

faith in focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

Volume 41/7 August 2014



Work out your own salvation?

Contents

Work out your own salvation? (1) A partnership that cannot fail	3
Work out your own salvation? (2) God is at work in you	5
Shepherds and sheep	7
Focus on home Gleanings	8
World in focus	10
Clash of cultures Christians must be clear-sighted about Islam, for better or worse.	14
Books in focus	20
Sing to the Lord – now why did they do that?	21
Missions in focus Poverty, prosperity, and the Gospel	23

All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.
Church and family notices are free, subject to
sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and
payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$35.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography
Printed by: Flying Colours

Editorial

The text “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). This is often misinterpreted, misunderstood and misapplied. A possible reason for this may be because the second part of the sentence (Phil 2:13) is either ignored, misunderstood, or doesn’t fit into one’s theological mindset.

I am sometimes inclined to think that the system of numbering verses in the Bible, which is very helpful on the one hand, is also a potential hindrance on the other. The text above continues in verse 13 “for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” (Phil 2:13) Reading the sentence properly and concentrating on the text, you get the full gist of what the apostle is conveying to the saints in Philippi. Many people, however, wrench portions of Scripture out of context and apply a meaning to them that was never intended. And, I am sure you can see that if you separate verse 12 from 13, you get a different view of the text, which will lead to a faulty interpretation.

So, what is the apostle saying in this sentence? Read what our two contributors have to say.

Mr Michael Flinn looks at a partnership that cannot fail.

Mr Bruce Hoyt reflects on God’s work in you.

Mr Steve Simmons addresses the problem of shepherds and sheep.

Mrs Harriet Haverland and her gleaners keep us informed about news in the churches.

World in focus looks at the persecution of Christians and other news-worthy topics.

Mr Peter Hastie interviews Mr Patrick Sookhdeo about Islam.

Dr Martin Williams reviews, *The Heart is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text*, by Murray Capill.

Mr John Rogers explains why the committee did certain things with *Sing to the Lord*.

Mr Brian T Wingard, a missionary with the OPC, writes about poverty, prosperity, and the gospel as he serves as head of the department of systematic theology and senior lecturer at Mukhanyo Theological College in KwaMhlanga, South Africa.

The Thought of God – Maurice Roberts – Pg.148

What about the child in church? It astonishes many a preacher that parents do not go through the sermon afterwards with their children at home. At an early age children may be trained to listen for the text of a sermon and for the main headings, illustrations, etc. It might mortify many parents if they realized that their children hear scarcely anything a preacher says in his sermon, but are thinking their own thoughts! This is pardonable in the very young and in any event it is better that children should be in the house of God listening to preaching than not in church at all. But we ought as parents to gather up the crumbs for the young by asking them questions at home and by helping them to recall and to understand at least the rudiments of what the minister was preaching from God’s Word.

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

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

Work out your own salvation? (1)

A partnership that cannot fail

Michael Flinn

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Philippians 2:12,13

Every coin has two sides that cannot be separated. The one requires or demands the other. It is the same with Paul's teaching in these verses in Philippians 2:12,13. There is both a command and a promise in this passage – something that we are all required to do on the one hand and a promise of something that God will do in us on the other.

In this article, we will look at the first of these – the command that comes to us. In the next article, Rev. Hoyt will be looking at the second – the promise of God's work in us.

The word "therefore" shows that what Paul is thinking here flows directly from what he has spoken of earlier in Philippians. From the opening verses of this letter, we can see that Paul had a very good relationship with the Christians in Philippi. Though imprisoned in Rome at this stage, Paul was not defeated or demoralised. He was filled with joy, especially when he thought of and prayed for the Philippians (1:4). He is absent from them in body, but not in heart. Their partnership in the gospel will continue (1:5), and Paul is confident that the Philippians will continue to make progress in the faith. Here Paul feels pulled in two directions. He would much rather depart and be with Christ, for that is "much better" (1:23), but if it is the Lord's will for him to remain, and to continue to assist the Philippians in their spiritual progress, then he is ready for that too (1:24,25). For Paul,

to live is Christ (1:21). This is what his life is all about. And why? The answer is in the wonderful verses at the opening to the second chapter. Christ did not regard equality with God as a thing to be grasped, or held tightly to himself. Instead, he humbled himself, and took upon himself human nature. He became a slave and became obedient even to the point of death on a cross (2:8). All this he did for us.

Paul's "therefore" in verse 12 flows directly from all of this. If this is what Jesus has done for us, though we did not deserve his mercy and grace, surely we must strive to honour him and to emulate him in our lives (2:5). For Paul, "to live is Christ", and here we see part of what he means by that. Christ has to be our motivation and our example for obedience and for progress in the Christian life. The Christian life is not some sort of empty moralism – striving always to do the right thing because that is noble or virtuous. The Christian life is a life of gratitude and thankfulness to Christ for what he has done for us. He is our Lord and our Saviour. He is also our example in his own humility and obedience.

Responsibility to bear fruit

So then: *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling* (vs. 12). We need to be careful here. Paul is not suggesting that by our hard work we will *achieve* our salvation in the end. In the Greek text, the literal order of the words is this: *with fear and trembling, your own salvation, work out*. In other words, we are given salvation by God as something that comes first. It is still a free gift with no strings attached. It always has been and it always will be (Ephesians 2:8,9). But then once we have received salvation, we have a responsibility to get stuck in there and labour to bring forth the fruits of salvation in our own personal lives.

What does this mean in practical terms? Well let me ask you this question: Where, in your Christian life, are

you having the greatest struggle at this point in time? Where are you being put to the test – that is – you know what the right thing to do is but in your heart you're having such a hard time doing it? If you can answer that question, then I can say to you that *there* is precisely where you are being challenged by the Scriptures to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

For the Philippians themselves, one of their big areas of testing was their relationships with each other. It was a wonderful congregation, and from what he says in this letter, it is clear that Paul loved these believers and fellow partners



Saint Paul by Bartolomeo Montagna, 1482.
<http://en.wikipedia.org>

“If we love Christ and are thankful to him, we will want to walk in his footsteps. The path is one of humility and obedience for us all.”

in the gospel (1:5) very much. Clearly also, the Philippians loved and valued the apostle Paul. They prayed for him (1:19); they shared with him in his gospel efforts, and like Paul they were

prepared to suffer for the gospel's sake (1:29). They were so concerned about him that they sent Epaphroditus to encourage him and to care for him in his needs (2:25). They had sent him monetary gifts to encourage him in his missionary efforts and support him in the work and they were the only church to do so (4:15,16). However, when they looked at each other, they found that they disagreed on certain issues. That would have been fine – we do not always see things the same way. But along with the disagreement, there was pride, and some people were going around saying that their views were more important than those of others and they should be listened to whereas those who disagreed did not know what they were talking about. Then the bitterness and grumbling set in, the disputes and disunity. Look again at what Paul says in 2:1-4 and 2:14,15. Later on in the letter, he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord (4:2).

So then the challenge for the Philippians, the area in which they especially needed to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, was the area of relationships with one another. Let me say that in this, they were no different from

any congregation of believers. We have been brought together as sinners who are saved by grace alone. We all love Christ and want to honour him because of what he has done for us. We do not argue and dispute *with him*. But arguments, grumbings and disputes with each other? That is another story. Can you see how Paul draws all these things together, starting with Christ who is and has to be the motivation and example for all of us as Christians? If we love Christ and are thankful to him, we will want to walk in his footsteps. The path is one of humility and obedience (2:8) for us all. As we strive to walk on that path, this will mean challenges and opportunities as we live and serve alongside fellow Christians. Hard going? Yep. No question about that. But this is the salvation that we have to continually work out this side of heaven.

But all this is only one side of the coin. In the next article, Rev. Hoyt will look at the promise of God's work in us as we strive to work out our salvation to his honour and glory.

Mr Michael Flinn is an emeritus minister and member of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.



Work out your own salvation? (2)

God is at work in you

Bruce Hoyt

“... for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” Phil 2:13 (NASB).

When the Apostle Paul exhorts his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ to “work out their salvation” (Phil 2:12), he is not calling them to do something **for** their salvation, that is to do something **to gain** their salvation. Rather he is calling them to live out the salvation they have received by grace through faith.

In Phil. 2:13 he makes clear that the motivation and the enabling to live out our salvation arises from the inward work of God. We can think of it this way: our ‘out-working’ arises from God’s ‘in-working’.

Here is one of the many places in Scripture where we see how our sovereign and personal God relates to us. Our responsibility to act is undergirded by God’s sovereign activity.

God is at work in you

What does it mean for God to work in us? Here Paul is speaking about the ongoing sanctifying work of the Spirit of God. In Eph. 2 Paul speaks about the regenerating work of the Spirit who “makes us alive” when we were dead in our trespasses and sins. However, God is not content merely to make us alive spiritually; His Spirit continues to work in us, transforming us and causing us to grow.

The work of the Spirit in making us alive (regenerating us) involves a reversal of the direction of our lives. He changes us from hating God and pursuing our own interests to loving God and seeking His interests so that our deepest desire is what Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

After this once-off work of God in us (regeneration), He continues to work in us by His Spirit because of our weakness and our continued sinful tendencies. Day by day He works to strengthen us and cause us to grow.

This work of God’s Spirit is hidden. It is not something we feel. It is like the growth of our bodies. When your son reaches his early teen years, he begins a period of physical growth that is so fast you can almost hear his body expanding to fill shoes and shirts that soon become too small. And yet if you asked him – “do you feel anything as your body is growing so fast?” – he would say he doesn’t feel any different than normal. Likewise the spiritual growth produced by the in-working of God’s Spirit is not something we feel. But it is real. Our Christian brothers and sisters will see it.

To will

We should also note that God’s work in us is not like a computer program that causes a robot to act in a predetermined way. As the Spirit of God works

in us, He is not running us around like programmed robots. No, His work is in complete conformity with our nature as persons: we make our own choices and decisions.

Furthermore, the work of God’s Spirit is not like the work of the evil spirits that cause people to do things they would not do if they were in full control of their faculties. Think of the occasion when an evil spirit caused a boy to scream, go into convulsions, grind his teeth, foam at the mouth, and throw himself into the fire and into the water (Mark 9:17-26). The Spirit’s work in us is completely different. It is quiet, effective and in complete harmony with our will as persons. He works in such a way that our will conforms more and more to His will, that our desires are more and more what He desires. This is what Paul means when he says that God is at work in us **to will**. He works so that we want and choose what pleases Him.

If you ask how the Spirit of God works in this unfelt yet effective way, we must answer, “we don’t know.” This is one of the mysteries of the Christian faith. It is similar to the mystery of God’s providence in nature. We believe on the basis of Scripture that God is ultimately in control of all events in nature, even what we call disasters, and yet we do not know how He works these things according to His purpose. We don’t see His hand directly causing the rain to fall



“Who knows but God Himself what He will accomplish through fallible, weak people.”

and the sun to shine or an earthquake or a mine explosion. By faith we believe He is in control. In the same way by faith we believe He is at work in us to want and to choose what pleases Him.

He does not force us against our will to choose what He wants. No, He rather gently and sweetly transforms our desires so that more and more we want and choose what pleases Him.

And to work

In addition to transforming our will, the Spirit of God empowers us so that we seek **to do** what pleases Him. That is, He enables us more and more to live according to His commandments. This is made clear in Ezekiel 36:26-27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

As Jesus teaches, all our words and actions come from the heart. Those whose hearts are being transformed by the Spirit of God have a growing desire to act in the way that pleases God. But can we do that? Can we actually do anything that pleases God? Aren't we depraved sinners?

There are many Christians of Reformed persuasion who are so intent on upholding the doctrine of man's total depravity that they ignore the scriptural teaching concerning the transforming and empowering work of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. Paul says that “God is at work in you, both to will **and to work** ...” This scriptural teaching is set forth in our catechism in Q/A 86, “... **we do good** because Christ by His Spirit is also renewing us to be like Himself

...” and Q/A 114, “... in this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, **they do begin to live** according to all, not only some, of God's commandments.”

Although the works done by the believer as he seeks to please God are far from perfect, he truly does good in God's eyes, seeking to obey all God's commandments. How can he do that? Because the Spirit of God is working in him. To say that a true believer can do no good in God's eyes is to deny the empowering work of the Spirit of God.

Such an idea runs contrary to the emphasis of the epistles of the New Testament as it addresses those who are in Christ and have His indwelling Spirit. There are many exhortations to do good and many commendations for doing good. Here are just four examples:

Gal. 5:22-23 “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ...*” Here Paul makes clear that the Spirit actually produces this kind of fruit in the believer.

Gal. 6:9 “*Let us not lose heart in doing good ...*” Here Paul encourages the believers to continue doing good despite the struggle that entails, implying that they are already doing good.

Eph. 6:7-8 “*With good will render service, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord ...*” Here we are encouraged to do good because the Lord will reward us.

Col. 1:9-10 “*We have not ceased to pray for you ... so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work ...*” Paul prays for the Colossians so that they will bear the fruit of good works which is expected of believers.

Many more passages could be listed which show that because of the in-working of the Spirit of God we are enabled to do works pleasing to God. Therefore doing works pleasing to God is to characterise our lives. That is why the Spirit of God is working in us!

For His good pleasure

Finally, we should note the goal of God's work in us, “*His good pleasure*” or as the NIV has it “*His good purpose.*” I

believe that this refers to the purpose He has for each of us in His overall plan of salvation. We cannot begin to comprehend His all-encompassing plan nor do we have much understanding of our own particular role in His plan. But this we can be sure of, as we seek to please God, humbly obeying His commands, seeking the direction of His Spirit through the Word: He will accomplish through us things beyond our imagination. He is that kind of God.

The apostle goes on in subsequent verses to exhort the Philippians to “*become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold fast to the word of life ...*” (NIV). We certainly live in a “crooked and depraved generation.” And who knows but God Himself what He will accomplish through such shining stars – through fallible, weak people of God as they are transformed and empowered by the Spirit of God working in them? Not that they are being empowered to do mighty deeds that cause the world to stand in awe, but that the Spirit of God is working in them leading them on toward being blameless and pure as they hold fast to the word of life.

This is the role God has for each of us as shining stars in His eternal, all-encompassing plan.

Mr Bruce Hoyt is the minister of the Reformed Church of Oamaru.

Something to think about

“Many American Churches are in a mess. Theologically they are indifferent, confused, or dangerously wrong. Liturgically they are the captives of superficial fads. Morally they live lives indistinguishable from the world. They often have a lot of people, money, and activities. But are they really churches, or have they degenerated into peculiar clubs? What has gone wrong? At the heart of the mess is a simple phenomenon: the churches seem to have lost a love for and confidence in the Word of God. Congregations where the Bible is ignored or abused are in the gravest peril. Churches that depart from the Word will soon find that God has departed from them.”
Dr Robert Godfrey – Westminster Theological Seminary



www.truthendures.com

Shepherds and sheep

Steve Simmons

We were on vacation and glad to be in a Reformed church, but the guest minister at the church we were visiting was raising questions for our children – hard questions. About halfway through the alleged sermon, our three-year-old son asked his mom why the man was not preaching. We were wondering the same.

The shepherds

When Jesus pulled Peter from the rubble of his threefold denial and thrust him back into kingdom service, he thrice commanded him to feed his sheep (John 21:15-17). Surely no little boys were asking at Pentecost why Peter was not preaching. Peter fed sheep.

In Jesus' restoration of Peter, we see something of the men God uses, as well as the use God makes of them. Having sinned grossly and wept bitterly, Peter was restored to the work of God. This display of compassion holds out hope to all kinds of grieved failures. From pulpit to pew, hope for future usefulness is offered to the repentant. But forgiveness is a call to service, and, for the pastor, that service always requires the feeding of Christ's sheep. God is pleased to mend the broken and then employ them in his service.

It is also clear from our text that love of God always accompanies the will to serve. God's work of restoration makes

men both fit to serve and willing to serve. Jesus might have asked Peter whether he was repentant, grieved, or ready to get back to work, but it was enough to summarize the whole of Peter's return with this question of love. The question "Do you love me?" required Peter to ask himself whether he had turned away from the idolatry of self-love and self-preservation. He was probed to the marrow of his soul as to whether he loved the Savior with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. A humbler Peter affirmed his love and received his commission to feed Christ's sheep.

Having been graced into being usable, Peter then was pressed into usefulness. John Calvin describes his calling as one that entails all kinds of ecclesiastical oversight, the total care of the sheep. Peter was to teach, train, and guide God's people. Simply put, he was to take care of them. He interprets and passes on this charge in 1 Peter 5, where he exhorts other elders to shepherd God's flock, serving as overseers, selflessly leading as examples.

Paul's similar exhortation to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:28) to shepherd the church of God is accompanied by the testimony of his own preaching of the whole counsel of God and his warning that savage wolves will come to draw disciples after themselves. To prevent any such defections, lambs must be fed. The Word must be preached in and out of

season, that the people of God may be admonished, corrected, reproofed, and instructed (2 Tim. 3:14-4:2).

The role of those called to shepherd is to equip the saints toward maturity, that they might not be carried off by every new trick and gimmick of the enemy. The mantle that Peter has passed on to all the faithful elders who have followed is the calling to teach and lead Christ's sheep. The pastor is called to feed sheep in an age when a Christian witness is a W.W.J.D. bracelet, a prayer life is using the Jabez mantra, a thirty-minute sermon is considered long, and the average church member reads little of his Bible and less of anything else that is theologically sound. The pastor is called by Christ to give the lambs of God an appetite for good theology, to help the sheep with the tough questions of the faith, and to provide such ministerial direction and discipline as the Scriptures require. This is what pastors do when they love Jesus. The whole of the ministry of the pastor is to press God's people to reach maturity.

The sheep

But what about the sheep? Do our Lord's words to Peter require something of them? It seems that Peter's commission contains an implicit demand that the sheep receive shepherding. If the church is to be pastored by a public and private ministry of God's Word, the

sheep must eat. Sheep are required to avail themselves of the gifts of God that come through the pastoral ministry of the church, taking care that the church to which they submit is biblical and Bible-centered. The modern passion for program-heavy churches with little sound teaching is an indictment against both pastors and church members. Sheep that choose anything over the sound teaching of the Bible choose it over Christ himself.

Those who excuse shallow, weak, or poor preaching by foolish assertions that other abilities or services compensate for their minister's deficiencies only display their ignorance of the pastoral ministry and affirm that their minister is not fit for the task. The shepherds that God

sends are such that feed his people with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15). Sheep should beware when the focus of the ministry is not sound teaching and its application. You can be sure that the ministry that is not about feeding sheep has a lot to do with wool sweaters and mutton stew.

Finally, church life is not a democracy. If Peter was called to shepherd, then God's sheep were called to be shepherded, and this is the pattern that Peter (1 Pet. 5) and Paul (Acts 20) passed on through the elders of the church. In our "count every vote" egalitarianism, it is hard to swallow that God requires distinctions in our roles. Sheep are required to obey and be submissive to

those who watch over their souls, for not doing so would be unprofitable (see Heb. 13:17). This is not a blind obedience without reason, but hearing the voice of the Great Shepherd through those he has called to his work.

Shepherds who love Jesus will feed the sheep. Sheep who know Jesus will seek and follow the faithful preaching of God's Word. Anything less is less than love and is a dinner invitation to wolves.

The author is pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in Portage, Mich. Reprinted (slightly edited) with permission from Tabletalk, March 2002. Reprinted from New Horizons, May 2002.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings

BY THE GLEANINGS

TEAM:

Odette De Kock –
Auckland Presbytery

Yvonne Walraven –
Wellington Presbytery

Frances Watson –
South Island Presbytery

Collated and edited by **Harriet Haverland**

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Rev. John Rogers of the Reformed Church of the North Shore will lecture at Knox Theological College in Mbale, Uganda for three weeks later this year.

Luke and Danae Scheepers received the wonderful news that Luke has been declared clear of cancer. God is good indeed.

Remember **Albert Couperus** and his family in prayer as Albert continues studying for the pastoral ministry at Mid America Reformed Seminary. The RCNZ Deputies for students for the ministry have sent our session a very good report on Albert's progress. He is consistently

getting good results and a recent report from the Mid America faculty has also confirmed his good progress in preparation as preacher and pastor, DV. Thanks be to God. (Wanganui)

DENOMINATIONAL

Currently there are six churches in our denomination seeking pastors: Bucklands Beach, Hastings, Palmerston North, Foxton, Wellington and Oamaru.

Christian Reformed Churches of Australia Resource Sale: For more than 30 years, CRCA Resources (formerly RCA Resources, formerly EMIT) has been supplying churches and its members with quality Christian books and church educational material with a Reformed perspective. We have seen many changes of administrators, as well as a change in location (Dandenong to Mount Evelyn). It is now with great sadness that I write to inform you of the imminent closure of CRCA Resources. Over the past 10 years, the use of internet has increased monumentally. This has led the way for churches and individuals to begin obtaining their material easily and cheaply from other sources. In these tough financial times, many churches are also finding it difficult to find the money required to pay for this material. Thankfully, you still have quite some time to continue to support our business: we don't plan to close up shop until June

30th, 2015. We will endeavour to sell off all the material we currently have in stock, so as to be able to wrap up while still covering costs. We would like to thank you all for your patronage and support over the years. We would also welcome input from any individuals or churches who feel that they could assist us in some way. There will be various sales over the next 12 months, with the current one being 50% off all sale stock, until June 30th, 2014. If you would like to take advantage of this sale, simply use the code "50SALE" in the 'Redeem Discount Coupon' section when checking out online (www.resources.crca.org.au).

MISSIONS

India: In January of this year the Rev Dirk van Garderen and his wife Gonny went to India and met with the folks involved in the After-school care programme in Madurai. Real progress has been made in the after-school (ACCESS) work. Our churches support 25 villages in this programme with about 30 children attending the two-hour after-school programme, 5 or 6 evenings a week. Given that their parents are usually illiterate and have poor hygiene standards, the Christian based programme is having a huge impact. Being able to compare what they saw with a previous visit three years ago, progress was amazing! The NDC, (with our support), is seeking to

sponsor a second (new) cluster of 25 villages to strengthen our involvement. We also support the Peniel Vocation Training Centre for slum/village girls in Bangalore. 50 young women attend this college and receive training in English (a key need for education and job opportunities), nursing, or sewing, fashion design and embroidery. The impact of this course and the gospel on these mostly Hindu young women is little short of miraculous. The van Garderens met with both present-day and past students whom they interviewed in some depths. Their stories bore testament to the power and relevance of this work.

News from the OMB – Building Team for PNG: On 23rd of June a building team went to PNG for about 2½ weeks to assist the Ekoru congregation in building a manse for its candidate minister. The Reformed Church of Ekoru is a small village church in the Sogeri Plateau predominately made up of women and children. They have decided to move the church building from inside the village (in a valley) to the roadside to make the church more accessible to people from other tribes so the church can grow and not remain an insular one-tribed church. They have already built a new church building and almost completed a “guest-house” attached to the church building. However, their building resources are limited to about three or four men. Their candidate minister, who is also a keen tradesman, is struggling to do his pastoral work and training as too much time is taken up with building. The Overseas Mission Board of Toronto is committed to helping sponsor the materials for this project, but the distance from Canada does not make it cost-effective to send out work teams. Reformed Ministries, on behalf of the Reformed Church of Ekoru, has asked the New Zealand churches to help complete the building of the manse. While working up in Ekoru, the Ekoru congregation will host them. The building team will face challenges in working in an outlying village away from the comforts of New Zealand culture. The RCNZ flew to PNG on 23 June (returning 10 July) to build a manse for the Ekoru congregation. They are Eric Meinsma (Hastings), Dave Leenders and Blair Posthuma (Silverstream), Ben de Vries (Wainuiomata) and Jono Reinders (Christchurch).

Solomon Islands: Susan Larsen has successfully applied for another position in the Solomons, again as a volunteer with

Austraining, doing similar work to what she did at Bethesda. In July she began a one year ‘Teacher Trainer’ position at a small newly-established vocational training centre for deaf students named the Wale and Esther Special Training Centre (WEST Centre) in Gizo in Western Province, 1 hour flying time or 1.5 days boat trip north from Honiara, nearer to Bougainville.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

Drugarm Wellington is seeking the following: Volunteers, Team leaders, Prayer and financial assistance. Drugarm is a Christian organisation seeking to bring the gospel to our City. We do that by regularly travelling in our Drugarm Street Van to the centre of Wellington on Friday and Saturday nights from about 10pm-3am, meeting up with the students outside the Architecture School to give out hot drinks, donated bakery food, and conversation to any who stop and listen. We then often go to Courtney Place and park up across from the Reading Cinema. There we meet homeless people who all seem to enjoy our company and often engage us in talking about Christianity. We also get a lot of drunk or ‘happy’ people coming to us for hot drinks or the bakery food and many of them always ask us what Drugarm is and why and what we do. This is a good opportunity to explain our role as Christians in our society. We can only hope that they will remember this in the morning. If you would like to know more about this please don’t hesitate to see Hadleigh de Reus or Bill Wierenga. Alternatively thanks to Seth Zorn we now have a website. You can visit us on <http://www.drugarm.org.nz/> (Wellington)

RTC Preaching Conference: September 25th-26th in Geelong, Victoria.

Auckland Reformation Conference: October 30th to November 1st – The speaker this year will be Dr. Phillip Scheepers, speaking on the theme “**Let the earth hear His voice**” – *Reflections on the Reformation and the Call to Missions.*

Young Adults’ Convention (YAC) is for all 18- to 30-something-year-olds who want to grow their relationships with God and each other. Due to Synod, this year’s YAC will be on 14-17 November, again at Lakeview Bible camp in Rotorua. We’ve tried to choose a date that falls between uni exams and the wedding season. From 2015, YAC will

be the second-to-last weekend in August.

CLASSES & COURSES

North Shore held a CAP Money Management course in July, which is about setting up a budget and a system to

August 15th 1929 – April 7th 2014

*At the age of 84 years,
the Lord called*

**ANNA MARIA
(Anne)
SCHELLINGERHOUT
(NEE BEHET)**

to be with Him



*We are thankful to God
for her firm faith and that she is
now free from pain and suffering.*

*A loved wife of the late Hendrik
and Mum, Oma and Great Oma
to:*

Peter Schellingerhout

*Henry and Anna-maria
Schellingerhout*

Leo and Carol de Vos

Graeme and Jackie Posthuma

*19 grandchildren and 9 great
grandchildren*

**Micah 6:1-8
Psalm 121**

manage finances and live within a budget.

PRESENTATIONS

Hamilton: Dinosaurs and the Bible – Most folk, particularly children (yes, even Christian kids) believe that dinosaurs lived millions of years ago. This often leads them to refuting the Bible's account of the history of the Earth and the book of Genesis. But, did you know that dinosaurs are mentioned in the Bible? Robert Hunt presented the DV "Is Genesis History?".

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Buckland's Beach: Cadets and Gems delivered local phonebooks to raise funds for Youth events and the Cadets and Gems Mission project.

Hamilton: Cadets and Gems are having a Garage Sale on Saturday 6th Septem-

ber DV at Aberdeen Church. This is to raise funds for those going to National Cadet camp in Nelson early next year and is also for their Misson Project.

TOURNAMENTS

Volleyball Tournament 2014: The annual volleyball tournament is booked for Saturday, September 20th (DV) at the Masterton Community Centre and is again open to all the North Island churches and run as a fundraiser for the Silverstream Christian School.

The **Pukekohe** youth will DV be hosting the indoor soccer tournament again this year, on the 2nd of August.

ACTIVITIES

Buckland's Beach hosted a "LABS games night" for the Language Assisted Bible Study classes to enjoy an evening of fun and fellowship together with church

members.

Hamilton: Talk on euthanasia – On Tuesday 17 June Renee Joubert gave a public talk on, "Assisted dying: Should suffering NZ'ers be allowed choice at the end of life? What can we learn from Belgium and The Netherlands?" This is in reference to the "End of Life Choice Bill" to legalise euthanasia / assisted suicide in NZ, which could be debated by parliament as early as October.

The **Hamilton** Flame youth group put on an Ice Skating event for the Auckland Presbytery youth.

The **North Shore** men have started putting one Saturday per month aside to help each other, or anyone in need, work on projects such as digging a trench, redecorating, landscaping or moving; there's no job too big or small.

World in focus

Christianity and genocide?

British politician challenges the West's 'conspiracy of silence'

In the lead-up to Easter, UK Prime Minister David Cameron committed his government to fighting the persecution of Christians abroad, saying no group is under more pressure for its faith.

Cameron is not alone in making the claim. In February, US Congressman Chris Smith said "The global persecution of Christians has gone from bad to worse." In November 2012, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said "Christianity is the most persecuted religion worldwide." In January 2011, former Lebanese President Amine Gemayal said "What is happening to Christians is a genocide."

In May 2013, Christian Solidarity International an international human rights organisation issued a Genocide Alert for Christians and other religious minorities in Syria and Egypt.

On March 12, the day before Cameron's announcement, Lord David Alton, of the UK's House of Lords, spoke at a Lenten Vigil dedicated to the suffering church in Syria and the Middle East. During the service, Alton highlighted the systematic killing and

outright persecution of Christians, which he said "takes place without hardly a murmur of protest."

"There is a mistaken belief that somehow this has little or nothing to do with us," he said.

Speaking in a town near London, Alton discussed in detail what he said is the "complete denial about the existence of religiously motivated persecution" in hopes of encouraging policymakers, intelligence services and the media to have a more considered understanding of religious radicalisation and intolerance.

"Religious illiteracy amongst policy makers in Western nations means that the way we view these conflicts has led to serious mistakes," he said.

Alton's talk, titled "Paying a Price for Belief," addressed maltreatment of Christians globally but focused specifically on North Korea, Pakistan and Syria – places where he said being a Christian requires one to pay the ultimate price for their faith.

"The two greatest fault lines of our times are the fault lines between Christianity and secularism, and Christianity and Islam," he said. "Unless we lay bare the ideology which lies behind radical Islamist thinking – and which too often reduces God to the status of a faction leader or tribal chief – and challenge the

conspiracy of silence which surrounds the question of religious persecution, at the hands of radical Islamists and atheists alike, we will sleep-walk into a massive tragedy."

Since 1948 the UN's Declaration of Human Rights has enshrined the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, but the document "is not worth the paper on which it is written," Alton said. "In country after country, all of this has been ignored. And little wonder that Pope Benedict on his visit to the Holy Land remarked: 'Churches in the Middle East are threatened in their very existence.'"

Persecution is not limited to Christians. An Indonesian atheist was fined and jailed for 2½ years after posting the words "God does not exist" and controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad on his Facebook page. Rohingya Muslims live under pressure in Burma, Bahias in Iran, and Tibetan Buddhists in China. However, Alton said, in every country where religious persecution occurs, Christians are in the front line.

This, he said, demands a response from Muslims in the West:

"If, in the face of evil deeds, secularists and Christians need to weigh up their silence and priorities, so do our Muslim brothers. Muslims, who have often settled

in our democracies, need to be much braver in breaking the conspiracy of silence and in identifying with those who suffer – among whom are many Muslim victims of visceral hatred motivated by persecution for being the wrong kind of Muslims. Never forget that many of these families came to Europe to escape the intolerance of countries like Pakistan, where a young Muslim girl was shot for wanting an education, and its Catholic minister for minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, was assassinated for preaching co-existence.

“Many of our European Muslims are good, law-abiding people, who want the same things for themselves and for their families as the rest of us. They are not, as some foolishly and wrongly caricature them, an enemy within. But if they remain silent it will increasingly be seen as acquiescence. It will, however, require

real courage to speak out against forces which have no respect for difference or diversity, or for life itself.”

Published: April 21, 2014 by Lauren Gunias

Sudanese Christian mother sentenced to death for apostasy is freed

Meriam Yahia Ibrahim’s death sentence for apostasy has been struck down by the court of appeal in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

“The release of Ibrahim was declared during a plea that was brought to the court of appeal by the Commission for the Defence of Women,” according to the national *Sudan News Agency*.

Ibrahim and her two children, a two-

year-old son and a baby girl born this month, are believed to have been released from the prison in North Khartoum this afternoon. They had been detained in the jail since February.

One of Ibrahim’s lawyers, Mohamed Mostafa, told *Agence France Presse* that the “reasons for her release have not been made public.”

“We are very, very happy about this – and we’re going to her now,” another of her lawyers, Elshareef Ali, told the *BBC*.

Ibrahim, a 27-year-old Sudanese doctor who gave birth to her daughter while in shackles, had been condemned to death by hanging during a sentencing that was conducted May 15. The boy also was forced to stay in prison with his mother, as his father was refused custody because he is not Muslim.

“Today’s ruling is a small step to redressing the injustice done to Meriam. However, she should never have been prosecuted. Meriam was sentenced to death when eight months pregnant for something which should not be a crime,” said Sarah Jackson, Deputy Africa Director at Amnesty International.

The Executive Director of Hardwired Global, a social justice movement seeking to end religious oppression, Tina Ramirez said, “We are witnessing a historic moment – in the three decades of President Bashir’s brutal dictatorship millions have lost their lives, yet here stands one defenseless and innocent young pregnant woman who forced President Bashir to respect her dignity and religious freedom.”

The American Center for Law and Justice, a Washington D.C. based group that uses litigation to press for religious and speech freedom, called the ruling a significant victory for religious freedom.

“This is tremendous news,” said Jordan Sekulow, Executive Director of the ACLJ. “Her release is a powerful testimony to the millions of people around the world who have called for her release. This is truly a significant victory for religious freedom.”

The ACLJ took part in a global campaign by sending out a legal letter to the Sudanese government on behalf of 350,000 people outlining its violations of law and demanding freedom for Ibrahim and her American children.

Reasons for Ibrahim’s imprisonment

Ibrahim was accused of apostasy for refusing to renounce her Christian faith. The authorities had previously said that Ibrahim’s release would only be possible



Inside burnt remains of Orthodox Church of Virgin Mary, Delga Village, Upper Egypt. 12 September 2013 – World Watch Monitor



Meriam Ibrahim, her husband, children and legal team.

Photo courtesy of Hardwired, Inc. WorldWatch Monitor

if she renounced her faith and divorced her husband, although Sudan's 2005 interim constitution guarantees freedom of religion.

She was charged as a Muslim because her father was Muslim. However, Ibrahim claimed to be raised as a Christian because her mother is Orthodox Christian and her father left the family while she was young.

Previous court rulings had ordered her to receive 100 lashes for committing adultery as they did not recognise her marriage to Daniel Wani, a Catholic American. Under Sudan's Sharia law, Muslim women are not allowed to marry Christian men.

A June 11 statement released by the Catholic Church of Khartoum suggested

that members of Ibrahim and Wani's families may have been motivated by a desire to access the couple's businesses, which includes a barber shop and agricultural products. It also said a lawyer who first dealt with the couple's case in September 2013 was forced to stop representing them due to pressure from Ibrahim's accusers, including her brother.

Some in Ibrahim's current legal team have received threats from extremists who say their actions are "un-Islamic" and that they, too, should receive death sentences.

Agence France Presse also reported that extremist groups had lobbied the Sudanese government to uphold the sentence.

[In spite of Ibrahim's release, the

family was detained one day after her release from prison for allegedly 'forging documents'. This was the latest information to date as of 26 June. Ed.]

World Vision does a 360 on same-sex marriage

The American branch of World Vision caused quite the brouhaha in the evangelical world in late March over their stance on same sex marriage. They announced a change to their hiring policies that would allow professing Christians in legal same-sex marriages to be hired by the charitable organisation.

This announcement swiftly incurred the wrath of many parts of the evangelical world, sparking a firestorm on blogs and social media. Up to 2,000 donors purportedly canceled their support for World Vision after hearing about the announcement.

Because of this enormous backlash, World Vision backtracked and reverted to its original hiring policy just 48 hours after the initial announcement. World Vision U.S. President Richard Stearns wrote in a letter that,

we failed to be consistent with World Vision U.S.'s commitment to the traditional understanding of Biblical marriage and our own Statement of Faith, which says, "We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God."

These events have again highlighted some of the problems that surround "parachurch" organisations. These organisations seek to transcend denominational borders and unite Christians of all stripes to a given cause. This strategy has allowed World Vision to become one of the largest charitable organisations in the world. However, this big-tent approach to charity can also result in a lowest-common-denominator approach to the faith commitments of the organisation. They have to adopt policies that appease a wide spectrum of supporters, liberal and conservative alike. This is evident in the rationale that World Vision gave for the initial policy change, where they stated that they wished to remain neutral on same-sex marriage because this is an issue that is not settled at the local church level. World Vision has taken a similar tack on other contentious issues such as divorce and remarriage and women in office. Unfortunately, despite the rhetoric of neutrality, World Vision is in fact taking a stand on these issues whether



Protest to free Miriam Ibrahim in Madrid, Spain. June 11. 2014

HazteOir.org /Flickr/ Creative Commons

they realise it or not; to make no decision at all is a decision.

Parachurch organisations such as World Vision have undoubtedly done a great deal of honorable work. However, we should be careful not to let them displace the messy community life of actually existing church bodies, or to mistake them for the church itself. The church should not be eclipsed by her children.

Reformed Perspective

News from Slovakia

Posted on June 4, 2014 by J.C. von Krempach, J.D. Turtle Bay and Beyond Today, Slovak MPs from SMER (Social-Democrats) and KDH (Christian-Democrats) voted to define marriage as a 'unique bond between a man and a woman' in the Constitution. Ruling party SMER agreed to the demand of opposition party KDH in exchange of their support for a judicial reform. The support for the amendment in the chamber was overwhelming: 102 parliamentarians voted in favour of the constitutional amendment, while 18 voted against. The Constitution was amended to make attempts to re-define marriage less likely in the future. This amendment seeks to go further than banning same-sex "marriages". Its explanatory referendum specifies that "it will be impossible for the rights and duties associated with marriage to be conferred in any way other than a legally recognised union between a man and a woman". Although only in an explanatory memorandum, the statement seeks to outlaw any form of union for same-sex couples. With this amendment, Slovakia follows a trend among European countries: it is the seventh EU Member State (after Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Hungary, and Croatia) to have enacted such a clarification, belying false assertions (e.g. by the ideologically biased European Court of Human Rights) that there were a general trend towards recognition of same-sex "marriages" in Europe. In this sense, it is hoped that today's decision will have its due impact even outside Slovakia, as it will further undermine the credibility of such assertions, which unfortunately are a recurring feature in the ECtHR's case-law.

Reformed Church in China closed by government with pastor arrested

A 4 June 2014 *World Magazine* article titled "June Crackdown" reports that Chinese police on the evening of 1 June 2014 arrested Pastor Wang Yi of Early Rain Reformed Church in Chengdu,

China, and another church member was bludgeoned by police for passing out pro-life brochures. Pastor Wang preached earlier that day to his congregation of around 200 about Christian persecution, where he told them that Stephen faced it, Western missionaries to China faced it, and he and his congregation may have to as well.

Police re-arrested Pastor Wang on the morning of 4 June 2014 as his church planned to hold a meeting to pray over China. Congregants said the police then shut off power to the office building where the church meets and posted signs that it was under maintenance. Church leaders then emailed congregants, asking them to pray in their small groups instead, as police likely are watching the church building.

by Raoul Kingma

Pro-Life Youth Speak out at UN Forum

By Mark Kowalewski

NEW YORK, June 20 (C-FAM) Youth symbolise vitality and a future – and the UN, often teetering on the brink of irrelevancy, is keen on inviting young people into its midst. But a recent forum for youth exposed a dangerous trend – and an opportunity for pro-lifers.

The forum gathered opinions from youth in preparation for a high-level meeting of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) next month. Young C-FAM delegates discovered the panelists, moderators, and other participants at the two-day affair held radicalised views and a deeply pro-abortion and anti-religious bias – not at all representative of youth worldwide.

So the members of C-FAM's International Youth Coalition (IYC) spoke up in defense of the most youthful human life – the unborn – and defended the role of religious groups in caring for the world's most vulnerable and impoverished citizens.

"The world we want is a world that wants us!" was the forum's unofficial motto. This could be construed as a pro-life sentiment, IYC members blogged, embracing the youngest of children – unborn babies. However, it was not taken that way by the most outspoken participants, who also exclude people with religious beliefs.

"People are using traditional religion as an excuse to keep condoms and contraceptives out of the hands of youth," said a Planned Parenthood-affiliated panelist in a session on development in

Africa. He called for a stronger focus on women's reproductive rights, a euphemism for abortion. The moderator of the panel echoed his statement.

An Ecuadoran youth said religious values have no place in health care, and the medical industry should be completely secular. IYC delegate Karl Hetzke disagreed, saying

"Secularised medicine is a false premise," and, "Faith-based organisations have a huge role to play not only in providing health care in the hospital, but also in counseling youth in regards to emotional health, and healthy life choices in general."

The moderator endorsed Hetzke's comments, noting that religious organisations provide most of the world's medical services.

On the second day, a session on education found several youth delegates calling for internationalised education standards that include comprehensive sexual education and training on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality.

At the end, each youth delegate was allowed to give closing remarks. Despite coming from a region with some of the most pro-life laws in the world, Latin American representatives issued the strongest pro-abortion statements. "States should express and apply policies and programs legalising abortion; making it accessible, risk free, and free of charge, as well as eliminating any waiting period and any counseling sessions that involve parents," one young woman said.

It was disappointing but indicative that the largest round of applause during the forum went to a Chilean youth calling for even more women's reproductive health rights. To be young and not a revolutionary is almost a "biological contradiction," he said, and endorsed a revival of Occupy Wall Street-like protests against capitalism.

The call for revolutionary anti-establishment activity has been parroted at the UN's high levels. A senior UN Population Fund official recently invoked the Occupy movement to rouse youth into demanding a pro-abortion reproductive rights agenda for adolescents.

It remains to be seen whether the pro-life perspective will be represented when the summary of the forum's discussions and recommendations are presented at the ECOSOC high-level meeting in July.

Clash of cultures

Christians must be clear-sighted about Islam, for better or worse.



Patrick Sookhdeo talks to Peter Hastie

.....

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo was born in Guyana, South America, into a Muslim family and became a Christian while a student in London. He studied theology at London Bible College and holds a PhD from the London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. He has also been awarded doctorates from Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon, and Nashotah House Episcopal Seminary, Wisconsin.

Dr Sookhdeo has been a visiting lecturer at Oak Hill Theological College, London; Ridley Hall, Cambridge; and Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. He has served as a visiting professor at Reformed Theo-

logical Seminary, Orlando, and Washington. He is also adjunct professor at the George C. Marshall European Centre for Security Studies and senior visiting fellow at the UK Defence Academy. He has worked in London as a pastor and church planter for 23 years. In 2001 he received the Coventry Cathedral International Prize for Peace and Reconciliation. He is the author/editor of 10 books. He is the international director of Barnabas Aid and Barnabas Fund, and director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity. He is married to Rosemary and has three adult daughters.

Patrick, Islam is one of the most powerful religions in the world today. How does Islam shape the belief of its followers?

The most important thing to grasp about Muslims is that they see themselves in terms of their religion. They are com-

mitted to it. Islam defines their identity. They may not believe all the teachings of Islam but they still define themselves as traditional or cultural Muslims. The vital thing is that issues of faith and religion are of supreme importance to them. Of course, this is not the way that people tend to see themselves in the West. We are more ambivalent towards religion and are likely to find our identity in ways that are decidedly secular.

Are Muslims like Jews in this sense?

Yes, they are similar in the way that each of their religions tends to define them. If you are born a Muslim or Jew, then that is what you are. You can be Jewish or Muslim without believing everything that the religion teaches. I remember someone once saying to me, "Islam is in your blood. It's always there". What is happening today is that as more people

become Muslim and Islamic values and identity become more widespread, Muslims feel more emboldened. The interesting thing is that as the number of Muslims grows, instead of being repelled by some of its more unattractive features, people are actually drawn to it because of its sense of duty, discipline and order.

So what attracts people to Islam?

Islam projects strength and vitality in a way that secularism and Christianity in the West do not. For example, Muslims believe in a transcendent God. In the West the tendency has been for God to become so immanent that He is hardly different from us. People are searching for authority in a directionless world and Islam offers a god and a plan that appears to answer many of their religious longings.

Again, western society is collapsing because the notion of duty has been lost. Our age has abandoned ideas of obligation and responsibility. Islam, on the other hand, focuses on order, duty and morality. Against the West, which is preoccupied with sexual freedom, Islam presents itself as a defender of ethics, family and community. I should add, however, that the way that Islam presents itself and the way it actually operates are worlds apart. Be that as it may, Islam presents itself as an advocate of strong theism and traditional morality, and that is how it's perceived.

Many in the West see Islam not simply as a proselytising faith but as a political and military force as well. Is there something about the nature of Islam that gives rise to this threat?

There is an aspect of Islam, arising out of Muhammad's own struggles with his enemies, that gives rise to this perception. Muhammad's life as a religious leader and prophet can be divided essentially into two stages. If we take the traditional Muslim chronology, which is questionable, Muhammad's activities in Mecca up to AD 621 are essentially peaceful and spiritual. During this period he conducts no wars although he does experience persecution as a result of his new-found beliefs. Then in June 622 he flees from Mecca to Medina in what is described as the *hijira* (or migration). This is the turning-point in his career and marks the beginning of the Muslim era and calendar.

Traditionally the *hijira* takes place as

a result of persecution. Muslims claim that Muhammad was forced to leave an enemy land for a secure place in which he could practice his religion. Nevertheless, the debate continues as to why he really left Mecca. Some scholars believe that Muhammad was actually preparing to move to Medina so that he could establish a city-state there and install himself as its leader. They claim he had political and military ambitions as well as religious ones. It may well be that both positions contain elements of truth. Certainly Muhammad did experience considerable hostility in Mecca. However, it is likely that he was making plans for the spread of Islam and the invitation from Medina coincided with his plans for the next stage of Islam's development.

Do you think it's remarkable that in the short space of eight years he was able to move into Medina and assume its leadership?

Yes, Muhammad was an extraordinarily gifted leader. From the moment he arrived in Medina his preaching achieved almost total success. He soon gained political and religious control of the city. He became its statesman, legislator and judge. It was the first independent Muslim city, and Muhammad attracted many followers from the surrounding regions. Now at that stage, as any leader would do, he had to consider how he was going to defend his faith and how he would take it forward.

At this point, we see certain developments emerging. Muhammad claims that he received sanctions to engage in offensive wars to defend his religious city-state and he announces that the Jewish tribes are to be seen as a threat.

In AD 630 he was able to return to Mecca with an army of 10,000 warriors. He conquered the city and established the Meccan shrine, the *ka'ba*, as Islam's most sacred place. So Islam developed in a cauldron of conflict and Muhammad from the outset began to fight to defend and propagate his faith. In such a context, warfare and conquest became inevitable. Although the notion of *jihad* includes the idea of striving against evil and doing good, the concept expanded to include the ideas of defensive and offensive wars. I think at that point you can see the shift in Muhammad's theology. He now has this wider view of the world and Islam's place in it. He also sees that an Islamic worldview leads inevitably to Islamic world domination. He looks into the future and sees that

“Islam presents itself as an advocate of strong theism and traditional morality, and that is how it's perceived.”

salvation for the nations lies in submission to Allah. It thus becomes his mission to achieve this through conquest.

Some would argue that Islam is more of an Arab liberation or revolutionary force. Muhammad certainly stamped his identity on the Arab people and gave them a religious aspiration to expand their sphere of influence beyond their region.

Was his view driven largely by his vision of the future or by political necessity?

I think that anyone who looks at the texts objectively will see that Muhammad is driven to a large degree by political necessity. We mustn't forget that he was constantly under attack. He felt that he had to both defend himself and attack his enemies. Once he had conquered Arabia, he believed he had a mission to bring the whole world into submission to Allah. Therefore he had to expand.

However, we mustn't forget that Muhammad believed that he was God's final prophet and that Islam was the true expression of God's will. If this was so, then it raised problems as to how Muslims were to deal with those who contested those claims. What are Muslims supposed to do with infidels? Restrict them or enslave them? And how should they deal with their enemies, the Jews? The very nature of Islam's absolutist claims raised considerable problems for the way that Muslims relate to others.

The Islamic view of the future is something that develops more in the Hadith

“They want what the West has to offer but they don’t want its values. This creates enormous tensions for Muslims.”

literature after the time of Muhammad than in the Qur’an itself.

Muslims are often portrayed in the western media as a religious group that feels superior to other faiths. Is this a fair portrayal or just media bias?

I think we need to understand that there is, in the very nature of Islam itself and its followers, an inherent sense of superiority. It is because God has sent the final messenger, Muhammad, to them. They alone possess the truth; they are supreme.

This comes to the fore in their view of creation. It is very different to the Christian view. As Christians we believe that all men are created in the *imago Dei*, in the divine image. Every human being is therefore invested with profound significance irrespective of our sex or station in life. In Islam that isn’t the case. In fact, it’s blasphemy. Islam believes that while God made man from the ground and breathed life into him, man does not necessarily possess the divine image. This creates a problem in establishing human value. How do you assess the value of a man to a woman, or a Muslim to a Jew, or a Christian, or an unbeliever? Muslims believe that the worth of a follower of Muhammad is twice that of a Christian. So Islam, by its doctrine of creation, creates a real distinction in value among human beings. While Christian men and women are worth half the value of their Muslim counterparts, infidels or pagans are worth even less. Under Islamic law, humanity and the value of human life is classified in very legal ways.

Is Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” thesis about Islam and the west a credible explanation?

I think Huntington would have been more helpful in his analysis if, instead of using the term civilisation (which is a technical word with different nuances), he had spoken of a “clash of values”. I would certainly agree with him that there is a clash of values, both in an internal and external sense.

Within Islam itself there is a clash taking place which some have expressed rather simplistically as a clash between the “mosque and the McDonalds”. Essentially, it’s a clash of Islamic tradition versus modernity. This is an internal battle of values within Islam between those who want to hold on to their traditional values and those who believe that Islam must adapt itself to the modern world. The former believe that nothing within the Qur’an and the Hadith can change. The idea is that Muhammad represents the perfect model of life and this must be implemented in its entirety.

However, there are clashes taking place at other levels too. For example, there are various clashes that are taking place throughout Islam as a whole such as the Sunni-Shiite conflict, ethnic conflicts, and conflicts amongst the Kurds, Sunni and Shia. All these clashes are having significant effects on Islam.

Finally, you have another major conflict which is a conflict between Islam and the West. This is focused on values. The Muslim sees Western culture as being built primarily upon the sovereignty of the individual. They regard Western law as nothing more than an expression of the will of the people as opposed to the will of God. They view the West as culture based on human autonomy – essentially to do whatever you like. Everything about the West is inimical to Islam, since Islam calls for complete submission to Allah.

Although Muslims would claim that Islam allows substantial freedom, it is always a freedom within very strict limits. It is impossible to venture beyond those limits. In Islam the community is always greater than the individual and this places very severe restrictions on freedom of expression. For example, you haven’t got freedom to discuss the authority of Muhammad and whether or not he is a prophet. In many Islamic societies to do so is a criminal offence. You haven’t got the freedom to say, “Let us take the Qur’an and examine it using some of the critical methods that

are applied to the text of the Bible”.

This creates enormous tensions for Muslims. On the one hand, they envy the West and its success. They want what the West has to offer but they don’t want its values. What they don’t see is that the foundation of the West’s progress lies in its commitment to analysis, criticism and the right to choose. I think the tension between wanting what the West has to offer in terms of its technology and standards of living and rejecting its fundamental ideals represents a major clash for Muslims today. It’s a huge struggle for them.

From AD622 Islam has been engaged in territorial claims against other societies. Are there any lasting lessons on how the West should meet and face those challenges?

Islam teaches that all lands belong to Allah, who has given them to the Muslims. The nations they don’t possess are theirs in theory and will gradually become theirs in practice. The conquest and subjection of territory has been a central teaching of the Qur’an and an integral part of Islam.

The earliest Muslim leaders, beginning with Muhammad, had a policy of expansion. Muhammad captured Mecca and then subjugated the whole Arabian peninsula. A few years after his death, Muslims captured Damascus and then all Syria. This set a pattern for what was to come. Within the next few centuries Islam spread throughout many countries in Africa and Europe, then into the Indian subcontinent and later into south-east Asia.

What we need to understand is that in Muslim thought the past determines the present which, in turn, determines the future. So, if you want to understand the way Islam works today, you need to look to the past. And if you want to know where we will be in the future, then you need to go back and look at the past.

In the last 30 years in particular, especially since 1979, Islam has been undergoing a resurgence. Muslims believe that Islam will one day rule the world. They have rediscovered the Qur’an, the role and centrality of Muhammad, the *hadith* (traditions recording Muhammad’s words and actions), the *sunna* (the customs of Muhammad), the *Shariah* (their rule of life), and the period of Arab “holy history” (the period when they were victorious). Now, in redis-

covering these elements of their faith, particularly the last, they have been re-energised. There is a verse in the Qur'an which says, "Power and honour belongs to Allah and his messenger Muhammad". So, Muslims believe that when they are faithful to Allah they will be victorious. In their eyes, power belongs to God, and when Allah gave it to Muhammad and the early leaders of Islam who followed him faithfully, they won every engagement on the battlefield. They defeated the nations to the east and the Byzantines to the west because Allah was with them.

For the last 30 years, Muslims have undergone a similar process of reflection and analysis. They have been re-examining the golden ages of Islam and yearning for an end to the age of western colonialism. They long to remove the shame and defeat of the past and seek victory and honour in its place. This explains why they see the world in ways that seem so foreign to us. In their eyes, it's Islam that will win. In the end Islam will triumph over the conspiracy of the Jews, Americans, Europeans, and the rest of the world. The point is that Muslims are driven by a conviction of ultimate triumph over their enemies and that the world belongs to them.

“Islam actually condemns suicide bombers and terrorists; what it does not condemn is armed conflict (jihad) performed in the name of Allah.”

Islam says that it stands for the traditions of the biblical prophets and regards Jesus Christ as the greatest prophet before Muhammad. Is there some contradiction between Muslims' claimed veneration for both Jesus and Muhammad? Why do they think Muhammad is superior to Jesus?

Muslims place Jesus on a very high pedestal. They accept His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miraculous deeds, His ascension into heaven and His second coming. That sets Him apart from Muhammad. However, Muhammad still ranks above Jesus because Muslims believe that he is God's final messenger. He delivers the final revelation. Therefore, in Muslim eyes, Muhammad surpasses Jesus and every other prophet. He is also a man's man. He isn't weak. He has a sword, leads his people into battle, and has a wife; in other words, he lives in the real world, as a real person, engaging in real actions, and at the same time bringing the final message.

In that sense, there is a sense of tension between Jesus and Muhammad. Jesus almost seems too spiritual for life in this world. Muhammad, on the other hand, is portrayed as a perfect model for humanity. Some Islamic theologians have gone so far as to claim that at the creation God made Muhammad first, then took a portion of him and created the world from it. In this sense, Muhammad is seen by some Muslims as the unifying principle behind the universe. Others have actually elevated Muhammad to a position where he is an intercessor before Allah, so it's an interesting tension that emerges between Jesus and Muhammad. Ironically, they don't see any tension because they simply ascribe a lesser role of intercession to Jesus.

But how do Muslims deal with the miracles of Jesus? Don't they establish His credentials as the final prophet and the divine Son of God?

Muslims don't dispute the many miracles that Jesus did. The Muslim consensus is that every prophet must work a miracle. As far as Muhammad is concerned, they believe that the great miracle which he wrought was to write the Qur'an when he was illiterate. Nevertheless, miracles are not critical for Muslims despite the fact that at the moment there are a lot of books coming out on Muhammad's miracles. For Muslims, the key element is the final revelation. That is the greatest miracle.

How does that separate Muhammad from a self-proclaimed prophet like Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church?

You have raised a critical area for Islamic theologians: exactly how does one distinguish between a true prophet and a false one? The problem that Muslims confront is that there are some definite parallels that exist between people like Joseph Smith and Muhammad. For example, scholars have pointed out that in both cases an angel acted as a mediator. In the case of Joseph Smith it was the angel Moroni, but for Muhammad it was the angel Gabriel. Again Smith claimed that the book of Mormon was written on tablets (in his case gold ones), and Muhammad claimed that the Qur'an was written on tablets too. So the parallels are striking. These observations raise an issue which is very difficult to discuss, namely, where do these "revelations" come from? What was their source? This was a concern, dare I say it, for Muhammad himself. It is alluded to in the Qur'an and has become embedded in the controversy. It is a critical area but it is almost impossible to explore in Islamic theology.

Is it a life-threatening issue?

It's incredibly life-threatening! Anyone who challenges the authority of Muhammad in today's climate is risking reprisal. Everyone has seen what has happened to people like Salman Rushdie.

What are the essential teachings of Islam and do they have anything in common with Christianity?

The essentials are very simple. Muslims believe in one God, as do Christians. The problem is that we disagree about the nature of God. While Christians are Trinitarian, Muslims are virtually deistic. They also believe that Muhammad is the ultimate prophet of God. We cannot accept that because we believe that God has spoken finally in the person of Jesus Christ. Further, Christians cannot accept that the Qur'an is in any sense the word of God. To do so would invalidate the claims of the New Testament that Jesus is God's final word to us.

Again, although Muslims say that they believe in the second coming of Jesus, Christians cannot agree that Jesus will return as a Muslim. Instead, we believe that Jesus will return as supreme ruler to judge all humanity. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom made up of

Muslims and then lead them back to paradise.

So while there are some superficial similarities, it is extraordinarily naïve to think, “Oh, isn’t it wonderful; we both believe in Jesus.” One senior American evangelical recently suggested this in a public prayer. If you listen carefully to what he said he referred to Jesus or ‘Isa – the Muslim form of Jesus – as the person who had changed his life. Ask yourself, “What is the meaning of ‘Isa?” ‘Isa in the Qur’an offers no salvation. He doesn’t save you from your sin because Muslims believe that He didn’t die on the cross. Now since it is only God who can save, the ‘Isa of Muslims is a very truncated Jesus.

The problem today is that too many Christians are playing the Muslim game of contextualising Christian theology into Muslim theology. What is often forgotten is that the so-called “similarities” disappear on closer inspection. Indeed, the differences are huge and if we fail to understand those differences we risk being swallowed up into Islam. My present fear is that this is already happening in much Christian theology.

What is it about Islam’s understanding of God that differentiates it from all the other religions?

Islam focuses on the utter transcendence and power of Allah. He is essentially a powerful force as in classical deism. And since God rules with absolute will, then it is His power that’s important at the end of the day. We can only submit to that will.

What are the implications of such beliefs?

Well, it means that the idea of fate tends to become a working principle in the believer’s life. Whatever happens to you is according to God’s will. When your car breaks down, “it is the will of Allah”. Personal responsibility becomes unimportant and the use of reason and analysis are often viewed with suspicion. For example, we treat traffic accidents and road fatalities very seriously in the West. However, in Saudi Arabia it’s not appropriate to talk about road accidents or how many people were run over. It’s simply the will of God. If an airplane crashes with a Muslim pilot at the controls, then is he responsible? The short answer is no; it is the divine will.

The problem here is that Islamic theology has no real basis for engaging in

change. If all of life is subject to fate, what logical basis do you have to engage in change? The contrast with Christianity is striking at this point. The Bible tells us that we are made in the image of God and that we are also fully responsible for our actions. This means that it is possible to make responsible choices and to bring about fundamental change. We can use our minds and energy to great effect. It is these assumptions that have undergirded the modern scientific enterprise and the cultural advances of the West. Christian thought, which stresses the importance of the mind and the need to make responsible choices, has been the great engine that has driven western progress. Unfortunately, the reason why Muslim societies are unable to experience the same kinds of transformation is that their theological understanding of God, themselves and the world does not permit it. This is what is missing in Islam.

The other problem with an Islamic view of God is that if he is so sovereign, then how do you separate out his actions? Evil comes from him, but so does good. In Islam God becomes completely arbitrary. One day he can be kind to you and the next day he can be awful. That is not a satisfactory basis for a personal relationship with his followers.

Can you explain jihad? Is it just a spiritual concept as some suggest, or does the term also refer to actual warfare?

The concept of jihad began in a relatively positive way. The Arabic word means “striving”. It was used originally of striving to live a good and righteous life and to worship God with all one’s heart and mind. It’s a concept that refers to strong exertion in living a noble life.

However, with the passing of time, jihad took on more violent connotations. This was inevitable because Muhammad had to defend his community against enemies. At that point, he received revelations which allowed him to engage in a defensive war and then in offensive war. These revelations allowed him to justify his “striving” (jihad) in a military sense against those who wanted to destroy him.

When some people say that Islam promotes peace, in one sense they are correct. But in another sense they are obscuring the fact that the concept of jihad also has violent associations. The fact is that both ideas are contained in the one word.

Now one important question that

“Muslims are streets ahead of the Christian missionary effort in terms of radio, television and influencing government and society.”

is often debated in Islamic circles is whether jihad represents the sixth pillar of Islam? Certainly in the Saudi version of the Qur’an we read of jihad as being the sixth pillar. There jihad is understood as a “striving” to the end of time for Muslim world domination.

Certain Muslims today – especially modern Wahhabis – have latched on to this more radical idea and are giving it wider currency. The question that confronts Islamic leaders is this: is it a really legitimate interpretation of the Qur’an to have a theology of armed conflict and violence embedded in the text with modern application, or should those texts be interpreted more fairly to emphasise the original notion of jihad? This would enable Islamic scholars to teach that striving for righteousness and holiness is good, that serving others is legitimate, that education is desirable but that hurting others and waging war, whether in defensive or offensive conflicts, is no longer a valid concept for Muslims in today’s world. Islamic scholars really need to re-examine their sacred texts and realise that the concept of jihad should be interpreted in more enlightened ways. There needs to be a revolution of understanding within Islam, and they must come to terms with the relationship between reason and revelation. There is now a body of scholarship which is saying that there needs to be such reconsideration, but those scholars are a very small minority.

Muslims are clearly operating with a different worldview to the West. Is there anything wrong in seeing them through exclusively western eyes? For example, should we be calling "mujahidin" terrorists or suicide bombers?

No, I don't think we should. The terms "terrorist" and "suicide bomber" are meaningless words for those engaged in jihad. We need to let them define themselves and then approach them on their own terms. Otherwise, we will never address the issues that are at the heart of the conflict. The problem is that Islam legitimises the concept of jihad and says that it's okay to go and defend other Muslims who are facing oppression. Indeed, it justifies violence and dying in the cause of Allah. Until we address that issue we cannot begin to resolve the problem. We are talking at cross-purposes.

We need to realise that Islam actually condemns suicide bombers and terrorists; what it does not condemn is armed conflict (jihad) performed in the name of Allah. When the West condemns terrorist and suicide bombers, Islam agrees. The issue we need to address is whether the Qur'an really teaches the modern and radical understanding of jihad, in which war and violence are justified. Currently Islamic teaching on war is in a state of flux. The traditional doctrine of jihad is no longer all-pervasive and unquestioned; new lines of interpretation of the Qur'an and of the term jihad are being explored, although they are not nearly as influential as the more radical views.

Some might claim that you are just playing with words?

No, I am not. Every Muslim who dies on the battlefield in jihad dies as a martyr. We need to understand that. When we call them criminals or terrorists we blind ourselves to the real problem and obscure the fact that the real issue is a theological one. What we have to do is address the principles of violence within their religion. And this is why I have problems with typical Western responses to Islam. They are not sufficiently theological. They don't relate to the core texts of Islam and question the claims of the radicals.

People often say to me, "Why do you start with their religion? Why don't you just say that there are a few extremists out there who are a bunch of criminals and they don't represent the religion?" And I say, "Hang on. You can't

start there. You have got to start with how Islam understands itself in terms of conflict. How does it see the use of violence? How does it understand fellow Muslims who pursue violence?" Unless we begin here, we will make no progress in addressing any of these issues.

I think the best hope in the long-term of confronting the problem of Islamic violence is to re-examine the textual evidence and theological justification for it. Without an underlying theology to fuel jihad, it will eventually shrivel and die. The best thing we can do in the West is to encourage sincere Muslim scholars to pursue theological reform which reexamines and challenges the violent tradition of jihad and the connection of Islam with the state. Such a strategy has the greatest potential to isolate those who are committed to violent jihad from their support base amongst wider Islamic society. Unless the West addresses the textual legitimacy of radical Islam, then all that the future holds is an endless struggle against dedicated Muslims who continue to emerge hydra-like as a result of this underlying ideology.

Christian theologians have been engaging with Islam for 1400 years. Do we have anything to learn from the early apologists like John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas and Raymond Lull?

I think we have a lot to learn from them. First, they remind us that theology is all-important. The problem that we face today is that too many theologians and missiologists think that culture is the vital issue. So they study culture and tend to push theological issues to one side. John of Damascus and the others took a different approach. They realised they were up against a theological system that had to be addressed as such. They were not only masters of Christian theology but they were also experts in the teachings of Islam.

Is Islam engaging in a missionary enterprise of its own in the West?

Yes, it is – on a massive level. Western Christians have little idea how large it is. Islamic dawa (mission) is multifaceted. It is also centrally organised on a prodigious scale. The Saudis have spent over \$100 billion between 1980 and 2000 on establishing global dawa. They have poured money into the building of mosques, the training of teachers, developing literature, publishing and media. It's been done on a colossal scale.

Muslims are streets ahead of the Christian missionary effort in terms of radio, television, and influencing government and society. They have a clear goal within our society to Islamise it. There is a development of consciousness, organisational structure, and engagement with authorities to bring about a community founded on Islam. They see themselves as engaged on an eternal venture to transform the whole of society.

Are Muslims working to eliminate Israel?

This is what they say in public from time to time. One of the most alarming things that I have witnessed recently is a growing convergence between Muslim and Christian attitudes towards the Jews. I am deeply troubled by the growth of anti-Semitism in the church, especially among evangelicals. It has surfaced recently over issues in Gaza. The Muslims have very shrewdly positioned themselves as victims. So they have said, "Come and help us!" Now a number of Christian leaders have crossed over to support the pro-Palestinian, anti-Semitic lobby. While I am not inviting anyone to take a particular side on this issue, I think some Christians are being sucked into an anti-Israel position which borders on the anti-Semitic. Evangelicals

“Sometimes Christian money has been used by radical groups to engage in violence. I have known of Christian money being used by terrorists to kill Christians.”

are now being duped by people at the very heart of their own community. This trend towards anti-Semitism became very clear recently during the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

What happens when Christians give funds, say, to the Palestinian government?

Christians who make such donations have no control over where their money is spent. This is very sad because more and more Christian groups are working with Islamic aid agencies such as in Pakistan. Christians must realise that once they give their money to such groups it can be spent in ways that would offend them. Sometimes Christian money has been used by radical groups to engage in violence. I have known of Christian money being used by terrorists to kill Christians.

How should a Christian approach evangelism and witness to Muslims?

I believe profoundly in the love of Christ towards Muslims. I was once a Muslim, too, so I am fully committed to sharing the gospel with them.

I think we must remember the spiritu-

al dimensions of the struggle we face. If we want to share the gospel with them, nothing less than the power of God released by the Holy Spirit is adequate. In my experience, most of the Muslims who come to Christ are not won over by intellectual arguments which challenge the validity of their faith. They usually have a personal encounter with Christ, often as they are reading the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament. Others have testified to the power of the love of Christ working through their Christian friends. Sometimes the Lord uses extraordinary means to reach Muslims and speaks to them through dreams and visions.

While arguing with a Muslim is often not fruitful, knowing about Islam can certainly help Christians answer some of their most frequent objections to the gospel. Christians need to know how to answer the claim that we worship three gods and that the Bible has been corrupted by the Christian church. If Muslims believe that we have a good understanding of their position, that will help our conversation and might encourage them to be more open to Christianity. Have courage to share your own testimony; believe in divine intervention.

There are more Muslims becoming

Christians today than any other time in history. In virtually every part of the world, Muslims are turning to Christ in growing numbers. I think this is an enormous encouragement. I have been a Christian now for nearly 50 years and in recent years I have never seen so many Muslims being saved. There is no single effective approach. Many become Christians through national workers. Others hear about Christ through radio or television ministry, never meeting missionaries but just Christians in their local communities. One Coptic Orthodox priest, Father Zachariah, has had a phenomenal effect through television in leading Muslims to Christ. The Muslims offered \$60 million to kill him because he has been so successful. So the role of radio, television and literature is crucial in Christian evangelism. I think God is doing wonders through a wide variety of methods. It is just allowing the Lord to use us for His glory.

Australian Presbyterian, April 2009

Mr Peter Hastie is the Principal and Pastoral Dean at Presbyterian Theological College, Victoria.

Books in focus

The Heart is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text

by Murray Capill

Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2014. 272 pages.

It is a pleasure to be able to recommend Murray Capill's new publication on preaching practical application, *The Heart is the Target*. Murray Capill offers excellent insight into the biblical theological principles that guide our practice of applying the Bible to our lives, along with practical guidance and examples for the sermon preparation process. In this book Capill addresses concerns about how to develop applications that go beyond what he calls "bolt-on" applications. "Bolt-on applications," as he explains it, "are predictable, vague, weary applications that are just tacked to a commentary on the text. Most com-

monly these are 'more' applications: love more, give more, serve more, pray more, read your Bible more, trust more, come to church more, and so on" (pp. 19–20). The problem with "more" applications is that at their best they "fail to do justice to the richness of God's Word that confronts us with far more than a list of basic evangelical duties," and at their worst they do little more than moralise, "leaving people with the feeling that, while they are saved by grace, they are sanctified by their own diligence in praying more, loving more, serving more, trusting more, and so on." In contrast to this, Capill's book is a clarion call for a more holistic approach for developing "rich, varied, and penetrating application" (p. 20). Holistic application, he says, is concerned with bringing "the message as a whole to the person as a whole for life as a whole" (p. 26, emphasis added). One



of the great problems with “bolt-on-application” is that it tends to treat the sermon as a Bible talk or lecture with a few of “more” applications tacked on to the end. This approach tends to limit the Bible to a storehouse of facts or propositions and the preacher to a seminary lecturer. But as Capill reminds us in chapter 2, the Bible intends to do more than simply inform (it doesn’t do less than that but it certainly intends to do more than that); it also teaches and rebukes, trains and corrects, tests and convicts, encourages and exhorts. To this we could also add, saves, transforms, comforts, assures, warns, judges, and so on (as speech act theorists have been telling us for a long time). The first stage of the preaching process, then, is to discern the intended purposes of the Bible and their varied applicatory possibilities. Three further chapters help us work better with the Word: chapter 7 deals with preaching the gospel of the kingdom in all of its expansiveness; chapter 8 focuses on applying biblical narrative; and chapter 9, one of my fa-

vorite chapters, looks at preaching the “-lives” of the Bible: indicatives (“enjoying God and what he has done”), imperatives (“calling for gospel-empowered obedience”), and subjunctives (“responding to Christ together”). But not only do the purposes of God’s Word need to be pressed against the lives of the listeners, but they also need to be pressed against the life of the preacher. Chapter 3 thus addresses “The Life of the Preacher.” As a preacher I found this to be the most personally challenging chapter in the book. Good preaching is not just the fruit of a week spent in the study, but also the fruit of a life lived before God (p. 82) as the preacher engages the text spiritually, not just technically (p. 93). This is crucial because “the preacher is the conduit through which the message of the living Word is passed to God’s people today” (p. 82). This leads us to the heart of the book: “The Lives of our Hearers: The Heart is the Target” (chapter 4). In many ways chapter 4 is the counterpart to chapter 2. The Bible has many purposes (chapter 2) because

people are complex beings (chapter 4) with various conditions and needs (chapter 5). If people were composed only of minds then a Bible talk or lecture would do the job. But as Capill demonstrates, the heart, according to biblical anthropology, is comprised of mind, conscience, will, and passions. Living application, then, needs to inform the mind, press upon the conscience, assist the will, and inflame the passions. The heart is the target and Capill shows us how to aim for it with accuracy. This is a book that all teachers and preachers of the Word need to read and heed. Further adding to its value are the discussion questions at the end of each chapter making this book an ideal tool in the training of young and aspiring preachers of the Word. I highly recommend it for pastors, elders, college students or anyone wanting to more faithfully, accurately, experimentally and deeply apply God’s living Word to the whole of the person for the whole of life to the glory of God.

Dr Martin Williams

Sing to the Lord – now why did they do that?

John Rogers

Why indeed? Well, we thought we had good reason. So let me try to explain a little. Some of these I might have explained elsewhere – perhaps in earlier articles or reports to Synod over the years, but the questions come up every now and again; or perhaps there are some things about the book that I thought might be helpful to explain, so here goes.

Why keep the *thees* and *thous* and other old words and usages? For many reasons. But let us first dispense with one hoary old objection. Despite the complaints one hears at times, most of them are still perfectly well understood and, you may be surprised, if you have your eyes and ears open, at times still used in all sorts of places. (Although, if you

really don’t know Elizabethan English, please don’t **use** it to try to sound – well, for whatever impression you are trying to give. Nine times out of ten that I hear people trying to use it they miss-use it horribly and, frankly, make fools of themselves.) But now I realise that I answered this question reasonably fully, giving several reasons, in an article I wrote for *Faith in Focus* in late 2009. So I refer you back to that.

Why the explanatory footnotes?

Our policy of amending hymns as little as possible or necessary has led us to retain some words that just may not be so well understood today. Hence our footnotes in small print just above the ‘footer’ line. For example, *harbinger* in 341; *unction* in 343; *quicken* in 245; *earnest* in 447; some on the committee

even thought *own* (as a verb) in 369, meaning acknowledge, might not be understood. Dear people, we really do need to be reading more! Then there is *Lord Sabaoth* in Luther’s “*A might fortress is our God.*” That was never a spelling mistake as your computer will indicate! It was never meant to be Sabbath. It is a transliteration of the Hebrew Jahweh Tz’vaoth, Jehovah, Lord of hosts! Lord of armies! Hence, of course, “he must win the battle”!

But what were we going to do with the poor old *publican* in 449, “*Lord, like the publican I stand*” (Luke 18:10)? For today a publican is a tavern or hotel keeper. I trust our young people are not breaking their necks to enter such a career. However, when the Lord tells us in Ps.104 that he gave us “*wine to*

gladden the heart of man" we cannot say that such would, in itself, be sinful. But a publican in Jesus' day was a tax-collector. We have so footnoted it. However, that too can give the wrong impression. I have as many problems as any of you when the state claims more than 9.9999% of my income while God only claims 10%. (I quite recognise God owns me lock, stock and barrel, from the hairs I have lost from the very visible crown of my head to the nail on my little toe. But he only claims 10% as a tax!) Yet Romans 13 tells me I must "pay taxes to whom taxes are due" and Paul doesn't quantify the amount. (And I may only rebel when I am required to disobey God or forbidden to obey him.) The problem with the publican was not that he collected taxes; neither is that in itself a sin; it was that he collected taxes for the conquering empire, the Romans, hence he was regarded as a traitor, a quisling. Further, very often he demanded an exorbitant collection fee, which is to say, he also robbed his fellow Jews for his own benefit (see Luke 3:12-13). So what single word could replace *publican*?

But to explain possibly obscure words is not the only reason we used footnotes. Hymns are often, as they should be, interlaced with biblical quotations and allusions. When it comes to Charles Wesley we would have to say they are riddled with biblical allusions (eg., 232, 442). Some of these are obvious. Others not so; for this reason too we have used footnotes. For example, the third stanza of 156 begins, "O for the living flame from his own altar brought, to touch our lips," The idea comes from Isaiah 6:6-7; so footnoted. Then there is the well known, but apparently not so well understood, "Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by thy help I'm come" in 201. Ebenezer is a compound of two Hebrew words, *eben* and *ezer* which mean stone and help, respectively. In 1 Samuel 7:12 "Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far has the Lord helped us.'" That is, he set it up as a memorial to the Lord's help in overcoming the Philistines. Thus the footnote gives both the biblical reference and the meaning of Ebenezer.

One of Isaac Watts' most beautiful hymns, 217, begins, "Join all the glorious names of wisdom, love and power, that ever mortals knew, that angels ever bore; all are too mean to speak his worth, to mean to set my Saviour forth." Mean is footnoted: it means, here, poor, in-

sufficient. We want to use the idea of Christ being our elder brother somewhat carefully, but it is perfectly biblical. Fred Green in 225, "Christ is the world's light," even has us singing of "God in man our brother" – rather unusual. Yet it too is biblical as the footnoted Heb.2:11-12; Ps.22:22 show. Other examples of where we have footnoted Scripture references to lines that could be understood wrongly are 303 and 312.

Why have we 'de-capitalised' pronouns for God? About this, we understand and acknowledge the pious motive in writing *He* and *His* when referring to God. It is a right and proper piety and honour shown to God. We have not followed that practice, and for good reason.

First off, it is not grammatical. The Authorised Version never capitalised pronouns for God; neither did the NIV, either in English or American editions. We don't want to become grammatical pedants. On the other hand, we don't want to be grammatical vandals either. Grammar helps make our meaning clear. We should really only break the rules deliberately, for effect – and then, when we know them.

However, some have said to me when discussing this matter that clarity is another benefit of capitalising pronouns for God. Aha! That presupposes it is clear in the original to whom the pronoun refers and the Hebrew and Greek do not use capitals. Many times, of course, it is perfectly clear from the Hebrew and Greek to whom the pronouns refer. But there are times when the Bible is not immediately clear. So what is being made clear at times is one translator's interpretation rather than strictly his translation. I recognise that interpretation is never very far away from translation. Yet there should be as little interpretation in translation as possible. This is one difficulty we have with the NIV. It seeks to make difficult passages clear. Granted, a translation should be as clear as possible, but if the original is unclear, the translation should reflect that. Just let the people of God grapple with it. Otherwise, we have the translator's understanding of the Word of God and not the Word of God itself.

When it comes to the Psalms, another factor comes into play. There is often a double reference. For example, in Ps.34:19-20 we read; "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers them out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken." John 19:36 tells us that this was fulfilled

in Jesus, when the centurion desisted from breaking his legs, as he broke those of the other two crucified with him to ensure they were dead. Should the Scots then, whose versification we used for this Psalm, have used capitals in the sixth stanza: "From all the troubles of the just the Lord will set him free. The Lord protects his every bone, and broken none will be"? No, for David first sang Ps.34 of himself and we may sing it as a promise for us also – not to be taken literalistically, but still as a promise of protection and preservation. The same is true of Ps.8: "What is man that thou dost take thought of him? Or the son of man, that thou dost care for him?" Since Hebrews 2:5-8 interprets this as speaking of Jesus Christ, should we therefore capitalise the pronouns in our versification to honour Christ? No. For then we would dishonour man to whom it also refers. It refers to Christ as man. And man as created by God is also only "a little lower than God" (or "a little lower than the angels" as Hebrews 2, quoting the Septuagint, has it; the Hebrew has *Elohim*, the usual, and a plural, word for God in the OT). Both are true, albeit in different ways.

One comes across many other instances like this in the Bible and our mandate was to provide versifications of the Psalms for singing "that are as faithful as possible in content and form of expression to Scripture." And the thing about the Psalms is: you are never sure when you are going to see Christ there – in the very wording. But if we capitalise the occasions where that is obvious, we close your eyes to the occasions where it is not obvious and so you, and we, will stop looking. Often when we try to make things simpler we only make ourselves poorer.

Do you have a
business?
Why not
advertise in
Faith in Focus

Poverty, prosperity, and the Gospel

Brian T Wingard

I was asked by a student in class, “If the Bible doesn’t teach the principle of ‘multiplication in giving,’ what can we tell them that Christ says to the poor?” The following is an abridgment of my written reply.

The witness of Scripture is clear that God considers the poor and, therefore, directs his people to consider the poor. “Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him” (Ps. 41:1). The question is not, however, what message ought to be proclaimed to the materially wealthy. The issue concerns the message from God’s Word that ought to be proclaimed to the poor.

First of all, what do we mean by the “poor”? The difference between poverty in North American terms and poverty in African terms is quite discernible. In North America, there are people possessing many things, who, nevertheless, think of themselves as living in poverty because, in comparison to others, they are disadvantaged. Even in the African context, however, poverty is a relative thing. In comparison to the living conditions in many of the villages of East Africa, the living conditions in some parts of rural South Africa are a picture of unimagined luxury. People call themselves poor as they compare themselves to others.

Does the Bible view poverty as an absolute term or as a relative term? In 1 Timothy 6:8, the apostle Paul suggests that possessing food and clothing ought to bring contentment to a Christian. One might say that the biblical understanding of poverty is the lack of those things that are necessary for the sustenance of healthy life.

Does the word of Christ have a message to the poor, when poverty is defined like that? It most certainly does!

Paul, in Philippians 4:19, states that God will supply all our needs. This is a promise that can be proclaimed to God’s people without hesitancy and without reservation! It is less clear that Scripture makes promises when poverty is a relative term in comparing one person’s possessions with another’s.

Eyes on the Kingdom

What is the message that will encourage God’s people to direct their vision where the Scriptures direct it? The Lord Jesus Christ addresses the issue in Matthew 6:19-34. Of particular note is verse 33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

In verse 20, Jesus promises “treasure” to be received which might be referred to as “bountiful reaping.” It is clear, however, that this refers, not to reaping in this life, but to reaping in the life to come. This allows the eyes of God’s people to be directed to the proper place. “But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” Jesus says, “and all of these things will be added to you.” He is saying that we should not first seek our own welfare, but leave it in the hands of God. Eyes that are on the kingdom will be eyes that are turned in faith away from their own needs to the priorities of the kingdom of God.

A proclamation of “giving in order to get” turns one’s attention to one’s own condition. It sets one’s attention on the matters of “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” If the “godliness” of giving is presented as a means of gaining prosperity, does it not point God’s people in the direction of which the apostle Paul warns in 1 Timothy 6:5 – “imagining that godliness is a means of gain”? The biblical principle of giving is not “giving in order to get,” but *giving in order to give*.

The context of 2 Corinthians 9:6 and “the principle of multiplication”

Is “the principle of multiplication” taught in 2 Corinthians 9:6, which says, “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”? Does the context of this passage give us the right to expect that, from the bountiful sowing of money or other material possessions, one might expect the bountiful reaping of more money and material possessions?

Admittedly, in this passage what is sown is a material gift. The question, however, concerns the reaping. Does the context indicate that the bountiful reaping is of material possessions? What does the passage say? In verse 8, the harvest is mentioned as “contentment in all things” and abounding “in every good work.” In verse 10, the actual word “harvest” is employed, but Paul calls it “the harvest of your righteousness!” In verse 11, indeed, mention is made of “being enriched in every way,” but the

“The faith we direct to Christ is rewarded by the gift of himself. True faith takes hold of Christ for his own sake”

enrichment is then explained as the “thanksgiving to God” that will come as the gift is communicated to the saints. A careful reading will show that generosity produces thanksgiving, and thanksgiving must refer to the “harvest” that is produced. The same point is emphasised in verses 12-15. Also look at the quotation taken from Psalm 112:9. The distribution to the poor is said to have a result, but that result is not spoken of as a return of multiplied possessions, but as of “righteousness” that endures forever.

Can I trust God with my wealth?

In class we were discussing the text from Proverbs 3:9-10, “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” It was suggested that this can be construed as a promise of multiplication.

We cannot ignore this text, and we cannot ignore the previously mentioned text from Matthew 6:19-34. How are we to look at them and see a harmony between them, rather than a disjunction?

Both texts declare to us that we can trust God with our wealth and that he will provide for our sustenance. The Old Testament farmer or vinedresser was not going to be shortchanging himself by following the command of the law and giving the firstfruits of his harvest to the Lord. The disciple of Jesus is to understand that the Lord will not allow him to go hungry or naked, if he sets his mind upon seeking God and the righteousness of his kingdom. In both cases, the issue is trust in God, rather than in one’s own devices.

In the one case, it teaches that God would so direct his providential care that the harvests would be abundant enough that the “firstfruits” could be sacrificed without fear. In the other case, the message is similar. Jesus directs that his disciples’ vision is to be trustingly turned away from their own needs to the needs of the kingdom. They are to be confident that God will bring what they need into their hands. In both cases, we are directed to the fatherly care of the One who directs our course.



Missionary Brian Wingard teaching at Mukhanyo Theological College in KwaMhlanga, South Africa.



South African women making bricks by hand.

Conclusion – the heart of true faith

Christ’s message to the poor is that *they can* trust him to meet all their needs! Yet, he is not the means to an end, but an end in himself. The faith we direct to Christ is rewarded by the gift of himself. True faith takes hold of Christ for his own sake – not because of what he can do for the believer! The message that we preach to all humanity – rich or poor, black or white, high or low – must leave room for the words of Habakkuk 3:17-18, “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive

fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”

The author, an OP missionary, is head of the department of systematic theology and senior lecturer at Mukhanyo Theological College in KwaMhlanga, South Africa.

New Horizons, April 2014