

faith in focus

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Church history should never be boring

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Editorial

What do you think of church history? Is it something that you consider to be irrelevant and just plain boring? Or, do you find it a most fascinating and stimulating topic relating to the life of the church?

No doubt there will be a variety of responses. I am sure that everyone knows that church history is an integral part of the history of this world and its major events. What happens in one country is a result of what happens in another, and so on. Church history is about the Lord and His people and what they are doing in this world.

Just think about the finding of America, Australia, New Zealand and many other places that were discovered by European explorers.

It was an opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission and bring the gospel to the four corners of the world – to those living in darkness.

In 1517, nearly 500 years ago, a monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the castle-church in Wittenberg. This single event brought about a chain of events that would change the world in a way similar to the Day of Pentecost some 1,500 years earlier.

Church history is about real people and real events. And reading about such people ought to be an encouragement to us. We live in relatively peaceful and safe times compared to many before us. There was a time when your profession of faith could mean the end of your life. You might end up facing the lions in the Colosseum, the torturers of the Inquisition or the stake like Jan Huss and Hugh Latimer, etc. Real people, men and women, involved in real events, heroically died for their faith and because of their love for Jesus Christ.

Next time you are in your church library, why not take out a book and read about a person or an event that helped to shape that part of the world that you live in?

Our contributors provide some real food for thought as they write about our church history theme.

Mr Leo de Vos instructs us about the importance of church history.

Mr Josh Flinn gives us good arguments for studying history.

Mrs Sally Davey provides seven reasons to love church history.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt focuses on the message in Colossians.

Mr Harry Antonides looks at the persecution of Christians today.

Mr Graeme Zuidema provides an update about life at the RTC in Geelong.

Mrs Harriet Haverland and her team keep us up-to-date with recent happenings around the churches.

Mrs Marianne Reinders summarises the Christchurch (Cornwall Street) congregation's 60th anniversary celebrations

Mr John and Mrs Susan Huizinga write about what is happening in Dickinson, North Dakota where they now live.

Cover Images: Mr Anton Posthuma

"Praise is the best of all sacrifices and the true evidence of godliness."

John Calvin

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.

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Church history should never be boring (1)

Why Church History is not boring

Leo de Vos

Suggesting that history is not boring is like hearing that Brussels sprouts are good for you. I am not going to write about the many benefits of eating brassicas (from the cabbage or cole family), although they are numerous. But I do hope to entice you to taste some church history, which is really good for you! I am offering you a few important reasons to visit your church library and taste some church history.

We should learn the big picture of church history first

There is a sense in which all history is church history. As believers, we understand that Christ, who has received the scroll with the seven seals, is in full control of all history (Revelation 5). Just as this vision comforted the early churches addressed in Revelation, so we are comforted that all history unfolds at Christ's command for the benefit of his church. The book of Revelation gives us the entire history of the church from Christ's first to his second coming.

After our first parents rebelled against God at the instigation of Satan, God gave them the best promise ever! "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15). This promise is often called the mother promise because it gives birth to all the other promises in Scripture. It has been called the *proto-Evangelium*, because it is the first gospel promise in the Bible. The Lord is cursing Satan and telling him that he will be completely crushed. Have you seen the desolation of Smaug, the greedy, destructive menacing dragon of the Hobbit? Well, in Genesis 3:15 God is promising the desolation of Satan through the victory of Jesus by his suffering, death and glorious resurrection. Remember when you study church history that this battle between Christ and Satan has already

been won. We see Smaug (Satan, the old dragon) crushed at the cross, but defeated at the second coming of Christ and cast into the lake of eternal fire at the final judgement.

We learn of the triumph of the Gospel through church history

Revelation 20 informs the believer that Satan has been bound by Christ for a thousand years. This is the period from Christ's first to his second coming. This period of Satan's binding has seen the triumph of Christ through the forward

We learn from our mistakes and lost battles throughout church history

If we do not learn from the mistakes of the church in history we will not be able to discern our own situation. God often reminded his people in the Old Testament that if they were not careful to remember his works in the past, they would forget his promises for the present and future. You can read about how we often don't learn from church history in Psalm 78. Here are a few examples of what we should be learning.

You have probably all had Jehovah's

“If we do not learn from the mistakes of the church in history we will not be able to discern our own situation.”

march of the gospel. When we study church history, we constantly see the transforming power of the gospel. The nations which lived in the deepest darkness of Satan's deception come to gospel light because Satan has been bound.

Did you know that God used a twelve year old Maori girl named Tarore to spread the gospel in New Zealand? The story of Tarore is fascinating! Your children will love to hear it read over and over again. Here is a brief taste: Tarore was hungry to learn to read at the mission school of the Reverend Alfred Brown and his wife, Charlotte, in the Waikato. Tarore learned so well that she received an award of the gospel of Luke printed in Maori. This gift was so precious to her that she wore it in a kete (weaved basket) around her neck and slept with it there. Now you have to read the rest of the story to find out what happens to Tarore and her kete!¹

Witnesses knocking on your door. When you tell them that you are a Christian, they will make the same claim. But often they are ignorant of church history. Arius, around 300 AD, taught the same heresies the JW's still teach. The Arians used to chant, concerning the person of Christ, *There was when he was not*. Athanasius saw through this heresy and challenged it. Concerning Jesus Christ he said, *He became what He was not without ceasing to be what He was*. When people told Athanasius that the whole world was against him, he replied: "If the world is against Athanasius, then Athanasius is against the world." His confession cost him a great deal of personal comfort. Because of his courage and scriptural insight, we recite the Nicene Creed in our churches.²

We have seen a resurgence of Islam in the world today. Believers can learn a great deal from church history. Is Islam really the peaceful religion the media portrays? Although your Islamic neigh-

bour may very well be a decent, peace-loving person, the Islamic religion was never peaceful. Mohammed was not a true prophet but used violence to further his self-revealed religion. Wherever Islam spread, so did tyranny and slavery. When the gospel grew, Christians built hospitals and showed compassion to the poor. Did you know that at the end of the failed Children's Crusade, thousands of European, Christian children were forced into Muslim slavery?

Church History teaches us to be suspicious of teachings within the Christian Church that are relatively new. Did you know that Pentecostalism is just around a hundred and fifty years old? Read about Edward Irving, the tall, handsome Scotsman who left a promising ministry in the Church of Scotland. He ended up sitting in the pew of his Pentecostal church while men and women spoke nonsense in the name of the Lord.³

We learn about the sufferings and experiences of Christians from church history

Church history teaches us that, although Christ has triumphed over Satan, we are still soldiers. We are, in fact, fighting a dangerous enemy that has a short time left. Like the ferocious Nazis near the end of World War II, Satan knows that his days are numbered. The Bible often warns believers that if we are faithful to Christ, we will have to suffer. We need

to teach our children that we might very well have to suffer for our faith.

The tears and sufferings of God's people are well documented in church history. Read about the poignant sufferings of the early Christians. Seventy years after Revelation was written, Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna. He was an old man by the time he was brought to the Roman proconsul: they demanded that he say, "Caesar is Lord!" In the Roman arena Polycarp was given one more chance to confess the emperor. He then said, "Eighty and six years have I served Him. Never did He do me any injury. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" Later, as the eighty-six year-old saint was being burned, his voice was heard in the midst of that stadium as he cried to God, "I thank Thee that Thou didst think me worthy of this day and hour, that I may be a martyr".

Young ladies will find the story of Perpetua of Carthage moving. She was born into wealth, the daughter of an official of the city. She was just married with a young child when she was arrested for attending a profession of faith class. Even when sorely tempted to renounce her faith to go back to her baby, she refused. She died bravely after first being gored by a wild bull in the arena and then executed by a gladiator.⁴

The life and martyrdom of William Tyndale are wonderful! When Tyndale was led to the stake in Antwerp, his

keeper and the jailor's daughter had already been converted to Christ, because they had never seen a man who was so tender and loving to his enemies.⁵

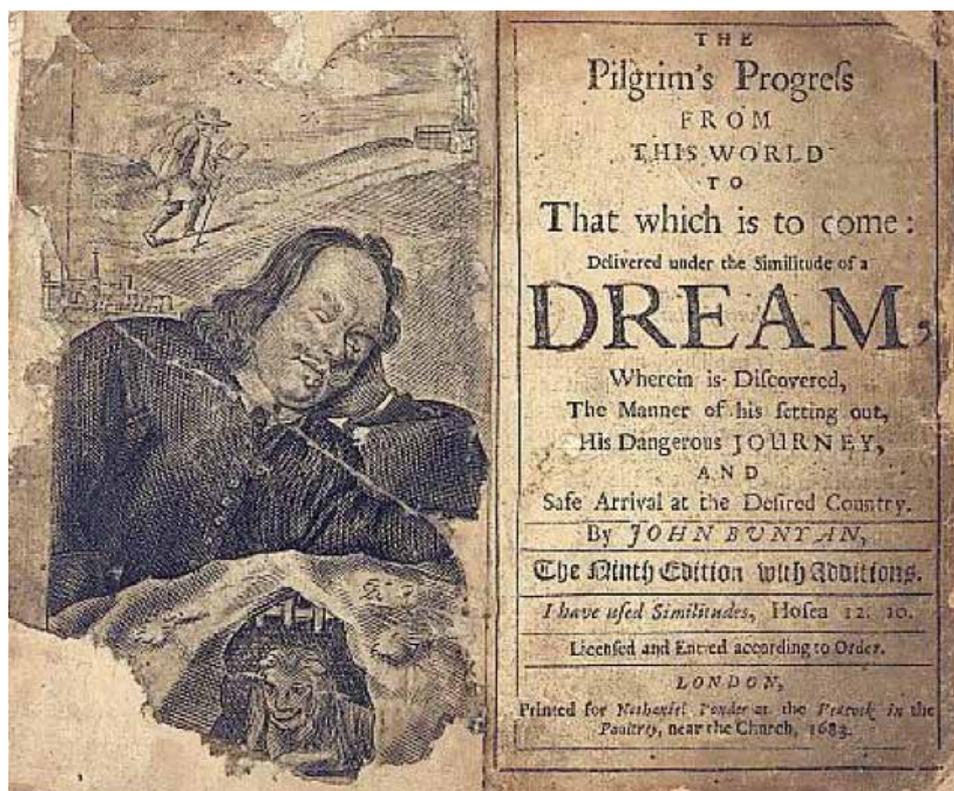
We can learn much about Christian experience from the life of John Bunyan. While in the Bedford prison, he had two books, his Bible and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in three volumes. He wrote many more, including *Pilgrim's Progress*. Rats crawled through straw which prisoners slept on, if they could afford it. Often he heard the chains rattling of men who were being led to the gallows. He was afflicted with fears of death and worried about his young wife and blind daughter, Mary. He also says, "I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the word of God as now. Those Scriptures that I saw nothing in before are made in this place and state to shine upon me. Jesus Christ also was never more real and apparent than now; here I have seen him and felt him indeed." When fears overwhelmed him he was comforted and supported by the tender grace of God.⁶

We learn to trust our sovereign God from church history

Let's learn from church history that we do not need to face every new crisis with alarm. We often get quite hyped up about new threats against the Christian family and the Christian faith. The truth is that God has never forsaken his church. In fact, all of history and church history happens for the sake of his church. The next time you might be tempted to despair, read Revelation 5. Who holds the scroll with all of world history recorded on the front and back? Who is opening the seals until the completion of history (the seventh seal)? Who commands the angels with the seven trumpets? Who controls the seven bowls of wrath until the final judgement of history (the seventh bowl)? Hallelujah, for the Lord omnipotent reigns!

We need to sniff out good books and films about church history

It's hard to develop good reading habits in those who have been conditioned to watch TV or spend many hours on the Internet. I advise parents and church librarians to get the children of the church interested in reading. Homeschooling parents have helped us to be blessed with many excellent church history resources, including kids' books. And for those who have never experienced the delightful pleasure of reading a good



Christian biography on a cold winter day in front of the wood burner, there are many good DVDs.

I heartily recommend all the books I have referenced in the footnotes. I advise churches to buy plenty of books for children. Here are a few more suggestions for church libraries. Recently William Boekestein has written some excellent children's books on the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort. Simonetta Carr has written some biographies for young readers on Augustine, Athanasius and

others. All of these books are beautifully illustrated. *Tolle Lege!*⁷

Notes

- 1 Cowley, Joy, *Tarore and Her Book With Historical Paintings*, Bible Society New Zealand, 2009
- 2 Coray, Henry, W., *Against the World: The Odyssey of Athanasius*, Inheritance Publications, 1992
- 3 Dallimore, Arnold, *The Life of Edward Irving: Fore-runner of the Charismatic Movement*, Banner of Truth, 1983
- 4 Vreugdenhill, John, *God's Care and Continuation of His Church*, 3 Volumes, Netherlands Reformed Publishing, 1991. This is an excellent, thorough resource for young people, and for schooling. Unfortunately, it appears to have

been translated into English by a Dutch speaking person, so the language is often awkward.

- 5 Edwards, Brian H., *God's Outlaw: The story of William Tyndale and the English Bible*, Evangelical Press, 1988.
- Daniell, David, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, Yale University Press, 1994. A lovely book!
- 6 Cook, Faith, *Fearless Pilgrim, The Life and Times of John Bunyan*, Evangelical Press, 2008. One of my favourite books!
- 7 Latin for "take up and read".

Mr Leo de Vos is the minister in the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata.

Church history should never be boring (2)

Church history shouldn't be boring

Joshua Flinn

The modern education system endeavours to promote the philosophy that knowledge is the saviour of society. This is a bold claim. Many governments have justified their education budget with the philosophy that: 'Without education, no nation can flourish and prosper.' Others have argued that 'It is a disinterest in education by some members of society, or the inadequacy of its implementation, that hinders nations from developing'. There is truth in both these statements and yet the conclusion drawn from them by our secular governments and education systems has almost always been wrong. The error lies primarily in a misunderstanding about what education is.

Let's look more closely at how this secular principle is applied to the study of history (although the conclusion drawn does have a much broader application).

Why do we study History?

- a It's good for you! *Hardly a convincing argument though, is it? Cod liver oil and kidneys are good for you (allegedly) but that doesn't mean we all enjoy them.*
- b All the great leaders studied History! To be great you must study history! *Two problems with this: not all of them did study it! AND, what do you mean by history? I could argue that most of the great leaders in history knew how to fight with a sword (Past knowledge).*

Does that mean our modern education system is failing our youth by not teaching swordplay?

- c Your dad was really good at it! *He was good at backflips on the trampoline but you don't seem to be advocating that being a part of the curriculum.*
- d Your parents tell you to. *Okay, fair enough.*
- e You can learn to write essays and argue your point effectively. *Also true, but you can do this with lots of other subjects too.*
- f You can learn from other people's mistakes. *Now, this is the most common argument in favour of studying history, and it deserves some further thought:*

Edmund Burke became famous for this quote: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' This is now an extremely common justification for studying the past. Yet is it actually convincing? Does knowledge of others' past mistakes *actually* enable us to avoid repeating them? It bears mentioning that this is not a new philosophy: Socrates, like Burke, also believed this was the case; that if people knew the truth then they were unable to act in falsehood.

There is a degree to which this is true – indeed, God constantly reminds the Israelites in the Old Testament about their history. "I... brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of

slavery..." (Exodus 20:2) This was essentially a history lesson and God wanted His people to learn something. He told them about their forefathers so that they would not repeat the mistakes of the past. Yet, did those reminders actually stop Israel from turning away from God again and again? What exactly is the lesson they were supposed to learn from their history? Are Burke and Socrates correct that knowledge redeems?

Unfortunately, their arguments indicate a lack of understanding about the human condition. The need for redemption from sin is the actual primary issue here. We repeat our mistakes because we are sinful. Paul states that 'I do what I do not want to do.' Even when we know what is wrong we continue to do wrong. The human condition, as you see with the Israelites, is to continue turning away from God at every available opportunity. God reminded them of their history, not to breed a dependency in their own strength, but to reveal to them the need to look outside of themselves for help.

Let's face it: do we actually learn from the past? How much did the old super powers of America and Russia learn from Hiroshima and Nagasaki? There are still nuclear weapons all over the place! Didn't Hitler learn from World War One that you shouldn't take what isn't yours? Nope, World War Two happened. What about the other nations? France tried to hold onto Vietnam immediately after

World War Two even though they were still reeling from being invaded themselves. The League of Nations publicised the sins of the Nazis because they were the common enemy, yet they covered up the atrocities of Russia because Britain and Russia were allies. Apparently, having knowledge of past mistakes doesn't actually enable humanity to avoid making future mistakes.

To be fair, there was a lot of learning going on during this period of time. But, people sought to learn so that they could pursue their own sinful desires. Knowledge puffed up. As such, the focus of the learning (rather than the knowledge itself) is what is important. We can learn just as many bad lessons as good lessons from past mistakes because of our sinful nature.

This appears to be a bit defeatist then, doesn't it: A history and classical studies teacher writing an article about why history shouldn't be boring; and he is telling you that the most commonly-used argument for valuing history is actually flawed. Henry Ford said that 'History is bunk', arguing that it was a waste of time to study. Was he right then? Definitely

not! History has massive value (that's why God uses it!) – and the reasons why it's precious are actually much more exciting than those listed above.

History is your story

Have you ever considered that the study of church history is the study of your own family? When God adopted you as an heir to His kingdom you became spiritually related to well over 2,000,000,000 people throughout time. Although this number is an estimate and difficult to truly pin down, the size of God's family is certainly much larger than simply how many Christians there are in the world right now (or in the four walls of your own church building).

Furthermore, this is not an impersonal or meaningless link, either. Our relationship to one another spiritually is closer and worth more than our relationship with our blood family. If I may say so, your relationship to me is closer before God than your relationship to your non-Christian friend with whom you have grown up and worked alongside for the past twenty to thirty years! And we probably don't even know each other!

This is an amazing thing. Consider for a moment: When you go to heaven, you will meet up with billions of brothers and sisters you don't even know, and yet your father in heaven has adopted each and every one of them. Aren't you vaguely interested in what they are like?

But this raises another issue. We have a tendency to limit our own stories to our work and family life. When we meet new people, those tend to be the topics we raise. We may extend this to our opinions on politics or the economy but really, why is this worthwhile? Why would we show an interest in a numerical catalogue of over two billion families and a list of each of their jobs simply because the Bible says we are related?!

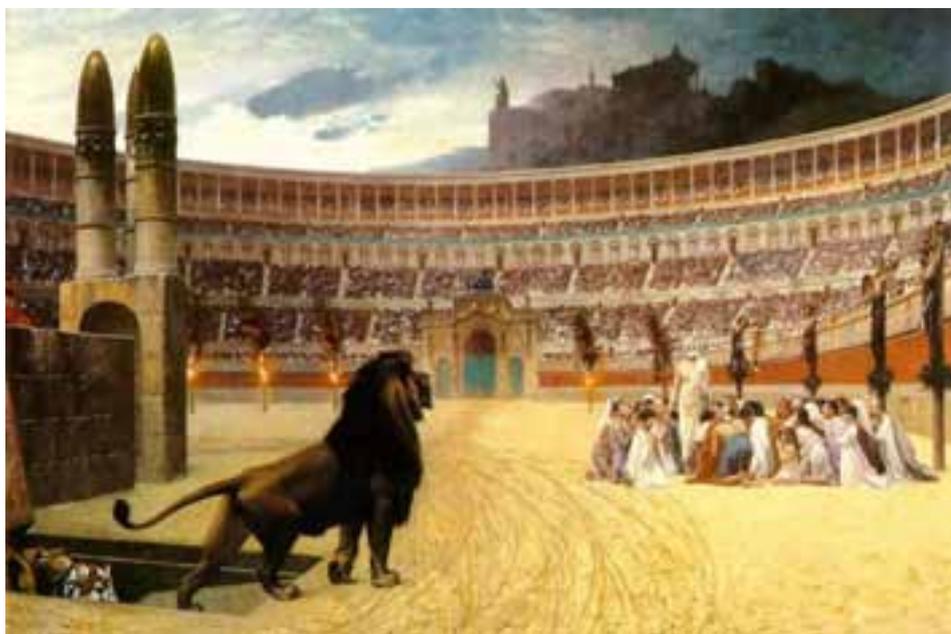
The answer to this is tied up in why we are related in the first place.

History is His story

"A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." (Proverbs 16:9) One of the aspects I find most engaging in the study of history is that I am trying to work out what God is doing in different events. This can be dangerous – the book of Job gives some warnings against interpreting providence incorrectly. Nevertheless, God is directing every man's steps. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28) All things! Every! Single! Thing! is used by God! Consider that for a moment.

Consider again Exodus 20. The beginning of verse 2 (quoted earlier) states 'I am the Lord your God, who...' God reminded the Israelites constantly of His goodness to them through concrete examples and events. Prior to the repeat of the commandments in Deuteronomy, Moses says to the people: "For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard." (Deut 4:32). These reminders were not simply an excuse to have something to talk about during the weekend barbeque; rather, they served as a valuable reminder of the Lord's care and compassion. Even in Christian education this emphasis is so often lacking. If you study any event which happened on this earth you are studying the character of God and the works of His hands. This is where the true wonder of academia lies for a Christian.

“God has been present in every decision made by every human who has existed since the beginning of time.”



Jean Leon Gerome, "The Christian Martyrs Last Prayer".

Every moment of your life God is directing you towards Him through a myriad of tiny but magnificent means. We as humans tend to be blind and deaf to anything which doesn't have a 42" viewing capacity and a high-quality sub-woofer. Take a moment to consider: God has been present in every decision made by every human who has existed since the beginning of time. How does that make you view your own life and your own decisions? What has God been trying to teach you? What has He been training you for? How can you pursue Man's Chief End better now than you did a year ago?

History is the story of redemption

But that's not all! Church history should also be exciting because it points us toward the need for a saviour and the fact that God has sent a redeemer. What was God teaching the world through the tower of Babel? What was God teaching the world with His destruction of the Philistines? What was God teaching the world during the Civil War of America? He was teaching us (among many other things) that history has a greater purpose than to not repeat mistakes or to win pub quizzes. I encourage you to read

Psalm 73. Take a moment to think about David's view of others. What does he actually learn from his meditations? What is he reminded of?

Moses continued his history lesson to the Israelites in Deuteronomy by giving the purpose of their reflection: "**Therefore** know this day, and consider *it* in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. You shall **therefore** keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."

We cannot avoid repeating our mistakes unless God enables us to do so. History, therefore, becomes a constant reminder of our **need for God**. Even with the best of intentions and exceeding effort we fail to be truly wise. The number of wars fought in our world's history with Christians on both sides is staggering. "He (God) takes away the understanding of the chiefs of the people of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless wilderness." (Job 12:24). Seems pretty dire huh!? But: The study of history is the study of on-

going redemptive work in the lives of God's people. Just as the Bible points to Christ, the entirety of history also points to Christ. God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is **always** at work. He didn't start working at Genesis and began His Long Service Leave after finishing Revelation. He isn't leaving us all to our own devices because He is bored of His creation. God works to purify you and train you in righteousness. How can we not respond to Him in thankfulness, praise and worship? Glorifying our Father in heaven for His protecting and guiding hand?

Between the time you woke up this morning to right now as you were reading this article, God has been active in your life. What has He been doing? How has He blessed you lately? What has He been teaching you? How has He reminded you of His goodness? Who are you that He is mindful of you?

Mr Joshua Flinn is a member of the North Shore Reformed Church and was a history and classical studies teacher, before he and his wife Hannah left for Chicago, Illinois to study for the ministry at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Church history should never be boring (3)

Seven reasons to love Church History

Sally Davey

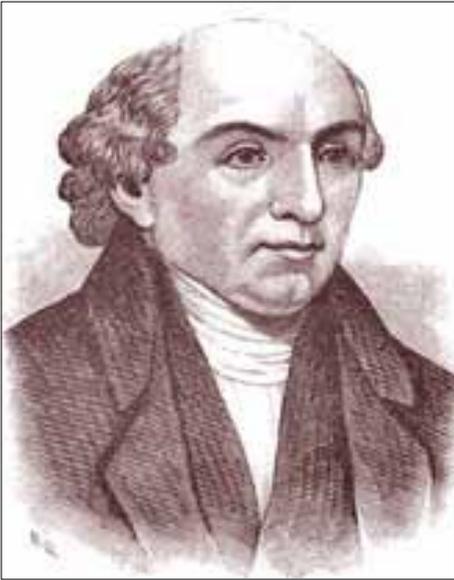
Where do *you* turn when you need encouragement? What keeps you going when you've had enough; when you're discouraged about the state of your walk with Christ, about the state of society, about the church and its witness to the world? Some people just talk to a friend who agrees with them. Others turn off and forget it all for a while. I turn to church history.

History is a great personal encouragement; and has been ever since I was a young Christian and discovered the American Puritans through some university courses. Here were Christians who faced difficulty and trauma, who did their best to shine God's truth into their

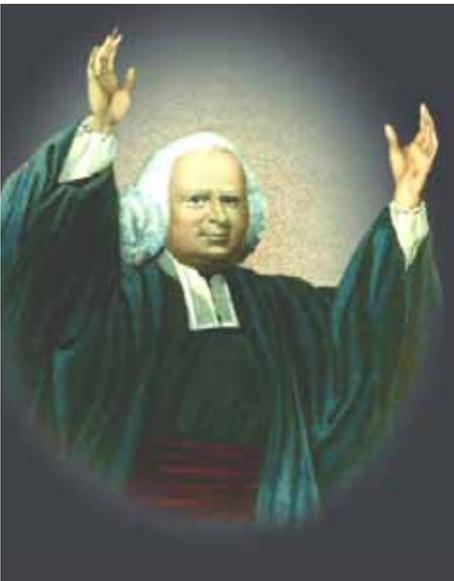
world, and who were deeply in earnest about sin. They have shown me how church history can teach, correct and encourage us when we pay attention to its lessons. I don't know how many times I've heard people say they didn't like history at school, that it was boring, all about dates, and so on. Never have I found this true! History, being about people, has all the fascination of living with people. The study of human nature never dulls—so why should history? Here are seven reasons I love church history.

1 God has a great plan of redemption. Scripture teaches, from beginning to end, that God has a plan for the world, and for mankind. He redeems a

people for himself through his Son, Jesus Christ, and all history is shaped toward that end. You can see it unfold from its beginning in the Garden of Eden to its culmination in the heavenly city. He promises that nothing will thwart it. It is breathtaking in its scope. It is being worked out by our great, infinite-personal God who "neither slumbers nor sleeps". Realising this takes the sting out of every moment of frustration or discouragement you and I might face in our brief lives on earth. God's plan is so great – and yet we are a part of it. It is so very much bigger than me and my small moment in it. But at the same time, it is encouraging – and humbling – to know that he has made me part of that great plan.



William Carey



George Whitefield



J C Ryle

2 God preserves his church. This is a fact. God has promised it, and he has demonstrated it in action. When Jesus told Peter that the gates of hell would not overpower the church (Matt. 16:18), this was a promise that Christians were able to rely on in the many difficult times to come. No matter what the persecution of his followers; no matter what the unfaithfulness of the majority of the “visible church” at times, Christ has kept his people safe. The church will survive – it will never be extinguished. This promise must have steadied the feet of many a Christian during the persecutions of the early church. It must have kept believers true to his Word during the Reformation, when Catholic authorities were burning men and women for refusing to give up their biblical convictions. It kept Christians like Bishop Ryle encouraged during the nineteenth century, when liberal theology, Darwinian speculation and the lure of Roman ritual were assailing believers on all sides. It will keep us going, too, in a day when the Christian faith is increasingly unpopular, when absolute truth seems so at odds with the relativistic spirit of the age, and when the evangelical church is increasingly marginalised. We shouldn’t be discouraged, we shouldn’t fear that the powers of evil will wipe the church out! Unfaithful churches may “lose their lampstand”, but true believers will be preserved. Jesus has promised that the church will never be snuffed out. When we study church history, we learn that time and time again it has been in peril – but never, ever destroyed.

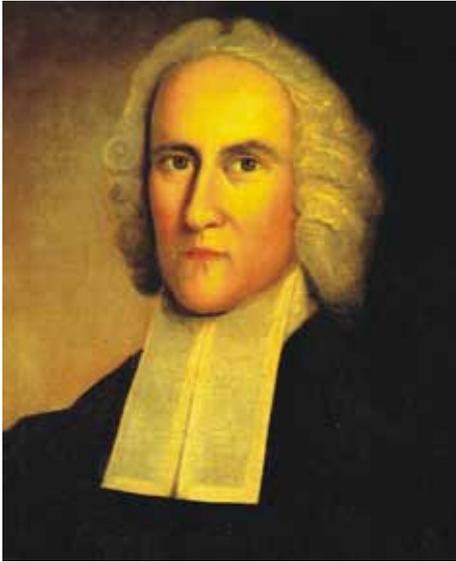
3 God revives his church, and increases it. During many times in the history of God’s people it has seemed as if the faithful were few in number, that the world around them was in a sorry state, and that they were generally despised. This much was true during the time of the prophets. Elijah quite understandably thought that he alone was left – that Jezebel had done away with anyone else prepared to serve God publicly. He wanted to die. During Jeremiah’s time there was widespread idolatry and disobedience - Judah was about to reap its reward of judgment. And yet God promised always to preserve a faithful remnant, and even turn it into a force for spiritual renewal. Didn’t he promise Daniel,

through the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, that the rock of Christ and his church would shatter the fourth (Roman) kingdom and that it would stand forever (Daniel 2:44)? This certainly came to pass when God began at Pentecost with a room full of frightened disciples in Jerusalem, and within three hundred years had planted churches all over the crumbling Roman world.

He has revived his church from unpromising beginnings many times since. Just think: Europe was a spiritual mess at the beginning of the sixteenth century, full of superstition, lacking in knowledge of biblical truth, and oppressed by a greedy church hierarchy. God used a handful of faithful scholars and teachers to rediscover the Bible and transform much of western Europe by its light. Think again: England at the beginning of the eighteenth century had little wholesome gospel influence. There were few pulpits where the truth could be heard, while much of society was living immorally, drunkenness was widespread and poverty, hardship and despair were the result. God converted the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield, and through their preaching great numbers believed in the Saviour. By means of ongoing discipleship the poor became hardworking, honest and thrifty – and a nation was transformed. Think yet again, of the church of the nineteenth century, which sent missionaries all over the world and took the gospel to pagan peoples who had never heard it before. And today, there are churches from those regions sending missionaries back to the west, now lacking gospel light itself.

The point is – God can and does revive his people and extend his church whenever he wants. We should not despair because our witness is weak today. We should repent of our sloth and disbelief, of course – but we should pray, believing, that God would do a great work again – and be ready for him to use us as his agents.

4 His Word is true, and will stand forever. One of the great aims of Satan is to destroy the Word of God; and he has tried in numerous ways to obscure it, distort it, undermine it, even outlaw it over the centuries. These strategies have shaken God’s people at times; but more often, they have simply provided those who never truly believed



Jonathan Edwards

with excuses for turning their backs on the church. Consider the efforts of the German Higher Critics – scholars who, in the nineteenth century, began to treat the Bible as any other document, subjecting it to critical literary and historical analysis that encouraged their doubt of its authenticity and truthfulness. This led to a weakening of many church-goers’ respect for the Bible. Many view the Higher Critics as one of the main causes of church decline. But the Bible has endured; and the very analytical techniques which encouraged doubt have been used by believing scholars to understand and teach the Bible more effectively than before. The great Christian scholars of our day are the better for the challenge levelled by the sceptics of the nineteenth century.

Seven hundred years before Christ, Isaiah wrote that while the grass withers and the flower fades, the Word of our God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8) I am encouraged as I look back and see how God has preserved his Word. Its truth is still living and active today. I have seen the wisdom of Solomon exercising the power to amaze someone encountering it for the first time, proving to them that the God who understood the human heart in 1000 BC understands it every bit as much now, 3000 years later. His Word changed hearts in Solomon’s time; and it convicts and converts today.

5 We should not be discouraged when the church is weak. It is tempting, at times when there is little to get enthusiastic about on the church scene, to shrug your shoulders and hibernate like a squirrel. Perhaps you’ve just endured a church argument over some-

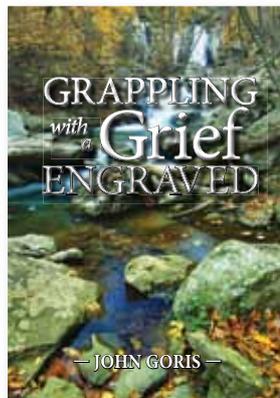
thing petty and silly – or even something more serious, that has left you wondering how God’s people could be so foolish, sinful and *wrong*. It’s times like that when church history can be its most encouraging. It teaches us that the church has not always been weak, and motivates us to pray that God would stir his people up again. It helps us realise that similar things have happened in the past, and attracts us to the righteous response of Christians before us. Sometimes it simply heartens us by reminding us that these things pass: it is God’s church, and he can and will deal with them.

6 Godly men and women spur me on. We all need the motivation of personal example: that is the way God has made us. Scripture shows us – Jesus lived with his disciples and instructed them, Paul taught the churches and lived out the Christian life before them. We all need role models, of whom Jesus is the greatest. Hebrews 12 tells us that the “great cloud of witnesses” depicted in Hebrews 11 should inspire us “to run with endurance the race that is set before us” (v.1). The same is true of the many, many men and women who have

lived faithful lives in the two thousand years since. They, too, are a cloud of witnesses who keep me running with more endurance than I might otherwise. My reasoning goes like this: if God can keep William Carey faithfully teaching the gospel for years in India without a single convert, then surely he will keep me sharing the gospel with the people who live in my household, in a far less hostile environment! If God can keep suffering Christians faithful in the Soviet Union for decades, then surely he will keep me true to him too should our government persecute us in times to come?

7 Church history teaches me chronological humility. When we know nothing of the past we think too highly of the present. I’m always finding ways I could do better as a Christian when I read church history. I learn about more faithful habits of prayer, more selfless and persevering acts of service, stronger and bolder witnessing to the truth than I have seen in myself or my own day. I am rebuked, instructed and encouraged.

Church history – boring? No, it is the greatest inspiration for service to Christ.



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Colossians for Women (1): *Staying focused on Jesus*

I think it's fair to say that sometimes we women can lose our way in relation to who we are. For some it may be just a little detour, off the main route, while others may, at times, go in the completely wrong direction. We may struggle with the ideal standards of motherhood we feel we need to meet. We may not understand the role of Christ in either our married or single state. Perhaps we fail to understand what it means to be forgiven in Christ. Others struggle with figuring out God's will for their lives, or what submission in marriage really looks like, or why they can't stop feeling guilty about everything.

So what do we do about this? Some of us pick up the phone and call our sister/mother/friend. Another might cruise the blogosphere, or may check out the

church library to find yet another book on being a good wife (or mother). Others just struggle on, trying their best to do better.

I would like to suggest that there is a simple yet rich answer in the Bible. Recently, the Ladies' Bible Study group I'm part of studied Paul's letter to the Colossians, and it struck me again as to how rich, wise, and comforting the Bible is. As God's Word, it is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), and speaks to us in all situations, reminding us that, ultimately, our identity is in Christ, and that, as we "live in him" (Colossians. 2:6), in the "fullness [given] in Christ" (2:10),¹ in His Word (and through His Holy Spirit) he has given us every resource we need to face all of life's challenges.

Colossians reminds us that we are

daughters of King Jesus. Indeed, a key issue for the Colossian Christians and also for us today is the danger of losing the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus, thinking that we need something different, or more than just this gospel. It is so easy to get distracted – to be over (or under) zealous, or restless, or unalert – for our focus to no longer be on him. Paul's clear message is to set our minds solely on Christ.

These are powerful words, but how does being focused on Christ help? Because I have found this message refreshing, encouraging, and challenging, I intend to write a short series of articles which reflect on and highlight various themes in this letter that teach us to move forward in our Lord Jesus, to, as Paul writes, "be mature and fully assured" (4:12).

Brief background

The remarkable victory that we have as God's people, who have "died with Christ" (2:20) and "been raised with [him]" (3:1), is played out already in this letter's origins and context. It was written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome, and delivered to Colossae, a small town in Asia Minor not far from Ephesus, by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9), and most likely read in the home of Philemon. From Paul's letter to Philemon (delivered in the same mail bag), we learn that Onesimus was Philemon's runaway slave, who had been converted to the gospel (perhaps by Paul in Rome), and sent by Paul back to his master. Onesimus is a real-life example of someone who was "alienated from God ... but now reconciled ... by Christ" (1:21-2). He had been "dead in sin" but is now "alive with Christ" (2:13). We also see in this how the gospel radically alters relationships— in an amazing turn of events, Onesimus returns voluntarily to his master and, we assume, Philemon



accepts his slave as a “brother in the Lord” (Philemon 16).

Paul has never met this young church personally (2:1); it had come to know the Lord Jesus through Epaphras (1:7), who had heard about him from Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Epaphras is, however, no longer in Colossae, but is with Paul in Rome (4:12-13).

Paul’s aim in writing to the Colossian congregation is to “present everyone perfect in Christ” (1:28). It seems that there is a heresy trickling in the background, although its precise details are not given. Especially in chapter 2, the Colossian Christians are warned not to be led astray, but, instead, are to remember (and live by the fact) that they have “fullness in Christ” (2:10). Maturity is thus to live out of this fullness, and to be alert to various dangers that will take their attention off Jesus.

The challenge in *Colossians*

The centrality of Jesus as Saviour and Lord is thus a key theme in *Colossians*. Moreover, this letter recognises a common temptation in the lives of believers to remove Jesus (and the gospel of grace) from the centre, to instead replace him with something (or someone) else. In this context, a possible topic sentence in this letter could easily be 2:6-7: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” In 1:28 Paul states that he wants to “present everyone perfect in Christ” and therefore the Colossian Christians (and we) are to remember the teaching received about Jesus. That is, that he is the anointed one (the Christ), sent by the Father, to “[rescue] us from the dominion of darkness and [bring] us into [his] kingdom” (1:13). Indeed, as Paul teaches in 1:15-20, Jesus is supreme. To give some examples: everything is created “by him and for him” (1:16), “in him all things hold together” (1:17), he is the “head of the body, the church” (1:18), “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things” (1:19-20). In other words, Jesus is our saviour and king; he is ruler of the universe and of our lives.

So then, says Paul, just as you learned these incredible things about Jesus, go on accepting him. Grow deep roots. Be established, firm, built up. That is, don’t move away, or even sideways, from the gospel of Jesus, but dig deeper

into it, becoming mature in your faith. Indeed, as you grow in your relationship with Jesus, overflow with thankfulness. Knowing him results in thankfulness that cannot be contained, but spills over into every aspect of our lives.

An important question for every Christian, then, is this: is Jesus Lord of my life? Or am I tempted to cut him out of certain areas? It’s easy to sing “Jesus is Lord” but to live out this confession when the rubber hits the road can be difficult. If Jesus is our Lord, we obey him, and allow what he values to shape us and our lives. It means, for example, that I have an attitude of respect for my husband (3:18 and Ephesians 5:33), show compassion and kindness to the lonely neighbour who knocks on the door at an inconvenient time (3:12), and work diligently not for my own career advancement but for the Lord (3:23).

writes: “we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9), and that Epaphras’ fervent prayer is that the Colossian Christians “would stand firm” (4:12). Paul also instructs the Colossians to pray, being watchful and thankful (4:1), and also asks them to pray for him (4:3-4).

Implicit in these prayers is the belief (and trust) that only God can provide the help we need so that we are not distracted from our focus on Jesus, but, instead have our “hearts [set solely] on things above” (3:1). Indeed, that our hope for this life and the life that is to come is centred on the person of our Lord Jesus. It’s all about him, and in him we have everything we need to serve him. Paul thus writes that he labours with “all his [Jesus’] energy” (1:29), and

“It’s easy to sing “Jesus is Lord” but to live out this confession when the rubber hits the road can be difficult.”

If Jesus is Lord of my life, I don’t add ‘little’ things to my life, or to the lives of others, in order to (in my own imagination at least) get a little closer to God. In the spirit of Colossians 2, I don’t raise my children to think that all good Christians never play computer games on a Sunday, or that Christianity is largely about doing the right thing. Instead, we model for our children and have them focus squarely on a person (Jesus), on the gospel of grace where everything revolves around what he has done – and is doing – in his redemptive plan for us.

Meeting the challenge

How do we, however, get past the distractions, so that Jesus is truly Lord of our lives? Do we just try a little harder? Or think of someone admirable and simply choose to follow her example? Do we find inspiration in a particular author (or blog), only to find that she always seems to do a much better job than we do?

Answering these questions is the focus on my next article, but for now, it is enough to observe Paul’s focus on prayer, which he (and Epaphras) model. Paul

that we “have been given fullness in Christ” (2:10).

So, do we try a little harder? Find a human solution? That should not be our primary response to life’s challenges. Instead, we rest in Jesus. We remember that we are His daughters, and pray, with Paul, that we be “strengthened with all power according to [the Lord’s] glorious might so that [we] may have great endurance and patience” (1:11). It is only when our focus is completely on Jesus that answers to and strength for the complexities of living our (imperfect and frequently difficult) lives start to fall into place.

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

The persecution of Christians today: And why this story must be told

Harry Antonides

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. (Hebrews 13:3)

We are witnesses to murder, and our governments are accomplices. The relentless destruction of the last remnants of the Middle East's Judeo-Christian civilisation is well under way. And we are silent. (Ralph Peters, "Middle East Genocide," New York Post, June 1, 2013.)

Many living in the free West take for granted the precious freedoms we enjoy, such as freedom of speech, belief, association, and movement. But if we begin to reflect on this topic, we soon realise how privileged we are. Just looking back to the last century when millions suffered and died in two world wars should cause us to pause and reflect with gratitude on living in a civilised and free society.

Especially Christians should spare a thought and prayer for the millions of fellow Christians who are – again – suffering severe persecution simply because they are Christians. They are not the only ones suffering hardship and oppression. But this article will concentrate on the suffering of Christians living in sharia/ Islamic-ruled countries.

Many hoped the Arab Spring would usher in a new phase of openness and freedom in the Arab/Muslim world. Instead, it has enabled a hard-line branch of Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood and its offspring, to obtain power in Egypt, the most, at least potentially, influential country in that part of the world. Surrounding countries with a majority Muslim population are also experiencing a move toward strict sharia governance.

Turkey is now headed by a government that is determined to change from a secular to an Islamic country. Both Egypt and Turkey are facing strong opposition from citizens who are rioting in the streets. The outcome of these struggles is hard to predict, but so far



it appears that the hardliners have the upper hand. The plight of Christians caught in the crossfire in Syria, where a reported 93,000 people have died, has become extremely precarious.

The new exodus

In the midst of all these upheavals, there is one consistent trend: an increase in the persecution of Christians. The radicalisation and upheavals in many sharia-ruled countries is forcing Christians to flee. Where can they go? Many have ended up in refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey, and in Syria prior to the outbreak of civil war. Some have been able to emigrate to the West, but many do not have the means or opportunity to do that.

A 2010 report of the Vatican synod on the Middle East exodus stated that Christians numbered about 20% of the population a century ago, but that has now dropped to 5%. Ironically, the Christians in Iraq, the country liberated from the despotic rule of Saddam Hussein in 2003, has seen a large outflow of Christians, particularly after the massacre at Our Lady of Deliverance Church in Baghdad on October 31, 2010, that killed 58 church members, including two priests, and severely wounded many more. Raymond Ibrahim, author of *Crucified Again: Exposing Islam's New War on Christians*, writes: "Today, Christians are an all-but-extinct species in Iraq – more than half have fled – and what few

churches remain are still under attack."

Michael Terheyden writes that after the attack in October 2010, terrorist groups have attacked Christians in their homes. Church leaders were reluctant to hold Christmas services, and about 80% of Christians were afraid to attend church. About 10 churches were closed and Sunday school was cancelled (*Catholic Online*, July 30, 2012).

The same story applies to the Christians in Egypt, where they are fleeing in unprecedented numbers. The Egyptian Union of Human Rights Organizations states that 100,000 Christians have emigrated since March 2011. "The Coptic Christians are one of the earliest Christian communities in the world, and they are the largest minority in the Middle East today" (about 10% out of a population of 80 million).

Terheyden reports that Islamist groups have stepped up their campaign of threatening, beating and even murdering Christians in Egypt. "Their churches, businesses and homes have been ransacked and burned to the ground. As it turns out, the so-called Arab Spring has allowed Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis to grab power. Some Copts fear this is an ominous turn of events. They worry that life in Egypt will grow much worse in the next few years."

Why do they hate?

Attacks on Christians and their churches

and homes are happening all over the Muslim world. No doubt, the perpetrators were encouraged in their violence by the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheik Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah, who declared on March 12, 2012 that it is “necessary to destroy all the churches of the region.” Thanks to the Internet and to a number of valiant authors, including Raymond Ibrahim, whose new book *Crucified Again*, as well as his regular monthly reports on the Muslim persecution of Christians, are goldmines of information and insight.

In his book he traces the source of Muslim hatred of Christians to the Koran and the hadith (words and deeds attributed to Muhammad). Following is a condensed summary of the information in *Crucified Again*, pages 18-30:

The Koran contains a number of anti-Christian verses, including Koran 5:73, “Infidels are they who say Allah is one of three,” a reference to the Christian Trinity; and Koran 5:17, “Infidels are they who say Allah is the Christ, [Jesus] son of Mary” (see also Koran 4: 171). To be referred to as an infidel (that is, a “kafir”) is to be categorised as an enemy of Islam, who must be either eliminated or subjugated (see Koran 9:5 and 9:29).

Some Koranic verses speak well of Christians but there are many more that condemn Christians. That contradiction is resolved by the doctrine of “abrogation,” that is, the later (hostile) verses cancel out the earlier (tolerant) ones, which date back to the time Muhammad had no political power. The Koran’s final word on the fate of Christians and Jews is found in Koran 9:29: “Fight those among the People of the Book who do not believe in Allah nor the Last Day, nor forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor embrace the religion of truth, until they pay the yizya with willing submission and feel themselves subdued.”

The idea of fighting non-Muslims until they pay tribute is imbedded in Islam. Muhammad made this claim about himself: “I have been commanded to wage war against mankind until they testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and that they establish prostration-prayer, and pay the alms-tax [that is, until they become Muslims]. If they do so, their blood and property are protected” (Ibn al-Hajjaj Muslim, Sabib Muslim, C9BIN31). There are hun-

dreds of similar Islamic texts enjoining Muslims to fight non-Muslims until the latter either convert or pay tribute and live in submission.

It is on the basis of such exhortations that Islamic scholars hold that their religion is destined to wage a continuous war against the non-Muslim world. This is how the Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldun explained this feature of Islam, as quoted by Raymond Ibrahim: “In the Muslim community, the holy war [jihad] is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and the obligation to convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force.” Other religions do not have such universalistic duty. “*But Islam is under obligation to gain power over other nations.*” [Emphasis added.] No one can be excused for not knowing that this branch of Islam means what it says about its goal of world domination.

The conditions of Omar

This historic document also called the Pact of Omar dates back to the reign of the second caliph Omar bin al-Khattab (634-644). It had its origin in an “agreement” between the caliph and the conquered Christians. Muslim scholars disagree about the exact dating and subsequent redaction, but they agree that it is authentic and relevant for today.

The eighth-century Muslim jurist Abu Yusuf declared that the Conditions must “stand till the day of resurrection” because they are in agreement with the Koran and the Hadith literature.”

In the 14th century Ibn Qayyim

wrote what became accepted as the authoritative document, *Rulings Concerning Dhimmis*. (Dhimmis are defeated and subjugated non-Muslims.) He praised the Conditions for their faithfulness to the essence of Islamic teachings. Here follows a small selection of the Conditions as reproduced in the Ibn Qayyim version, quoted in *Crucified Again*. The conquered Christians appear to be speaking:

When you came to our countries, we asked you for safety for ourselves and the people of our community, upon which we imposed the following conditions on ourselves for you:

Not to build a church in our city – nor a monastery, convent, or monk’s cell in the surrounding areas – and not to repair those that fall in ruins or are in Muslim quarters; Not to prevent Muslims from lodging in our churches, by day or night, and to keep their doors wide open for [Muslim] passersby and travelers;

Not to harbor in them [churches, monasteries] or our homes a spy, nor conceal any deceits from Muslims;

Not to clang our cymbals except lightly and from the innermost recesses of our churches;

Not to display a cross on them [churches], nor raise our voices during prayer or readings in our churches anywhere near Muslims;



Not to produce a cross or [Christian] book in the markets of Muslims;

Not to congregate in the open for Easter and Palm Sunday, nor lift our voices [in lamentation] for our dead nor show our fire-lights with them near the market places of the Muslims;

.... Not to display any signs of polytheism, nor make our religion appealing, nor call or proselytise anyone to it;

.... To honor the Muslims, show them the way, and rise up from our seats if they wish to sit down;

....To host every traveling Muslim for three days and feed him adequately;

We guarantee this to you upon ourselves, our descendants, our spouses, and our neighbors, and if we change or contradict these conditions imposed upon ourselves in order to receive safety, we forfeit our dhimma [covenant], and we become liable to the same treatment you inflict upon the people who resist and cause sedition.

Ibrahim points out that these abject humiliations imposed on Christians in the past, are now again inflicted on the Christians in the Muslim world. He quotes part of a recent Friday mosque sermon by the Saudi Sheikh Marzouk Salem al-Ghamdi as follows:

If the infidels live among the Muslims, in accordance with the conditions set out by the Prophet – there is nothing wrong with it provided they pay Jizya to the

Islamic treasury. Other conditions are ... that they do not renovate a church or a monastery, do not rebuild ones that were destroyed, that they feed for three days any Muslim who passes by their homes... that they rise when a Muslim wishes to sit, that they do not imitate Muslims in dress and speech, nor ride horses, nor own swords, nor arm themselves with any kind of weapon.... (Crucified Again, p.30)

The Syrian disaster

The case of Syria is especially tragic where Christians are having to flee for their lives because of the civil war, and then are running headlong into Islamist rapists and killers.

Their churches are attacked, often with loss of lives. In October 2012 a car bomb exploded near the only Syriac Orthodox Church in the town of Deir Ezzor; five people were killed. There were three attacks on Aleppo churches in four weeks. The number of people killed in the November 2012 attack on the Syriac Orthodox Church in Aleppo was estimated to be between 20 and 80.

In the same month the historic Arabic Evangelical Church of Aleppo was mined and blown up. The pastor Ibrahim Nasir expressed bitterness and sadness of all Syrian citizens that makes Christians “inconsolable Today is the day when we cry out to Christ to say: my God, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (*Crucified Again*, p.69).

On June 1, 2013, Mark Durie, Anglican vicar in Melbourne, and author of *The Third Choice*, posted (markdurie.com blog) a report of Martin Janssen (translated from the Dutch) about the heart-breaking stories of Syrian Christians who

had escaped to Jordan. Janssen had participated in a prayer walk for two Syrian clergy, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim, who had been abducted by Syrian rebels. Afterwards he met with a number of Syrian refugees who told about the hardship and losses they had experienced as they were forced to flee their homes and villages when the rebel forces moved in.

The rebels announced that from now on the villagers would be under an Islamic emirate, and were subject to sharia law. The Christian residents were offered four choices:

1. renounce the idolatry of Christianity and convert to Islam;
2. pay a heavy tribute (jizya) to the Muslims for the privilege of keeping their heads and their faith;
3. be killed;
4. flee for their lives, leaving all their belongings behind.

The Janssen report continues: “Some Christians were killed, some fled, some tried to pay the jizya and found it too heavy a burden to bear after the rebels kept increasing the amount they had to pay, and some were unable to flee or pay, so they converted to Islam to save themselves.... The scenario reported by Syrian refugees is a re-enactment of the historic fate of Christians across the Middle East.”

Even when the Syrian refugees manage to escape to surrounding countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, they find no peace. They are not welcomed but experience growing hostility.

The Syrian Christians who met with Janssen came from Idlib, Aleppo and villages in the countryside between these two cities. Their testimony was unanimous. Many of these villages had a large Christian presence until a few years ago, but now Christians no longer live there. One of the group, Jamil, an elderly man, told the following story about his village near Idlib where 30 Christian families had always lived peacefully alongside some 200 Sunni families. That changed dramatically in the summer of 2012.

One Friday trucks appeared in the village with heavily armed and bearded strangers who did not know anyone in the village. They began to drive through the village with a loudspeaker broadcasting the message that their village was now part of an Islamic emirate and Muslim women were henceforth to dress in accordance with the provisions of the



Islamic sharia. Christians were given four choices. (See 3rd column previous page). Eventually Jamil fled the village; he lost his land and farm. Some families who could not escape or pay the Jizya converted to Islam. To his knowledge there were no Christians killed in his village, but he heard about a neighboring village where three Christian families survived, who were then murdered in the middle of the night.

Miryam, an Armenian middle-aged woman from Aleppo told about the looting and plundering by armed militias, stealing wheat, bread and fuel, and entire inventories of schools, businesses and factories. If owners protested they were executed. She said that it is pos-

sible to adapt to the most difficult conditions. But it is impossible to live with constant fear that even the simplest daily activities such as taking your children to school, attending church, and trying to sleep when you know that there are people in your neighborhood who consider it their religious duty to kill as many Christians as possible.

Miryam and others in the group saw no future in staying in a country where their lives have been turned upside down. But where can they go? Listening to such stories and trying to imagine what unspeakable trauma these Christians experience is heart breaking.

What can we do? What should we do?

1. Pray for the persecuted;

2. Be well informed about the Koran and hadith-inspired hatred towards Christians and other infidels in the Arab/Muslim world;
3. Do everything possible to inform others in your families, churches, schools, and communities about the devastation caused in all cultures where sharia law is supreme;
4. Reach out to the persecuted, through international agencies, especially churches;
5. This may require that we in the West get ready to welcome a flood of refugees whose lives have been made impossible in the Muslim world. **U**

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Update from Geelong, Australia

Graeme Zuidema

Last time I wrote a piece for *Faith in Focus* I was serving as a ministry intern in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. Since then we, as a family, have made the short shift across the ditch to Geelong, Australia. We live in a lovely house which is situated about 3.5kms away from the Reformed Theological College (RTC). Our daughter, Sarah, has started at her new school, Covenant College, and is settling in well. In God's providence, Sarah's teacher is Mrs Sallee De Hoog who just happens to be the wife of one of my lecturers, Rev John De Hoog - it's amazing how the Lord works. Our son, Joshua, is still at home with Amanda but, in time, he will attend the local kindergarten. We are currently worshipping at South Barwon Christian Reformed Church; they hold their weekly services at the RTC and, therefore, some weeks it can feel like you never leave the RTC. Nevertheless, in our opinion, this is a small price to pay. We are involved in a weekly Bible study and Amanda also attends a mid-week women's Bible study. Given the similarities between New Zealand and Australia in church, culture, outlook and generous government assistance, the move from New Zealand has been

rather seamless. There have been many little things, too numerous to mention, that have made our transition so smooth. We are very thankful to the Lord for his gracious providential care.

Our Initial Impressions of the RTC

So we are in Australia. What are our initial impressions of the RTC? Well, our first is that it is a blessing and a privilege to study at a college that has so much history with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). When you visit the RTC the photo gallery that you walk by when you head upstairs to the library displays this long history. I don't know why, but every time I walk past this gallery I find myself looking at these photos and marveling at the service the RTC has provided for the church. Many men and women, who serve and have served in the RCNZ, appear on this wall. I must say, however, some of the hair styles have changed over the years, and some clearly haven't; I'll let you speculate who still looks the same today, perhaps just a little greyer.

This history, nevertheless, tells us something; it tells us that I am studying at a college that has been tried and tested for nearly 60 years; that I am studying at a college that has equipped many faithful gospel men and women for the

Lord's church; that I am studying at a college that continues to train men and women for kingdom work; and therefore, as I sit in the lectures, we are confident that what is taught is faithful to God's Holy Word. Even so, this doesn't mean I go blindly into every lecture; 1 Thessalonians 5 instructs me to, "Test everything. Hold on to the good." However, having said that, 2 Timothy 2 declares, "entrust [the Word] to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." It is with this second passage in mind that we trust that this historical college, with which the RCNZ has had a long and ongoing relationship, continues to diligently entrust the Word to reliable men.

Our second impression is the value of learning the RTC encourages. The first semester I studied Christian Worship, Church History, Old Testament Foundations and Greek. I have found these classes to be thorough and engaging. The courses are taught not only with a strong Reformed perspective, but also with an awareness of New Zealand and Australian cultures. Furthermore, most of the class outlines, PowerPoint slides and notes are helpfully uploaded onto "RTC-Moodle". Therefore, if your note-taking has let you down, you can easily download the PDFs. Moreover, every student needs books. This year, as well

as previous years, the Geneva Foundation has provided full-time RTC students with a \$400 bursary to be used to purchase books from Reformers Bookshop in Sydney. We are very grateful for this generous gift and I am looking forward to using some of these books in my second semester, when I will be studying Christian Worldview, Church History, Old Testament Prophets and Greek.

While the RTC is an academic college that promotes excellence, it is continuously encouraging head and heart engagement. I have found this very beneficial. It seems so easy to start treating the Bible like a text book. Hence, the Tuesday morning devotions and the weekly Spiritual Formation Groups are a helpful reminder that Jesus Christ is our all in all and the next high distinction on an essay is not our ultimate goal; it is a means to an end.

Our third impression is the RTC's desire to be mission-hearted. This occurs at many levels and, perhaps, deserves an extensive article outlining the different mission opportunities the RTC is involved with. We particularly appreciate the RTC's intent to reach out to those who live in Barkley Hall.

Barkley Hall is the student residence at the RTC and it provides accommodation for RTC students and other tertiary students studying in Geelong. Included in the monthly accommodation fees are the weekday evening meals which are served in the RTC dining room. These meals commence with a short devotion led by RTC students, residents or staff members. Most Friday nights we, as a family, join the residents for a meal and I have been given the opportunity to lead the devotion. This opportunity to share the gospel with 30 plus residents, where the majority are non-Christian and come from various backgrounds, is extraordinary. We pray that the Lord will open hearts to the gospel and continue to bless the mission endeavours of the RTC.

Just the First Year and Prayer Requests

This update and these initial impressions are merely giving a personal reflection on our experience thus far. Who knows what our update will say next year; and, who knows what someone else's experience will be like.

Nevertheless, while this update is personal, we have some prayer requests for

the wider RTC community. First, please pray for the lecturers and their families; the lecturers' responsibility for equipping men and women is of upmost importance for our churches. Second, please pray for the students and their families. We, and we're sure the other students, treasure your ongoing prayer. Third, please pray for more students, especially those considering pastoral ministry. If you consider the vacancies within the RCNZ and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) alone, we, as churches, are not training enough men to fill established churches and upcoming church plants. Jesus' words, "the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few," (Mt 9:38), ring true for our denominations. Furthermore, for me, personally, I would (selfishly) love more RCNZ pastoral ministry students to attend the RTC. Given Br Luke Scheepers has completed his studies, I'm it! At times I have found this quite discouraging. Nevertheless, the Lord has graciously blessed us with fellow students from other denominations such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the CRCA. The ongoing encouragement and conversation with these stu-

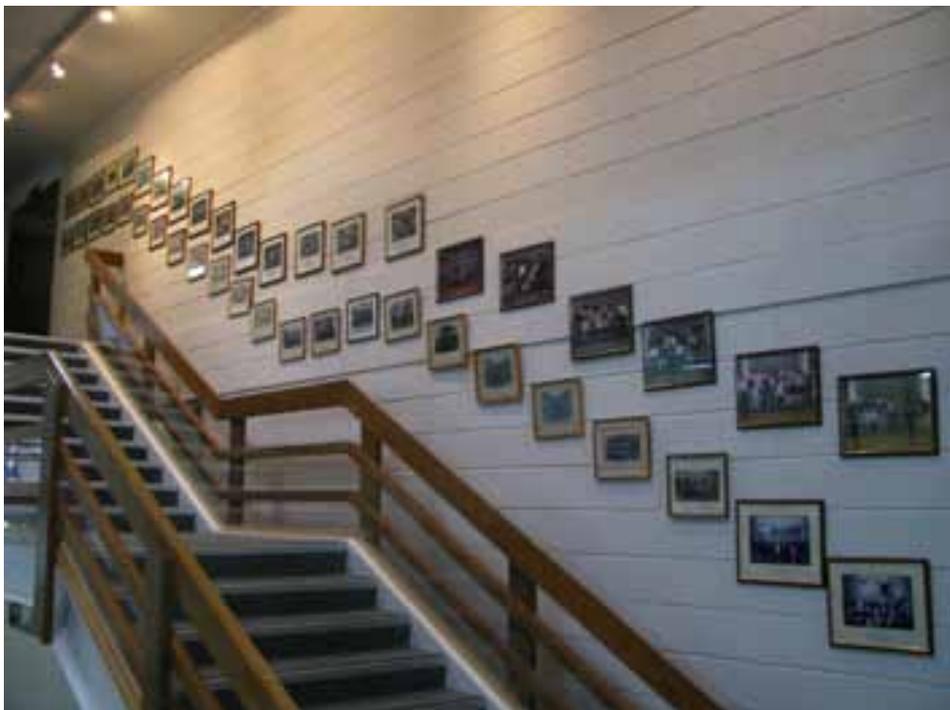


Graeme and Amanda Zuidema with their two children, Sarah and Joshua.

dents and lecturers is priceless. In light of our prayer request for more students, there are upcoming conferences which you can attend to be equipped further and learn more about the RTC. Furthermore, if you're looking for accommodation while you attend these conferences – look no further – as long as you book early enough Amanda and I would love to have you stay with us.

Resting on His Amazing Love

Please receive our heartfelt thanks for your ongoing support. We realise that we still have so much to learn and many challenges to face over the next 3½ years. Nonetheless, with the Lord's strength, we will strive to rest on God's amazing love for us in Christ. Our constant prayer is that we will continue to be shaped and moulded by God, for his glory.



The photo gallery of past and present students as you walk upstairs to the RTC library.

Great is Thy faithfulness

Over the weekend of 29/30 June we were privileged to celebrate 60 years of the Lord's faithfulness and blessing to the Reformed Church of Christchurch. The weekend's events gave opportunity for rejoicing, reflection and gratitude. For 60 years the Lord's Word has been faithfully preached, first in Cornwall Street, and now also in the daughter church of Bishopdale, granddaughter church of Dovedale and preaching post in Rangiora. At last count nearly 1,400 people have been part of the Cornwall St church throughout its history. We were challenged to reflect on the influence the church has had on all those lives and to seek out those who have wandered from the faith they once professed.

Of the original 26 communicant and 5 baptised members who signed the protocol for the institution of the Reformed Church of Christchurch on 10 March 1953, at least 16 have passed into glory, but we were blessed to have five present at the celebrations – Frans Dekker, Herman & Annie Moot and Piet & Gre Mulder. There were many others present who had been in the church from near to its beginnings. Fred Braam took opportunity to thank first generation leaders in the Reformed churches for the legacy they, in God's providence, have given second generation leaders – for their witness, their absolute commitment to Christ and each other, and for the structures and disciplines they passed on.

The Saturday evening celebration featured items from different sectors of the congregation. Highlights were a 'radio interview' and a session item. Esther Smith one of the presenters of our church's weekly 'Foundations' radio programme interviewed one of our founding members Piet Mulder and Rev

Bill Wiersma our minister for 10 years from 1969-1979. This was both enlightening and entertaining. All current and past office bearers of the Cornwall St session who were present were called to the stage to revisit a session item from 1978's 25th anniversary celebration, singing together – in Dutch – 'Drie Kleine Kleutertjes'. A challenge for the undutch. Three current office bearers ably filled the 'kleutertjes' roles.

On Sunday we gathered for worship in the early afternoon at the Bishopdale church, together with brothers and sisters from Bishopdale and Dovedale as well as further abroad. Rev Bill Wiersma preached on John 14:6 "Jesus Brings Us to the Father". Messages from elders at Bishopdale and Dovedale, and the messages from churches and individuals read the





night before reminded us of the unity we have as believers in Christ and as a denomination.

There was time after both the Saturday evening and Sunday worship to sit down and catch up with old friends and recall

the early days – a blessed time of fellowship.

In the time leading up to the celebrations, one thing the organising committee became very aware of was how fragmented the record of certain parts of our church history was. The late Wybe Gorter wrote a brief history of the first 35 years of our church, which is a treasure. However there has been no systematic archiving of such things as church directories and photos. Several older members said they had held onto things for years, and then had a clean out and threw it all away. Quite a number of our early members have now passed into glory and for the most part their memories have gone with them. We plan to collect oral histories from some of our older members in the coming months, for the enrichment of those yet to come – both in terms of understanding the passion and drive which lead to the establishment of the church and also a better understanding of the times they lived in and the work of God in their lives. We encourage all churches to consider capturing their history before it is lost.

To God be the Glory.

Marriane Reinders

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**

CHURCH PLANTING

Dunedin/Oamaru: The Elders of the Oamaru group of the Reformed Church of Dunedin are happy to inform our brothers and sisters throughout New Zealand that the South Island Presbytery gave its full approval to proceed with the institution of the Reformed Church of Oamaru. They are therefore happy to announce that a special service of institution is planned for Saturday, August 10th, at 2pm in the Reformed Church of Oamaru, 4 Eden Street, Oamaru.

Bishopdale – Change to Rangiora Services: Please note that from the beginning of August our 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. The first morning service will be on Sunday, 4 August at 10.30am.

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Rev. Dirk and Mrs. van Garderen are overseas for three months' holiday. They will be spending most of their time in the United States visiting their daughter Delinda and her family, and Rev van Garderen will also be representing our churches at the International Conference of Reformed Churches in Cardiff, Wales.

Rev. Leo and Mrs. Carol de Vos will visit Hukanui as Hukanui considers ex-

tending a call to Rev. de Vos.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Pukekohe: Sunday, July 7th, was a historic Sunday as it was the last time we worshipped in the old building before it was demolished. The church building was constructed in 1929 by the Baptist Church and was used by them until 1986 when the Pukekohe Reformed Church bought it. The Baptist Church was informed that the building would soon be demolished and their members were invited to attend the last worship service in it for old times' sake. We are now worshipping at the Harrisville School Hall, 202 Harrisville Road. The old manse has been sold



ALBUM OUT NOW!!

For from the sophisticated sound studios of today's contemporary artists comes the authentic sound of grassroots Papua New Guinea. Accompanied by the guitar, and supported by chirping cicadas and the odd rooster, these young men and women sing praise to God. Their songs are sung in a variety of languages, straight from the heart, and bridge the culture gap with ease, communicating the artists' love for Christ alone.

www.facebook.com/LongKraisTasol Visit the site to listen to samples and look at purchase options (Paypal and Internet Banking available). Order CD via internet or by sending email to timdevos3.16@gmail.com. **DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR!**



Delivery to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, US and Papua New Guinea

PROCEEDS GO TOWARDS THE PURCHASE OF NEW MUSICAL EQUIPMENT FOR STUDENTS AT REFORMED CHURCHES BIBLE COLLEGE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

and moved off the site in preparation for the new building and car park and has gone to a rural location in Ararimu. A very successful working bee was held to demolish the old hall.

Palmerston North: The new building is nearing completion. We hope that it will be completed around mid-August. The official opening celebrations are scheduled for October 11th to 13th.

Christchurch: It is with much joy and thankfulness to God that the Christchurch congregation can announce that a settlement was reached with their insurers for almost the full value of their policy in regard to the earthquake damaged building at Cornwall Street. They can now begin to look at rebuilding their place of worship. God is indeed faithful and good.

DENOMINATIONAL

Diamond Jubilees: The Reformed Presbyterian Church of **Bucklands Beach**, the Reformed Church of **Hamilton** and the Reformed Church of **Palmerston North** are preparing to celebrate their 60th anniversaries later this year.

Sing to the Lord: The new song book of the RCNZ is in its final stages of formatting and proofreading before it goes to the printer.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH and EVANGELISM

Christchurch – The *Radio Ministry* is fast approaching 10 years of broadcast. The first broadcast was in August 2003. Please remember this ministry in prayer, that the word of the Lord will be broadcast faithfully and that the Spirit would work in the hearts of those who hear.

Silverstream: Holiday Bible Club – it has arrived! We are looking forward to a very exciting four days and would love to see you there. On Friday we will hold a barbeque with family and friends.

Wainuiomata: Holiday Bible Club – please keep the Holiday Bible Club in your prayers. Everyone is invited to come along for the closing of the HBC and to join us for the BBQ lunch and help with the cleaning up afterwards.

Reformed Churches of Hamilton and Hukanui: Home Mission Committee: The session has given approval and whole heartedly endorsed the formation of a Home Mission Committee to focus on our local mission efforts. We all know that we have a huge mission field on our back door step when we see our

society moving away from God at such a rapid pace. As a church it is good to consolidate and think about ways that we can improve our focus on bringing God's Word of truth to our community around us. As a committee we will be looking at how we can not only tap into outreach activities that are occurring already within our church, but will also look at new ways in which we can be a witness to those around us through various means.

CAMPS and CONFERENCES

The Auckland Reformation Conference will be held on the 1st-2nd of November at the Reformed Church of Avondale. The theme is "Justification Then and Now: Why This Great Truth Still Matters" and the speaker is Dr. Martin Williams, lecturer of New Testament and Greek at the RTC, Geelong.

Christchurch – The Annual Winter Camp is happening! We'll be ice swimming,



RTC

Reformed Theological College

Preaching Conference

September 2013

Thursday 26 & Friday 27



Guest Speaker: Dr Peter Adam

www.rtc.edu.au/Calendar/Events



On June 27th, 2013, the Lord called home to be with Him

AALTJE (ALICE) HOLTSLAG
aged 92

Dearly loved wife of Henk (deceased) and mother of Dick and Gina, John and Maria and Martina and Neil.

Nana of 11 grandchildren and 36 great-grandchildren.

The funeral was held at the Silverstream Reformed Church.

"The eternal God is a dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms"

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**

chilling, and enjoying time together at Lake Lyndon lodge! The more people we get along, the more fun it is, so bring your friends!

ICRC Conference: August 28th to September 4th – Cardiff, Wales

RTC Preaching Conference: September 26th to 27th

Young Adults' Camp: August 30th to September 7th. YAC is on for all 18- to 30-something-year-olds at Lakeview Bible Camp. Rev. Andre Holtslag will be leading the studies.

CLASSES and COURSES

Women's Leadership Breakfast: This was hosted by the Avondale Reformed Church in July and led by Jenny Waldron. It was especially useful to women's ministry leaders, elder's wives, Bible study teachers and anyone who wanted to be better equipped to help the women around them. The topic, "Would you like to better serve the women around you?" was covered in two sessions "Women Helping Women – A vital task for women" and "What is a Woman's role within the Church?". Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live ... Then they can train the younger woman to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure ... (Titus 2:3-5).

Auckland Presbytery's Men's Study Day: August 17th at the RC North Shore, titled: A man's call to lead pastorally. The biblical role of a man is to lead. Whether in a leadership role or not, men must lead, and this means pastorally/spiritually. To effectively lead spiritually we must form relationships (with God first) and with each other. The study day will explore the biblical role of man's responsibility to lead and form the relationships with those we must work with – our brothers and sisters. Further, we will look at how we should be accountable to and disciple/mentor those in our care.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Hukanui: The Leprosy Mission NZ Fundraising Dinner was held with the goal of raising \$21,000 for a new generator to supply a hospital that has no reliable electricity. The charity dinner and concert was hosted on July 19th at the Woodlands Historic Homestead.

North Shore: The Annual Garage Sale will be held in October. This year we will be fundraising to help pay for our Cadet

and Gem club members to go to the national camp at Nelson in January 2015.

ACTIVITIES

Hope Project: 2014 marks the bicentenary of the gospel in Aotearoa – and the ‘Hope Project’ is seeking to use that to share the reasons for the hope we have in Christ with every home in New Zealand in the weeks leading up to Easter 2014 through multiple media. A road show is traveling throughout our nation to give believers an opportunity to hear about this first hand, as well as hear some stories about our early history that few have heard before. More information can be found at www.hopeproject.co.nz

Reformed Theological College: The RTC Monthly for June is out. Please pray for the students as they sit their exams. Remember Phillip Scheepers as he lectures at the Reformed Theological College of Myanmar in July and the other staff in their various tasks. Dr. Scheepers comments on a useful book that can help us to understand Islam better. Dr. Murray Capill comments further about spiritual disciplines in the Ministry Spot.

Understanding Genesis 1-3: Laidlaw College invites you to an evening of dialogue between Old Testament scholar Dr John Walton of Wheaton College and Associate Pastor Joe Fleener of Howick Baptist Church, on how to understand

Genesis 1-3. Both speakers will have 60 minutes to present their reading of the creation accounts in Genesis 1-3 and will then take questions from the audience. We will be recording these presentations and uploading them to our website after the event for those who can't make it.

TOURNAMENTS

Youth Soccer Tournament: August 3rd in Pukekohe.

Volleyball Tournament: September 28th for all North Island churches at the Masterton Recreation Centre. This is being run as a fundraiser for the Silverstream Christian School.

South Island Ladies Fellowship report

Welcome aboard SILF airways flight 2013, so sit back have your ears and hearts open with God as our pilot and Jesus our co-pilot.

And that's how this years South Island Ladies Fellowship began. The theme was Life is a Journey and was hosted by the Reformed Church of Christchurch. There was a great attendance of women from all over the South Island and with over 100 registrations the new church auditorium at Bishopdale was well suited to the event.

The speaking was split into three

themes Travel Arrangements, Detours and Reflections. Monique Posthuma began with travel arrangements and based her talk on 2 Peter 1:1-11. Using the travel theme she split this passage into three points Ticket, Suitcase and Confirmation. Monique highlighted that Jesus is our ticket to the trip of a lifetime and with that we have assurance of eternal life. Secondly faith is our suitcase for this trip to which it should always be increasing and we are to make every effort to fill it with the qualities of goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love as listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 and that if these aren't increasing we are going on the journey blind!. Thirdly we are com-

manded to make every effort to confirm our "ticket" not by our own works, but by an increasing faith by increasing the virtues we put into our suitcase.

Dr Joyce Alberts was the second speaker and spoke on the detours that our lives may take. As a clinical psychologist Joyce presented helpful methods for analysing our thoughts and working through our emotions and any unhelpful thinking patterns. Joyce used the men and women of the bible to provide examples of various detours our lives can take. A poignant quote from Corrie ten Boom "there is no pit so deep that God's love cannot reach" ended the second talk.

The third talk (reflections) was a video presentation of interviews of 5 senior



Music team – Nina Hardy, Joyce Alberts, Laura and Renee Posthuma



Anna Begg and Liana Havelaar performing skit



On the adventure tour.

members of the Reformed Church of Christchurch. The interviews covered the highlights and lowlights of their lives and how their faith has shaped these moments. Life events like immigration and marriage were discussed and dark days surrounding a loss of a child and childlessness were brought up with honesty. These five women shared their lives with openness and sincerity and by doing so provided encouragement to those that were present.

The afternoon activity was an adventure tour of Christchurch where carloads of women were given a list of directions to follow that would take them on an around the world trip through west Christchurch to complete various tasks. Destinations such as India, Africa and Australia were visited where participants had to answer questions to gain stamps for their "passports".

The singing was well accompanied by several musicians playing piano, flute, cello, saxophone and clarinet. The morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea provided a chance to catch up and enjoy each other's company and meet new faces. Encouragingly the women from the Oamaru congregation have agreed to organise next year's event.

By Kirsten Alberts



The ladies listening to Monique Posthuma speaking.



USA is home for ex-pat Kiwi

Five years ago, our family left the shores of New Zealand to start a new life in the U.S. Little did we know what the Lord had planned for us. Our initial residence was an old house situated on the farm of Susan's parent's in Carson, North Dakota. John was offered employment at a John Deere Dealership 12 miles down the road. We attended the OPC in Carson where we became members.

A year later, in November 2009, John was offered another position with his employer based in Dickinson, North Dakota. Dickinson is about 100 miles (160 km) from Carson. After prayerful consideration, John decided to accept this position, knowing that we would have to travel to Carson for worship services.

Dickinson is a smaller town of about 26,000 people situated in the southwest of North Dakota. It has many farmers and ranchers and employs folks in the town hospital and local university. Dickinson is close to the Theodore Roosevelt National Park and has a very country feel to it. It is predominately Roman Catholic with four large catholic churches.

After living in Dickinson for six months we received a phone call from Pastor Richard Stetler, a minister in the RCUS (Reformed Church in the United States). He had heard that we were living in Dickinson and wanted to know if we were willing to attend a weekly Bible study as part of the RCUS mission work to start a church in this town. This was very exciting news and we knew the Lord was at work!

One of the main commodities North Dakota now produces is oil. A lot of oil! It is the second largest producer of oil in the U.S., second only to Texas. North Dakota produces 769,000 barrels of oil per day from The Bakken shale formation. Many high profile oil companies are locating their head offices in Dickinson which means existing and new employees are now calling Dickinson their home. At this point in time there are not enough people to support the growing industries of oil, agriculture, and retail business. . The State of North Dakota has an unemployment rate of only 3%

and is the leading state in the U.S. for financial growth. With all that is happening we have a huge opportunity to spread the gospel and tell others about the Reformed faith.

Our Bible studies grew in number so as to allow us to call a full time minister. Pastor Dale Clark and his wife, Sandra, joined our group in March of 2012. Since then we have had regular worship services with a number of local families attending, including regular visitors. We had our first baptism of a covenant child (Stryder Roller) born into our group that same year, and in February of 2013



Nicholas and Justin Huizinga professed their faith.

Currently, we have a fortnightly Bible study. We are studying The Canons of Dort and the Heidelberg Catechism as an introduction to the Reformed Faith. The men meet once a month for a men's Bible study and the women meet fortnightly and have done a number of Reformed studies together.

We are looking for a permanent place to worship in Dickinson as we are starting to outgrow the meeting room at the Holiday Inn Express. We have set up a committee to address this and pray that the Lord will provide.

It has been a real blessing to have families from Palmerston North, New Zealand visit and worship with us in Dickinson. Stephan and Hester Bryant and their children came in September of 2012 and more recently, we had the privilege of hosting Jordan and Paula van der Wel.

We continue to give thanks to the Lord for the progress of the First Reformed Church of Dickinson. It is our fervent prayer that the Lord will continue to add to His fold as there is much need for the truth of the gospel to be preached here in western North Dakota.

Faithfully in His Service,

John and Susan Huizinga

John and Susan Huizinga and their family were members of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North before moving to North Dakota in late 2008.

