals beholden to the all-powerful state. In other words, the so-called intermediate institutions, which in a free society serve as a bulwark of freedom independent of the state, must be eliminated.

A Marxist voice

The Marxist philosopher Herbert

Marcuse (1898-1979) became a prominent leader of the cultural revolution. His books *Eros and Civilization* (1955), a book that became a bible of the counterculture, and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) became popular in the countercultural ranks. He wrote that the march through the institutions would be accomplished not by direct confrontation but by “working against the established institutions while working in them.” This tactic has been an overwhelming success, especially in the university, the media, and government. Kimball writes that these tactics of insinuation and infiltration rather than confrontation are the primary means by which “the countercultural dreams of radicals like Marcuse have triumphed.”

Is it not ironic that this Marxist philosopher – who represents and advocates a philosophy that everywhere it is applied brings nothing but slavery – pontificates about the abolition of repression in all personal relations including (especially) the man-woman relationship. Kimball writes that Marcuse “blends Marx and Freud to produce an emancipatory vision based on polymorphous, narcissistic sexuality....”

In other words, the old-fashioned notion of faithfulness in marriage and the biblical instruction to help raise the next generation must be discarded. Here is his reasoning in his own words, reported by Kimball: Marcuse speaks glowingly of “a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality” that “protests against the repressive order of procreative sexuality.” He recommends returning to a state of “primary narcissism,” that is, “the Nirvana principle not as death but as life.... This change in the value and scope of libidinal relations...would lead to a disintegration of the institutions in which the private interpersonal relations have been organized, particularly the monogamic and patriarchal family. 168

If you had to fit this convoluted argument into one sentence, you could say: “We want freedom from the institution of the family because it is a cage of enslavement.”

Kimball summarizes the purpose of this book as follows: “The aim of *The Long March* is to show how many of the ideals of the counterculture have quietly triumphed in the afterlife of the Sixties and what that triumph has meant for America’s cultural and intellectual life.”

In my view he has been amazingly successful, and for that he deserves our gratitude- as well as many thousands of readers.

hantonides@sympatico.ca

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“Give men time. I took three years of constant study, reflection, and discussion to arrive where I now am, and can the common man, untutored in such matters, be expected to move the same distance in three months? Do not suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused. Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we then prohibit wine and abolish women? The sun, the moon, and stars have been worshiped. Shall we then pluck them out of the sky? Such haste and violence betray a lack of confidence in God. See how much he has been able to accomplish through me, though I did no more than pray and preach. The Word did it all. Had I wished I might have started a conflagration at Worms. But while I sat still and drank beer with Philip and Amsdorf, God dealt the papacy a mighty blow.”
Martin Luther

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings ...

BY THE GLEANINGS

TEAM:

Odette De Kock – Auckland
Presbytery

Yvonne Walraven – Wellington
Presbytery

Frances Watson – Christchurch
Presbytery

Collated and Edited by **Harriet Haverland**

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Josh and Hannah Flinn have moved to Chicago so Josh can begin his studies at MARS.

Hukanui voted with an overwhelming majority to put a call forward to **Rev. David Waldron** of Hastings, but he declined this call to continue the work in Hastings.

Rev. John Haverland of Pukekohe is to supervise **Mr Luke Scheepers'** short-term vicariate at Bucklands Beach during pastor van Garderen's absence (July 16th – October 12th). It will allow Luke and

the church to test his calling in the practical work of Christian ministry.

Albert Couperus has successfully completed his first year of ministry study at MARS in Chicago. He has also sustained his licensure exam before the Consistory of Redeemer United Reformed Church of Dyer, Indiana and is now recommended for pulpit supply as a student preacher, or licentiate in the United Reformed Churches. Over the US summer he will do an 11 week internship under Rev. Richard Kuiken at Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church, New Jersey (Rev. Erik Stolte served one of his internships there also). Do keep the Couperus' in your prayers. (Wanganui)

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale session reports that, in its meeting with the Rangiora fellowship, there was consensus to move towards morning worship services and also towards calling a man to the work there. Session now needs to discuss how and when these decisions will be implemented.

Christchurch – This past week the Building committee met with the Insurer. It was a fruitful meeting and a further meeting is scheduled for 11th June. Please pray for this committee, that they

might be a godly witness to the Insurer in their dealings with them. May the Lord grant each of us patience and wisdom as we deal with personal insurance matters also. The Lord in His providence has placed these circumstances before us; may we use this for His glory and for our sanctification.

The three Christchurch congregations formally celebrated the **60th anniversary** of Christchurch Reformed Church over the weekend of 29/30 June, with Rev W Wiersma preaching at a commemorative service.

MISSIONS

Wally and Sjannette Hagoort: The Overseas Missions Board wishes to inform the churches that Br. Wally and Sr. Sjannette Hagoort will finish their mission work in Papua New Guinea in January 2015. After this they will repatriate to New Zealand. The Hukanui Session, OMB and the Hagoorts believe that the time is right for them to conclude their service in PNG. We have all greatly appreciated the support of the churches through the years of their service. Please keep Wally and Sjannette in your prayers as they continue to serve the remainder of their time on the field and prepare for leaving the field and re-settling back into New Zealand.

ACTS OF SERVICE and DEACONAL

Silverstream: Ladies Fellowship – A special guest speaker from The House of Grace, a maternity home for teenage mothers will be coming to speak to us about their mission. All ladies in the congregation are invited to attend this special evening. At a time when the practice of abortion is so readily available, we want to support those young ladies who have the courage to choose life. Since this is the mission we're supporting this year, it would be wonderful to be able to provide them with tangible help. We invite the entire congregation to help us collect any of the following items that appear on their need list: Prayer, food vouchers, Pledge Clean and Dust, newborn "all-in-ones" with long sleeves, laundry powder (for sensitive skin), scented nappy bags, nursing pads (disposable or fabric), maternity pads,



Preaching Conference
September 2013
Thursday 26 & Friday 27



Guest Speaker: **Dr Peter Adam**

www.rtc.edu.au/Calendar/Events

infant sized nappies, photo albums, overnight bags, toilet paper (ongoing need), anything else that you can think of that may be suitable to encourage and help a young teenage Mum who is choosing life for her baby.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH and EVANGELISM

Avondale: The kindy is proving to be a great means of reaching out and evangelizing to the community. A couple of the Korean mothers are being taught English using simple Bible stories. They covet your prayers for the ongoing mission at the kindy where families are being witnessed to every day for Christ.

Silverstream: Music Ministry – The Evangelism Committee warmly invites all those who are interested in visiting the elderly to join the music group. A musical ensemble consisting of piano, guitar, cello and flute has been practicing for the past few months in order to accompany singers in a ministry to visit shut-ins at homes for the aged. This group is not intended to be a formal choir, but simply a group of people coming together to sing and visit the elderly. The visits will be once a month once we get started. Thank you in advance, on behalf of the Evangelism Committee.

Wellington: Bring a guest! – Next Sunday morning, 16th June, DV, we hope to have a gospel service to which you can bring a guest. It is an opportunity to invite people whom you know and whom you would like to hear the gospel. (Of course every service should bring the gospel, but this time we shall be mindful of those who are not familiar with hearing the message of God's Word). We do expect visitors from different backgrounds, i.e. religious backgrounds. When you speak with them greet them warmly, and do not be too inquisitive, some don't like that. Sit with them and help them find their way in the Bible or the hymn book. Pray that the Lord may bring in many to respond to our invitations.

CAMPS and CONFERENCES

Queen's Birthday Camp: May 31st to June 3rd. A fun-filled weekend of engaging studies, amazing food and good fellowship at the YMCA Camp, Kaitoke.

Geelong Bible Conference: July 5th to 7th at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong. Topic: "Is the Church past her sell-by-date?" with Rev. Derek Thomas

Please join us at the...

Auckland Reformation Conference 2013

1-2 November

Justification Then and Now: Why This Great Truth Still Matters



Guest Speaker:

Dr. Martin Williams

*Lecturer in New Testament and Greek
Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Australia*

Dr. Williams holds a PhD from the University of Otago, having completed his dissertation on 'The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter.' Dr Williams has been engaged in mission work in Cameroon, has served for several years as a pastor, and has taught New Testament exegesis and theology at the Faculté de Théologie Evangélique in Cameroon, West Africa and New Testament Greek translation and exegesis at the University of Otago. He came to his current teaching position at the Reformed Theological College in 2012.

Where? The Reformed Church of Avondale, 63 St Georges Road, Avondale, Auckland

The conference will provide opportunity for instruction from God's Word, singing praise, fellowship with one another as we rejoice in our common Reformation heritage, and encouragement to hold fast to and proclaim anew the biblical doctrine of justification – the doctrine of which Martin Luther said "if this article stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses."

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24).

Friday, 1 November

***7:30 pm:** "Galatians: The Magna Carta of the Reformation"

Saturday, 2 November

8:00 am: Breakfast gathering – men's meeting with Dr. Williams and separate presentation for the women

9:30 am: "Justification (Then): The Battle Cry of the Reformation"

11:15 am: "Justification (Now): New Perspectives on Justification"

12:15 pm: Question & Answer

*Book tables (used/new) will be available (opens 7:00 pm Friday – closes 1 pm Saturday), light supper Friday evening, and Saturday morning tea. Limited billeting will be available for the Friday evening. There is no fee for this conference but donations will be thankfully accepted to cover conference costs. For planning purposes, please contact Lisa Moelker if you plan to attend or have questions regarding billeting. **09 828 8979** or plmoelker@hotmail.com

as the keynote speaker.

Young Adults' Camp: YAC is on for all 18- to 30-something-year-olds at Lakewind Bible Camp, Rotorua from August 30th to September 2nd. Rev. Andre Holt-slag will be leading the studies. E-mail Michael at mtsalisbury@gmail.com for an enrolment form.

RTC Preaching Conference: September 26th and 27th at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. This year's theme, Preaching Biblical Wisdom, explores the wisdom literature of both the Old and New Testaments. Drawing from the books of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Song of Songs and James, we'll look at how godly wisdom can be powerfully and practically preached, and how wisdom can become part of our message of

hope that moves and motivates us to serve Christ.

Auckland Reformation Conference: November 1st and 2nd. This conference will provide opportunity for instruction from God's Word, singing praise, fellowship with one another as we rejoice in our common Reformation heritage, and encouragement to hold fast to and proclaim anew the biblical doctrine of justification – the doctrine of which Martin Luther said "if this article stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses." "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24). Guest speaker this year is Dr Martin Williams, Lecturer in

New Testament and Greek at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong.

CLASSES and COURSES

Avondale: Women's Leadership Breakfast – Saturday, July 6th with Mrs Jenny Waldron at the Avondale Reformed Church.

North Shore: Auckland Presb. Men's Study Day: Saturday, August 3rd at the Reformed Church of the North Shore.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Volleyball Tournament 2013: Saturday 28th September (DV) in Masterton. This year again it is open to all the churches in the North Island and is being run as a fundraiser for **Silverstream Christian School**.

ACTIVITIES

Free e-books: R C Sproul has produced a series of short books addressing 14 crucial questions. They are intended to help Christians address their own questions as well as giving tools to help others asking these questions. The questions addressed are: Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?; Can I Have Joy in My Life?; Can I Know God's Will?; Can I Trust the Bible?; Does God Control Everything?; Does Prayer Change Things?; How Should I Live in this World?; What Can I Do with My Guilt?; What Does It Mean to be Born Again?; What Is Baptism?; What Is Faith?; What Is the Trinity?; Who Is Jesus?; Who Is the Holy Spirit? These e-books can be downloaded for free at <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/freeforever.html>



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"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."
Prov 1:7

Teaching Principal and/or Teacher

The Silverstream Christian School is a Christian school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed faith. We believe this Reformed faith to be the most accurate expression of biblical Christianity. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith and to Reformed Christian education. This is an exciting opportunity to be part of a vibrant covenant community, and we look forward to your application. If you have any questions or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact us. Please forward your C.V. with 3 referees to:

Contact details:
Dirk den Harder
Email: dirk39@xtra.co.nz **Ph** +64 4 528 8066

Short Report of the OMB Meeting

Friday 10th May 2013 at Masterton

Those present at this meeting were the Rev. Peter Kloosterman (Chairman), Mr Derek Cressy, Mrs Rosalind Cressy (Administrative assistant), the Rev. Hans Vaatstra, Mr John Koolaard, Mrs Elise Stolte, (Treasurer), Mr John Kloeg (Secretary), Mr John Verbokkem, Mr Jerf van Beek (Hastings sending church for the Doumas) the Rev. Robert van Wichen (Liaison: South Island Presbytery) and visitors Mr David Jochem (Christchurch) and Mr Henri Pennings (Hukanui, sending church for the Hagoorts). Apologies were received from Mr Henk Velvis (Hastings) Also

absent was Hamilton's representative, Mr Pieter van der Wel (JR's sending church) and our Auckland Presbytery liaison, the Rev Dirk van Garderen. Normally we don't record all the names of those who attend meetings in a report like this. We do so here so that readers know who your board members and representatives are; and as an expression of gratitude to God. It is evident in the makeup of the board that God provides His church with many people who have a heart for missions, who are willing to serve and who have a range of spiritual gifts which enable our OMB to serve the Lord and His church well.

The treasurer provided the meeting with a regular financial update. We are on budget for which we are grateful. However, the donations received have given us a modest surplus, which helps balance the cash flow. Further to the regular budget expenses we have received good support for the projects on the field, which arise now and then.

In the past such projects have included housing for college students, a new photocopier for the Bible College and in conjunction with the Canadian churches money towards the purchase of extra land as a garden block for resident students at the RCBC. So to our churches on behalf of the OMB, a heartfelt thank you for your ongoing generosity!

The Rev. Peter Kloosterman, Mr John Kloeg and the Rev. David Waldron (Hastings) plan to attend the Reformed Ministries conference in October this year, Lord willing. While in PNG our delegates will have a range of tasks to perform. These include providing pastoral care for our missionaries on the field, interacting with the Reformed Ministries team and the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church Mission Board, and seeing how Reformed Ministries in PNG is fulfilling its vision. An important part of that vision is to train PNG nationals as church leaders, with the long-term goal of establishing the Reformed Churches in Papua New

Guinea as an independent federation of churches.

Further information was gleaned by Board members about emeritation and furlough for missionaries serving on the field. This information will be incorporated into the revised Missions Handbook, which will serve as a set of guidelines to assist our denomination in its task of missions. The OMB plans to finalise revisions of the Missions Handbook in June this year, Lord willing. In the meantime the Board approved the new guidelines for furlough in order to establish such provisions for the Rev. Alan Douma who has been on the field since 2008.

The meeting concluded with the viewing of a newly-developed powerpoint presentation on the OMB's personnel, budget, responsibilities, and mission projects. This is being developed as a promotional tool for use within our churches.

**Hans Vaatstra
Reporter**



CBI NEW ZEALAND NEWSLETTER MAY – 2013

While CBI continues to bring the Word of God to prisoners it becomes more evident that the Lord is guiding this ministry. Isaiah 55:8 comes to mind; "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord." We thank the Lord for His patience with us and for His strength as we trust in His ways to lead us.

During 2012 two of the NZ prisons were closed down – New Plymouth Prison and Mt. Crawford Prison in Wel-

lington. There are plans to build a new men's prison in the South Auckland area. However the NZ prison population remains largely unchanged over the past 5 years. At present there are 17 prisons in NZ. CBI has students in each of these prisons.

The total prison population in March 2013 was approximately 8,700. This includes around 500 female prisoners and 1900 prisoners in remand.

A brief overview of CBI NZ during 2012:

- We have close to 500 students enrolled in the CBI Courses.
- There are 92 Instructors and a team of 10 volunteers working in our office.
- We processed 1225 lessons from March 2012 to February 2013
- In this same period there were 291 new enrolments
- We posted out more than 500 Christmas cards in December to CBI Students.

One student shared *"Firstly thank you for remembering me over the Christmas holidays and sending me a beautiful Christmas card. I was humbled to know that you were thinking of me at that time."* This sentiment was expressed by many of the students.

There have been some requests regarding feedback about the CBI finances. During this last financial year (1/4/2012

– 31/3/2013) our income was \$13,207 while our expenses totaled \$14,778 – a shortfall of \$1571. I am very thankful for the financial support we receive from Churches and individuals. CBI NZ is registered with the Charities Commission which means your donations are tax deductible.

We have found that many of the CBI Students in NZ have problems with literacy. Part of each lesson is the weekly devotional booklet (the Roadmap) which many students find particularly difficult. As a result a significant number of students stop with the studies early on in the Course. This is reflected somewhat in the number of students enrolled.

In August 2012 I introduced a new CBI Course in NZ as I travelled to each region in the Country meeting with Chaplains and Instructors. The Course, called Manga Messiah (10 lessons) is aimed to reach those prisoners who struggle with literacy. However it is also designed to reach children whose parents are in prison. Therefore the Course material has a very different format and content.

In November 2012 the first student enrolled in this Course. As at the end of April we had 50 students enrolled. It is proving to be very popular with the prisoners. However some students are even struggling with this Course. We have received some very positive

feedback from the students doing this Course. Some are asking if we have more Courses like this available. One student struggles with his writing and wrote very little in his answers. In lesson 5 he writes ... "it is great to learn more about the Bible each lesson I get through. When they ask the questions it is getting better for me to understand it and I think my writing is getting better now than when I started."

When asked the question: Who did you tell about the story of Jesus' birth? One student responded: "I told my son and he said he thought Christmas was about Santa now he knows we remember Jesus was born on that day."

Another student shared: "I want to thank you for your encouragement and support with me doing the Manga Messiah studies. It is a blessing to become a follower of Jesus. His words of wisdom help me through everyday life. I thank the Lord for the CBI Team in having faith in me in my walk with the Lord and I praise God for your encouraging words. Thank you for mentioning that I may continue the CBI studies when I'm released because I will definitely continue to learn about God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The highlight for me this past year was to be asked to present the final certificate to the first CBI NZ student who had completed all the CBI Courses – a total of nine courses which he completed in four-and-a-half years. I was able to meet with the student for half an hour prior to all the men in the Alpha Unit coming to the Chapel for the presentation. The Lord did some amazing work in this man's life as he worked through each course studying the Scriptures.

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all the Instructors who faithfully mark the lessons. Thank you for all the time and effort you put into supporting and guiding the students. Your work is the heart of this ministry.

Our next newsletter will be devoted to sharing with you some of the many responses we have received from the students.

Please continue to pray for the ministry of CBI in the prisons and for those involved with the work of CBI in NZ. If you would like further information about Crossroad Bible Institute you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, P.O. Box 11005 HASTINGS 4158

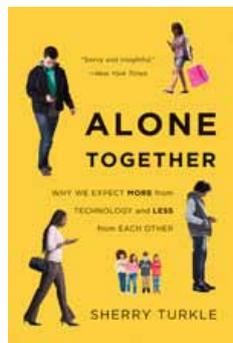
Books in focus

Alone Together: The Great Irony of Modern Communication: A Review Article

by Sherry Turkle

Published by Basic Books, 2011

Reviewed by T. David Gordon



Sherry Turkle has written a thorough and interesting analysis of our curious relationship with electronic and digital technologies. The entire book examines the paradox contained in the sub-title: That we expect (even long for) human relationships with our technologies, while contenting ourselves with sub-human relationships with humans. As she says in the preface, "I leave my story at a point of disturbing symmetry: we seem determined to give human qualities to objects and content to treat each other as things" (xiv).

This is no mere editorial or screed. Turkle is Professor of Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, a licensed clinical psychologist, the director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, the editor of two books, and the author of four other books. Turkle studied under the late Joseph Weizenbaum in the mid-1970s when he was working on his famous ELIZA program. This particular volume functions as the third part of a trilogy that includes *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1997) and *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (2005). It is the result of a fifteen-year study that included interviews with over 450 individuals. The book is 360 pages long, and includes 290 footnotes spread across forty-one small-type pages. The book is divided into two parts, and the two parts disclose the paradox that constitutes the book's thesis. Part One (chapters 1-7) is entitled "The Robotic Moment: In Solitude, New Intimacies" and Part Two

(chapters 8-14) is entitled "Networked: In Intimacy, New Solitudes."

When Turkle refers to ours as "the robotic moment," she qualifies that she does "not mean that companionate robots are common among us; it refers to our state of emotional – and I would say philosophical – readiness" (9). She traces the development of social/companionate robots since Weizenbaum's ELIZA, discussing Tamagotchis, Furbies, Paros, My Real Baby, AIBO, Cog, Kismet, Domo, and Mertz. Her observations of these devices and our usage of them lead to her basic conclusion that "now, instead of simply taking on difficult or dangerous jobs for us, robots would try to be our friends" (xii). "The robot, for some," says Turkle "is not merely 'better than nothing,' but better than something, better than a human for some purposes" (7). Robots are now being developed to care for the young and the elderly, and some of each appear to be content with the circumstance. One elderly woman said of her robotic dog, "It is better than a real dog ... It won't do dangerous things, and it won't betray you ... Also, it won't die suddenly and abandon you and make you very sad" (10). Indeed, the fifth-graders Turkle studied "worried that their grandparents might prefer robots to their company" (118), and in one case she observed such an event: "Edna's attention remains on My Real Baby. The atmosphere is quiet, even surreal: a great grandmother entranced by a robot baby, a neglected two-year-old, a shocked mother, and researchers nervously coughing in discomfort" (117). And though the young people did not like being overlooked by (great) grandparents or parents, many of them also preferred robots to people, as one young girl said: "In some ways Cog would be better than a person-friend because a robot would never try to hurt your feelings" (93). After fifteen years of observation, Turkle noted, "children want to connect with these machines, to teach them and befriend them. And they want the robots to like, even love, them" (86). Indeed, both young and old alike, while acknowledging verbally that these robots are just machines, continued to cover and make excuses for their obvious mistakes, a trait that Turkle refers to as "complicity" (131).

Turkle is not an alarmist, but she writes the book with genuine concern over what she perceives as a profoundly de-humanising tendency to expect and desire robots to replace human companionship: "Many roboticists are enthusiastic about having robots tend to our children and our aging parents, for instance. Are these psychologically, socially, and ethically acceptable propositions? What are our responsibilities here?" (17). Turkle shares the concern of one young girl who said, "Don't we have people for these jobs?" (76). Towards the conclusion of Part One, Turkle says, "My Real Baby was marketed as a robot that could teach your child 'socialisation.' I am skeptical. I believe that sociable technology will always disappoint because it promises what it cannot deliver ... A machine taken as a friend demeans what we mean by friendship" (101).

In Part Two, Turkle discusses how the network has altered our social structures in similarly dehumanising ways, referring to "the unsettling isolations of the tethered self" (155), and citing research that "portrays Americans as increasingly insecure, isolated, and lonely" (157). In this section, she discusses social networks such as Second Life and Facebook, and the communications technologies of instant messaging, texting, and cellphones. Even though young people show traits of virtual addiction to their digital technologies (Turkle is aware that multi-tasking "feels good because the body rewards it with neurochemicals that induce a multi-tasking 'high,'" 163), they also share candidly with Turkle their misgivings and anxieties about them. They are very aware that they are, as Turkle says, "always on" (151, and Turkle also refers to "the anxiety of always," 260), constantly producing and managing their digital personae, fearful that they will project a "self" that others will not like and fearful that they cannot erase from these websites mistakes that can injure them both now and in their futures. As one young woman said to her, "I feel that my childhood has been stolen by the Internet. I shouldn't have to be thinking about these things" (247). Many young people also appear to be aware of the addictive tendencies of these technologies: "I think of a sixteen-year-old who tells me, 'Technology is bad because people are not as strong as its pull'" (227).

Turkle shares the concerns others have expressed about the tendency of social networking sites to become a substitute

for real human community. For many of the individuals she studied and interviewed, the online "life" was as important as their actual life: "Pete says that his online marriage is an essential part of his 'life mix.'" ... He makes it clear that he spends time 'in physical life' with friends and family. But he says that Second Life 'is my preferred way of being with people'" (160-61). Many log on to anonymous "confessional" sites to acknowledge their transgressions without actually having to do anything about them face-to-face with anyone: "I ask her if online confession makes it easier not to apologise. Her answer is immediate: 'Oh, I definitely think so. This is my way to make my peace ... and move on.' I am taken aback because I did not expect such a ready response" (233).

Perhaps the most surprising result of Turkle's interviews was the intensity with which her subjects (both adult and youth) avoid/evade landline telephones and, increasingly, even cellphones (many use their cellphones exclusively for texting). They regard telephones as intrusive, and express anxiety that they will not know what to say or how to end the conversation, so they prefer texting or IM-ing, where they can compose what they wish to say without the anxiety of immediacy. Referring to this tendency, Turkle expresses again the paradox that constitutes her thesis: "We work so hard to give expressive voices to our robots but are content not to use our own" (207).

Though trained in psychoanalysis, Turkle writes as a true media ecologist, observing "not what computers do for us but what they do to us, to our ways of thinking about ourselves, our relationships, our sense of being human" (2, emphasizes mine). "We make our technologies, and they, in turn, shape us" (19). "Technologies live in complex ecologies. The meaning of any one depends on what others are available" (188). Turkle's voice is joined to that of Maggie Jackson (*Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, 2009), Winifred Gallagher (*Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*, 2009), Mark Bauerlein (*The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future* or, *Don't Trust Anyone under Thirty*), 2008), and Nicholas Carr (*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, 2010).

We can no longer afford the conceit that our helpful and powerful technologies – for all their help and all their power – come without remarkable

human costs. "But these days, our problems with the Net are becoming too distracting to ignore ... The ties we form through the Internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are ties that preoccupy. We text each other at family dinners, while we jog, while we drive, as we push our children on swings in the park. We don't want to intrude on each other, so instead we constantly intrude on each other, but not in 'real time'" (294, 280). If there are any solutions, they will not be easy: "This is hard and will take work. Simple love of technology is not going to help. Nor is a Luddite impulse" (294). What Turkle suggests, instead, is what she calls "realtechnik" (294f.), as we assess the results of the networked life and "begin with very simple things ... Talk to colleagues down the hall, no cell phones at dinner, on the playground, in the car, or in company" (296).

Turkle is evidently a humanist, but she does not disclose whether she is a theistic humanist or a secular one (she does make passing reference to her Jewish heritage). Readers of *Ordained Servant*, therefore, will not find a theology of technology here nor a theological critique of our current technologies. But readers will find here many insights about how and "why we expect more from technology and less from ourselves." Tolle, lege.

T. David Gordon is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America serving as Professor of Religion and Greek at Grove City College, Grove City, Pennsylvania.

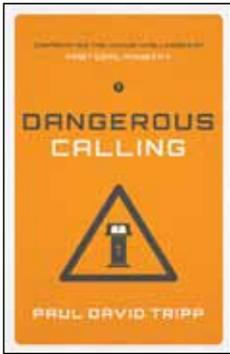
Ordained Servant Online, January 2013.

Dangerous Calling: Confronting The Unique Challenges Of Pastoral Ministry

Paul Tripp

Reviewed by: Greg Hoadley

Dangerous Calling begins with the story of a pastor that is all too common. While this pastor's ministry appeared to be doing well, his success was illusory. The persona he projected toward his congregation was brazenly at odds with how he was behind closed doors. He was prideful, often said contemptuous things about those to whom God had charged him to minister, became dismissive of his wife's repeated warnings, and was growing increasingly distant from his family.



Who was this pastor that author Paul Tripp was describing? Paul Tripp. Through providential circumstances, he came to realise that he was not conducting his ministry in a godly manner. But through his many travels and classroom lectures, he discovered that many other pastors have the same struggles.

Here's the bottom line: because pastors are in the trenches, they don't get the spiritual nourishment that they

are called to give to Christ's flock. Therefore, many are in survival mode, silently struggle with their own sins, and live in fear of their being discovered. These struggles can include having a seminary mind-set (i.e., valuing academics over ministering to people), being blind to their own heart issues, succumbing to isolation, and slouching towards mediocrity.

Tripp wrote *Dangerous Calling* to alert pastors to these very real dangers and to give them the tools to combat them – most particularly, regaining a sense of awe of God and his Word. In this book, he shows a compassionate tenderness toward pastors who are discouraged. Tripp reminds them of the great, merciful God they serve, and he tells them how to first feed themselves from God's Word before they feed their congregation.

But Tripp is also confrontational where he needs to be: "As a pastor, you'd better

be ready to fight for the gospel, but you'd better also be ready to war for your own soul. You'd better be committed to being honest about the battles that are going on in your own heart. You'd better be prepared to preach the gospel to yourself. You'd better arm yourself for the inner conflict that greets anyone in ministry."

While *Dangerous Calling* is geared toward pastors, it is also a useful tool for ruling elders, because it will help them to better understand and minister to their pastors. It will also help elders to better watch out for warning signs that their pastor may need help.

With so many pastors leaving the ministry every year, the publication of *Dangerous Calling* is a much-needed and timely book. All pastors, elders, and seminarians should read it carefully.

Reproduced from the OPC website, June 2013

Helpful Christian applications on your tablet

If you are a Smartphone or Tablet user, or wonder why people reach for their phones during Bible reading in Church, read on.

I bought a tablet about 6 months ago. The initial reason was to replace a diary that required me to transcribe all notes and phone numbers at the start of each new year. There had to be a better way. A 7 inch tablet with an external keyboard was what I chose. It works well for the diary keeping. For this I use the Dejaoffice app from the Google Play store. While browsing all the numerous apps (applications) available, I found that lots of these are free. I found apps to help you in your Christian walk, Bible study programs, commentaries, daily devotions etc. Be aware that since there are numerous apps available, you need to be discerning in your choice of what to download and use. I have found the following very useful for my Bible study. I use the Bible study app, by Olive Tree. This is free from the Google Play store. The free version uses the ESV Bible and you can add free study books, sermons and commentaries. I have installed Matthew Henry's com-

mentary and have this showing at the same time as reading the Bible. You can also set up reading plans to help in your study of the Word. Most of the reading plans that were discussed in the Faith and Focus April issue can be set up as your reading plan on Tablet or Smartphone. You can highlight verses, write notes, and tag verses with your own named tags. There are lots of possibilities and they are easy to use. This application can be used when not connected to the internet. The other app that has proved useful is the Christian Creeds and Reformed Confessions from Christian Works Mobile app. You can search phrases and it has the proof texts with hyperlinks to the Bible. This app includes the following; Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Cannons of Dort, Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechism.

The well known Today booklet is available as a free app. You can receive the daily Bible readings on your tablet, however you do need to be connected to the internet to use it. As it comes out daily, it does sometimes get confusing what day it is, as our day starts ahead of the Americans. Our Daily Bread is another devotion app. available from RBC ministries. This is one that you have to buy to install. There is a one off cost of \$1.16. Other pos-

sibilities are to receive the Tabletalk devotion booklet on your tablet. This requires a subscription to the magazine to receive it.

There are other good uses for these electronic gadgets. If like me, you travel long distances for work, why not download an mp3 audiobook? Again be discerning, there are ones available from Christianaudio.com who have some free titles available. Audio books by well known writers such as John Piper and Jerry Bridges are worth a try. How about downloading that sermon your Pastor preached that inspired you? Or one that you missed as you were busy with the children. Or you can download that sermon your friends talked about that their Pastor preached last week. Our own RCNZ web page has audio sermons. Just go to www.rcnz.org.nz and pick 'sermons' on the left hand side. Some of our Reformed Churches have their own web pages, with their Pastors sermons on them. You can also get to them via the RCNZ web page, just go to 'where we are' on the left hand side.

I am sure there are other useful apps, but these work well for me. Do you have one that works well for you? Let us know so we can share it with others.

Herman Borger
hborger@xtra.co.nz

Fear, sovereignty, and evangelism

John S. Shaw

Have you ever found yourself in a conversation with a clear opportunity to present the gospel, but said nothing? You knew you should say something, but your tongue was suddenly frozen.

Fear presents one of the greatest threats to a vibrant, evangelistic ministry. No doubt every one of us remembers a moment when we missed an opportunity to speak the truth of the gospel because of fear.

Perhaps our fear of evangelistic conversations grows from overestimating the courage of those whom the Lord has used to bless the church in the work of missions. We imagine that men such as Charles Spurgeon or David Livingstone never trembled at the thought of speaking the good news. We tell ourselves, "Clearly, Christ called and sent them as evangelists, but I lack that gift."

Indeed, the Lord has set apart certain men as evangelists (Eph. 4:11), and therefore we call some ministers to serve as evangelists in order to plant new churches. Yet that doesn't mean that only such men are called to share the gospel. The Lord calls every believer "always" to be "prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). But that certainly doesn't mean that Spirit-gifted evangelists have no fear.

Maybe it would help to consider how the Lord bolstered the apostle Paul in the midst of fear and trembling. Yes, even Paul struggled with fear, but the Lord gave strong encouragement to the apostle to put fear away and go on speaking.

Paul describes himself as ministering in Corinth "in weakness and in fear and much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). The apostle had reasons to tremble. Due to Jewish opposition, he was forced to shake off his garments and leave the synagogue behind, taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Refusing to give in quietly, his opponents brought charges against Paul before the tribunal. They were nothing if not persistent in their resistance to the gospel.

"Fear and much trembling" is a very human response to such opposition, and Paul struggled under the weight of it.

So the Lord addressed the apostle in a unique manner, speaking to him in a night vision (Acts 18:9-10).

The Lord's answer to fear

First, the Lord begins with a gentle rebuke: "**Do not be afraid.**" These familiar words call to mind the many times in biblical history when the Lord comforted his children with the same refrain. For example: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isa. 43:1). The Lord tells his servants to put fear away, because fear stands contrary to our position as his prized possession. Calvin also notes that "nothing is more contrary to the pure and free preaching of the gospel than the straits of a faint heart" (*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2, p. 187).

Second, the Lord gives a stirring mandate: "**Go on speaking and do not be silent.**" Aren't you encouraged to know that the apostle needed this kind of instruction? This is the same man who wrote letters to congregations and ministers urging them to be ready

to preach the word in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2). Yet he needed the same instruction. So the Lord urges Paul to put away the fear that produces silence. Rather, he is to speak the gospel consistently and boldly.

Third, the Lord offers three strong promises:

1. "**I am with you.**" Here the Lord reiterates another common biblical promise. The Lord made the same promise to Joshua as he led the people into the Promised Land, saying, "I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you" (Josh. 1:5). The people of God carried that promise with them as the Lord extended his kingdom throughout the land of Canaan. The Lord makes the same promise to his church today as he extends his kingdom to the ends of the earth: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." God guarantees his presence with the church in the Great Commission and at Pentecost (Matt. 28:20; John 14:15-18; Acts 1:8).

2. "**No one will attack you to harm you.**" Notice what he doesn't promise. He doesn't say, "No one will attack you." Rather, "No one will attack you *to harm you.*" They might attack, but I will preserve you. The Lord fulfilled that promise



Conversation about Christ in Queens, New York.

to Paul in Corinth. His opponents attacked him, dragging him before the tribunal. Yet the Lord delivered the apostle from harm. The proconsul refused to judge the apostle and released him to go on speaking the good news. The Lord never promises his church freedom from opposition, but he certainly promises preservation. Although some believers have died for their service to the gospel (including Paul), the Lord always cares for his people. Nothing, neither tribulation nor death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-39).

3. **“I have many in this city who are my people.”** Paul’s night vision closes with the truth of God’s sovereignty. Many people in Corinth already belong to the Lord, although neither they nor Paul know it yet. The Lord utilizes the truth of his sovereignty to bolster the witness of the apostle. Isn’t that wonderful, and perhaps surprising? Many people argue that sovereignty and predestination discourage evangelism, but in this passage the Lord places sovereignty at the foundation of effective evangelism.

Sovereignty and evangelism

J. I. Packer picks up on the connection between God’s sovereignty and vigorous evangelism:

So far from making evangelism pointless, the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility – indeed, the certainty – that evangelism will be fruitful. Apart from it, there is not even a possibility of evangelism being fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel. (Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, p. 106)

As members of a denomination that celebrates the sovereign power of God in salvation, we should be greatly encouraged by this. This biblical truth – that God chose his people in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) – serves as a rallying cry to the church. We serve a God who is powerful to save, and he sends us out



Bill Welzien (left) giving evangelism training.

as witnesses. What a glorious privilege! Yet a question remains. We celebrate the sovereign power of God in salvation, but how are we responding to that truth? Are we zealous in the work of evangelism? Are we tireless in speaking the gospel, so that those who belong to God might be found and gathered? Are we confident that the sheep will follow the voice of Christ wherever he is heard? If so, are we speaking boldly as instruments of the Lord?

There remains much work to be done in the gathering of the elect into the church of Jesus Christ. The Lord sends us as his emissaries in that mission, and he sends us with words of encouragement. He offers a gentle rebuke: do not be afraid. He gives a stirring mandate: go on speaking and do not be silent. He offers three strong promises: I am with you; no one will attack you to harm you; I have many in this city (and these cities) who are my people.

We may not have the evangelistic gifts of the apostle Paul, or even those of Spurgeon or Livingstone. Yet the Lord gives us the same assurances of his continuing presence and his sovereign power in salvation. Armed with these certain promises, let us go on speaking the plain truth of the gospel with boldness. May the Lord use us as instruments in his advancing kingdom and produce in us a zeal to plant new churches throughout North America toward that end.

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