

faith in
focus

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Pilgrims and strangers in this world

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Editorial

Christians should be like Abraham who, when he left Ur of the Chaldeans, lived in the land of Canaan – the land of his sojourning. Or, dear Christian, are you very much at home right here? You may think it a strange question, but I believe it is one we need to ask ourselves constantly. Do you love this world too much, or do you feel like a pilgrim and stranger?

Given the fact that we are “earthly saints” – physically attached to this present world, we may be tempted to feel a wee bit too comfortable here. After all, we put down roots and build little empires that take on an appearance of permanency.

You may have left your homeland and come to New Zealand and decided to make it your permanent home. However, this is NOT your permanent home. Although you are a citizen of New Zealand, or some other country, your true and permanent citizenship is in Heaven with your LORD.

While you live here on earth, you have dual citizenship and belong to two kingdoms – one earthly, the other heavenly. If you are a New Zealand citizen, then you are a subject of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and a member of the Commonwealth. If you are a Christian, you are a subject of the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS, and a member of the church of all ages, which this KING purchased with His blood. One day soon, you will stand before the Lamb of God, in the presence of a countless multitude from every nation, clothed in white (royal) robes, singing His praises. There, you will be in your permanent home, enjoying the fruits of “sonship” in the glorious presence of your “Abba, Father”.

In the meantime, you are a pilgrim and stranger in this world. Our contributors write about some aspects of our pilgrimage as strangers in this world.

Mr Michael Flinn investigates Abraham's pilgrimage.

Mr David Waldron directs our thoughts to our permanent home.

Miss Simone Buob writes about the benefits of the book *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Mrs Sally Davey reviews *The Pilgrim's Progress From this World to That Which is to Come*.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt has a conversation with her child.

Feminine Focus will be written by Mrs Hoyt for the next few months while Mrs Davey has a bit of time off from writing the column.

Mr Harry Antonides writes a compelling series of articles about truth in our age.

Mr Paul Archbald tackles the serious issue of being unequally yoked.

Mrs Harriet Haverland and her team of “gleaners” keep us up to date with news from the churches.

Mr Michael J. Kruger reviews *A “New New Testament”*: Part 3, by Hal Taussig. Mr Jody O. Morris reviews *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals*, by Richard Mouw.

Mr Eric Tuininga, full-time missionary to Mbale, Uganda for the OPC, reports on events at Knox Theological College.

Images: p1, p5, p7, Mrs Sally Davey. Many thanks to Mr Vladimir Kievskiy for being a willing subject in these photos. p3, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, USA. <http://allart.biz/>

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.

Aliens and strangers

Michael Flinn

"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth ..."

(Hebrews 11:13)

These words are applied in the book of Hebrews to Abraham in particular. He was a man who lived by faith; and faith, as defined in Hebrews 11, is "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (vs.1). Faith is an acceptance of the word of God because it is God who speaks it. Faith does not need the reality of what is promised to be present before one believes and acts on that promise.

Make no mistake: it took great courage and commitment for Abraham to respond to God's promise in Genesis 12. Against the background of the table of nations in Genesis 10 and the dispersion of the peoples after their attempt to make a name for themselves by building a tower that reaches to heaven (11:47), God informs Abraham that he will make *him* into a great nation. What's more, God will make *Abraham's name great* (12:2) and all peoples on earth will be blessed through him (12:3). But for this to occur, Abraham has to leave his country, his people and his father's household and go to the land that God will show to him (12:1). This was no easy calling. Abraham was being effectively told to burn his bridges with his family, his country, and his past and find his security in God alone.

Believed God's promise

When he reached the land of Canaan, Abraham discovered that the reality of the situation was not exactly in sync with the promises God had given him. The land God had designated for him was occupied already by the Canaanites (12:6) and there were items of cultural and religious significance already in place

there. Nonetheless, Abraham believed God's promise that his offspring would be given this land (12:7) and he proceeded to build altars in Canaan, calling on the name of the Lord (12:8).

However, verse 10 of Genesis 12 tells us that there was a famine in the land and Abraham was forced to leave Canaan and travel to Egypt. Again, God's promise must have seemed out of step with the reality of Abraham's situation. Again, he had to trust and act not upon what he saw with his eyes but upon the promise of God alone. He was still on a journey.

As the journey continues, God makes another promise to Abraham. This time, he is told that he and his wife Sarah will have a son (15:4). There are only two problems: First, Sarah had borne Abraham no children all their married life (16:1). Second, he and Sarah are now in their latter years, beyond the age when children might be expected (17:17). Again, the promise and the reality seem to be at odds, and all Abraham can do is trust God's word.

When the child was born, it was time for rejoicing. Isaac was the miracle child, the child born outside all human expectation. Furthermore, he was the one on whom the further promises of God depended. God would establish his covenant with Isaac "as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him" (17:20). Here God is informing Abraham, in effect, that all the other promises he had received from the Lord would ultimately be realised through Isaac. Remember, Abraham was destined to become the father of not just one but *many nations* (17:6) and his descendants would be as the stars of the heaven for multitude (Gen. 15:5).

Faith tested

Imagine, then, the shock and bewilderment that Abraham must have felt when he received from God a command to kill Isaac in sacrifice. "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the



The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek, Peter Paul Rubens (1577 – 1640)

“The promises and the blessings associated with the covenant were both gracious and bountiful and every last one of them was fulfilled.”

mountains I will tell you about.” (22:2). Strictly speaking, of course, Isaac was not Abraham’s *only* son. He had another son called Ishmael. But Ishmael was not the child of promise and the covenant blessings and responsibilities would not be realised through him. From the point of view of God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants, Isaac was the *only* child. Everything else was bound up with his life and his future. Quite apart from the horror of even thinking about killing a son in sacrifice, let alone having to carry that out, Abraham is being asked to bring an end to all the promises in one fearful stroke. How can this be? How can God be asking this of him? Hebrews 11:19 tells us that Abraham reasoned God could raise Isaac from the dead. Of course he could. And he would have to if the other promises were to be realised. But why would God require such a thing?

From the comfort of our vantage point, we can say with equanimity that this was all designed to show in advance how God would later offer up *his* Son, his only Son, whom he loved. God himself would provide the Lamb for sacrifice and

he would not stay his hand. The offering would take place in this very region of Moriah, because this was the place where the temple in Jerusalem would be built centuries later (2Chron. 3:1). Of course! It all fits. But what did Abraham know of all this? This was the greatest test of faith that Abraham ever faced. It came after a lifetime of other tests. Time and time again, the patriarch had to take God’s word on trust, believing and expecting the promise apart from and even in spite of the reality that he faced in life.

Small beginnings

What of Abraham at the end after all those years of walking with God and trusting in him? How much did he have to show for it? After all, God had promised him and his descendants the land of Canaan, and it was on this basis that the patriarch had burned his bridges with his family and his homeland and begun his pilgrimage with the Lord. Well, all he possessed of this land was a field with a cave in which he could bury his dead. Hardly a significant land acquisition. And this was not achieved as a result of vic-

torious conquest. Abraham had to purchase this field from Ephron the Hittite at an exorbitant price (23:10-16).

Was God harsh and mean-spirited through all of this? Absolutely not. The promises and the blessings associated with the covenant were both gracious and bountiful and every last one of them was fulfilled. In fact, they are still being worked out today as the Gentiles continue to be brought into the Church (Galatians 3:29). Abraham is indeed the father of a multitude of nations and all peoples of the world are being blessed through him!

Moreover, Abraham’s life and his faith are a tremendous example to us all. They show us that there is much more to life than the things of this world. We too are on a journey with the Lord, and we too will receive our tests of faith along the way when the promises seem to be out of sync with the reality we are facing. Like Abraham, we need to take God’s word on trust and continue to walk with him. Like Abraham, we need to look for a heavenly city, living all the while as aliens and strangers in this world.

“If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

(Hebrews 11:15,16).

Mr Michael Flinn is a minister in the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Pilgrims and strangers in this world (2)

Heading for home

David Waldron

Have you ever been on a camping holiday, expecting a wonderful break away with sunshine, sizzling sausages on the barbeque and freshly-caught snapper for breakfast, only to get caught in torrential rain? The noise of the falling

water gets louder and the wind starts to make the guy ropes sing an eerie tune. Bucketloads of fluid are dumped on the flysheet, while the groundsheet starts to bubble up with the flood that is now flowing across your camping spot. It’s night-time and you don’t sleep a wink. When a dark grey dawn finally arrives

you are tired, everything is saturated, and there’s only one place you want to be: home.

Home is a place of familiar comfort, a personal reference point, a place of belonging. Home is a cosy, intimate, relaxed, ‘gezellig’ place where friends come to visit. When you hear the word

'home', you might think of the building where you now live, or the one you grew up in. Having a place that we call "home" is a basic, universal human desire. For some it is a 3-bedroom house on a quarter-acre section; for others an Inuit igloo, or a small North American condominium, a Mongolian yurt, or even a mansion on a sprawling English country estate. However, those who sleep on the streets of cities around the world have nowhere to call home.

'Home' is also a country with which we identify as a citizen. Whilst a kiwi is a nocturnal flightless bird, the word also describes a person who calls New Zealand 'home'. Not everyone has such a place. There are an estimated 12 million people worldwide who are 'stateless'; as refugees they don't belong anywhere and have no nation they can call 'home'.

The first homeless people on this earth were our ancestors, Adam and Eve. They lost their place of belonging in Eden and no one on earth has ever had a true home since. Theologian Donald Bloesch has described the difficulties of our sojourn on this earth by saying that *"our greatest affliction is not anxiety, or even guilt, but rather homesickness – a nostalgia or ineradicable yearning to be home with God"*¹.

Even the perfect man, Jesus Christ, could find no place of belonging in this world². When He became part of this creation, through His conception by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, He left His true home in the place called 'heaven'.

Our permanent home

The word 'heaven' in the Bible sometimes refers to the physical space above the earth; the atmosphere and the space beyond³. Heaven is also a Scriptural term for the holy dwelling place of God⁴. It is a divine workplace from which God sends blessings to His people⁵ and punishment on His enemies⁶. Heaven is also the abode of those creatures who worship God in close fellowship with their Almighty Creator. It is the permanent home which Jesus Christ promises to all those who belong to Him, a place prepared by the Son of God in His own Father's house⁷. It is called the 'new heaven and new earth'⁸ and is a place where God's home is permanently amongst His people, who will live physically in His glorious presence forever. The new heavens and new earth is a place of complete safety, enduring peace and abundant wealth⁹. It is a productive

realm of abundant life¹⁰; a domain of pure light where Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, will be seen in the flesh.

This will be a world without evil. The effects of sin on this groaning creation will be utterly abolished. There will be no more pain, no more crying, no more mourning and no more death. All that is troublesome in this life will be removed. In this eternal home there will be no more pride, no more malice, no more hating one another, no more hurting one another and no old age.

Some Christians have a very vague idea about what this heavenly home will be like. Others may even picture an ethereal emptiness, conjuring up mental images of an airy-fairy realm in the clouds. This is not the new earth which God has revealed to us in His Word.

The new world, which God promises for His people, will be this old world

“Understanding where you are heading makes every difference to the journey along the way.”

completely restored. This home will be a physical place, a renewed earth which will be partly familiar to us. That which is truly good in this world will be retained



whilst all that is not will be removed. We will have bodies like our present ones, only perfect, and not subject to decay. There will be ground beneath our feet and the staggering beauties of a new earth to behold with our physical senses.

The new heavens and new earth will not be static or boring, but dynamic and fascinating. As finite glorified human creatures we will spend forever progressively exploring the unfolding wonders of our infinite Creator God and the breath-taking wonders of all that he has remade. This will be a place where our deepest desires and longings are fully satisfied. Pastor John Piper has said *"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him"*¹¹. He will be perfectly glorified in the new heavens and the new earth. We will be perfectly satisfied in a home full of gladness, joy and universal peace¹².

Our true home

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the new earth is our true home. We are not citizens of this world. We do not belong here. We are pilgrims, sojourners, strangers on the land of this earth. Yet our lives, as God's people, are not aimless wanderings, but our journey has God-given purpose, meaning, and a glorious goal.

Understanding where you are heading makes every difference to the journey along the way. Have you been on a tramp or a climb with the aim of reaching a high vantage point, perhaps a mountain peak?

When you begin from the car park, the track may be a broad one with an easy gradient. Here in New Zealand it is likely to be enclosed by thick bush on either side and if it's summer on the West Coast, you'll likely have to contend with pesky sandflies en route. Further along, the way will steepen and you may find yourself slipping back with each step as loose stones or scree slide away under your feet. Then you reach a point where you can look up above the tree-line and see that the peak you wish to scale is still a very long way off.

There are many reasons why a travelling trumper may become discouraged on an alpine walk. In a similar way, there are also many reasons why a Christian pilgrim may struggle with motivation. It is the hopeful thought of that lofty peak from which the satisfied climber will survey the expansive surrounding landscape which keeps the weary feet moving. So likewise it is the anticipation of arriving at one's perfect, permanent home which keeps the Christian moving forward. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: *"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"*¹³.

Not home yet

Perhaps you are struggling in your Christian pilgrimage even as you read this article. It's not biting sandflies that bother

you, but you have been hurt by rumours and gossip. You're not slipping on loose scree rock, but you are battling to overcome a persistent sin. You look at the holy standard of living which God calls you to in His Word and it all seems overwhelming and you want to give up. You realise how little progress you have made and how far you have yet to go.

These are the times to remind yourself that you are not yet home and that your distress is like that of being battered around by the wind and rain on a camping trip. A tent-maker by trade, the Apostle Paul describes our present bodies as being like temporary shelters and our future homes as being in a permanent *"building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"*¹⁴.

One of the many privileges which I enjoy as a pastor is leading engaged couples through pre-marital counselling. During one of the early sessions, I generally ask the question "how much time are you spending with one another". I expect the answer to be something like "as much as we possibly can!" Betrothed couples want to be together; that's why they eagerly look forward to marriage!

When we look forward to going home, we are looking forward to being with Christ, our Heavenly Bridegroom. The best way to prepare for our homecoming is to spend time with the Lord now. We do this when we read His Word, we hear His truth preached, we study His wisdom, and when we pray. We also prepare for our homecoming when we spend time in fellowship with those fellow pilgrims who, like us, are looking for a true home apart from this earth. Like fellow trumppers on an uphill slog, our brothers and sisters in Christ serve the Lord as they encourage us when the route forward seems overwhelmingly difficult.

A foretaste of things to come

Fellow believer, whilst we have not yet arrived at our eternal home, spiritually we have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem¹⁵. The church is a foretaste of the fullness of our heavenly home to come. The worshipping covenant community is where we belong as we are all being prepared for our future place of permanent residency. The local church is the place where those who have faith (an assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen¹⁶) find a temporary home whilst being surrounded by a wicked and perverse generation. As sojourners, aliens and strangers on



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

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this earth, God's people "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them¹⁷".

Beloved fellow Christian, that city, that promised country, is our true and permanent home. Pilgrim, as you press on through the storms and strains of this life, always remember that you are heading for that home, but that you have not, as yet, arrived.

Notes

- 1 Donald Bloesch, *Theological Notebook* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989), 183
- 2 Matthew 8:20
- 3 usually as part of the phrase "heaven and earth" e.g. Genesis 14:19; Matthew 5:18
- 4 e.g. Revelation 4-5
- 5 e.g. Deuteronomy 26:15; Isaiah 63:15
- 6 e.g. Psalm 2:4; 11:4-7
- 7 John 14:1-3
- 8 Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1
- 9 Revelation 21:10-27

- 10 Revelation 22:1-5
- 11 John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1996), 50
- 12 Isaiah 65:25
- 13 Phil 3:13-14
- 14 2 Corinthians 5:1
- 15 Hebrews 12:22
- 16 Hebrews 11:1
- 17 Hebrews 11:16

Mr David Waldron is the minister in the Reformed Church of Hastings.

Pilgrims and strangers in this world (3)

A pilgrim's progress

Simone Buob

Some of you already know that I am a Swiss whom God led to New Zealand to be converted through many intensive Bible discussions with Paul and Sally Davey. Longing for more knowledge of His Word, I travelled to the United States and attended Greenville Seminary, where I did my Master's degree in Biblical Theology and Christian Education.

During most of my time in the States I lived with Tony and Kathleen Curto. Dr. Curto was one of my professors as well as my elder at the Covenant Community Orthodox Presbyterian Church that I attended. The one book he probably loves more than any other is *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. This book was written in the mid-17th century by an English pastor who was imprisoned for his faith. It is an allegory of the Christian life with all its joys and trials; and has been a delight to Christians all over the world ever since. It was Dr Curto who introduced me to it. He was leading us through the book in our adult Sunday School class; and Bunyan's story captivated me from the moment we entered the life of Christian, the main character in the book. I was so fascinated by it that I decided to teach it to my Sunday School kids, and Dr. Curto helped me with my lesson preparations. We spent much time discussing Bunyan's journey; and the more I learned, the more I marvelled.

Similar struggles

Ever since then *Pilgrim's Progress* has been one of the most important encouragements in my own Christian pilgrimage. How well I remember the burden on my back, the despair at feeling it and not knowing how to get rid of it. How well I remember the people around me ridiculing me for my struggle – and even more so for leaving the City of Destruction¹. How could I ever forget the Slough of Despond² and the many times I found myself in it? There have

been many a Worldly Wiseman, who have tempted me to take the easy path that doubtless would have brought me back together with the family I had left behind. How often have I stood at the foot of Hill Difficulty³, seeing the paths to the right and to the left, being tempted to take the easy one? And the valley of the shadow of death, I remember that place, too. How well I know the feeling of complete loss and loneliness; then the comfort of hearing the words "Though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow





The ladies' study group in Rankweil, Austria. The author is on the right.

of Death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." (Psalm 23:4)

I could go on and on ... there is not a page in Bunyan's book that did not move my heart. And why is that? There is not a paragraph in Bunyan's book that is not footnoted with Bible passages. He is leading us through God's Word in a most amazing, moving and understandable way. Where others write explanations in words, he writes them in allegories. And these helped my own understanding immensely. I identify so much with Christian, and recognise his struggles and his failures as my own. Every time God brings something difficult along my path, I remember Christian's pilgrimage and with it God's Word and His Promises. Then I feel encouraged and ready to climb Hill Difficulty, or to turn away from Worldy Wiseman. Then I know to use the key of prayer to escape from the Castle of Doubt⁴ or to be ready and not to sleep and lose my scroll⁵.

Back in Switzerland I attend the ERKWB (Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche Westminster Bekenntnis – which, translated into English, is the Westminster-Confessing Evangelical Reformed Church). My congregation is in Rankweil, just over the border in Austria. I was asked to lead a ladies study group. Their desire was for me to introduce them to some good theological books. As many of those books are not available in German, the

ladies wanted the study to be held in English.

Recent converts

Their English is not very good. Most of the ladies have no theological background at all, and many have gotten to know the Lord recently. They have grown up in a postmodern world, where good, solid churches are nearly non-existent. Most of them have unbelieving family members (fathers, husbands, children...) and are working daily with people who strongly promote liberal thinking in every regard. It is important to say that in all this they are no different than me. The only difference is that God has led me away and introduced me to wonderful teaching and fed me abundantly. He allowed me to stay at Palace Beautiful⁶ longer than I could have ever asked. But I always knew that I would have to leave the Palace and that the valley would be coming next. That would be a valley where good food is rare, but where I would be needed to help others that are even more starving than me.

I knew that *Pilgrim's Progress* would touch my friends' hearts as it did mine, for our roots are the same. If it helped me so much to carry on in my journey, it would doubtless be good nourishment for them too. I also knew that some of the ladies struggled to understand God's promises in His Word, and I was con-

vinced that Christian's pilgrimage would be a great help in that regard. It helped me to teach them much about the Bible without concentrating on a specific book; and to give them a good overview of its most important teachings.

It took us about one year to get through. We would read it together, then I would translate for them what they did not understand, and would expound the different allegories. I explained what they stood for, which Bible passages they were connected to, and how we have to understand them. I constantly tried to use examples from everyday life in my explanations, which was not hard, as *Pilgrim's Progress* is all about the Christian's everyday experiences.

Christian's journey has become to these ladies what it became to me – a very important help on their own pilgrimage. They were encouraged by the simple fact that a faithful man like Bunyan, who knew the Bible so much better than any of us, struggled just as much as we do. There were a few allegories that they found particularly helpful. For instance the one, where the devil is trying to put out the fire (work of grace) in our heart by pouring water over it. But the fire burns all the higher and hotter, as Christ is feeding it with oil at the same time. Or the chained lions in front of Palace Beautiful. The lions, which are an illustration for all the temptations

that come our way, seem so threatening. But God has chained them all. The ladies were also encouraged by the countless Bible passages we meditated upon.

Difficult questions

But we wrestled through many issues as well. One of them was that God has not chosen all mankind to be saved. Bunyan allows Christian to meet many people on the way that are religious and call themselves devout and good men, though they are lost in their misery and sin. Some of the ladies struggled with that. Why would God punish a person for eternity that is doing “no evil”, lives a proper life, supports the poor and helps where help is needed? *Pilgrim’s Progress* helped us to discuss this question thoroughly with every new ungodly character it introduced.

And another but similar point is the man in the iron cage. Christian meets him in Interpreter’s House. He was a man who formerly followed God but then turned away from the right path. Now he sits in the iron cage, knowing that his days are over, that he cannot repent. This, too, was an allegorical picture that caused lots of discussion. Is God not all-forgiving? And if God is the one hardening the heart then how can this man have a fair judgement? Those are complex theological questions that cause many of us to ponder and struggle at times. We tend to look at it too much with our human understanding – not realising that God sees the heart.

We all are sisters and brothers in Christ. It doesn’t matter where we were born, where we grew up and where we live now – we all are on the journey

to the Celestial City [heaven] – and we all struggle along the way. Therefore, Bunyan’s wonderful story, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, will be valuable to every one of us.

Notes

- 1 Bunyan’s image for this sinful world governed by the evil one (Christians leave it when they believe and follow Christ).
- 2 Bunyan’s image to describe a Christian’s place of great discouragement (it is as hard to get out of as a sticky swamp into which one may fall).
- 3 The place in Bunyan’s story where Pilgrim encounters many trials and temptations – all of which are intended to teach him perseverance, and faith.
- 4 The place where Christian and his friend Hopeful have been imprisoned by the Giant Despair.
- 5 Christians’s assurance that he is truly saved.
- 6 Palace Beautiful is an allegory of the Church of Christ, where Christian gets well taught in God’s Word and takes part in the Lord Supper.

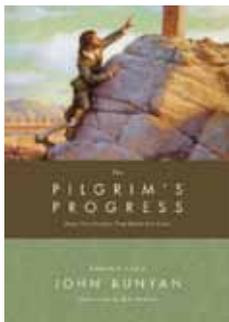
Pilgrims and strangers ... a review

The Pilgrim’s Progress From this World to That Which is to Come

by John Bunyan.

Edited by C. J. Lovik,
with illustrations by Mike
Wimmer (Crossway Books,
2009).

Reviewed by Sally Davey.



Have you ever read this wonderful story? (I don’t mean – do you know about it; or do you have a general idea of the storyline? I mean, have you read it yourself?) Perhaps you have heard about it, even often, and have always meant to read it some time. But perhaps the seventeenth-century language put you off and you never have.

Here, then, is a version for you. It has been lightly and sensitively edited by a writer who loves and respects Bunyan’s work. It reads, recognisably, as Bunyan’s book – most of the famous names and places are the same. All that has been changed are archaic words and difficult sentence structure. With the addition of thirty full-colour paintings by artist Mike Wimmer, the book has a seventeenth-century “feel”, but one that looks natural to modern readers. It is a really attractive edition; and in hardback would make an excellent gift for a new Christian or a young family.

My guess is that this would be a very good choice for a family to read together after dinner. With a discussion after each chapter on the lessons it contains for the Christian’s life, it would be an edifying serial for the whole family.

Don’t leave this classic of English Christian literature on the shelf – enjoy its blessings together.



Christian looks for a way of escape outside the City of Destruction.

Veronica Hoyt

Conversations with our children: *The Whale*

We sit outside drinking coffee and lemonade in mild April sunshine, in the recently-opened New Regent Street in the centre of Christchurch – basking in another milestone in our city’s rebirth. Life is good! What makes it even better, however, is the chance to discuss with my eleven-year-old son a film we have just seen in Alice-in-Videoland’s tiny revamped cinema, a documentary entitled *The Whale*. “Mum,” he says, “that is the most emotional film I’ve ever seen.” Indeed, it is a powerful film. It struck at a very deep level, not just for him but also for me.

Our discussion is rich, however, because we discuss the film in the context of this being God’s world, and is reminiscent of God’s direction to us in Deuteronomy 6.

The instruction in Deuteronomy 6, to constantly impress God’s Word on the hearts of our children, is also important today! Like the people of Israel, we, too, are to talk about what the Lord has

done, whether we are at home or on the road, when we lie down and when we rise up. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, we have an added challenge to do so in a gospel-focused way, reflecting afresh on what the Lord has done for us in the work of our Lord Jesus. This is critical, a challenge in which all parents must faithfully participate.

This challenge will be my focus in this series of articles, *Conversations with our Children*, in which I will seek to apply the instructions of Deuteronomy 6, with the gospel of our Lord Jesus at the heart of discussions with our child(ren). Of course, whatever I say in these articles is not the last word on the topic – any discussion with our children needs to be done sensitively and wisely, depending (for example) on the child’s age, personality, and the situation at hand. We should, however, do what we can to connect with our children, engage with them in order to help them figure out God’s world. My aim in this series is to provide some food for thought about the kinds of conversations you might have with your child – indeed, with any child you talk to.

The film

The Whale relates the story of a young orca whale (called Luna) that gets separated from its pod in Nootka Sound, Vancouver Island, Canada, and communicates the dilemma of what to do about this highly social, playful creature that is intent on forging a ‘friendship’ with humans. What to do with an animal also known as a ‘killer whale’ that comes up (too) close for human contact? Responses vary. The local First Nation (Canadian Indian) interpretation is to assume that the orca, which appears in the same week that their late chief dies, is a reincarnation of this dead man, especially because this had been predicted only a week before his death. Others – the local

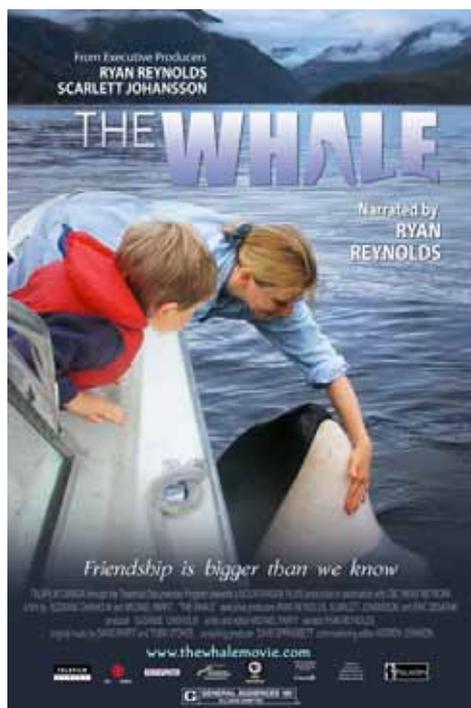
inhabitants of this tiny settlement and the summer holiday-makers who swarm the area, especially after news of Luna spreads – enjoy the novelty of touching the orca, making eye contact with him, even putting their hands into his huge mouth and stroking his tongue. Others, however, are not as excited about this unusual phenomena. Various boaters are outraged at the damage he causes to their boats. More significantly, it is not long before the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) forbids any contact between humans and this animal. No-one is to touch him, or even look at him, something easier said than done with this playful animal. Indeed, the DFO needs to pay ‘stewards’ to keep people away from the whale.

To some extent, *The Whale* is about the clash between ordinary men and women (including those from Canada’s First Nation) and the (government) DFO. Indeed, the DFO is depicted as not understanding the local situation, thus making significant (and, at times, foolish) bureaucratic decisions, remotely. The film relays the story of the little guy against the big guy, where the little guy wins because the government eventually backs down (to some degree) and at least allows the orca to stay in the area, rather than forcibly removing him from the area, possibly for an aquarium at a marine park. Various problems remain, however.

It’s a film with plenty of action and tension. It also raises deeper questions, however, that my son and I talk about in the April sunshine.

Fallen creation

We agree that the film’s setting is stunning: mountains, bright green in summer and snow-laden in winter; inlets of the sea, mostly calm – sometimes shown in the bright sunshine of mid-day, at other occasions in the stillness of dusk or even at night. The orca, too, is



amazing: its size, its ability to dive and frolic and swim with such smoothness and speed, and its incredible ability to link with human beings. This is God's creation in all its glorious splendour.

And yet ... There is a proviso, and it is this that is central to the heartbreak that this film portrays and where most of its tension resides.

The Whale does not depict this magnificent specimen in a perfect world. First of all, Luna is separated from his pod. The film comments that, unlike human families, whale families don't split up but stay together for life (mums, dads, grandparents, uncles, aunts, children). However, for some inexplicable reason this little whale gets 'lost,' separated from his family. Various details draw out the pathos of this separation. For example, scientists ascertain that each night this lost orca sends out calls to his family – calling, but each time receiving no answer. Moreover, despite his best (and persistent) efforts, Luna is unable to connect in a satisfactory way with human beings. Communication between this animal and humans is limited and inconsistent, and so much of what is 'said' is not understood. He needs to be with other whales in order to properly thrive.

Even keeping in mind the bias in filming techniques, what this film portrays is heartbreaking. It is another reminder that creation, too, is a victim to our sinfulness. As Romans 8 states, creation groans in travail. It, too, needs rescuing.

Fallen rulers

Not only does this sea creature exist in a fallen world, but the human beings involved in this saga are also fallen. What becomes very clear in this film is humankind's limited understanding of the animal world. What do we really know?

This is obvious in the First Nation's response, which mixes traditional animism into this modern-day phenomenon. This is clearly wrong, something that an eleven-year-old can grasp. However, the DFO also sends mixed messages. It has a special charge (backed by Canadian law) to take care of (rule over) this situation, but the film portrays how little they understand this situation. Their solution is to legislate that no-one is to have anything to do with the whale. How can we know what is best for this animal, they ask; and they therefore insist and enforce (to the tune of a \$100,000 fine) that no one has any contact with this

animal. This ruling is, however, violated by a whole host of people who don't listen to it, even though it is backed by the law of the land.

Clearly there is something wrong here. Mankind was created to rule this world (reflected in the cultural mandate, Genesis 1:26-8). It is obvious in this saga, however, that we don't do this very well, are no longer very good at carrying out the command to rule (have dominion) over this earth. This distressing situation in *The Whale*, full of human conflict and incompetence, is, in many ways, a result of our inability to either rule ourselves or this creation, including this lonely orca whale. The pathos thus deepens. It highlights our fall from the high position given us in the garden of Eden.

Redemption through Jesus

This film offers little hope. As many predict, Luna dies, killed by the blades of a tug boat's motor. My son and I reflect, however, that even if the film doesn't offer a solution, there is more to say. That is, that, when we are confronted by our fallen world, we must also consider that redemption has (and will) come through our Lord Jesus. Even fallen creation will one day be completely redeemed by Him (Romans 8). We talk about that. There is hope for the animal kingdom, too, since Jesus will also redeem His creation.

Moreover, Jesus has also rescued us! Already today, thanks to Him, as His redeemed people, we can begin to live more faithfully in our care for this world. Moreover, one day we will be able to rule properly over creation as kings and queens of the new earth as we were created to do. That's something to thank God for! It also gives us hope when confronted with unfixable situations like that of Luna.

There's plenty more that we could have talked about, but this article summarises a little of what we talked about while sitting outside drinking our coffee and lemonade. Truly, God is good. He has given us His world to enjoy, and He also provides opportunities to speak about it to our children so that they, too, can make sense of it. Because of Jesus, they may look forward to the perfect world that is to come.

With joy we give thanks to our God for the celebration of the

60th Wedding Anniversary

of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

AART and ADDY SNOEK

20 May 1953



"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" Psalm 32:8

With love from all your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren:

Hans and Stella
Jenny and Hadleigh, Adam and Katy
Christy
Emma and Seth, Edith

Eric and Ingrid
Richard and Judith, Natalie and Jared
Elise and Clarence, Olivia, Charlie-Bill and Adelaide
Sarah
Michael

Ron and Judy
Laura and Michael
Eliot
Troy

Monique and Gerry
Sam
Ben

What happens to truth in an age of delusion? (PART 1)



Harry Antonides

"In a sense, God – the personal omniscient deity of Christendom – has been dying for centuries. His lordship over the world has been threatened by every scientist who discovered a new natural law of organic growth, by every invention of man that safeguarded him against "act of God" disaster, by every new medicine that tamed a disease and solved another mystery of life. But it is the 20th century, the age of technological miracle, that has seen the triumph of the Enlightenment and the apparent banishment of God from the universe – even, thanks to Freud, from the human soul." (Time , December 25, 1964)

"When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything." (C.K. Chesterton)

"If you reject absolute truth absolutely, you are not only incoherent but in danger of becoming the worst kind of dogmatist." ("Obama and the End of Liberalism?" Interview Charles Kesler, NRO, January 16, 2013)

Western civilization is beset by an overwhelming series of seemingly insoluble problems and difficulties. All of them involve the very core of who we are as humans. What is the purpose of our lives? How do we know how we should live? How do we discern right from wrong? Where do we find the answers to the most burning questions about nationhood in a world of turmoil, violence and warfare? What are the principles that can guide us in structuring government to secure peace and justice for all? Furthermore, how can we distinguish between the public and private sectors of society, so that all the

"mediating structures" in society, such as the family, education, media, business, science and untold numbers of voluntary associations, are able to function freely in keeping with their unique character and purpose?

War and rumors of war

Looking back over the past century, we are not encouraged to think that these questions have ready and easy answers. In the second decade of the 20th century, Europe was torn asunder by a murderous war (World War I) that cut short the lives of an estimated 20 million people.

In revulsion against so much slaughter, people became wary of all militarism and vowed to never again get involved in such barbarity. The result was that just two decades later, Europe was unprepared to stop Hitler's military machine from conquering most of Europe. It took five years of brutal warfare that razed

entire German cities, destroyed its industrial infrastructure, and resulted in the death of an estimated 60 million soldiers and civilians, before Western Europe was liberated. (Other estimates of the total death toll of World War II range from 50-70 million. Many more millions were wounded in body and soul in both world wars.)

In the meantime, Eastern Europe was left to suffer nearly four more decades of Soviet tyranny.

In 1989 the Cold War came to an end with the unraveling of the Soviet Union, raising the hopes and prospects of a more peaceful world. Yet the world was and is still a dangerous place with new sources of conflict and war festering.

Since World War II, radical Islam has spread its tentacles across many countries, not only in the Middle East, but also into Africa, Asia, and even into the Western countries. Osama bin Laden spoke for millions of Muslims when he declared war on the West, notably the United States, and Israel, the only country in the Middle East with a vibrant culture and freedom of religion.

The treacherous 9/11 attack on America, and subsequent terrorist attacks in European countries, notably in Spain and the U.K., were shocking reminders that we are still living in a violent and dangerous world. These events leave no doubt that hatred of the West is deeply imbedded in the hearts of a significant segment of radicalized Muslim believers who are convinced that they are called to establish the caliphate worldwide by violence and stealth.

The remaking of Europe

In the 1950s, millions of Muslim immigrants began to stream into the Western countries, since Europe needed workers for its industries. The work often involved menial tasks. Originally these immigrants were expected to serve as guest workers, temporary labourers who would eventually return to their home countries. Instead, many decided to stay and were accorded full citizenship. Their numbers swelled quickly. In the process many began to form separate enclaves in the largest cities. (The total number of Muslim newcomers into Europe according to a 2010 Pew survey was estimated at 44.1 million, with a projection for 58.2 million by 2030.)

Initially the European countries, steeped in the ideology of multiculturalism, facilitated this development without a program of integration for the newcom-

“Both former French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, have publicly stated that they no longer believe that multiculturalism can lead to peaceful coexistence.”

ers. Meanwhile, many Muslim leaders told their followers to consider the West alien territory and instructed them not to integrate. This is in line with the Muslim doctrine that mankind is divided into a world of peace (Islamic) versus that of war (non-Islamic/infidel). In 2008 the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan told a large crowd of Turkish immigrants in Germany that “assimilation is a crime against humanity.”

This growing dissonance between the host countries and large numbers of Muslim immigrants eventually led to severe conflicts and even riots, especially in France. Several countries experienced first-hand the violent wrath of radicalized believers in their duty to spread the rule of Allah. Holland was shaken when the outspoken politician/professor Pim Fortuyn was brutally murdered in May 2002, followed in November 2004 by the murder of Theo van Gogh.

Both men had been blunt in their criticism of Dutch immigration policies that allowed radical Islamism to freely take root in that country.

Muslim terrorists attacked Madrid in March 2004 killing nearly 200 and wounding some 2000 victims. In July

2005, a similar attack on the London public transit system killed 56 people and wounded many more. These and other killings of defenceless people sent shock waves through all of the free world. Many began to have serious doubts about the growth in their midst of a separatist Muslim culture in the name of multiculturalism.

The end of multiculturalism?

Both former French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, have publicly stated that they no longer believe that multiculturalism can lead to peaceful coexistence. Sarkozy, speaking after the killing of seven people in Toulouse by an Al Qaeda-trained Muslim on March 23, 2012, said that there are “too many foreigners on our territory” (Toronto Star, March 24, 2012).

Chancellor Merkel was far more direct, leaving no doubt about her views, presumably shared by many Germans. She understands that the problem is not at the surface but reaches down to a people’s deepest convictions. Last year Merkel stated that Germany’s roots are Judeo-Christian. She said: “Now we obviously have Muslims in Germany. But it



is important in regard to Islam that the values represented by Islam must correspond to our constitution. What applies here is the constitution, not Sharia law.”

At a meeting of her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party in October 2011, the Chancellor said that at the beginning of the 1960s Germany welcomed Muslim guest workers, expecting that they eventually would return to their home countries. But that did not happen, so for a while it was believed that Muslims and other Germans could live side-by-side in harmony with each other. But this turned out to be a multicultural pipe dream, or as Merkel said, this approach has “failed utterly.”

At another CDU meeting she said that



the debate about immigration, “especially by those of the Muslim faith,” was an opportunity for her party to stand up for its convictions. She explained: “We do not have too much Islam, we have too little Christianity. We have too few discussions about the Christian view of mankind.... We feel bound to the Christian image of humanity – that’s what defines us. Those who do not accept this are in the wrong place here” (Soeren Kern, “Islam in Germany: ‘Germany Does Away with Itself,’” June 16, 2012).

With that, the Chancellor threw wide open a discussion that until now is mostly avoided in public, especially among the political leadership. Their attitude is one of deference mixed with fear of offending Muslim supremacists who are adept at using the freedom in the West to advance their cause. They have managed to infiltrate and influence every major institution from the media, the universities and the government to advance their cause, while being quick to intimidate and silence anyone who raises a critical voice.

Think of author Salman Rushdie, or the case in Canada against Maclean’s magazine, Mark Steyn and Ezra Levant,

a few years ago. Such threats and harassment send a chill among public figures who will think twice before they write and speak about what they really think. At the time of this writing the Obama administration is in negotiations with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to make any criticism of Islam a criminal offence. The now-retired Secretary of State Hillary Clinton played a major role in these discussions.

A two-fold challenge

As anyone knows who follows the daily news, ours is a violent and chaotic world. Most of the Western economies are in trouble, some very seriously so; politically, most governments are struggling to

keep the extensive welfare states from collapsing; militarily, many countries in the Middle East and Africa are at war or are fearing the outbreak of war. This is especially acute because of Iran’s determination to obtain nuclear weapons and to destroy Israel. What are we to do? What should Christians do?

In summary, we face two serious threats as citizens of the Western nations. The first one is internal, that is the radical secularization of life, so well-expressed in the three quotations at the beginning of this article. To be sure, the West was never totally Christian in the sense that it was completely unified as one religious community. But it was Christian in the sense that it was profoundly influenced by the Christian faith. This meant that there was a largely shared belief in God as the Creator of the world, the source of goodness and truth, and of the moral law that enables us to distinguish between right and wrong.

Such shared belief is now gone, and the consequences of that change are not trivial, but go to the core of human existence. Most importantly, it means that we are in the dark about truth; we can no longer distinguish between good and

evil or right and wrong. In other words, we live in a world of delusion – as expressed in the title of this series.

The second threat comes from the outside, and is directly related to the first. It concerns the large flood of Muslim immigrants into the West. Among them are many moderates who are happy to escape the Islam-ruled countries mired in poverty and tyranny. The problem lies with those Muslim immigrants whose minds are shaped by leaders who preach a supremacist version of Islam, and who are adept at using the freedom they enjoy in the West to expand their Islamic ideology. They have been very successful in intimidating anyone who criticizes Islam.

The result is silence or denial about what has rightly been called the creeping Islamization of the West. This is the second major problem we must understand and confront, which is made more difficult because it comes at a time when the West is spiritually disarmed. In other words, the West’s spiritual emptiness combined with an openness to other influences makes it vulnerable to the inroads of a radicalized Islam that is aggressively spreading its influence all over the world.

The secularism of the West is providing an open door for the jihadists – and they know it. This brings to mind Jesus’ words in Matthew 12. He tells the story of a house that is cleared of one evil spirit, which is then taken over by seven even worse evil spirits.

Much, much more will be said in future installments.

Mr Harry Antonides is retired and since 1997 has been involved in volunteer work in church and community. He now also works as a freelance writer with a special interest in the impact of Islam on the West and on the Christian Church. He is the author of many articles and book reviews, as well as two book length studies, dealing with multinational corporations in Canada (1978) and with the history of the Social Gospel in Canada (1985).

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A bad Yoke

P N Archbald

I was recently shown some articles, written by Christian authors who were trying to prove that God does not forbid marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. So yes, the title of this article is about how believers are to be “yoked” in marriage, not about a “bad joke” pronounced with a Dutch accent.

These articles employ three main arguments in an attempt to make marriage of a Christian to another believer a matter of preference rather than law:

- 1) 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 is not, as such, about marriage to an unbeliever;
- 2) 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 shows that it is not unlawful for a believer to marry an unbeliever; and
- 3) Christians are now ruled by the Law of Love, not legalistic rules.

Before I address these arguments, I would like to give a brief overview of the biblical teaching on this subject.

The whole Bible is against religiously-mixed marriages for the believer

Already, in the very dawn of history, the Lord made known His views on religiously-mixed marriage. The subject comes up in Genesis 6:1-8, before Israel was a nation or the Mosaic Law was given. The best interpretation of this passage is, I believe, that the “sons of God” (believing men) saw that the “daughters of men” (unbelieving women) were beautiful. They put “looks” above spiritual qualities, and got hitched. The result was the “Nephilim” – not a race of giants that resulted from the mating of fallen angels with humans, as some have contended, but “strong-arm” men who lusted for power. They were sons who followed the example of their unbelieving mothers, not to mention the worldliness of fathers who were supposed to be believers. The net result was a great spiritual decline in the world, leading to the spread of wickedness everywhere – and eventually to the Flood. While this is not put in the form of a prohibition, we are left in no doubt about the Lord’s attitude to religiously-mixed marriage – in a situation where the context involves

the whole human race, not just Israel.

Further on in Genesis 28:6-9 we see Esau disregarding his father’s instructions to avoid marriage with the Canaanites. Here we have the origins of the old covenant prohibition against religiously mixed marriage. That prohibition is formalised as covenant-law in Exodus 34:11-16, where Israel is told not to make any covenants with the Canaanites – in case they intermarry and lead God’s people into idolatry. Deuteronomy 7:3 is even more direct.

To be sure, God’s people often ignored this prohibition. King Solomon is a prominent example, with his tendency to cement political alliances with the nations by adding many foreign women to his harem. Yet Nehemiah 13:26 makes clear that this was sin and led to further sinning on Solomon’s part.

Many other verses could be mentioned. For example, Judges 3:6, where the sin of believing parents in allowing their sons and daughters to inter-marry in this way, is given as an explanation for the decline of Israel in the time of the Judges. It is also worth mentioning the many references to this problem in Ezra-Nehemiah. There, the amount of intermarriage had increased so much that the “foreign wives” had to be put away, with their children (Ezra 10:3). It has been suggested that this extreme

solution to the problem was necessary because the number of foreigners was so great in the small and fragile Post-Exilic community – those who held to the true religion were in danger of being swamped. In Malachi 2:11-12, the prophet pronounces judgement on the man who does what Judah has done – profane the sanctuary by marrying the “daughter of a foreign god.”

When we come to the New Testament, we may not assume that Old Testament regulations automatically terminate. What God has once commanded/prohibited remains in force until such time as He indicates that it has been abrogated.

Is there any such indication of abrogation in the New Testament? Far from it! In 1 Corinthians 7:39, a believing wife whose husband has passed away “is free to be married to whom she wishes, *only in the Lord.*” Then in 2 Corinthians 6, believers are warned not to be “unequally yoked” with unbelievers (v. 14), to “come out from their midst and be separate” and “not touch what is unclean” (v. 17). The Westminster Confession (24:3) therefore states, “It is the duty of Christians to marry only in the Lord ... neither should such as are godly be unequally yoked....” The Confession footnotes most of the passages I have already cited, including 2 Corinthians 6:14, as proof-texts. That makes



Image courtesy of JustShutter / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

the issue a confessional matter, as our churches subscribe to the Westminster Confession.

The “unequal yoking” of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Some have tried to argue that the apostle is only warning against mixing sinful behaviour with the Christian lifestyle; or perhaps warning against joining with unbelievers in their sinful practices; but not against *marrying* an unbeliever.

When we consider the following aspects of the passage, we see how wrong-headed such interpretations are:

There are 6 words that have to do with personal associations piled up here: “bound together”; “partnership”; “fellowship”; “harmony”; “in common”; and “agreement.” This is not simply talking about behaviour, but relationships and

he says this passage is against all “intimate association” with unbelievers. The apostle is not forbidding all association – for then we would have to go out of the world – only the *intimate* association that tries to join together two hearts or lives that should not be joined, since one is hostile to God and both are ultimately hostile to each other.

Since intimate associations are in view in this passage, we will certainly have to include the situation where a believer courts an unbeliever, as well as the end-result, the mixed marriage. If these relationships are *not* included in the prohibition, then what relationships could be? After all, these are the most intimate of relationships, the ones that are most likely to put believers at risk of compromise in this area of partnerships. If the most intimate association is ruled

those who would ignore 2 Corinthians 6.

We should also not lose sight of the fact that later in the same chapter (1 Corinthians 7:39), the apostle makes it crystal-clear that a believer who has a choice must marry “in the Lord.”

The Law of Love

Lastly, there is an argument that believers today are bound only by the Law of Love – not by detailed regulations. This is really the “Antinomian” (“against the law”) view. It is a hole big enough to drive as many trucks through as you might desire. It leaves one free to do anything at all, so long as you can get away with calling it “love.”

The “Law of Love” (James 2:8; 1 John 2-3) is about loving God whole-heartedly, and your neighbour as yourself. But how do we know what that looks like? Only by applying the various laws God has given us to show how He wants us to express our gratitude to Him. This how we know that we have come to know God, that we keep His commandments (1 John 2:3-4). “Love” is opposed to externalism, not to rules. It is opposed to lawlessness (Romans 6). True love and gratitude towards God should create a strong desire to let close to our hearts only those who love God as we do, not those who hate Him.

A timely warning

Because we live in an age of great compromise, we need to be clear about the seriousness of this sin of “mixed marriage.” In Malachi 2:1-12 it is referred to as “treachery,” “profaning” the covenant and sanctuary, and “committing abomination.” Malachi calls upon the Lord to “cut off” those who incite others to this sin, or who follow the lead of those who do so.

But we also need to be aware that the human heart is very deceptive – even in a Christian. When we desperately want something that is forbidden, and our emotions are running high, we quickly look for ways to justify what God has forbidden. It is very easy today to get your hands on material that will help you fool yourself, especially via the computer. There is hardly an ethical or doctrinal issue around, where you cannot find articles written by those who claim to be believers, but where the view expressed is completely contrary to the Word of God. It is vital that those who find themselves in a dangerous situation with a relationship don’t go looking for a way to justify sin, but listen with an open

“When we desperately want something that is forbidden, and our emotions ... we quickly look for ways to justify what God has forbidden.”

their inherent harmony or lack thereof.

All of these words apply – or should apply – to the marriage relationship between believers. Some of the words in this group were used in biblical times to refer to the marriage-relationship.

The Old Testament texts alluded to in this passage also have to do with the relationship between God’s people and those outside the covenant. Isaiah 52:11, cited in 2 Corinthians 6:17, has to do with Israel separating itself, especially from Egypt. Deuteronomy 22:10, which forbids yoking a donkey and ox together for ploughing, is one of a group of laws against mixing different things. These laws are all designed to remind Israel that the covenant people are to be separate from the nations. They were laws not simply about worldly behaviour, but also about relationships. Charles Hodge is correct when he comments that this passage forbids the union of “incongruous elements or persons.”

That does not mean that the apostle is forbidding only mixed marriages. Again, Hodge hits the nail on the head when

out, then how could any lesser associations be a problem?

The mixed marriages of 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 should not be appealed to as a way of off-setting 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. The situations are quite different. In the one case, a believer acts against God’s command and enters a forbidden relationship. In the other, two unbelievers have lawfully married before one is converted by God’s grace. The two have made lawful vows. Perhaps there are children involved. The Lord upholds the vow and the institution of marriage that He gave not just to believers, but to all mankind. He also protects the children of such a union by insisting that the marriage remain intact – so long as the unbelieving party is willing.

The drastic measures in Ezra-Nehemiah, where families were broken up after marriage vows were made, is exceptional. However, the principled objection against those who knowingly broke God’s Law remains as a warning to

heart and mind to the Word of God.

In terms of the tendency to rationalise the sin away, I often hear the argument, "Oh, but he/she might be converted by my witness." Isn't this part of the reason the apostle gives in 1 Corinthians 7:16 for a couple remaining married after one is converted? It is, of course, possible that the unbeliever will eventually be converted, whether we speak of a 1 Corinthians 7 case, or a 2 Corinthians 6 situation. But just because the Lord "strikes straight blows with crooked sticks," that does not justify *us* embracing crookedness! Where one party is converted after marriage, he or she may start to give their witness with a "clean slate." It is entirely different when a believer courts and then marries an unbeliever. There, the believer is giving a bad witness from the very start: a witness of disobedience to the Word of God, and what amounts to idolatry. For it is a form of idolatry to put one's own desires or another human being above God and His revealed will.

The other main rationalisation – "But he/she does not really *hate* God; he/she has promised to support me in my Christian beliefs" – is therefore a lie. Every unbeliever, no matter how noble, hates God. You either love Him or hate Him. There is nothing in between. Someone who hates God cannot truly support the Christian faith. For that reason, I have found that in nearly every case where a mixed marriage has gone ahead on the basis of such false promises and premises, it has later turned bad. In nearly every case – and I have seen a few – either the believer has fallen lower and lower, following the witness of the unbeliever; or, the unbeliever's true character has come out over time, making life more and more miserable for the believer.

It is therefore important to avoid getting into situations that will tempt the heart to become bound to an unbeliever. Meeting up regularly with an unbeliever for intimate dinners and drinks is asking for trouble. Caution is also needed in computer and phone contact, or with

any other way that relationships can be developed and deepened. You may tell yourself, "We're just good friends," but frankly, I've heard that one many times before.

Parents also have a big responsibility to guard their children. Remember, Judges highlights especially the sin of the parents in giving their children to marry unbelievers. Parents need to be aware of whom their children are meeting, chatting with, texting etc. The Lord holds parents accountable, in some respects, over the marriages of their children.

May the Lord give Christian parents the courage to remain firm on this matter. May He also give the youth of our churches a firm conviction that they should only marry "in the Lord," and the courage to rebuff any advances from unbelievers.

Mr P N Archbald is the minister in the Reformed Church of Silverstream.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings ...

BY THE GLEANINGS

TEAM:

Odette De Kock – Auckland
Presbytery

Yvonne Walraven – Wellington
Presbytery

Frances Watson – Christchurch
Presbytery

Collated and Edited by **Harriet Haverland**

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Rev. Andrew de Vries has declined the call from the Christian Reformed Church of South Gippsland (Bishoptdale)

Rev. Dirk van Garderen officially retires at the end of June. He and Gonny will then take 12 weeks' long service leave, during which time he will also represent our churches at the ICRC Conference in Wales. After this, it is possible Rev. van Garderen may continue to serve the

congregation in some capacity should they still be without a pastor. (Bucklands Beach)

We have had a very good response from various individuals and other congregations within the denomination to our request for help in financing **Josh Flinn's** studies for the ministry, for which we are very thankful. (North Shore)

Rev. Bruce Hoyt will attend the International Conference of Reformed Churches meeting in Cardiff as one of the RCNZ delegates.

CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES

60th Anniversary Reformed Church of Christchurch – We rejoice to inform you of the planned formal celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Reformed Church of Christchurch on the weekend of 29/30 June and to invite you to join with us in remembering with joy and gratitude the Lord's work in our city over the past 60 years. The Reformed witness began in Christchurch with Cornwall St in 1953 and has, under the Lord's sovereignty, extended to daughter and granddaughter churches.

This anniversary is not just a celebration for Cornwall St, but for the three Christchurch churches and will be held on Saturday evening 29 June, 7.00pm at Bishoptdale Church. We plan an evening of fun and fellowship. It will be an opportunity to entertain and reminisce.

On Sunday 30 June at 1:30pm a worship service is planned in the Bishoptdale church as the climax of the celebration – to give thanks for the past and seek

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the Lord's blessing on the future. Rev. Bill Wiersma is coming over DV to join in the celebrations and to preach at this service.

The Reformed Church of Wellington celebrated their 60th anniversary on May 5th. They have also appointed a builder to undertake their renovation work and this is likely to start in mid to late June.

CHURCH PLANTING

Important Meeting of the Rangiora congregation & supporters – The Session is calling a meeting with all Rangiora supporters to discuss the progress so far and what lies ahead. This meeting will be held after the Rangiora service on 5 May. In particular we would like to discuss our future direction, and for that reason it would be useful to have as many as possible present. Two significant matters that will be discussed at the meeting are:

- Future ministry needs and possible options
- A proposal to commence Sunday morning worship services instead of the current evening service.

The Session and Steering Committee considers a morning service to offer the following advantages:

- It is thought more likely that visitors would come to a morning service, thus providing greater outreach potential
- It would give the Rangiora Congregation a greater sense of its own identity
- It opens the possibility of other out-

reach and fellowship activities from time to time in the afternoon

- Sunday School could be considered in the future

It is encouraging to find ourselves in the position of being able to discuss the advancement of the Rangiora work. We hope that everyone who has been involved so far will be present at the meeting.

MISSIONS

Today is the last Sunday **Timothy and Zara Woo** will be with us before they leave for their missionary service in Zambia. What a blessing it has been to have their presence amongst us for the past three months. This morning we have the opportunity to commission them to the work the Lord has given them in Zambia. In conjunction with this morning's service, straight afterwards, Shashi Christian from SIM New Zealand will speak to us about the work of SIM. After this there will be a shared lunch in the hall behind the church. (Dunedin)

ACTS OF SERVICE & DEACONAL

Hukanui – Five ladies and two men from Hukanui recently trained to be CAP Befrienders. One of us has started with a Debt Centre client already! Please pray for the client, the CAP team and us as a church, that we would all be open to what God intends in this situation.

Masterton Cooking classes: There are seven of us in the *TRUE FOOD* team.

We have had a few try out lessons with members from the congregation to find out how it would go, which was fun and taught us a lot. We are aiming at people who may find it difficult to prepare a home cooked meal from scratch. Our courses will run for 6 weeks and we plan to offer them 4 times a year DV. We have been very blessed with numerous kitchen items given to us for free or for a small donation [including the new fridge you can see in the scullery] from the Salvation Army in Carterton. You will soon see some of the kitchen cupboards with a small lock on them; this is to make sure that our 'stations' have all the necessary equipment each week and that kitchen items do not get mixed up. At present we are working on recipes, getting the kitchen ready and advertising for 'students' to sign up for our first course and hope to start the first class on the 16th of May. Have a look at the laminated brochure and flyer that are hanging up by the pigeon holes if you would like more information. Please pray for us that it may be a blessing and that people will come to the course. If you know of anybody who may be interested, please spread the word.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

North Shore – Cadets and Gems had a community afternoon where we invited the local children to come and make Mother's Day presents, this was part of the mission badge for this year. Unfortunately there was a heavy shower of rain which might have put some off, however 15 did come which was great. Two girls said they were keen to come and join Gems while one mother said she would like to come to church, so we need to pray for them. Overall we had a fun afternoon, a big thanks to all those who helped organise it. We will look at organising another one later in the year.

CAMPS & CONFERENCES

The National Deacon's Conference at Dovedale (Christchurch) proved to be informative, encouraging and a blessing for all who attended. Most of the churches were represented. The focus was on the work of the deacons in general, the challenge to be a cross-cultural community as well as practical advice on giving and the legal (taxation) issues involved. We also heard a lawyer speaking on family trusts, enduring power



Preaching Conference
September 2013
Thursday 26 & Friday 27



Guest Speaker: **Dr Peter Adam**

www.rtc.edu.au/Calendar/Events

of attorney and a person's last will.

RTC Preaching Conference: 26 & 27 September 2013 at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. This year's theme, Preaching Biblical Wisdom, explores the wisdom literature of both the Old and New Testaments. Drawing from the books of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and James, we'll look at how godly wisdom can be powerfully and practically preached, and how wisdom can become part of our message of hope that moves and motivates us to serve Christ.

Christchurch Missions Conference – Queen's Birthday Weekend at 90 Highest Road. On Friday night, **Wally**

and Sjanette Hagoort will speak about their work in Papua New Guinea. On Saturday, **Rev. Peter Kloosterman** will speak about missions and in particular about the work of the Overseas Missions Board. **HL** from the Reformed Church of Wellington will speak about her work overseas. Others will speak as well about their involvement in missions and how you might get involved as well. More details will follow in the next week or two.

CLASSES & COURSES

Rico Tice, the author and presenter of *Christianity Explored*, will be running a workshop in Christchurch. Rico is a

gifted evangelist, and he will be equipping us to minister the gospel to those whom God has called us to love in New Zealand. Come along for a day of training on evangelism essentials, engaging others, and exploring Mark.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Avondale – The Cadets and Gems wish to thank everyone who attended the dessert evening fundraising event for National Camp 2015. We enjoyed serving you delicious desserts and showing off our talents as entertainers! Also a big 'thank you' to those who made desserts and helped in the kitchen.

Wellington Women's Presbyterian Meeting 2013

The time had come. The preparations all done. It was time for the Wellington Women's Presbyterian Meeting for 2013. As Hastings is a long drive for the ladies from the other churches, we decided to organise an optional Friday night session for those who wanted to make it a longer weekend away. Starting with yummy Thai takeaways, over 40 ladies gathered together in the fel-

lowship hall. Fiona van't Sant gave us a short devotion about hands, after which, we were treated with some hand pampering with a simple sugar hand scrub. It was a good time to catch up with some old friends and make new ones, and those who wanted to had their fingernails painted with a choice of a variety of colours. The evening finished off with cheesecake, fruit and drinks.

Saturday morning started with a delicious morning tea, when the ladies had an opportunity to browse through our very own "Op Shop". The back room of the fellowship room had been

cleverly transformed into a well set up op shop, with lots of clothes, bric-a-brac, and fresh Hawkes Bay fruit for sale. Once appropriately name tagged, all the ladies gathered into the auditorium where Tina Heesterman ably led the proceedings of the day. She kept us on our toes with spot prizes, questions and mystery parcels throughout the day. Jenny Waldron was introduced as our speaker, and using Titus 2:3-5 as the basis of her talk, Jenny covered the Why, Who, What, Where and How of Women helping Women. It is women mentoring women: teaching, caring, showing, admonishing,



loving and passing on the wisdom, so that it would help us bring glory to God with the tasks set before us, binding our community closer together, building up the body of Christ and to help us help other women. After the talk we broke into groups, each given a question to discuss and then joined back together to discuss answers given. A copy of the book "Women's Ministry in the Local Church", by J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, was given to each of the churches represented there, for their church libraries. A collection was taken and the money received plus the money from the op shop came to just over \$1000. This money was going to the Solomon Islands to help Jair and Laurette Dunkirk and Ant and Petra Lagas in their work there.

With the help of the Calvinettes, a lovely lunch was served of soup, buns, and a wide variety of salads and, of course, fresh fruit. Geneva Books had set

a stall for people to peruse and buy their books, and the ladies had fun trying on different clothes and finding a bargain at the op shop. After a bit of persuasion, to come out of the op shop, we managed to get all the ladies together for the photo. There were 106 ladies present.

In the afternoon, after we sung the Women's Presbyterial anthem and had the roll call, our first speaker was introduced. Alison Cowell from Healthy Eating, gave a talk about "Eating Well". She likened our bodies to car engines, we need the right fuel and if we eat the wrong things, it can affect the way our body works, e.g. rashes, tiredness, digestive system not working properly. We need to check out the warning signals our bodies give, when something is not quite right. Our second speaker was Rachel McKay from the *Open Home Foundation*. She gave a talk about the work Open Home do. She explained

how some children have difficult family situations when Open Home can give care to these children in need. It could be respite care, giving parents a break from caring after children with more needs, or times where parents are not fit to look after their own children. She asked us if God was calling us to do this particular type of work.

We finished the afternoon with singing and prayer. Afternoon tea was served; cheese, crackers and fruit. Last minute purchases were made at the op shop and the Wellington Women's Presbyterial Meeting was over for 2013. Thank you to all the ladies who worked hard to make the weekend possible. Thanks to all the ladies who took time out to share this time together – we hope it was a blessing to you.

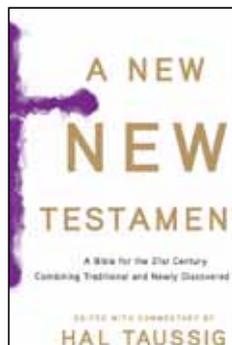
Hastings Ladies Fellowship

Books in focus

Man-Made Religion at Its Best: Review of a "New New Testament": Part 3

Hal Taussig

Reviewed by Michael J. Kruger



This will be the last installment of my extended post of Hal Taussig's *A New New Testament* (Houghton Mifflin, 2013) which attempts to create a new canon, with 10 "new" apocryphal books added to the traditional 27-book corpus.

In prior posts, I have examined the overall purpose of the project, the promotional language on the cover flap, and the apologetic offered in the introduction. In this final review, I will make some observations about the last part of the book entitled, "A Companion to A New New Testament."

The problems in this section are no

less abundant than in other sections, so we will only be able touch on them briefly. We can divide our discussion into three sections: (1) historical problems, (2) methodological problems, and (3) theological /philosophical issues.

Historical Problems

There are many historical/factual statements throughout this section that are highly questionable. Let me just mention three.

1. On p.484, Taussig claims that we have fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* "from the first hundred years after Jesus died." In other words, prior to c.130. Curiously, he never mentions which fragment he has in mind. The only options are P.Oxy. 1, 654, and 655, but these are all third century. To suggest there is a *Thomas* fragment from the early second century is shockingly inaccurate.

2. On p.501, Taussig claims that Clement of Alexandria rejected the gospels of Mark and Luke and "accepted only Matthew and John." But, this simply isn't true. Clement affirmed four and only four gospels as authentic. At one point he dismisses a passage in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* on the grounds that "We do not have this saying in the four gospels that have been handed down to us."¹ Eusebius agrees and says

that Clement affirmed all four gospels.²

3. On p.506, Taussig argues that there was no New Testament in "the first five hundred years of 'Christianity'" because "the technology of book production was such that combining all twenty-seven texts into one was more or less impossible." I find this statement to be incredible. The technology for large codices was in place long before the year 530 (five hundred years after Christ). Not only do we have full NT and OT codices in the 300's (e.g., codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus), but we have multi-quire codices all the way back in the second century (e.g., P66), suggesting that the technology for larger books was in place quite early.

Methodological problems

When it comes to choosing the books for this "new" canon, it is clear that Taussig is using a particular methodology. Let me just mention one aspect of this issue.

When describing how these new books were chosen, Taussig says they were "selected in a manner similar to the way historical Christianity made many of its crucial choices: by a collective decision-making process" (512). But, this modern "council" does not function at all like the ancient ones. Taussig gives the impression that ancient councils actually

chose books and decided the canon. But that is a misleading way of describing the process. The ancient councils did not just “pick” books they happened to like, but affirmed the books they believed *had functioned as foundational documents for the Christian faith*. In other words, these councils were declaring the way things had been, not the way they wanted them to be.

In contrast, this modern New Orleans council, is simply picking the books they prefer, not the books that have historically functioned as foundational to the Christian faith. For example, this new council included a bizarre and esoteric poem entitled *The Thunder: The Perfect Mind*. Was this a foundational document for early Christianity? Not at all. For one, it is not necessarily even a Christian document, never mentioning the name of Christ or any distinctively Christian doctrine. Moreover, as Taussig himself admits, “There is no mention of Thunder in any other known piece of ancient literature”(179). Is this a foundational document? Hardly.

Theological issues

Finally, it should be noted that Taussig, in this final section, reveals a little of the theological motivation for this book. There is nothing wrong with having a theological motivation, but it is still worth pointing out.

Taussig offers a reason for adding these documents, namely that they “can make a real difference in the spiritual lives of ordinary people” (489). What kind of difference? “[The Gospel of Mary] inspired women to think of themselves as real leaders in conventionally male-dominated situations. The Gospel of Thomas proclaims the radical availability of God inside people, and *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* reframes what it means to be men and women” (489).

It is here that we come to the heart of this book’s theological aims. In fact, Taussig even admits, “These kinds of significant meanings in the lives of real people are at heart of what the New Orleans Council ... wanted for the public” (489).

Thus, this book is not about history but theology. Not about the past, but the present. It is a book designed to change our conceptions of gender and to make it more egalitarian. And it is a book designed to give us a Gnostic version of God, a God found inside of us.

In sum, Taussig has produced a new set of Scriptures to accommodate his new

theology. And thus he has reversed the normal order of things. While theology usually comes from Scripture, Taussig has used his theology to create a new Scripture. It’s man-made religion at its best.

Notes

- 1 Strom. 3.13.
- 2 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.5-7.

Mr Michael J. Kruger is President and Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC. In addition, he is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and serves as an Associate Pastor (part-time) at his home church, Uptown PCA.

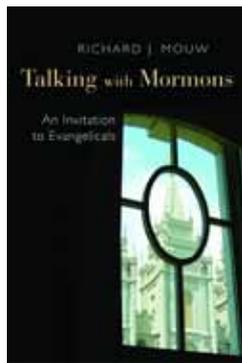
<http://michaeljkruger.com/>

Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals

by Richard Mouw

Published by Eerdmans, 2012

Reviewed by: Jody O. Morris



Richard Mouw is the president and professor of Christian philosophy at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. He is a self-professed Calvinist and was once a member of the Christian Reformed Churches. He writes from an “evangelical perspective” (p. 3). He is also well known among Mormons and Mormon scholars. I appreciate the advice that he gives to evangelicals on how to engage Mormons. I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in this subject.

Mouw’s “main concern” in the first part of his book is “to nurture friendlier relations with the Mormon community” (p. 43). The last half of the book deals more with engaging Mormons on theological matters.

Mouw’s conciliatory tone comes out early in the book. On page 3, he describes an apology he made to Mormons “for the way we evangelicals have often treated them.” Mouw also

distances himself from evangelical leaders who have spoken harshly of Mormons. He describes a presentation that Walter Martin (author of *The Kingdom of the Cults*) gave in a small church in 1965 that both he and a young Mormon happened to be attending. Mouw writes, “I came away from that encounter convinced that Martin’s theological critique of Mormonism was correct on the basic points at issue. But I also left the church that night with a nagging sense that there was more to be said, and that the way to let it be said was captured in the young Mormon’s complaint, ‘You are not even trying to understand!’” (p. 9). Mouw offers an argument for calling Mormonism a “new religious movement” rather than a “cult” (p. 30).

As Mouw approaches the theological issues surrounding Mormonism, he asks whether there could be some Mormons who are wrong in their theology but truly Christian through faith in Christ. While he agrees they are confused about Christ, he still thinks their faith could be genuine. In making his case, he cites a footnote in which Charles Hodge expresses his belief that liberal theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher was a true Christian (p. 35).

I leave Mouw’s theological reflections in the chapters entitled “The Same Jesus?” and “What about Joseph Smith?” to the discerning reader. I conclude with a question he has for the Mormon with sincere faith: “Given your obviously sincere love of the Saviour in whom you’re trusting for your salvation, is the theology you teach capable of sustaining that trust?” (p. 58).

Reproduced from the OPC website, May 2013

I felt soundly rebuked this week when I read the following quote:

‘He who complains of the weather, complains of the God who ordained the weather!’

William Law

A light shining in the darkness

Eric W. Tuininga

Greetings in Christ from Mbale, Uganda! Christ rules over all nations! I praise God continually that Christ's kingdom has reached many formerly pagan lands, including Europe, America, China, and Uganda!

The Mbale area is home to many tribes and languages. While visiting believers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Uganda (OPCU), you might hear the following greetings: *Mulembe!* (Lugisu), *Kojeyo!* (Lunyole), *Koizeyo!* (Lugwere), *Habari!* (Swahili), *Oli Otya?* (Luganda), or even *How are you?* (English). Worshipping and teach-

ing here often reminds me of the triumphant verse, "[You] have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9 nkjv).

The way Christ ordained for his kingdom to reach Uganda is inspiring and encouraging. The gospel first reached Uganda in 1875, about ten years after Islam first arrived. The first Anglican missionaries, invited by the king (Kabaka), arrived in 1877. One early missionary, Alexander Mackay, told the Kabaka that Islam is the religion of the false prophet Mohammad, that slavery is a great evil, and that the traditional Lubaale cult is wrong. On one occasion, to prove his

point, Mackay threw a Lubaale charm into the fire, to the gasps of his terrified audience. When no evil befell him for such a scandalous act, many began to take his Christian message seriously. In 1881, the first converts were baptized.

"Here in Africa, before, people were worshipping mountains, trees, and spiritual dark powers. But now, because God has put a desire in our lives, we seek him. At first we did not seek him, but now we seek him." So said Knox Theological College student Hagada Medad, in a sermon preached in February 2013 on Isaiah 65:1.

However, wherever Christ is at work, Satan also fights. And Satan fought hard



This photo shows Eric Tuininga with students and staff at Knox Theological College in Mbale.

to keep the gospel out of Uganda. One missionary, Bishop James Hannington, was killed by warriors on order of the king, on October 29, 1885. His words were, "Tell the Kabaka that I die for Uganda."

The persecution of Christians intensified when one of the Ugandan kings attempted to force his pages to engage in homosexual acts with him. They refused because of their faith in Christ. He was furious that these early converts would put loyalty to Christ above loyalty to the king, and so on June 3, 1886, thirty-one of them were burned alive, bearing joyful testimony of their assurance of heaven. The blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church, and Christianity began to spread, enthusiastically preached by Ugandans themselves.

The Anglican mission strategy was that wherever churches were planted, Christian schools would also be built. Poor village families eagerly sent their children to these schools. As a result, within one or two generations, Christianity had reached most of Uganda! Today Muslims are copying this strategy and building many Muslim schools, sometimes giving free tuition to attract Christian children. While 80 percent of Ugandans now consider themselves Christian, pagan practices continue in the villages. Even in the church, the true gospel is being undermined by the prosperity gospel, moralism, and empty ritual.

Into this situation, for the last twenty years, the OPC has sent missionaries to Eastern Uganda in order to assist the church here. As a result, new converts come to Christ, new churches are planted, believers grow in their faith, Reformed theological education is provided, and Christ is honored and glorified by having a faithful, godly, doctrinally solid church here in Uganda.

It has been said that there is a famine in Uganda – not a lack of food or rain, but a lack of theological training for pastors. My primary task since arriving in Uganda in July 2012 has been to train men for the ministry at Knox Theological College (KTC), a seminary operated by the OP Uganda Mission. There is a great need for solid training, and it is a great privilege for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to be here to provide this blessing. Currently there are ten students at KTC from a variety of backgrounds: five from the OPCU, three from the Reformed Fellowship Churches of Kenya, a denomination across the border in Kenya, and two from a Pen-

tecostal background (eagerly embracing Reformed doctrine).

Reformed theology is a great treasure that we are able to provide the church here. One of the students at KTC is from a large Pentecostal church that teaches the prosperity gospel. In our soteriology class (soteriology is the doctrine of salvation), he asked, "How can we get this doctrine to more people?" When his pastor gave him an opportunity to preach, he preached on justification by faith through the righteousness of Christ, a doctrine the congregation had never heard before. This student also had a long conversation successfully convincing an elder that the commonly held doctrine of a distinct "second blessing" accompanied by speaking in tongues is unbiblical. Pray for a modern reformation in the churches here!

Spiritual warfare

I would like to give you a picture of the spiritual warfare in the midst of which KTC students and OPCU pastors are proclaiming Christ. Recently I asked the students at KTC to write a short paper describing common sins in their culture or tribe and how to address these sins. Here is a portion of what one young man wrote:

In my tribe of Banyole in Butaleja District, most people believe in the spirit gods. Each clan in Bunyole has a spirit god which they worship, and there are more than three hundred clans. Every year, beginning from August until December, they go to serve the spirits. That is when the harvest finishes, and most people have harvested the crops from the gardens. So each clan prepares to serve the ancestor spirits. During this time there is beating of drums in the whole of Bunyole. People take food, drinks, hens, and goats to slaughter blood for their demons or spirits. There is a god of the rain, a god of mountains, a god of marriage.... There are men who put on animal skins – those are the ones who present before the spirit gods all the problems of the clan.... Each clan has one man who puts on animal skins, and this man is called *Omutusa*. This man is chosen by the spirits/demons. This person doesn't do any work. The clan will provide for him everything because he

speaks with the spirits. They offer to him food, hens, milk, etc., during the harvest time. This fellow has the power to command anything either to curse or bring barrenness [even] to the young boys and girls, and he is the most feared person, for he speaks to the demons.... Everyone in Uganda fears my tribe because of curses. They can curse a tree, and it dries – they claim to have this power. They curse crops not to grow well until they come to *Omutusa* [and get him] to say something; then their crops will grow well and produce.

When I come across these persons [demon worshippers], I ask them questions to know for sure if their spirits can save them from death and the wrath of God, or if they can find peace eternal. Can they have assurance of eternal life by consulting their demons?

Then I can tell them about the true God and his Son Jesus Christ, who can save them all from the bondage of sin and death. I can tell them what is written in the law – the first of the Ten Commandments – and how we were weak to keep that law, so God sent his Son, who kept it perfectly for us.

There is life in Jesus Christ.

There is grace in Jesus Christ.

There is now no condemnation in Jesus Christ.

This is the one whom we must worship, the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them. The one who has the power over death and to give life, the one before whom every knee shall bow down and worship – even their [evil] spirits are subject to him! He is the judge of all nations under the sun! And if they believe this good news, then I can pray with everyone for his salvation in Jesus' name.

Into the spiritual darkness, the light of Jesus Christ is shining as the gospel is preached! We, as the OPC, have a great privilege to partner with the OPCU churches here in this work! In addition to teaching at KTC, I help to mentor and encourage the congregations that form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Uganda. The OPCU has ten congregations: one here in Mbale and nine village churches: Bukonde, Kama, Mazimasa, Kakoli, Petete, Nampologoma, Kachonga, Kaiti, and Khamoto. I realize



This photo shows women from one of our churches in Uganda.

that to you these are just names, but to us, they are people: brothers and sisters, friends, and fellow believers. I wish you could meet them all, but I am privileged to greet them on your behalf and to enjoy the unity of Christ's church around the world!

More than 90 percent of OPCU members are peasant farmers, which means that they have no regular employment. Instead, they grow their own food, and hopefully have some to sell in order to provide for basic needs like soap, sugar, and blankets. Many of them live in very small homes with dirt floors and no electricity or running water. Many people in Uganda endure real suffering, some of whom we have had the humbling privilege to meet.

Loving our Ugandan neighbors

The material poverty of our Reformed brothers and sisters in Uganda provides a wonderful opportunity for us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. One of the key themes of God's Word is that believers must joyfully give to one another; especially those with more earthly possessions have a duty to joyfully give to those who have less. For example, 1

Timothy 6:17-18 esv says, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty.... They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." The OPC seeks to be generous and ready to share with our brothers and sisters in the OPCU.

A wonderful example of this kind of church-to-church, cross-cultural giving is found in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. There Paul is taking collections from the Greek churches in Macedonia and Achaia, in order to provide for the poor believers in Judea. We are urged to abound in this grace: "But as you abound in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us – see that you abound in this grace also" (2 Cor. 8:7 nkjv).

In an effort to abound in this grace, the OPC helps our OPCU brothers and sisters in a variety of ways. We provide their diaconal committee with a small amount for each congregation to use to help support their widows and orphans (about \$25 per month per congregation). We have an arrangement with a local Christian health clinic, whereby OPCU brothers and sisters can receive medical care. We also help to subsidize

a radio program where OPCU pastors preach. We have promised to drill wells for the village churches. One goal of the mission here is to have a full-time deacon living here in Mbale to oversee these projects and help in other ways, so that the OPCU brothers and sisters can become more and more self-sustaining.

There are other ideas of how the work here might move forward, including setting up a reading room to distribute Reformed literature, starting Reformed Christian schools, and expanding KTC with vocational programs. Please pray for wisdom as we look to the future and explore how we can partner with the Ugandan churches to advance Christ's kingdom.

Thank you for your prayers! Thank you for your support! My wife, Dianna, and I, with our eight children, are very much enjoying our life and work here. Pray that we will faithfully reflect Christ and be a real blessing here in Uganda.

The author is an OP missionary in Uganda.

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