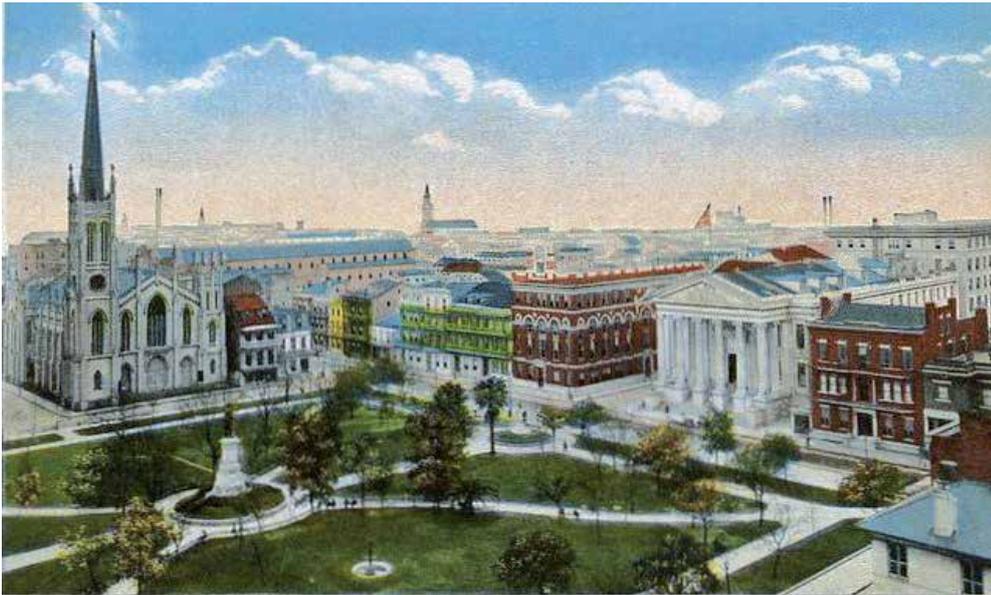


faith in **focus**

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(top left)
Palmer's church, New Orleans, LA, showing City Hall and Soule's College.

(below left)
First Presbyterian Church, Augusta Georgia

(bottom right)
First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans



The Southern Presbyterians

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Editorial

I have only recently finished reading a two-volume tome on church history, some 2,000 pages. It began with John Wycliffe and finished with William III of the House of Orange.

The thing that is most clear when tackling such a history is that no event ever takes place in a vacuum or in isolation from other events. There is nothing random or by chance when we view the work of the God of nations. And the same could be said for the Southern Presbyterians of some 150 years ago.

They were a polite, cultured, industrious and fiercely independent people who were Reformed in their faith. They were earnest Calvinists who took the Bible very seriously and dubbed “old school” in their approach to biblical matters.

Their ministers were men of renown. To mention a few: Benjamin Morgan Palmer, Robert Lewis Dabney of Virginia and James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina, undoubtedly the greatest theological mind of the South.

The Southern Presbyterian church was solidly biblical in how it approached church polity, the reason for their existence and contribution in the society in which they lived. Yet there was, it seems, a serious blind spot – slavery. And before you think that was the only reason for the Civil War – it wasn't. There was a tremendous amount of political pressure brought to bear upon the southern states by the governing party in Washington. When the South decided to secede, which was their constitutional right, it brought the wrath of the North upon them.

This is not the place to raise what led to the American Civil War. What we want to look at in this issue are the life and times of the Southern Presbyterians of the United States. Our contributors give us a great snapshot of what things were like.

Mr J Sawyer gives a historical overview of the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Mr Daniel Wilson and Mr Paul Davey discuss James Henley Thornwell: The Preacher of Logic on Fire.

Mrs Sally Davey writes about John L. Girardeau's ministry to the slaves.

Mrs Jenny Waldron encourages more devoted devotions.

Mrs Renée Joubert of Euthanasia-Free NZ, informs about the next social issue in New Zealand.

Mrs Harriet Haverland gives an overview of what is going on in the churches.

Mrs Sonja Ploeg and Moana Leenders review *Bridge to Haven* by Francine Rivers.

Mr Eric Tuininga, OPC missionary to Uganda, gives an update on the work there.

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

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

The Southern Presbyterians (1)

An intensely Presbyterian Church

Jack W. Sawyer

Living through the centennial and now the sesquicentennial of the American War between the States and being native to a region trampled upon and thoroughly ravaged by the cruel hand of civil war, constrains one to reflect upon the observation of the renowned Mississippi author William Faulkner, who famously wrote that in these parts “the past is never dead. It’s not even past.” The past certainly rings true in the sound and fury of long ago battles that continue throughout the South as they are reenacted by many civil war aficionados and hobbyists, even here in Central Louisiana scene of horrific battles in 1864. It would be easy to think of the South merely in terms of this late unpleasantness and its root causes, states’ rights, slavery, secession, etc. These are scarred into the American consciousness. No doubt foreigners also think of the South primarily in terms of that war with its subsequent “reconstruction”, Jim Crow racial tensions, civil rights, and the Ku Klux Klan.

But beyond these images and the even more popular vistas of NASCAR, hillbillies, moonshiners, rednecks, and King Cotton, the serious student of history, particularly the Reformed Christian, will want to take note of the religious dimension so vital to understanding the South. For Christianity pervaded the Old South, helping create all its polite virtues and obvious vices, making it both “a territorial place and a state of mind.” Both territory and mindset were shaped in no small measure by migration of the Scots-Irish across the Atlantic to the frontiers of colonial and post colonial America. Joined by Highland Scots, Huguenots, Germans, and Swiss, they brought with them a fiercely independent temperament, and a significant percentage of them also brought a commitment to church life as shaped by the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Presbyterian Elders were important officers

in the regiments of George Washington’s victorious army at Yorktown. American Presbyterians were on the forefront of the establishment of educational and political institutions, and Presbyterian Churchmen were some of the most influential public men of their day.

For but one example, the South Carolina Presbyterian, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, was to become esteemed as the

first citizen of New Orleans, Louisiana for half of a century. He was beloved by Jew and Gentile, Catholic, and Protestants of all denominations. One does not usually associate a Presbyterian minister with the worldly city of New Orleans, but Palmer was a giant in his day, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans from 1856, with intervals due to Civil War, until his death in 1902. Palmer was noted for



Benjamin Morgan Palmer

his Calvinistic convictions and powerful preaching, but he was especially beloved for his pastoral care during times of dread Yellow Fever epidemics which periodically ravaged New Orleans. Palmer, unlike numerous other clergy refused to leave the city and made thirty to fifty visits a day into homes which displayed any signs of the plague. Hereby he won the hearts and minds of the city ministering the consolation of the Gospel to any and all sick

and dying, but particularly to those with no church association. The sweet balm of his ministry shaped New Orleans and Louisiana well into the 20th Century. Palmer, though rarely speaking to politics, was influential in Louisiana seceding from the Union, and later his civic outspokenness dealt the Louisiana lottery a death blow.

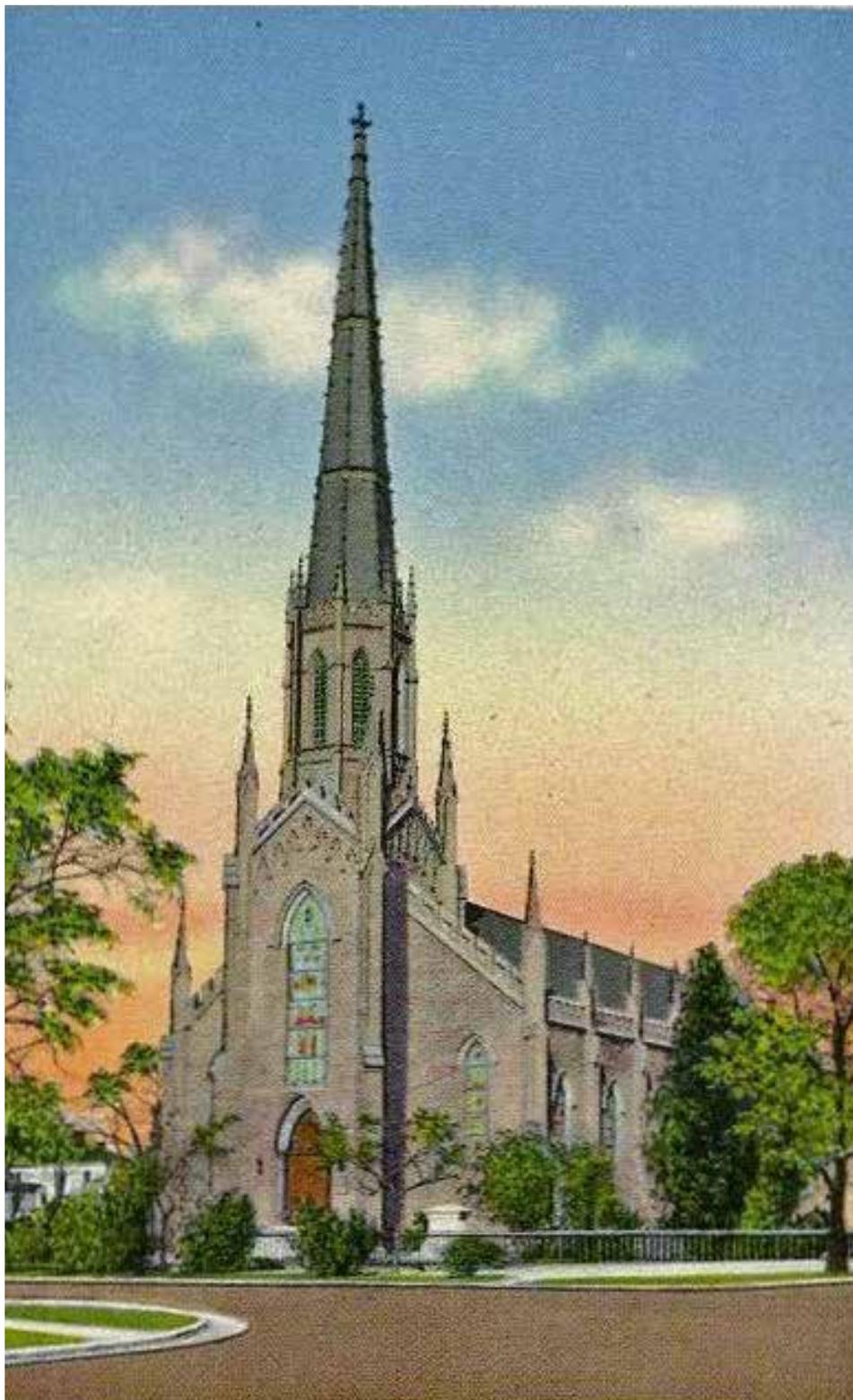
Palmer was but one of a number of luminaries in the Southern Church

which included the likes of Robert Lewis Dabney of Virginia, the noted biographer of the Confederate General “Stonewall” Jackson, and James Henley Thornwell of South Carolina, undoubtedly the greatest theological mind of the South.

Prior to the War Between the States, these Southerners were a part of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America in what after 1837 was called the Old School for its theological conservatism and strict adherence to the Westminster Standards. The Southern Church only took on an independent existence as the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America in 1861 upon the secession of numerous Southern States from the Union, and upon the PCUSA General Assembly of 1861 passing resolutions demanding loyalty to the Federal Government, by now under the Lincoln Administration. After the War, the two churches did not reunite until 1983. From 1865 the Southern Church (the mother church of J. Gresham Machen founder of the OPC) was renamed as the Presbyterian Church of the United States or PCUS.

On December 4, 1861 commissioners from 47 Southern Presbyteries met in Augusta, Georgia to organize this new church. One of the most notable acts of this Assembly was an “address to the churches of Jesus Christ throughout the earth.” This document was intended to provide the rationale for the existence of the Southern Church, its character, mission, and particularly its relationship to the institution of slavery. This last issue was to reflect a horrible blind spot in the way of thinking then extant in the South, and much of the North. As one contemporary Southern theologian has lamented, “unfortunately they did not take into serious consideration the fact that the blacks had been stolen from their homeland and that for Christians to buy stolen, kidnapped victims was wrong.” Nor was thought given to the Old Testament idea of the release of the captives and the Jubilee in the calendar of Israel. Still it seems that it is easier for 21st century Christians to criticize the blind spots of erring forefathers than to see and repent of their own.”

These Southern Presbyterians were committed to what is called *Jure Divino* or divine right Presbyterianism. The idea was that the polity or government of the church was set forth in Scripture as clearly as its doctrine. The doctrine set forth in Scripture was for them of course Calvinism. The form of government,



The church of James Henley Thornwell, built in 1854 and saved from the flames of the war between the states.

“The constitution of the church, the Bible, provides the divine warrant for her doctrine, government, offices, mission, and worship. Where there is no biblical warrant, the church may not speak or act.”

just as clearly was Presbyterianism – in which ruling elders were to have parity with teaching elders in the courts of the church, and the missionary and educational functions of the church were not to be delegated to or usurped by independent boards and agencies. These two points had been vigorously debated in the Old School Church in the decades prior to 1861.

“We are not ashamed to confess that we are intensely Presbyterian,” wrote Dr. Thornwell. “We embrace all other denominations in the arms of Christian fellowship and love, but our own scheme of government we humbly believe to be according to the pattern shown on the Mount, and by God’s grace we mean to put its efficiency to the test.” This was to mean to these Southerners that the “great business” of the church in fulfilling the commission of her Lord to make disciples of the nations was to be carried out through the agency of the church itself and her executive committees.

The church in their view was created by Christ a divine institution, with her own spiritual polity. It is “a positive institution, and therefore must show a definite warrant from the Bible for everything that she does. It is not enough that her measures are not condemned. They must be sanctioned, positively sanctioned by the power which ordains her, or they are null and void.” We might call this the regulative principal of church government, or “you can only do what the Scripture commands.” The church is not free to do all that Scripture does not forbid.

The constitution of the church, the Bible, provides the divine warrant for her doctrine, government, offices, mission, and worship. Where there is no biblical warrant, the church may not speak or act. Thus was deduced the cardinal principal for the Southern Church that the Church, as a Spiritual body may not as a rule intermingle with politics for she has not received such a mandate from her Lord and His Word. Thus is explained, even in the crucible of the Slavery controversy in the United States, the reticence of the Southern Church to call slavery per se sinful (as one still finds in the writings of men such as the late Prof. John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary). In a similar fashion J. Gresham Machen refused to call the use of alcohol sinful per se, even during the height of the American Prohibition movement of the 1920’s and 1930’s.

For those who revere the words of the Heidelberg Catechism Question 96, that we may not make graven images nor worship God in any other way than He has commanded in His word the following will ring true. “In the Worship of God the church is bound by the written word, in the sense that she is not only to do what God has enjoined in the matter of His worship, but to abstain from doing what he has not enjoined. God is absolute dictator in the affair of worship, and, consequently ... every invention of man therein is a grand impertinence and wickedness.” The founders of the Southern Church were deeply committed to what we call the regulative principle of worship, being extremely reticent to introduce liturgical excess and innovative music. Even instrumental music and especially organs were rejected in some quarters.

The guns of the American War Between the States of 1861-65 have fallen silent. In one sense the old South is gone with the wind, and yet Faulkn-

er is still correct about the past. Not because of sesquicentennial re-enactments, or commemorative volumes, or fresh historical assessments in newly published books. Not even because of continuing disquiet about race relations in America. But the past is not past for the Reformed Christian, because timeless principles were at stake in the Old Southern Presbyterian Church. For the confession that she would be an Intensely Presbyterian Church governed in her doctrine, polity, mission, and worship by the positive sanctions of the Word of God alone still bear careful scrutiny and are rich with potential application to any church, anywhere that still humbly desires to bear the yoke of Jesus. Here is that yoke,” the church is permitted to act only by divine command. Our doctrine, our discipline, our worship are all divine and revealed things, to which the church can add, from which she can take away, nothing.”

The once thriving, vibrant church of Dr. Palmer in New Orleans is no more. Its vitals were devoured by his own successors, men of another spirit, shepherds who in their desire to be relevant and contemporary introduced strange, foreign ideas into the doctrine, government, and worship of the PCUS. The old paths of the past which had marked the Church’s fidelity to its constitution rooted deeply in the infallible Word of God were rejected. For these modern false prophets, the past was past and dead. But for the wise, the truths that governed the Southern Church in its heyday, are still not past or dead. Though only a tiny remnant of the former Southern Zion still heeds the voice of the fathers, their confession still speaks in the words of the Prophet and says To the Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the Earth, “Stand by the way, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and you shall find rest for your souls.”

Mr. Sawyer, a native of Alabama, was ordained and served as a Pastor in the RCNZ from 1984-1994. For the past 15 years has served as an OPC pastor in Louisiana. His ancestors fought in the Confederate army. Quotations are from the Bible; Presbyterians in the South by the late Professor Ernest Trice Thompson; and Preachers With Power, by Prof. Douglas Kelly of Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. Published by the Banner of Truth.

The Southern Presbyterians (2)

James Henley Thornwell – The Preacher of Logic on Fire

By Daniel Wilson and Paul Davey

As most of you know, I (Daniel) was born in North Carolina, USA. I have always had an interest in history, and being a Southerner, I have always appreciated the heroes and history of the Southern United States. I was particularly attracted to the men of the 19th century who lived before and around the time of the Civil War. The pastors and preachers of this era faced very difficult challenges in culture, in politics and in the church, and yet they endured those trials with an amazing spirit of faith. These men were driven to search the Scriptures for the answers to the issues they faced in life, and that led them to develop the system of Reformed and Calvinistic theology to a new level of beauty and detail. Much of what was written then is still useful and practical for the church today!

Paul Davey is a Kiwi born and bred; but having read good biographies on this era in church history, he too grew to love Southern theology and thought. Because we share this love of things Southern, Paul and I were asked to write an article on a particularly outstanding figure of this time: James Henley Thornwell. We both believe that a conversation between Paul and I is the best way for us to give you a taste for what we love about this man, and this remarkable era.

So, Paul, please tell us more about the tumultuous times in which Thornwell lived.

Paul:

South Carolina, Thornwell's state, is in the heart of the South. A well-established plantation and agricultural industry had developed leading up to the time of Thornwell (1812-1862). The South was primarily agrarian, with a lot of

cotton and other crops grown, whereas the North was becoming industrialised. Southern farms ranged in size and productivity. As in agriculture, in the South, the government, military, and support industries and services consisted of a range of people groups, with various religious affiliations and social and economic status. Many of the settlers were of British and French descent. The large black population brought into the South in the 18th century had a profound influence. We need to remember this is the New World. The *mores* of the Old World didn't always apply. Not everyone,

or their emigrating forebears, came with a mindset to establish a God-fearing, ordered society. Often, those who wanted that were in the minority.

In the early 19th century the infant United States of America had fewer states, and they were more loosely associated. Each had more local independence. For various, including economic, reasons the northern states wanted the southern states to continue in the union. Many would argue the case for union on much broader grounds than just economic utility. Many Southerners were slaveholders and most wanted to continue this practice. As the



James Henley Thornwell

years progressed, and world opinion changed, the northern states took increasing issue with the southern ones. The increasing tensions triggered the war between the northern and southern states (Civil War) of the early 1860s.

At the same time as the growing political conflict, there was a growing conflict in the church. Within the Presbyterian Church a major issue had arisen in the 1830s between the “New School” revivalists and the “Old School” stalwarts led by Hodge in the North and Thornwell in the South. The New School men were revivalists who were more interested in what “worked” to bring revival, and they were less constrained by the Word of God. The Old School men rightly tied theology AND practice to Scripture, which made them reject many of the practices of the overly pragmatic and emotionally charged revivals of their day. This debate continues to ebb and flow even in our own day. Eventually the Old and New School people parted company. During the Civil War both churches divided on geographic lines, eventually to reunite on geo-political lines rather than theological ones.

Thornwell faced political, social, ecclesiastical and economic turmoil at many times during his life. No doubt this contributed to his usefulness.

So, Daniel, Please tell us something of Thornwell’s youth and background. How did God prepare him to face those tumultuous times in which he lived?

Daniel:

Thornwell was the second child born into a relatively normal family for the time. His father was a manager for a plantation, which meant that the family was well-cared for and respectable. However, at the death of his father, Thornwell’s life was completely changed – he was only 8 years old. Not having any significant means of provision, Thornwell and his family went through many years of hardship. Thornwell’s early education was in part due to the generosity and charity of a couple of wealthy men who took an interest in him. This was probably what God used later to lead Thornwell to take such delight in the training and encouragement of young men for ministry. Those who have most benefited from others investing in them are those who most enjoy doing the same when they are able! And thus even difficult times have a beautiful end result in the lives of God’s people.

Thornwell was taken under the wing of a lawyer, William Robbins. Robbins both taught and tutored Thornwell, which ensured that James was well-trained in both logic and debate. This early taste for law and logic was most likely instrumental in developing the vibrant, stimulating sermons for which Thornwell was well-known. His powerful mix of argument and fervour led his preaching to be described as “*logic on fire.*”

Thornwell completed a mostly classical education at South Carolina College and, after failing in a tutoring job, became a school principal for two years. It was during this time, at the age of 21, that he was accepted as a candidate for the ministry by his presbytery. James moved north to pursue seminary study in Andover, Massachusetts, but soon transferred to Harvard Seminary. After 6 weeks, health concerns forced Thornwell to return home to South Carolina, where he intended to continue his seminary education. However, the extreme need for ministers led him to receive and accept a remarkable call, and so he was ordained at age 25 with less than a year’s seminary education. Yet any questions about his suitability are quickly answered by the fact that within 3 years of ordination, Thornwell was called upon to take a professorship at South Carolina College! Early on in his ministry, Thornwell was active in the presbytery and the wider church, and this, combined with his theological studies/lectures proved to be the perfect setting for an incredible impact on the theology and practice of the church.

Paul, what do you think are a couple of noteworthy aspects of Thornwell’s ministry and work in the church?

Paul:

As you have already suggested, Daniel, JHT was noted for excellence in both the pulpit and the seminary. He had a wonderful relationship with his wife. A strong marriage lays the foundation for a man to be able to love others in a godly way. JHT cared about the men he disciplined; he cared about their minds and their hearts. Evidence of warm relationships abound in the correspondence that BM Palmer quotes in his interesting biography, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Banner of Truth, 1974); including with the men he disciplined. The men whom the Lord brought to Himself through Thornwell’s ministry were nur-

“Flowing on from his gifts of logic, Thornwell was a formidable debater. In fact, many of his works are from controversies which he faced in his life/ministry..”

tured in heart and mind by this gifted man. They were aided in their walk with the Lord not only by what they heard from the pulpit, but also by being with their teacher. Thornwell worked on his students’ minds, hearts and lives according to God’s Word. Thornwell saw the necessity and benefits of education for Christians, and he sought to educate others in all the spheres of his influence.

Thornwell’s exceptional mind was cultivated through disciplined study of the Word of God. Added to his wonderful gifts were graces. The tone of his manner appears to be gracious, kind, generous and godly. Extensive study of theology and church history, following his legal training, meant that JHT proved to be a formidable figure in the courts of the Presbyterian Church. He argued, to give but one example, that the ruling elder was a presbyter, equal with the ministers in ecclesiastical courts, contrary to his equally eminent, northern friend, Charles Hodge. These and many other characteristics are found preserved in the copious, careful correspondence that JHT engaged in. He was a real worker!

Daniel, what do you think were Thornwell’s greatest contributions and legacy?

Daniel:

Well, Paul, Thornwell was known as the South's "most formidable theologian" in his day. His superior intellect led him to teach in the State University for many years, all the while playing an active role in the Presbytery. Perhaps one lasting contribution to the American church was the ideal of a scholar pastor. My own seminary named Thornwell's scholarship as one of the reasons they aimed to have such a rigorous 4 year seminary degree. That concept of "logic on fire", or biblical reasoning warmly preached to God's people, is a legacy of Thornwell.

Flowing on from his gifts of logic, Thornwell was a formidable debater. In fact, many of his works are from controversies which he faced in his life/ministry. Much of these writings is as accurate, biblical and helpful today, as it was in Thornwell's lifetime. If you need to debate someone about the Roman Catholic church – read Thornwell's works. If you want to know the nature of the office of elder in the church – read Thornwell's works. If you want to refute German rationalism and the ideas of modern philosophy – read Thornwell's works! His logic is a lasting gift to the church of the Lord Jesus.

Sadly, one of the things that Thornwell is remembered for most is his defence of slavery. He was one of the chief advocates of Southern slavery. He based his argumentation firmly on the Scriptures, and it would be difficult for any to find

fault with his basic logic. Sadly, his logic and argumentation were hinged on a romanticised version of Christian-owned plantations. When compared with the reality of slavery as it existed across the South, Thornwell's arguments no longer hold water. But this too serves as a positive lesson for us. Every generation, every person has their blind spots and weaknesses. Just because Thornwell was wrong here, it doesn't mean we should write him off. Nor when we find weakness or error in one another should we immediately discount everything else. Instead, we need to look for the good, and rebuke the bad – leaving the judging or condemning to the Lord.

Perhaps another lesson from Thornwell's defence of slavery is his profound dependence upon God's Word. When faced with a difficult debate over major political issues, Thornwell searched God's Word for wisdom. Even though I disagree with his conclusions, his method is noteworthy. He and other Southern Theologians were known for their diligent submission to God's Word. The Scriptures were supreme in ordering life, and if one could have shown Thornwell anything from God's Word – I am convinced that he would have changed his life to suit what God's Word said. We too should have such a zeal and dependence on God's Word. We too should be "Berean" scholars, searching the Word daily to confirm what we are taught, just like Thornwell.

Paul, perhaps as we end our discussion, you would like to explain why you think Thornwell is worth our time in our day.

Paul:

I'm sure you'd agree Daniel, that like Winston Churchill, Thornwell had plenty of setbacks in his childhood. If he'd wanted to pity-party he would have had more excuse than most of us. He had his weaknesses and troubles, but these didn't stop him using his gifts and getting on with some remarkable service for Christ. As you've indicated, he understood that God's Word is for our instruction and exhortation, that we may be equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Thus, he got about knowing that Word extensively, using all the intellectual talents God had given Him. He humbly submitted himself both in learning and in going about applying that Word to himself and others. Affectionately, deliberately and diligently, he disciplined those Christ entrusted to him in his congregations and in the seminaries in which he taught. He didn't shy away from the theological and ecclesiastical debates that he encountered. He engaged with the issues of the day, too; be they slavery, civil war, or whatever was important. He is in so many ways a model that we should follow.

You'd also agree, Daniel, that we have merely scratched the surface of Thornwell's usefulness in this little article. We commend to you readers Douglas Kelly's *Preachers With Power* (Banner of Truth, 1992), B.M. Palmer's *Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (Banner of Truth, 1974) and the four volumes of *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell* (Banner of Truth, 1974), some of which is available online. Good biographies are pretty stimulating. Both the biographical works we've mentioned have enough drama and interest to keep non-literary chaps at the page! The enjoyment and usefulness of investing some hours becoming familiar with James Henley Thornwell is well worthwhile.

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The Southern Presbyterians (3)

John L. Girardeau, Minister to the slaves of South Carolina

Sally Davey

It is not difficult to appreciate the great strengths of the Southern Presbyterian Church in the early nineteenth century. It comprised of many solid, faithful congregations where the truths of the Bible were honoured and clearly taught; and where, from time to time, sudden bursts of religious awakening added large numbers of people to the churches. These were churches where commitment to sound theology and evangelical zeal were often found combined. That the Southern Presbyterians produced fine preachers, theologians and churchmen who made important contributions to the body of Reformed understanding internationally is not surprising.

And yet – in this day and age, many of us are surprised at one major, glaring inconsistency in their witness. How could committed Christians live with the slavery that was so prevalent in the

economy of the South? Surely it flew in the face of Christian compassion and the equality of sinners before God? Christians are called to help the poor and oppressed; but didn't these Presbyterians involve themselves in oppression instead? What, if anything, did they do for the multitude of African slaves who served them, and who lived in their midst? The life of one of their ministers shows how some of them grappled with this moral dilemma, and attempted to do quite a lot.

Family and Childhood

John Lafayette Girardeau was born in 1825 on James Island, South Carolina. He was the son of parents of Huguenot background (South Carolina was one of the destinations to which French Huguenot refugees fled after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.) His grandfather had served in the American Revolutionary War (hence the name Lafayette, after the French general who had assisted the American side). His father was a small-scale plantation owner who grew cotton; so young Girardeau grew up in close contact with slaves. His mother was a compassionate, sensitive lady who was the spiritual centre of the home; and the Girardeau home was one where Christ was spoken of naturally and often. Family devotions were the norm, the Lord's Day was observed carefully, and the family were actively involved in their local Presbyterian church, including the weekly prayer meeting held in different family homes.

Mrs Girardeau was especially kind to sick and needy slaves. She would often care for them, and almost certainly passed her compassionate influence on to her son, giving him a deep interest in the black population of the Low Country (coastal region) of South Carolina. Sadly, she died when Girar-

deau was just a young boy, and his life was completely changed. Within the next two years his father remarried, he lost a close uncle and also his maternal grandmother. It seems his stepmother was not especially kind, and he was sent off to school in Charleston. He had lost

“There was a genuine desire on the part of many Christian Southerners to teach the slaves the gospel. They were happy for their slaves to attend church, and for preachers to visit the slaves on their plantations..”



John L. Girardeau, 1825-1898.

a great deal of the security of his childhood. His attendance at Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston was one important anchor where he found kindness and friendship.

When he was 14 or 15 he went through some spiritual turmoil, recognised his need of salvation, and trusted in Christ. This set the direction of his life; and around this time he started at College. He loved it: academically able, he treated his studies in the liberal arts and the classical languages as preparation for a lifetime of ministerial service. He graduated in 1844 and spent the summer as tutor to the Hamlin family on their plantation 8 miles from Charleston. One of the daughters would later become his wife.

Ministry to the Slaves

Girardeau's heart remained in the Low Country of South Carolina, though, where the black population, far more numerous than further inland, had fewer opportunities to hear the gospel, and where there was a great deal more ignorance and the practice of Voodoo. His first pastoral charge was at the Wilton church in rural Colleton County. He regularly preached to a large congregation of white people in the morning, and to blacks in the afternoon. He also systematically preached to the slaves on the surrounding plantations; often on the porches or inside the homes of their masters. He did not insult the intelligence of the slaves, and used the same order of service for both. He taught them

that contributed to its success.

First among them is surely Girardeau's preaching, which contemporaries described as delivered in a clear and gentle voice; but was soul-searching and Christ-centred. It frequently affected congregations in a similar way to Whitefield's preaching – many were grieved by their sin to the point of tears. The second major factor was the church's thorough teaching programme, involving catechism instruction and Scripture memorising.

There was plenty of precedent for work among slaves in the South. Girardeau himself had a cousin, C.C. Jones, who was a leading evangelist of the slaves as well as a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, and who had written a catechism to instruct black people, *Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States*, in 1842.

There was a genuine desire on the part of many Christian Southerners to teach the slaves the gospel. They were happy for their slaves to attend church, and for preachers to visit the slaves on their plantations. As has been pointed out, they provided money for the building of the Anson St church – better accommodation than the stifling balconies the slaves occupied in regular white churches.

However, this all happened in an atmosphere of paternalism. The whites, even those most interested in the blacks like Girardeau, always viewed them as little brothers incapable of advancing to the spiritual maturity expected of white Christians. This unbiblical view led some (not Girardeau) to deny church leadership to black members. To us, such a view is unworthy of Christians who believe that sinners saved by Christ have equality before God. Yes, these Christians had big blind spots with regard to slavery – yet so do we, on other subjects.

The striking thing is that these Presbyterians persevered in their efforts to teach the slaves thoroughly – at a time when it was actually illegal to teach slaves to read and write. Fear of incendiary revolutionary ideas infiltrating from northern abolitionists had led to a dread of providing slaves access to such material through literacy. Girardeau's efforts to preach the gospel and teach the catechism in this setting went some way to overcome the many handicaps slaves suffered in growing in their understanding of the Word of God. As C.C. Jones had argued, God, in his providence, had brought massive



The now destroyed Zion Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina. This was the first Presbyterian Church ever ruled by black elders.

In 1845 he began study for the ministry at seminary in Columbia, where he frequently heard the preaching of James Henley Thornwell and Benjamin Palmer at First Presbyterian Church. Thornwell's theological convictions and personal walk with Christ had a great influence on the young Girardeau. In his seminary years he was confirmed in solid, conservative Old School Presbyterianism and longing to see the kingdom of Christ extended through souls coming to the Saviour. He also busied himself doing what he could to bring the gospel to the poorer and more hardened sinners in Columbia at the time. As a student, Girardeau became known for his spiritual fervour and tender, ardent prayer. He also had the makings of a particularly fine preacher.

good psalms and hymns, refusing the view that the slaves' own simple chants were good enough for them. Girardeau clearly believed that the goal was to lift the blacks' understanding, not leave them at a level of ignorance.

Then he was called to a new work. Second Presbyterian Church had begun in Anson St in Charleston for the slaves of the city. A building seating 600 had been built by the slaveholders and opened in 1850. Thornwell had preached on Colossians 4:1 at the opening service. By 1854, when Girardeau took up his ministry there, there were 36 members; and by 1860 there were over 600, with a regular Sunday attendance of 1500. This was an extraordinary ministry, obviously blessed by God in its fruitfulness; and it is helpful to consider some of the things

numbers of African people formerly ignorant of the gospel to the New World. It was the duty of white people, who had known so much spiritual blessing, to teach them the gospel.

Girardeau's church had a substantial educational programme. Slaves were trained to memorize vast portions of Scripture, catechisms and psalms and hymns. Sabbath Schools (a feature of solid churches since the 1820s) were the main venue for this teaching. By 1857 the congregation had outgrown the Anson St mission, and it was decided to build a huge new church on Calhoun St on a piece of land donated for the purpose. It was the biggest church in Charleston, with seating for 2500. By choice of the black members, the name was "Zion" church. There was considerable outreach among the community of black domestic slaves in Charleston, and the church continued to grow rapidly. New members were disciplined in "classes"; each class having no more than 50 members, and the leaders were drawn from among the spiritually mature black men. The classes filled a number of functions – Christian fellowship, keeping the members and leaders informed of sickness and need, and furthering the members' growth in Christian understanding and spiritual graces.

The work flourished. In 1858 there were 245 black communicant members; and by 1860 that had increased to 492. Since Girardeau preached 3 times every Sunday, attendance must have been far bigger than the total membership. It seems that church membership did not decline during the Civil War, either.

What the War Brought

However, the war did have a devastating effect on the South generally; and on the churches in particular. Tensions between the Northern states and the South in the period leading up to the war led most Protestant denominations, including the Presbyterians, to divide into northern and southern entities. Girardeau kept the members of Zion Church fully informed of developments in the Presbyterian Church, so they understood what was happening when their church split from their northern brethren.

Soon, everyone was affected and nothing would be the same again. In 1862 Girardeau took leave of the church to serve as a chaplain in the Confederate Army; only returning in 1865 after having suffered defeat and imprisonment. Charleston was occupied by Northern

forces and many public buildings, including Zion Church, were confiscated. The church trustees had to negotiate with the new authorities to recover the church building from a Northern missionary who had tried to take it over. Some black Christians felt unwilling to be under a white pastor in the new circumstances, though a large number wanted to return to Girardeau, and did so. It was a sad situation: many of the Southern whites were defensive and bitter; and the policy of the Freedman's Bureau, set up by the Northern government, was to divide the now free black citizens from the Southern white populace. The Bureau strongly encouraged the blacks to leave the white churches and to form their own with the help of the Washington government. Over time, the blacks affiliated more and more with existing black denominations, developing their own leadership and forms of worship. Zion church was ultimately abandoned, and the building demolished.

After the War

In these circumstances Girardeau's pre-war ministry was finished, and he served until the mid-1870s in a largely white congregation in Charleston. He never lost his lifelong zeal for the spiritual well-being of the blacks, and one of the Sabbath school groups his church operated was for black people. Girardeau's gentle and godly character, preaching gifts and scholarship were widely recognised by this time, though, and the 1874 General Assembly of the (Southern) Presbyterian Church elected him Moderator. It also elected him Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology at Columbia Seminary, where he taught for twenty years until his retirement at the age of seventy.

Girardeau's ministry shone as a beacon of hope in a culture undergoing cataclysmic change. Between the early 1850s, when his preaching ministry began, and the 1880s, when he finally retired from theological teaching, Southern society was revolutionised. White society, while largely Christian, had a huge moral blind spot in condoning slavery; and yet the closeness of master and slave allowed for considerable spiritual influence of the one upon the other for good – which Girardeau did all he could to encourage. He was even prepared, within the constraints of that setting, to devote his entire preaching ministry to the black people. When war and the victory of the Northern army destroyed slavery in

the South, it also destroyed the close relations between black and white, resulting in a policy of separation. That Girardeau could face the ending of his ministry in such circumstances without bitterness of heart speaks highly of his character.

Such turns of events can be hard to bear. What happened to Zion Church bears resemblance to many situations in the history of the church. Wars and revolutions can wreak havoc on churches as people flee the violence, or take sides. We can wonder why God would allow this apparent crushing of his good work. Ultimately, though, we have to entrust what God has begun to his good hands. Sometimes, as in the book of Acts, he simply scatters his people so that they can take the gospel further. Other times, he allows his people to live out their faith in unexpected ways or circumstances. It is certainly true that the Southern Presbyterian churches did not die: they carried on as some of the more faithful churches in the U.S. into the next century; and formed the basis of what is now the largest faithful Presbyterian denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America. And while it is sad that many black people left behind the beginnings of solid reformational teaching that Girardeau and his like had been giving them, there are signs that more than a few black churches are hungering for this very thing today. As for Girardeau himself, he carried on preaching and teaching in the places he was able; trusting in the God he loved for the outcome. And we shall all rejoice together over the results in heaven.

Resources

I am greatly indebted to the following works for my understanding of Girardeau's life and ministry:

C.N. Wilborn, *John L. Girardeau (1825-98), Pastor to Slaves and Theologian of Causes: A Historical Account of the Life and Contributions of An often Neglected Southern Presbyterian Minister and Theologian* (PhD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003).

Douglas Kelly, *Preachers with Power: Four Stalwarts of the South, Daniel Baker, James Henley Thornwell, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, John Girardeau* (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1992)

Jenny Waldron

Devoted devotions

I have vivid memories of my Mum reading her Bible every morning. No matter how early I staggered out to the kitchen, Mum would be there, in her dressing gown with her Bible, reference books and concordances, and prayer list studying God's Word and praying. She was a tremendous example to me of a godly woman, who meditated on God's Word and talked with her Lord whom she loved.

What does our devotional life look like? Theoretically and theologically, we know devotions are important and yet time slips through our fingers. Days can go by without us spending time with our Lord. God also requires more of us than a quick read of his Word and a rote prayer before we are up and off about our busy day. Nancy Leigh de Moss in her devotional book¹ wrote this: "Do you know what it is to have devotions without having devotion? I do. We carry out the routine of reading our Bibles and saying our prayers without truly cultivating a love relationship with Christ. We're busy with a multitude of spiritual activities, yet we've lost perspective of whom we're serving – and why."

Instead of doing "devotions" we

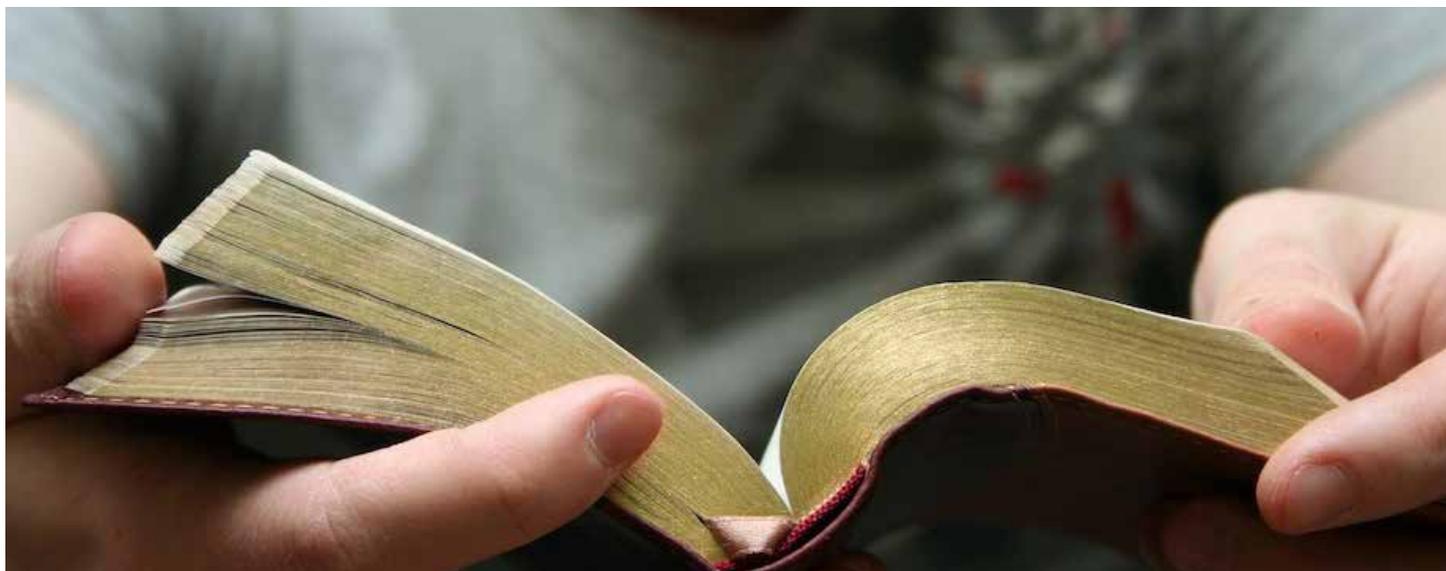
become devotionless. We are not to just go through the motions but we are to spend time forgetting all else and focussing on God and his Word. We need silence and solitude to truly spend time with God; however, we live in a world of almost constant noise and distraction. The radio blares, the TV babbles, the cellphone beeps, our email pings, the baby cries, the young adult yells; each demanding our attention and driving out the quiet voice of God's Spirit. Oh how we long for a time and place to spend in quietness and solitude but so often we allow noise, distractions and the internet to take over and destroy what would have been a precious time with the Lord.

Donald S. Witney writes²: "Without exception, the men and women I have known who make the most rapid, consistent, and evident growth in Christ-likeness have been those who develop a daily time of being alone with God. This daily devotional habit is not easy to develop because we lead busy lives and have an Enemy aware of the stakes involved. Missionary martyr Jim Elliot knew of the battle: 'I think the devil has made it his business to monopolise on

three elements: noise, hurry, crowds... Satan is quite aware of the power of silence.'"

So let's try and carve out some silent time in our lives and meditate on God's Word. Sometimes we might think that we can survive on the preaching on Sunday alone, but to grow and mature we need more than that. We need God's Word nourishing us, feeding us and watering us regularly. When we haven't been reading our Bible on a daily basis, we find ourselves easily distracted and spending time unwisely; on Facebook instead of praying, or perusing the newspaper instead of reading the Bible. Then other areas in our lives start to become unstuck. We may become impatient with the children, narky with our husband or selfish, unkind and ... the list goes on. We can become very weak very quickly. Oh, feeble and pathetic humans that we are! God's Word really does change lives. It revives, strengthens and encourages us. It humbles, convicts and reminds us of the great love that Christ has for us.

Before we look at different ways that we might use to spend time with Jesus Christ, remember that there is no condemnation for those who are in Him.³



This means no beating ourselves up with guilt, or feeling bad when we haven't been able to spend time today, or this week, or that we feel like we have messed up yet again. When my children were young, (which, when you have several children, seems to stretch on for a very long time) finding time for any kind of personal devotion seemed impossible. I was either busy with little children or so tired, that, if I sat for more than 30 secs I was almost guaranteed to drop off to sleep. Even as the children became older, life still seemed too busy to fit in a personal devotional time. Be encouraged to keep going, start again, to pick yourself up 'off the floor' and carry on. In fact, as I was writing this article this month, I really struggled with finding and making time for my devotions, but I am now encouraged to keep going.

Having established the need to spend time in silence and solitude how, practically, can we achieve this?

Get up early

Simple answer. For some people, like my dear late mother, this may be less of a struggle than for others. Even if you get up early one morning a week, starting the day by spending time with God is such a blessing.⁴ It takes discipline to begin, but it will become a habit and a pattern of life that you will not want to do without.

Carpe Diem

Many years ago, I had a sign on the noticeboard in my kitchen that said "Carpe Diem". Although this translates as "Seize the Day", for me it reminded me to "Seize the Moment." When children are small, it seems life is an endless list of tasks to do, little people to cuddle and nights spent awake. However, it is surprising how often there are moments when the baby is asleep and the toddlers are playing peacefully, and all is quiet. Seize the Moment and grab your Bible. The Word of God can refresh and revitalise like nothing else, and will help us to get through those rough days. Having verses to memorise written up on cards and placed on the kitchen window sill or the back of the toilet door can help us focus to spend time thinking about the verse(s). Have a Bible in the car so you can Seize the Moment during piano lessons, soccer games and ballet practice. If the children are at catechism or Cadets, Seize the Moment. Many women take their babies for walks in the stroller or in later years take up walking for exer-

cise. We can use this time to pray and to meditate on a portion of God's Word. Memorise Scripture so that you have the Word of God at your "finger tips".

It is also amazing how much prayer can be done with your hands in the sink, when hanging out the washing, or on the bus/train to work. The thing is to capture every thought, Seize the Moment or to put it another way, Redeem the Time.

Read through the Bible yourself

There are a number of Reading Plans that enable you to read through the Bible in a year or two. McCheyne's⁵ Bible Reading Plan will get you through the Bible in a year and the Psalms and the New Testament twice. You could read one column yourself and maybe include the other readings in family devotions, reading to the children or with your husband. I have often marvelled at the relevance of the particular reading for that day to my life, even though the list was put together approximately 150 years ago. This is the Lord's providence and His wonderful supply. The Psalms in particular are often helpful when you are tired, stressed or depressed. They are generally short (you can read Ps 119 in sections) and the authors knew about suffering and "going down into the pit" and yet, they also express the greatness of our God to bless, rescue and sustain us. Throughout the Psalms, the Psalmist delights in God's word. He meditates on it, thinks about it, learns from it and obeys it. He is nourished, encouraged, and led by it. When sorrows⁶ come, the Word strengthens, and comforts him. When temptations knock, it guards his heart⁷ and mind so that he will know what displeases God and not do it! And so it is for us too.

Meditate on God's Word

This kind of meditation isn't some scary eastern religious practice, rather it is carefully reflecting on God's Word⁸, letting it really sink into us and allowing it do its good work in our lives. For example; several years ago, I spent a number of weeks meditating on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, one phrase at a time. I started with "Our Father" and thought about what that meant and how that applied to me, as a Christian. This concept of "Father" was a struggle for me, because I am adopted and don't know my birth father and my adopted "Dad", though a godly man, seemed distant in my youth. I was really able to focus on how God is my heavenly

father, and my preconceptions, false ideas and experiences needed to be put aside as I was confronted with biblical truths about God being my Father. As I meditated, week by week, on each phrase, and studied similar passages, I understood the Lord's Prayer in a way that was deep and profound and still affects me to this day.

So meditate on the Scriptures. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand them, and for the Word of God to really take root in your soul so that, as the Psalmist said, "I may not sin against you." The best way to be able to identify anything that may lead us from the path that God has set before us, is to have the Word of God firmly and deeply rooted in us, and to continue to be washed by His Word.

Read devotional books⁹

These can be useful in addition to reading the Bible. Be sure to choose a good author. I am currently using Nancy Leigh de Moss's book, *The Quiet Place* and I have found her writing and insights very helpful.

Study the Bible together

If you are attending a Bible study group you can spend time during the week, studying the text and getting to know the passage well. Use the cross-references in the margins and concordances at the back of your Bible to gain a better insight into the text. Follow the 'rabbit trail' of where certain words are used in different verses to gain a deeper understanding.

So, I encourage you to Seize the Moment. Meditate on God's Word, let it sink deeply into your heart. Pray a lot. Spend time with your Lord Jesus Christ. Cultivate a love relationship with Him. Glorify God and enjoy Him. Have devoted devotions.

Notes

- ¹ Nancy Leigh de Moss – *The Quiet Place*
- ² Donald S. Witney – *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life*
- ³ Rom 8:1
- ⁴ Ps 5:3
- ⁵ <http://www.mcheyne.info/calendar.pdf>
- ⁶ Ps 119:27,28
- ⁷ Ps 119:9-11
- ⁸ Ps 1:2, Ps 119:23,97,99
- ⁹ Suggested Devotional Books:
Nancy Leigh de Moss – *The Quiet Place*: Moody Publishers
Paul David Tripp – *New Morning Mercies*: Inter-
versity Press
Charles Spurgeon – *Morning and Evening*
RC Sproul – *Table Talk*: Ligonier Ministries

Euthanasia: The next social issue facing New Zealand

Renée Joubert

Politicians are waiting for an opportune time to resubmit the End-of-Life Choice Bill to the ballot. This proposed euthanasia legislation affects every New Zealand family as well as the legal, medical and social fabric of our society.

It's important to be informed about what euthanasia is, what the Bill proposes, and what the Bible teaches on this topic. It's also important to be

“Once the law implies that suffering people are better off dead, it would be a logical step to consider it cruel to “deprive” people of death simply because they're unable to make a legal request.”

proactive and there are several ways you can help.

What is meant by “assisted dying”, “euthanasia” and “physician-assisted suicide”?

“Assisted dying” is a euphemistic umbrella term for physician-assisted suicide (PAS) and euthanasia. It's called PAS when a doctor prescribes a lethal drug for a patient to self-administer. It's called euthanasia when a medical professional kills a patient deliberately, usually by administering a lethal drug.

These are NOT euthanasia:

- A patient refusing medical treatment or resuscitation
- Switching off life support
- Withdrawing medical treatment that has become futile or burdensome

All of the above means the patient dies a natural death from an illness or injury. Euthanasia is an unnatural death caused by a deliberate act, when the person's body is still able to sustain life.¹

Sometimes the media and those supporting euthanasia confuse good medical care with euthanasia. Some treatments, for example, open-heart surgery, involve the risk of death. Foreseeing this risk is not the same as causing death. We need to remember the overarching principle: if a doctor's sole intention is to address disease and/or relieve symptoms, then he or she has not committed euthanasia if the patient dies.

What does the *End-of-Life Choice Bill* propose?

The bill proposes “medically assisted death”, a euphemism for legal assisted suicide and euthanasia, for anyone over 18 who has either a “terminal illness or other medical condition that is likely to end his or her life within 12 months” or an “irreversible physical or mental medical condition that, in the person's

view, renders his or her life unbearable”.²

It would effectively legalise assisted suicide on demand since virtually everyone could claim to have an irreversible condition, for example, disability; chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, allergies or back pain; mental illness; skin pigmentation; scarring; or ageing-related conditions. Any condition, including depression, could be labeled irreversible when further treatment is refused.

It's important to note that this legislation is not for the dying, but for people who may still have months, years or decades to live.

This Bill is similar to the Belgian law. Euthanasia is also legal in the Netherlands, Luxembourg and since June 2014, in the Canadian province of Quebec. Physician-assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland and the US States of Oregon, Washington, Vermont and Montana. It was legal in the Northern Territory of Australia from 1995 to 1997.

Some reasons why euthanasia should not be legalised

1. Legalising assisted suicide sends a hypocritical message about suicide.
2. Legalisation changes the role of doctors from being healers and carers, to also being killers.
3. Legalising euthanasia and assisted suicide means making it legal for one person to be involved in deliberately ending the life of another – a profound change to criminal law that is open to abuse.
4. Medical diagnosis and prognosis are too arbitrary to be grounds for legal killing. Doctors make these judgments based on probability, not certainty. So often doctors disagree on a diagnosis and rarely do patients live as long as their doctors estimated they would. I recently met a lady whose doctor diagnosed a terminal lung condition and “gave” her three months to live. That was 30 years ago!

5. Suffering should never be a ground for legal killing, because it's universal. Everyone suffers in some way at any moment.

Suffering is also subjective and arbitrary. It would be arrogant to tell a person with say, allergies, "You are not suffering as much as someone who has cancer." Both people may feel their suffering is unbearable. Feelings are fickle.

A law that allows euthanasia for some will inevitably be extended to others who are also suffering, in the name of equality and avoiding discrimination. Nowhere in the world has euthanasia been limited to the people for whom it was originally legalised.

Once the law implies that suffering people are better off dead, it would be a logical step to consider it cruel to "deprive" people of death simply because they're unable to make a legal request. It's now regarded a necessity to euthanise disabled babies and comatose patients in the Netherlands. Dutch and Belgian studies show that doctors and nurses have euthanised patients without consent because "death is in their best interest". According to a 2010 study, 32 % of reported euthanasia cases in Flanders, Belgium, occurred without the patient's explicit request. In half of these cases death was the wish of the family. Ninety-two percent of these victims were 65 years or older.³ Legal euthanasia is a vehicle for elder abuse.

6. Written safeguards look noble on paper but are unenforceable in practice. A 2010 study showed that only 53 % of cases in Flanders, Belgium, were reported. Of those, less than three-quarters followed legal requirements.⁴

Why do advocates want euthanasia to be legalised?

The pro-euthanasia lobby wants suicide regarded as a normal and "rational choice".⁵ They want assisted suicide to be legal, because they say, suicide can be violent, unsuccessful and lonely.⁶ Eligibility criteria such as "only for the terminally ill" is only a stepping stone towards their ultimate goal: assisted suicide for everyone, including children.⁷ If the proposed End-of-Life Choice Bill becomes law only one step would remain: eliminating the age limit, as Belgium did about a year ago.

Some politicians want it legalised because it would reduce health care costs. Leaders of the Green movement said that they support euthanasia and any other measure that would reduce

the human population, because humans are bad for the environment.⁸

A common pro-euthanasia argument is, "I want to control the timing and manner of my death". Suicide can be regarded an individual matter, but assisted suicide certainly isn't so because it requires at least one other person. Furthermore, control over death is an illusion. Suicide and assisted suicide can both involve unforeseen complications.

Members of the public who support euthanasia usually do so because they think terminally ill people want it. A UK study of the terminally ill found that the desire for hastened death is uncommon and that treatable depression is a significant factor.⁹

The public also fear having uncontrollable pain. Many are unaware that virtually all pain can be controlled. Dr Paul Dunne, a palliative care specialist, says it's possible to guarantee that a person won't be in pain. Only 1% of his patients have been unable to remain conscious in the process.¹⁰ Dr Peter Admiraal, a leading Dutch pro-euthanasia doctor, said, "essentially all pain can be controlled ... euthanasia for pain relief is unethical".¹¹ It's a matter of ensuring everyone has access to care by adequately trained professionals.

Where it's legal, people request assisted suicide or euthanasia mainly for existential reasons or emotional reasons such as loneliness and fear. In 2013, 93 % of Oregonians receiving doctor-assisted suicide gave "loss of autonomy" and 89 % gave being "less able to engage

in activities that make life enjoyable" as key reasons.¹²

What does the Bible say about euthanasia and assisted suicide?

Suicide, assisted suicide and euthanasia are contrary to what the Bible teaches.

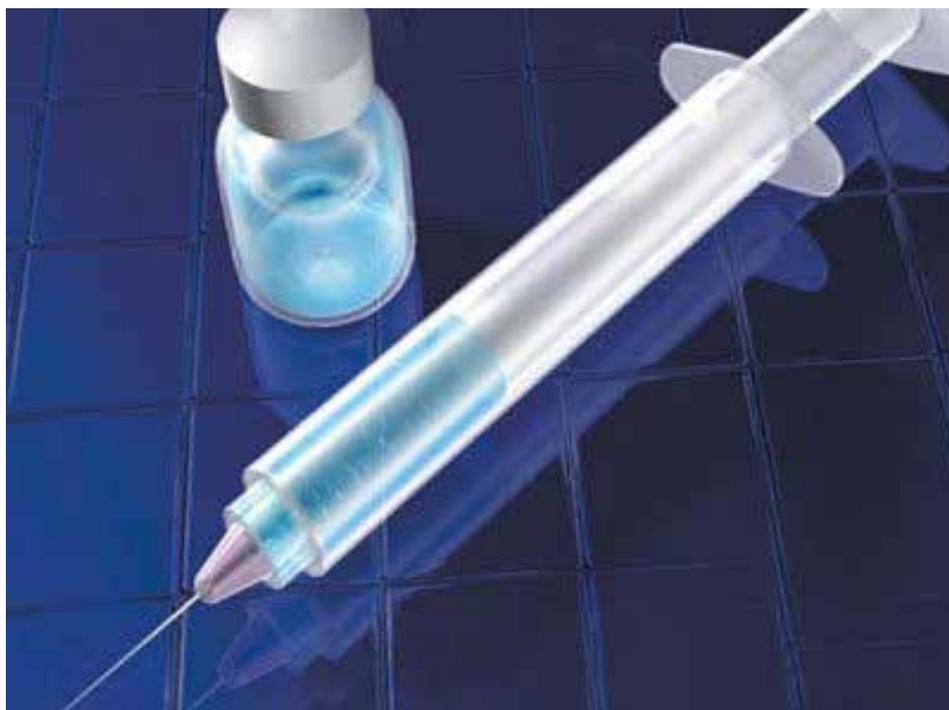
1. God created humankind, not animals, in His image ([Genesis 1:27](#)). Euthanising animals doesn't justify euthanising humans.

2. Human life and death is God's domain ([Deuteronomy 32:39](#), [Ecclesiastes 8:7-8a](#), [1 Samuel 2:6](#), [Psalm 31:15](#), [Job 13:13-15](#), [Job 14:5](#)).

3. God, not people or modern society, defines what's good and what's evil ([Isaiah 5:20](#)). Everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of their good and evil deeds during this life ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)).

4. God commanded, "You shall not murder" ([Exodus 20:13](#)). The Hebrew word for murder means "illegal or immoral killing" as defined by God, not society. God condones the intentional killing of humans in only three circumstances: self-defense ([Exodus 22:2](#)), a just war and the death penalty, which are outside the scope of this article. Any other circumstances qualify as the shedding of innocent blood, which God hates ([Proverbs 6:16-17](#)).

5. Two assisted suicide requests and five suicides are mentioned in the Bible. Each of the people concerned, apart from Saul's armour-bearer, were called wicked. Their actions are presented as a warning against walking in their



footsteps. Abimelech asked his armour-bearer to kill him so he wouldn't be killed by a woman ([Judges 9:54](#)). Saul asked his armour-bearer to kill him to relieve his suffering. When his armour-bearer refused, Saul killed himself and the armour-bearer killed himself also ([1 Samuel 31:3-5](#)).

The other suicides were by Ahithophel ([2 Samuel 17:23](#)), Zimri ([1 Kings 16:18-19](#)) and Judas ([Matthew 27:5](#)). Samson's death was an act of war since his goal was to kill the Philistines ([Judges 16:26-30](#)).

6. Jesus died by crucifixion, the death penalty, and not by drinking poison as some have claimed ([Matthew 27:32-50](#)). He didn't commit suicide – He didn't nail Himself to the cross. He knew the purpose of His death, but didn't seek it ([Luke 22:41-44](#)). He lay down his life to save humankind ([John 10:11-18](#)), motivated by love ([John 15:12-13](#)).

7. Elijah ([1 Kings 19:3-8](#)) and Job ([Job 6:8-9](#)) were suffering and wished to die, but asked God to end their lives instead of committing suicide or asking others to kill them. God restored them and they are held up as good role models for us to follow. Jonah was so angry that he asked God to take his life. God rebuked him for his attitude ([Jonah 4:1-11](#)).

8. God still expects people to follow His commandments. We love God and others by obeying His commands ([John 14:15](#), [1 John 5:2-3](#)). God's people are defined as those who follow His com-

mandments and remain faithful to Jesus ([Rev 12:17](#) and [14:12](#)).

9. Jesus confirmed the validity of the Sixth Commandment and taught us to go beyond its literal meaning ([Matthew 5:17-22](#)).

10. Jesus demonstrated compassion through care and healing, but never by killing a suffering person. He never promoted death over life ([John 10:10](#)).

11. "Mercy killing" is unbiblical. Loving our neighbours includes not ending their lives ([Romans 13:8-10](#)).

12. We should look after the vulnerable and refrain from killing them ([Jeremiah 22:3](#)).

13. We are called to be actively involved in rescuing those at risk of being killed ([Proverbs 24:11-12](#)) and defend the cause of the vulnerable ([Psalm 82:3-4](#)).

14. Our response to suffering should be to trust in God ([Romans 15:13](#)), pray about everything and focus on the positive ([Philippians 4:6-9](#)). Then we will receive joy, peace and hope amid our circumstances. We should live a life of love ([Ephesians 5:1-2](#)), bear each other's burdens ([Galatians 6:2](#)) and do what we can to meet others' needs ([Matthew 25:35-45](#)).

15. We can look forward to a new heaven and earth without suffering ([Revelation 21:1-5](#)).

16. We should not fear death ([Romans 8:37-39](#)) nor hasten our own death, because our bodies are not our own ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)).

The last verse of *In Christ Alone*¹³ sums it up well:

*"No guilt in life, no fear in death –
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home –
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand."*

What can you do to help?

Legalised euthanasia is by no means a 'lost cause' or inevitable: dozens of euthanasia bills have successfully been defeated in New Zealand and overseas! The key to success is being informed and proactive. It's also important to show the media and politicians that there is significant opposition to euthanasia and to ensure anti-euthanasia arguments are being represented in each debate. Here are some ways you can help:

1. Be informed. Sign up to the Euthanasia-Free NZ newsletter. Send us your questions.¹⁴

2. Help to inform others by sharing information on social media and elsewhere.

3. Help raise our credibility by 'liking' our Facebook page¹⁵, following us on Twitter¹⁶ and becoming a member of Euthanasia-Free NZ¹⁷. The media and politicians take these numbers as an indication of support for our cause.

4. Write letters to the editor and comment on online articles.

5. Attend talks on euthanasia and ask probing questions for the benefit of the audience.

6. Support life-friendly politicians, not only by giving them your vote, but also in practical ways between elections. Encourage them and pray for them.

7. Pray for decision makers, organisations on the frontline and for those who are suffering without hope. Pray for those who are pushing destructive legislation.

8. Help to relieve physical and psychological suffering in your community.

Brian Johnson wrote in *Death as a Salesman*:

"In contemplating assisted suicide, society is considering a dramatic departure from the values that teach us to respect and protect the vulnerable and the innocent. But remember that society isn't govern-

PRO-LIFE FACTS

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident, stood up for the unborn. He was hung by the Nazis. There are striking similarities between the Nazi holocaust that brought more than six million Jews to Auschwitz and other concentration camps to be murdered, and the abortion holocaust in which sixty million unborn children are killed every year in surgical abortions alone. The Jewish holocaust and the abortion holocaust emanate from the same culture of death, which denies the inalienable right to life endowed by God on every human being from the moment of conception, regardless of gender, culture, age, education, religion, developmental stage, socio-economic status, or any other facet of human existence. No particular group of people has more, or less, right to life than any other group. Those who don't learn from history are bound to repeat it. Over the main entrance gate at Auschwitz were the words in German, "Work makes you free". This was a lie. In fact, this was where Jewish people were imprisoned, devalued, abused and deprived of their lives. The premise of abortion might be summarised in a similar lie: "Abortion makes you Free."

ment officials; society is really just normal people like you and me. As you evaluate assisted suicide, consider carefully, for lives are at stake. Ultimately, the life you save may even be your own."¹⁸

Notes

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- 11 Meuhlenberg, B. 'Palliative care versus euthanasia'. Viewed on 17 December 2014, <http://billmuehlenberg.com/2010/09/25/palliative-care-versus-euthanasia/>
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- 13 'In Christ Alone', Getty and Townend, Kingsway Music, 2001.
- 14 To sign up or ask questions, please e-mail admin@euthanasiafree.org.nz or write to PO Box 47773, Ponsonby, Auckland, 1144.
- 15 See <https://www.facebook.com/EuthanasiaFreeNZ>
- 16 See <https://twitter.com/EuthFreeNZ>
- 17 See <http://euthanasiadebate.org.nz/become-a-member/> or write to PO Box 47773, Ponsonby, Auckland, 1144.
- 18 Johnson, B. P. *Death as a salesman: What's wrong with assisted suicide*. 2nd ed. New Regency Pub, Sacramento, 1998, p. IX.

Renée Joubert is the executive officer of Euthanasia-Free NZ, a nationwide secular organisation leading the campaign against the legalisation of euthanasia and assisted suicide in NZ. She welcomes your questions and comments. More information can be found at www.euthanasiafree.org.nz or by contacting her at renee@euthanasiafree.org.nz

GO BACK ONCE MORE TO HOLLAND

(Nog N Keer Terug)

We invite you to join us on one of our exciting fully escorted tours of Holland, Belgium, France and Luxembourg in the spring/summer of 2015

The tour offers you the opportunity to combine your interest in all things beautiful in Europe with free time to visit family or friends.

What makes our tours so very attractive:

1. Small groups - only nine people in each group.
2. Personally escorted by a guide who takes care of everything every day.
3. Local guides with local knowledge in the cities exclusively for our group.
4. Our groups typically comprise a mix of solo travellers and couples so if you choose to travel by yourself you will not be travelling alone.
5. All accommodation and entrance to events bookings taken care of before you arrive in Europe.
6. We assist you with Passports, Airline tickets, Travel Insurance and we look after lots of other bits and pieces for you. Once in Europe we meet you at the airport and your holiday begins.

There is nothing for you to do but enjoy yourself. No hassles.

At the end of the holiday we come back with you to the airport and assist you with seating choices and luggage arrangements. You don't have to worry about anything.

The tour is composed of 2 weeks of day tours in Holland, 2 weeks of free / family time and 2 weeks visiting historical Brugge and Ghent in Belgium and on to Paris, Luxembourg and Trier. In Paris we will visit most of the iconic landmarks and take an afternoon and evening look at Paris from the summit of the Eiffel Tower. Yes there will be plenty of stops along the way for coffee and cake, sightseeing and photo opportunities, all at a leisurely pace. No crack of dawn starts for us.

You must be 55 plus and independently mobile as the tour takes in some pleasant city and garden walks. There are only a few seats left so you must act quickly. The first tour starts on 16th April and the second tour starts on the 9th June.

For more details and an itinerary contact Robert or Claire Spits, email: robertspits@gmail.com or phone on +61 3 418 520 (if unanswered leave a message and we will return your call)

Please note that 'nog n keer terug travel companions' is a not for profit venture.

Since 2009 we have conducted spring/summer tours to the Netherlands for Christian Seniors from Australia. We had received an enquiry from someone in New Zealand and we thought it would be nice to make this offer to Christian Seniors in New Zealand as well. The tours are called **Travel Companions**, a name that reflects what the groups are as we travel together.

Travel Companions is not a business and we make absolutely no profit from the tours at all. In fact, we put in many hours in both Australia and in the Netherlands putting together the itineraries and bookings before each tour starts. because **Travel Companions** is not for profit the tours are around half the cost of regular tour operators.

We do enjoy being able to give our migrant seniors and sometimes their adult children an opportunity to go back to the Netherlands and beyond with a completely personally escorted tour. The tours are a service to people who would never be able to do this trip on their own, but in a small close knit group of Christian Seniors lead by a personal escort/ driver it is possible.

The group including ourselves enjoy not just the places we visit but also the warm Christian fellowship we share together.

The tours also make it possible for people to visit with family and/or old friends in the Netherlands, maybe for the last time. For some going to church and worshipping in Dutch is a very nostalgic experience. So this year, 2015 we hope Lord willing and health permitting to do the same again.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings

THE GLEANINGS TEAM:

Odette De Kock –
Auckland Presbytery

Yvonne Walraven –
Wellington Presbytery

Frances Watson –
South Island Presbytery

Collated and Edited by Harriet Haverland

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Rev. Hans Vaatstra attended the General Assembly of the Grace Presbyterian Churches in New Plymouth on behalf of the RCNZ.

The Palmerston North congregation voted to call the **Rev. Paul Archbald** of Silverstream to serve as their minister of the Word and Sacraments.

Rev. Bruce Hoyt preached his last sermon in Oamaru on December 7th, officially retiring a week later. He and his wife Lois then packed up in preparation for their move to Christchurch where they have purchased a home. Please remember the Oamaru congregation in your prayers as they continue the search for a minister to replace Rev Hoyt.

Mr Ryan Sparks, a graduate of Covenant Seminary, his wife Jenni and their three children visited Bucklands Beach for a few weeks in October and November 2014. The Bucklands Beach congregation voted in favour of a proposal from their Session to ask Mr Ryan Sparks to serve as a Vicar in their church under Rev. Dirk van Garderen. Mr Sparks accepted this request. He will be asked to follow the normal pathway leading to ordination in our denomination: a preliminary examination to declare him a candidate for ministry (after being here about 8 months) and, should he be successful, an official call can be made. Upon acceptance and a final examina-

tion by the Presbytery, he would (DV) be ordained.

Rev. Norm & Mrs Wilma de Jong returned to the U.S., having spent three months “filling in” in Hastings.

Rev. Tom & Mrs Jean Tyson will arrive (DV) end of January 2015 to help out in Hastings for a period of three months.

Julian Dykman’s Preliminary Examination was sustained. We are thankful to the Lord for strengthening and enabling Julian and Melinda through this process. This means Julian is now available for call as a minister in the RCNZ and CRCA. Julian and Melinda will be visiting Foxton and Wellington Reformed Churches, and will also be visiting a couple of churches in Tasmania in mid-January.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Christchurch: Structural engineering work on the new church building is now underway whilst the Building Committee is still working with the Council and seeking to address issues which have been raised regarding the resource consent. Please be in prayer for the Cornwall Street Church building project.

The Reformed Church of **Foxton** has voted to go ahead with building their own church on a property they already own on Main Street Foxton. This would be the first time the congregation has had its own building!

North Shore: Excavations to shift a sewer line and for the preparation of new foundations were underway for the church extension. The worship services have moved to Westminster Christian school. The new address is 30 Westminster Gardens, Unsworth Heights.

Christchurch: A new Baptist church has been planted in Rolleston and they are using – and very much appreciating – Sing to the Lord as their hymnal.

MISSIONS

Still Praying? Our CRCA mission base in Honiara, Solomon Islands, really does need a director. In the past few months you may have been praying whether God is leading you to offer yourself for this service. If you’d like to lead a little team of hard working missionaries, if you

love the Lord’s people, if serving poor communities of Christians in a beautiful but needy country just three hours from Brisbane would be fulfilling, if you’d be excited helping teams of eager short term missionaries who come from New Zealand or Australia ... you’re just the person we need! Have a chat soon with Peter van der Schoor (03 6229 3331) or send him an email vdschoor@inter-node.on.net

ACTS OF SERVICE & DEACONAL

Andrew Van Leeuwen received an official commendation from the District Commander of Police at a public ceremony outside the Christchurch City Council Building. In September this year, a bus carrying 17 school children collided with a milk tanker in Cheviot. On impact the bus driver and a six year old passenger were flung from the bus onto

LADIES PRESBYTERIAL

— ADVANCE NOTICE —

When:

Saturday, 21 March 2015,
9.30 – 3.00 pm

Where:

Reformed Church of
Wainuiomata

Topic:

“Bound – Now Free”
New Life in Christ

Mark your calendars for a day of fun and fellowship with other ladies of the Wellington Presbytery.

More details to follow.

the road way. The bus then continued to circle the intersection and headed towards where the bus driver and the child lay. Andrew ran into the road and helped the bus driver onto the footpath (whilst another person retrieved the child) as the bus headed towards them. In his commendation, the District Commander noted that "Mr van Leeuwen's fearless actions undoubtedly saved the life of the bus driver and Police commend him for this. These actions embody bravery and community spirit of the highest order". (Christchurch)

Jesus said "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" {Matthew 5:16}

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

Buckland's Beach: The attendance of the LABS classes increased strongly in the last few weeks of 2014. The power and impact of this ministry is very real.

Hastings: A big thank you to everyone who helped make the Seniors Christmas morning tea a success! We could not have done it without you – baking, gifts, transport, musicians, setting up and serving and all the bits in between. We had again a large group of over 20 people from Parkvale Estate come and join us and received apologies from those unable to make it. Thank you to the Sunday School for singing. It is a highlight for everyone to hear them and see them all dressed up! Thank you – Mission Committee

North Shore: We continue to be en-

couraged as we teach the LABS classes. In the first few weeks of the last term for 2014 the amount of students more than doubled, we are finding that people are bringing their friends along. It is true that we don't know what to expect from week to week. We are running 3 classes: one for those people who have very poor English, a middle class on Basic Bible studies for people who communicate quite well, and a class on the Gospel of Mark for those that speak good English but want to get better. All appear to enjoy the use of the Bible – even though not all are Christians. Please pray for this work.

Wellington: Church neighbourhood outreach opportunity – 'And who is my neighbour?' We would again like to reach out to the church. We would like to deliver a special Christmas gift of home baking along with a card inviting them to join with us in the Christmas Carol and Christmas Day services.

CAMPS, CONFERENCES, CONVENTIONS

Shepherding the Heart Tour: In March 2015 Ted and Margy Tripp will DV tour NZ and speak in Auckland (March 20th to 23rd), Palmerston North, Hastings and Christchurch. In an age of countless parenting philosophies and theories, you can't afford to miss hearing solid biblical teaching on this vitally important area. Tedd is the author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart* and together they have written *Instructing a Child's Heart*. Tedd's

books and videos are used throughout the world. For more information Telephone: 06 876 6079 or 027 479 0002 or visit <http://shepherdingthehearttour.co.nz/>

Auckland Ladies' Presbyterial Day: March 28th

Hamilton Easter Convention: April 3rd and 4th

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The RTC has undertaken a study to consider how best to offer its courses in a rapidly changing study environment. Please pray that the Lord would guide this process so that the college can continue to serve our churches effectively – especially in training men for pastoral ministry. The Graduation Ceremony will take place DV at the start of next year on February 27th, with Rev. Peter Hastie, Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne, as the guest speaker. Dr Phillip Scheepers had been in New Zealand to speak at the Reformation Conference in Avondale, after which he travelled overseas to conduct some research as part of his Long Service Leave. The RTC hosted a group of around 30 people from across Australia, New Zealand, and the Solomon Islands to explore future ministry opportunities at the EXPLORE conference. In 2015 it will again be possible to undertake theological study from your own home. For more information, please contact our registrar, Henk de Waard: hdewaard@rtc.edu.au



**Ladies Presbyterial 28th
March 2015 Putokohu
Reformed Church**

Registration & Morning tea at 10am

Mark your calendars for a day of fun and fellowship with other ladies of the Auckland Presbytery.

SAVE YOUR SEAT FOR THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION AT 11:00am



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

Teacher Vacancy

Silverstream Christian School is seeking the services of a Reformed Primary/Intermediate School Teacher for the 2015 school year. Silverstream Christian School is a school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed Faith. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed Faith and Reformed Christian Education. This is an opportunity to be a part of a vibrant covenant community.

If you have any questions or wish to apply please email: board@silverstreamchristian.school.nz or phone Koen van der Werff on (04) 5297 558

ACTIVITIES

Wellington: Calling all our Church Ladies – This year the end of year Fellowship meeting will be hosted by the Wellington Group. Ladies of all ages are invited to an evening of fellowship, friendship and fun, to be held in the new lounge of our church building. Please encourage all to come and spend an evening with us in our new extension and let us serve you.

Short report of the Auckland Presbytery

The Auckland Presbytery met for its final meeting of 2014 on Friday the 28th of November at the Pukekohe Reformed Church. The meeting was opened with the singing of "Hallelujah, Praise Jehovah", the reading of Psalm 146, a brief devotional based on that Psalm from the Rev. D. van Garderen, and prayer. After the checking of credentials, the Rev. John Rogers was appointed moderator for the meeting.

Looking ahead to 2015, it was noted that the Reformed Church of Hamilton will be organising the Men's Study Day. This past year, the men of Presbytery had the joy of meeting together with brothers from the Grace Presbyterian Churches for a time of fellowship and instruction at

Grace Theological College for a seminar entitled *Shepherding for Growth in a Post-Christian culture* with special guest speakers Zach Eswine and Greg Perry, past and current lecturers at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. Those in attendance expressed thanksgiving for the opportunity to fellowship together with brothers of like faith.

Church visitation reports were presented and discussed regarding each of the congregations of the Presbytery. After a time of mutual thanksgiving for the Lord's work among us, being spurred on by the example of our brethren in the Grace Presbyterian Churches who, despite their small size, have demonstrated a great commitment to see new churches begun, a general desire was expressed to see the churches of Presbytery give greater concentrated thought and prayer towards the possibilities of church planting efforts.

A report was received from our synodical examiner regarding the preliminary examination of Mr. Julian Dykman in the Christchurch Presbytery in October and the upcoming examination on 13 December. The meeting also received a report from the National Diaconate Committee reminding us of the upcoming Compassionate Catalogue giving opportunity and the special Christmas offering for the Henry Murray School for the Deaf. Mr. Pieter van der Wel was re-appointed for another term as clerk

of Presbytery.

The meeting was concluded with prayer by the Rev John Haverland.

Peter J A Moelker

Short report of the Wellington Presbytery

The Wellington Presbytery met on Saturday 1 November 2014 at the Reformed Church of Hastings. The moderator was the Rev Paul Archbald.

The meeting went from 9.30 a.m. and finished before lunch. The gist of it consists of the following six items:

1. Youth Liaison Report: this report, presented by Mr C van der Meulen, was received by common consent. Presbytery adopted the following motions: 1) that Wellington Session oversee the 2015 Queen's Birthday camp, and 2) that Hastings Session oversee the 2016 NYC.

2. OMB Liaison Report: The Rev Kloosterman presented a verbal Report on the move to develop new oversight for those who replace the Hagoorts and the continued work regarding Board placements.

3. Report Counsellor Vacant Churches: Presbytery received a written report from the Rev Goris for the Wellington Reformed Church, and verbal reports from the Revs Vaatstra for Foxton, and Kloosterman for Hastings. As for Foxton, Mr Vaatstra commented, on the building and calling programmes in Foxton – these are well under way. As for Hastings, Mr Kloosterman expressed words of appreciation regarding the work of the Rev de Jong, and the well-being of the congregation, as well as the number of young people preparing for Profession of Faith.

4. Presbytery adopted a motion from the Reformed Church Wellington that the hymn, "O God beyond All Praising" be approved.

5. The Reformed Church of Masterton notified Presbytery regarding the Preliminary Exam of Vicar Mr Ben MacDonald to be held in July 2015.

6. The Reformed Church of Silverstream expressed concern regarding the appointment of the main speaker at the 2014 YAC camp. Particular concern was expressed regarding his position (his interpretation and views) on creation and evolution.

Pieter van Huyssteen

PRO-LIFE FACTS

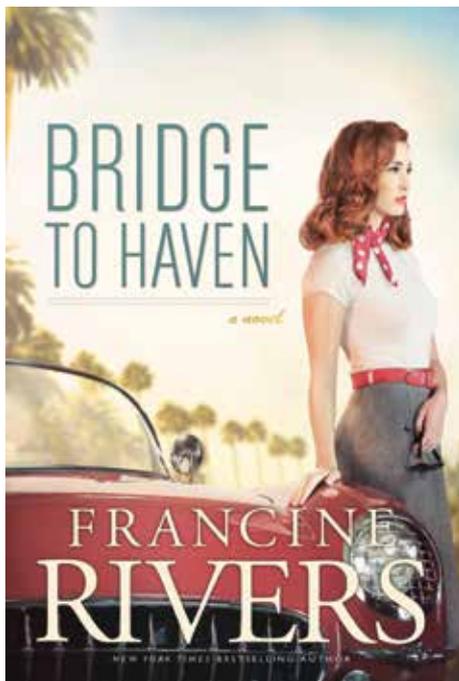
Right to Life is disappointed that the National Council of Women [NCW], which has an outstanding record over 120 years of promoting the interests of women, has adopted at its recent National Conference a remit calling on the government to decriminalise abortion. Decriminalising abortion will not improve women's lives but instead would intensify the harm done to women, children and families in our society. The consequences of decriminalisation are:

- It would remove abortion from the Crimes Act. It would no longer be a crime to kill an unborn child.
- The killing of the child would be a health issue and the state would have no interest in protecting the right to life of the child - which would be the property of the mother.
- An abortion could be for any reason or no reason, effectively for the full nine months of pregnancy.
- Increased discrimination against the disabled would be more likely as children who receive a pre-natal diagnoses, e.g. Down syndrome or Spina Bifida, could be killed up to birth.
- Discrimination against females may increase as the law would not prevent sex selection abortions, which tend to favour male children.

Bridge to Haven

Francine Rivers, Tyndale House Publishers 2014

Reviewed by Sonja Ploeg and Moana Leenders



It was with eager anticipation that we began to read *Bridge to Haven*, Francine Rivers' latest novel, set in America in the late 1930s. We were quickly pulled into the story which begins in the small town of Haven as Pastor Zeke rescues Abra, a wailing newborn abandoned under a bridge. We follow Abra through her childhood and her turbulent journey through adolescence which leads her to the glitz and glamour of Hollywood in its early days.

Francine Rivers wrote, "My prayer is that the story ... will draw you into a closer relationship with the God who sent His only Son, Jesus, to die for you so that you might live forever in Him. Our dreams of happiness are fulfilled only in Him. May you step out in faith and cross the bridge to the haven of rest God provides."

Sadly, we feel that this book had the opposite effect. 80% of the story is set before her conversion, and we travel through Abra's life experiencing her deep pain of rejection, followed by the devastating repercussions of living a promis-

cuous lifestyle as she moves from one abusive relationship to another. Francine Rivers is quite graphic in her descriptions, and we found this disturbing. Ephesians 5:11-12 exhorts us to "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret." In some of her previous books, Francine Rivers writes about difficult topics in an effort to expose them, yet in a less graphic manner than here. Whilst one could argue that Rivers is still exposing the darkness of Abra's lifestyle, it is out of balance with the Biblical perspective of her sin.

Abra eventually becomes a Christian and marries Josh. Like all young men in the novel, Josh's primary attraction to Abra is sexual. Although Josh may be a Christian, he is yet another man who uses Abra to fulfil his own dreams, rather than seek her personal spiritual growth. As a Christ-like figure, Josh is very disappointing. Jesus loves us unconditionally, but sadly for many women who have been awfully abused, the 'happily-ever-after' will not come until heaven.

Abra's life seems to present an unrealistic portrayal of conversion and the Christian life. Suddenly, towards the end of the story, Abra is dramatically converted, falls in love, and gets married to an amazing (somewhat fairy tale) Christian man. Suddenly Abra's life seems to be magically transformed, without any repercussions of her previous lifestyle in her marriage. This seems so shallow. Where was the pain and regret? What message is this giving our daughters? That we can sin all we want without any repercussions? No! God's grace and the immense depth of His forgiveness are truly amazing and undeserved gifts, which Francine Rivers discusses in this book. However, we still live with the consequences of our sin. God's Word exhorts us constantly to live according to His will as this is what is best for us. Young Christian women reading this may be led to the false conclusion that they can expect no negative repercussions for wrong choices.

We were deeply disturbed at the explicit detail that Francine Rivers went into describing their wedding night. Ephesians

5:3 says, "But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." We would certainly not be wanting our daughters to read this sort of content, and were disturbed to find it within the pages of 'Christian' literature.

Sadly as a work of fiction, Rivers fails to draw us in to the story and feel much empathy for Abra. Abra suffers much throughout the story, but the reader is left frustrated with her apathy towards her own life. It is not often that a novel evokes such a strong reaction in either of us. Romans 12:2 tells us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." This book has large sections that conform to this world, and do not encourage us to renew our minds in Christ. We therefore cannot recommend this book.

PRO-LIFE FACTS

Pregnancy Options & Help is a Christian charitable group that supports women during pregnancy. Starting as a way of responding to NZ's abortion crisis, the group tries to bring the love of Jesus into all areas of women and children's lives. They run a 24 hour helpline (0800UCHOOSE) and offer supported accommodation with a family. Currently three young women are staying – two pregnant and one with a child. Sometimes they care for babies until things improve for mother and sometimes they set up shared care arrangements. A generous midwife and lawyers are a huge help. Did you realise a non-resident woman can be billed up to \$10,000 to have her baby in a NZ hospital? The Society receives occasional funding but runs almost totally on donations. Check out their website, UCHOOSE.org.nz.

Our ministry in Mbale, Uganda

Eric W. Tuininga

What is your goal in life? What are you living for? If your goal is to glorify God and enjoy him, then here is an opportunity: glorify God with me for what he is doing in Uganda.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Uganda was a land of spiritual darkness. No one knew Jesus Christ. No one was forgiven. No one had hope of everlasting life. But God the Father has loved the tribes of Uganda, and in deep love and mercy, he has sent his gospel. Beginning in the late 1800s, many people from many tribes turned to Jesus Christ as their Savior. Many passed from death to life and from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. However, by the 1930s the church was in danger of falling into a cultural Christianity, as has happened in so many other nations.

But in God's grace, in the 1950s a large revival swept across much of Uganda – a revival that emphasized repentance, forgiveness in the blood of Christ, and living a holy life. The effects of this revival continue today. For example, when you meet a Christian, a common question is "Are you born again?" For many people, a non-born-again Christian is one who belongs to a church but is not seriously following Jesus Christ. A born-again Christian is one who has truly repented and is committed to following Jesus. Today in Uganda, there are millions of people in both groups, as well as millions of Muslims.

In this spiritual dynamic, we have the immense privilege of ministering the good news of Jesus Christ! The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is working in two areas of Eastern Uganda: Mbale and Karamoja. In this article, I will be describing some of the work in Mbale. Mbale is a fast-growing city of about 100,000 souls, with hundreds of thousands more

in the rural areas around the town. Our main focus of ministry here is on leadership training – especially training pastors. In many churches, pastors have little to no training. There is a great danger of sincere zeal without knowledge, and pastors are aware of this. They have an eagerness to receive theological training and a hunger to know God's Word. It is such a privilege to train pastors in this context!

The OPC training center here is Knox Theological College (KTC). We teach courses in theology, biblical studies, and practical ministry. Currently there are about twenty-five students, half of whom are Presbyterian, from denominations such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Africa, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Uganda, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Uganda. Others come from evangelical or Pentecostal churches with colorful names such as Renewal Spiritual Center of God

and Christ Focus Church. Although they come from different churches and different tribes (at least six different tribes are represented), these brothers have a number of things in common: an openness to being taught from God's Word, a hunger for solid theology, and a zeal to honor Christ in their ministries. Christ is bringing reformation to various churches, giving pastors the knowledge to resist common false teachings such as the prosperity gospel. Please pray that Christ would bless this effort at KTC to advance his kingdom and build his church in Uganda!

Another aspect of the ministry in Mbale is a special relationship we have with a small denomination called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Uganda (OPCU). I regularly preach in their pulpits, help with evangelism, attend presbytery meetings, and provide counsel and encouragement to these brothers and sisters. There are eleven congrega-



Eric Tuininga leading Saturday morning men's Bible study in Mbale, Uganda.



Eric Tuininga leading worship in Mbale, Uganda

tions and church plants from three different tribes, with plans to expand to a twelfth location soon. Most of these congregations worship with dirt floors, wooden benches or mats on the floor, mud walls, and no instruments. They see pictures of churches in America (in movies, on Facebook, etc.) and marvel, "Is that luxurious building a church?" The church in Mbale meets for worship outdoors – about one hundred people together under the shade trees. One area of praise in the OPCU is how Christ is raising up godly leaders. Two years ago, there were only four ordained pastors to serve these churches. Last year another brother was ordained, and recently four brothers completed their theological training and are now moving toward ordination.

A number of these congregations have started Christian schools. There are four small Christian schools teaching nursery (kindergarten) and some P1 and P2 (first and second grade). It was a privilege recently to hear children from one school reciting the Children's Catechism!

Would young men in America go to seminary if they knew that upon graduation no church could pay them a salary? Perhaps a man might find a tent-making job, but what if the unemployment rate were over 50 percent? Perhaps he could operate his own business, but men gifted to be pastors are not always gifted in running a business, and to run a business well demands so much time that there is little time left for the church. This is the difficult situation in many congregations in Uganda. Pray for the churches to grow and thrive, both spiritually and financially, so they will be able to provide enough for their pastors to be free from worldly care and employment. Also, praise God for pastors who sacrifice earthly wealth for the sake of Christ and his church! So many times when I visit pastors and other believers here in Uganda, I think of what Jesus said: "The first will be last, and the last will be first." These believers, who have so little and struggle so much, will surely be rewarded by Christ on the final day!

A dynamic of life in Mbale is the presence of Islam. It has been a great honor to meet believers who have come from a Muslim background; they endure persecution and opposition from their families, yet cling to Christ. Recently I was assisting with membership interviews in a church plant, and a twelve-year-old girl desired to be baptized, although she knew that her father would be very angry. She gave a good testimony of her faith in Christ. Her mother was too afraid to permit her to be baptized at this time, since their entire clan is Muslim. Please pray for these sisters!

One verse that continually comes to my mind is "Love as

brothers" (1 Peter 3:8 niv). Sometimes, when I meet Ugandans who have a nice house, or who are able to afford medical care, I ask them where they find their money. Often the answer is that they have a brother or uncle who lives in the United Kingdom or America and sends money to support the extended family back in Uganda. They can invest that money and improve their standard of living. This is how family members love each other, even among unbelievers. One of the amazing fruits of the gospel is that, as Christians, we become brothers and sisters with one another, a brotherhood that is far deeper than language, tribe, or nationality. Christ was not ashamed to call us brothers, and he gave up his wealth so that we might be raised up to glory. What would you do if your brother or sister were living in a small, one-room apartment with four children – or if they were living with a dirt floor and had no access to decent medical care and became very sick? The OPC seeks to show some of this "love as brothers" through an arrangement with a local Christian medical clinic where OPCU members can receive treatment.

Please join with us in praising God for his work in Uganda. He is great and awesome! He is worthy of praise! We are not worthy of the great privilege of serving God in this place, but God is able to use us to help our brothers and sisters to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Satan's attacks are continual, as he tries to seduce the church here through materialism, worldliness, paganism, Islam, nominal Christianity, and cults such as Mormonism. But God is at work building his church, gathering in his elect, and doing glorious things. Truly the harvest is plentiful and the workers few.

New Horizons, December 2014

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