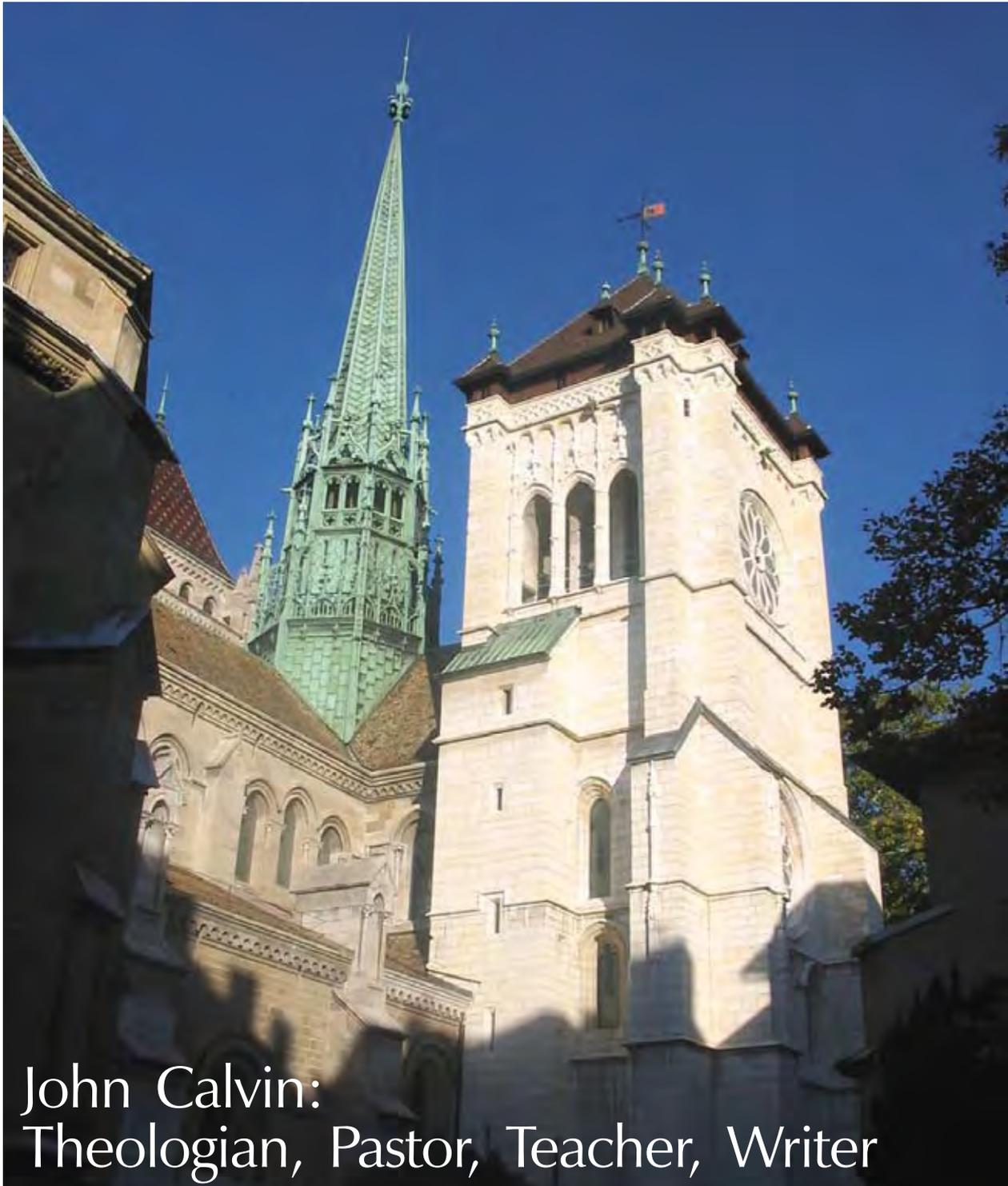


faith in
focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 37/4 MAY 2010



John Calvin:
Theologian, Pastor, Teacher, Writer

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Editorial

I suppose you could be excused for thinking that in regard to articles on John Calvin the editor “missed the boat”, because it was Calvin’s 500th birthday last year, and that is when all the reformed magazines around the world published articles on him. I don’t think it really matters, because the influence that Calvin has had on the churches of the Reformation for the last 450 years is always worth celebrating and writing about. His influence can be seen in every reformed denomination throughout the world. In our case, just look at the standards of the RCNZ (“Four Forms of Unity”), our understanding of Scripture, church government, church order, liturgy, Psalms, the Lord’s Supper and baptism. This month is no exception, it is always appropriate to thank our Sovereign Lord for the work of His past servants.

James Edward McGoldrick of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary looks at Calvin the Theologian and Pastor. Hywel R Jones of Westminster Theological Seminary in California looks at the Preaching of Calvin, and Simone Buob a teacher from Switzerland studying at Greenville Theological Seminary, gives some interesting insight from a modern-day “Swiss” perspective.

Dr Sally Davey writes about Christina Rossetti, who wrote religious poetry with biblical themes such as sin, suffering, death and heaven.

Janice Reid gives the second part of the update on Timothy and Zara Woo in Zambia, where Timothy works in the library of the Theological College of Central Africa.

There are the regular newsy articles of World in Focus, Focus on Home with the Gleanings column, Presbytery reports, letters to the editor and a report on the Wellington Ladies Presbyterial, followed by book reviews on The Piety of John Calvin: A Collection of His Spiritual Prose, Poems, and Hymns and John Calvin: A Pilgrim’s Life.

Many thanks to all the contributors. I hope you enjoy this issue.

Photo Credits:

Cover – St. Pierre Cathedral, the main church in Geneva, where Calvin preached. <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

Page 10 and 11 – Simone Buob.

“... while a brilliant intellectual, [Calvin] was also a sympathetic pastor and caring friend who loved God and loved others, who, in turn, loved him.”

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.

John Calvin (1)

Theologian and Pastor

James Edward McGoldrick

The Protestant Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther, was the most important development in church history since the apostolic age. Many people returned to biblical teachings long obscured or perverted in the Middle Ages. The foremost theologian of the Reformation was John Calvin (1509-64), whose five hundredth birthday we celebrated last year.

Calvin was born and educated in France, and he early demonstrated great intelligence and scholarly aptitude. His cousin Pierre Olivetan appears to have been a major influence persuading Calvin to embrace the Protestant faith. Calvin wrote, "God, by a sudden conversion, subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame."¹ Olivetan was an able Bible scholar who assisted in translating the Scriptures into French. Calvin later improved that translation, and it became the basis for the Genevan Bible.

By the time of his conversion, Calvin had become a proficient scholar in

classical literature and law—preparation which equipped him well to become a theologian. Perhaps because he was a rather shy person, Calvin became a reformer reluctantly. He went to Geneva in 1536 and met William Farel, a dynamic preacher, but one who was inept at organizing the reformation in that city. Farel demanded that his new friend join him in the ministry and pronounced a curse on Calvin's desire to pursue a quiet life in scholarship. The intimidated Frenchman complied, but in 1538 angry civil authorities expelled both of them. He returned in 1541 with serious reservations, but remained there as chief pastor of the Reformed Church until he died.

As he expected, enemies of the Reformation in Geneva continued to harass him, and years of struggle elapsed before he could free the church from state interference. He faced resistance to the moral reforms he promoted. Along with the other Reformers, John Calvin taught salvation by sovereign electing

this treatise, he accomplished something Luther never attempted: a systematic, integrated explanation of the whole spectrum of Christian beliefs.³ From a rather modest beginning, the author expanded and revised his work several times, until in 1559 the final edition appeared in four substantial volumes.⁴

A careful reading of the *Institutes* shows Calvin's indebtedness to Luther and their mutual reliance upon Augustine of Hippo (354-430), the greatest thinker of the ancient church. Like Augustine, Luther and Calvin contended with entrenched ideas about salvation as a cooperative endeavor in which God and man make necessary contributions. The clarion call of the Reformers was *sola gratia, sola fide*: salvation by grace alone, through faith alone—and, of course, in Christ alone. Luther said of justification through faith alone, "On this article rests all we teach and practice."⁵ Calvin called it "the main hinge on which religion turns."⁶ Without this truth, there could be no gospel. Justification to Calvin meant



Sixteenth-century portrait of John Calvin by an unknown artist. From the collection of the Bibliothèque de Genève (Library of Geneva).

“To learned and unlearned alike, he proclaimed, *The whole life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness.*”

grace. This doctrine provoked stern opposition, as when Jerome Bolsec, a former monk, complained that Calvin's teaching made God responsible for evil. Bolsec was expelled from Geneva and later returned to Catholicism. He wrote a bitter diatribe which later biographers magnified to defame Calvin.²

Calvin the biblical Theologian

By the time he arrived in Geneva, Calvin had already published his great work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In

“remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.”⁷ He considered the dispute over justification to be “the principal point of contention we have with the papists.”⁸ As one modern observer has remarked, “Reformation teaching on justification spoke with one voice ... On nothing were all the reformers more agreed.”⁹

Calvin's doctrine of sin and salvation affirms universal human depravity and the sovereignty of divine grace. The Fall deprived sinners of genuine freedom, so

their only hope for salvation lies in the unmerited favor of God. In contending with opponents of this doctrine, Calvin wrote *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* in 1543, in which he praised Luther's earlier work, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525).¹⁰

As a champion of *sola gratia*, John Calvin wrote much about the means of grace—the Word of God and the sacraments, as well as prayer. He viewed the sacraments as signs and seals of gospel promises, visible indicators of God's favor toward his elect. In denying that baptism produces regeneration, he differed with Luther, but, like the German reformer, he urged Christians to think about their baptism often as a means to encourage their dependence upon divine love. He cited Acts 2:39 in support of infant baptism and maintained that elect children would come to Christ, and that the sacrament would avail to strengthen their faith in the Savior.¹¹

In contrast to Ulrich Zwingli, the reformer of Zurich, who regarded the Lord's Supper as only a memorial of Christ's sacrifice, Calvin, like Luther, believed in the real presence of Christ in the sacrament, although the nature of that presence is spiritual, not corporeal, as Luther maintained.

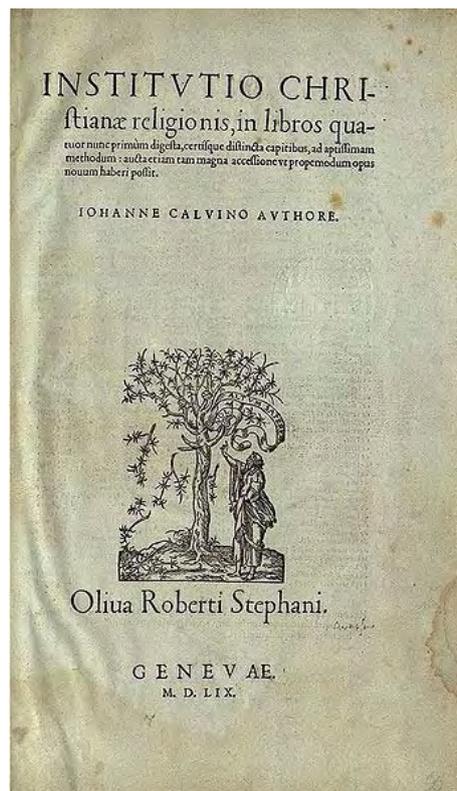
To Calvin, the bodily ascension of Jesus to heaven meant that his presence on earth must be spiritual, but those who receive the Supper in faith actually commune with the Savior in an inexplicable union to the nourishment of their souls.¹² Although Calvin's teaching on this subject did not satisfy Luther, the reformer of Wittenberg did not reject it acrimoniously, as he had done with the symbolism of Zwingli. When Luther read Calvin's *Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord* (1540), he rejoiced and concluded that, had the Zurichers read it earlier, disputes about the sacrament might have been avoided.¹³

Calvin the pastoral Theologian

The major theme of Calvin's theology was always the glory of God. In his zeal to promote the divine glory, he demonstrated deep concern for human beings, God's image-bearers, whom he longed to enlist in the cause of reformation. The eternal and temporal well-being of people occupied his attention, for he understood he could do nothing for God directly, but could honor God by assisting others to know their Creator and to realize their obligations to love and obey him. As a scholar, he lectured

to candidates for the ministry in Latin; but as a pastor, he preached in French to communicate with common people. To learned and unlearned parishioners alike, he proclaimed, "The whole life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness."¹⁴ He defined godliness as a "pure zeal which loves God as a real Father and looks up to him as a real Lord; it embraces his righteousness and detests offending him more than it does dying."¹⁵

To encourage the piety of God's people, their pastor taught them from



Title page from the final edition of Calvin's *magnum opus*, *Institutio Christiane Religionis*, which summarises his theology.

Scripture, for he knew spirituality requires the truth of divine revelation as the basis for personal life and its healthful development. As the Holy Spirit leads Christians to accept sound teaching, that knowledge must regulate all of life. Even in his *Institutes*, Calvin sought to promote sincere piety as well as sound theology, and to demonstrate the connection between them.¹⁶

With sympathy and compassion, Calvin sought to help believers as they struggled with temptation in their quest for spirituality, that is, for "reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces."¹⁷ Calvin recommended regular reading of Scripture as the principal means of progressing in sanctification. As the

Holy Spirit creates faith in the Word of God, piety requires believers to organize their lives around Scripture, applying its teachings in all areas of their endeavors. They must participate in public worship to hear the Word expounded, and they must reinforce that with private study and meditation on biblical teachings.

Although John Calvin was a profound thinker, he was not a detached scholar who viewed learning as an end in itself or a means to satisfy one's intellectual interests. The knowledge of God's Word empowers Christians to resist temptation and to produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Calvin, as a caring pastor, strove to aid the saints in dealing with the obstacles to spirituality they confronted on a daily basis. A careful reading of his devotional writings continues to be a valuable resource, since modern believers face the same difficulties as their spiritual ancestors did in the era of the Reformation.¹⁸

Although detractors of John Calvin have often portrayed him as a cold, uncaring, authoritarian despot, he was actually a warmhearted pastor, deeply concerned for the spiritual and material needs of others. Many passages in the *Institutes* offer consolation for troubled believers. Calvin's letters also reflect his loving concern, especially for Protestants persecuted for their faith. When he learned about the slaughter of Protestants in France, he wrote, "I [am] worn out with sadness and not without tears, which so burst forth ... that they interrupt my words."¹⁹ When a leader of the Huguenots faced death by burning, Calvin advised him to prepare for a wedding feast with Jesus.²⁰ This pastor-theologian knew how to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15), for the death of his wife and their only child taught him the meaning of personal sorrow.

To believers enduring various afflictions, the reformer of Geneva urged confidence in the sovereign providence of God, which provides opportunities to examine one's thoughts, in order to discover causes for divine chastisement. "All those who regard their troubles as necessary trials for their salvation not only rise above them but turn them into an occasion for joy."²¹

Portrayals of John Calvin as a self-absorbed "loner" are misleading, for he knew the value of friendship and cherished the fellowship of those who labored with him in the cause of reformation. When Theodore Beza, his closest associate in the ministry at Geneva, contracted

bubonic plague, Calvin related that he was “weighed down with a load of grief,” for he believed that Beza “loves me with more than a brother’s love and reveres me as a father.”²² When the son of his friend M. de Richbourg perished in the plague, Calvin wrote to his grieving father, “I found myself so distracted and confused ... that for several days I could do nothing but cry.”²³

The Calvin of myth may appear as a man with a heart of ice and a countenance of stone, but the Calvin of history, while a brilliant intellectual, was also a sympathetic pastor and caring friend who loved God and loved others, who, in turn, loved him.

Five hundred years have elapsed since the birth of John Calvin, but his influence remains strong and continues to summon Christians to God-centered-

ness in principle and practice. Always aware of his own sinfulness and failures, Calvin understood clearly the meaning of salvation *sola gratia*, an indispensable truth if people are to enjoy the proper knowledge of God and of themselves. As they experience the saving grace of Christ, they must desire the divine glory in all areas of life, submitting to the authority of God’s written Word. Calvin provided the appropriate prayer for such transformed souls in the statement that became his motto: “My heart I offer to thee, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.”

Notes

- 1 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 1:xl.
- 2 Helpful accounts of Calvin’s struggles in Geneva appear in Albert Hyma, *Christianity and Politics* (Lippincott, 1938); J. Marcellus Kik, *Church and State: The Story of Two Kingdoms*

(Nelson, 1963); Phillip C. Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy* (Edwin Mellen, 1963).

- 3 The first edition of Calvin’s work is available in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Eerdmans, 1975).
- 4 Two excellent abridgments of Calvin’s work are *A New Compend of Calvin’s Institutes*, ed. H. T. Kerr (Westminster/John Knox, 1989), and *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne (Baker, 1987).
- 5 Martin Luther, “The Smalkald Articles,” in *The Book of Concord*, ed. T. G. Tappert et al. (Fortress, 1959), 292.
- 6 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster, 1960), 3.11.1.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 3.11.2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 3.19.11, n. 14.
- 9 M. Eugene Osterhaven, *The Faith of the Church* (Eerdmans, 1982), 166.
- 10 John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (Baker, 1996).
- 11 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5 and 4.15-16.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 4.17.32-33.
- 13 Calvin’s treatise is in *Calvin’s Selected Works: Tracts and Letters* (reprint, Baker, 1983), 2:163-98. See B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New* (T. & T. Clark, 1982), 287, n. 53.
- 14 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.2.
- 15 John Calvin, *Truth for All Time: A Brief Outline of the Christian Faith* (Banner of Truth, 1998), 3. This summary of the first edition of the *Institutes* is a fine place to begin a study of Calvin.
- 16 See Paul Chung, *Spirituality and Social Ethics in John Calvin* (University Press of America, 2000), 8.
- 17 John Calvin, *The Christian Life* (Harper & Row, 1984), ix.
- 18 See John Calvin, *The Golden Booklet of the Christian Life* (reprint, Baker, 2004) and John Calvin, *Grace and Its Fruits: Selections from John Calvin on the Pastoral Epistles* (Evangelical Press, 2000).
- 19 Calvin, *Calvin’s Selected Works*, vol. 4, letter of May 4, 1545.
- 20 Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin* (reprint, Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009), 90. This is an excellent account of Calvin as a tenderhearted pastor.
- 21 John Calvin, *Suffering—Understanding the Love of God* (Evangelical Press, 2005), 30.
- 22 Calvin, *Calvin’s Selected Works*, vol. 5, letter of June 30, 1551.
- 23 Quoted by Stauffer, *Humanness of Calvin*, 88.

The following excerpt is taken from a preface John Calvin wrote for Pierre Robert Olivétan’s French translation of the New Testament in 1534.

Without the gospel everything is useless and vain; without the gospel we are not Christians; without the gospel all riches is poverty, all wisdom folly before God; strength is weakness, and all the justice of man is under the condemnation of God. But by the knowledge of the gospel we are made children of God, brothers of Jesus Christ, fellow townsmen with the saints, citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, heirs of God with Jesus Christ, by whom the poor are made rich, the weak strong, the fools wise, the sinner justified, the desolate comforted, the doubting sure, and slaves free. It is the power of God for the salvation of all those who believe.

It follows that every good thing we could think or desire is to be found in this same Jesus Christ alone. For, he was sold, to buy us back; captive, to deliver us; condemned, to absolve us; he was made a curse for our blessing, sin offering for our righteousness; marred that we may be made fair; he died for our life; so that by him fury is made gentle, wrath appeased, darkness turned into light, fear reassured, despisal despised, debt canceled, labour lightened, sadness made merry, misfortune made fortunate, difficulty easy, disorder ordered, division united, ignominy ennobled, rebellion subjected, intimidation intimidated, ambush uncovered, assaults assailed, force forced back, combat combated, war warred against, vengeance avenged, torment tormented, damnation damned, the abyss sunk into the abyss, hell transfixed, death dead, mortality made immortal. In short, mercy has swallowed up all misery, and goodness all misfortune. For all these things which were to be the weapons of the devil in his battle against us, and the sting of death to pierce us, are turned for us into exercises which we can turn to our profit. If we are able to boast with the apostle, saying, O hell, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? it is because by the Spirit of Christ promised to the elect, we live no longer, but Christ lives in us; and we are by the same Spirit seated among those who are in heaven, so that for us the world is no more, even while our conversation [life] is in it; but we are content in all things, whether country, place, condition, clothing, meat, and all such things. And we are comforted in tribulation, joyful in sorrow, glorying under vituperation [verbal abuse], abounding in poverty, warmed in our nakedness, patient amongst evils, living in death. This is what we should in short seek in the whole of Scripture: truly to know Jesus Christ, and the infinite riches that are comprised in him and are offered to us by him from God the Father.

The author teaches church history at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The second edition of his book, Luther’s Scottish Connection, was recently published by Solid Ground Christian Books. Reprinted from New Horizons (October 2009) with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.

John Calvin (2)

The preaching of John Calvin

Hywel R. Jones

For the greater part of thirty years, on almost every day of alternate weeks and sometimes twice on Sundays, John Calvin preached to the people of Geneva. Such a record shows how highly he regarded the preaching of the Word of God in relation to his work of reforming the church. It also supplies the background for the often mentioned fact that on returning to Geneva after his expulsion, he resumed preaching at the place in Scripture where he had left off almost four years earlier. The whole of his demanding life can therefore be regarded

been translated into Dutch, German, Latin and English by then. This is how enough survived for the value of Calvin's preaching ministry to be appreciated. But the story of neglect continues, for in the 19th and early 20th centuries his *Commentaries* and the *Institutes* were given much more attention than were his sermons. It was not until 1973 that all of his sermons on any one book of Scripture were published. Since then many more have become available. The purpose of this little essay is to encourage Christians and especially ministers to read them.

Emile Doumergue, one of Calvin's

believe and obey them. This is what makes Calvin's preaching so instructive and inspiring. His aim was to speak 'God's thoughts' to the people of Geneva but only as God had talked about them in Holy Scripture. Today there is all too often a disconnect in the pulpit between God's truth in the text of Scripture and the expressing of it in contemporary language. Some preachers are all talk and no truth; others are all truth and no talk. This is why we will consider his preaching as a deliberate and earnest attempt at 'talking God's talk after him'.

Holy Scripture is God talking

It is well known that Calvin gave a unique place to the Bible in his theology. He believed that its authority was the result of the identity of its ultimate Author. He was adamant that the books of the Old and New Testaments were breathed out by God through human authors, that they were God's Word and that no others were to be added to them. But he was also insistent that the God of the Bible who spoke that text still speaks to his people in and by it. He combined that definitive text with its dynamic message; that provided him with a bridge from Scripture to sermon. This dynamism was not something added to the text by the preacher, but it was conveyed via the text to the preacher by the Holy Spirit and so through his sermon to the hearer. The result was that, in the words of the *Second Helvetic Confession*, 'the preaching of the word of God is the word of God'.

Calvin made a very significant statement on this subject in Book I, Chapter 7 of the *Institutes*. It reads, 'Now daily oracles are not sent from heaven, for it pleased the Lord to hallow his truth to everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures alone. Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven as if there *the living words of God* are heard.' (*Inst.* 1.vii.1, *Battles' translation*) T. H. L. Parker's translation of the

“Preaching ... requires communicating truths to people so that they understand, believe and obey them.”

as either preparation for pulpit work or as a consequence of it. He regarded himself as being first and foremost a preacher-pastor.

Between 1536 and 1564 Calvin preached around 4000 sermons, and it is a remarkable providence that we have any of them. For one thing, he wrote none in manuscript form. Secondly, the early attempts that were made to compile a record of them were spasmodic, and the results were unsatisfactory. Thirdly, even when a secretary was found who could keep up with the oral delivery, and after 48 bound volumes of sermons were deposited in the Library of Geneva in 1613 as a result of this man's skilful and painstaking work, they were not jealously guarded. Nine of them had gone missing by the end of the 18th century; the rest were sold by weight in 1805. It was therefore a mark of God's providence to his church that many had

many biographers, said on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of his birth, and from his own pulpit, that in his view 'the real and authentic Calvin, the one who explains all the others was the preacher of Geneva' who 'moulded by his words the spirit of the Reformed of the sixteenth century'. What was so special about his preaching that it had this effect? I venture to describe it as 'talking God's talk after him'.

We are familiar with the expression 'Thinking God's thoughts after him'. We use this to emphasize the importance of understanding God's truth with regard to every area of Christian faith and conduct. Calvin's *Institutes* and his *Commentaries* provide essential and substantial grist for that mill.

But preaching requires more than thinking thoughts – even right and coherent ones! It requires communicating truths *to people* so that they understand,

emphasized words is better. He renders the Latin as ‘the actual tones of God’s voice’ and comments on the ‘as if’ as follows, ‘What is being tacitly denied by the qualification is not the presence or the activity of God but only any sort of visible or audible perception of that presence of activity.’ This is what Calvin called the ‘*vivacité*’ of Scripture, a term that he also used of the Word preached. He preached as he did, not only because he was sure that the Word of God was true, but also because he experienced its intrinsic vitality. God’s presence and thunderous voice at Sifial are described as ‘the hiding of his power’ in Habakkuk 3:4 (KJV), and that expression can be

in hand in the pulpit, depending on where his text was to be found. This was an object lesson (the only visual aid!) for the people. Doing that is not as common as it ought to be! The sheer simplicity of the sight must have contributed greatly to the power of the occasion. Standing before the people with Scripture in hand expressed the fact that God was about to speak to them through what the preacher was about to declare.

Secondly, he made it his aim to preach through whole books of the Old and the New Testaments. His custom was to preach from the New Testament and Psalms on Sundays and the Old Testament on weekdays. In doing this

tated and well adapted to the capacity of his sheep’ (italics ours). We will avail ourselves of those epithets as headings for the rest of our comments.

Duly premeditated

There are significant differences between Calvin’s Sermons on the one hand and the *Institutes* and *Commentaries* on the other. For one thing he did not write out what he was going to preach, much less revise it with publication in view as he did the *Institutes* and the *Commentaries*. In the preface to his sermons on Psalm 119, Calvin himself wrote ‘I did not write them in my room. They are printed exactly as I delivered them in the church, and they show the ordinary style and manner of our teaching.’ What was that? His preparation for his pulpit work was thorough and personal. He abominated lack of preparation and said on one occasion:

If I should enter a pulpit without deigning to glance at a book, and frivolously imagine to myself, ‘Oh well, when I preach, God will give me enough to say’ – and come here without troubling to read, or thinking what I ought to declare, and not carefully consider how I must apply Holy Scripture to the edification of the people – then I should be an arrogant upstart.

Of course the fruit of all his other work flowed into his thinking about his sermon text. One respected writer summarized his preparatory work as follows:

His preparation consisted of reading the comment of others (including the early church fathers, and probably the Scholastics, as well as his fellow Reformers), working out a very careful exegesis of the text with his remarkable linguistic skill and his tremendous knowledge of the Bible, and finally reflecting on the application which he would make to the congregation and in what way he could best communicate it. All of these thoughts were then sorted and stored in his amazing memory.

By this gathering of material about his Scripture text and arranging it in his mind he not only prepared a coherent address, but he also pre-prepared himself. It became his own as much as it was God’s. The result was a preached sermon that had *vivacité*.

“His sermons were ...
duly premeditated and
well adapted to the
capacity of his sheep.”

applied to Calvin’s preaching of God’s Word. By con-*trast*, this is one reason (the main one?) why preaching has so declined in the 20th century church – the loss of belief in the text of the Bible as the Word of God *and* experience of its power by those who preach it.

Calvin’s preaching – talking God’s talk

Calvin sought to conform his preaching to Holy Scripture in four ways. *First*, he would have nothing but a Hebrew Old Testament or a New Testament in Greek

he showed that Scripture was coherent and that context was important in the interpretative task. Not only did he have a sense of how one portion of text led to another but also he had a sense of the larger context—even the whole canonical one—and not merely of the particular book of Scripture in which the text for the day was to be found. His preaching was based on the facts of the oneness of the people of God in all ages and of the gospel of God’s grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word of God made and makes the people of God.

Thirdly, this was done in the context of the worship. A call to prayer and the use of the Lord’s Prayer could precede or follow the sermon seamlessly. That prayer often began with something as natural and powerful as, ‘And now let us fall before ... confessing our sins and calling on him for aid.’ In doing this he showed how aware he was that Scripture was only to be spoken and heard in communion with God its living Author and that no sermon would be effective without his gracious blessing. That was another aspect of ‘the hiding of his power’.

Fourth, he had studied the text *and* the congregation. Conrad Badius was a pioneer of the printing industry. He heard Calvin preach often and wrote that his sermons were ‘not rolled off by the dozen as a form but *duly premedi-*



Calvin’s pulpit in St. Pierre Cathedral.

Well adapted

Quite deliberately he did not preach as he wrote or as others had who used a rhetorical format for their sermons. He went further back in the history of the church to men like Origen, Chrysostom and Augustine, all of whom addressed their hearers in a homely manner. But he was not allegorical or topical in his use of Scripture. His method was to adhere to the form in which God had laid out his Word in the text of Scripture and to talk about it in a way that was familiar, that is, 'personal'.

In his sermons he talked to people from start to finish. He began with a brief but lucid summary of his message

on the immediately preceding passage. He then made his way through the portion of text selected in an orderly manner, highlighting words and expressions and fastening their truth on the consciences of his hearers. His concentration on the text was relentless. He despised oratorical flourishes. He never quoted other authors. His vocabulary was non-technical and full both of analogies taken from realms of ordinary human experience and of applicatory comments to human life. It has been said that his rather plain language was 'heavy with the smells and tastes and sights of everyday life in city and country and was clearly

observant of the smallest things in the life of his people'.

Just as he heard God talk to him in the Bible, so he showed it to his people in his text, talking about the truth in the tones that God had used, whether instruction or reproof, warning or appeal. Such coalescence between God's words and man's words is true preaching.

Hywel R. Jones is Professor of Practical Theology, at Westminster Theological Seminary California. Reprinted with permission The Banner of Truth, Issue 545 (February, 2009), pp. 8-13.
www.banneroftruth.co.uk

John Calvin (3)

Calvin, Switzerland and the world: an international story

Simone Buob

Switzerland is a country of considerable importance to reformed Christians. It is here they find their theological roots. Christians travel from all over the world to see the church Calvin preached in, the street he lived in, his grave and



Simone Buob, a Swiss national and author of this article.

the Reformation Wall. Some go as far as Zürich to learn more about Calvin's early contemporary, Huldreich Zwingli. But most who visit Switzerland go neither for the sake of the Reformation Wall nor any church, they simply go for the sake of the Swiss Alps, Swiss cheese and – what we are most famous for – Swiss chocolate. I was born and grew up in Switzerland and love my country as no other. I would have been able to tell any tourist all about our cheese, our chocolate and especially the beauty of the Alps, but if I had ever met somebody asking me about John Calvin, I would have had to answer with a blank look on my face: who is John Calvin?

After twenty years of life in a country that is about a fifth of the size of New Zealand, after many years of sound school education and a college degree in education, I still had not come across the names of John Calvin or Huldreich Zwingli and had very little interest in the Reformation or church history in general. I knew that the Reformation had caused the Swiss cantons to become either Reformed or Catholic – some cantons even split because of differences in beliefs – but it never

caused me to ask why it had all come about. In my generation it did not seem to be of much importance anymore. Every single town has an Evangelical (Protestant) Church and a Catholic Church. They may differ in doctrine, but in most cases insignificantly. The Catholics have become very liberal, so have the Protestants; and the result is a broad mix of people who seem to believe a little bit of nothing. I was no exception. In my early years at school I asked what the difference between Protestants and Catholics is. The answer I got was simple enough: the Pope is the head of the Catholic Church, the Protestants do not have a pope. Little as I was I knew plenty of people who called themselves Catholics and denied the Pope, and based on that I concluded that there really is no difference between the two religions at all. The Catholic Church seemed to be more fun. We got to celebrate Holy Communion, Confirmation and all sorts of other things which the Protestants could not. Based on that, I was satisfied to belong to the Catholic side. Whether there was a pope in Rome or not did not bother me.

Only a few know about Calvin

I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say that most of the children in Switzerland grew up as I have. They do not have any real knowledge about the difference between Protestants and Catholics and neither do their parents. Most Swiss citizens belong to either one or the other religion, pay their church taxes regularly, elect the local church governments, send their children weekly to religion and Bible classes and attend the church a few times a year. Only a handful of people know about John Calvin and the men to his left and right sides on the Reformation Wall. Why is it that a man like John Calvin, who has so influenced churches all around the world, has become an obscure figure in the country he once lived and laboured in? Or maybe I should ask the question the other way around: why is it that a man like John Calvin has shaped and influenced the church internationally?

In answer to this question we need to remember the situation in which the Reformation arose. Over the centuries the Catholic Church had become corrupt. There was a regular selling of church offices, called simony. The common people were frightened by cruel teaching and pictures about hellfire until they were willing to pay money to keep their souls from hell, or reduce their time in purgatory. The Bible was withheld from them, and the church services were held in Latin. None of the common people were able to understand what the Word of God truly teaches, because it was feared that this would have deprived the Catholic Church of its wealth and uncovered its ignorance. Another point we need to be mindful of is that the people at that time were in much greater danger of early death due to the lack of medicine and diseases such as the plague. It is no surprise that Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone stirred the people and freed them from their fear that their lack of money might mean their souls would be cast into hell.

Calvin very gifted

Martin Luther was not the only one who had discovered the faulty and deceptive teaching of the Catholic Church. Zwingli had come to similar conclusions and so had William Farel. Both men started to preach the gospel in several different places in the German and French-speaking parts of Switzerland. It was William Farel who discovered the greatness of

“If I had ever met somebody asking me about John Calvin, I would have had to answer with a blank look on my face: who is John Calvin?”

John Calvin. The day Farel met Calvin in Geneva he knew that Calvin had a knowledge of Scripture, and the ability to write and to preach as none he had met. Therefore he urged Calvin to stay and join him in the work of reform. He even threatened that God would curse him should Calvin consider moving on to Strassburg to live a quiet and peaceful life. It was the joint effort of Calvin and Farel that reformed the city of Geneva; and while Farel has been forgotten by many Christians, Calvin is remembered as the one who changed Geneva. We may ask ourselves why it is that Calvin's theology has had such a far-reaching influence in reformed circles and why others like Zwingli, Farel and even Luther did not have the same influence.

Farel himself was a strong preacher and knew the Scriptures well, but he lacked Calvin's writing ability. Zwingli died too young, and his theology was not sufficiently developed to be able to shape the Church internationally as

Calvin's did. Luther's influence is probably most comparable to that of Calvin, but the Lutheran church became less biblically sound shortly after Luther's death. Martin Luther, though great in many ways, failed to fully understand the biblical teaching on important doctrines like the Lord's Supper and irresistible grace, which kept the Lutheran church from becoming completely reformed.

Calvin was not only a great theologian, he also understood how to apply the teaching of the Bible to every sphere of life. His reforms encompassed not only the Church's preaching and teaching, but also its government. His establishment of the office of deacons brought social welfare and care of the poor with it. He emphasized a *presbyterian* form of church discipline and was also involved in educational establishments such as the Genevan Academy, which came into existence in 1559. Men like John Knox were taught and trained there. Calvin produced a lot of writings, such as *The*



Calvin at the Reformation Wall in Geneva.

“Calvin was not only a great theologian, he also understood how to apply the teaching of the Bible to every sphere of life.”

Institutes of the Christian Religion, which is as valuable today as it was four hundred years ago. After Calvin's death his wide-reaching reforms did not die, but were carried on and further developed by various men such as Beza (1519-1605), Francis Turretini (1623-1687), John Knox (1510-1572), Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and many more.

Much opposition to Calvinism

Calvin's strong convictions and vigorous reform provoked much opposition. Calvin's work quickly spread to France, his birthplace, where his writings appeared on the first comprehensive Index of Forbidden Books issued by the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformed

Christians in France, called Huguenots, were severely persecuted there. Thousands were killed and many forced to flee to countries like the Netherlands, England, Germany and Switzerland. Because of this Calvin's theology was spread all over Europe. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* were translated into Dutch in 1560 and became a key text for the Dutch Reformed Church. John Knox, who studied under Calvin, carried his theology to Scotland, where Presbyterianism was permanently established in 1689. Calvinism spread from Europe to North America, mostly through Christians who emigrated to the New World from England the Netherlands and Scotland. The missionary movements of the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries and also post- World War II efforts have caused the Reformed faith to spread all over the world.

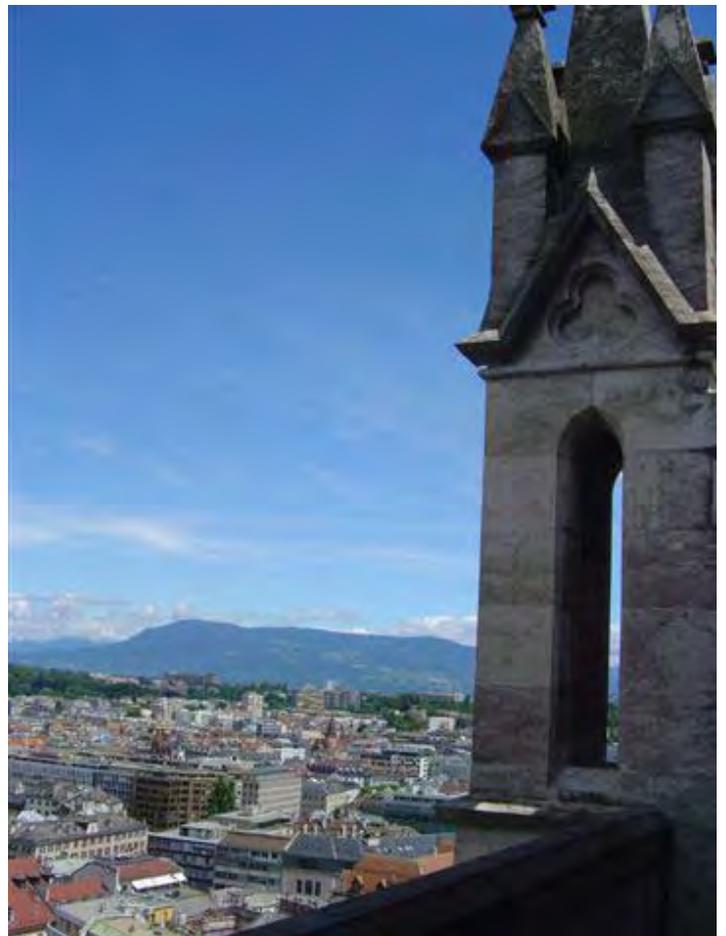
We can conclude that God has used many means to spread the Reformed faith to every part of the world. He used the depraved state of the Catholic Church to awaken the people and make them eager to follow biblical doctrine. He used a man of John Calvin's skill to proclaim His Word and shape His Church. He used the persecution of Christians to spread Calvin's theology to several parts in Europe as well as to America; and He used the far-reaching effect of a world war to cause missionaries to take the gospel even further. In all of this Calvin definitely had a unique role. God chose him as his vessel to further His own glory.

How I learned about Calvin

I have tried to explain why Calvin had such an influence internationally, but equally important is the question of why he seems unknown in modern day Switzerland – where once he was so influential. You may wonder how I even learned about Calvin, having shared with you my ignorance of church history, and of faith in general.



The front of St. Pierre Cathedral, the main church in Geneva where Calvin preached.



A view of Geneva from St. Pierre Cathedral.

God took me around the world to open my eyes. In 2001 I travelled to New Zealand for an internship on Paul and Sally Davey's sheep and pig farm in Rakaia, Canterbury. I was at a point in my life where I openly questioned God and wanted nothing to do with people who read the Bible and attended church. Paul and Sally are members of the Reformed Church of Dovedale. They invited me to participate in their daily evening devotions as well as in Sunday worship. I remember my many New Zealand winter evenings in their living room very clearly. I tried so hard to prove

same time realised that I was lacking true understanding of it. God led me through deep valleys, I was torn between love for my country, my family, my job and the reality that I could not find what I sought most – understanding of the Word of God. When God took my Mom, who died of cancer after battling it for four years, I realised that love for country and family and job cannot come before the need for spiritual nourishment. I decided to go to Greenville where I was able to gain the knowledge I sought. Greenville Seminary opened up a new world to me. I realised how ignorant I had really

“... important is the question of why [Calvin] seems unknown in modern day Switzerland – where once he was so influential.”

to them that one does not need to go to church and one does not need to know the Bible in order to follow God, but my arguments failed and theirs prevailed. God could not have shown me more clearly that I was on the wrong track. I was astonished at the church community, their commitment to and love for one another. They truly lived what they believed to be true, and I was accepted as a friend among people whose faith I did not understand and did not dare to seek. After my first visit in New Zealand I continued to read the Bible and then returned every year, always during my summer break, to help out on the farm and gain more spiritual insight in attending the church and discussing the Bible with Paul and Sally.

No spiritual nourishment

It was through them that I heard of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. I did not consider Greenville as an option for many years, but the longer I lived in Switzerland, the more I realised that I could not find the spiritual nourishment I needed. The churches are weak and liberal. The congregations mostly consist of a few elderly people who attend church out of tradition rather than conviction. I read the Bible and at the

been. How mightily God had used my own country for the furtherance of His kingdom! I learned about John Calvin and all the other Reformers, about the Bible and its unlimited depths.

They have forgotten God's blessings

God taught me how ignorant I had been, but even more than this, how ignorant my country has become. I ask why the Swiss people have forgotten how much God has blessed them and used them, and the answer I think, is simple: It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. God has blessed Switzerland abundantly. He has spared it from any major wars, any major floods, fires, or famines. He has allowed it to be a peaceful place, a beautiful place. He has allowed our economy to flourish, our standard of living to be comfortable. We have become wealthy and in our wealth and comfort we have forgotten that God is the one who gives in abundance. We have followed the same path all modern civilised societies walk along, the path that gives man credit for everything. We feel like we deserve what we have, that we have gotten it through our own doing and in our ignorance we perish.

Confess our faith

This is Switzerland, the nation which John Calvin served; and if we Christians don't wake up and become careful, our churches could easily slip away and disappear. It does not matter whether it is Switzerland, or other European countries, America, Australia, New Zealand or somewhere else – modern man is the same sinful, wretched being everywhere, seeing the blessings of God as his own right, as what he deserves. We need to be prepared by having a reason for the hope within us at all times, we must try to awaken those who are sleeping and see that we don't just look the other way as they race to damnation. May my country's rejection of the truth be an example to others of how we do not want to end. May it fill us with a desire to serve our countries and help them remember John Calvin, the man and his message, and the ways God used them in bringing His Word to the nations.

Simone Buob is a Swiss primary school teacher who has made five visits to New Zealand, worshipping with the Reformed Church of Dovedale. She has spent the past four years studying at the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina, and is about to return to Switzerland to resume teaching.



Traditional grave of Calvin in the Cimetière de Plainpalais in Geneva; the exact location of his grave is unknown.

Jonah and Nineveh in 2010 – Haiti President replaces Mardi Gras Festival with three days of fasting and prayer

A 16 March 2010 ASSIST News Service article by Jeremy Reynolds titled “Haitian Mardi Gras Festival Replaced with Three Days of Prayer and Fasting” reports that in the wake of the 12 January 2010, 7.0-magnitude earthquake, Haiti’s president René Préval, for the first time in Haiti’s history, cancelled the internationally attended annual Mardi Gras Festival, and instead called for three days of fasting and prayer 12-14 February 2010.

An estimated 1 million people, more than ten percent of Haiti’s population, gathered each of the three days across from the earthquake-collapsed National Palace, where a Haitian Christian leader said: “In unity and humility we cried out to God. One can truly assert that God has visited Haiti during these three days and has poured his shower of blessing and forgiveness over our nation. We closed the three days with seven tours around the National Palace (like Jericho). It took us four hours to make it because of the density of the crowd.”

Reciprocal Ministries International (RMI) reports that more than 3000 people professed faith in Jesus Christ during the three days, including 120 Voodoo priests. Another church in Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital and the center of the earthquake, reported over 2000 professions of faith.

RMI said that President Préval had been asked by Christian leaders for three years to set aside a national day of prayer, but had always refused for fear of offending the Voodoo practitioners and Roman Catholics. When Préval was contacted after the earthquake, three days of prayer and fasting were declared in lieu of the Mardi Gras Festival.

Resolutions coming out of the three days of prayer and fasting included:

- that 12 January be declared an annual National Day of Reflection and Thanksgiving;
- that 14 February be declared an annual day of National Prayer and Fasting;
- that the Bible should be adopted as the spiritual constitution of the new Haiti and should be taught in all Haitian schools;

– and, that the Haiti president should finish all official speeches with the words, “God bless Haiti.”

A YouTube video of the three day services is available at: <http://www.allabout-god.net/video/haiti-3-days-of-prayer>

For further information on the spiritual situation in Haiti prior to the earthquake, please see the March issue of *Faith in Focus*, p14, “Poverty drives 225,000 Haitian children into slavery”.

+ Assist USA

Seven Christians arrested in Asmara, Eritrea, for praying together in a private home

International Christian Concern (ICC) reported 23 February 2010 that Eritrean security officials on 18 February 2010 arrested seven Christians in the nation’s capital of Asmara for praying in a private home, then took the seven to an unknown location.

ICC reports that the predominantly-Islamic country of Eritrea has imprisoned 3000 Christians for exercising their religious freedom, that the imprisoned Christians are kept in underground dungeons, metal shipping containers, and military barracks, and that several of the Christian prisoners have died due to torture and a lack of medical attention.

+ International Christian Concern

Louisiana public school industrial arts teacher placed on leave for refusing to allow student to build wiccan altar for class project

A 2 March 2010 Des Moines Register article titled “Wiccan Altar Puts Teacher, Officials at Odds” reports that Guthrie (Iowa) Center High School Industrial Arts teacher Dale Halferty was put on paid leave 1 March 2010 after refusing to allow a student to build a Wiccan altar for a class project.

The student is a practicing witch, and had been bringing a book on witchcraft to class.

+ Des Moines Register

Presbyterian Church of Ghana Asante Presbytery holds workshop for ministers, presbyters, and catechists

A 3 March 2010 article on the GhanaWeb website titled “Presbyterians Asked to be Committed to Ideals of the Church” describes a recent workshop for ministers,

presbyters, and catechists held by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG)’s Asante Presbytery with the theme “Let us rise up and build – the way forward after eighteen decades of existence as a church.”

At the workshop, PCG Moderator of the General Assembly the Right Rev. Dr. Yaw Frimpong-Manso voiced concern about the lack of evangelism in the church, and said that church members are idle, undisciplined, and ignorant of the tenets of the faith. The moderator added that “it was important for Presbyterians to cherish selfless and dedicated service in the missionary work in order to transform society.” Additionally, the moderator advised church members to “shun activities and lifestyles that were not in conformity with the church’s beliefs and practices,” “to promote education, employable training and health outreach programmes to enhance the physical well being of people,” and “to campaign vigorously to bring back “the Presbyterian discipline.”

+ GhanaWeb

Reformation Trust publishes By Grace Alone: How the Grace of God Amazes Me by the Rev. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson

Reformation Trust Publishing on 26 February 2010 published *By Grace Alone: How the Grace of God Amazes Me* by the Rev. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson.

In the book, Dr. Ferguson laments that “we have lost the joy and energy that is experienced when grace seems truly ‘amazing.’” In an effort to restore the wonder of divine grace, he reflects on it from seven angles, each built around a stanza from a rich but little-known hymn, “O How the Grace of God Amazes Me,” written by Emmanuel T. Sibomana, a pastor in the African nation of Burundi. This book poses probing questions for today’s believer: “If I am not amazed by God’s grace, can I really be living in it? Can I really be tasting, and savouring, and delighting in it?” But those willing to delve into God’s Word with Dr. Ferguson will come away with a deeper astonishment at the depths of God’s grace.”

Dr. Ferguson is the Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church (Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church) in Columbia, South Carolina, and is Professor

of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

+ *Reformation Trust Publishing*

Yale University Press publishes Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," A Casebook

On 15 February 2010, Yale University Press published Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," A Casebook, edited by Wilson H. Kimnach, Caleb J. D. Maskell, and Kenneth P. Minkema.

The book "presents the accurate and definitive version of Sinners, accompanied by the tools necessary to study and teach this famous American sermon [and] contains questions for in-class discussion, a chronology of Edwards's life, and a glossary. In addition, curricular materials and video mini-presentations are available on a dedicated Web site."

+ *Yale University Press*

Philadelphia PCA Pastor seeks to replace prosperity gospel in black churches with biblically-grounded, redemptive Christianity

An article in the March 2010 ByFaith Magazine by Melissa Morgan Kelley titled "Seeking Revival Within the Black Church" describes a small group of black Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) teaching elders preparing to lead a 4-6 June 2010 conference called "Revival 2K10: Worshiping God Through Preaching, Prayer, and Praise," being held at the New Song Community Church in Baltimore, Maryland.

Ms. Kelly interviews the Rev. Lance Lewis, pastor of Christ Liberation Fellowship PCA in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which is a plant of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Mr. Lewis expresses concern about the entrenchment of the prosperity gospel and word of faith teaching that have increased within African-American churches over the past twenty-five years, and says that these movements are "as much a threat to the historic black church as theological liberalism was to the evangelical church in the early part of the twentieth century."

Mr. Lewis continues: "When people see that the prosperity gospel doesn't work they may reject God altogether" and expresses a vision of a more biblical way of believing, "where people no longer measure their lives by their circumstances, but seek to serve the Lord as an end to itself. That helps to provide a foundation for a growing, thriving, and

flourishing walk with the Lord."

Describing the upcoming conference, Mr. Lewis says: "Revival 2K10 seeks to offer preaching and teaching that provides biblical answers to the questions that are on the minds of church and unchurched black people. They're chiefly concerned with what is the substance of salvation in the here and now."

+ *Presbyterian Church in America*

United Nations Commission panel discussion for Girl Scouts features Planned Parenthood brochure encouraging girls to "talk dirty" and engage in aberrant sex

The 17 March 2010 issue of the Wednesday STOPP Report written by Rita Diller describes a recent meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women where a panel discussion held for the World Association of Girl Scouts and Girl Guides, where parents were not invited, featured Planned Parenthood handing out a brochure titled "Healthy, Happy and Hot," which encouraged girls to "talk dirty" to their sex partners, to engage in aberrant sex, and claiming there is no right or wrong way to have sex.

The brochure additionally affirms that young people living with HIV have the "right to sexual pleasure" and "have the right to decide if, when and how to disclose their HIV status;" and that laws requiring young people to disclose their HIV status to sexual partners "violate the rights of people living with HIV by forcing them to disclose or face the possibility of criminal charges."

+ *American Life League*

Annual women's meeting closes with delegations saying no to abortion

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) Last week, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) closed its annual session with delegations defining abortion out of a resolution on maternal mortality. Over the course of this year's two-week commission, United Nations (UN) member states were embroiled in heated negotiations over "reproductive rights" language which some delegations believe would be used to promote abortion.

+ *Samantha Singson*

Revocation of church-building permit reversed in Indonesia

On 25th February 2010 a State Court in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia reversed the decision taken by the the Purwakarta regency government in October 2009

to revoke the building permit for Santa Maria Catholic Church. The revocation of the permit was caused by Islamist threats towards local residents and officials because of the church construction project. According to Compass Direct News report, church leaders said members of the Islamic Defenders Front "continually terrorised" both the regent and residents who had previously given their approval for the church building. The head of the church legal team told Compass that the Purwakarta government is planning to appeal against the decision of the State Court, but church lawyers are optimistic that "construction likely would resume once the High Court in Jakarta rules."

+ *WEA Religious Liberty – March 2010*

Attacks against Christians in Mexico

Voice of the Martyrs Canada and Voice of the Martyrs Mexico report of increasing attacks on believers by traditionalist religious and rebel groups in Chiapas, Mexico in recent months. Reports show that on 28th February 2010, three Christians were shot and wounded on their way home from church services in the region of Mitxiton, and rebel sympathisers assaulted approximately 40 Christians who were asleep in their homes in the city of Tumbala.

+ *WEA Religious Liberty – March 2010*

More attacks against Christians in Uzbekistan

Forum 18 News Service reports again on continuous attacks against Christian communities in Uzbekistan and particularly against Baptists. Three leaders of the Baptist Union were on a public trial, broadcasted on the Uzbek state TV, in which they were forced to pay "what the Court claimed was unpaid tax" and "two were removed from their posts", according to Forum 18. Another Baptist was forced to pay a fine after he refused to appear as a witness in the trial of three leaders of the Baptist Union. Forum 18 states that the described "is part of frequent state-sponsored media attacks on religious believers of all faiths and freedom of religion and belief."

+ *WEA Religious Liberty – March 2010*

Please pray for the Christians in troubled parts of the world who are suffering for Christ. Pray that the Lord would bring to naught the efforts of the enemies of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sally Davey

Christina Rossetti (1830-1895) and the grave, sweet beauty of melancholy

Victorian religious poetry is not at all popular today. That's not because it is bad poetry – far from it. It's because people find the “religious” bit strange and embarrassing. They're not religious themselves; and references to God, Christ, death, the resurrection, sin, guilt, shame are foreign to the modern mind. So poets like Christina Rossetti, preoccupied with the themes of sin, suffering, death and heaven, have been subject to studied neglect for well nigh a century. It seems to me that we should recover such a vibrant poetic resource, so much more in tune with our own world view than the literature produced today.

A desire to serve God

But perhaps you're not in the habit of reading poetry. Such a compressed form of writing, dense with symbolism and imagery, may seem hard going. You're glad you were able to leave it far behind, in your sixth form classroom ... And those writers' lives were so different from mine. What, you might well ask, does a Victorian spinster with an enigmatic personality and an artistic temperament have to do with me and my world? My answer is – surprisingly more than you think. Christina Rossetti was a Christian woman who knew about being in love, who had domestic and family concerns, and a weighty experience of suffering. She was also possessed of a deep desire to serve God with the gift he had given her.

Christina was the child of two cultures: her father, Gabriele, was the son of a Sicilian peasant family. A local nobleman generously funded his way through university, but after he became involved in the political turmoil of the post-Napoleonic climate in Italy he had to flee to England for safety. There he met Frances Polidori, daughter of a cultured English family and an equally-cultured Italian father. Frances leaned more towards her English side, and had been a very accomplished governess. Gabriele was passionate, impractical, and also artistic and intellectual. He was Roman Catholic;

she was an evangelical-leaning Anglican. All her life Christina, their fourth and youngest child, was pulled between these two and somewhat warring strains in her nature.

It has been noted by one of her biographers that between the ages of perhaps 12 and 16 Christina changed from being a warm, impulsive little girl into a shy, very self-controlled and self-contained young woman. In her later poetry she chided herself for this reserve – which she called critically her “self-respect”. At the age of 35, having recently visited Italy and become friends with an Italian woman living in London, she wrote:

*We Englishwomen, trim, correct,
All minted in the self-same mould,
Warm-hearted, but of semblance cold,
All-courteous out of self-respect.*

*She, woman in her natural grace,
Less trammelled she by lore of school,
Courteous by nature not by rule,
Warm-hearted and of cordial face.*

High Church adherence brought change

What had caused the change? This biographer¹ believes her deep, permanent plunge into High Church Anglican teaching is to blame. She took on all the values and the thinking of a Charlotte Yonge heroine, and thereafter was devoted to church life of a kind that emphasised self-sacrifice, strict adherence to the Prayer Book and the sacraments, extreme reticence over matters of doctrine, and so on. It altered her personality – and her life.

From now on she lived at home with her parents, too often unwell to take work as a governess, inhabiting a world of family and friends. Her older sister, Maria, became a governess and a writer on Dante's poetry. Her brother William was also a writer, though earning his living as a civil servant in the Excise Department. Perhaps the most talented and famous member of the family was Christina's other brother, Dante Gabriel,

the celebrated pre-Raphaelite painter and poet. His friends – artists, writers of various kinds, and his female models, all became part of Christina's social and creative world.

Brothers drifted from the faith

Christina, her mother and her sister, Maria, all remained devoted Christians – of a High Church stripe – to the end of their lives. Her two brothers, however, were a different story. William, though a much-loved, very protective, responsible and supportive older brother, drifted off into agnosticism. Dante Gabriel, a classic artistic temperament, lived rather erratically, in questionable relationships with his models and somewhat addicted to chloral, taken to counter insomnia. He was depressive and wildly enthusiastic by turns; and certainly not committed to biblical Christianity. His sisters and mother all worried about William and Dante Gabriel; and Maria later entered an Anglican order of nuns partly to pray for God's mercy that they might be converted.

As a young woman, though shy, Christina was very beautiful. The artistic friends of her older brothers greatly



Christina as a 17 year-old; Dante Gabriel's first oil painting.

admired her. When she was 18, Dante Gabriel's friend, James Collinson, who had been a regular and devout member of her congregation, Christ Church, proposed. She refused him since he had recently turned to Roman Catholicism. When he renounced the Catholicism and returned to the Anglican church she accepted him; but only briefly. Probably, she was not really in love with him, but had succumbed to her family's emphasis of his good points. Two years after the engagement, Collinson re-joined the Roman Catholic church and, as he might have expected, Christina broke the engagement off. Tensions between Roman Catholicism and the Anglican mainstream were heightening over some important test cases at this time; and for Anglicans, "going over to Rome" was spiritual betrayal.

Christina was twice to forsake a potential husband because of her faith. Much later, in her mid-thirties, she was quite deeply in love with another artist, Charles Cayley. He was rather eccentric, and certainly a very shy man. Christina and the family had known him for years – and she seems to have left him in uncertainty for a long time as to her answer. Eventually, however, she declined – this time, because he was an unbeliever. Most biographers are somewhat incredulous that a woman of this mature age, without other prospects, should refuse marriage simply on the grounds of religious scruple. How little they know – they do not believe 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, as we do. Christina realised that her refusal was a decisive path-setting for the rest of her life. She would be single, dependent, and probably short of money. Seen on some levels, it would be an empty life. Here is what she wrote around this time:

*Oh, what comes over the sea,
Shoals and quicksands past;
And what comes home to me,
Sailing slow, sailing fast?*

*A wind comes over the sea
With a moan in its blast;
But nothing comes home to me,
Sailing slow, sailing fast.*

*Let me be, let me be,
For my lot is cast;
Land and sea all's one to me,
And sail it slow or fast.*

A gift for God

But Christina had her gift of poetry, and always, she saw it as a gift to be used for God. She wrote a huge volume, over 50

years of her life, until she died of cancer in 1894. She was an intense personality – yes – but while much of her poetry was deep and sad, she is also famous for her gentle, song-like simplicity. Nowhere more characteristically do we find this quality than in her poems for or about children. Many of them were published in the early 1870s in a collection entitled *Sing Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book*. And sweet songs they are, some like songs mothers sing to their children:

*My baby has a mottled fist,
My baby has a neck in creases;
My baby kisses and is kissed,
For he's the very thing for kisses.*

Others are more grave and reflective:

*What are heavy? Sea-sand and sorrow:
What are brief? Today and tomorrow:
What are frail? Spring blossoms and youth:
What are deep? The ocean and truth.*

She also wrote love poetry. We will never know how much touched her own experience, or that of others, or was simply the product of her own romantic imagination, fed on the literature of the several languages she knew. She spoke often of the sadness human love knows. Here, perhaps in memory of her sister-in-law's illness and death, she wrote:

*Pardon the faults in me
For the love of years long ago;
Good-bye.
I must drift across the sea,
I must sink into the snow,
I must die.*

*You can bask in the sun,
You can drink wine, and eat:
Good-bye.
I must gird myself and run,
Though with unsteady feet:
I must die ...*

*Not a word for you,
Not a lock or kiss,
Good-bye.
We, one, must part in two;
Verily death is this:
I must die.*

Faith was implicit

But above all, Christina's poetry was religious poetry. After her death, her brother William separated her many poems into "religious" and "general" by topic – but this is an artificial (and really impossible) distinction. Her general poems are permeated with religious



The Girlhood of Mary Virgin by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Christina and her mother were models for the two women).

reflection; and her religious poems are saturated with thoughts of human love. Her faith was implicit rather than finely reasoned. She herself wrote: "To me it seems that our duty towards the Bible is to obey its teaching in faith. I do not think we are bound to understand or account for all its utterances." William wrote that her attitude was "My faith is my faith: it is not evolved out of argumentation, nor does it seek the aid of that." ² That said, Christina's knowledge of the Scriptures was wide and deep; her language was permeated with biblical imagery and phrases – all used with accurate understanding of its context. She was particularly fond of the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Revelation. The phrase she apparently quoted most often was "Vanity of vanities" (Ecclesiastes 1:2); and frequent also were "hope deferred [maketh the heart sick]" (Proverbs 13:12) and "deep calleth unto deep" (Psalm 42:7).

Not alone in the subjects she wrote about

One only has to flick quickly through the very large Penguin Classics edition of her complete poems to see that almost all her poetry deals in some manner or other with aspects of Christian faith. As a Victorian poet she was not alone in her preoccupation with death and the brevity of life. But she also stresses hope in Christ, and in life beyond the grave; in the fact that parting with loved ones is merely temporary. Human love could only ever be a pale reflection of God's infinite love for us through his Son. Here are

the two stanzas of "Love is strong as Death":

*"I have not sought Thee, I have not found Thee,
I have not thirsted for Thee:
And now cold billows of death
astound me,-
Buffeting billows of death astound me,-
Wilt Thou look upon, wilt Thou see
Thy perishing me?"*

Christ answers:

*"Yea, I have sought thee, yea I have found thee,
Yea, I have thirsted for thee,
Yea, long ago with love's bands I bound thee:
Now the Everlasting Arms surround thee,-
Thro' death's darkness I look and see
And clasp thee to Me."*

Because of the intense, primarily religious character of all her poetry, Christina Rossetti and those like her

are not popular or widely-read today. But there is at least one poem that has remained beloved in the English-speaking world. Here are the first two and last two verses of what is probably Christina's best-known poem of all, "In the Bleak Mid-Winter". It is sung as a Christmas carol. Try listening to it as sung by the boy choristers of King's College, Cambridge, to the tune Cranham, composed for it by Gustav Holst:

*In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.*

*Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter*

*A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty
Jesus Christ.*

*Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Throng'd the air,
But only His mother
In her maiden bliss
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.*

*What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,-
Yet what can I give Him,
Give my heart.*

Notes

- 1 Georgina Battiscombe, *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (Constable, London, 1981)
- 2 Quoted in Frances Thomas, *Christina Rossetti: A Biography* (Virago Press, London, 1992), p. 282

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Theological College of Central Africa (TCCA) *continued*

Last month we heard about the ministry of Tim and Zara Woo, members of Dunedin congregation who have been working in Zambia for the past two years. The Woos are back in New Zealand for a short time now, but here's some more information about what they've been doing, and what they hope to continue doing on their return. Tim will, Lord willing, continue his work at the Theological College of Central Africa, helping those studying for the ministry to delve more deeply into the Word as they access the books in the college library. Zara ... well, what will Zara do? Read on!

Home of the aged

Once we went to visit a Home for the Aged run by the Salvation Army. Seeing that the elderly ladies appreciate visits and attention, Zara started to visit them every week. She tried to start a Bible study group with the four English speaking ladies. It did not work out the way she planned. One 94 year old Roman Catholic has hearing problem and prefers to have one to one conversation rather than a group study. Another lady suffered a type of disorder which makes her walk around often, so again Zara spends private time with her each time. Nevertheless she enjoys the time with them all. Normally she studies the Word of God with two ladies before going on to the other two separately. With elderly folks suffering from all kinds of illnesses, having to share rooms and using communal facilities, Zara finds it more important to focus on the person of Jesus Christ and the glorious hope that we have despite the trials and sufferings in this temporary life. Now that she has built up relationship with them, they have good fellowship each time encouraging each other.

Hospitality

Zara is also busy practising hospitality, inviting visiting lecturers to our house. Many missionaries, Zambian pastors from other provinces and Chinese friends come to our place.

TCCA Registry

In mid September 2009, the principal of TCCA asked if Zara could help with the work for the registrar. The person in charge had left the College and she was asked to step in to take over the task. That kept her very busy especially in November and December 2009. There was such a lot to learn and there were moments of stress with this new work but she enjoys the involvement with the TCCA community. There are things yet to learn on the job as individual applicants can be very different. One thing that saddened her greatly was to see some very godly applicants, committed to serve the Lord and passionately desiring to be trained so they are better equipped for ministry, yet unable to come because of insufficient financial sponsorship. The student roll in TCCA has dropped significantly in

the last few years; the main reason is lack of finance.

Chinese ministry

There are other opportunities open to us in Ndola. When we first came, we never thought of working among the Chinese people in Zambia. We never knew we would be meet Chinese people here! But it turns out there are many Chinese workers in Africa. Most of the Chinese in Zambia concentrate in Lusaka (the capital) and in the copper mines of Copperbelt Province north of Ndola. In Ndola itself, there is a small contingent of Chinese doctors sent by the Government to work here for a term of 2 years. There are also a few Chinese firms here and most of them are in the industrial area. Recently the Chinese Government donated three big stadiums to Zambia and one of them is in Ndola and they have started building it. Most of the workers in this project are from China and at the moment close to three hundred of them are working here.

From time to time we meet these folk in supermarkets or elsewhere in town. Some have become friends and we know them quite well. Timothy started a Bible study with one Chinese doctor early last year and he became a Christian. However, he was transferred to another city, so we do not see him much since then, and we are worried whether he could still maintain his faith. Timothy is now doing a regular Bible study with another Chinese doctor. It is not easy to witness to the Chinese people here: they work very long hours and have their rest day on Sunday, some only have a rest day on alternate Sundays. Many of them live in their own compounds and for security reasons it is not easy to reach them by outsiders like us. But we have prayed for opportunities to do more outreach to these people, and the Lord has graciously answered our prayers. He opened up some opportunities for us and we came to know several more contacts. We made use of the Chinese New Year to visit the Chinese people we had not connected with for a while. We are still praying for wisdom and time to continue building up these friendships. Please pray that God will raise up more Chinese-speaking Christians who would like to come to work among the Chinese people in this area.

What's next?

Time flies and we will be in Zambia for 2 years in May 2010. We will return to



Tim and Zara Woo (foreground, right and left) having dinner with three Chinese doctors. The doctor on Tim's right is a friend from New Zealand – he and his wife (also a doctor) have just completed three months short term work in Ghana.

New Zealand for about 10 weeks from 7 May to 19 July 2010. After that, Lord willing, we will go to Hong Kong for 12 days before returning to Zambia on 31 July for another 2 years. We feel that God is leading us to stay longer so that we may complete what we have started this term.

When we look back, a theme that has been mentioned several times by our principal in 2008 encouraged us greatly and we would like to share it with you. The theme is "I'll be with you." This is what God told Moses. Moses of course had so many excuses and we probably feel the same – unworthy, incapable, why me, etc., but God says, "Go, I'll be with you." God spoke the same to Joshua. Joshua was intimidated by the task facing him and he felt weak and discouraged, but God says, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." That is also what God speaks through Isaiah, "I will be with you when you pass through the waters, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. You will not be scorched when you walk through the fire, and the flame will not burn you."

After nearly two years in Zambia, we can truly say that God is with us and He is faithful and He looks after us, and we are comforted and encouraged by His words. We could see His guiding hand in many instances and experience that He listens to our and your prayers. We also thank God that SIM Zambia and the

missionaries here are very good to us and we get lots of encouragement from them. Thank God that we are able to adjust to life in Zambia, although sometimes, even now, we could feel frustrated and discouraged. We are thankful that we live in Ndola, a big city (but not too big). This makes our adjustment much easier than serving in a rural area. We can enjoy the conveniences of living in a city, have electricity and running water. Our fellow missionaries in the rural area have a much harder life and they really sacrifice a lot in order to serve our God. Thanks again for praying for us faithfully. We are continuing to be encouraged to know that we have so many supporters back home. Thank you.

Planning a mission trip? Let us pray for you!

If you or somebody you know is planning a mission trip – short or long – please let us know. We want to pray for those on mission trips overseas, but we cannot pray if we don't know that you're going! Deadline for submission of articles to Faith in Focus is 6 weeks before the month the magazine comes to your church. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at reid4radio@gmail.com.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Bishopdale

Pastoral. Congratulations to Ron and Ank Wisse who celebrated 50 years of married life together yesterday (27 February)! What a blessing! God has been good to you! We also rejoice with Peter and Janine Heeringa who will celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary this coming Tuesday (2 March).

Congratulations to Richard Vanderpyl on his appointment as the new principal of Middleton Grange effective from the beginning of the second term. There are two weddings coming up in March. Lord willing, Stu Ford and Anna van Tuinen will marry on Friday the 12th. The service will begin at 2:00pm and will be held at the Kaikoura Presbyterian Church, 11 Deal Street. Robert van Wichem will be officiating. The following Friday, Jeremy Bangma and Amy Jochem will tie the knot. The service will be held at Cashmere Hills Presbyterian Church, 2 MacMillan Ave at 1:00pm. Andrew de Vries will be officiating.

Dovedale

Prayer Meetings. For some time now, we have benefited from and enjoyed the privilege of gathering for prayer on the Friday before the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Acts 1:14 and 1 Thess. 5:17 reveal the importance of prayer in the life of the church. Over the last couple of meetings the session has given some thought to extra shared prayer within our church community. With this in mind, we would like to schedule an extra prayer meeting to be held before the afternoon service in the months between the Lord's Supper. Thus, prayer meeting dates for the year will be: Friday April 9th, Sunday May 2nd, Friday June 11th, Sunday July 4th, Friday August 13th, Sunday Sept 5th, Friday October 8th, Sunday November 7th, and Friday December 10th. We are still thinking about an appropriate focus for this extra prayer time but wanted to alert you to this already.

Evangelism Workshops. Bill Berends, lecturer in apologetics at the Reformed Theological College, has kindly agreed to hold some workshops on "Evangelism and the Defence of the Faith" here at Bishopdale on Friday evening the 9th of April and on Saturday morning the 10th of April. He will cover The Why – The Goal: not winning the argument, but leading people to Christ; The How – The Method: Not just rational arguments, but lifestyle and testimony; and The What – dealing with issues we meet in today's society. This should be a wonderful opportunity to learn more about how to share the gospel with people in our community. Keep the date free!

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. A very warm welcome to Rev Dick and Mrs Mary Wyjna who have come all the way from Denver, Colorado to help us out for the next three months. This is indeed a kindness for which we are truly grateful. We do look forward to getting to know you both during your time with us.

Hamilton

From the Pastor: On Wednesday evening the elders joyfully agreed to the requests of Susannah Bennett, Ryan Bos, Lisa Hemmes, Johan Kloeg and Tessa Vorschezang to profess their faith. This will take place in a few weeks' time.

Hastings

From the Pastor. Today we have the opportunity to rejoice with the Landkroon family as we witness Johann's profession of faith. Having expressed a strong desire to profess his faith publicly, Johann met regularly with Pastor Hoyt last year. The session are confident that Johann has a heart for the Lord and desires to continue to walk in His ways. Praise God for the perspicuity (clear central message) of the Scriptures. Prison Ministry. Today John Verbokkem's group, Dick, Jerf, Mike, Harry, Esther and Brenda returned to 'Unit 7' Hawkes Bay Prison. Security has really toughened up for visitors, for obvious reasons. "We've never had religion in our home" a young prisoner reveals to me after the service. "You were never encouraged by your mum or grandmother to attend church with them?" NOPE. "Have you a Bible?"

"Yep, I'd like to look at this CBI course". So the journey begins. Encouraging? You can say that again. I would like to think that seven years visiting prison, the message conveyed to prisoners – We are here this morning to bring you a church service and sharing with you guys God's holy and true word – has sunk in. The message today: The purpose of life, Scripture reading: Ecclesiastes 1, Prayer: for prisoners, their families, the message, Welcome: "It's great to see you here", Songs: They guys can sing and harmonise beautifully. These are the tools that are used. Interaction and distributing Godly reading matter, bring the morning to an end. We are thanked profusely. Your prayers, brothers and sisters are received with graciousness. We thank you! – Brenda. Shout joyfully to God, all the earth, sing glory to His name ... Psalm 66: 1,2.

Wedding. Ed and Maureen Saathof are happy to announce the marriage of their daughter Rachel to Neville Wilson. The wedding ceremony will be held on Tait's beach (a private venue), just north of Napier on March 6th at 12 noon. All are most welcome to attend the ceremony which will be followed by light refreshments at the beach. Please bring



Rev. David Waldron welcomes Johann Landkroon to full communion and full participation in the life of the church after Johann had professed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in the Reformed Church of Hastings on March 14.

a rug to sit on. Please ask Ed, Maureen or Rachel for directions if you wish to attend. If the weather is unsuitable, the ceremony will be held at Christ Church, Pukehou.

North Shore

Profession of Faith & Baptism. With great pleasure we inform you that David Bilton who has been worshipping with us for the last two years wishes to publicly profess his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and be baptised and be received into the Church. We thank the Lord for so working in David's heart. David is still working out a date suitable to members of his family whom he would like to invite. On the same day Letritia Spies, whose profession of faith was approved last year but was unable to take place because of a trip to South Africa, will also profess her faith. We are thankful to the Lord for his grace to us in working in the hearts of these two young people.

Palmerston North

Calling All Men: Of All Ages. This is an advance notice. The men's fellowship will be having its first meeting of the year on Friday 26th March, starting with

coffee at 7:30pm. We will be looking at a video series on Leadership by Dr. Nelson Kloosterman. We plan to meet every two months on a Friday evening, so please plan to be there! Any queries please see Eeuwe Reitsma.

Archivist Needed: The entire archives for the RCNZ denomination reside right here in our church building, Harmony House. Due to ill health, the previous Archivist, appointed by the Synodical Committee, has had to resign. The Committee has asked the Session of RCPN if we can locate a suitable person here in the Palmerston North congregation who could look after this unique resource, at least for a period of some months. The work is exacting and fascinating and absolutely essential to the maintenance of the history of our Church denomination in NZ. If you would like to know more, please see one of the Deacons. Thanks.

Pukekohe

Last Thursday a baby girl was born to Sarah and Wayne Kingham and we rejoice with them in the birth of another healthy baby and give thanks to God. They have named their daughter Lucy Elizabeth. Mother and daughter are both well. Davy and Lara Roberts were married yesterday. We are thankful they have made this commitment to each other and pray they may also come to a firm commitment to the Lord. Michael and Alida Posthuma were married yesterday. We wish them a blessed marriage and pray they will also be of encouragement and help to others around them. A warm welcome to family members and friends who are here for this occasion. Wedding. It is with joy we announce the wedding of Lara Kuipers and David Roberts. This will take place, DV, at 3:00pm this Friday, 12th of March, at Kohekohe Church, 1180 Awhitu Road. All are welcome to attend this service and the afternoon tea that will follow.

Silverstream

Session Notes. Non-Smoking Policy: Session would ask members to refrain from smoking on the church property. This rule has been in place for some time, though it is often ignored. It is our desire to set a good example to the young people in our church, and to visitors. In the past, we have actually had visitors cite this matter as a factor in their decision not to keep attending

our church. None of us wants to be a stumbling-block in this regard. Please keep this in mind, after the service and during the week.

Session Notes. Session is pleased to announce that two young people sustained their examination for Profession of Faith: Amy Posthuma and Geoffrey Doyle. We thank the Lord for the good account these young people gave of their faith, both as to doctrine and life. Barring any lawful objections, and Lord willing, Amy and Geoffrey will profess their faith during the morning worship service on March 28. If there are any objections, these should be conveyed in writing to the elders as soon as possible. Please pray for these young people of our congregation.

Wellington

This morning we have the privilege of welcoming Christel Dodunski as a new member of our church, as she reaffirms her faith during our service.

Short Report of the Auckland Presbytery Meeting 26th February, 2010

Due to Auckland traffic problems (okay, all the rest of you, have your laugh!), the meeting began a half hour late with the Rev. Michael Willemse in the chair. The main item on the Agenda was the final examination of brother André Scheepers, having accepted the call from the Hukanui congregation. Hence the meeting was held in the wonderfully renovated and expanded facilities of the Hukanui Reformed Church. The synodical examiners, the Revs Peter Kloosterman and Andre Holtslag from the Wellington and Christchurch Presbyteries respectively were especially welcomed. André first preached a sermon on a text of his own choice: Blind Bartimaeus, Luke 18:31-43. After the evaluation by the Rev. John Haverland and brief discussion by the Presbytery delegates, the sermon was sustained and André was then examined in Ethics, Bible Knowledge, Church History, Symbolics and Church Polity (Systematic Theology, Old Testament and New Testament being omitted due to the fact that André was being examined in the same Presbytery as for his first exam and that he gave a very good account of himself in those topics

40th Wedding Anniversary of ROGER and MARTY ELDERSHAW

21 March 1970–
21 March 2010

*"Praise God from Whom
All Blessings Flow"*

With thanks to God, and love
from:

Moana and Martin
Martin and Corina
Duncan and Ilona
Simon and Melanie

And all their grandchildren

at that first exam). This part of his exam was also, after a brief discussion by the delegates, sustained. We are very grateful to the Lord for this outcome and wish André and his wife Sue the blessing of the Lord in the years ahead and in particular in the Hukanui Reformed Church. The elders of Hukanui announced that André's installation would take place on Saturday, 27th March, at 4pm, Lord willing. Presbytery then had time only to discuss a few other matters, in particular, one in relation to the OMB; viz., that instead of the churches being levied very heavily and/or requested for more special offerings in one year to cover the set-up costs for the Rev. Alan & Odette Douma in PNG, the Presbytery endorsed the Rev. Dirk van Garderen's suggestion, which will be presented to the OMB at its next meeting, that the OMB seek a loan from the Church Extension Committee to spread the outstanding amount over a number of years.

John Rogers.

Short Report of the Christchurch Presbytery Meeting on 13 March 2010

Elder Les Chapman, on behalf of the Reformed Church of Christchurch the calling church, read from Ephesians 4:1-16 and encouraged the delegates to strive for spiritual health and wealth through unity in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rev Andre Holtslag then chaired the remainder of the meeting.

In answer to Article 47 questions Dunedin reported on a positive outlook in Oamaru with the arrival of Rev Bruce Hoyt and a good number of regular visitors there. However the Timaru work needs prayer with the imminent departure of Rev Jim Klazinga. For their part Christchurch reported on their blessing as a congregation with regular preaching assistance from the Bishopdale ministers. Both these churches need prayer as to securing the services of permanent ministers.

Written reports from the Overseas Mission Board and Reformed Theological College representatives were received and discussed.

The appointment of counsellors to vacant churches was reviewed and Rev Robert van Wichen was confirmed in the position at Christchurch. For Dunedin the

addition of Rev Bruce Hoyt to the session has allowed Rev Andrew Nugteren to be relieved of the role of counsellor. Liaison appointments with synodical committees were also made.

Arising from a previous request from Presbytery, Rev Daniel Wilson introduced

a topic on the purpose and role of catechetical instruction. The major thrust of his presentation and of the ensuing discussion considered the balance of responsibility between parents and the church.

John van Dyk

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Allow me to make a few comments, as a member of an earlier Psalter Hymnal Committee and an old Reformed Church organist, on the article (*Faith in Focus*, March 2010) "Back to the future with our Psalms and Hymns" by the Rev. Rogers, drawing your attention to:

- 1 Part 4.b.1 of the Psalter Hymnal Committee meeting minutes (30/6/2000), which, after having called into question all the near-hysterical statements about the emasculation of the Psalm texts in the grey Psalter Hymnal, nevertheless moved, "NOT to recommend at this stage – as it 'horrifies' many, – to 'do our own book ...'" and then to
- 2 Synod 2002's majority decision to appoint a committee to do the very same thing.

Now the *Faith in Focus* statement appears, explaining why this synodical (North Shore motion) decision was made:

- a the first and foremost reason being that "too many Genevan Psalms tunes (43) in the grey PsH, which are 'variably' (whatever that means) received in our churches;
- b Genevans are not a familiar part of NZ church music".

Well, they may not be familiar to some, but they do still sing them in many of our Reformed sister- or half -sister churches in Australia, South Africa, Canada, the USA, Hungary, France and Switzerland, and they were and still are a most basic part of our continental Calvinist French/Dutch/Psalter heritage. Any senior Dutch member of our very own RCNZ can still sing many of them from memory in Dutch: this has apparently been ignored or forgotten, or has never been properly understood and appreciated by some or many of our ministers.

This has always amazed me, yea baffles me still! Is it explained a little(?) by the fact that our Canadian, American and

even our few NZ ministers grew up either with the blue *Trinity Hymnal* – which has only snippets of Psalms (many set to United Presbyterian American 19th century Sunday-School jingles), still to be dug out via the index in the rear of the book? Or is it with the Blue *Psalter Hymnal* – with similarly-sourced Psalms – and where many so-called Genevan Psalms are given in a less than sound harmonisation, to a totally incorrect rhythm (ex the "de Vries Koraalboek"), adapted by Mr Bruinsma, in rather archaic versifications by Dutch Americans of the mid 1900's?

We must realise that the beautiful melodies of the Genevans are not only unparalleled in the world of Psalms and hymns, their very uniquely different rhythms set them apart (nearly all of them possessing their own very specific patterns, very few the same). All fit their texts admirably, every time; their church/tonality/ modality having surprised, astonished Psalm and hymn musicologists for several centuries.

Take the trouble, have a really good look, study the proper rhythmic settings of the Genevan Psalms and it will strike, it must strike anyone, that they are unique, that their melodies are beautiful, composed by the best Christian musicians of Calvin's time and at his behest. Calvin is a man honoured for the treasury of his doctrinal theology, often featured in articles in our very own *Faith in Focus*. But what do we do with Calvin's Psalms?

Letters to the editor are most welcome. They should refer to an issue the magazine has recently published. Their language should be temperate, and they may not charge anyone with an offence. They should be brief, and they may be condensed/edited by the editor. The opinions expressed are those of the writer, and not necessarily of the editorial team of *Faith in Focus*.

What did we do with these Psalms? As a Reformed Church in NZ? In our new 2008 *Sing to the Lord* psalter (provisional) we have dumped most of them, retaining only 12 of that rich heritage, supplanting them with a selection of almost all new Psalm versifications of Scottish or Australian Presbyterian origin, many to new, sometimes, indeed, way-out tunes. At length and in detail I have elaborated on this in previous letters to the Committee and to the RCNZ. And I say it again; there is also nothing particularly – as stated – “NZ-flavoured” about these Psalms.

As a matter of fact, there is no NZ-flavour-Psalter extant; the Anglicans read or chant them, so do the Roman Catholics; the Presbyterians do not sing many Psalms any longer, neither do

the United, Congregational, Methodist or Baptist churches (Psalms mostly set for choirs only). Many hymns have even been supplanted by songs with very repetitive texts to simple ditties – (I refer you to the ringbound and hardcover NZ HymnBook). The United Churches of Canada sing Psalms as hymns (ex the traditional *Scottish Psalter*), chant or read them responsively (based on the 1989 NZ *PrayerBook*).

A further *Faith in Focus* statement mentions as direction from Synod: “We also shall wherever a Genevan Tune is presented provide a non-Genewan alternative”, (just in case one might be insulted, or cannot/will not sing a Genevan Psalm??)

We did call some time ago the attention of all the RCNZ and the Committee

to these problems with our Psalmody, but received very few or no comments on our very detailed critique. Is there no or only scant interest in this so very important part of our worship??

It remains for us to live in hope that, with the hymnal part of our *Sing to The Lord*, the Committee will make up for the somewhat foreign strangeness of the provisional Psalter. Are we indeed detecting a willingness to do this, to still include “as far as possible” Psalm selections from our presently and provisionally approved sources: our *Psalms and Hymns 1965/6*”, the *Book of Worship* and the grey *Psalter Hymnal*. One would certainly hope so.

Yours in the Service of our Lord and King,

A. Snoek.

Sir, I was gratified to read the Rev. Leo De Vos’s March 2010 article about the real Saint Patrick – that lovely Christian of the old British Church who evangelised Ireland, and so has been hijacked by Irish Papists as one of their lot!

The account of his conversion, while working as a swineherd for the Irish pirates who had captured him as a boy playing on Britain’s western seashore, is full of pathos. We don’t know whether, in modern terms, his home village (in Latin called Bernicia) was in Scotland, Wales, or England. Also, there are conflicting versions of how old he was: some say he was still only a little boy when his loving Christian parents ransomed him, and that he was returned to them by way of Gaul.

But there’s no doubt that, while his captivity was probably not a long one, he would have known his captors were approaching his parents for his ransom; so surely he drew a parallel with our own ransom paid by Christ’s Atonement; and what his parents had told him must have registered at last. And when the ransom had finally freed him, he and his Dad must have wept together like the Prodigal Son and his father when they met again!

It’s a pity so few people know the facts about St Patrick; but I remember a good British novel, “Lease of Life”, first published c.1952, in which a plodding Anglican vicar, aware he has not long to live, ruminates on the real St Patrick’s story mangled by the Papists, among other musings. It made a fine film, starring Robert Donat, c.1954, but naturally didn’t risk upsetting the Papists

by mentioning the true St Patrick; so if it’s now a video or DVD, your readers ought to view it. And I attach a copy of a poem by the delightful American writer of humorous verse, Ogden Nash (1900-1969, I think), which you might

like to publish: it’s a very nice confirmation of Mr de Vos’s article, though I don’t know whether the late Mr Nash himself was a Christian.

H. Westfold,
(RCNZ, Wellington).

Saint Patrick was a proper man, a man to be admired
O numbering his virtues I am never, never tired
A handsome man, a holy man, a man of mighty deeds
He walked the lanes of Erin, a-tellin of his beads
A-telling of his beads, he was, and spreading of the word
I think that of Saint Patrick’s Day, Saint Patrick hadn’t heard

The saint was born a subject of the ancient British throne
But the Irish in their wisdom recognized him as their own
A raiding party captured him, and carried him away
And Patrick loved the Irish, and he lived to capture they
A-walking of the valleys and a-spreading of the word
I think that of Saint Patrick’s Day, Saint Patrick hadn’t heard

He defied the mighty Druids, he spoke them bold and plain
And he lit the Easter fire on the lofty hill of Shane
He lit the Easter fire where the hill and heaven met
And on every hill in Ireland the fire is burning yet
He lit the Easter fire, a-spreading of the word
I think that of Saint Patrick’s Day, Saint Patrick hadn’t heard

Saint Patrick was a proper man before he was a saint
He was shaky in his Latin, his orthography was quaint
But he walked the length of Ireland, her mountains and her lakes,
A-building of his churches and a-driving out the snakes
A-building of his churches and a-spreading of the word
I think that of Saint Patrick’s Day, Saint Patrick hadn’t heard

But the radio announcer is ever in the vogue
He ushers in Saint Patrick with a rolling Broadway brogue
He oils the vernal air waves with macushlas and colleens
Begorras, worra-worras, and spurious spalpeens
If Saint Francis had a sponsor, we would hear him as a thrush
And Saint George would cackle cockney
Saint Patrick, here’s my blush.

Book in focus

The Piety of John Calvin: A Collection of His Spiritual Prose, Poems, and Hymns

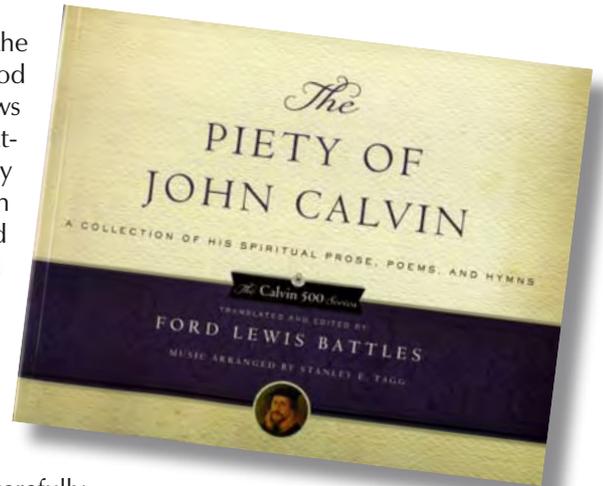
Ford Lewis Battles, P&R Publishing
Reviewed by Bryan D. Estelle

With the passing of July 10, 2009, the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, books about him are rolling off the presses. This one provides a window into the piety and godliness of the great Reformer. Ford Lewis Battles, a great Calvin scholar, was the principal translator and editor of the original volume published by Baker. This new edition by P&R Publishing contains a foreword by David Hall and a preface by Battle's daughter, Nancy Howitt-Battles.

This collection of Calvin's writings aims (1) to present the man Calvin as

he saw himself, (2) to explain the Christian life as he understood it, and (3) to examine his views on, and practice of, prayer. Battles accomplishes these goals by including seven carefully chosen selections. Each is accompanied by instructive introductions and terse endnotes for the reader who desires more information.

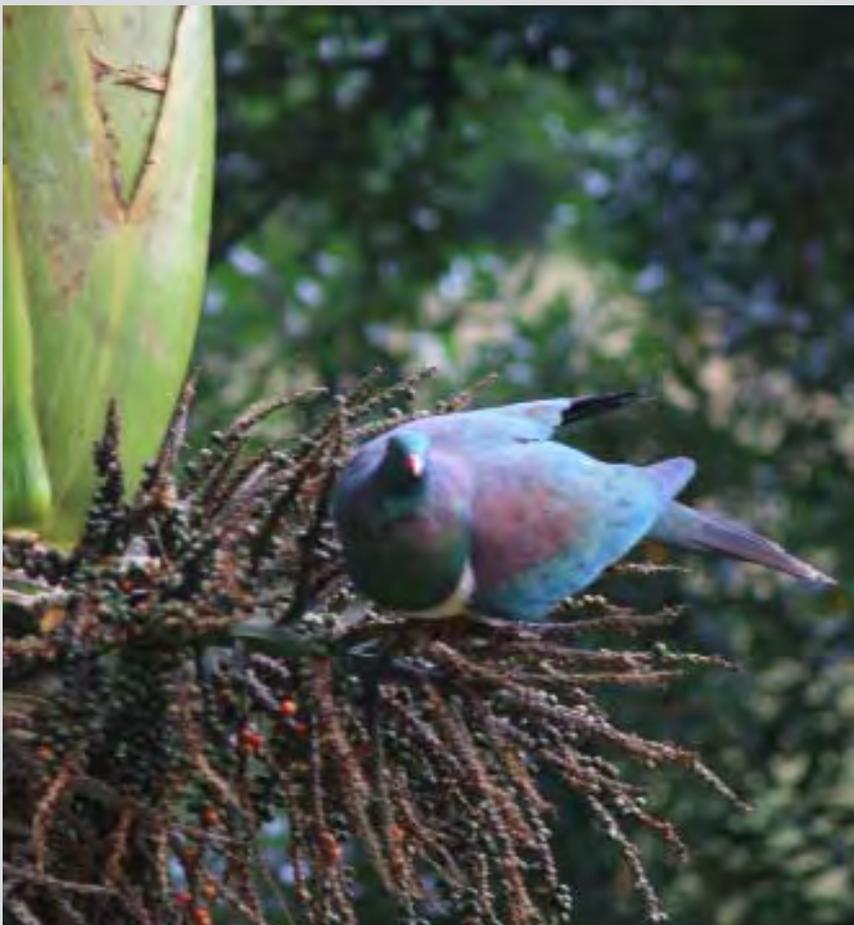
The book is beautifully organized. From the formatting and arrangement of the text in the book, as well as the carefully constructed words, the reader can gain an appreciation for Calvin's aptitude as a poet and theologian. Indeed, many of the selections demonstrate an almost hymnic quality, on which Battles comments in the notes.



Calvin teaches in these writings that the way to heaven is via the earth; that is, recognizing that this earth is full of dread death and all its consequences, he encourages Christians to look heavenward. Calvin's felicitous thoughts on Christian liberty can be found here. Does God make creation so beautiful that it should be unlawful to enjoy it? Calvin gives no quarter for the Christian who would exploit these truths as a pretext for sin. Additionally, his loathing of human pride before the Most High is a major theme throughout the selections.

The selections are shot through with psychological and spiritual insight into the human condition and psyche. Calvin did not countenance any "cheap grace." He insisted on the highest standards for holiness. Even so, he was a realist – knowing well the pity of his heavenly father – recognizing our feeble frame and offering courageous words for the saint who desires to redouble his or her efforts. "Let us not lose courage even though our progress is but slight. For even though the actuality may not correspond to our desire, when today outstrips yesterday, all is not lost. Only let us look with pure and true simplicity toward our goal."

This reviewer noticed only one spelling error in the book (p. 20). He also wishes that such a book could have been printed on better quality paper. Even so, the publishers are to be commended for producing a handsome book that should grace the coffee tables, nightstands, and private libraries of many Christians. It reveals Calvin's deep inner piety and encourages us to follow in the same path.



"Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell; They lift up their voices among the branches". Ps 104:12

Photo: Nathan Borger

John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life
Herman J. Selderhuis, IVP
Reviewed by Ben Westerveld

Our souls are nourished by reading Christian biographies, particularly those which faithfully recount the joys and struggles of this earthly pilgrimage. In this respect, Herman Selderhuis has done us a great service by producing a well-written biography of the Reformer of Geneva, John Calvin (1509–64).

While the bulk of the biography traces Calvin's ministry in Geneva, the reader will be intrigued to learn about the loss of his mother at the age of six, the strained relationship with his father, his gradual conversion to the Protestant faith, his exile from France, his cold reception as an immigrant in the Republic of Geneva, his distaste for accumulating money, his poor health, the death of his only child, the loving care given to his dying wife, his stubbornness, and his moments of personal discouragement and reproach. Neither applauding him nor cutting him down, Selderhuis simply presents the man of God, John Calvin.

Selderhuis has an engaging writing style, so that the biography reads easily. However, the numerous subtitles (on nearly every page) break the flow of the biographical pilgrimage. Also, Selderhuis has included few significant quotations

from Calvin's personal correspondence. The addition of longer quotations would have enabled the reader to enter better into the thoughts and feelings of this brother in Christ.

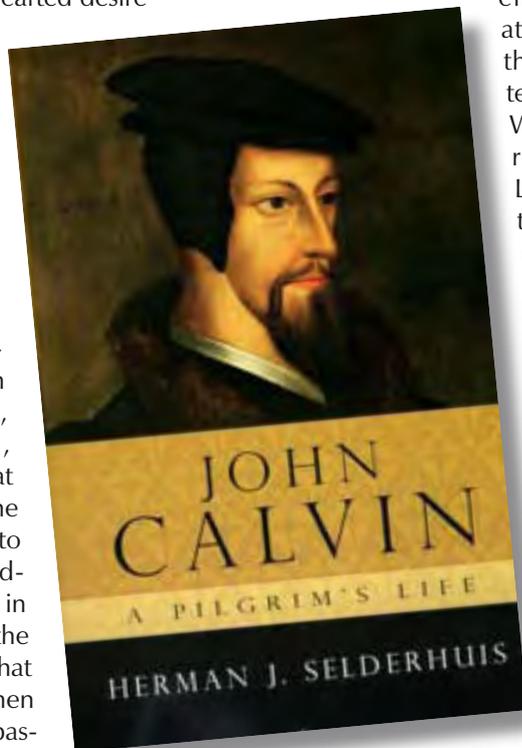
I would heartily recommend Selderhuis's biography to all adult believers, and not simply to Calvinists. Critics of Reformed doctrine would do well to read about Calvin's faith and life. An appreciation of his wholehearted desire to serve God may soften the sharp criticisms of his modern-day critics.

Those who love Reformed (Calvinist) doctrine would also benefit from reading this biography. Calvin is neither Christ, nor an apostle, nor the last great theologian that the Lord has given to the church. Reading about Calvin in the weakness of the flesh reminds us that he too is an earthen vessel, a fallible pas-

tor, as well as a struggling pilgrim.

I would strongly encourage pastors to read Selderhuis's book. Calvin's passion for the full ministry of the Word – preaching, catechising, writing, theological training, pastoral counseling, without neglecting the diaconal care of refugees fleeing persecution – should remind us of our full-orbed calling.

Reading the biography of John Calvin enables us to look at the man behind the theological system that we cherish. We are once again reminded that the Lord Jesus continues to give gifts to his church, particularly pastors and doctors of theology, to steer us away from false doctrine and to edify us in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:7–16). In our time, may he again raise up such men of God to unite us in our one, holy faith.



Report of the Wellington Women's Presbyterial held on Saturday 20 March, 2010, at the Reformed Church of Silverstream

57 ladies met on a beautiful day to fellowship together, be encouraged by what our guest speaker had to teach us and be challenged in our walk as Christian women.

Mrs Yvonne Walraven welcomed us, shared some Bible verses relating to being One in Christ Jesus and prayed. We were asked to sign a card for our Sister Nel Boere, who is undergoing continued treatment for breast cancer.

Tinned food was donated by the

ladies for the support of Te Omanga Hospice.

Our guest speaker Rev. Andre Holtslag, was then welcomed. He taught us from Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. The first verse was on "Bodily Worship" and after our lunch verse 2 was on "Not Conformed but Transformed."

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. We can spend much time caring for our outward appearance, which is going to change with age, forgetting to nourish our souls. Beauty comes from within. We are to nurture our children in these ways so we all can be like Christ.

At the close of the morning session, Mrs Walraven presented Mr Holtslag with a book voucher as a thank you. He could use this during the lunch break! We do appreciate the Session and congregation of Dovedale for allowing him to speak to us. Mr Holtslag led us in prayer and gave thanks for our lunch.

During the lunch break there was ample time to enjoy fellowship, and make use of the Geneva Book Stall.

At 1.20 p.m. We gathered in the foyer of our new church building for the editor of Faith in Focus, Mr Walter Walraven to take a group photo. Now, trying to get 57 women to stop talking and pose for a photo is not easy! We look forward to seeing the photo.

The afternoon programme began with holding an offering for Crossroad Bible Institute. This is a correspondence Bible Study ministry for prisoners. There are 8,000 prisoners in this country. Many members in our denomination are Instructors who mark the lessons which are accompanied by a personal letter. We were able to raise \$417.20, for which we gave thanks to God.

The ladies who had chosen to learn a new craft then went to the hall with Mrs Nicola Wharekawa.

The rest of us stayed in the church



and Mr Holtslag continued with Romans chapter 12 verse 2 – “Not Conformed but Transformed”. It is so easy for us to conform to the ways and thinking of the world. Verse 2 tells us to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”. The only way to do this is to be reading the Word of God. Mr Holtslag gave us much to think about and help us in our daily walk with Christ. There was time for questions. Mr Holtslag asked for prayer points and closed in prayer.

Mrs Tina Flinn from Palmerston North thanked the Silverstream Women’s Fellowship for a very special day. In the Providence of God next year we will meet in Foxton.

Sincere thanks go to the kitchen “crew” Rachel and Shari Walraven and Michelle Leenders who showed their skill and flair in preparing the lunch, morning and afternoon teas, and Jennifer Verbokkem and Nicola Wharekawa as musicians.

In the programme, we received reports from five of our churches in the

Wellington Presbytery. There seems to be a decreasing interest by the women in our congregations to attend women’s fellowship. Husbands, support your wives in this work, for the well-being of our congregations, and as an example to our daughters, grand-daughters, and great grand-daughters. God has been pleased to give us four generations in our churches and we should be growing to His glory.

Mrs Maria Holtslag

Top left: Pastor Andre Holtslag addressing the Wellington Ladies Presbyterial on the two-part topic “Bodily Worship” and “Not Conformed but Transformed”.

Below: All the ladies who attended the Presbyterial.

