

# Ecumenical relations – are they fruitful?



# Contents

<b>Ecumenical relations – are they fruitful? (1)</b> The RCNZ in ecumenical perspective	3
<b>Ecumenical relations – are they fruitful? (2)</b> Why Sister – Churches?	6
<b>Ecumenical relations – are they fruitful? (3)</b> The biblical case for ecumenicity	9
<b>Outward focus</b> Some things do not change – and why they are so attractive	12
<b>Feminine focus</b> Developing a family culture	14
<b>Beholding the glory of Christ at Christmas – what did Simeon see?</b> Christmas meditation	17
<b>Focus on home</b> Gleanings	19
<b>Obituary</b> Rev. C Larsen	20
<b>World in focus</b>	21
<b>Books in focus</b>	22

.....  
All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

#### The Editor:

Walter Walraven  
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven  
Upper Hutt 5019  
Email: [fnf@rcnz.org.nz](mailto:fnf@rcnz.org.nz)  
Reformed Churches Home Page  
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

#### Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.  
Church and family notices are free, subject to sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

#### The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa  
79 McLeod Street  
Upper Hutt  
Email: [ricwhare@paradise.net.nz](mailto:ricwhare@paradise.net.nz)

#### Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)  
Bulk Rate: \$35.00  
Overseas: \$60.00  
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

#### Production Staff:

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag  
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography  
Printed by: Flying Colours

# Editorial

In times past, ecumenism - or ecumenical relations - was not a favourite subject for me. That could have had something to do with my lack of understanding of and interest in the subject. There was a time when I (and others) questioned the value of sister-church relationships, mainly because some of these relationships had gone belly-up, and as churches we had to go through the painful process of severing the tie that binds.

Am I still of the same opinion? The short answer is no!

As Reformed Churches in New Zealand, we have an ecumenical calling to churches in this land and to others overseas.

According to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, the word ecumenical carries this description: “representing a number of different Christian churches” or “promoting or relating to unity among the world’s Christian churches: *ecumenical dialogue*”. This word originated in the “late 16<sup>th</sup> century (in the sense ‘belonging to the universal Church’) and came to us via late Latin from the Greek oikoumenikos, from oikoumen ‘the (inhabited) earth.’”

Given that explanation, what does it mean for the RCNZ? Firstly, we should unite with churches who have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and Christ Jesus being the corner stone, and that we challenge others to a greater faithfulness to the Scriptures, locally and abroad.

Our unity with other churches must be based on the truth of God’s word and a common confession, being the Four Forms of Unity. It is not a position of compromise, rather one of deeper understanding and working toward a true unity. The Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 28, states that we are “bound to join” the true church, which could be understood to imply seeking the fullest expression of the unity we have in Christ, with other federations. The sister-church relationship is the fullest expression we have.

Over the years our small federation of churches has been able to develop some very meaningful relationships with other like-minded churches around the world, engage in missions with them and even form sister-relationships.

Our contributors were requested to write about the fruitfulness of our ecumenical relations. I trust you will find these articles bear out the fact they are just that – fruitful.

Mr Jack Sawyer puts the RCNZ in ecumenical perspective.

Mr John Goris explains why we have sister-churches.

Mr John A Bouwers (*URNCA Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity*) gives the biblical case for ecumenicity.

Mrs Sally Davey considers the value of those things that do not change.

Mrs Jenny Waldron writes on developing a family culture.

*World in focus* provides some useful news and views.

*Gleanings* continues to keep us informed of significant events.

Mr Dirk van Garderen provides an obituary for the Rev. Carl Larsen.

Mr Charles R Biggs writes about what Simeon saw – our Christmas meditation.

*Books in focus* – some very interesting books reviewed for the interest of ministers, elders and members alike.

Images on p1 and p3-4 by courtesy of Mr Jack Sawyer.

(top right) *International Conference of Reformed Churches in Cardiff, 2013.*

(bottom) *Free Reformed Churches synod 1990 where the work to become sister churches began.*

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 Dordt, 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.

## Ecumenical relations – are they fruitful? (1)

# The RCNZ in ecumenical perspective

### Jack Sawyer

As the saying goes, many of our RCNZ forbears came to these shores with “the shirt on their back and five pounds in their pockets.” After many years, I still stand amazed and inspired at what that first generation accomplished. Their *kerkesef*,<sup>1</sup> vision, energy, and commitment remain a remarkable story, and should continue to be a model and an inspiration for their ecclesiastical children and grandchildren. We who are now so prosperous, and seemingly so busy, do we

ever stop to consider how our grandparents, mostly migrant young people in their twenties, far from their hearth and home, with slim resources and young families, began to organize churches, called elders and deacons, convened synods, compiled church orders, and reached out to other churches? In fact, we have entered into the fruit of their labor as we go to church every week. Their reaching out to other churches, without which I would not even be writing this essay, will be my focus; and I hope that what follows will prompt us to

appreciate their effort and consequently what it means for us today.

Why did our RCNZ fathers reach out to other churches? In a word, from one important perspective, isolation. Many of us who migrate become lonely, missing our families and the familiar, amidst the effort to adjust to a new country, new topography, new climate, and in New Zealand holidays at a different season of the year. I remember many years ago, as a fresh, young pastor, new parent and new immigrant, feeling ill-adjusted in my first charge in Silverstream. I finally



*Our corps of ministers is/was truly ecumenical. As can be seen by this image, they came from different backgrounds and contributed to defining and enriching the character of the RCNZ. Picture taken at Riverbend Center, Havelock North at ministers and wives conference 1994.*

figured out that part of my feeling ill at ease was that I, having grown up in wide open country, could not see the horizon – and being surrounded by steep hills, I felt closeted. With lots of rain and cold southerlies, I lacked not only the feeling of space but also the sunshine I was accustomed to enjoying. Even the light seemed different, and the sharp rays of the sun quickly burned me! How encouraging it was for a young pastor, encountering the *onbehaaglijkheid*<sup>2</sup> of the immigrant, to be embraced by other immigrants who understood, who could encourage and sympathize. Folks like this lifted my arms in my struggle to become a faithful, immigrant pastor.

There is an ecclesiastical point to this reminisce. Churches, like individuals, friends, and families, are supposed to be connected. The early British immigrants missed “home.” They imported their customs, food, the names of their towns and gardens, even their deciduous trees, all in an effort to acclimate

to their new home and make it more familiar. The post World War II Dutch immigrants, while trying to assimilate, also imported *Olie Bollen* and *Klompes*. But more importantly, they missed their Reformed connectional community, in short their church life. As they learned the language, and attended local Protestant churches they became acutely aware that their isolation was not merely geographical, familial, and cultural but also theological. They were aliens discomforted by the apostasy of the New Zealand Churches and their embrace of Arminianism and Modernism, or in the case of some like Lloyd Geering, virtual atheism.

Our parents were aware then of their geographical isolation, their theological isolation, and thus their need to reach out to other parts of the world as they sought to become faithful, English speaking, New Zealand Churches. They needed help. First they turned to Holland, and early on to other

English speaking countries in order to seek ministerial personnel and English language materials and programs.

But something was at work in the hearts of our church founders that was more than the psychological impulse of a lonely longing for hearth and home, for family and the familiar. No, this impulse runs to Scripture, to the union which believers have with Christ their head, and thus with each other. This communion is ecumenical. It cannot be complete apart from some connection to the whole church throughout the world. The longing to be connected was, and is, rooted in our Savior’s High Priestly entreaty in John 17, where he prayed for those given him of the Father, and those who would believe through them, that they would be as united as the Father and the Son, that they would be together sanctified in the truth, solidified in the experience of true joy, and protected from the hatred of the world and the enmity of the Evil One. Believ-



The synod of 1989 with ministers and elders from a variety of reformed backgrounds melding together to form a unique federation of churches in New Zealand. In the Lord’s providence, this continues to this day.

ers throughout the world, and history, have needed this prayer! Our fathers were not an exception to this rule, but their instincts in reaching out prove the efficacy of Jesus' prayer.

In New Testament history, we also see the fruit of Jesus' prayer as we read in the sacred text of "the churches of Christ struggling to overcome their sworn enemies (the world, the flesh, and the devil), in order to overcome a pluriformity of culture, religions, and lifestyles, precisely in order to follow the apostolic admonition to make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit, in the bonds of peace." It was in pursuit of this prayed for, blood-bought unity that Paul and Barnabas were sent to the first Synod at Jerusalem. It was in pursuit of unity in faith and practice that Paul and Silas delivered the decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem for the Gentile Churches to observe. It was in pursuit of that unity that Paul, the ecumenical evangelist brought the power of the gospel to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile; and labored tirelessly to help the churches to understand that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew, nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, male nor female, but one new man in Christ Jesus.

This ecumenical impulse and calling was also an important characteristic of the churches of the Reformation. In 1552, John Calvin had memorably and eloquently written to Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury that, "Amongst the greatest evils of our century must be counted the fact that the churches are so divided one from another that there is scarcely even a human relationship between us; at all events there is not the shining light of that holy fellowship of the members of Christ, of which many boast in word, but which few seek sincerely indeed. In consequence, because the members are torn apart, the body of the church lies wounded and bleeding. So far as I have it in my power, if I am thought to be of any service, I shall not be afraid to cross ten seas for this purpose, if that should be necessary."

So also with the children of Calvin, via Holland, who came to post World War II New Zealand and were compelled to begin their own churches," for the sake of our salvation, and that of our posterity." They, too, were willing to reach across oceans to find and later provide help, and also to find united fellowship with others of like, precious faith. They were no cultural or theological isolationists, but as Calvinists in doctrine

and church government, so they were also in ecumenism. They reached out to local Presbyterians and many other Christians.<sup>3</sup> They asked the mother country for help and the Gereformeerde Kerken sent Rev. Bill Deenick, a real pioneer of our churches.

Please consider for a moment how this reaching out for help eventually filled the RCNZ corps of ministers throughout our history. Imagine, no Dykstra, no deGraaf, no Brenton, no Pellicaan, no Van Dam, no Boelens, no Venema, no Pieters, no Reitsma, no Wiersma, no Gillard, no Palmer, no Kloosterman, DeVos, no Zorn, Williamson, and no Tyson. You understand the list could go on, but can you imagine no Hoyts in the RCNZ for a moment? These men all answered a call to come over and help us. Their call and work can be traced by one path or another back to the early days, to the leadership of Bill Deenick, and the willingness of young church members to step out in faith and call and accept ministers from far and near. Thankfully today we have fine young men in ministry who were raised in our churches, but even they owe a connectional debt to the ecumenical impulse of our fathers. Please note that to this day the RCNZ need outside help to staff our pulpits. Can you even begin to imagine our churches without the ministry of those who answered the ecumenical call and came to our aid?

Now, further imagine no ecumenical partnering in theological education. Where would our churches be if there had been no shared ecumenical vision for training pastors with the help of the CRCA, and Australian Presbyterians? Into the mix of men like Henk DeWaard, Stephen Voorwinde, and Alisdair McEwen, also came the OPC with the multi-generational influence of Ray Zorn. He was stated clerk of the RCNZ Synod, beloved Pastor in Hamilton, and Principal and Professor of Dogmatics at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. Today, of course, there is Principal Murray Capill, one of our own.

Even with the tensions that have periodically flared up in the RCNZ's relationship with the RTC, the vital importance of this ecumenical venture cannot be denied. It is impossible to think of the RCNZ without the names of Archbald, Capill, Douma, Haverland, Rogers, Van der Wel, Van Garderen, Willemse, and now younger men like Van Wichen and DeVries. Also worthy of note is the Venema ecumenical

“Building relationships with other churches is not like seeing how many friends you can accumulate on Facebook. One of the primary goals of ecumenical outreach is fellowship in mission work.”

connection. Richard Venema, on loan from the CRC, served two congregations in the RNCZ. His son Cornel, who spent some memorable years here, has had a key role in training Andre Holtslag, Erik Stolte, Albert Couperus, and Joshua Flinn at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Building relationships with other churches is not like seeing how many friends you can accumulate on Facebook. One of the primary goals of ecumenical outreach is fellowship in mission work. Ecumenical vision has led to missionary endeavor far beyond the shores of New Zealand. Here one recalls Bruce Hoyt being sent to Canada in 2007 to the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches, there earnestly to call for the implementation of a sister church relationship that would be supportive of joint missionary labors in Papua New Guinea. And that leads to reflection upon the 25 year quest for sister church relations with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia, and our side by side work overseas. And please remember that "our own Alan

and Odette Douma" must in some sense be shared with Australia and the CRCA. Going back further, one remembers Pim Oppelaar and our work with the OPC in Formosa. Likewise, Barry James, John Rogers, and Paul Archbald have made vital contributions in Africa with the OPC Uganda mission.

Finally, this essay would not be complete without asking us to reflect upon the widely used Christian Education materials from the OPC and the CRC, together with the *Psalter Hymnal*, a staple in our churches for so many years. Of great significance to our covenant youth is the Calvinist Cadet Corps. We must not forget that this wonderful ministry to our youth was transplanted from North America and has long found fertile soil among us. It was through a vital inter-church relationship that these materials and ministries came to our shores, and into the very fabric of our church life.

Through the years, as synods were setting their budgets, I have periodically heard asked, "are we not spending too much on inter-church relations and foreign travel?" Certainly, much ecumenical work can and should be done these

days via the internet, by email or skype. But there is still no substitute for face to face encounters with likeminded brethren in order to forge vital relationships of trust and confidence in our brethren. Such trust and confidence is the lubricant that enables the smooth sharing of personnel, resources, and ministry. As one who has studied the RCNZ at some length, I believe that this is vital to understanding the history and character of the RCNZ. Where we would be, what we would be if it were not for the help we have received and given through our relationships with other churches? How do you put a price on that?

Think of all that our grandparents accomplished with "the shirt on their back, and five pounds in their pockets." For the last three synods, it has been my privilege once again to be in attendance as a fraternal delegate, and among the churches I love, and once served. One remark has been repeated in all three Synods. "We have become prosperous." Now that does not mean everyone is rich, or has as much as they want, or that some do not undergo financial hardship. But it does mean that

compared to the resources available to our churches in the 1950s and 1960s for an ecumenical budget, the RCNZ of today is amply supplied.

To whom much has demonstrably been given, much is required. It is this old pastor's prayer, that the ecumenical impulse, prayed for by Jesus, and demonstrated in New Testament history, the Reformation, and in the faith of our RCNZ migrant founders, will not grow myopic and weak in the present and coming generations.

- 1 *kerbesef* means church consciousness, awareness, and loyalty. It means you really comprehend the importance of your church.
- 2 *onbehaaglijkheid* the author is searching for a Dutch word to describe the malaise and uneasiness that some migrants experience in a new country and culture as they adjust and assimilate.
- 3 Only limited space keeps me from mentioning the work of the RCNZ in the ICCC, RES, ICRC, and the faithful work of Dick Vanderpyl, Dirk Van Garderen, Bruce Hoyt, and others.

*Mr Jack Sawyer is a minister in Pineville Presbyterian Church in Louisiana, USA and was a minister in the RCNZ during the '80s and '90s.*

---

## Ecumenical relations – are they fruitful? (2)

# Why Sister – Churches?

### John Goris

Sisters have a common bond: not only the immediate tie with each other, but also a far broader bond with grandparents, great-grandparents, cousins, etc. Sister churches also have a special connection that is worth exploring, and experiencing. However, just as sisters are not entirely alike (even twin-sisters) – they have their distinct features. That common bond between churches is a great incentive to associate more closely. Even those folk "adopted" into a family still have that sense of belonging as well as sharing something of the family heritage.

Churches, then, even if they find themselves spread out over differ-

ent continents, can have many things in common. Basically, **all those** who are truly part of God's people have a common bond.

### One Church ...

We must remember foremost that this bonding is **an article of faith!** We confess this in the words of the Apostles' Creed: "*I believe one holy catholic (i.e. universal) church, the communion of saints ...*". We say that we are one, not because we are similar, but because we are **Christ's!** As such we need to express that common bond in the communion of the saints.

We believe that there is ultimately one Bride of Christ: one Bride who prepares for His coming, and the more we long for that coming, the more we

want to be ready. That readiness is expressed in being tuned into His will for us. That implies also, that since **together** we are His Bride, we reach out to each other ... as Christians, as churches, and to yet-to-be Christians. Of course it is a welcome experience to enter a place of worship at the other end of the globe, and to discover that they have a very similar order of worship. It is always encouraging to discover that we are family. Yet the ultimate bond is *in the Spirit*. That thrills most!

### Bonds in His Providence ...

When we speak of sister-churches we think of common bonds. As members of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, we recall that in our earliest

“Precisely because the Church is universal, it is important to seek a meaningful bond with like-minded churches on a world-wide scale.”

years we had strong connections with the Netherlands, and also with Australia, Canada and the USA. We needed help from our sister-churches overseas. They provided us with pastors, with pastoral training, with practical knowledge as to how to function as a faithful church in our particular context. The wisdom and support from “older” sisters was much appreciated. However, it was also pleasant to discover that while many of our earlier members came from a variety of Reformed denominations, they were bonded together here in **one** denomination.

Over the course of the years we have grown together not only as those of different backgrounds from overseas, but also with fellow-believers within our own country, sometimes through marriage, sometimes through sharing the gospel with like-minded Christians, and indeed also with those who came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who began to love the Reformed heritage we had.

#### Ecumenical relations ...

Precisely because the Church is universal, it is important to seek a meaningful bond with like-minded churches on a world-wide scale.

Initially there was the R.E.S. (Reformed Ecumenical Synod), through which we associated with Reformed and Presbyterian Churches worldwide. Later we joined the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches). This gave

us stronger “identical” bonds with many churches. With some we kept “personal” ties as sister-churches, and with others we were bonded through the one ecumenical association, i.e. ICRC. In earlier years we established the bonds with the “original” Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, and the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the USA, and after some years also related to the Liberated Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. We can still learn from one another’s ecclesiastical manners and mistakes.

Almost from the start we also kept in touch with the OPC, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA, and their wider heritage. Bonds were also established with the United Reformed Churches of North America, and the Canadian Reformed Churches. We attended conferences and learned from each other and sought to encourage one another in biblical truth. These type of “family gatherings” always have had special significance.

#### Helpful lessons ...

By observing how others seek to serve the Lord and King of the Church, we could pick up valuable lessons and practical directives.

From the brothers and sisters in the Liberated Reformed Churches (**GKNv**) we can learn to relate better to churches on the mission field. They do not speak of a “mother-daughter” church relationship anymore, but of “sister-churches”. It takes away the notion that “we in the

West know best”. We must be prepared to share with and learn from each other. This is a commendable approach.

From the brothers and sisters in the **OPC** we can learn to look for “mission fields” that are “needy” and “inaccessible”. After all, the Lord of the Church sent us to go into all the world to preach the gospel. And sometimes those so-called “inaccessible” places may be part of our secular cities at home. Several centuries ago the Moravian Brethren sought out the most hazardous mission fields. You may remember one of its leaders, Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf. His motto was, “*I have one passion: it is Christ!*” As from the seventeenth century these folk went to places like Greenland, Labrador, Patagonia, and among Australian aborigines.

From the brothers and sisters in the **CGKN** we could learn to focus not only on the sound theological mind, but also on the warm evangelical heart for Christ. How essential it is to have **both**: head- knowledge and heart-knowledge of the gospel. We need to underscore that often!

It was also encouraging to read something in **Tok Amamas long PNG**, newsletter of October-November 2014, that struck a chord. Among others this comment was made at a recent conference: “We also considered the issue of not fostering *dependency*! And the answer to dependency is not independence as such, but *inter-dependence*.” Well said, brothers!



Bethel Canadian Reformed Church. We became sister churches in 2011. [www.churchbuilder.ca](http://www.churchbuilder.ca)



The Independent Reformed Presbyterian Church of Kwangju, Korea, where John Goris preached while attending the ICRC. Image, John Goris

### Cross-cultural bonds ...

And last but not least, we do need that wider “embrace”. I remember an older colleague from the Netherlands writing about regional peculiarities of so-called country/district congregations in the Netherlands. A generation or so ago these places remained rather isolated from other parts of the land. This is almost unthinkable in the present high-tech communication situations! My colleague wrote about a *reluctance to change*, and a resistance to broader perspectives. The common response at that time was: “We have always done it that way!”

Cross-cultural contact makes us aware of a wider input and the implications of Biblical truth. It is not without purpose that the apostle Paul wants us to think of the Church as “the Body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12-31). You know that passage ... “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you”, nor again, “the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”

Surely, this does not only apply to the local congregation. It certainly has a bearing on the inter-local, and international situation too. Although at one time communication was restricted, these days distance can be overcome in many ways. In fact, people are on the move, and settle for shorter or longer periods outside their original habitat.

Through the ICRC our NZ Reformed Churches rub shoulders with people from Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in many parts of Asia. This provides challenging interchange. The October 2015 Asia-Pacific Regional conference will again see many represent-

atives from Australasia and from Asian countries come together in Seoul, South Korea, DV. We also expect to see the Rev. Alan Douma from PNG, as well as Sister Janice Reid, still working for *Reach Beyond* in South East Asia.

We know that several churches in these regions live under much pressure from local ideologies which are pushing for prominence. It will be good to encourage each other in the Lord. Statements like those in Acts 20:36 and Acts 21:5-7 are ever so encouraging. How wonderful to strengthen each other in the Lord, and to pray for each other! The Church lives in a hostile world, no matter where it is located, and the need for encouragement is great. Of course, this also applies to the local scene where we live. We do well to pay attention to that. It is vital to put on the whole armour of God, and keep the communication channels with Headquarters open all the time.

### Lessons to be learnt ...

Can we learn from one another? Indeed! God has graciously endowed us with His Spirit so as to grasp spiritual truth, even with our limited and sin-affected human minds. We need to encourage one another to walk in “the paths of righteousness for his Name’s sake”, and He leads us in that (Psalm 23). So then, as we seek to know and to practise truth in genuine orthodoxy, we do well to be alert to pitfalls. H.L. Ellison describes it in this way: “*Orthodoxy is in itself a very precious thing. It becomes hard, cruel and narrow, when it becomes the expression of something other than a continuous living fellowship with the God of truth*”.<sup>1</sup> Words to ponder!

### Personal involvement ...

Personally I have deeply appreciated the bonds with Asian Christians. My faith has been enriched when I counted its many blessings. The challenges are many. There is a noted humility and a hunger for the Word. “Can we study the Scriptures again? I want to bring a friend along who does not know the gospel: is that OK?” Of course, it is! It is always a pleasure to feed “hungry” people: hunger for the Word is so stimulating. It also makes me dig into the Scriptures even more, so as to share more, and more generously. Not only that: it makes me enthusiastic about meeting that multitude that no one can number, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev 5:9 & 7:9). And best of all: it will be the time when I shall meet my Saviour in all His glory, even the glory of His love, in His hands and feet!

<sup>1</sup> H.L. Ellison, “*From Tragedy to Triumph*” (1958)

*Mr John Goris is a member of the Reformed Church in Wellington and a minister emeritus who has served in several congregations in New Zealand and Australia.*

---

## Like a Tree

And he is like a tree  
Planted by streams of water\*  
What splendid sight is he  
With leaf and fruit abounding:  
So promising is he ...  
A sight indeed astounding.

Who is this blessed “he”  
Whose walk is so noteworthy,  
Who flourishes to be  
Outstanding among mortals,  
So focused heavenward,  
Adorning this life’s portals?

It is the man of truth  
Who’s come to know the Way,  
Retaining vital youth,  
Shunning what leads astray.

God knows him!

Wellington, May 2014  
\*Psalm 1

*Leaves Galore – Poetic Reflections by John Goris*

---

# The biblical case for ecumenicity

### John A. Bouwers

I crossed a national border and a couple of state lines to get here. That's nothing when you consider that John Calvin said he would cross ten seas for the sake of unity. He wrote Archbishop Cranmer in April 1552 with a particular concern for the Church of England. He was discouraged by the devastation the church experienced in its disunity. Calvin was known as the apostle of ecumenicity.

My assignment is to speak on the biblical mandate for ecumenicity.

We start with the conviction that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is one.

My presentation is based largely on John 17. I will also reference Article 27

*The following is a speech (edited for length) by Rev. John Bouwers, pastor of Immanuel United Reformed Church in Jordan, Ontario, at last year's URCNA Classis Eastern US, Semper Reformanda Conference. The conference was held on October 14, 2014, prior to the meeting of classis. The Rev. Bouwers is chair of the URNCA Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU).*

of the Belgic Confession and what our fathers have taught with regard to the "... one holy catholic church ..." I refer you also to a very helpful document on the OPC website, *Biblical Principles for the Unity of the Church*.

We come from a context of churches that relate to each other in the bonds of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council), where together we express a commitment to

the pursuit of organic unity among like-minded churches.

In the URCNA, we conduct our ecumenical efforts with a view to complete church unity. Admittedly, this is not something that is easily attained, but it is the goal. My challenge is to encourage you from the Scriptures as to why that should be the case. We can become cynical, but we should not be. We ought to live by faith: "I believe a



*Building relationships with other churches, is like building bridges which requires, skill, time, effort and patience.*

holy catholic church ...” This confession needs to be brought to expression.

Jesus Christ makes plain in John 17 that this is His heart’s desire. Ephesians 4:3 states that we are “... to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” It’s a unity we are to keep; to manifest; to work out; to bring to expression.

Some suggest we should be content with unity as a spiritual essence and not be so concerned about the expression of unity. That is a false dilemma. Yes, ultimately we must root in what is given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the work of the Spirit. But out of that reality we are to be busy.

In our own broken experience we know it is relatively easy to break unity. Sometimes it is necessary, when Truth is at stake. It’s a more difficult challenge to bring unity about. We are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation to the world. We need to show that reconciliation to the world.

### **The church is one**

First is the declaration of unity as reality. Belgic Confession, Article 27 says: “We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood,

“It is not either/or: the mission of the church and our call to ecumenicity means that we work together. The world must see that we are serious about the gospel of reconciliation.”

sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.”

Over against the accusations that they had destroyed the unity of the church, the Reformers declared, “We believe one holy catholic and apostolic church.” They believed, based on the Scriptures, that God has one work in the earth.

The Lord has a covenant, and the language of Leviticus 26:12 is repeated throughout Scripture: “I’ll be your God; you’ll be my people.” He binds Himself to one people and dwells with them. In the New Testament, Ephesians 2 explains, the walls of partition have come down. God has one people. If the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles can come down, certainly the wall of partition between Reformed and Presbyterian is not insurmountable.

There is one body. Ephesians 4:3 states, “... keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-16 is a call to manifest that unity and bring it to expression.

The consummation is seen in Revelation 21:3 where the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God as a bride prepared for her husband, and again the Lord says, “I will be with you, and you will be My people; I’ll be your God.”

The church is one. It is a declaration of faith.

The Reformers understood that Reformation was required because of the deformation of the church. There had been a sham kind of organisational unity in the place of a commitment to the Truth and to the gospel. In the face of this the Belgic Confession describes the one holy catholic church as “a holy congregation of true believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.” Unity is found in Christ. The Reformers were accused of rending church unity: “Where the Pope is, there is the church,” their accusers said. But the Reformers responded, “Where Christ is, there is the church.”

Perhaps you’re in a foreign place and you run into someone who is also a believer. They are also expecting “their salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, they are sanctified and sealed by the Spirit,” there is a unity you enjoy together. The church is one.

Jesus says in John 17:1, 2, “Father, as you have given Him (that is the Son) authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.” Verse 9: “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those

whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.”

The blessed reality of unity roots in what God has given from all eternity. It roots in election; in God’s sovereign grace; it is fundamentally a gift of God. Unity is not, first and foremost, organisational. That was the Roman Catholic error. We need to stand on the right foundation. It needs to be unity in Christ, a work of God’s Spirit. That’s the unity for which Christ prayed, a gift of God, and a reality.

At the very least we understand that it is an eschatological reality. Jesus prayed, “Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am, and to behold My glory.”

Unity is a reality. And as we look forward to that unity, we need to work it out today.

### **Unity as idol**

But there is also the danger of unity as idolatry.

The Heidelberg Catechism says idolatry is having or inventing anything that one places trust in apart from or alongside of the one true God. Unity is an idol if it becomes more important than God; if, for the sake of unity, we deny parts of our confession.

When unity becomes an idol, as it did in the days leading to the Reformation, it becomes a weapon with which to pummel those who seek to call the church to faithfulness. “The church is one; you can’t rend the fabric of the church.” Yet the Bible was not opened and the Lord Jesus Christ was scarcely preached. Hope was not found in the gospel of God’s sovereign grace, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Those who proclaimed these truths were viewed as troublers in Israel. When unity becomes idolatry it takes on a role more significant than the truth of the Word of God.

A careful look at John 17 reveals what Jesus is praying for: “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word...” Verse 8: “For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.” “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” Any desire for unity that would make the Word secondary is a sham. That is the liberal ecumenical movement.

“Uniformity hinders unity when we emphasize our distinctive, defining moments as churches, a moment in history, an emphasis, a way of preaching.”

Another form of unity as idolatry demands “everything gets done the way I do it.” But unity is not uniformity, and it is important to understand the difference.

In Colossians 3:11 we read: “... there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free ...” There is diversity, but it is not a threat to unity. Diversity contributes to the blessing of unity. An overemphasis on uniformity can hinder true unity. Diversity ought to contribute to our sense of privilege and blessing. We have things to learn from each other.

Uniformity hinders unity when we emphasise our distinctive, defining moments as churches, a moment in history, an emphasis, a way of preaching. Distinctives are elevated to the point of confessional status: “We might have the same Confession, we might agree in everything we confess from the Word of God. But we preach differently, so we’ll never be united.” This form of idolatry hinders unity.

Finally, if we declare unity as reality, the implication is that we need to engage the demand for unity as responsibility. Jesus prayed for it.

Some suggest Jesus wasn’t praying in John 17 for the organisational unity of the church, that, instead, Jesus prayed for His return to the glory of the Father

and that His people would experience that reality with Him. That’s true enough in the ultimate sense. But we can’t deny that what Jesus prays for has implications for practical unity today.

In Scripture there is an expectation that the church be governed in a certain way. “Appoint elders in every city ...” We see that in Acts 14, as well as in the pastoral Epistles. Acts 15 suggests a connectionalism in the life of the church – the need to consult with one another. Having consulted with one another at the Jerusalem Council, what was decided there was communicated to the churches as, “... the decrees for you to keep ...” The expectation is that churches hold one another accountable, live according to this standard, and continue to interact with each other. Therefore, when Jesus prays for unity to come to visible expression, this kind of connectionalism is an application of what Jesus prays for.

We are taught to work for what we pray for. *Ora et labora*. Jesus prays and works, says John 17:21 “so that the world may believe that You sent Me,” and “so that the world may know that you have sent Me.” Jesus works for what He prays for. Shouldn’t we do the same?

### Answering an objection

People say, “Time spent on ecumenicity takes time away from the work of evangelism.” According to Jesus, that’s a false dilemma. For the sake of our witness to the world, we need to strive for oneness. We are ambassadors of reconciliation, yet we can’t get along with each other? We need to examine ourselves, and give better expression to what we have in Christ.

In Ephesians 4:32, Paul says to forgive one another as you have been forgiven in Christ. “Ah, but we’re spiritually one,” we say piously. Yet our actions say something different. “I’m not talking to those people. We haven’t talked to them since the 1930s or the 1940s.”

Jesus says, “that they may be one, that the world may know.” It is not either/or: the mission of the church and our call to ecumenicity means that we work together. The world must see that we are serious about the gospel of reconciliation.

R.B. Kuiper wrote in his *The Glorious Body of Christ*: “There are Christian denominations which are so similar in their interpretation of the Word of God [and I would interject that they hold faithfully to the same confessions, historical differences and emphases aside] that they can without compromising their convic-

tions merge with one another. It may be said that organisational unification is their solemn duty.”

Not to do so, to be complacent or unconcerned, would be sin. It’s our solemn duty.

Since our inception as United Reformed Churches, we have engaged extensively the work of ecumenicity. It is reflected in our name. We were born of secession, but want to say to the world, we’re not about being by ourselves. We want to seek in whatever ways we can to bring true unity to expression.

I can speak personally of the blessing of witnessing walls and barriers coming down. We thank God for this, His work.

At the same time we need to strive for more. In relation to John 17 there are those, Martyn Lloyd-Jones being one, who emphasise the essentialness of spiritual unity over against the expression of unity. We should not take that approach.

If unity is a spiritual reality (and it is), why does Jesus continually pray for it? Because He wants to see more of it. He wants it manifested that the world may know. Now, we can sit back complacently and say, “Ultimately in eternity, eschatologically, all will be well.” Or we can become disillusioned and say, “It’s hard work. We’ll never attain perfect unity until the eschaton anyway, so why bother?” But that would be like saying with regard to our own personal sanctification, “I’m not going to be perfect this side of eternity anyway, so what’s the use?”

We are not antinomians; we never stop striving in terms of our desire to be renewed after the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise with our ecumenical calling, we strive for more.

John Murray wrote:

*It is to be admitted that the fragmentation and lack of coordination and solidarity which we find within strictly Evangelical and Reformed churches creates a difficult situation. And how this disunity is to be remedied in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is a task not easily accomplished. But what needs to be indicted and indicted with vehemence is the complacency so widespread, and the failure to be aware that this is an evil, dishonoring to Christ, destructive to the edification defined by the Apostle as the increase of the body into the building up of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16) and prejudicial to the evangelistic outreach to the world. If we are once convinced of this evil, the evil of schism in the*

body of Christ, the evil of disruption in the communion of saints, then we have made great progress. We shall then be constrained to preach the evil, to bring conviction to the hearts of others also to implore God's grace and wisdom in remedying the evil, and to devise ways and means of healing these rup-

tures to the promotion of the united witness to the faith of Jesus and the whole counsel of God.

What is to be indicted, as Murray says, is complacency. The challenge for us is, are we willing to work, to strive sacrificially? Are we willing, as Calvin

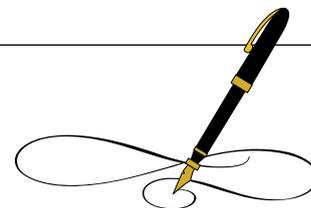
was, to cross ten seas for the unity of the church?

First appeared in Christian Renewal October 2015. Reproduced with permission.

---

## Outward focus

Sally Davey



# Some things do not change – and why they are so attractive

We tend to think that moving with the times is the church's route to relevance and success. There is some truth in that, of course. Unless we properly understand how our world is changing, why it is changing, and keep telling it the truth in ways that it will understand, we are failing in our duty. We always need to stay abreast of change, and care about what it does to the way people think and live their lives.

However, I often wonder whether we overstate the case for that. Not everything changes; and certainly not so fast as we sometimes think. Moreover, not everyone out there in the world thinks that things *should* change, or likes the ways our culture does. Furthermore, not everyone is in fact changing. Or at least, not in every way.

Much has been made of the way opinions have changed about homosexuality, for instance. Opinion polling suggests that the majority against gay marriage has been replaced by a similar majority in favour – in only 10 years. But this does not tell us everything about society and change. You would get the impression from such poll results that it is possible for a concerted public opinion campaign (such as the gay lobby engaged in) to effect any sort of change it wanted, given enough money and television time. You would also get the impression that the general public is very

receptive to such change. Is this true? Sometimes I wonder. There are some fairly substantial forces that work *against* change, particularly among some groups of people in our culture.

When I was a teenager, a book by Alvin Toffler entitled *Future Shock* (1970) made quite a splash. Its thesis was that people in western society had seen so much change in the previous century or so that they were becoming quite worn out by it. Change destabilises and fatigues people, Toffler argued. Socially, psychologically, even physically, they cannot cope with it. Depression and neuroses result. It will make them look for stability and permanence; for things that *do not change*.

Toffler was primarily writing about technological change (and we've seen even more of it since 1970). But social change, especially changes in morality and family life, wreak much more havoc. While one may be able to cope with learning a new type of machine or tool of communication, learning to cope with a new type of "mum" or "dad" is quite another story.

Changes in technology are not in themselves good or bad – the ways technology is *used* may be good or bad, but not the technical development itself. Changes in the ways people behave and the ways they think about that behaviour, however, may be very much good

or bad – as anyone who knows much at all about the Bible, and believes what it teaches, will be able to say straight away. (This is not to say, however, that all social change is either bad or good; some things are indifferent). It just takes biblical discernment to know the difference.

It is also true to say that people are temperamentally different from each other. Some thrive on change, while others are very sensitive to small changes, and shrink from them. One could suggest various reasons for this. Personality differences may account for it: introverted types (often shy and timid) are more averse to change; while extroverts (confident, willing to give things a go) are predisposed to enjoy it. Then again, conservative people love to preserve what has always been; while liberal, freethinking types often like to kick over the traces, throwing out the old in favour of something new that they themselves have invented. It has often been noted that younger people are more able to adapt to change and rise to its challenge, while older people resist it, and find it a threat. Why? Perhaps when one reaches a certain age – and has invested a lot of time and energy into achieving something (a way of life, a family, a career or business goal) – or at least accustomed oneself to a certain status quo over time – then one is less happy about seeing

that discarded for the sake of “change”.

Some people are unhappy about change but don't know what to do about it. They have an instinctive hunch that some change is bad; and they don't like being challenged by, say, their children, who might want to do something their parents disapprove of. Many parents in this situation have nothing to fall back on. No concept of absolute truth, on the basis of which they can say to their children: “You must not do that – it is wrong.” This is what happened to many of the friends and contemporaries of my parents in the 1960s and 1970s. Challenged by their children when they protested at mixed flatting, then living with girlfriends and so on, these parents had no answer to “this is my life, I don't follow your values, it's all relative anyway.” My parents grieved for their friends, who had to watch their children go off the rails, but who were unwilling to commit themselves to the absolute truth God had revealed, and which would have given them solid ground on which to stand.

None of the “change” the world pre-

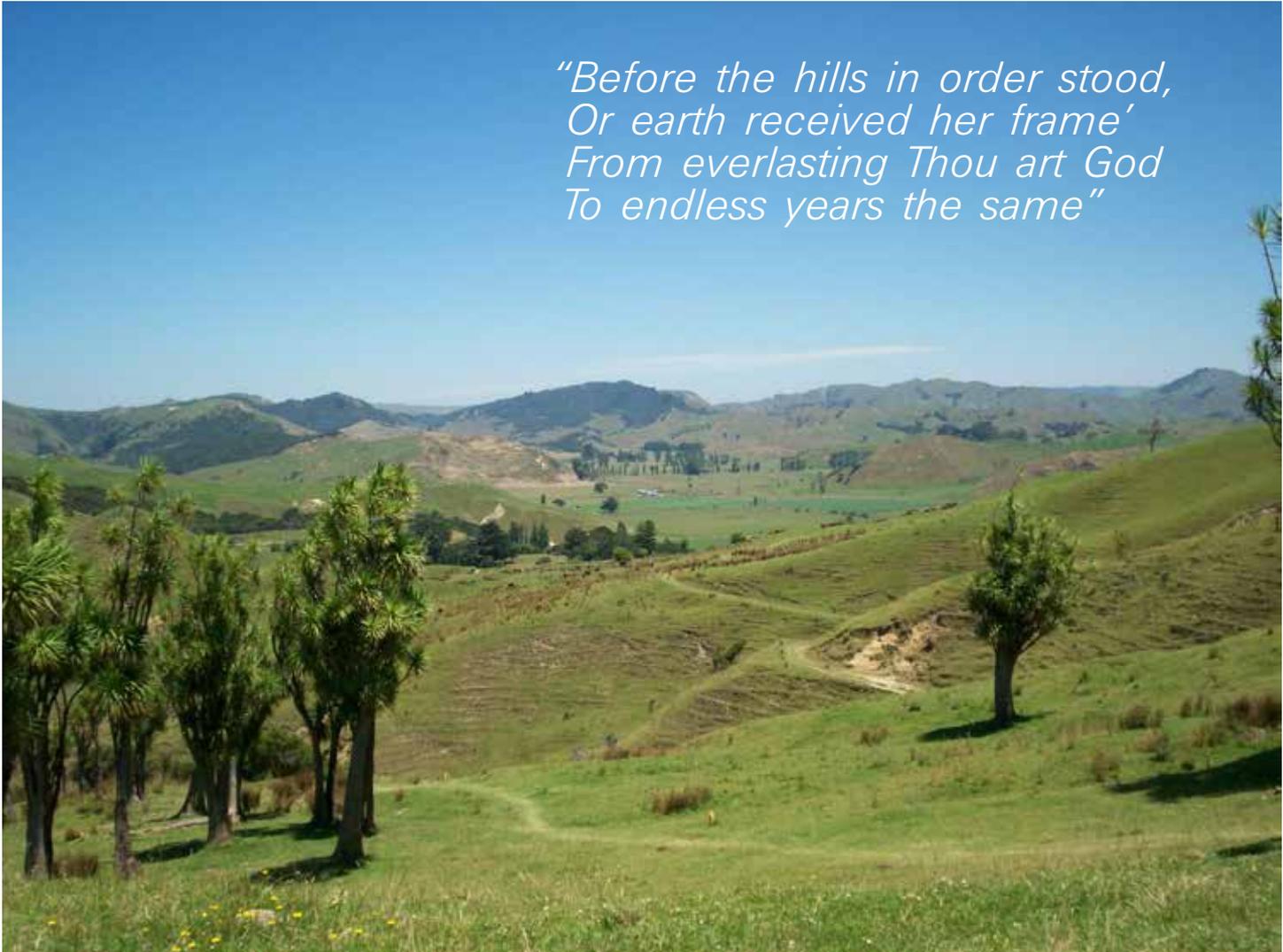
sents is a challenge to biblical truth. God is transcendent over all historical change – none of it takes him by surprise. In fact, he has it all under control, and only reveals parts of his purposes in it to us. He knows that the human race is floundering around in sin and rebellion, and yet he works out his purposes in and through it. Above all, he intervened by sending his Son to die for those he loved before the world began. He cared enough to do it. While he holds all of history in his hands, he is no unmoved, uncaring being. He is a Person, who loves and saves.

He cares about those caught up in change, and who sense their lostness in it. One of the ways he does this is by showing us how unchanging, and therefore, reliable and reassuring he is to those who love and obey him. Throughout Scripture he presents himself as “the same yesterday, today and forever.” His character does not change, his laws and expectations of us do not change, his way of salvation does not change. As Paul wrote to the Romans, if you want to be right with God, the way is the

same as it was for Abraham – you will be declared righteous “by faith” in the Saviour. To rebels who want to kick over the traces and change everything, he is implacable. But to those bewildered and insecure, aware that without God they are lost, he offers comfort, security and unchangeableness.

There are outworkings of this for the Christian, of course. We live privileged lives, secure in the knowledge that God has overcome the world and everything it might throw at us – persecution, loss of family, incomes, homes, even life itself. He is our great security in a world of constant change. He gives us order in chaos, hope in time of trouble, and the promise of eternity when nothing in this world of sin and death will last.

This is the great point. The things that do not change, because they are true, and relate to God himself, are an important part of our message of hope in this dying culture of ours. We are mistaken if we think that people always respond to a gospel of change, novelty and relevance above all. Many people actually think that sounds hollow – and



*“Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame’  
From everlasting Thou art God  
To endless years the same”*

rightly so. There are many folks around us who are suspicious of new/modern/youthful and want to be shown something true/right/lasting.

Last year, at Christmas, I read an interesting article in the British *Telegraph* newspaper. Its author, Tim Stanley, is an unabashed conservative (with a small “c”). He noted that (though only 32 then himself) the “older you get, the more permanence matters.”

Earlier in the year he had written about Abbeyfield House, a nursing home specialising in dementia care that makes its residents feel at home by recreating the 1950s of their youth. There are red telephone boxes in the hallway, a shop selling old brands of goods, wirelesses and older types of television. This therapy apparently works very well. Although all of the residents have either moderate or severe dementia, only three are on antipsychotic medication (and, at that, the lowest dose). This, Stanley observes, “suggests that the desire for permanence really is natural and deep. And it makes some of the toughest moments in life more bearable.”

Christmas, he notices, does the same thing. There are some things British

people always appreciate at Christmas – turkey, the Queen’s speech, carols from King’s College on the television. For him, and by implication, for many others, “Christmas is about permanence ... a reminder of the eternal promise of God’s love .... The love is there in the fact that God sent his only son to us for the express purpose of being a sacrifice that would bear all our sins.”

Some people scoff at traditionalists, but “to keep things the way they always were is to anchor yourself in the ages.” And, “given how stormy life can be, that’s a blessing,” Stanley adds.<sup>1</sup>

I resonate with this. An “anchor in the ages” is a calming, deeply stabilising thing. To realise we have long, unbroken roots in the past, with things that have been in place for a long, long time – and are therefore greater and more permanent than we ourselves are – is a tremendously reassuring thing. This is what we have as Christians: an unbreakable union with God’s people through the centuries, and with Jesus Christ, the head of that church. It will never be destroyed; and neither will our part in it.

All this reminds me that it would be a good thing to share the Christmas

story with a few of life’s storm-tossed people this year. I’m thinking that there are probably many people who would be receptive to the idea that some important things are true, and lasting. They look forward to a Christmas consisting of food, family times, and presents, perhaps. But why? It looks like a celebration – but of what? They probably acknowledge that the world, even our affluent and peaceful world, is a social mess. They may well be willing to hear about God’s intervention to rescue lost people, and to straighten out all those things that are crooked. Have they ever heard about the reality of Christmas? The tinsel, the gifts and the general merriment will always have a hollow ring to those who lament the impermanence of life. These things won’t last. Some other cultural fad will replace them. But show them the historical facts of Jesus’ birth, the purpose of his coming, the certainty of his return – and you show them something that will never change.

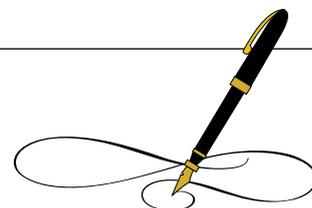
#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Tim Stanley, “God brings a Permanence We All Need”, *Daily Telegraph*, 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2014. (Accessed via the *Telegraph* website)

---

## Feminine focus

Jenny Waldron



# Developing a family culture

We recently visited a strong Christian family for a meal. There was plenty of food, laughter, and talking across and around the table, but it was the love they shared, for each other and God, that was most palpable. They are bound so strongly together that those within the family are willing to go the extra mile for each other. They rejoice in the times they come together, they pray together and the bonds of love are felt through all levels of the family. Above all their family life reflects God’s character and they have a strong family culture that holds them together.

How can we build a solidly Christian

family culture that is firmly grounded in Christ in our homes? A family culture is composed of the traditions, habits, environment and inward workings of a family that glue it together. For the Christian parent this means that everything should be an outworking of their faith in God. We are to teach our children diligently while we are sitting, walking, lying down and rising.<sup>1</sup> The Lord is to be the firm foundation upon which we build our family, otherwise we will be building our house in vain.<sup>2</sup>

A Christian family culture encompasses more than the annual Christmas dinner or the family devotions after every

evening meal. God’s Word is to permeate our family life and culture; informing how we resolve conflict, how we show our love to one another and how we work together; to name some factors. A strong Christian family culture produces confidence in children because they have a firm sense of where they have come from, who they belong to, a deep sense of acceptance and their need for a Saviour. Some aspects of family culture will be inherited from your own family experiences and your spouse’s. There may be other facets that you adopt and incorporate into your own family situation.

It may be helpful to break developing a family culture down into three main areas; Values, Norms and Rituals.

### Values

These are the foundational building blocks for a family. These are the moral and spiritual values and virtues we teach and instil into our family. Christian values need to be thought about and actively taught. They need to be seen, practised and encouraged. For example; if a child is going to learn to tell the truth, they need to hear their parents telling the truth.<sup>3</sup> Or if they are to learn to be content, they need to see and learn from their parents how to be satisfied, in whatever circumstances and with whatever comes their way.<sup>4</sup> For Christians, inculcating biblical principles and values into their family life is an imperative.<sup>5</sup> A Christian family should show clearly to the world around them the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives. That is not to say we always get it right all the time, but it also does not mean we are to be like the Pharisees, paying lip service to how the Bible calls us to live. Rather, we are to trust in the Lord that He will help us in our work to teach and show; humility, forgiveness, love,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control<sup>6</sup> etc. These values and virtues should resonate throughout our Christian families.

### Norms

Norms are how the values work out in our lives, how the family normally reacts in different situations and how it functions as a whole. Some families are boisterous, hugging, have robust discussions, and show their love outwardly. Other families may be polite, formal, quiet and serene. Neither are right or wrong, if they are conducted from an attitude of loving the Lord, but both examples are out-workings of the “norms” for your family. Taken to extremes a loud family may tend towards being angry and even violent and a quiet serene family may become unloving and cold, neither of which are Biblical patterns. Norms can be created intentionally or by default. If we are not intentional, we usually go with whatever is easiest at the time. This may seem like the least trouble, but in the long run, it may become hard work as later on we need to deal with bad attitudes, lazy habits and ungodly behaviour. What may have been cute at 2 years old becomes totally unaccepta-

ble and out of place at 16!

Family norms include how you treat one another. With respect, with hostility, with love, with abusive authority? Sadly, some families are domineering, or lack any emotion, or lie to one another or abuse one another. The norms are about how the family values come into play in specific situations e.g. tantrums, noisy children, differences of opinion, resolving conflict. This is why it is so important to be intentional about making sure your family values are Biblical and then purposefully implementing them.

Our children sometimes complain they can't watch this or do that. Our response is that “other families may watch or do those things, but we are Waldrons! This is what our family does.” This too, can help children accept that all families are different, unique and special, but this is the one they belong to and these are the values and norms that we believe are right and fitting for our family.

Another “norm” that affects the family culture is the expectations we have for our children: Do we expect our children to get a university degree or become a qualified tradesperson? Or do we expect them to be a blue collar worker or in retail, or work in the family business



“The main thing is to actively and deliberately create and design a family culture that primarily gives glory to God and suits you and your family.”

or on the farm? Do we exalt the position of being a stay-at-home mum? Do we expect our girls to use, wisely, the talents, gifts and intelligence God has given them? In some families, here in New Zealand, there is no expectation of a job but rather that they will be like their father and grandfather and live off social welfare. Whatever expectations we have for our children, most importantly, we should all be praying for our children’s salvation and spiritual lives.

### Rituals

These are the events and traditions that your family practices repeatedly over a long period of time. These may be carried over from your childhood and sometimes they are added to or change as the children become more numerous or older. These rituals will be the times that children will most likely remember about their family life together. Many aspects come from how you were brought up and so there needs to be a melding of the two traditions (from the husband and the wife) into your own unique family blend. My husband was brought up with jam dishes, butter knives and serviettes in silver rings at every meal. I was brought up with picnics, dinner in front of the TV and a help yourself attitude at meals. I know how to use a butter knife but I cannot see the point in all the extra dishwashing this entails. However, on Friday nights, for many years, we enjoyed a formal dinner

with flowers on the table, little glass dishes for the sauces/jams, the correct cutlery and linen serviettes. It is helpful to work out what your family culture is going to look like. For example you may include feast times, coming-of-age, birthdays, and annual holidays. Food is often associated with rituals (especially traditional family recipes) and adds to the sense of comfort, pleasure and togetherness. Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper around the meal table. Every family has particular dishes associated with particular occasions and family times together: cheerios and “fairy bread” (open sandwiches with 100s and 1000s sprinkled on them) and a themed cake for birthdays, oliebollen at New Year’s Eve, Mum’s rich fruit cake, roast turkey and all the trimmings at Christmas, a braai or a kiwi bbq, eating freshly caught fish at the beach, a salad made from fruit and veggies straight from the garden, or meat from your own farm animals.

### Creating family celebration times

It is good to create special occasions because they weave texture and substance into a family’s culture. It may be a seasonal celebration that a family gathers to spend time with one another like Christmas or a summer holiday regularly spent at a particular spot or fishing together on the lake or sailing at the beach. It might be a mid-winter dinner or meeting each year at RCNZ Family Camp (I often think it is like the Feast of Booths<sup>7</sup>) or a gathering together of family for a weekend each year. The Lord instigated several times of feasts throughout the year for the Israelites to come together as a congregation, to remember Him, to offer sacrifices to Him and to spend time in fellowship together. Although we do not celebrate the Old Testament feasts, it is a good thing to come together to celebrate God’s goodness to us and to enjoy time with one another. A large extended family we know, gathers every 5 years for time together and to give thanks to God for all his blessings and goodness to them. They now number 99 (at the last count) and there is a strong family bond throughout the whole family from the oldest Opa to the youngest great-grandchild.

### Birthdays

Some families use birthday celebrations to strengthen the bonds within a family. For many years, we had a tradition of everyone coming into our bed on the birthday morning and the recip-

ient would receive and open various presents. They were then treated to a cooked breakfast (in bed with Mum!). The family devotion that evening, after their favourite dinner, was based on a Bible reading, and as our children have biblical names, on the character in the Bible with the same name. My parents would always ring the child and sing “Happy birthday” over the phone.

One family we know sings “Happy Birthday”, very loudly, very badly. It is their tradition!

Friends of mine, who are grandparents, drive or fly to their grandchildren’s birthdays, creating very close knit family ties. Sadly another friend said her parents-in-law were always too busy for the grandchildren and her son is now just one of 20! Grandparents, aunts and uncles can play a large role in contributing to a family culture too. I encourage you to tighten those bonds of familial love and support. Share your faith with the young ones, and pass on your history. A dear older lady, now a widow, regularly has each of her grandchildren over for dinner. She also prays for them; for their salvation and walk with the Lord.

Developing a strong Christian family culture will take time, intention and effort. Each family culture is a unique blend of each personality in the marriage, of the values you believe in and the faith you have. It is also how those values become the normal way your family does things and functions together and the traditions and rituals that work for your family to bind them together. The main thing is to actively and deliberately create and design a family culture that primarily gives glory to God and suits you and your family.<sup>8</sup>

1 Deut 6:7

2 Psalm 127:1a

3 Ex 20:16, Col 3:9

4 Phil 4:11-12

5 Prov 22:6

6 e.g. 1 Peter 5:5, Matt 18:35, Gal 5:22

7 Deut 16:13

8 Recommended Reading:

Elizabeth George: *Woman After God’s Own Heart* – Harvest House

Edith Schaeffer: *What Is A Family* – Baker Books

Susan Schaeffer Macaulay: *For the Family’s Sake* – Crossway Books

# BEHOLDING THE GLORY OF CHRIST AT CHRISTMAS – WHAT DID SIMEON SEE?

### Charles R. Biggs

I have a favorite hill in my little town of Round Hill, Virginia, which I enjoy ascending at a particular time of morning in the summer months. The light has already dawned by the time I start climbing to the summit. The light helps me on my way up the hill, but I don't see the full glory of the sun until it comes up over the mount.

This is descriptive of Simeon's place in redemptive history. He was living at the first light of the dawn of the last days. The light had dawned with the coming of Jesus in his incarnation, but Simeon did not behold the beautiful glory of the Son until his mother and father brought him into the temple. Although Simeon had believed God's promises and had lived righteously in the strength of them, he had yet to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus as he would.

Simeon was a righteous and devout man, full of faith, who eagerly anticipated the fulfillment of God's promises. He went by the Spirit's guidance into the temple one morning, and on that special day beheld the unfathomable love of God the Father, the wonderful Savior of the world, the light to the Gentiles, the glory of Israel, and the embodiment and realization of all of God's promises (Luke 2:25-32). Simeon beheld the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). He rejoiced, saying, "My eyes have seen your salvation!" (Luke 2:30).

### But what did Simeon see?

Simeon saw a child who would have looked like any other – nothing extraordinary to outward appearances. There was no glow, no halo around baby

Jesus' holy head. He was clothed in our humanity, in the likeness of sinful flesh, born in the likeness of men, and the glory that he had enjoyed as the eternal Son before the foundation of the world was cloaked (Isa. 53:2; John 17:5; Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7).

But Simeon saw something special because the Holy Spirit showed it to him by giving him eyes of faith (as emphasized in Luke 2:25, 26, 27). We are told specifically that Simeon "came in the Spirit into the temple" (2:27). Simeon then received into his arms his blessed Savior-King (2:28), the very revelation of God's salvation to sinners.

It is similar with us today. The Holy Spirit is still leading believers to behold the glory of Jesus. In order to behold who Christ is, and what this means for us, the Holy Spirit must make our dead hearts alive (Eph. 2:1-5). We need to be enabled to behold him with eyes of faith, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened by the power and grace of God (Eph. 1:17-19; 2 Cor. 4:6).

### Do you see Him, too?

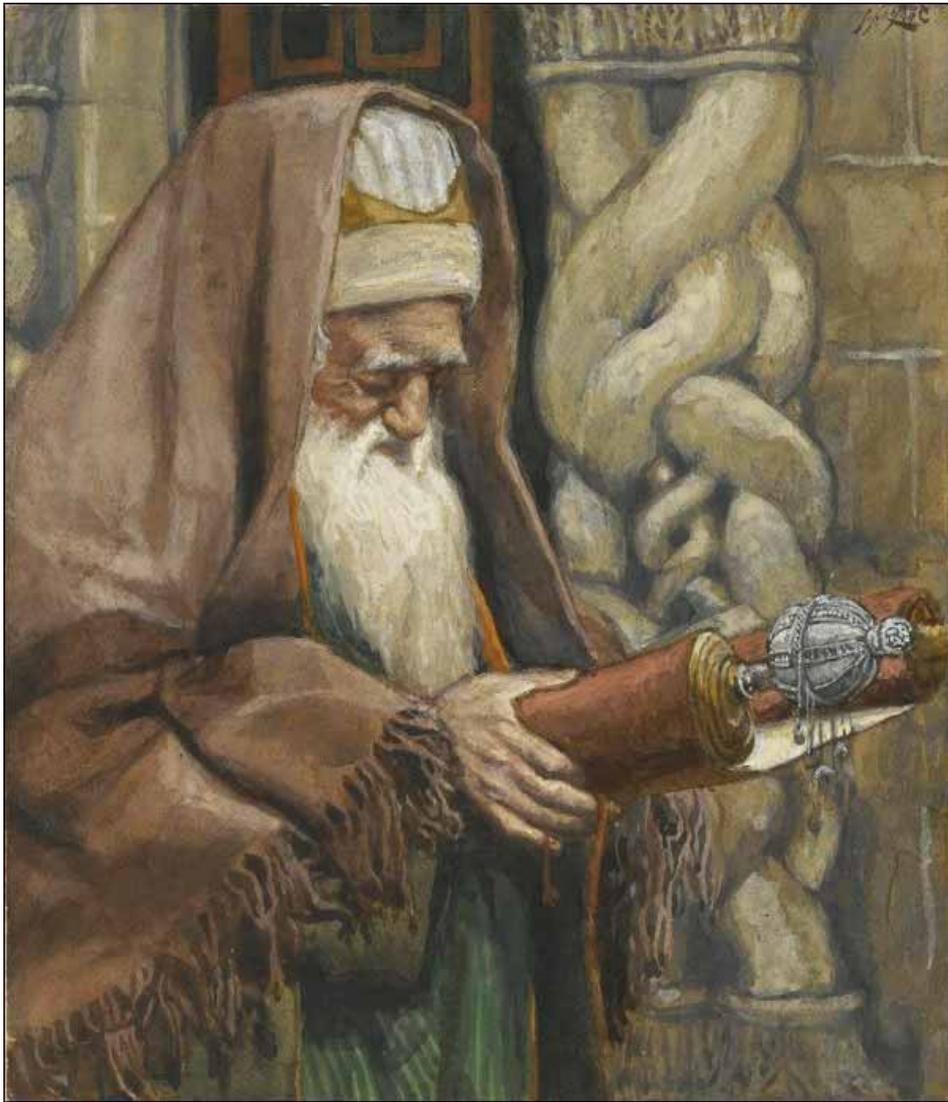
Do you see just a child, merely a baby, or do you see the living God in human flesh to live and die for sinners, to be raised for our vindication and righteous declaration before a holy God, to ascend to God's right hand as the King of kings and Lord of lords? If you see this, then it is God who has worked in your life, and you are an heir of all his wonderful "Yes" promises in Christ! (2 Cor. 1:20). Can you rejoice that even though your physical eyes may be dimmed by sin's doubts, and you may grow weary as a pilgrim on the way, your eyes of faith can still see and can still be strengthened as you gaze upon your glorious King?

Do you pray to see this more clearly? (Eph. 1:18).

As God's people living between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ, we are taught to look on and behold the glory of Jesus Christ. We are taught that as we behold this glory, we are transformed by the Spirit from one degree of glory to the next (2 Cor. 3:18). One of the rich benefits of living on this side of the resurrection, as recipients of God's Spirit, is that we can behold the image of God in the face of Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:6). The Old Testament saints beheld Christ's glory in shadow and type (Luke 24:24-27; John 5:39), but we behold the true image of God as he is fully revealed in the time of fulfillment. Have you received him? Have you embraced this glorious King as he is held out to you in the gospel? Do you have "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6)? Embrace him now. Take up the blessed Jesus in your arms of faith and receive him as your beloved King!

Beloved, rejoice that the glory of God in Christ has appeared! This salvation has been clearly revealed to all (Titus 2:11-14). We still await the full revelation of this glory, but let's get in practice for it. John Owen wrote in his magnificent treatise *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, "If our future blessedness shall consist in being where he is, and beholding of his glory, what better preparation can there be for it than in a constant previous contemplation of that glory in the revelation that is made in the Gospel, unto this very end, that by a view of it we may be gradually transformed into the same glory?" (*Works of John Owen*, 1:275).

The Scriptures tell us to practice be-



Simeon in the Temple, waiting for the consolation of Israel. James Jacques Joseph Tissot, (French painter and illustrator, 1836-1902).

holding this glory by eagerly anticipating Christ's appearing and sober-mindedly being watchful for it (Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 4:7). We are to love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8), just as Simeon, our forefather in the faith, did. Do you eagerly await him? This provides real food for your faith and clarity for your heart and mind. Seek to behold him through the Scriptures.

Simeon received a special promise: that the final chapter of God's redemption would dawn with the coming of the Messiah before he died (Luke 2:26). And once he laid eyes on the glorious Savior, clothed in his own flesh – the eternal Son permanently united to his human nature – Simeon's heart soared in exultation, joy, and praise. His soul was flooded with the peace that only God in Christ can give! (Rom. 5:1-11). He was ready to die. Are you ready to die? Can you say today, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21)?

What a glorious privilege it is for us,

too, as those who live in the last days, on this side of the resurrection, at the end of the ages, at the close of history, and at the end of the world as we know it, to live anticipating the fact that we will see Jesus Christ face-to-face – not as an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, but as the King adorned with power, majesty, and glory (Isa. 6:1ff.; 33:17; John 12:41; Rev. 4:9-11; 5:9-14). The apostle John says that we will very soon "see him as he is" (1 John 3:2-3), which is an answer to the Lord Jesus' prayer for his own on the night of his death (John 17:24). We will behold the King in his full majesty, glory, and beauty! "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty" (Isa. 33:17; cf. Ps. 45). Hallelujah!

Are you eagerly awaiting his appearing? Like Simeon, our forefather, are you waiting for the full revelation of the comfort and consolation that God will bring in the salvation and restoration of all things at the return of Jesus Christ? (Luke 2:25-26; Titus 2:13)? Are you full

of joy that is "inexpressible and full of glory" because of this (1 Peter 1:8)? Are you being led regularly by the Holy Spirit to behold him in God's Word?

As God's people, recipients of his Spirit and his promises, let us behold Jesus in his holy Word, looking daily at his graciousness, compassion, gentleness, judgment, and zeal for holiness, as he is displayed and revealed to us in his person, promises, offices, and grace! Behold, God's salvation – and the only hope for sinners! Let this encourage us to be eager in our anticipation of his return on our pilgrimage in the present age.

Let us await the awesome moment when we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye. Previously we could have beheld Christ only in the flesh, but on that day we will behold him face-to-face with eyes of incorruptible and eternal glory, and we will be changed! (1 Cor. 15:50-53). What a reason that is to serve him! Our eyes, too, by faith, have seen the Lord's salvation, but we haven't seen anything yet! Nothing can compare with what we will see (Rom. 8:18-21; 1 Cor. 2:9; 13:12; 2 Cor. 4:18). That is our great hope – live joyfully in it.

#### **Do you see what Simeon sees?**

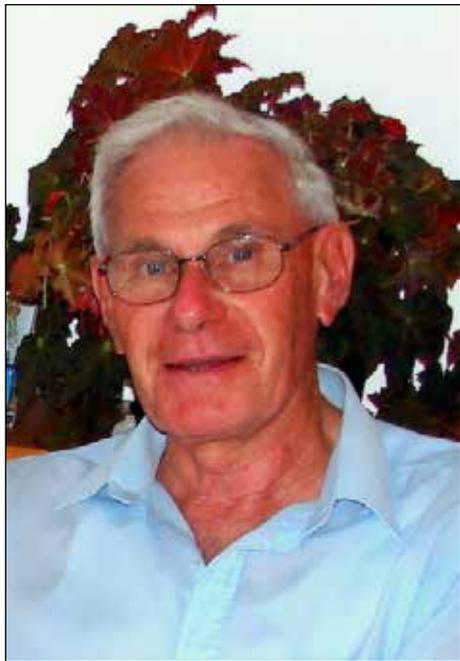
Have you beheld the Savior of the world as your only hope? Have you beheld the Savior to make you strong in grace? Have you beheld the Savior to encourage you on your pilgrimage and strengthen your faith? Have you beheld the Savior; do you anticipate seeing him better? Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

On my favorite hill, I can enjoy the light and see the beauty and glory of the sun, but I cannot dwell there. I cannot live there. Time goes on, the sun rises and sets, and it is night again. But one day, the night will be over and the full day will be here (Rom. 13:12; Rev. 22:5).

One day soon, I won't run to see glory and capture moments of the beauty and glory; rather, it will consume me. Let that cause your hearts to soar with exultation and the praise of God this Christmas; let your souls be filled with God's sweet peace as you, too, say with Simeon: "My eyes have seen your salvation!"

*The author is pastor of Ketocoin Covenant Presbyterian Church in Purcellville, Va.*

*Reproduced from New Horizons, December 2014*



### **The Rev. Carl Andrew Robert Larsen**

**7th October 1933–  
24th September 2015**

On Wednesday 30th September 2015, family, friends and congregation members, laid to rest the earthly remains of the Rev Carl A.R. Larsen, dearly loved husband, father, ‘papa’ and great grandfather in Howick, East Auckland, New Zealand. Carl’s parents are also interred in this cemetery.

The burial service was followed by a special thanksgiving service at Bucklands Beach, attended by more than 200 people. It was a celebration! Carl’s was a life well lived. The local school Carl attended as a child in Howick had as its motto, ‘Service before Self.’ After Carl came to know Christ as his Lord and Saviour as a 16-year-old, he endeavoured to live his life as Christ’s own according to that motto. Indeed, as he pointed out over and over again, “He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease”, or “He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less.” (John 3.30)

Following his conversion as a 16-year-old, Carl was eventually led to spend two years doing preparatory study at the

NZ Bible Institute (Bible College of New Zealand, now Laidlaw). It was also at this time that he felt attracted to another young student, Joyce Harford, who he forever called the ‘Joy’ of his life. After BTI this young man was encouraged to continue studies at the newly established Reformed Theological College (Geelong Australia) in 1957. In January 1958, while back in NZ for a very short while, he married Joyce and took her with him to Geelong. Carl graduated in 1963.

A passion for mission saw Carl and Joyce, with their three little girls (Christine, Janice and Vanessa), head to West Australia to work as a vicar to work alongside Miss Mary Jones in an Aboriginal Mission – mainly with half-caste aboriginal people based in Brookton (WA). He was to serve the Lord in this special work for two years.

In October 1965 Carl was ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacraments in Classis NSW in order to begin ministry in Newcastle-Gosford (1965-71). Two more girls were born during those years (Susan and Robyn).

In 1971 Carl and family moved back to Aotearoa after being called by the congregations at Tokoroa and Kerepehi. He served there for 6 years before being called to Dunedin as well as Oamaru and Balclutha. He arrived in Dunedin during December 1977 and served there until 1987.

In 1987 he returned to his beloved Howick to commence work at the Howick Baptist Home and Hospital until he retired in January 1999. Carl also served on our denominational Overseas Mission Board during his Dunedin years (as convenor/chairman) and, from 1995 as convenor/chairman and treasurer of the National Diaconate Committee when it was moved to the Auckland region. Carl and Joyce returned to Bucklands Beach where both of them had been involved at the time this group became a part of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand under the leadership of the Rev J.A. Scarrow. They served in this congregation faithfully and inspirationally for over 25 years.

Carl Larsen never saw himself as a great preacher or profound biblical scholar. Indeed, one of the main reasons

for his ‘retirement’ in 1987 was his belief that there were now enough men of calibre who would more than fill his shoes. But he truly was a man of God – often he was the first person who newcomers to the Bucklands Beach fellowship got to know. Above all, he was a man of (sometimes very lengthy!) prayer. Christ’s love for him was demonstrated in a thousand-and-one different practical ways. Here was a man of God who inspired many. Service before self all the way!

He learned to live with cancer during the last years of his life. The removal of a kidney and with that endless tests, etc., was not easy. However, it was only during the final weeks of his life that the cancer became aggressive. In that sense the Lord was good indeed.

What stands out during this period of Carl’s life as a cancer sufferer was contentment. He had indeed learned the secret of being content in all circumstances – especially during the terminal stages of cancer. That spoke louder than a thousand sermons! We who shared with him in these last years and especially these last months, were ministered to in a real and lasting way. We praise and thank God for servants such as Carl.

For me personally it was the first time during my ministry that I was involved with and attended the funeral of a dear colleague. Again and again, as I heard the testimony of many people I kept on thinking, ‘A life well lived – by the grace of God.’ And so it was.

Carl never regarded himself as a faith hero. He would be the first to tell you that he was anything but. He would have been embarrassed by the fuss made over him at his funeral. Fair enough. But it is precisely a man of his spiritual of this calibre who demonstrates the love and victory of Christ and give glorious hope for the future that awaits us all. I and many others thank God for his faithful servant Carl .

**Dirk J van Garderen**  
(*Bucklands Beach*)

# What the Future Holds

by Denny Burk

President Obama was correct when he said the Supreme Court's gay marriage decision landed like a thunderbolt. The decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which legalized gay marriage nationwide, is indeed a watershed in our national life. Although a majority of Americans now support gay marriage, many of us regard this decision as a moral and judicial tragedy.

From a legal standpoint, it represents five unelected justices' imposing on the nation a new definition of marriage. The judgment is not rooted in sound legal principle but in the opinions of five lawyers arrogating to themselves the right to enact social policy. The Supreme Court has no right to redefine marriage for all fifty states, but that is exactly what it did.

From a moral standpoint, the decision is a complete subversion of the good, the right, and the true with respect to marriage. Marriage is the covenant union of one man and one woman for life. Its connection to procreation and children has been revealed to us in nature, reason, and common sense. The Bible further reveals that marriage is an icon of the gospel – a symbol of Christ's cov-

enant love for His church (Eph. 5:31–32).

The court's decision attempts to turn all of that upside down. As a result, it stands against reason and common sense. More importantly, it stands against the purposes of the One who created marriage to begin with (Gen. 2:24–25).

### A New Reality

Although I am disappointed with this decision, I remain confident that Christians will continue to bear witness to the truth about marriage – even if the law of our land is now arrayed against us. Still, many Christians are left wondering how to move forward into this new reality.

I am a pastor, and this question is exactly what I have heard from the people in my church. Our members by and large don't have questions about the Bible's teaching on homosexuality and marriage. They get that. Nor do they have questions about their obligation to love their neighbors, to seek their good, and to be at peace with everyone (Mark 12:29–31; Luke 6:33; Rom. 12:18). They get all of that as well.

Their question is how to live out what Jesus has called them to be when people treat them with hostility. I recently talked to one church member whose boss is gay. About half of her coworkers are also gay. They are her friends, and she loves them. She wants to keep a relationship with them, and she hopes to remain a part of their lives. But she's concerned that her Christian beliefs on marriage and sexuality will alienate them once they become known. The last thing on her mind is waging a culture war or winning a debate with them. She just wants space to be their friend, even if they ultimately disagree about these fundamental issues.

I could tell other stories of brothers and sisters in Christ who are not only concerned about maintaining relationships with friends at work, they are also concerned that they will face professional suicide if their Christian views become known among their coworkers. Again, they don't want to pick a culture war fight with anyone. But neither do they want to face losing their job or a reprimand in their HR file when they fail to show up for the office party for their

coworker who just married his same-sex partner. They are trying to figure out how to be faithful to Jesus, a faithful friend, and a faithful employee when those obligations seem to be in tension.

That is the challenge that I'm seeing among our members. What they are wondering is whether their Christian faith will be tolerated in the public space. And I'm not talking about any desire on their part to engage in aggressive and obnoxious proselytizing. They are wondering if a genuine pluralism will exist in post-*Obergefell* America, or if Christian views on sexuality and marriage are now being excluded from our national life.

I am so grateful for these dear brothers and sisters in my church. None of them have expressed any thoughts of forsaking Jesus' teaching because of these difficulties. They are going to walk with Christ no matter what the cost. I praise God for that. But still, I am concerned for them, and I am praying for them. They are silent casualties on the frontline of a culture war they don't want to be in. They just want to follow Jesus in peace. And as the implications of *Obergefell* trickle down into their lives, I pray that they will be able to do just that (1 Tim. 2:2).

### Increased Opposition

Christians are beginning to realize that their place in American life is now being adjudicated in the court of public opinion. And it is not at all clear whether this will end well for the Christian church.

Earlier this year, we saw the governors of Indiana and Arkansas abandon Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRA) in their states. It was a signal moment in our national life that revealed how profoundly America has changed in its attitudes about homosexuality, how out of step evangelicals are with the new sexual orthodoxy, and how willing many Americans are to punish evangelicals for their transgressive beliefs.

We saw two Republican governors back away from state RFRA that would have been completely uncontroversial just ten years ago. We saw a national media snarkily dismiss our first freedom in the Bill of Rights with scare quotes

## RCNZ Family Camp

26th Dec - 2nd of Jan

Finlay Park  
Cambridge

Morning Studies  
Murray Capill

Evening Devotions  
Albert Couperus

For info and to register:  
[www.rcnzonline.com/familycamp](http://www.rcnzonline.com/familycamp)

or as “socalled” religious liberty. We saw politician after politician either unwilling or unable to make a coherent case for religious liberty. And we saw countless talking heads denigrate religious liberty as a euphemism for bigotry and discrimination. *New York Times* columnist Frank Bruni wrote that Christians should be “made to take homosexuality off of its sin list.” It is no wonder that Nicholas Kristof has said that “evangelicals constitute one of the few groups that it’s safe to mock openly.”

Religious liberty has taken an epic beating in American life, and it feels like we’re just getting started. And the focus of the attack seems to be on evangelicals. Evangelicals are beginning to feel open disdain from our cultured despisers, who find our ancient faith to be freakish and discordant with post-sexual-revolution America. There is no “silent majority” for Christians to appeal to for succor. Evangelicals are a bona fide minority when it comes to our commitment to Jesus’ teaching about sexuality. It’s not merely that people don’t like our views. It’s also that people don’t like us because of our views. In fact, a recent poll has found that there are more people who view gay people favorably than there are that view evangelicals favorably.

### Retreat or Engage?

Without question, evangelical Christians face a new reality in post-*Obergefell* America. And they are wondering how to move forward. They hear some leaders counseling retreat and disengagement from the culture. They hear other leaders say that we need to engage the culture war with the kind of politicking that marked the old Moral Majority of the 1980s.

Neither option really captures what Jesus taught us about our enduring relationship with the world. John 17 records the words of Jesus’ prayer just before He was handed over to be crucified. His prayer focused not only on the eleven remaining disciples, but also on all those who would believe in Him through His disciples’ testimony. In short, Jesus was praying for us.

Among other things, Jesus prayed that we would be in the world, not of the world, for the sake of the world.

- 1 Jesus prayed, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one... . As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (vv. 15, 18). This means that disengage-

ment from the world is not an option for Christians. He has sent us into the world knowing full well that we will face opposition: “In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world” (16:33).

- 2 But being in the world does not mean being of the world. In John’s gospel, “world” is not a generic word for planet earth. It’s a technical term denoting humanity in its fallenness and rebellion against God (see also 1 John 2:15–17). So when Jesus sends us into the world, He knows that He’s sending us into a realm of active rebellion against His Father’s purposes. But His expectation is that our presence in the world will be a “sanctifying” influence. Why? Because our allegiance to Jesus and His Word “sanctifies” us in the midst of the rot (John 17:16–17). And that is the point.
- 3 We are in the world yet not of the world for the sake of the world. Jesus says that He sends His sanctified disciples into the world so that “the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (v. 23). Ultimately, our sanctification in the world is for a mission: to show the world – in all of its fallenness and rebellion – that God sent His Son to die for sinners.

Yes, we face a new reality in the aftermath of *Obergefell*. But we know how to move forward into this new reality because Jesus has already given us our marching orders. He has shown us that opposition from the world is the norm,

not the exception. And we know that we will overcome in the end because Jesus did (16:33).

From *Ligonier Ministries and R.C. Sproul*. © *Tabletalk* magazine. Website: [www.ligonier.org/tabletalk](http://www.ligonier.org/tabletalk). Email: [tabletalk@ligonier.org](mailto:tabletalk@ligonier.org). Toll free: 1-800-435-4343.

## Acknowledgements

2015 has been a good year for the magazine. We are thankful to the Lord, that there were no interruptions this year. Many thanks to all our contributors for taking the time to write edifying articles. Your labours have been appreciated.

Many thanks to our regular columnists, Mrs Sally Davey and Mrs Jenny Waldron, who have diligently supplied articles each month. I would like to acknowledge the tireless work of Mrs Sally Davey as sub-editor. I appreciate her talents, creativity, suggestions and practical help. Many thanks, Sally.

Many thanks to the members of the National Publications Committee, who ensure that the magazine continues to be viable.

Many thanks to Flying Laser Colours for their expert technical support and printing.

On behalf of the *Faith in Focus* team, we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season.

## Books in focus

### ***Calvin on the Christian Life***

by Michael Horton

**Crossway, 2014. Paperback, \$19.99. Reviewed by OP pastor Christopher Chelpka**

On August 23, 1535, John Calvin wrote to King Francis I of France, explaining his purpose for writing the Institutes. He wanted to help people live the Christian life by teaching them the Christian faith. “My only purpose,” he wrote, “was to teach some rudiments by which those who are touched with

some good affection for God might be instructed in true piety.”

This objective was grounded on the belief that doctrine and life go together. As Calvin explained in the Institutes, salvation starts with the gospel, but it can’t end there. Doctrine “must enter into our heart and pass into our daily conduct.” The gospel “is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life.” Using the Institutes as a guide, Michael Horton helps us to see this vision of piety in *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever*.

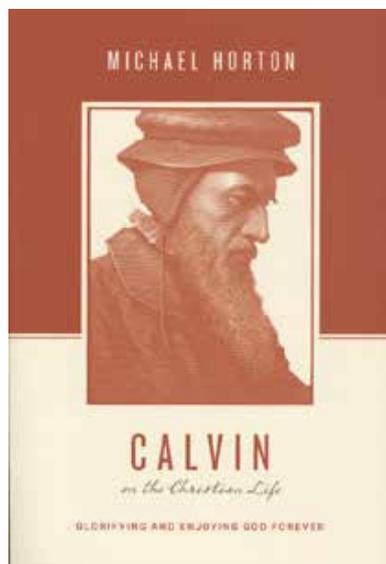
Horton begins with some introductions and a brief biography of Calvin. Then, in chapter 3, he develops Calvin's theological foundation for Christian living: knowledge of God and of ourselves in relation to him. "Nearly all the wisdom we possess," wrote Calvin, "consists of [these] two parts." Chapter 4 explains the way we receive this wisdom: as a story of redemption, not as a set of proof texts.

In chapters 5 and 6, Horton explores Calvin's doctrine of Christ as our mediator and the gifts that we receive in our union with him. Chapters 7-11 describe the ways we receive these gifts and how sanctification occurs in the family of God. These chapters are filled with insight and practical applications for piety. The same is true for the final chapters.

In the final chapters, 12-14, Horton considers the Christian's life in the public square. He puts Calvin's ideas in their historical context and shows how Calvin's view of Christ and culture "is more complex and even paradoxical" than some assume. Those who think they already know Horton's opinions on these matters may be surprised by what they read.

This book succeeds in showing the organic connection between Christian doctrine and Christian living, as seen in Calvin's thought and life. Occasionally the book seems to lose this focus when the implications for piety are more assumed than stated, but Horton never strays from his main objective.

I particularly enjoyed three things about this book. First, Horton summarizes Calvin's ideas in an accurate and memorable way. This is impressive, especially considering how good Calvin was at communicating his own ideas!



Second, Horton highlights some overarching motifs in Calvin's theology, such as "distinction without separation" and compassion for the weak. Third, the book is inspiring. Horton shows us that Calvin is a worthy example to follow, not because he was perfect, but because he knew what it meant to believe and live in light of the cross. By that same light, we are encouraged to do the same, for the benefit of others and to the glory of God.

***Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom***

by Carl Trueman

**Crossway, 2015. Paperback, \$17.99**

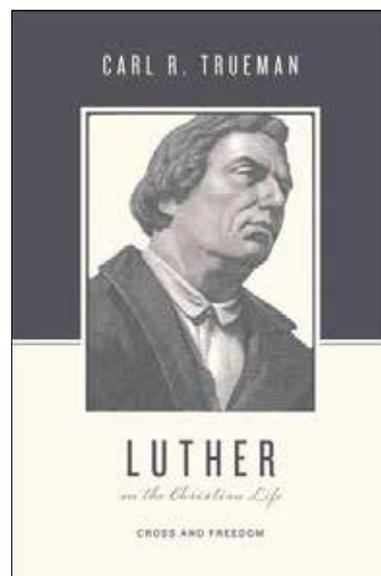
**Reviewed by OP pastor Nathan Holloway**

Martin Luther is a character from church history who is bound to come up in conversations about the Reformation or justification. He is one of those historical figures of whom one needs to have a basic grasp. Yet Luther is very complex. This is why Carl Trueman's *Luther on the Christian Life* is such a great book.

Trueman provides a lens for the modern interpreter to understand Luther's life and thought. His book begins in the first chapter by walking the reader through the life of Luther to provide the context for his thought. The subsequent chapters move into the thought and theology of Luther, showing how his views progressed over time. Trueman relates each topic to the Christian life.

One might assume that a book on Martin Luther would deal primarily with justification by faith. However, this work focuses on Luther's views on the Word and the sacraments. In fact, three of the eight chapters are devoted to his views on the Word of God. One chapter discusses Luther's view of the Mass, but his view of the sacraments trickles throughout the book. Also important in the portrayal of Luther's thought is the distinction between theologians of glory and theologians of the cross. These concepts are set in the proper context of what Luther meant by them.

This book is commended for three reasons. First, it introduces many of the key writings of Luther. On multiple occasions, the reader is told that Luther valued *On the Bondage of the Will* and his catechism above all his other works. This tells the selective reader where to go first. In addition, this book helps the reader to understand Luther's earlier



works in light of later developments in his thought. This is helpful to those who will not be able to read all of his works.

This book is valuable, secondly, because of the pastoral advice it offers. It is part of a series that focuses on the contributions of historical figures to the Christian life. While modern Christians in general are challenged, Trueman has much to say specifically to ministers. This advice ranges from how to preach to how to relate to one's family.

The third value of this book is the example its author provides of how to relate to those with whom one is not in full agreement. The author is a Presbyterian writing on a Lutheran. There are some strong and important disagreements between their perspectives. But even in the disagreements, there is the possibility of being sharpened and challenged within one's viewpoint, as Martin Luther has sharpened and challenged the author.

***Not Just a Soup Kitchen: How Mercy Ministry in the Local Church Transforms Us All***

by David S. Apple

**CLC Publications, 2014. \$13.99.**

**Reviewed by the Deacon Board of Grace Reformed Church in Reedsburg, Wis**

Put aside all other books you have read about becoming a deacon or doing the work of a deacon. This is a book by a man who has walked the talk. It has the information of a good manual and the readability of a good memoir (which the early pages explicitly are).

Combining his spiritual calling as a deacon with more down-to-earth "street smarts," David Apple serves as a fine



guide for deacons in the Reformed tradition, and, more broadly, for anyone actively involved in mercy ministry.

Apple has almost thirty years of experience directing ACTS (Active Compassion Through Service) at Tenth Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Philadelphia. Smack in the middle of that city, he, they, have

seen it all. As a result, this book is chock-full of good advice.

Much of the advice comes in the form of general guidelines, and some in very practical (even pointed) terms, such as: "Do not work harder than the person coming to you for help," and "It is not the deacons' task to be 'Lone Rangers' in their ministry."

Some of the most memorable words of advice are found in this set of rules: rule #1: "Do not give money"; rule #2: "Do not give money"; rule #3: "When in doubt, see rule #1."

Lest anyone get the impression that such quips predominate, we would quickly add that the book also includes several substantive appendices, including a list of resources, guidelines for deacons, a sample talent survey, and a bibliography.

Since not every deacon will have the time and the inclination to take up this book and read, we would offer here a few more gleanings from Apple's book. In our opinion, these points should make it onto the agenda for discussion at your next deacons' meeting:

Present the gospel.

Ask for references.

Set limits on what one recipient can receive without others' approval.

Do not give cash.

Do not visit an applicant alone.

Let the recipient earn a contribution, if possible (e.g., help around the church).

Require some responsibility from the recipient (a budget, perhaps).

Keep records.

Do not give assistance without the agreement of at least one other official.

Encourage church attendance.

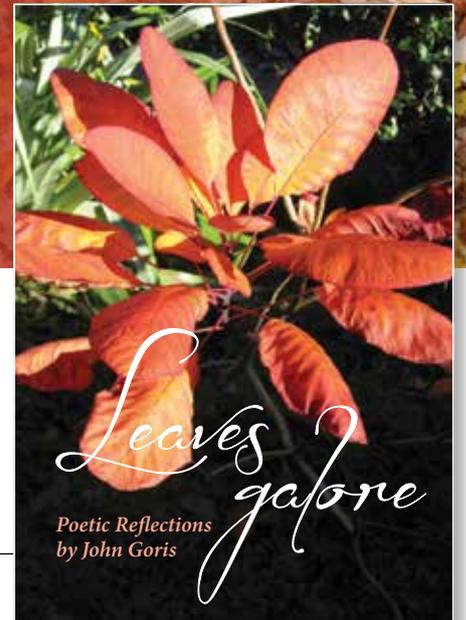
Pray with the applicant.

Becoming a deacon is like going to a foreign country. We think it unwise to do that without a guidebook. We encourage you to make this book your guidebook.

*Reviews reproduced from New Horizons, October 2015*

# Leaves galore

Poetic Reflections  
by John Goris



*This delightful collection of poems by John Goris is a testimony to his love for the beauty of our Creator, and His wonderful tapestry surrounding us. This is poetry about our green environment from a Christian perspective! Through these poems, he reminds us of our God and Saviours' work of creation, redemption, re-creation, preservation and His ongoing eternal plan. This wire-bound collection of 71 poems, colour images and sketches is a must.*

*... read ... observe ... and praise him who created every tree and saved his people by the sacrifice of his person as he hung on one of them.*

*— Dr Joel Nederhood (Retired minister of the Back to God Hour, USA)*

*These poems ... a great collection full of food for thought!*

*— Marit Flinn, (Wellington)*

*The Wordsmith's craft, he in his sermons hones,*

*Now bent to write of nature's coloured tones.*

*— John Westendorp, Minister Emeritus, Christian Reformed Churches of Australia*

Published by Matrix Typography

Price **\$27.00** (includes postage)

Bulk orders of 10 or more **\$22.00** + postage

Send orders to\*:

**Matrix Typography Ltd**  
**walter@matrix-typography.co.nz**

*\*All orders must be paid for online before despatch.  
Prices and postage for New Zealand only.*