

faith in **focus**

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Working with your hands

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Editorial

In the Lord's providence, most men and some women will be in the workforce earning an income for at least 50 years or so, before they contemplate greener pastures. Most will in some shape or form work with their hands.

It would seem that society has three or maybe four classes within the workforce. There are the academics, the professionals, the skilled and the unskilled. Each has its place and is of benefit for the greater whole.

However, working for an income is not all there is to working with your hands. There are also the volunteers, who help those who cannot help themselves. These people are in a position where they are able to give their time, free of charge, to help other people in need.

Whether you are in paid employment or not, there are a variety of ways that one can work with their hands.

In the church, we are very blessed with people who have some wonderful skills. The Lord has ensured that there are gifts among His people for the building up of the body. The gifts that I am referring to are those of a very practical nature – where something needs doing, there is someone who can help. Just think of all the skills available in our congregations that can be used for the benefit of our brothers or sisters or even for someone outside of the household of faith.

Our contributors have written articles about their own real-life experiences and given some wonderful insights into their own unique area of work. For the Christian, there is always work to do. There is no retirement as such because we are to use our God-given gifts for the benefit of others for the whole of our lives.

I heartily recommend you take the time to read these encouraging articles and to consider the great blessing we have all received by the Lord and through His saints, who work with their hands to God's glory.

Mr Tony Posthuma writes about the unique challenges and opportunities for Christians in the building industry.

Mr Andre Holtslag considers what the Bible teaches about working with your hands.

Mrs Beppe Dijkstra and Mrs Jantina Buter provide insight into their own unique "works" of sewing and flower arranging.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt focuses on being wrapped up in Jesus – the second installment on the message of Colossians.

The life of Herman Bavinck and his theology, is our Reformation Day article, written by Mr Cornelis P. Venema (President and Professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary).

Thanks to Mrs Harriet Haverland and her team, who keep us up-to-date on news from the churches.

Mr Sasha Walicord (OPC pastor) reviews *Solid Ground: The Inerrant Word of God In An Errant World*, by Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer, Ed.

Mr Eric Kayayan (Reformed Faith & Life) provides a report about the radio station in Timbuktu in Northern Mali.

Messrs Holtslag and Waldron, who attended the missions conference at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, report back.

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

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

Working with your hands (1)

“Unless the Lord builds the house...”

The challenges and opportunities of the Christian builder

Tony Posthuma

Having left school and completed a four – year carpentry apprenticeship in Christchurch, working on a mix of commercial and residential work, I had in the back of my mind the long – term goal of starting my own building company. After spending nearly 15 years working in Auckland, the Gold Coast and Brisbane on high – rise apartments, large industrial and inner city high – rise buildings, an opportunity came up enabling a return to Christchurch in December 1993 to set up Grace Builders with my younger brother, Graham, and our wives.

Grace Builders have been operating in Christchurch for 20 years now, and we have certainly experienced God’s blessing and protection over these years.

We have trained 18+ apprentices, which has been one of our major aims – passing on the skills we were taught

ourselves as apprentices. Many of our contractors are envious of the quality of our apprentices, who predominantly come from Christian families and have a good Protestant work ethic. As with all good staff, not all stay but some move on, taking with them a thorough grounding in carpentry skills.

With a ready workforce one always has to have a work stream for the teams to move on to. We have found over the years that ‘word of mouth’ is the way we get nearly all our work ... “your reputation goes before you” – quite encouraging, but also sobering, as you constantly have to be aware that you are only as good as your last job!

How do we aim to run our business?

There are many challenges which have to be met, and in the early days we set out in broad terms what we thought was an essential formula for a successful

business. We didn’t sit down and write it out, but I guess discussing things at smoko cemented these thoughts in our minds! We wanted to be Christian in word and deed by:

- A desire and commitment to complete our projects within the agreed time frame and budget.
- Communicating well with our clients at all times – we are not perfect in this but this is our goal!
- Being honest and fair in all our trading
- Attention to detail, offering clients alternatives and looking after their best interests.
- Prompt payment of accounts to suppliers and sub – contractors.
- Creating a great place to work through having a clean, safe and tidy site.
- Building a loyal partnership with suppliers and sub – contractors. The cheapest price is not always the best. Through having an ongoing relation-



The author supervising a concrete pour.



ship and repeat business with our suppliers and sub – contractors, we are able to share the Gospel in word and deed; as we can take a greater interest in them as people.

- Running an efficient site so that when contractors are advised that the work is ready for them this is actually the case. Keeping them well – informed if we are held up through weather or circumstances outside of our control.
- Humility to admit to mistakes and to make good rather than trying to cover up.
- A productive and incident – free work site with best work practices and a good health and safety record equals a great place to work!
- Offering up – skilling through various health and safety courses, first aid and other useful courses.

Often clients ask why the name ‘Grace Builders’? Though it is an acronym for our names, we are Christians and thought it a good name for a building company. Our name also gives opportunity to share about our trust in God and the ways He provides for us so abundantly. We recently had a staff member leave, and

we were able to present him with a Bible, challenging him to read it regularly as it is the source of true life in Christ. A couple of the team have, over the years, been able to testify to their faith – and through their work and speech have no doubt left an impression on this young man’s mind. We pray for our employees – not only for their physical safety, but also for their spiritual wellbeing. We have been called to be salt and light in this world, and through our conversations and work attitude we can be a leavening influence in our work place. Over the years we have had opportunity to send several of our guys to help out with the Doumas in Papua New Guinea. This has proved a beneficial experience for our young men, and an opportunity to use their skills and talents in a missions context, as well as a time of spiritual benefit to themselves.

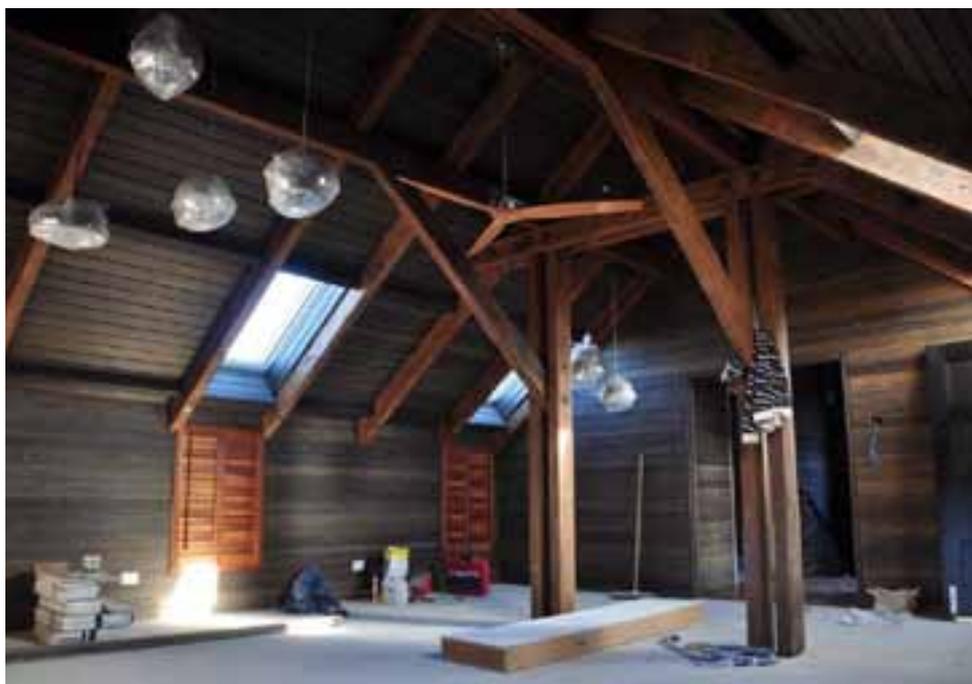
Facing the challenges in the Building Industry

Some of the biggest challenges facing a Christian builder are not the logistics of running a project, but more in how we react to situations that crop up during the course of the project. The detail, for

instance, which someone has not quite fully understood but has manufactured anyway, can be such a situation. Instead of expressing frustration and anger, we need to work through the problem generously, offering a way around the problem and working *with* the supplier or contractor instead of against them; and enthusiastically encouraging them to get it right next time. This may cost time and effort but is a far greater witness for the Gospel of Jesus. The same goes with the late delivery of critical items, particularly imported components such as specialty glass, stone or roofing materials. Lots of things happen which are outside of our control and it’s better to express understanding and suggest avenues or means by which the items may be delivered more promptly than to rant and express anger, abuse and negativity! Ultimately all things are in God’s control and we need to remember that! Maybe God is also teaching us to be patient and understanding when these situations arise as they do! “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you live at peace with all men” ... we are called to do this and this in itself can be quite a sanctifying objective in the hustle and bustle of a construction site where “time is money.”

Whilst working in Queensland I was offered an opportunity to be involved in the construction of a casino and resort. I declined the offer, as I don’t think a casino, however interesting the build, serves the best interests of my fellow human beings. I didn’t want to be associated with a project which could bring suffering and misery to multitudes who

“There is an orderliness in building plans ... which are a culmination of the client’s dream.”



could least afford it, even though some may benefit.

"The best written contract to have is one that stays in the drawer and never has to be referred to for the duration of the project!" These were words uttered by a wise contracts manager when I was an apprentice; and they still hold true today. To ensure this is the case good communication with clients is essential, especially when there are increased costs and variations to discuss – being up-front with all the detailed extras is the best policy. There is always room for give and take; and this always shows good will and a keenness to be fair and reasonable about extra costs.

In all the years we have been in business we have only had one non – paying client; and rather than pursue him we just let it go, believing this to be the best thing to do in the situation, even though we felt aggrieved !

Thinking about a career in 'building'

How do you decide on the vocation you wish to pursue? This can be a very vexing question; and one which young people, especially of school leaving age, agonise and wrestle with. Some age – old good advice here is to list your strengths and weaknesses, then work to your strengths. List them – what interests you? What turns your wheels? What are your natural talents, abilities and gifts, which God has given you that you can use to serve Him best? These were some of the considerations I looked at when I decided to take on a carpentry apprenticeship back in the day! I enjoy my work and always have done.

Beginning work as an apprentice is like being at the bottom of the rung. You are green as grass, naïve about hard work, and you can be the butt of many practical jokes like being sent to the hardware store for a "long weight" or to go to the yard and pick up the "timber stretchers" or "the sky hook" – all very humorous and humiliating at the same time!

Building is very much a vocation of creating things; and as an apprentice you need to ask plenty of questions, just like being three years old again! Why? What for? Why do you do it that way? Why don't we do this first? And on it goes, it's all part of the learning process and there are no short cuts to gaining experience. You have to be on the job, observing, following instructions, gaining skills by practice, and working out in your own

mind how you could do things more efficiently next time. Reading, writing and maths don't seem that bad on a building site, especially when it comes to filling out your time sheet correctly!

Physically, building is demanding work requiring good dietary habits and getting sufficient sleep – "V" and a pie on the way to work doesn't cut it! Being physically fit is essential to being able to carry out your work efficiently and for you to enjoy the challenges. Most apprentices we have trained play rugby

it well all of the time because God sees us all of the time. So work as though you have an audience of One. Work is part of your worship!

As an apprentice you need to show initiative, being early on the job, running out the power leads, getting the power tools out, if it is dark setting up the flood lights if they aren't already out, seeing that there is enough tea, coffee, sugar and milk for the day. (Don't wait till 9.55am to find this out!) One of my pet hates is the apprentice who can't

“Work as though you have an audience of One. Work is part of your worship!”

or football with the associated practice nights to keep fit.

The variety of different work has always attracted me and, yes, we live in a fallen world and some tasks can seem awful and downright difficult – but performing them well is always dependent on our attitude to how we approach our work. As God's image bearers we need to reflect this in the way we carry out our work, doing it with all our might and doing it joyfully!

When I was growing up, my parents instilled in me that we ought to do our work as unto God, not just doing a good job when the boss is around, but doing

make a decent cup of coffee or tea and has to be reminded every day to put the jug on!

Being an apprentice is a time of enormous learning – learning trade skills, working as a team member, learning problem solving, learning to work harmoniously with other tradesmen who do things differently to the way you have been taught. This reminds me that we are all apprentices of Jesus, learning to serve others, practising humility in an environment which at times can be hostile to Christ.

A verse that I learned when I was young and which has stuck with me is



Col 3 v23" Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord not for men". As we work with our hands we need to remember to do everything to the best of our ability, giving it our very best shot, not half – heartedly.

As an apprentice you also get to learn how to read plans, which opens up a whole new dimension of understanding how a building is put together beginning with the structural and architectural drawings. Once you can read a floor plan and figure out how the various cross sections and details relate to a specific area you have a feeling of "Wow, I understand this and know exactly what the designer wants to be built."

There is an orderliness in building plans – engineers, architects and other professionals all have input into the plans which are a culmination of the client's dream. The work of making the dream a reality continues with the practical work of building on site and you, as an apprentice, are helping that dream become reality by doing your work to the best of your ability, and always to honour and glorify God.

What does it mean to honour and glorify God? It's to be punctual at work, to be willing serve others, following instructions however mundane, having a willingness to learn and an eagerness to please those with whom you are working; and to be an engaged team player, not shirking work or stealing time by playing or texting on your phone in work time! In other words, by doing your work whole-heartedly.

How do I go about getting an apprenticeship?

- Many schools have Gateway courses, and building academies, which connect with employers directly seeking placements for weekly half – day work experience time. This is a great way to get onto a work site and show your keenness with a view of being offered an apprenticeship at the end of the school year. Unit standards can also be achieved this way.
- Polytechs offer Pre – trade courses, which run for an academic year and teach all the carpentry theory in a compressed format over the year. 1-2 days a week there is practical, on – site work experience – again, an opportunity to excel and achieve unit standards; and hopefully be offered a carpentry apprenticeship.
- You can approach a builder whom you know and make yourself available to try out for a few weeks over the school holidays with a view to being offered an apprenticeship.

Key to all of this is to put your best foot forward, and present well. My boss told me that the first impressions count: deportment, attitude, personal appearance, the state of your shoes all paint a picture. This may seem old – fashioned, but get with the program – most employers are looking for well – presented, enthusiastic and engaging apprentices!. As apprentices of Jesus we ought to be able to tick all these boxes and much more!

In conclusion

Six days you shall labour and do all your work but the seventh is a Sabbath to the Lord your God". (Ex 20:8) There is no getting around it, we were created to work, to be creative, to subdue the earth, to be good stewards of all that God has blessed us with. God Himself at the very beginning of time was active and *creative!* We read in Gen 1:1:" In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God created man in His image, He created man to have a special place in His creation. God designed humans to exercise dominion over creation and we are also to be his image – bearers. We were created to mirror the glory and excellence of the triune God.

We have been created with work in mind – we have been designed to work as fellow workers with God. As his image bearers we are to show off God's excellence, creativity and glory to the world.

Ever practical, I'll leave you with these thoughts from a book I'd recommend you all to read, *Work Matters* by Tom Nelson. In one of his chapters he writes:

"So often we think of worship as something we do on Sunday and work as something we do on Monday. However, this dichotomy is not what God designed nor what he desires for our lives. God designed work to have both a vertical and horizontal dimension. We work to the glory of God and for the furtherance of the common good.

On Sunday we say we go to worship and on Monday we say we go to work, but our language reveals our foggy theological thinking. That our work has been designed by God to be an act of worship is often missed in the frenzied pace of a compartmentalised modern life.

Once when touring Westminster Abby and St Paul's Cathedral I was reminded of the apocryphal story of the three stone masons who were engaged in conversation by a visitor, "What are you doing?" the visitor asked the first stone mason. "I am cutting stone," the mason replied. A second mason chimed in, "I'm making a living", and "how about you?" the visitor asked the third mason. "Me, I'm building a Cathedral for God and his people". What a difference our perspective on work makes."

Mr Tony Posthuma has been building for 39 years and is a member of the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.

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Working with your hands (2)

“Work with your hands”

Andre Holtslag

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” is a question we all have heard. Eventually, as we get a little older, it changes into, “What do you think you will do after school?” Or, it might get further refined into, “Are you doing Year 13 next year? And then what?” And often times, the first assumption behind the question is further study of some sort. Ideally, you will go to university to get a degree, or, if you are not quite so ‘academic,’ to polytech to get a diploma, or, going one rung further down the ladder, you might do a job-specific training programme and get work, or, lower again, you do a trade apprenticeship, stack shelves at Pak-N-Save or take drive-through orders at Maccas, become a secretary, or do a labouring job at a farm or factory!

Now, I realise that there are a whole lot of generalisations and assumptions in the previous paragraph, but they are found in many of us to one degree or another. And so, even though many university graduates use their degrees in occupations that have a practical component in them of one sort or another (engineering, agricultural sciences, accountancy, etc), we have this notion that the workforce is divided into two groups: ‘academics’ and ‘tradesmen’ or ‘brain workers’ and ‘hand workers’. One sits in an office and thinks while the other actually gets his hands dirty making stuff. And at the individual family level, this might amount to something along the lines of: I want my son to be a lawyer/accountant/doctor/teacher/CEO, but failing that, he can always be a baker.

Societal influence

Indeed, a quick look at education statistics reveals our society’s growing attraction for university education (For some reason, it was much easier to find Aussie statistics than it was NZ ones?! {There has to be a joke in there somewhere ☺} I expect, though, that they show similar trends by proportion).

In 1939, Australia had a population of 7 million people, 6 universities, and 14000 enrolled students. In 1960, it was 10 million, 10 unis, and 53,000. In 1975, it was 14 million, 19 unis, and 148,000. Now, it is 23 million, 41 unis and over 1,000,000 enrolled students! But on the other hand (and I could find NZ statistics for this), official apprenticeships were at a high of 26,000 in 1980, dropping to 400 in 2000 (!), and just 12,000 today.

So, where does 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 fit into this subject? For there Paul says to his readers, ‘Work with your hands.’ And his words there echo those in Ephesians 4:28, where the saint who had been stealing is told that he “must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands.” Can we dismiss 1 Thess. 4 as no longer culturally appropriate (after all, they were all peasant farmers and tradesmen back then, weren’t they)? Are we guilty of ‘looking down our noses’ at manual labour in favour of more ‘glamorous’ occupations? Where does a futures trader or a Google programmer, who spends his/her whole day at a computer keyboard

(striking keys with his or her *hands*!) fit into this verse? Are these words in fact very timely in our academic-focused age? Should we ignore university degrees and be tradesmen because the Bible elevates manual labour here?

Well, let’s consider the passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 in its own right before we jump to conclusions or seek application from it.

And in the first place, we should note that 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 says more than just “work with your hands.” The two verses say, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” And it will help us to spend a few moments thinking about the situation of the believers that Paul wrote to, as well as the words surrounding these two verses.

A rebuke for sloth

The two letters to the Thessalonians reveal that the believers there had an un-



“Our culture is full of glamorous jobs that deceive us into thinking we are inherently better than others because of our positions.”

healthy fixation with the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. They were so sure that He would return any day (1 Th. 4:13-5:11 & 2 Th. 2-3), that some had abandoned daily work as pointless, which led them to rely on the generosity of other Christians for daily necessities (2 Th. 3:6-15). And Paul had very strong words to say to such as these, even warning other believers to excommunicate them if they continued this idle lifestyle. And from his warning in 1 Thess. 1:4:11 about ‘minding your business,’ commentators agree that these folk were probably busy interfering in the running of the church and perhaps even demanding diaconal support from the church, and/or poking their noses into the lives of their neighbours in an undue manner.

Secondly, from Acts 17, we learn that the Jewish community very quickly stirred up the crowds against the Christians in Thessalonica. Securing work in Jewish businesses there was nigh-on impossible for believers, as the Jews would ‘excommunicate’ those who left the Jewish faith. And working for and with Gentiles was equally problematic because many businesses were intimately connected with the pagan gods that were associated with each trade, including temple feasts and symbols and rituals. So work options were not exactly in plentiful supply. ‘Beggars’ were not able to be choosers.

In a Greek city such as Thessalonica, manual work was usually viewed with disdain as suitable for the lower social classes or slaves. But this would not even have rated as a possible concern for Paul given his own work as a tent-maker, something he points to in 2 Thess. 3:8-9, as well as for the Lord Jesus Christ who was also a tradesman (Mark 6:3). It is also true that many converts in the NT church were from the ‘lower social classes’ and slavery, which meant they knew only this kind of work. Here is what Hendriksen says in his commentary:

Manual labour was even more common in those days than it is now. There were slaves, hired labourers, independent artisans (cf. Acts 19:24) each having his own workshop, farmers or helpers on farms. Of course, a harbour-city like Thessalonica also had its ship-owners and its leaders in commercial enterprises. And there were the men who owned or worked in bazaars. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that some of the men in control of business, whether big or small, belonged to the church. In many cases, no doubt, manual labour was combined with business on a small scale. But in the present passage, at any rate, the emphasis is not on doing business but on working with the hands. The bulk of the membership must have consisted of manual labourers, skilled or unskilled.¹

We see then that this passage does address a *specific* community who live in a *specific* context. And so, at the very least, this passage is not arguing *in favour* of manual labour versus what we might call professional work.

Dignity in labour

What this passage does remind us of, however, is the inherent value and dignity of manual labour. One of the reasons for giving this instruction to the Thessalonians was that working like this would earn the respect of “outsiders (v11).” Industry, discipline, creativity, dedication, and ‘honest-toil’ would be noticed and esteemed by non-Christians. And it is worth recalling in connection with this that at the time of the Reformation there was an idea that religious or church-related work was sanctified in God’s eyes, while other work was a necessary evil. Part of the Protestant Reformation was recapturing the bibli-

cal concept of the dignity of *all* human labour (1 Corinthians 7:17). This became known as the doctrine of *vocatio* or vocation. It is described also as the ‘Protestant work ethic’ – My work is my calling from the Lord which I do to the best of my ability and to His honour and glory.

And in connection with this, consider the following quote from Ken Jones: “Sin causes some to have exalted views of themselves (and a corresponding low view of others) because of the type of work they do. Our culture is full of glamorous jobs that deceive us into thinking we are inherently better than others because of our positions. This leads to condescending judgments about the work, character, and dignity of those who do not have “glamorous” jobs.”² But this is not in keeping with what we have discovered in our study of this topic.

Technical jobs undersold

In fact, there are some in the world at large calling for a rethink about workforce training in the light of certain economic realities. In a recent B.B.C. online article³, a journalist summarised a C.B.I.⁴ report that argues that “a growing demand for degree-level technical skills will not be met by traditional university courses In particular the authors say more young people should be encouraged to take technical and vocational courses which they say have long been undersold and should have parity of esteem with academic routes.”

Speaking personally, before entering the ministry, I spent 11 years working as a shoe repairer. I fondly remember the personal and customer satisfaction of a job well done, by my own hands!

It is interesting to observe, also, that many professionals often have a practical ‘hobby’ that enables them to work with their hands.

I think also of builders and bakers and farmers, etc, that I know in our churches who have given work opportunities to many young men, in particular, who were struggling at school but who found great satisfaction in a practical trade. And in addition, owning a business such as this has meant many men had some flexi-time, that meant they could make daytime visits as office-bearers, which might not be as easy for a professional to make.

There are choices

By way of conclusion, then, we should at the very least acknowledge that a discussion such as this one is something of

a luxury discussion. The fact is we do have choice today. Prosperity means we can make choices about our work. I have often heard people say that they could not do that job because "it would drive them up the wall!". Well, let's first of all thank the Lord for the work He gives us, even as we remember that we work, first and foremost, for His glory.

But let's be careful also not to disdain work of any kind and to factor in the kinds of things we have talked about as we make our work choices.

- 1 William Hendriksen (N.T.C. – *Thessalonians, Pastorals, and Hebrews*) 1996, Baker Books, p.105
- 2 <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/sloth-diligence/>

3 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-23508074>

4 Confederation of British Industries

Mr Andre Holtslag is the minister of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Working with your hands (3)

There are many ways to work with one's hands, and to serve God and others with them. Many of us have creative skills that we can use to make something beautiful for gracing a special occasion; or to decorate our homes or the homes of others. Such a skill doesn't necessitate a "job" or a salary: often it is a quiet, loving contribution offered for friendship's sake. Here are two women who use their creativity in just this way.

.....

"She was full of good works and acts of charity"¹

Beppy Dijkstra

The story of Dorcas in Acts 9 has always encouraged me. This dear Christian lady in Joppa had given herself and her talents to help poor widows in their distress. She had sewed for them; and their grief at her death showed how much they loved her. When Peter arrived, they held up the garments she had made so he could see what she had done for them. Would that our own sewing would testify in such a way after us!

Sewing encompasses many categories: for example, fabric technology, fabric art, haute couture, tailoring, quilting and so on. We are privileged today to have access to many types of "high tech" sewing machines, a wide range of fabrics, patterns, craft books and all sorts of accessories. These machines enable us to make light of many fiddly tasks like inserting zips and buttonholes.

Our skills can be used for the practical and mundane (mending, altering or making functional items) as well as for making garments for special occasions that require extra care and attention to detail.

Sewing can be creative and beautiful, surely a gift from God. We can use accessories for embellishments, to enhance garments or projects. The Bible honours the gift of sewing. Think of the detail that God gave Moses in Exodus 28 for the priestly garments, or the description

of wedding gowns in Psalm 45. Think again of the "scarlet" and "fine linen and purple" the Proverbs 31 woman uses to make beautiful clothing and bed coverings. The finest quality, and the richest of decoration are indicated here! There is pleasure in seeing the drape, fall and cut of garments, in picking suitable fabrics, patterns and making the garment fit. There is knowledge required to take a two-dimensional object and turning it to fit a three-dimensional person!

Then there is the thrill of seeing the



“Any one of our skills is a gift from God, and becomes a blessing to all when used, improved and enjoyed.”

colours, prints and potential in the many craft fabrics available today. Projects made from your “stash” can be used for your home, for gifts, “thank yous” and fundraisers. It is good to Challenge yourself to master new techniques or re-learn old and nearly-forgotten ones. When you pass knowledge and techniques on to the younger generation, thereby teaching basic life skills, it can be difficult to know who benefits the most.

Sewing in all its forms is not just working with your hands but also involves your intellect. Any one of our skills is a gift from God, and becomes a blessing to all when used, improved and enjoyed.

A personal journey

It seemed that the “sewing gene” had passed me by, despite having a mother and aunt as accomplished seamstresses. My first attempts were quite laughable. I remember drawing the seam allowance on a skirt, so I could at least try to sew a straight seam. That was met with great disapproval from the sewing teacher. Later attempts were not much

better, sewing sleeves in the wrong way and not understanding what “nap” is for example.

My soon-to-be husband tried to encourage me. First, by saying that sewing could not be that difficult. Second, by making an apron. He picked out the fabric and drew up his own design, which he then put together. I still have the apron, wonky seams and uneven gathers and all.

Gradually I improved and was able to sew to commercial standards, making swimming pool covers and various soft furnishings. My sewing machines also kept pace. The first was a very basic model that only did straight and reverse stitching. The next one was very reliable and lasted me more than thirty years. My latest is a joy to use with a range of accessories and embroidery stitches to choose from.

The most challenging sewing projects for me have been making friends’ and daughters’ bridesmaid and wedding dresses. My approach is to set the deadline the week before the wedding day so there is time for any emergency altera-

tions needed. I then work back, planning each step for each dress. I find that really helps with stress and keeps everything manageable. Yes spare bedrooms do turn into fabric and fitting rooms for the duration! At the end, there is a sense of joy and satisfaction in helping brides realise their dreams.

Quilting is a hobby that developed or “exploded” only recently. Skills required for applique, cutting, machine and hand piecing, quilting by hand or machine are very different to sewing a garment. Any inaccuracies in cutting, seam allowances, geometric shaping or piecing stand out immediately. I knew that I had the “bug” when, working on one quilt, I found I was planning the next one and the next one and The range of projects seems endless. Making queen-sized quilts, whole cloth quilts, jazzing up throws for grandchildren with funky appliques. Baby cot quilts made from leftover wedding dress fabrics. Wall hangings for friends and family, using their favourite colours. Other quilts because you really want to use a particular design or technique. These provide opportunities for fund-raisers.

The journey has made me realise what a blessing it is to be part of God’s family. Co-operation, encouragement and calling on others’ expertise are practical examples of the community of saints in action.

Notes

1 Acts 9:36

Mrs Beppy Dijkstra is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Working with flowers

Jantina Buter

I love flowers; I always have. With their huge spectrum of colours, shapes and fragrances they tell of their Creator in a most energising way. Never, though, would I have dreamed of being a florist for special occasions. Back in Holland I used to see my mother-in-law making stunning arrangements as she competed in local flower arranging competitions.

A bunch in a vase was as far as my ability went. Things have changed since then, though. Trial and error are good taskmasters. It never ceases to amaze me that fresh flowers have this unique ability to make a venue come alive. It is as if God’s grace and presence enter the space with the flowers He created.

About 10 years ago I grew tired of the artificial flowers we had in the front of the church auditorium. I *simply* started with whatever grew in our garden or along the road here in West Melton. Then the library turned out to be an excellent source of flower arranging books. Jane Packer and Paula Pryke have published many well-illustrated books on technique to help a novice

like me. Wedding flowers followed for dear friends with abundant trust. It took me hours of thinking about the design and construction; and days of finally putting it together. But I was caught by the bug. The bug of the unique intimacy that comes from being involved in creating something that *benefits* and beautifies the person and the occasion. It is immensely satisfying, creating a bond with the person involved that lasts way beyond the fading of the flowers. Anniversaries, openings and funerals followed. Early on I decided I would only do the florist work on a cost-reimbursement basis. I didn’t know what to charge anyway, but it gave me the freedom to agree to work only for



those with whom I have a special bond.

Arranging flowers has helped me in my Christian walk. It taught me about not worrying, as time and time again God provided exactly the right flowers or pots when I could not find them anywhere. It taught me about my motives when the only reaction was the reimbursement of my costs. I doubted the days' work I had done till it dawned on me that it was first and foremost my pride that was hurt. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men", Col. 3:23, became a liberating text that I hold dear to my heart.

Over the years I have met such lovely Christian people. In most cases I ask the family to send a friend to help me, as there is always time pressure. I want to start as late as possible so the flowers still look their best during the occasion. While putting wires in leaves at 11.00 pm my helper and I have the most wonderful conversations, and special bonds of friendship are created.

Creating something that is beautiful gives me deep satisfaction. And it is a privilege that I am allowed to be involved with the occasion. Sometimes it is a very, very sad time in people's lives. And the flowers can bring comfort and love in a way I can't express with words.

Sadly, flower arranging is a skill that is slowly disappearing. Especially the government budget cut of the evening classes' subsidy will dry up the supply of volunteer people who have the skill to make a large arrangement. I started small with an arrangement for the Sunday worship service and the coffee table at

home. But with the help of good instruction books and practise I have learned a lot. May I encourage you to give it a go? Who knows you might catch the bug as well.

Jantina Buter is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

60th anniversary

Palmerston North Reformed Church 60th Anniversary

Most of you will be aware that we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Reformed Church here in Palmerston North! We have a weekend full of celebration and praise to the Lord planned!

The events that are being planned are going to take place on the weekend 11th – 13th October 2013 and are as follows:

On **Friday 11th October** we will be having the **Official Opening Ceremony** which will be a formal event starting at **7:30pm – 8:30pm** and will be a time to be able to thank all involved in the efforts to complete the church building. This will be followed by a time to chat and have coffee and cake.

On **Saturday 12th October** we will host a **Community Open Day** from **10am – 12pm** at which the local neighborhood as well as the general public will be invited to come view our new building. We will also display the various activities and services our church has to offer. As part of the entertainment we will have a bouncy castle available, so feel free to bring the children along for a morning of fun and fellowship.

In the evening on **Saturday 12th October** from **4pm – 7pm** we will be celebrating the **60th Anniversary of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North!** We will have the first hour as a formal get-together of praise to the Lord for His many mercies and blessings to us as a Church, for having preserved us for so many years and to pray for many more years to come. Afterwards we will have time for fun, fellowship, reminiscing and refreshments!

On **Sunday 13th October** we will have a **Sunday of Thanksgiving** and we will have a shared lunch between services.

Please come and join us for a weekend full of fellowship and fun! May God bless the plans that we have made and may He be with us as we transition to our new church building! From the Anniversary Committee.

Colossians for Women (2): *Wrapped up in Jesus*

In her book, *Grace for the Good Girl: Letting Go of the Try-Hard Life*, Emily Freeman describes her life:

My idea of who I should be is at war with who I am. I want to be perfect in every situation. I just do. I want to know what to do. I want to know how to do it right. And I want to do it. All. By. My. Big. Self. Not only do I want to do everything perfectly, I want to look perfect while I do it. I want to act perfect and sing perfect and have perfect teeth. I want to parent perfectly, to wife perfectly, and to have a clean house. All the time.

My solution to the disconnect between my perfect, imaginary self and my real-life self is to force life to look the way I want. Somehow. Anyhow. And so I work and I labour and I do the right thing. I stay strong when I feel weak and I fake happy when I want to cry because

my ideal image has everything to do with put together and nothing to do with falling apart. (16-17)

In this scenario Emily has lost sight of the Lord Jesus. Her concern is what others think about her and how she presents herself to them, to prove to them (and God) how good she is. It cripples her and she acknowledges the constant presence of fear. She writes: “I feel fear. It washes over me with its lies and half-truths. The lies aren’t blatant. They marry themselves with a little bit of truth so the distinctions are blurry at best. And so I practice the presence of fear and refuse the presence of Jesus” (18).

Last issue I asked how we get past the distractions, so that Jesus is truly Lord of our lives. Do we just try a little harder? Find a formula to follow? Or think of someone admirable and simply choose follow his/her example? Do you find inspiration in a particular author (or blog), only to find that what looks so easy for her is so difficult for you? We saw that a core theme in Paul’s letter to

the Colossian Christians is to “set your minds on things above, where Christ is seated” (3:1).¹ Earlier, Paul had noted their rescue by the Lord Jesus from “the dominion of darkness ... brought into [his] kingdom” (1:13). Indeed, they have “died with Christ” (2:20) and been “raised in [him]” (3:1). They are thus to continue to focus on him as their Lord and Saviour, to see in him the answers to life’s difficulties and perplexities.

This time we look at some implications of this teaching of *Colossians* as it impacts our motivation: fear or security.

Motivated by Fear

Emily (quoted above) is motivated by the opinions of others: “what will *they* think if I ...” She is probably not alone in this. I know that this is something I need to fight against. What about you? What motivates your decisions?

Frequently, we link fear with other religions, such as the pressure of pleasing the god Vishnu in Hinduism, or of keeping the gods happy in pagan religions. There are many Christian novels about other cultures (and times) that focus on the power of evil and the fear this generates in the characters we are reading about. Emily, however, makes a good point. Fear can motivate Christians, too, in their wish to please God and others. Sadly, however, when fear drives us, it takes us further and further away from the cross of Jesus. In seeking to help ourselves, we forget Paul’s teaching in Romans: “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:14-15). Fear of others belongs to the kingdom of darkness referred to in Colossians 1, from which we have been rescued by Jesus, of whom “we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid’” (Hebrews 13:6). Through Jesus

60th ANNIVERSARY BUCKLANDS BEACH

Dear Friends,

Time marches on at great pace!!

Indeed it has been **60 years** ago that a group of Dutch immigrants and some dissatisfied East Auckland Presbyterians decided to start the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach. We are thankful for the Lord’s faithful providence and his undertaking of our church over all these years.

To celebrate this great milestone, we plan to have a shared lunch on **Sunday 13 October**, immediately after the morning service. It will be an informal occasion and we would like to invite you all to share the day with us. The morning service starts at 10.30am.

Email messages can be forwarded to the stated clerk of the Session at jimvanr@gmail.com.

we are in a safe place, in the embrace of the Lord God himself, who has revealed himself to us as our Father.

Fear, then, results in our trying to work things out for ourselves. Its opposite is resting in the “energy” we receive through Jesus, as Paul did. The gulf between these two perspectives is stark. Emily comments that “the energy it takes to live for you is killing me” whereas Paul writes: “I [labour] with his [Christ’s] energy, which so powerfully works in me” (1:29). Emily rests in herself, whereas Paul finds his strength in the finished work of Christ. She is needy; he is full. She tries to fix things herself; Paul finds his solutions in the grace available in Jesus.

Taken Captive

Emily’s scenario here is an illustration of Paul’s warnings in Colossians 2, where Paul warns his readers to “see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (2:8). She is taken captive in various ways, not least by the fear that pushes her to prove herself to God and to others. She sets up in her mind a need to achieve something in order to measure up, to justify her inclusion in the kingdom of God.

For Emily, this achievement is in a perfect public persona. Some of us suffer from this same temptation; others may not to the same extent. Perhaps the temptation comes in the guise of proving yourself some other way; for example, choosing to home-school to demonstrate how good a mother you are; feeling that no-one has married you because you have no value; wanting public recognition of acts of service in the church (or resenting it when it isn’t given); or needing to prove yourself in your career (or studies).

A major message in *Colossians* is, however, that we don’t need self-effort. You and I don’t need to prove anything. Nobody can improve on the perfection we already have because of Him! Paul writes that we have been “given fullness in Christ” (2:10). In Christ we have all the treasures of His wisdom, love, strength, endurance, and so on. Indeed, with the Word of God living in us (ultimately, this is Jesus), we, in turn, can overcome even Satan (the evil one) himself (1 John 2:14). In Jesus we have it all!

Paul’s plea also to you, as a woman in the twenty-first century, therefore, is

not to find your security and self-worth in anything or anyone except Jesus, not to be deceived by the values of this world, but instead to remember (and rest in) your rescue from the “dominion of darkness” by the only One able to do so, our Lord and Saviour.

Motivated by Jesus

To be fair to Emily, her fear is not the focus of her book. Rather, her purpose is to show up the flaws of such a life. She writes: “I lived this toxic way for many years before I understood about The Rescue” (19). Her book is thus a reflection on the dangers of living a life behind a “mask” (in fear), as well as, and more importantly, of the liberating freedom that we have in Christ. She writes of the long time that it took for the penny to drop that, not only did Jesus die for her sins (she came to believe this when she was still a child), but that in doing so He gave her a new life (see Colossians 3:3). She writes: “I understood at an early age about the first rescue. Jesus came to save sinners. He came for the lost, the broken, the hurt, and the lonely. He came to heal sick people and to raise dead people and to die for the sins of everyone. Never once did I consider he also came to save me from myself” (124). She failed to see the completeness of her rescue. It took her a long time to realise that she didn’t need to compare herself to others, to feel both less-than and better-than others. It all starts and ends with Jesus.

A relevant question, however, is how *not* to be this way, especially if it has become a sinful habit. Again, Emily’s insights are helpful. She writes about the help she received from understanding Colossians 3, and summarises it as follows:

Receive: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” (3:15)

Remain: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.” (3:16)

Respond: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” (3:17)

Remember: “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (3:2-3)

Emily is quick to point out that this

is not some magic formula or a how-to checklist, but spends a chapter on each one of these four points to show how these verses have helped her to overcome her self-dependence, and to lean, instead, on the Lord Jesus. She concludes:

What you believe about God and yourself and the world becomes your hiding place ... Our hiding places can be either our havens or our prisons. Setting our minds on the truth of God’s Word will ensure that we don’t stay captive ... And we will then say with confidence, “You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance” (Psalm 32:7). (166-67)

Wrapped Up in Jesus

Thus, to get back to our question: how do we get past the distractions and focus only on Jesus? It is by understanding, through the grace of God, what it means to be in Christ. He is, to use Emily’s words, our “hiding place.”

Or, to use another metaphor, it is to be wrapped up completely in Christ. It is as if we are literally inside him – enclosed, wrapped up, protected, safe. It is also, to stretch the word play, to be completely absorbed (wrapped up) in learning more about him, and worshiping him in all that we do. Sometimes we say of a courting couple that they are all wrapped up in each other, to the exclusion of others. Whether we see this as positive or negative is another topic, but the metaphor is useful for us as we reflect on the totality of orienting ourselves towards God, to the exclusion of the wisdom of this world. We seek to know Jesus better, to trust Him in everything, and to imitate him (Ephesians 5:1, 1 John 1:6). This is what it means to live in the “kingdom of the Son” (1:13).

This centrality of Jesus in who I am is freeing. It prevents an unwholesome reliance on rules, checklists, how-to formulas, and traditions (a focus in Colossians 2), and, instead, provides the foundation on which to live out of the principles of Christian living found in Colossians 3 and 4. I’ll write more on that in my next article in this series.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, Bible references are from *Colossians*.

Herman Bavinck: His life and theology

Cornelis P. Venema

Earlier this year, the fourth and final volume of Herman Bavinck's great *Reformed Dogmatics* was published in English.¹ At last, this model of Reformed theological scholarship is available in English to students of Reformed theology. This year also marks the one hundredth anniversary of Bavinck's Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. The time is ripe, therefore, to get (re)acquainted with Bavinck.

Bavinck's early life and education

Herman Bavinck was born in Hoo-geveen, the Netherlands, on December 13, 1854. His father, Rev. Jan Bavinck, was a respected pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. This denomination was originally formed in 1834 as the result of a "Secession" (Dutch: *Afscheiding*) from the Hervormde Kerk, the state Reformed church of the Netherlands, which had become increasingly liberal and estranged from the Reformed confessions.

Already in the early years of his formal education, Bavinck consistently excelled as a student. At the age of sixteen, he was enrolled at the "gymnasium" in Zwolle, a boarding school that was in many respects comparable to a North American college, and completed the normal four-year program in three years. While at Zwolle, Bavinck expressed his desire to attend the University of Leyden for his seminary training. The University of Leyden was perhaps the most liberal, and certainly the most academically prestigious, of the Dutch universities at the time. The faculty at Leyden was known for its repudiation of confessional Reformed theology and its advocacy of an "ethical" and "critical" reinterpretation of the Christian faith. Bavinck's parents and others prevailed upon him to commence his studies at the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church in Kampen. However, Bavinck's desire for a full university training at an institution widely renowned for its out-

standing scholarship compelled him to transfer to Leyden, much to the chagrin of his parents and many others who feared that he would be unable to retain his convictions under the pressure of a Leyden education.

Bavinck completed his studies at Leyden in 1880 with the degree of doctor of theology, having written a dissertation on *The Ethics of Zwingli*. He distinguished himself at Leyden as an exceptional student, and was granted the doctor's degree "with honors." During



Herman Bavinck

his study at Leyden, Bavinck learned much from his teachers, but also faced many challenges to his personal confession and convictions. To one of his close university friends, he confided that "I have learned much at Leyden, but also unlearned much."²

Professor of dogmatics

After completing his studies at Leyden, Bavinck entered the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church of Franeker. While in Franeker, Bavinck twice declined an appointment to teach theology at the Free University in Amsterdam. However,

in 1882, when the General Synod of the Christian Reformed Church invited him to fill the vacant chair in dogmatics at its seminary in Kampen, Bavinck accepted and began his labour on January 10, 1883, with an inaugural address on "The Science of Sacred Theology." This address was well received throughout the churches, and it caught the attention of Abraham Kuyper, who reviewed it in *De Heraut* (January 21, 1883), observing that "I have hardly ever read a treatise with such undivided attention, from start to finish, as this inaugural." With this inaugural address, Bavinck embarked upon a twenty-year period of productive labour at Kampen. Much loved by his students for his modesty, unusual eloquence, and extraordinary breadth of knowledge, Bavinck produced during his Kampen years his *Reformed Dogmatics* in a first edition of four volumes (1883-1901).

In 1892, Bavinck made the first of two trips to America. He gave an address to the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System in Toronto, Canada. He took the occasion to visit his close friend, Geerhardus Vos, who was then teaching at Calvin Theological Seminary. He also visited Princeton Theological Seminary, where he met and befriended professor B. B. Warfield.

During the struggle that took place in the 1880s to unite the churches of the Secession (1834) with the churches of the Doleantie (1886),³ a dispute arose over the question of church control of the teaching of theology and the preparation of students for the ministry. Most of those who stood in the line of the Secession of 1834 wished to maintain the principle of church control, whereas those who stood in the line of the Doleantie under Kuyper favoured the principle of "free study," or the location of the discipline of theology in a university setting. Bavinck, who participated significantly in the process that led to the union of these churches in 1892, was something of an anomaly in his own tradition, for he was sympathetic to the idea that theology should be pursued in

a university context so as to encourage the most rigorous academic and “scientific” approach. This helps to explain Bavinck’s decision, upon the fourth occasion of an appointment in dogmatics to the Free University, to accept the appointment in 1902.

In 1908, Bavinck visited America for a second time, principally to deliver the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. On this visit, Bavinck was also privileged to visit President Theodore Roosevelt. There is evidence of some shift in Bavinck’s scholarly interests during this later period of his teaching. As he confided to a close friend, “As I grow older my mind turns more and more away from dogmatic to philosophical studies and from these to their application to the practical needs of life about me.”⁴ In many of his later writings, Bavinck attempted to offer a broad philosophical and pedagogical basis for the pursuit of excellence in Christian schools at every level, including the university.

In the providence of God, Bavinck’s life ended unexpectedly, at a time when he was still engaged in a variety of academic, political, cultural, and church activities. After offering an eloquent address on the floor of the synodical meeting of the Reformed churches in Leeuwarden, Bavinck suffered a heart attack, from which he first rallied but never fully recovered. After a prolonged period of illness, Bavinck “fell asleep” in the Lord on July 29, 1921. Among the poignant memories recorded of visits with Bavinck at the time was his reply to the question of whether he was afraid to die: “My dogmatics avail me nothing, nor my knowledge, but I have my faith, and in this I have all.”⁵

Characteristic features of Bavinck’s theology

Although it is difficult to capture the person of a figure like Bavinck, the profile that emerges from his writings and biographies is that of an exceptionally gifted, yet modest and unassuming, scholar. When he engaged the views of others, even those with whom he strongly disagreed, Bavinck was uncommonly courteous and respectful. Wherever possible, he would acknowledge the partial truth expressed by other theologians, even though he could not finally concur with their viewpoint. Consequently, although he was ultimately uncompromising in his convictions as a Reformed theologian, Bavinck was often respected by contemporaries who were not sympathetic

to his confessional position.

There are several outstanding qualities that characterise Bavinck’s work as a theologian. One of these qualities reflects what we have noted about his person, namely, his sympathetic treatment of the views of others. Throughout his writings, Bavinck exhibits a meticulous care in representing alternative positions. Before he critically engages a position with which he disagrees, he is at great pains to represent it in the best possible light. He also resists the temptation to arrive prematurely at a conclusion. In his *Dogmatics*, for example, Bavinck evidences an extraordinary familiarity with the discussion of theological topics throughout the history of the church. When he addresses a theological topic, he takes account of the spectrum of opinion throughout history and among the most diverse confessional communions (whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox). Only after a thorough canvassing of the biblical, historical, and confessional discussion of any particular topic does he arrive at a conclusion of his own. However, these qualities of meticulous and catholic scholarship, painstaking research, and consideration of the possible answers to a question, are among the reasons why Bavinck’s *Dogmatics* continue to be a model for contemporary Reformed theologians.

Three broad themes

Three broad themes recur throughout Bavinck’s writings as a Reformed theologian. The first of these, the subject of his Stone Lectures, is the philosophy of revelation. In the face of the withering philosophical and critical attacks upon the historic doctrine of divine revelation, Bavinck worked consistently throughout his life from the settled conviction of the reality of the triune God who reveals himself through all of his works in creation and redemption, and who has provided for an inscription of that revelation in the Old and New Testaments. Reformed theology must build, even as the church is built, upon the sure foundation of God’s own testimony to himself and the manifestation of his grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second of these themes is Bavinck’s emphasis upon the “catholicity” of the church and the Christian faith. All truth, in whatever sphere or academic discipline, derives from a knowledge of God’s works in creation and redemption. Reformed theology may never, therefore,

“My dogmatics avail me nothing, nor my knowledge, but I have my faith, and in this I have all.”

fall prey to a parochial or narrow spirit that eschews the pursuit of scholarship or abandons the academy to unbelief.

A third and final theme that pervades Bavinck’s theological writings is one that he shared fully with his contemporary, Abraham Kuyper, namely, that “grace perfects nature” – or, better, that redemption involves the renewal and consummation of all creation. The purposes of the triune God in redemption culminate not only in the re-creation of a new humanity through the work of Jesus Christ, but also in the realisation of God’s purposes for the whole of creation itself. Like Kuyper, Bavinck could not be satisfied with scholarship that does not seek to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Nor could he be content with the idea that any dimension of truth is separable from the truth that is in Christ, to whom all things in heaven and on earth are subject.

These themes, and the general outline of his *Dogmatics*, were to exercise a profound influence on such well-known North American theologians as Cornelius Van Til and Louis Berkhof.

It has been suggested, not implausibly, that Bavinck’s theology reflects a kind of “duality” that corresponds to his personal biography. Bavinck was both the faithful son of the Secession of 1834 and the scholar who deliberately chose to study at the most liberal university in the Netherlands. On the one hand, Bavinck endeavored to adhere faithfully to the authority of the Scriptures and the subordinate standards, or confessions, of the Reformed churches. On the other hand, he read widely

and engaged sympathetically the best of modern theological scholarship and culture. One could characterise Bavinck as, in these respects, a “man between two worlds.”⁶ This duality in Bavinck’s life should not be overstated, however, since it expresses in the arena of theological scholarship an inescapable feature of the life of every Christian who is “in but not of the world.”

It can only be hoped that, with the publication of Bavinck’s *Dogmatics* in English, more readers will have access to the contributions of this remarkable theologian. Although readers will not always agree with Bavinck’s conclusions, they will find him to be an outstanding model of Reformed theological scholarship – deeply rooted in the riches of scriptural revelation, sympathetically informed by the great confessions of the Reformed churches, instructed by the history of the church’s reflection upon the Word of God, and carefully engaged with the broad range of contempo-

rary challenges to the Christian faith. If readers learn anything from Bavinck, they should learn much about how the work of theology is to be conducted. In a beautiful passage from his *Dogmatics*, Bavinck offers a glimpse of his understanding of his calling as a Christian theologian:

“Dogmatics shows us how God, who is all-sufficient in himself, nevertheless glorifies himself in his creation, which, even when it is torn apart by sin, is gathered up again in Christ (Eph. 1:10). It describes for us God, always God, from beginning to end – God in his being, God in his creation, God against sin, God in Christ, God breaking down all resistance through the Holy Spirit and guiding the whole of creation back to the objective he decreed for it: the glory of his name. Dogmatics, therefore, is not a dull and arid science. It is a theodicy, a doxology to all God’s virtues and per-

fections, a hymn of adoration and thanksgiving, a ‘glory to God in the highest’” (Luke 2:14).⁷

NOTES

- 1 Translated from the Dutch by John Vriend, edited by John Bolt (Baker Academic, 2003-2008).
- 2 Valentin Hepp, *Dr. Herman Bavinck*, p. 87.
- 3 The churches of the “Doleantie” (“Grieving”) were a second secession of churches from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. These churches, under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper, would soon join with the churches of the Secession of 1834 to form the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, or GKN).
- 4 Henry Elias Dosker, “Herman Bavinck,” *Princeton Theological Review* 20 (1922): 457-58.
- 5 Dosker, “Herman Bavinck,” p. 459.
- 6 John Bolt, “Editor’s Introduction,” in Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:12.
- 7 Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:112.

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Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings ...

BY THE GLEANINGS TEAM:

Odette De Kock – Auckland
Presbytery

Yvonne Walraven – Wellington
Presbytery

Frances Watson – Christchurch
Presbytery

Collated and Edited by Harriet Haverland

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

The Rev. **Bruce and Mrs Lois Hoyt** left for the United Kingdom and America for a two month holiday and visiting family, during which time Rev Hoyt (and the Rev. Dirk van Garderen) will represent our churches at the International Conference of Reformed Churches which will be held in Cardiff, Wales.

The Rev. **Paul Archbald** left for Knox

Theological College, Mbale, Uganda. He’ll spend four weeks teaching there, returning home in September.

The Rev. **Dick and Mrs Mary Wynja** arrived in Hastings at the end of August to help out there for a three month period.

CHURCH BUILDINGS and SERVICES

Bishopdale: Please note that services at Rangiora will move from the afternoon to the morning. Our services will commence at 10.30am, and will still be held at Lamb and Hayward.

Palmerston North: Building Project Update: Mid August was our target date for the completion of the new church the building. One or two delays have meant that we are a little bit behind schedule, but the project is certainly in its final stages! The carpet is being laid now and there is good progress on the car park. At this stage, it looks like our first services in the new building will be on 1st September.

Pukekohe: The old church building has been demolished and the site cleared. Work on the new building is now

underway. For those who would be interested, a website has been set up on which one can view photos of the building project’s progress (<http://www.dropshots.com/pukechurch>).

DENOMINATIONAL

The Reformed Church of **Hamilton** – (1953 to 2013). It is with great joy that we anticipate celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Reformed Church of Hamilton over the weekend of 22-24 November. Since its institution on Sunday 22 November 1953 God has faithfully watched over and provided for this congregation and we want to celebrate His goodness to us.

Sing to the Lord: The new Hymnbook for our churches (entitled “Sing to the Lord!”) is at the printers! But before printing can take place, certain specifications must be decided upon, a quote will be obtained, and then a proof copy can be made and returned for final checking and approval. The book will be 873 pages, including 77 pages of various indexes – the largest being the topical index. There is also a large scripture reference index for the Hymns.

About 340 pages contain Psalms or other songs based on Psalms. There are 533 songs in total. Many will be familiar to you, so you should not feel in completely unfamiliar territory! We believe the new book will be superior to the Blue Psalter Hymnal both as a Psalter and as a Hymnal. The Confessions and Liturgical forms are not able to fit in the rear of the book without making it overly bulky (also, the updated liturgical forms do not have final approval), but a companion volume will be printed later with all the forms and confessions in it, including a modern English version of the Westminster Confession of Faith. May I encourage you all joyfully to "Sing to the Lord"! *John Koolaard*

MISSIONS

Bishopdale: Solomon Islands Missions Trip – Please pray that through this trip God would be glorified.

News from the OPC Missionaries in Uganda

The Rev. Paul Archbald of the Silverstream congregation travelled to Uganda to take a three week course at Knox College on the doctrine of God.

The Rev. David Okken reported that "for a number of weeks I have been leading a ministry to the local secondary school. Some years back we expressed our interest in doing something like this but at that time the school administration told us it would not be possible. With new staff, I decided to renew the offer this year. I was warmly welcomed. Every Thursday afternoon, we conduct a students' Bible study attended by some 30-40 students and 1 or 2 teachers. At present we are teaching on foundational doctrines such as: repentance, faith, justification, adoption and sanctification. It has been fun to guide students and teachers through the Scriptures and learn what they teach about these basic gospel truths. Our ministry has been very enthusiastically received, both by students and teachers."

Hastings: Island Evening – "Come fly with us to the Islands!" We invite you to come along and hear about our missionaries and their work! Our first stop will be PNG with a video from Alan and Odette Douma. Then Matthew Saathof will speak to us about his recent trip to PNG with David Kaijser. Next stop is Solomon Islands to watch slides from Ant and Petra Lagas. Then we fly over to the 'Mercy ship' located on

the West Coast of Africa where Bianca Saathof will tell us about how she will be spending the next 10 months serving as a nurse on the ship. Final landing is with David Waldron who will speak to us about the Mission Conference he attended in America.

Missions information meetings will be held at the North Shore and Avondale at the end of September. People who would like to find out more about the RCNZ Missions can go to either of these. The meetings will be led by the Rev Peter Kloosterman.

Voice of the Martyrs: Graham and Sandy Gallen from the Voice of the Martyrs will give a presentation in both Masterton and Pukekohe about the persecution of Christians around the world. This is a great opportunity to hear firsthand about our persecuted brothers and sisters.

PRISON MINISTRY

From the CBI Newsletter May 2013: During 2012 we had close to 500 students enrolled in CBI courses. At present there are 17 prisons in NZ; CBI has students in each of these prisons. There are 92 Instructors through the country and a team of 10 volunteers

working in our office in Hastings. We processed 1225 lessons from March 2012 to February 2013. In this same period there were 291 enrolments. During this last financial year (ending 31 March 2013) our income was \$13,207 while our expenses totalled \$14,778 – a shortfall of \$1571. We are very thankful for the support we receive from churches and individuals.

ACTS OF SERVICE and DEACONAL

Bishopdale: Calling gardeners and vegetable lovers – For the last two years we've had the opportunity to cultivate a plot of land at the Waiora Community Garden on Watsons Rd. It's been a great experience as we've enjoyed wonderful fellowship together and have been able to grow a bunch of veges *free of charge*. Waiora Trust provide a wonderful service to many community groups by making plots of land available as well as all the equipment needed including seed and seedlings. Waiora are currently asking for expressions of interest for the upcoming season which will officially start in September. We would love some more hands on deck this season. If you love gardening or are just keen to give it a

HAMILTON REFORMED CHURCH 1953 - 2013



It is with great joy that we anticipate celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Reformed Church of Hamilton over the weekend of 23-24 November. Since its institution on Sunday 22 November 1953, God has faithfully watched over and provided for this congregation and we look forward to celebrating His goodness to us. We cordially invite anyone who has been part of the life of this congregation during these years to attend the thanksgiving service that weekend. More details to follow.

Please join us at the...

Auckland Reformation Conference 2013

1-2 November

Justification Then and Now: Why This Great Truth Still Matters



Guest Speaker:

Dr. Martin Williams

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

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

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

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

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

Friday, 1 November

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

Saturday, 2 November

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

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

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

12:15 pm: Question & Answer

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

go or are looking for a space to grow your own veges we would love to hear from you. This year Waiora is also opening the gardens on Saturdays, so if you work during the week you are still able to join us!

CAMPS and CONFERENCES

Auckland Reformation Conference: November 1st to 2nd at the RC Avondale and the theme is "Justification Then and Now: Why This Great Truth Still Matters". The speaker is Dr. Martin Williams, Lecturer New Testament and Greek at the RTC, Geelong.

South Island Young Adults Conference: October 25th to 28th (Labour weekend) at Bishopdale Reformed Church. The theme is "Gospel Living", with Murray Capill, principal of the RTC, as speaker, as well as 2 other guest speakers during the weekend.

Fan the Flame Conference at the Reformed Theological College from November 23rd to 25th

Family Camp: December 27th to 2013 – January 3rd 2014. This year's speakers are the Rev. Peter Moelker and the Rev. Andrew de Vries. For a week of refreshment for your soul and your family's, what better way to spend a week of your summer holiday. For more information about the speakers and their topics, go online to www.rcnzonline.com/familycamp/ and while you are there, just click to register. Cabins are filling up. If you do not have internet access and would

Back issues of Faith in Focus

can be found on the

RCNZ Home Page

<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

like more information contact Sarah Kingham phone 09 238 6711

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Avondale – The January 2015 National Camp is to be held in the South Island and is a fantastic opportunity for our young people to spend a week in fellowship and Bible studies as they develop skills, Christian friendships and receive instruction in the faith. To help fundraise we are planning on having a car boot sale on October 12th.

Christchurch – Fertiliser Fundraiser 2013 – The CHCH Cadets and GEMS are selling their fertiliser again ready for the spring. Free home delivery.

Buckland's Beach – The Cadets and GEMS are proposing to hold a garage sale on Saturday, September 28th to subsidise camps and trips for children at the club.

ACTIVITIES

Hastings: Mid Winter Dinner – The long awaited and anticipated Mid Winter Dinner will be happening this Saturday! We hope you are all looking forward to a great evening of fun, food and fellowship together. Also, as we are attending a Wedding Banquet, please dress accordingly.

Silverstream: The Youth Club would like to extend an invitation to its *75th Annual Hungary Games Night* and want to see all your youth there! The *Top Group*-style games night will commence at 7:30pm at the Reformed Church of Silverstream. (Silverstream)

NEWS WORTH SHARING

Pro-life News: Family Planning has commenced abortions at its Tauranga Clinic. This news has stirred up an unprecedented response from the Christian community in the form of Full Page Testimonial advertisements in Tauranga newspapers, listing 35 Pastors, Ministers and Elders. Representing virtually all denominations in Tauranga, these leaders have made their stand for the unborn child in the following terms: "Special Message to the Women and Girls of Tauranga and surrounding areas: The Family Planning Association is now operating an abortion clinic at its Tauranga premises. We don't believe that the taking of a human life through abortion is what God wants, and is not a good option for either you or your baby. As ordained ministers and servants to the Christian communi-

ty in this area we make this promise to any woman or girl facing an unwanted pregnancy: If your circumstances are such that you feel that an abortion is an option for you then please give us the challenge of facing your difficulties with you. Our promise is to do all within our power and resources, privately and confidentially, and calling on the infinite Love of Jesus Christ, to enable you to overcome your difficulties, and bring a healthier solution for you – and life to your precious child." For more information about this pro-life fact, or other life issues please visit www.voiceforlife.org.nz

Auckland Presbytery, short report

The **Auckland Presbytery** met on Friday 5 July at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe. This was a historic occasion – the last meeting to be held in the old church building as it was soon to be demolished to make way for the construction of a new building.

Robert van Woerden opened the meeting on behalf of Hukanui and then handed the proceedings over to the Rev John Rogers as Moderator. Mr Rogers welcomed the elders of Avondale, who were all present, and also noted that this was the Rev. Dirk van Garderen's first time attending a presbytery meeting as a minister emeritus. He expressed appreciation for Dirk's many years of service in the RCNZ and, in particular, in the Auckland Presbytery.

The **Men's Study Day for 2013** will be held in the North Shore on 17 August and will have the theme *A Man's Call to Lead Pastorally*. It was decided not to address the questions from **Church Order Art. 47** at this meeting, given a full agenda, especially in light of an appeal from a member of the Reformed Church of Avondale.

The **church visitation roster for 2013** was agreed on. It was reported that Peter Haverland is now President of the **Auckland Regional Youth Committee** and that there had been some other personnel changes. The Stated Clerk is to liaise with the **OMB** about holding an information evening in Auckland. Messrs. John Rogers and Dirk van Garderen were re-appointed as **synodical examiners** for 2013. **Hukanui** noted that pulpit supply from the ministers of

We give praise and thanks to our God for the

60th Wedding ANNIVERSARY

of

FRANK and ELS GOUMAN

Married 15 August 1953

You have said: 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me.' Exodus 33:12b

With much love from your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren

Jim and Robyn

Aaron and Vayla – Rylan, Aniva, Summah;
Hayden and Kirsty – Hunter.

Janetta and Phil

David and Kat – Cody, Zoey; Tony; Michael.

Mary and Richard

Mark and Steph;
Lauren; Tim.

Claire and Jeremy*

Simon;
Jenny and Marcus;
Thomas and Catherine;
Nicholas; Rebecca

Trevor and Susan

Kendal; Caitlin;
Ella; Olivia.

Lorraine

Jonathan and Christy;
Nadia and Brad;
Kirsty.

Paul and Debbie

Leah; Tegan; Scott.

Judith and Tony

Rachel; Jared

Raymond and Debbie

Robyn and Rob

Emily; Jack; Sam.

Heather and Trevor

Leeonee; Serena;
Jazmine; Biannca;
Walter;
Barney; Melinda.

*Jeremy went to be with our Lord in 2007

the Presbytery had been somewhat less than had been agreed. It was therefore decided that the Stated Clerk would organise a roster for this in consultation with the Hukanui Session. The **Auckland Church Leaders** (a regular meeting of representatives of the larger denominations) had approached us as they were keen to have a Reformed voice in their meetings. Mr van Garderen agreed to act as our representative at this group.

The meeting broke at 8.25pm for an attractively presented and delicious supper prepared by Mrs Ally Kloeg – which was heartily appreciated and consumed! This also gave us occasion

to welcome members who had arrived for the hearing of the appeal and to seat them in preparation for this.

The meeting reconvened at 8.40pm and Mr Rogers handed the chair over to the Rev. Michael Willemse for the hearing of the appeal. The meeting then moved into closed session for this. At 11.47pm the meeting came out of closed session rejoicing that the appeal had been resolved in a mutually acceptable way, and thankful to the Lord for enabling this to occur.

After dealing with one further small item of business, the meeting was closed in prayer by Mr Rogers at 11.55pm.

Michael Willemse

Wellington Presbytery, short report

The meeting of the Wellington Presbytery on July 6, at the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, was convened by the Foxton Church and opened by the Rev. Pieter van Huyssteen. The opening devotion was on Ps. 46. Mr van Huyssteen spoke about the need for the believer to seek God as our refuge, even in affliction.

The Reformed Churches of Masterton and Hastings, respectively, answered the Article 47 questions. The Silverstream Church was also asked to give an update on their plans to send the Rev. Paul Archbald for short-term teaching in Mbale, Uganda, in August-September.

The Palmerston North Church reported on the minutes from other Presbyteries – in this case, Auckland. Some time was spent in prayer for the Auckland Presbytery.

Reports were received from the Youth Liaison and OMB representatives. The churches were encouraged to look at the OMB's presentation from the recent meeting on missions held at the Bishopdale Church; and to pray for the coming conference in PNG on the mission there, to be held in October. The conference will also be attended by representatives from the Canadian Reformed and Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The Presbytery also spent some time talking about the last National Youth Camp and the more recent Queen's Birthday Camp.

The Presbytery also discussed a paper presented by the Reformed Church of Silverstream on the nature of Presbytery concurrence in discipline cases. The discussion was fruitful, with the churches drawing closer together in a common understanding of these matters.

Paul Archbald

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Book in focus

Solid Ground: The Inerrant Word Of God In An Errant World

Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer, Ed.

Reviewed by: Sasha Walicord

In a day and age when much of the church seems to have lost its orientation, a call back to the roots of our faith is desperately needed. *Solid Ground* has exactly that objective, namely, to deliver a trumpet blast of truth to the church of Jesus Christ. Well-known Reformed thinkers, like J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, and Ligon Duncan are lined up in this work to awaken the church with essays that originally were addresses delivered at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology between 1975 and 2007, on the sufficiency, inerrancy, and

infallibility of God's Word.

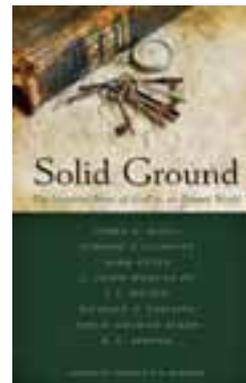
The first blast of the trumpet comes from J. I. Packer, who masterfully describes what a privilege it is for us to be able to know God through his Word and to be known by him. He also deals with the relation between knowledge and awareness of God in a most helpful way. This article alone would be worth the price of the book.

In the second essay, Ligon Duncan makes the case for the sufficiency of Holy Scripture for all areas of life. He points out, "God's infallible Word is fully adequate and authoritative for salvation and sanctification, for evangelism and edification, for faith and for life."

R. C. Sproul then defends Scripture as the carrier of God's truth and warns

us of subjective, relativistic distortions of the concept of truth. He reminds us that "truth is that which corresponds to reality as it is perceived by God."

"Scripture Alone" is the title of the late James Montgomery Boice's essay.



He reminds us that sola Scriptura is an uncompromising and all-encompassing concept for Christians. He ends his challenging essay with an equally challenging quote from J. C. Ryle: "Give me the 'plenary verbal' theory, with all its difficulties, rather than [doubt]. I accept the difficulties of that theory, and humbly wait for their solution. But while I wait, I feel that I am standing on a rock."

Richard D. Phillips encourages us from the great fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah to trust the power of God's Word. Both

preachers and congregations must trust God's mighty Word.

Mark Dever then elaborates on the centrality of God's Word for the church today. He makes a quite convincing case for expository preaching as the most important mark of a healthy church.

The perspicuity of Scripture and how it relates to sola Scriptura is the topic of Philip Ryken's illuminating contribution to this collection of great essays.

Edmund P. Clowney concludes the book with an essay on preaching as the

means of revival.

Solid Ground is a desperately needed wake-up call for Protestants who have become accustomed to a rather cavalier attitude to the Word of God. We need to be reminded that the Bible is to be our only rule for all areas of life, without exception. The authors have done an outstanding job of reminding us of that fact.

Reproduced from the OPC website, June 2013

Timbuktu – after Islamic 'Liberation'

Dear friends,

Yesterday I received the following report from my friend and brother in Christ Rev. Abdoulaye Cissé from Radio Tahanint in Timbuktu. After more than a year, he was eventually able to return to Timbuktu in order to see what can be done to restart the only Christian radio in the North of Mali. I thought you would like to hear from a first hand witness what conditions look like for Christians in the North of Mali.

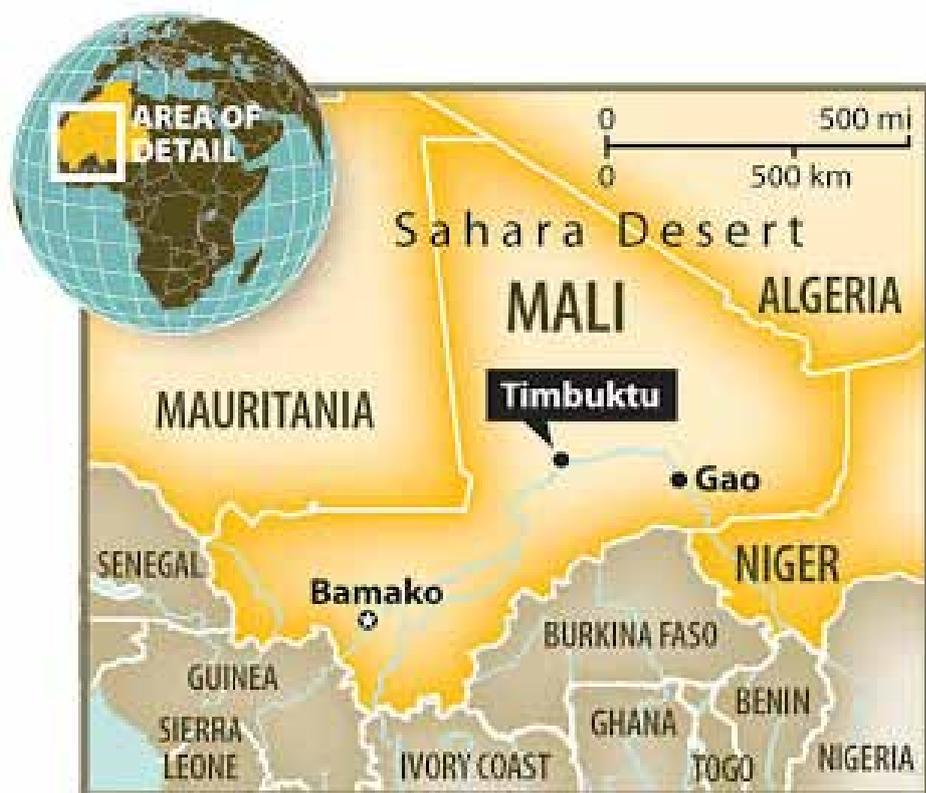
Warm regards, Eric Kayayan, Reformed Faith & Life

Dear Eric,

I greet you in the glorious name of our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom alone be the honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.

I made a trip to Timbuktu from 21 May to 28 May with Pastor Yiranou Traore on behalf of CBN (Christian Broadcasters Network) and OB (Operation Blessing) represented by Yiranou's son, Zoumare Traore Asaph. This mission also offered me the opportunity to see our families, our homes which we had to abandon. It was also possible for me to evaluate the state of affairs with regard to the radio ministry in Timbuktu, assess the needs and conditions for a quick restart of our activities, as we are now the only radio station that has not resumed broadcasting in Timbuktu.

Just after our arrival, we went to meet the political and military authorities of the city. Unfortunately, we could see neither the mayor nor any of his advisors. So we went to introduce ourselves to the police. After having described our mission state-



RICH CLABAUGH/STAFF

ment, we were strongly advised to introduce ourselves to the military command and police which we did immediately. While we were taking all these steps, I was heart broken because of what I discovered. Timbuktu is a ruined city, destroyed, devastated where "there is no crying no shouting, no joy, no laughter". The economy is dying. All Arab shops are closed; no bank is operating in the city. The Commissioner of Police told us that "some people in the city are in such a state of poverty they cannot hide their misery". In terms of administration, there is no activity. Electricity is provided courtesy of the Red Cross between 7:00 and 10:00pm. Commissioner Fomba told us that due to the lack of electricity, they cannot even install windows and doors in the old police station.

I found the local radio station completely ransacked. After the passage of the Islamists, the children threw themselves on all that remained. And they destroyed the entire electrical installation, pulled all plugs, removed the meter and cut a significant portion of the coaxial cable that allows us to broadcast. However, we thank God because

some of our equipment was saved. Upon instruction of Pastor Mohamed Ag Infa, doors and windows were sheltered through the care of two neighbours who agreed to keep them at their homes. So after cleaning up, I had a carpenter put all the doors and windows in place and an electrician restore electricity. I had hoped to start the broadcast but unfortunately still lack some essential equipment. Among others: two computers, a drive K7, CD player, radio control, two batteries, a 100 meter coaxial cable, another coaxial cable 15 meters, electric meter, etc. I will certainly put a coat of paint on all the walls.

We proceeded to clean the church where Sunday, May 26, we held the first service since the occupation. The children flocked around. We counted a total of 130 children, fourteen adults with two military policemen, four (mobilised for security) eight civilians, including five women. After worship we distributed ten New Testaments to children of the fifth grade to the ninth.

On Monday, May 27, we met Burkinabe military installed at the airport. According to the colonel commanding

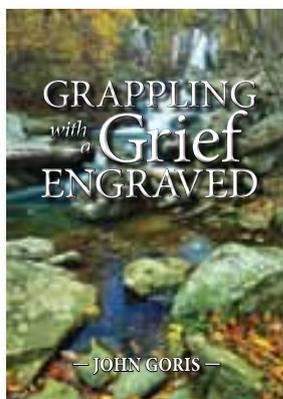
the battalion, there might be a hundred Christians among the soldiers. We had a session of praise and prayer with a dozen of them who were not on patrol that day. Burkinabe people are very organised and have told us they meet every night and pray for peace in Mali and also for the protection of God in their battalion. One of them told us that they started to put aside their tithes which they designated to a church in the city of Timbuktu. They also promised to provide a complete list of all Christians in their battalion with their references that they will send us for the church to continue praying for them. They also want to have the services of a pastor who could possibly come every night to pray with them.

From May 23 to May 27, Operation Blessing provided one meal to more than 150 children every day. We distributed 30 Bibles and 80 New Testaments. We had several opportunities to share the Gospel with military and civilians. We also heard very inspiring testimonies of how God protects those who have faith in Him and call upon Him. Aza, the guardian of the church explained to us how the Islamists had planned to burn Bibles and pews but the day before they were dispersed by the military strikes of the Serval operation. She told us how the Islamists had insulted her, spat on her and threatened to kill her, but her very young daughter invoked the name of Jesus, which stopped them immediately from doing more harm.

God has blessed us with our trip and protected us throughout our stay. He put in our way men, women and children tired, wounded and discouraged by months of Islamist occupation. It allowed us to encourage them by the Word of God.

Considering the city of Timbuktu today, I think of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah: like the Babylonians who ransacked it, the Islamists are now far away. The city is safe but must be rebuilt. And this reconstruction work must be done by individuals and community alike, it is everyone's responsibility in Timbuktu. For those of us who can, this is the time to return to Timbuktu. We must return to restore our houses ransacked, to resume our activities, work towards the restoration of peace, and play our role in the process of reconciliation.

*May the Lord bless you, your servant
Abdoulaye Cisse.*



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by John Goris

This book is a must for the home/church library and makes an ideal gift. These poems show the highs and lows on a journey through grief, as the author reflects on the Lord and His promises in the Scriptures.

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[These poems] teach us how we should feel and react when our own hour of loss comes Blessed be God who has in Christ given us the hope of eternity in heaven with those whom we loved and cherished here below –
Maurice Roberts (UK)

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A trip to MARS

The title of this short report may make it sound like an account of inter-planetary travel, but the reality is definitely earth-bound, although the distances involved are not small!

In June this year, Pastors Andre Holt-slag (Dovedale) and David Waldron (Hastings) shared the privilege and joy of attending two events at MARS (Mid America Reformed Seminary), near Chicago. A pastors' conference was followed by a missions conference. Both gatherings were primarily intended to equip ministers, missionaries and other gospel workers currently serving in the United Reformed Churches of North America (URC/NA). This is an ecclesiastical federation with which the RCNZ

now has a sister church relationship. The close similarities in heritage, church polity and worship practice between our own churches and those in the URC/NA meant that the presentations and discussions at the conference were highly relevant to our own New Zealand Reformed Church context.

The diverse topics covered in the pastors' conference included "Maintaining pastoral vitality in a long pastorate" by Dr Joel Beeke. In this presentation, the benefits of long term pastoral ministry were explained, together with some practical helps for maintaining spiritual vigour over the long haul.

In his talk "Blogs, Facebook and the flock", Dr David Murray argued that

pastors should take a positive approach to social media and become digital leaders. Wisely used, the internet today can be as beneficial to the spread of the gospel as the Greek language was in the 1st century and the printing press in the 15th.

In his address on "emeritation", Dr Joey Pipa noted that there is no concept of retirement in the Scriptures, but many encouragements to finish well. He noted that when a pastor is himself growing spiritually, he will not want to retire fully from gospel labours, although there may be a need to reduce the workload in later years when energy levels decline or physical ailments necessitate a reduction in work output.

During the missions conference, the Rev. Michael Brown spoke on the topic "How to plant a Reformed Church", arguing that church planting is the primary means by which evangelism is to be conducted. He presented a four-phase plan for planting a reformed church: establishing interest, establishing a core group, establishing a church plant, and establishing an organised church.

Dr. Brian Lee presented "Maintaining a vibrant ministry in a small church", arguing that vibrancy is maintained by planting churches which tend to grow faster than more established churches because they are more focused on outreach and evangelism. He also noted the pastoral limitations of small churches where finding elders to serve can be difficult.

The Rev. Mitch Persuad, in "The cultural factors in church-planting", spoke about the challenges of ministering in a multi-cultural context. He warned of the danger of thinking that we are culturally superior, or of equating western culture with Christianity. He exhorted pastors to preach Christ and love the people; and warned against the prevalent culture in many reformed churches of "those who want to join with us must adjust to our culture".

The Rev. Paul T. Murphy spoke on "The pastor as evangelist", emphasising that mission is not so much a task as our identity in Christ. He noted that the "New Calvinist" churches are growing with many new converts and asked why there are so few adult baptisms in the

Sing His Name

a hymn

The name of the Lord, Yahweh Sabaoth
The conquering king, with majesty clothed
The ruler of nations, His throne set on high
He marshals His angels, arrayed in the sky

Our God is Yahweh, who was and who is
Unique in all ways, in Him life exists
Before the world was, and man could yet look
His people He'd chosen, their names in His book

Creator alone, the one Elohim
Eternally God, while man is a dream
Which fades in the daylight, yet such is His love
He gave man the Saviour, the Lamb from above

He blesses His church, our Lord El Shadday
Provider of life, rains bread from the sky
Yet needing no service, He graciously gives
A gift to His creatures: to serve Him who lives

He dwells in the light, God El Elyôn
Most high in His power, all praise Him alone
His voice is like thunder, His ways none can know
Supreme His compassion, to people below

In God's name we trust, yet words can't contain
The glory and love, the power of His name
His holiness, mercy, all praises we bring
To God who redeemed us, in His name we sing

Jos Knol

07.05.'13



The Revs. Andre Holtslag and David Waldron in front of Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

URC/NA. He suggested that we have relegated missions and evangelism to a line-item on the budget because we have forgotten who God is. He exhorted pastors to lead by example and to develop relationships with non-believers; and for elders to be visibly active in extending hospitality to those outside the church. He suggested that each local church should identify their own local community's needs and then seek to meet those needs with the gospel.

Sadly, while there, we were not able to catch up with Brother and Sister Albert and Hanneke Couperus who were away on internship duties. However, Pastor Andre did have a chance to speak to Brother and Sister Josh and Hannah Flinn who have been at MARS for just a couple of weeks. He worshipped with them at Redeemer URC in Dyer, where they have made their church home. Brother Josh was due to begin the Greek intensive course the next day, and was very thankful for how things were working out thus far. Pastor David was blessed over the weekend to visit with the Rev. Norm De Jong, a retired OPC minister who had

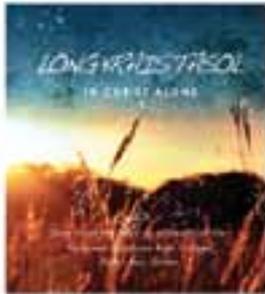
recently spent some time ministering to the Hastings church in New Zealand.

We are thankful to our congregations for making it possible for us to attend the conference as well as to establish and strengthen ties with pastors in the URC/NA federation. It was also a joy to worship with brothers and sisters in

different congregations of the Lord Jesus Christ in North America.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" {Psalm 133:1}

David Waldron
Andre Holtslag



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