

faith in **focus**

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Lessons from the past

Contents

Lessons from the past (1) Learning from the early Church: the evangelistic life	3
Lessons from the past (2) The early defenders of the Faith	7
Lessons from the past (3) Heroes and the modern idol cult	9
Outward focus Sharing the Gospel in urban New Zealand	11
A review The gospel of sex	14
World in focus	15
Focus on home Gleanings South Island Presbytery report	17
I'm praying alright a response	21
Missions in focus Into the forgotten heart of Africa	22

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>

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

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Editorial

The theme for this month is not so much about history, but what we may learn from history; and that means delving back into the past and learning about those who went before us.

Historians might possibly tell you that history is about mankind – his achievements and failures. In part we might agree with that. But, there is more, much more. History is about the Triune God and man's relationship to Him.

History is the study of past events, in time and place, particularly in human affairs. Time-bound, it has a beginning and an end. In between there are amazing events and those who shaped them, all of which has taken place under the government of the sovereign Lord God.

History is not a set of random, unattached happenings. Every event under the Son has been ordained and is part of God's eternal decree, which will be fully realised at the second coming of the Son of God. History points to Him and is about Him. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:36)

Christians should learn from history, especially Church history. There is much to be learned from the social, political and faith struggles of Christians in the past, which are an encouragement for us, not to repeat the errors of the past, but to help us understand how we live in this world, at this point-in-time.

There is so much that can be gleaned from the past. It is not something that is dead or static. It speaks to us, through the centuries, through the Scriptures, controversies, confessions and the lives of the saints who put their trust in the one true God and His Christ.

Edmund Burke an 18th-century Irish political philosopher, Whig politician and statesman once said, "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it".

Our contributors provide valuable, historical and practical insights into the evangelistic life, defending the faith and an analysis of the modern idol cult.

Mr Peter Moelker delves into the early Church's evangelistic life.

Mr Paul Archbald reflects on some very notable apologists.

Mr Josh Rogers analyses heroes and the modern idol cult.

Mrs Sally focuses on urban New Zealand and sharing the Gospel.

Mr Berwyn Hoyt reviews a book entitled, *Sex, Dating, and Relationships*, by Gerald Hiestand and Jay Thomas.

World in Focus has more articles about oppressed Christians. Please pray for them.

Mrs Harriet Haverland and her gleaners inform us of recent news from the churches, etc.

Mr William van Kessel responds to an article, "Will you pray for me?", by Miss R D Korvemaker, who is a writer and blogger (April 2014)

Mr Christo Heiberg, a minister in the URCNA visits the heart of Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Cover: Peter the Apostle talking with the servants of Cornelius a centurian. (Acts 10).

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.

Lessons from the past (1)

Learning from the early Church: the evangelistic life

Peter Moelker

Does the word *evangelism* scare you? Intimidate you? Perhaps make you feel guilty? If so, you would not be alone. The word *evangelism* might bring to mind any number of scenes: televangelists trying to coax you to open up your wallet, street preachers shouting at passers-by, trained professionals who are promoting the latest sure-fire program to add more people to your church, or that Christian who seems to have been given a special gift for speaking of Christ to others. What all these scenes have in common is that they are lacking one very important character in the scene, namely, you. While it is true to say that there were those in the early church who were particularly called to the office of evangelist (Acts 21:8, Eph.4:11, 2 Tim. 4:5), all God's people were called to live an evangelistic life. Acts 8:4 tells us that it was those who were scattered, specifically *not* the apostles, who "preached the word wherever they went." The word translated "preached the word" means "evangelised" (Acts 8:4). What can we learn from the early church with regard to evangelism? Perhaps the greatest encouragement is to be found in the truth that evangelism in the early church was not viewed as simply one aspect of the Christian life, but as one way to describe the *entirety* of the life of the Christian.

Capitalising on the context

It has often been said that the incarnation of the Son of God could not have happened at a more providential time. The coming of Christ was at God's appointed time according to His good pleasure when the time had fully come. But it is also a wonder of providence to consider the context into which the Son of God came and the world into which the gospel of Christ would be taken. The

system of roads in the Roman Empire made travel through the provinces relatively easy in comparison with what had been the case up until that time. The Greek language was the common language of the people. As we witness the spread of the Christian church in the Book of Acts and as we enjoy the variety of the letters to the churches in the New Testament, apparently the apostles used, without apology, both

the roads and the common language of the people for the proclamation and spread of the gospel. What would we have thought if the apostle had objected to using the roads because they were invented by the Romans? What if, instead of taking the roads, he would take a knife and cut himself his own road through the forest, make his own path over the mountains, etc.? Sure, he would not be able to get to as many cities and



The Four Evangelists, Jakob Jordaens, 1620. <http://commons.wikimedia.org>

“It has become common in the professing church today for certain worship services to be “targeted” to certain kinds of individuals.”

carry out as many missionary journeys, but at least he hadn't compromised the Christian message by using a pagan method of travel! Or what if the apostle Paul, instead of writing his letters to the churches in the Greek language that was spoken in the day, had engaged in a study of what the folks in Philippi had spoken 400 years ago and issued a letter to them in the language of that former day rather than in the language of their own day! I don't think we would hold up the apostle Paul as the greatest missionary who ever lived if such was the case.

And likewise, we must use the providential means of communication that God has provided in our day. When we send missionaries out to the field, we do not ask them to learn the language that was spoken in that country 400 years ago and communicate the gospel in that language, but rather to learn the language that is spoken today and communicate the gospel in the language of the people. But this principle is no different for the church here in New Zealand. We, like our missionaries in Papua New Guinea, must learn the language of the people of New Zealand today. We must communicate the unchanging message of the gospel in the common language. What does this mean practically? When you speak to your family, friends, neighbours, or co-workers about Jesus, are you speaking a language they understand? Is it common to them? There is

no need to eliminate the difficult and complex words of Scripture, but there is a need to communicate those truths in such a way that they are understood to the people whom we desire to reach for Christ.

What pathways of communication and travel have transformed our world today, just as the system of Roman roads transformed the world of a former day? The internet, Facebook, Twitter, instant messaging, are all forms of modern communication that are incredible to contemplate with regard to their speed and reach around the world. We must not reject them as inventions of the pagans to be shunned, but rather tools of our culture to be used for God's glory. God has placed us in this time, with this technology, with all its blessings and potential dangers. But as in the days of the early church and the apostle Paul, the Christian church need not cut another road through the wilderness when the Roman road is already in place.

A multitude of means

In the early church, the gospel was proclaimed in the synagogue (Matt.4:23, Acts 9:20, Acts 14:1), in the open air (Matt.13:2, Acts 3:11), in the assembly of Christians (Acts 2:42, Acts 4:32-33, 1 Corinthians 14:26), in homes (Acts 10:22, Acts 16:32), and in personal encounters (John 1:35-51). Michael Green, in his study of *Evangelism in the Early Church*, sums up the vital importance of the spread of the gospel in the early church through personal encounter. “The first chapter of St. John gives us the pattern. From the moment each man finds the truth about Jesus he is constrained to pass it on. It was through personal witness of John the Baptist that the two disciples found Jesus. No sooner had one of them, Andrew, made the discovery, than he found his brother Simon Peter, and brought him to Jesus. Next, Jesus himself takes the initiative and encounters Philip of Bethsaida, we are not told how. But Philip carries on the good work and finds Nathanael, and he in his turn is brought to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. This is more than the individualism of the author of the Gospel asserting itself. It is a reflection of the importance of personal evangelism in the outreach of the Church.”¹

Will Metzger, in his wonderful book on evangelism, *Tell the Truth*, describes the biblical pattern this way: “in Scripture we find many examples of the gospel being spread in a person-to-person

fashion. Jesus himself constantly converses with people to whom he is providentially led. He brings the word of life to them in the midst of their daily life In the early church the average Christian is found gossiping the gospel (Acts 8:1,4).”² A well-known church historian, having extensively studied the life of the early church came to the conclusion that “the chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession...but men and women who carried on their livelihood in some purely secular manner and spoke of their faith to those they met in this natural fashion.”³ So whereas there were a multitude of ways to bring the gospel to others, the biblical record makes it clear that every Christian believer was to lead an evangelistic life, that is, a life which proclaims the good news in every area of life, through personal encounters with other human beings, in the normal responsibilities of life.

Did the early church “target” a certain segment of the population in their evangelism? It has become common in the professing church today for certain worship services to be “targeted” to certain kinds of individuals, be they “traditional” or “contemporary,” be they the “older” generation or the “younger” generation. According to one antagonist of the church in the 2nd century, Celsus, the church seemed to reach out to and draw from the “dregs” of society. “Their injunctions are like this. ‘Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.’ By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and children.”⁴ Celsus obviously did not mean this characterisation of the early church as a complement. However, the gospel did not only draw those perceived to be from the lower class of Roman society, nor was the gospel “targeted” to one segment of society. As time went on, as F F Bruce explains, “Christianity was no longer confined to the lower strata of the Roman population, as it had been in Nero's time, a single generation before. It had survived the initial attempt to suppress it, and was beginning to infiltrate into the most noble families, even into the imperial family itself.”⁵

It is hard to imagine that in the context of a gospel proclamation which included the truth that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”⁶ that the church would have yet targeted the rich as opposed to the poor or Generation Y as opposed to Generation X or those who have a personal taste for classical music as opposed to those who prefer the hymns of the Gettys’. Did I say “hard?” What I should have said was “unthinkable!” The gospel of Christ unites and does not seek to promote division. The gospel of Christ drew men, women, children, and families from every social stratum of the Roman Empire. Is there something for us to learn here? The evangelistic life of the early church, in reflection of the gospel of peace embodied by their Saviour, established no barriers and knew no bounds. In that the Lord is calling people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, every age young or older, every colour, male and female, everyone the Lord places upon our path is a “target” for evangelism. Although, better to describe those who are the subjects of our concern as part of the *harvest* to be gathered rather than a *target* to be shot at!

Of lip and life

The early church did not separate the message of the gospel from the life of the gospel messenger. The early church did not view the task of evangelism as simply one aspect of a person’s life that could be taken out of the closet from time to time and safely put away again for a rainy day. The early church did not view the task of evangelism as something that the Christian needed to add into their already existing Christian life. Rather, evangelism, or telling forth the good news, was expressed in the total life of the believer.

In his study of the early church, J. G. Davies writes of the steady, yet unremarkable, advance of Christianity. “There was no elaborate missionary machinery; the faith was spread rather by personal contact and example. Hence Justin Martyr could refer to many who have ‘changed their violent and tyrannical disposition, being overcome either by the constancy which they have witnessed in the lives of their Christian neighbours, or by the extraordinary forbearance they have observed in their Christian fellow-travellers when defrauded, and by the honesty of those believers with whom they have transacted business.’”⁷

Honesty, forbearance in the face of being defrauded, and constant Christian living as a method of evangelism? This really shouldn’t surprise us in that it was the apostle Peter who clearly instructed the church to “live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12).

There is ample testimony to the fact that the early church spread the gospel through living gospel filled lives. And it would have come as no surprise to the early church, as it should come as no surprise to us, that we should not expect great blessing from a deedless proclamation of the faith. After all, it was James who said that simply speaking words of well-wishes to those in need, without doing anything about it, is no good at all. The reason? Faith by itself, “if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17).

The apostle Paul would often speak of his method of taking the gospel to the world of his day. One chapter of Scripture that is particularly helpful for understanding the apostolic teaching in this matter is 1 Thessalonians 2. First of all, the motive of the apostle was the



“We need to recognise that there are a multitude of means of spreading the good news. You do not need to have a theological degree ... but you do need to know the gospel yourself.”

pleasure of God, not the pleasure of men. “We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts” (vs.4). The early church, taking its cue from the apostle Paul, was not concerned with flattering men, tricking men, or greedy for the applause of men. Their hearts desire was to please God – to please God in worship, in faithful obedience, and in truthful witness to Christ.

Secondly, the manner of the apostle was characterised by the gentleness and love which a mother and father would demonstrate in dealing with their children. “We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children” (vss.8,11). Gentleness in the work of evangelism was obviously of concern to the early church, as the apostle Peter also encouraged the church to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Peter 3:15-16). When spreading the gospel, we must do so with genuine love and respect for those to whom we bring the good news. We

are not called upon to intentionally humiliate, exasperate, or denigrate those to whom we speak.

And thirdly, the message of the apostle was the message of the gospel brought in the context of the life of the gospel messenger. “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us....encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God” (vss.8,12). Sharing a life with people takes time, effort, and energy, but true love for people demands no less. Encouraging, comforting, and urging people cannot take place within the course of a 2-minute conversation. The apostle Paul and the early church were committed to investing their lives into the lives of those whom they brought the gospel to.

How did the early church take this instruction of the apostle Paul to heart in its work of evangelism? At the time of Chrysostom (347-407 AD), it is said that the Church of Antioch maintained 3,000 widows. Ambrose (339-397) sold church vessels to redeem prisoners from the Goths. Orphans and the families of martyrs were cared for. The pagan rhetorician Lucian of Samosata (125 – @180 AD), one who scoffed at Christianity, nevertheless was genuinely surprised by Christian concern for others. “It is incredible to see the ardour with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing.” He also noted how the Christians demonstrated “untiring solicitude and devotion” as they visited a prisoner and brought him meals.⁸ One of the best examples of how the early church brought the gospel by living the gospel where they lived is in the area of medical work, especially in the context of the epidemic in Alexandria in the third century. Richard Alderson summarises the response of the Christians to the epidemic this way: “Regardless of the danger, they tended the sick in the name of Christ. In fearlessly handling the dead and dying, they themselves contracted the dread plague. Labouring with ‘great piety and strong faith,’ they finally succumbed and so ‘departed this life serenely happy’. It all stood in stark contrast to the selfishness and panic of the unbelievers, who heartlessly abandoned their nearest and dearest in a vain attempt to avoid infection themselves.”⁹

What can we learn from the early church with regard to evangelism? We

need to capitalise on the context in which God has placed us. Like King David, we want to serve God’s purpose in our own generation. Look around you. What are the opportunities for spreading the gospel in New Zealand today? What “roads” are available to me? What “language” do I need to learn in order to communicate the gospel today?

We need to recognise that there are a multitude of means of spreading the good news. You do not need to have a theological degree from an accredited university to spread the gospel wherever you go, but you do need to know the gospel yourself. I can’t spread something I don’t have myself. But if I had bread to share with the hungry and if I knew that everyone would starve without bread, I would spread that bread, in the delightful words of the Canons of Dort, “to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction” (CoD II.V.).

We need to recognise that evangelism is not a *part* of the Christian life but instead that the Christian *lives* an evangelistic life. The testimony of the early church teaches us that the gospel spread through the lips and lives of followers of Jesus Christ who embodied the gospel in deeds of grace, love, and mercy. And as they spread the fragrance of Christ everywhere, they made “the teaching about God our Saviour attractive” (Titus 2:10). The evangelistic life is the attractive life – attracting others to the Saviour. How attractive are you?

Notes

- 1 Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, pg. 270, Highland Books, 1990.
- 2 Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, p. 21, IVP Books, 2012.
- 3 Ibid. pg.21.
- 4 As quoted in Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT Commentary, pg.81, Eerdmans, 1991.
- 5 F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*, pg.164, Eerdmans, 1958.
- 6 Galatians 3:28.
- 7 J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church: A History of the First Five Centuries*, pg. 87, Baker Book House, 1965.
- 8 As quoted in Richard Alderson, *The Early Christians – a Taster*, pg. 9, Day One Publications, 1997.
- 9 Ibid. pgs.9-10.

Mr Peter Moelker is the minister of the Reformed Church of Avondale.

Lessons from the past (2)

The early defenders of the Faith

Paul Archbald

“Apologetics” is the term used to refer to the defense of the faith. Those who specialise in this are often called “Apolo-gists.” Originally, the term was often used in a legal setting, where someone might speak in court in defence of another, or seek to defend his own actions or views. Since every Christian is called to be “always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you...” (1 Peter 3:15), every Christian is really called to be an apologist. To help us do that, it is good to consider those who are known for their efforts in this department. We can learn from what has not been done well, as well as from what has hit the nail on the head.

In this article we will consider the early Christian Apologists, many of them “church fathers” who wrote from the end of the New Testament era to the time of Augustine – the second to the fifth century AD. During this time there were three main schools of thought in the Christian world: Alexandrian (Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Aristides, Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus, Mileto and Appollinaris); Latin (Felix, Lactantius and Theodoret); and African (Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius and Augustine) – though some of these could be claimed by more than one school. Of these three schools, the Alexandrian was probably the most influenced by non-Christian philosophy, resulting in a compromised apologetic approach.

The early apologetic writings include the following names: Quadratus; Aristides; Aristo of Pella; Justin Martyr; Tatian; Miltiades; Appollinaris; Athenagoras; Theophilus of Antioch; Melito of Sardis; Hermias; Minucius Felix; Tertulian; the anonymous Letter to Diognetes; and Augustine.

In this early stage, much of the apologetic effort was motivated by a desire to defend Christians against severe persecution – as well as the positive desire to

spread the Gospel. The Lord Jesus had been executed ostensibly for trying to undermine the State. Christians were often seen in the same light, as enemies of the State. Many of the Apologists therefore addressed their defences to Roman emperors, like Hadrian, or to regional governors. Their approach was to give a reasoned defense in a judicial setting, seeking to prove that Christianity was good for the State, rather than harmful.

Atheists and anti-social

Christians were also accused of atheism, because they rejected the Greek/Roman

pantheon – both the old gods and the newer Caesar-worship. Christians refused to join in with the sacrifices and the religious festivals to these gods. They shunned the arena and the games, where these gods were honoured. They often refused military service, because of the oaths required to Caesar as god. This was seen as anti-social, as well as anti-State and anti-religion. Did these Christians not claim that they *hated* the “world”? These Christians are haters of humanity! They introduce religious novelty, rejecting the respected traditions of Greek and Roman society. They must be mad, they worship



Augustine of Hippo by Sandro Botticelli, 1490. <http://commons.wikimedia.org>

“Christian thought, grounded squarely on Biblical presuppositions, must oppose non-Christian thought, philosophy and culture.”

a God who was crucified! These are the kind of accusations commonly levelled against believers at that time. Christians were also accused of immorality: cannibalism, since they ate the body of their Lord; incest and homosexuality, since they loved their brothers and their sisters; and mistreating children. The Empire, as the Guardian of religion, peace, morals and justice, had to act against this dangerous sect of Christianity!

The Apologists sought to answer these various charges. Unfortunately, they did not always do so in a Biblical way. If we consider the New Testament, we find the apostles defending the faith against the attacks of Jews, largely by showing that Christ fulfils the Old Testament (Acts 7). When defending the faith against Gentiles, the apostles do not argue in an intellectual and philosophical manner against the prevailing Greek ideas. They simply *proclaim* the basic truths of Creation, Providence and Christ's work (Acts 17). In Acts 26, after outlining his own conversion and work, Paul again simply states the Biblical truth of the resurrection and calls upon King Agrippa to repent.

That does not mean that we may not use reason to show the futility of non-Christian thinking. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, the apostle also claims that they were “destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God ...” However, the believer's use of reason must be guided by the Word of God. Our weapons are not to be “of the flesh,” but those that are “divinely powerful” (verses 3-4) – the Word and

Spirit of God. Often, the early Apologists apparently relied on non-Christian attacks upon polytheism – either by pagan philosophers, or perhaps by Jewish apologists. It is legitimate to use arguments developed by non-Christians, so long as they are first severed from their false presuppositions and placed in the framework of Biblical presuppositions. The early Apologists were not always sufficiently careful about that.

Ignored false presuppositions

The more common arguments taken from these sources included the idea that antiquity proves superiority. Moses preceded Homer and the Greek philosophers, therefore Moses must be better. The Apologists also tried to show that it is idolatry that produces immorality, not Christianity. They argued that polytheism (many gods) is unreasonable. If these are used as stand-alone arguments, they are flawed. For faith in a myth could also bring about moral behaviour, relative peace, martyrdom etc. Moreover, if antiquity makes for superiority, perhaps we should say that the Greek philosophers were good, though Moses is better. If we can accept what the philosophers say at some points, why not all? The early Apologists tended to ignore the effect of sin upon the mind. They tended to ignore the false presuppositions that underlie even the most noble thoughts of the philosophers.

While the Apologists also argued from the resurrection of Christ and from fulfilled Biblical prophecies, they often treated revelation as a kind of add-on to the knowledge that the non-Christian already has – an approach that later influenced Roman Catholic apologetics. This idea of revelation completing non-Christian knowledge took its most serious form in those Apologists who tried to use the Greek idea of the *Logos*. The *Logos* was frequently viewed as an impersonal principle or force of Reason and Order in the universe. Some of the Apologists tried to Christianise and personalise this principle. Some identified it with Christ, who is called *Logos* – the Word – in the New Testament e.g. John 1:1, 14. Some, like Origen, even made the *Logos* subordinate to God. They argued that this *Logos* made the world of matter, because matter was seen as an unworthy thing for God to handle. Some of the Apologists believed that every human being had some of the *Logos* as a seed within, the principle of reason that enabled non-Christians and

their philosophies and cultures to arrive at some truth, though they needed the Bible to add more truth. This implies that the main problem in the world is ignorance, rather than sin. As a result, there is a playing down of the *antithesis* that comes because man is fallen and sinful – the opposition between the Christian and the non-Christian, between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, between Christian versus non-Christian culture. It ignores the effect of man's total depravity upon all his thinking. This problem is seen especially in the writings of Justin Martyr, in his student, Tatian, and in Appollinaris.

There were, however, some Apologists who saw things more clearly, who made revelation their starting-point and refused accommodation with non-Christian philosophy. Aristides made it clear that one cannot unite Christianity and paganism. Hermias stressed that pagan philosophy is vague, speculative and useless. The philosophers are therefore always contradicting themselves. The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God (1 Corinthians 1:18ff). Tertullian called the Greek philosophers the “Patriarchs of Heresy.” He realised that philosophy is never neutral. The antithesis always creates a deep gulf between Christian and non-Christian thought: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” To receive Christ, we need not merely additional information, we need the gracious operation of His Word and Spirit.

A notable defender

Most notably, Augustine developed these themes. Writing at the tail-end of pagan domination of the Empire, he opposed Manichaeism (a dualistic religion proposing two cosmic forces constantly opposing each other, one good and one evil). He also wrote against Pelagianism, which taught that original sin has not spread to all mankind, though people do imitate Adam's bad example; and that men can choose to do good without any special operation of God's grace, simply by using their free will. In answer to this, Augustine taught what we would call the “Five Points of Calvinism.” He stressed God's predestination, His sovereignty and the sovereignty of His grace. He denied the Pelagian teaching of free will. He stressed man's total depravity and therefore he upheld the antithesis between Christian and non-Christian thought. He emphasised the importance of the covenants. He emphasised God's sovereignty in

Creation and Providence, as opposed to a world governed by chance. He taught the distinction between the transcendent God and the totally dependent, finite creature. He made it clear that man needs an infallible Word and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, if he is to be saved by Jesus Christ.

All of this comes out clearly in Augustine's contrast between the *City of God* and the city of the world. While he saw the *City of God* as coming to expression especially in the church, he also realised that these two cities are in constant battle because of the unseen, spiritual forces that oppose each other – and because there are opposing presuppositions governing Christian and non-Christian thought, respectively. There can therefore be no accommodation between the two. Christian thought, grounded squarely on Biblical presup-

positions, must oppose non-Christian thought, philosophy and culture. That is not to say that Augustine refused to recognise the more noble aspects of non-Christian culture. He accepted that God restrains evil in this world, enabling unbelievers to come up with ideas that Christians can agree with on the surface. But beneath that, at the deeper level, there is no true unity between Christian and non-Christian thought.

That was the basis on which Augustine conducted his defense of the faith. It is that same basis on which Calvin and many later Calvinists have conducted their defenses. For that reason, Augustine has been called by some the "Father of Christian Presuppositionalism" – the attempt to ground the defense of the faith at every point on Biblical presuppositions, rather than seeking unity with non-Christian reasoning. Without

the Biblical presuppositions Augustine espoused – Creation, Providence, Total depravity, Revelation, the uniqueness of Christ and His work, and the work of the Holy Spirit – it is impossible to build a proper defense of the faith, avoiding accommodation with non-Christian thought. That does not mean we cannot begin our discussion with unbelievers at the points in which they are interested – as the early Apologists began their discussion at the points where paganism attacked the faith. We may begin with issues like Creation versus evolution, or the definition of marriage, or the "problem of evil." But our underlying presuppositions must remain clear to us: the same presuppositions that Augustine derived from the Bible.

Mr Paul Archbald is the minister in the Reformed Church of Silverstream.

Lessons from the past (3)

Heroes and the modern idol cult: *who do we look up to in the present age?*

Josh Rogers

In May 1840, Thomas Carlyle gave a series of public lectures on heroes and hero-worship. In these lectures he considered the need of man to look up to someone greater than himself. The desire to worship or at least to honour, to aspire to be like, someone of apparently greater knowledge or power than ourselves, is native to the spirit of man, and so hero worship comes about. Achilles, the Greek hero of Trojan War fame, was a fearless and skilful warrior. Hercules was admired for his great strength and ingenuity, Atlas for his fantastic strength in holding the earth up, Isis for her motherhood, Arachne for her skill in weaving, Alexander of Macedon for his courage and perception in waging war. Although all these are a bit different from sports and movie stars, it seems to me that



'Are you not entertained?' cries Maximus to the blood-thirsty crowd in the arena. erdesvilagunk.blog.hu

the honour paid them is on the same scale of fascination with which modern society regards sports and movie stars.

Shrines were established to worship Hercules and Alexander. We almost have our own shrines in the Hollywood Hall of Fame, but I would not want to condemn awards ceremonies, such as the BAFTA's and Oscars, in and of themselves as paying undue credit to the skill involved in producing films and television series. Nevertheless, the adulation of fans does, and should, I think, raise concerns, certainly at least of being wary of idolising such figures rather than merely acknowledging their skill in the same way that one would credit the ability of a carpenter or a businessman or a nurse. To help put it in perspective,

“Pay due respect to the skill of performers and sportsmen in such a way as to reflect God’s glory.”



society would hardly worship a lawyer, accountant, or surgeon because of his skill or knowledge.

Lest those a little older than the present generation, many of whom are keen fans of the likes of One Direction and Justin Bieber, forget, some decades ago the Beatles and Gene Pitney, to name only two examples, were greeted with similar adulation. Indeed, the very term *fan* is problematic, since it is an abbreviation of *fanatic*, which surely is something that should be reserved for the adoration of God alone.

In the ancient world, whether classical Greece or imperial Rome, actors and sportsmen were idolised. The ancient Greek world was somewhat more restrained than the later Roman world, but numerous festivals held around the year in various Greek city-states promoted competition in sports and theatre particularly. Our modern Olympic games are only one example of four such events which were held around the Greek world at different times of the year. A great deal of money was spent on these events, such that funding a four-horse chariot for a race was considered quite a sacrifice. Then, as now, men impoverished themselves in their ambition to achieve sporting or theatrical success, the financial supporters winning the prize itself, not merely winning vicariously as they do today.

The adulation of the crowds depicted in the film *Gladiator* is quite accurate (the film as a whole is quite accurate in many respects), including when we see Maximus demand of the crowd in one stadium, ‘Are you not entertained?’

In the scene in *Ben-Hur* when Judah ben-Hur defeats the Roman Messala, and so realises in some degree the desire of the Semitic and Canaanite peoples to see Rome defeated, we see some of the consuming interest, even passion, that was aroused not only for success but for those who brought it about. Successful charioteers, gladiators, and actors were all hailed almost as gods on earth. Sometimes their influence made them untouchable, and although their popularity was whimsical, it could protect them even from the emperor.

Actors, gladiators, and charioteers, the entertainers of the Roman empire, were idolised by their fans in the world of which much was summed up as ‘bread and circuses’ by the satirist Juvenal (Roman satirist; lived around 60 to 140 AD).

We sometimes wonder about the sense of confidence possessed by those who get caught up in the hype surrounding visiting performers or sportsmen. This hype in itself should suggest to us the origin of the problem. It is not God to whom our sinful nature is inclined to look for salvation (hence all the fuss about climate change and saving the whales, not that concern for the environment or conservation of animals is a bad thing). The essential problem with hero worship is that it is worship which should be directed to the true hero, Jesus Christ. As with many elements of the Christian life, how we value others is a balancing act. We may not treat them as though they have no worth, but we must not praise them to the skies either.

Three Scriptures spring to mind: ‘[they] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man’ (Romans 1: 23). We see here that God is perfect, man is fallen, and this affects both the inclination of our own hearts and points out the categorical difference in spiritual and judicial value between man and God. Man is not God, but he is made in God’s image and should be respected as such. ‘But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court’ (Matthew 5:22) and, to put things in balance, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, ... and your neighbour as yourself’ (Matt. 22: 37, 39). This last passage alludes to the ontological distinction between man and God, that he is creator, we are creatures, and between us is an infinite distance of value. Confusing creature with creator

was what went wrong with the golden calf; there is a categorical difference between God and man.

Paul in I Corinthians 7:29-31 speaks to this issue.

'From now on those who have wives should live as though they had none; those who mourn as though they did not; and those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of this world as if not

engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.'

Clearly Paul is not encouraging matrimonial neglect here since that would be in contradiction to verse 5 of this chapter. What he is saying is that, though God has given us good gifts to enjoy in their place, we must not be bound to them. We are to possess those gifts by being willing to give them up, not by being inseparably attached to them. True possession of something is to possess it, not to be possessed by it. Nothing God gives us in this life is to be our be-all

and end-all. Jesus said that 'he who tries to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' (Luke 17: 33).

The solution is to pay due respect to the skill of performers and sportsmen in such a way as to reflect God's glory. We may not value such people above other human beings, certainly not on a par with God, though we may give them their due.

Mr Josh Rogers is a member of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Outward focus

Sally Davey

Sharing the Gospel in urban New Zealand

We are increasingly a city-dwelling people. All over the world, the demographic trend is towards urban living. Even in poorer, rural-based societies, the population shift is towards the cities. In 1900 only 14% of the world's population lived in cities. By 1950 30% did; and in 2008 the numbers were evenly split. In 2011 the balance shifted to the cities: in developed countries, 74% of people now live in cities. New Zealand, it seems is no different. According to the 2013 census, 86% of us live in urban areas; one-third of the total population in Auckland alone.

Christians are increasingly aware of the challenges and opportunities cities present. Negatively speaking, cities are places where sin abounds. Crime, poverty, overcrowding, squalor and rioting are all miseries associated with city life. So, are cities inherently bad? Some Christians are quick to point out that the first city appearing in the Bible was founded by Cain, on the run after killing his brother. Another city, Babylon, acts as a motif for wickedness throughout the Bible. What is there to love about cities?

The thing is, the Bible is really a tale of two cities. Heaven, God's dwelling

place, is depicted by Jerusalem. It is the destination of God's beloved; and the scene of the glorious closing chapters of the Bible. Perfection may thus be found in a city. Where you *live* is not the problem of humanity – it's sin. You can live as righteously in the city as you can in the country, or in villages or small towns. The question really is, if God has placed you there – how are you going to live to His glory? Roughly three-quarters of the churches in our denomination are in urban areas. We need to figure out ways to serve him best in the place he has put us. If we live in the city, we need to bring the gospel to those who live in cities.

Neighbourhoods

Cities do provide opportunities. Let's investigate some of them. The first thing is that they are concentrations of people. Lots of people, living and working in close proximity. That means we can make it easy for them to hear the gospel and become part of churches. When you establish a church in a suburb, you have thousands of people living within a few-kilometre radius of your building; rather than the dozens you would have in the country or the hundreds you might have

in a small town. Most people have cars, there is public transport, so you can reasonably expect them to be able to come to your evangelistic event or worship service should they find a desire to do so.

“You will know better than anyone else what simple, but effective ways there are of getting to know those people God has placed you next to.”

The problem is, unbelieving people won't, on their own, out of the blue and as complete strangers, arrive at your church door all ready to hear the gospel with an open heart. (Christians will, because they know the ropes of church life and have every good reason to expect a warm welcome from their brothers and sisters in Christ.) This is not surprising, since people are suspicious of strangers today: con-men abound, and there is no end of religious charlatans keen to dupe the ignorant and take their money for dubious purposes. So we can't count on cold calls to people's houses or dropping leaflets in mailboxes to do our work. People simply don't trust strangers. We need to build relationships with people before they will be ready to hear the gospel from us.

You'd think this wouldn't be diffi-

cult, with so many of us living so close together. But it's not. Sometimes close proximity leads people to go to extra trouble to protect their remaining personal space – neighbours don't always appreciate spontaneous visits from well-meaning "nosy-Parkers". It's shocking, but true, that sometimes we know very little more about our immediate neighbours than the facts that their car is blue and they leave for work at 7:30 in the morning... But there are ways of giving those in your block, street or apartment complex an unthreatening show of friendliness. Block barbeques, playing sports and inviting the neighbour's kids to join you, watching sports and inviting the neighbours to share the game with you are all extremely simple ways to start developing a relationship with your so-far little-known neighbours. You

will know better than anyone else what simple, but effective ways there are of getting to know those people God has placed you next to. But if you're short of ideas, there's probably no better place to start than Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon's excellent book, *The Art of Neighboring: Building Genuine Relationships Right Outside Your Door*.¹

Work

The main reason so many live in cities is work opportunity. For a century or longer, people have been moving to cities in search of jobs. Cities are where you find factories, government departments, large corporations, big hospitals – all places that provide jobs and income, which enable you and your family to live. Work also provides dignity and purpose in life; and for many, the workplace is the major source of human interaction outside the home. Your workmates are often also your friends. That is one reason why redundancy is so devastating – you lose your friends, and your social interaction. It is very lonely being unemployed. All these things also mean the workplace is a great place to get to know unbelievers and befriend them. For sure, that doesn't mean chatting about the gospel during work hours. Working together only begins the friendship. Good conversation during coffee breaks or travel for work can take things further, leading perhaps to invitations to your house in the evenings or weekends. That's real friendship. We need to spend time with people to know their hearts. Sharing the gospel in a believable way does not happen without some degree of affectionate interest in people's lives.

Study

Another feature of cities is educational opportunity. Big institutions like universities, polytechnics and medical schools all draw young people from rural areas, small towns and foreign countries. New Zealand's cities are full of young people from other places, many of them away from home for the first time. This provides one of our greatest opportunities for sharing the gospel today. It is clear that the late teens and early twenties are the time when people establish important life habits, and make major decisions that affect the way they live for decades. Moving away from their parents, being keen to think for themselves and explore life means young people are often open to new ideas. Why not the gospel, if it is presented to them in a credible and



Lots of people, living and working in close proximity.

engaging way which includes thoughtful answers to their questions and objections?

But I've found that even more important than intellectual discussion for young people is a warm welcome into your home and life. Well-cooked meals and a listening ear, somewhere to go when things unravel are all very important to young people away from home. I remember well the couples who took me into their hearts when I was studying overseas. Their friendship established me in the faith, and they have remained friends and encouragers to me ever since. Their example made me want to help other young people in my turn. It's important to remember that opening your home like this not only enables you to share the gospel, it may also be teaching young people how to

care for others themselves in the future.

But there is one more thing that's important to remember. Churches cannot easily develop student ministries without students of their own who are keen to share the gospel themselves. It doesn't seem to work for a church to enter the university setting and try to set up a ministry from outside. You need real, *bona fide* students among your members who will make friends, and bring them into your homes and church. If your students like to hang out only with other church members and don't make friends among unbelievers you will find that you won't have unbelieving students in your midst. A good way to start is to encourage your own young people's passion for the gospel, and to develop their concern for those who don't yet believe. Then you can train

them to share the gospel faithfully and enthusiastically. The students will need help, though – evangelistic ministry to other students is not an isolated feature of church life – it's a friendship ministry that needs to involve families in showing love and hospitality to the newcomers in your midst.

Retirement

A third reason people move to cities is for extra care in their senior years. Sometimes it's because they want to be near children and grandchildren, sometimes it's because retirement villages don't exist in their small town or rural community. Either way, we find growing numbers of elderly people living in such facilities in New Zealand's cities. Some of them are doubtless members of your church, and you will know both them and the places they live. You may have decided to do something about the people in a retirement community near your church. Perhaps you visit regularly and sing hymns; perhaps you invite residents for meals or outings. These can lead to friendships and opportunities to provide some significant help over time. But you've probably also noticed that it takes a long time to win the trust and friendship of elderly people you've not known in their younger days. That's not surprising – older people can be very suspicious of strangers, and with good reason. They are vulnerable to fraud, and the unscrupulous can take advantage of them easily.

What has often occurred to me (and especially so, the older I get!) is that the older members among us have good opportunities to bring the gospel to people



of their own generation. It seems to me very helpful to have elderly Christians in retirement villages ready and willing to share the hope of the gospel. There are plenty of lonely, disillusioned, even embittered old people around who can be pretty unwell as well. Life may have been a big disappointment to them, either because of their own sin or someone else's. There is plenty of loneliness and regret to be found in retirement homes.

If you live in one you may well have tremendous opportunities to start Bible study groups, or offer a sympathetic listening ear. You probably have time as you may never had before in your life. Why not devote some of it to introducing a sad and lonely sinner to Christ?

There are many reasons that people live in cities, and there are many people who live in our cities. They connect us with a lot of needy sinners for whom

we may be the introduction to Christ. Part of our gratitude to Him for saving us in the first place is our keenness to share His way of salvation with others. It's a blessing if we live in a city, because every single day we have opportunity to do just that.

Notes

1 Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring* (Baker Books, 2012)

A review

The gospel of sex

Berwyn Hoyt

Lately I've been thinking a lot about sex. You might say there's nothing new here, and that I've just added my number to the ranks of mass humanity. But I insist that my case is different. In my case, I got there by reading a book on theology. Yep, that's what I said. This is a book about the gospel! And because of that, this is a book for everyone.

Not only is the book about the gospel, but it's also a book that answers the fundamental 'why' questions about **Sex, Dating and Relationships** – in fact, that's what it's called. But I want you to understand right from the outset that the authors Hiestand and Thomas have written a much more profound book than its title predicts. I don't want married folk to miss out on this: it's not just a book of advice for people thinking about marriage. It's also a perspective-changer for married people to understand what their marriage is all about.

I tentatively submit, this may be the most important book, written from within our culture, on the subject of sex and marriage. Since it answers the 'why' questions from the Bible, it also helps us (single or married) address the practical questions more than any other how-to book can do. But more importantly, it shows us how important and central sex is in God's gospel plans. Wow. That's a lot to answer for. Let me give you some quotes as teasers.

On purity before marriage:

God has not been as silent on this issue as many might think. If you're searching for a biblical, robust view of relationships and purity, let us invite you on a journey ... We will not be searching for a legalistic list of do's and don'ts ... [nor] to set up mechanism for self-control as though self-control were an end to itself. On this journey we will be searching for the heart of God, expressed fully in the person of Christ. We will be searching for a Son-exalting purity that is not defined by what it isn't but by what it *is*. Ultimately – though perhaps you didn't realize it – we will be searching for the gospel.

If your experience was similar to ours, you will likely have been told that the Bible doesn't speak clearly to the issue of physical boundaries in dating.

What's driving this book?

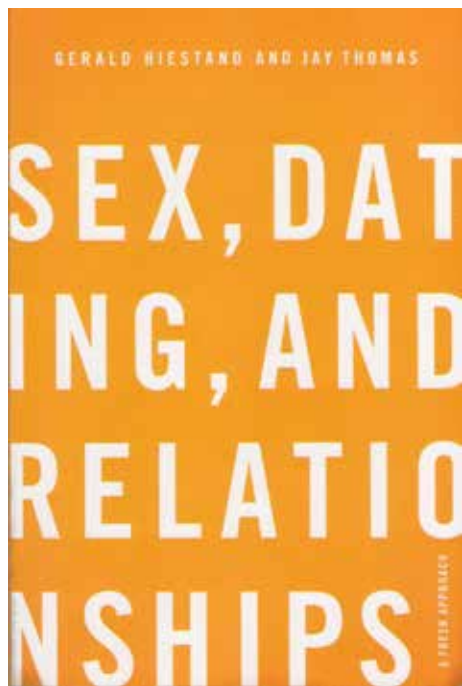
If this book is to be of any value to you, you must be committed to letting the Bible speak louder than the buzzing background noise of our contemporary evangelical subculture ...

[God] desires your sexual satisfaction more than you ever will, for through the proper expression of your sexuality, both you and the world will have a window through which to see the heart of the gospel. But if we fall prey to

the lie that sex is about our happiness alone, we will be robbed of the joy that God intends it to bring.

I have been underlining that this book is about *Sex and the Gospel*. In fact, that is the title of chapter one. But let me outline some of the other key chapters in the book:

- Chapter one ***Sex and the Gospel*** sets the groundwork and is the best chapter in the book. Do not skip it. It outlines why God created sex and how important it is in His plans. It works from fundamental principles and types of Scripture and is well referenced to Scripture. At the time of writing, chapter one can be previewed online at: tinyurl.com/kqd6ucp
- Chapters two through seven are a large section on the **dating dilemma**. If you're not looking for dating advice, then I would recommend that you read only chapters two and five of this section. Chapter two points out that, contrary to popular opinion, the Bible actually does speak to the question of "how far is too far" during dating. It does this by outlining the Bible's criteria for male-female relationships in three distinct categories: Family, Neighbour, and Marriage. By contrast, our society has developed a fourth special category which might be called "Dating relationships". Chapters



three and four work out the implications of this innovation. Chapter five deals with our hearts: it helps us understand our strong **sexual desires** biblically, and how they are

also shaped by the gospel working in us. Faith in Christ and coming to believe His perspective is the only solution to our sexual perspectives and temptations. Chapter seven offers an alternative to our society's extra-biblical concept of "Dating relationships".

- Starting with God's grace as foundational, chapter eight fleshes out the principles of this book in several **practical areas**: modesty in dress, how to think about sexual content in music or movies, what it means for internet use, and some insightful comments on flirting. These are not new topics, but here they are connected to a holistic portrait of who the Christian is in Jesus Christ.
- Finally, there is a chapter not to be missed on a **God-centred view of singleness**. This may be especially helpful to those who are single but who wish they were not.

Once again, this book is unique because it's not about suggesting stand-

ards or boundaries. Instead the book gives us Scriptural principles and shows us how to work out our sexuality from those. Even more importantly, it gives us gospel motivations to do so. The authors allow us to disagree with them on the details. But the book is well-referenced to Scripture. If we disagree with how they've worked it out, the onus is on us to apply these Scriptures ourselves. And they give us the tools to figure out what the Scripture really does teach us.

I predicted that his book would become the most important book on sex written from within our culture. But even if I end up being wrong, at the very least it is a hearty tonic to the Christian's confusion in a world awash with sex. It enables Christians to deal with the questions that sex raises, both personally and socially. It brings us a refreshingly sex-affirming message that is not only grounded in the gospel, but even (and especially) expresses the gospel.

Mr Berwyn Hoyt is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

World in focus

Nigerian government 'sympathises' with Boko Haram

The government has only 'woken up' to the kidnapping of the hundreds of school-girls because of global outcry.

New claims that parts of the Nigerian government share the anti-Christian convictions of Boko Haram have emerged since the group's abduction of hundreds of school girls, most of who were Christian and are still missing, one month after the incident.

"Many Nigerians will tell you that they don't trust the military. Some of the military and police have sympathies with Boko Haram," said Samuel Dali, the Pastor and the President of the EYN Church of the Brethren in Mubi while speaking with the *BBC* World Service on May 14. "Most of the police are Muslim and some of them are sympathisers with the insurgents."

Dali said many of the parents are "disappointed in the government and wondering if they will ever get these girls back," especially since they have

not received any consultation and claim to be treated as if the abduction never happened, aside from a visit from the Governor of Borno State immediately afterward.

Though rumours of an imminent attack ran through Chibok village before the April 14 kidnappings, Dali said government complicity with Boko Haram is the reason why little military resistance was offered. He said he understands the seriousness of his allegations, but said it's a reality because Boko Haram has "infiltrated all of the cabinets of the government."

Instead, Dali said, parents are putting their hopes in international assistance. "The news of the international community coming has also raised their hopes, and they believe that justice will be found through the international community," he said.

Sharon Ikeazor, a representative of the Nigerian opposition party, the All Progressives Congress, visited London last week asking for help.

"It's been an agonising 30 days," she

told the *BBC*. "The first ten days were critical. They [the government] could have gotten them back. To us, if after 30 days they haven't gotten them back we sense that they are overwhelmed."

During an interview with the *BBC* she was asked why the government has been unable to bring back the girls and Ikeazor said it's due to their lack of 'willpower' and proven by a sequence of events starting before the kidnapping, "It's not easy to move 30 girls much less 300 girls ... They were woken up in the middle of the night and herded into trucks, some of the trucks broke down along the way – in fact some of the villagers made phone calls. And you heard the Amnesty International report that they had four hours to respond and nothing was done, so they [the government and military] haven't done enough."

According to Amnesty International, Nigeria's military headquarters was aware of the impending attack soon after 7pm on April 14, close to four hours before Boko Haram began its assault on the school housing the girls.

Borno Gov. Kashim Shettima, agreed, telling the *BBC* that “The first few days were the most critical ... Some of the cars and lorries that the girls were herded into broke down along the road, it was in that process that some of the girls managed to escape, about 53 girls escaped, some escaped while they were pitching water and so on.”

The federal government had only “woken up” to Boko Haram’s abduction of the hundreds of schoolgirls when there was global outcry; Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan only called for a discussion 19 days after the abduction because of the international attention said Shettima.

Ikeazor said the reason the girls are still missing is largely due to the military being ‘demoralised’ and ‘corrupt’ and therefore they are ‘not willing to risk their lives’ against the better-equipped Islamist militant group Boko Haram.

“The most important thing is getting the girls back alive and that is why we are asking for international help”, Shettima said.

Several countries are providing assistance to the search effort, though the Nigerian government has shown some reluctance. CNN has reported that U.S. drones and manned surveillance aircraft are being used.

CNN also reported that, following the security summit on May 17 in Paris, Nigeria agreed with its four neighboring countries to share intelligence and border surveillance. The United States, United Kingdom and the European Union will provide technical expertise and training to the new regional African effort against Boko Haram.

Published: May 2014, by Lauren Gunias

Condemned to hang, pregnant Sudanese doctor refuses to recant

Meriam Yahia Ibrahim, a 27-year-old Sudanese doctor due to have her second baby next month, has been condemned to death by hanging, after yesterday (Thursday May 15th) refusing to renounce her Christian faith, despite pressure on her to do so, even in court.

Her lawyer reported that, after the court had given her three days to reconsider, Ibrahim bravely asserted again that she is a Christian; *Agence France Presse* reports that an Islamic cleric spoke with her in the caged dock for about half an hour. She was also addressed in court by her Muslim name.

On May 11, the Public Order Court in El Haj Yousef in Khartoum had sen-

tenced Meriam to death for apostasy. Her sentence that day to 100 lashes for alleged ‘adultery’ has also been upheld.

Amnesty International has condemned the sentences as ‘appalling and abhorrent’. Its Sudan researcher Maner Idriss says that Sudan is a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in which “everyone has the right to freedom of religion”. This includes the “freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching”.

Ibrahim’s lawyers say they will appeal to a higher court to get her sentence overturned, though it is unlikely to be carried out until her second child has been weaned, a provision in local law.

Ibrahim was initially arrested and released on bail under suspicion of committing adultery in September 2013 after someone, claiming to be a relative, lodged a criminal complaint against her. This claimed that she was a Muslim and therefore illegally cohabiting with a Christian man.

Under Sudanese law Muslim women may only marry Muslim men. Since her father was a Muslim, the authorities regard Meriam a Muslim and do not recognise her marriage to a Christian.

After she countered the adultery charge by saying that she was a Christian, the authorities arrested Meriam and detained her at the Omdurman Federal Women’s Prison with her 20-month-old son on 17 February 2014. At this point she was accused of apostasy – of apparently ‘leaving her Islamic faith’, a new charge incurring the death penalty.

Three witnesses from western Sudan came to Khartoum in March to testify of Meriam’s lifelong Christian faith, but they were not allowed to testify. Meriam showed the court on March 4 that she was a Christian by producing her marriage certificate, which states that she is a Christian and that her marriage was conducted in a church in Khartoum in 2012.

This case is so far unique in Sudan, as there are no other documented sentences from Sudanese courts, based on people of different faiths coming together in marriage.

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies says this case demonstrates “the internal contradictions of Sudanese law and its incompatibility with Sudan’s diverse population and international commitments”. Lawyers point out, for instance, that her son is being held in violation of article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Meriam Yahia Ibrahim Ishag was born in November 1987 in a small town in western Sudan to an Ethiopian Orthodox mother and a Muslim Sudanese father. Her father disappeared from her life when she was 6 years old, and her Ethiopian Orthodox mother raised her in the Christian faith. Later they moved to Khartoum where the mother died in 2011.

Meriam met Daniel Wani, who has dual South Sudanese and United States citizenship, in a church in Khartoum and they married in a church ceremony in 2012. She is a doctor; he is a translator. The couple’s 20 month old son, Martin Wani also has US citizenship by virtue of his father’s US citizenship.

If her death sentence is upheld her children’s custody would be granted to the government, as the husband is not



Daniel Wani with his wife Meriam Yahia Ibrahim, Source: Gabriel Wani/Facebook/news.com.au

granted any rights over his children due to being a Christian.

Middle East Concern reported that prison guards and other prisoners have abused Meriam while she is in prison. Meriam is also being denied medical treatment, including prenatal care for her unborn child. Muslim scholars have also been visiting her, pressuring her to return to the religion of her father.

A family member said: 'we are concerned for her wellbeing; it is not very safe for her to be in the prison with dangerous criminals'.

The government is denying Daniel Wani visiting rights to his wife and child, and has revoked his passport. They are keeping Martin in prison with his mother because they are prohibiting his Christian father from caring for him, as they consider the child a Muslim.

Ibrahim's sentence is the latest and most significant in a series of repressive acts by the Sudanese government against religious minorities. If the sentence is carried out Ibrahim would become the first person to be executed for apostasy under the 1991 penal code, prompting

concerns that the charge may increasingly be used against anyone who converts from Islam.

WorldWatch Monitor, May 2014

Buddhist monks and authorities obstruct prayer meeting in Sri Lanka

24 May. It is reported that on 27 April, while a group of 30 Christians were gathered for prayer in Bandaragama, Sri Lanka, a mob of around 30 persons led by Buddhist clergy stormed the premises they were praying in, and demanded that prayer meetings be stopped.

According to reports, the police who arrived on the scene instructed the Christians to stop the prayer meetings since there was no prior approval from the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

However, according to Sri Lankan legislation, there is no legal requirement to obtain prior approval for religious worship activities.

Christians in Sri Lanka have been facing an increase in persecution over the past couple of years. According to statistics from the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, 103 incidents

of Christian persecution were recorded in 2013 – a 98% increase from 2012.

So far this year, there have been over 40 attacks on churches and Christians in Sri Lanka.

NCEASL Incident Reports

Christian man jailed for refusing to pay fine for holding worship service in Kazakhstan

16 May. According to reports, a Christian father of 3 was jailed in Kazakhstan for refusing to pay a fine for leading an unauthorised worship service in his home.

Denis Yenenko was imprisoned for 6 days after he refused to pay a fine of USD 475 following a raid on his home in Sergeyeika in 2013.

He was initially penalised for "participation in the activity of an unregistered, halted or banned religious community or social organisation."

It is reported that, in 2014, 39 people were fined for exercising their right to religious liberty in Kazakhstan.

Forum 18

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 Zuidema has declined a call from the Reformed Church of Wellington and so continues his ministry in the Reformed Church of Dee Why in NSW, Australia.

Rev. Nathan Ketchen of Palmerston North has accepted the call to Christ Reformed Church in Meeker, Colorado (U.S.). He and his family will move back to the U.S. when their house here sells.

Ben McDonald has been placed in Masterton for his vicariate. Ben comes from Geelong, Australia, and did his theological training at the Reformed Theological College. He is married to Maria and have been living in Hamilton for the past two years.

Albert Couperus and **Josh Flinn** (our students at MARS) will both be doing their summer internships in Canada. Albert, Hanneke and their family will be at Wellandport United Reformed Church (URC) in Ontario and Josh and Hannah Flinn will be in Abbotsford URC in British Columbia.

Rev Dirk van Garderen recently attended the Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated). On Friday

of this week, the Synod will meet again and discuss the "Report on Men and Women in the Service of the Gospel". This report and its recommendations show how most of the deputies on this committee, and at least a part of this denomination, have moved away from the historic reformed view of the authority of Scripture and move to quite a different view and now tend to interpret and apply the teaching of the Bible much more in the light of the culture of the day (then and now). If the Synod moves towards acceptance of the report and its recommendations, whether now or possibly not till 2017, this could / will have far reaching consequences for our sister-church relationship with the RCN and for her relationships with other reformed denominations. Please pray for this denomination and this meeting of Synod.

WEBSITES

Avondale: www.avondalereformed-

church.com

Pukekohe: www.rcnzonline.com/pukekohe

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale – Building Use – The session has agreed to a request from the Tokaikolo Church (Tongan) to use our building Sunday between our services beginning next Sunday, 11 May. We have arranged with them to have a trial for a month to make sure both they and we are happy with the arrangement.

Christchurch: The preliminary design has now been completed, incorporating congregational feedback. Our architect has been very thorough in addressing the various comments received, and there are a number of changes in the latest set of plans which will be available for viewing following the service or from building committee members. We are currently working on obtaining an updated construction cost estimate, and once this is received the next step will be a congregational vote on whether to proceed to the next stage of design and consenting on the basis of the preliminary drawings and costings.

DENOMINATIONAL

Canons of Dort: Monday 5th May was an anniversary day. Back in 1619, 395 years ago, the Canons of Dort were published. The Canons were the official rulings of an international synod that had met to discuss certain doctrinal issues. The issues were five in number, which is why the Canons have five main heads of doctrine. Since then, Reformed Churches across the world have embraced this document as a faithful summary of what the Bible teaches about God's grace in salvation. Praise God for this blessing!

MISSIONS

PNG: Even though the Hagoort's are currently on leave here in New Zealand they continue to be active in planning for their brief return to PNG later this year to continue ministry until January 2015 and help train new missionaries to take over at the Mapang Missionary Home.

Solomons: Ant Lagas returned to the Solomons in April for a three-week period to help with the aftermath of the flood.

Solomons: Susan Larsen has returned to New Zealand, having spent four and a half years in the Solomon Islands completing her assignment of setting up the Bethesda Centre for the disabled. It is

likely that she will take up another task in the Solomons in the not-too-distant future.

South Sudan: In her April newsletter Marlene van Tonder wrote that she has been able to connect and build relationships with the locals through sewing – mending items of clothing as well as giving sewing lessons. However, soon after sending out this newsletter Marlene collapsed due to a back injury sustained some weeks before. She had to be airlifted to Kijabi Hospital, a mission hospital near Nairobi. She was in a lot of pain and an MRI indicated that she had partially ruptured two discs. She is slowly recovering. Please pray for her. Pray also for rain for the crops in South Sudan; and pray for peace in this country and wisdom for its rulers.

PRISON MINISTRY

Wainuiomata: If anyone has spare, unused Bibles at home and willing to donate these, could you please give them to Anton Swagerman for use at the Prison ministries.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

Bishopdale: Crafty Kids Club – What a privilege we have each year to share the gospel with the children of Cotswold School (and their parents). Please pray that the gospel would bear fruit in the hearts and lives of these children. Please pray that we might be able to form lasting relationships with the parents of these children.

North Shore: Our mainly music Ladies night was a great success; we had about 40 people attend with representatives from mainly music, LABS, Cadets/Gems as well as a few women from the congregation. The beautician who talked about skin care and make up was a wonderful Christian woman who wove a Christian illustration into every aspect of her demonstration. "You get dressed in the morning before you start your day *but* do you spiritually dress yourself to face the day?" (e.g. put your armour on against the enemy?) The clothing swap was fun and everyone went home with something. The refreshments were delicious and the evening was thoroughly enjoyed by all. It was a wonderful opportunity to talk with people individually, meet women who are familiar with our premises but are not necessarily Christians – we'll definitely do it again.

North Shore: Christians Against Poverty (CAP): We would like the opportunity to introduce CAP – Christians Against Poverty – to our church. This organisation provides holistic debt counseling services and money management courses. They work in partnerships with local churches, and our church have decided to get involved with them in our community and run the CAP Money management course.

Hamilton: The Gideons International has, by the grace of the LORD, placed and replaced 4200 Bibles in Rotorua's motels, medical centres, hospitals and rest homes. The Gideon team would like you to pray that Bible reading would be guided by the Holy Spirit and that the

ProLife News

Across the road from the entrance of Thames Hospital, every Friday for the past 18 months, a group of *Voice for Life* members and supporters have staged a peaceful protest. The abortionist drives from Auckland on Friday morning. Now the Waikato District Health Board has issued a press release featuring a social worker at the hospital who complains that their "graphic" placards are causing much distress and tears among the women arriving for their abortions. None of the signs display aborted babies. One shows a pregnant woman with her baby depicted as a shadowy outline. The placards read: "I am a child, not a choice" and "There is a better way – we can help". One of the protesters Lyn Hopkinson says: "We get a few insults, but there's a lot of public support, surprisingly enough from young men who wave and smile." "Is it worthwhile? Well one woman on her way for an abortion stopped to talk and ended up choosing to keep her baby. Another young woman showed one of us her little toddler. She decided to choose life." For more information on pro-life issues, phone Voice for Life on (09) 443 0995.

readers/people would come to faith in Jesus Christ.

CAMPS & CONFERENCES

STAND for the Gospel 2014: Howick Baptist Church will be hosting the STAND for the Gospel 2014 Bible conference with D A Carson in Auckland from 18-20 July.

<http://www.standforthegospel.org/conference/stand-2014/>

Men's Conference – Dunedin: An area of focus for our church this year is to encourage the men in our congregation to be the men God calls them to be. Plans are progressing well for a conference to help all our men in this. The date of Saturday 7 June, speaker Murray Capill and theme "Godly Men" have all now been confirmed. Other details will follow. We would strongly encourage *all* men in the congregation to keep this date free and plan to attend. Lord willing, it will be an encouraging, edifying and enriching time of learning and interaction with our speaker and other men.

CLASSES & COURSES

Bishopdale: Making Money Matter Budgeting Workshop – This week Unicia Veer from Kingdom Resources will continue on from her previous budgeting presentation. Unicia will be covering practical ways to save money around the home, including: Menu Planning; Grocery Shopping Skills; Saving Money on Power; and more! The workshop will be Wednesday 30th April, 7:30pm to 9:30pm at the Bishopdale Reformed Church.

Dovedale: Shepherding the Heart Tour – Dr Tedd Tripp, author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart* and *Instructing a Child's Heart*, and his wife, Margy, will visit NZ

in March 2015. Details are not yet finalised but there is a Facebook page – [shepherdingthehearttournz](#).

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Pukekohe: About 25 of the ladies enjoyed a Pink Ribbon Breakfast together in support of the NZ Breast Cancer Foundation.

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.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale hosted "A Night of Thanksgiving" for members of all ages to share in a meal and program celebrating how much we have to be thankful for as Christians.

Hamilton hosted a screening of the film

"Veil of Tears". This gripping film gives voice to the millions of women who are trapped in despair but stand on the verge of freedom. It brings to light their story of persecution and savage abuse – simply because they are women. After centuries of oppression, Asia's women are some of the most disadvantaged, unreached people in the world, but that's not the end of the story. God is raising up a remnant from the ashes, showing a story of redeeming love and the power of hope to change lives. In the film, you'll have opportunity to meet several of these rescued women and hear their stories. You will be moved by their testimonies, and inspired by the bravery and sacrifice of the everyday heroes that God is using to bring hope to an entire generation of women. A short trailer of this movie may be seen by going to www.gfa.org.nz. Please note that the movie is 90mins and rated PG13.

The **Pukekohe** men have started meeting together again monthly for breakfast, Bible study and a time of fellowship.

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Faith in Focus

South Island Presbytery short report March 2014

The tone for the meeting was set by an opening devotion from Philippians 2 which highlighted the importance of the unity of believers. This was a recurring theme throughout the meeting, and also in subsequent lunch-time conversations. Several items on the agenda dealt with our interaction with churches outside our federation of churches.

Bishopdale's vicar, Julian Dykman was welcomed.

The meeting proper commenced with a discussion on the process for reimbursing delegates for presbytery-related travel. A newly-aired suggestion was postponed until our next meeting.

The Reformed Church of Dunedin gave a positive report on the state of that church. New people in their fellowship were a significant cause for rejoicing. There was also much cause for thanksgiving in the report of the Reformed Church of Christchurch, including plans to return to Cornwall Street (which it is sometimes mistakenly named after), and the fact that although pastor Rott intends to leave in April there will not be a period of vacancy before Rev David Waldron takes over the ministry of the Word there. We prayed that the current spirit of peace and unity might continue in both churches, regarding future decisions involving church property.

There was some discussion of how best to promote the use of the new *Sing to the Lord* psalter hymnal. Meanwhile, imposing monuments erected out of the new tomes loomed in the foyer – a logistical puzzle for delegates who needed



From left: Fred Braam (Bishopdale), Rev Andre Holtslag (Dovedale), Rev Andrew de Vries (Bishopdale), Andrew Miller (Oamaru), Herman Borger (Nelson), Ed Havelaar (Christchurch), Dr Tim Rott (Christchurch), Rev Bruce Hoyt (Oamaru), Rev Daniel Wilson (Nelson), Rev Erik Stolte (Dunedin), Berwyn Hoyt (Dovedale) and John van Dyk (Dunedin).

to convey them to distant churches.

The South Island Presbytery is anticipating becoming the "home" of the RCNZ's Overseas Mission Board in the near future, so a considerable amount of time was spent discussing OMB-related matters. A suggestion that we ask the Synod to make the OMB a national rather than a regional body will be considered at our next meeting.

A proposed Church Order article outlining a procedure for admitting a church to our federation was discussed. While the proposal has been withdrawn for the time being, it was recognised that something of the sort could prove helpful.

Another proposal which will be promoted to the Synod is that the "Rules" for sessions and presbyteries be removed from the *Office Bearer's Handbook*. These have been a source of confusion for some who belatedly discover that these rules have been neither adopted nor adhered to. It may be helpful to

substitute some information on how our meetings are generally conducted.

As this would be his last meeting with us before his return to the United States, the Rev. Tim Rott was thanked for his work in the Presbytery, and for his interesting stories of America and the military. We also took our last opportunity to be photographed with him.

Ed Havelaar

The pastor's study ...

is a symbol of the calling of the Christian minister to be the shepherd of a flock of God. There, sermons are prepared to feed the congregation on God's Holy Word. There, the members and ministries of the church are prayed for so that the congregation may grow in grace and bear fruit in fellowship, teaching and witnessing. There, you will always find a friend and counsellor in time of need. He will not be surprised at your sins, nor will he judge you in them, but, he always invites you to share with him, the wisdom and love of God, the knowledge of forgiveness of sins, and the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. You are Always Welcome.

Back issues of *Faith in Focus*

can be found on the

RCNZ Home Page

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

I'm praying alright

a reply to an article by Miss R D Korvemaker
(April 2014)

This is what I pray.

Dear Lord,

Please be with the families in our churches.
Bless the marriages.

May the husbands/fathers see that evangelism
and leadership starts in the home.

May wives/mothers be, lovers of husbands,
lovers of children, lovers of home.

May young mothers be quiet godly workers at
home, bringing up their children in the home
and see this as their highest calling – not going
out to work outside of the home and farming
their children out.

Help parents to see that our children are
conceived and born in sin and that foolishness
is bound up in the heart of a child; but the
ROD of discipline will drive it far from them.

Help parents to set good routines and
disciplines for themselves and for their children.

May children be obedient to their parents.
Help our young people/youth to be mature,
godly; not gossips on Facebook, not boozers,
not immature, or sexually perverse, help them
to find godly Reformed life partners and be
ready to be the church of the future.

Give our people a love for your word and
prayer; that they may be engaged in these
every day – individually, as couples, and as
families.

Build a love for worship in our families – that
people may find it a joy to attend two worship
services on the Lord's Day and be devoted to
attending good weekly/fortnightly Bible studies.

Sanctify our worship Lord, and may it be
according to your commands – corporate
worship; with our children present by our

sides – not going out to some child's church or
Sunday school.

Help parents to educate their children in your
ways Lord – with attendance at a Reformed/
Calvinistic world and life view school – and if
this is not available, to start such a school, or
to home-school.

May our young people not be led astray by
the world, but also not by Pentecostal or
Evangelical friends and trends that would take
them away from the Reformed faith – which is
biblical Christianity.

Help our ministers to preach the full counsel of
God, the gospel of grace – the Scriptures and
our Reformed Confessions, TULIP, and the five
Solas – in doctrine and in practical application.

May our people (including the youth) be able
by the diligent use of the means of grace,
to stand strong in a "confused, God hating
world", and be sure of "where they would be
if Jesus came back tomorrow", and be very
much enabled to "do this thing called life" –
relying on His grace and strength – which is all
sufficient.

This I pray! Earnestly! Every day!

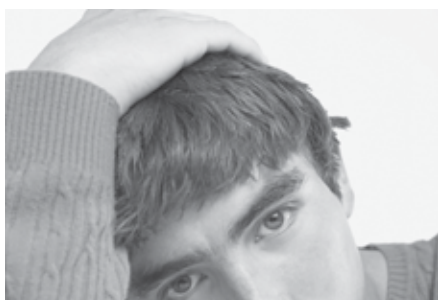
Some advice:

1. Pick godly friends.
2. Read good Christian books – start with
Foxe's Book of Martyrs, by John Fox and *Fair
Sunshine*, by Jock Purves (here you will find
accounts of young people – aged 10-20,
who were burned at the stake, cut in two,
or tied to stakes on the beach waiting to be
drowned by the incoming tide, rather than
deny their faith and compromise with the
world.)
3. Serve others – look outside of yourself.
4. Pray and meditate on God's word for
yourself every day.

May God bless our families and our churches
to His glory.

I will keep on praying alright!!

Will Van Kessel
Reformed Church of Dovedale



Into the forgotten heart of Africa

Christo Heiberg

When I was asked by the URCNA's CECCA committee to visit the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I agreed, somewhat hesitantly, not knowing what to expect. The federation has been in ecclesiastical contact with the United Reformed Churches in the Congo for some years, and the committee wanted to send someone to find out how our brothers and sisters are doing, and how we might be of help to one another.

I began making plans to go to one of Africa's largest cities, Kinshasa, formerly Leopoldville when the country was still a Belgian colony. Preparations included mandatory vaccines against the health risks of a city that National Geographic called "a marvel of dysfunction." For example, the city receives its water from the same river that accepts all of its sewage.

My doubts about the trip intensified as I read about the country's history. One celebrated author, Martin Meredith, called the Congo "the heart of darkness."

In the end I convinced myself: "This is the Lord's Work. He will look after me. If He has His people there, then that is where I shall go!"

I arrived at Kinshasa's International Airport on a muggy day in March, welcomed by two pastors, Revs. Kalala Kabongo and Abel Ntita. The latter is a church planter in the city, while the former comes from Mbuji Mayi, 600 km southeast of the capital. Rev. Kabongo served as my interpreter. He studied in South Africa and is well acquainted with the reformed ecclesiastical world.

On our way to the hotel we stopped at the Sion URCC congregation. Immediately I was struck by the poverty and the garbage-strewn dirt roads off the highway. It was a sharp contrast to the friendliness and neat appearance of the people I saw and met.

In a half completed, simple church building a few elders welcomed us in typical African fashion with an ice cold bottle of Coke. I spoke briefly from Ephesians 4:1-6, encouraging them in the Lord. We then travelled to the hotel

some 20km away. My room was on the first floor just above the neon lights of the casino.

After a shower and rest the two pastors came to pick me up for a meeting at a nearby restaurant. We spoke about their church federation and its brief history, about the state of the DRC, and the Lord's work in this vast country. At one point the generator stopped working and we were shrouded in the darkness of this city of seven million.

When the lights came back on the pastors explained in some detail how secularism, the cults and Islam are making inroads into Congolese society (which is nominally still 80% Christian) and how their small Reformed witness is struggling to find its place amidst a sea of Pentecostalism and the emerging Prosperity Gospel madness, introduced from America. Muslims are also infiltrating largely through businesses by requiring employees to submit to Allah. Although Congolese society is still pro-American, the West is losing credibility because of its permissive values, which it promotes via its entertainment culture, and particularly by governments and their strident homosexual advocacy in Africa, further eroding the fragile moral fabric of its society. In contrast to the West, Congolese society is still conservative, evidenced by the modest apparel of women, respect for the elderly, and the absence of pornography.

The next few days involved several visits. At Don de Dieu URCC a dozen ladies were involved in Bible study when we arrived. The president of the women's society led the study from I Corinthians 13. Afterwards Rev. Ntita shared with me that though divorce was becoming all too common in the country as of late, the URCC has so far mostly been spared from it.

At a church plant 20 minutes away we met an elder, his wife and children, and some other believers. The elder is an English teacher. He had been studying for the ministry at Lubumbashi in the south of the country when the training



Pastor Heiberg with the church leaders.

was suddenly discontinued by the leadership of the Eglise Réformée Confésante au Congo (ERCC). The action was sparked by a disagreement between the ERCC's leadership and the Dutch missionaries, which led to the split in the federation and to the formation of the URCC. This elder is now pursuing ways to complete his studies.

The "church building" was as modest as the first one we visited. Though up to 40 souls gathered for worship, it consisted of some posts holding up a corrugated iron roof, with sheets of fabric serving as walls. This island of reformed fellowship exists in a sea of semi-secular Catholicism, Pentecostalism and paganism. Another challenge is that folks in the community are reluctant to join a church where the preacher is not an ordained pastor.

We left the church-plant to travel through the hectic maze of Kinshasa's late Friday afternoon traffic. At one point the streets were awash with army soldiers returning from a military funeral. The cacophony of sounds was deafening, with horns honking, dog's barking, men yelling, music playing, and a flood of motorbikes and cars driving in every direction.

Our next visit was at an elders meeting at a church where conditions were extremely poor. The meeting lasted for two hours with its pastor Jean Philippe giving an exposition of John 10:1-6. He spoke of our Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd and what His example means for elders and pastors of the flock. A discussion ensued about fluctuating church attendance. The general consensus was that more consistent house visitation was needed, considering that many of these families are relatively new to the reformed faith.

I was asked to give advice on worship, pointing to the general guidelines we hold as reformed churches, while acknowledging that the Gospel must be contextualized (while never compromised) in every culture in its own way.

That night a powerful tropical thunderstorm struck, the likes of which I have never experienced, with thunder and lightning many times louder than the worst experienced in Ontario.

The next day we visited the congregation of Rev. Abel Ntita in Limete. The ladies gathered for Bible study here as well, with their pastor teaching about God's covenant with Abraham and how His salvation does not only concern the individual but whole families. I also

addressed the ladies, speaking from Matthew 5 on how Christ came to liberate women from the bondage of sinful man's degrading views and treatment. I did so against the backdrop of the terrible scourge of rape in the war-torn east of the country, learning later that it was International Women's Day.

After a morning visit to Rev. Ntita's home, we made our way back to Sion URCC where Pastor Ntita taught a small group of elders on church planting. He translated into French and adapted to the Congolese context a book on church planting written by several of our URCNA pastors back home. Arriving late, a young man was already teaching the brothers. I was struck by this lad's joyful faith as he led us through the ten principles of church planting. He lives next to the church and like so many others is jobless and praying for work. Pastor Ntita took over halfway and completed the afternoon's course, which lasted three hours, with no break on a very hot Saturday afternoon. I was impressed with how he challenged his Congolese brothers to take the Gospel into the jungle to the Pygmies, and not to look down on them because they are of a different race.

On Sunday morning we worshipped with the same URCC congregation we visited previously. The service lasted about three hours. Though in some ways different in worship style, the order of worship was based on the continental reformed model, the lyrics of the songs were sound, and well chosen to fit the order of worship, the singing was moving and passionate, accompanied by a little band, the law was read from Jeremiah 7, the Apostles Creed was confessed by the whole congregation standing, and baptism was administered with three questions being asked to the couple after a brief explanation of the meaning of the sacrament. I brought God's Word

“In this humble place – the living God was pleased to gather for Himself a people through His Word and Spirit, in the one true faith, to the glory of His name.”

from Ephesians 2:1-10, introducing my message with the story of the slave trader saved by grace, John Newton.

I experienced faith, joy and love among these Christians in their humble circumstances, which will not be forgotten. On my way to church I passed two Mormon "tabernacles" in immaculate shape. Yet it was here – in this humble place – that the living God was pleased to gather for Himself a people through His Word and Spirit, in the one true faith, to the glory of His name.

When I met with my two Congolese colleagues for the last time, they asked



me for my impressions. They in turn shared their desire for closer ecumenical contact with the URCNA, that we might come to their help in some of their most basic and urgent needs.

We said our farewells on Monday morning with warm Christian affection. As I was waiting to board my plane, I knew that the Lord had brought me here. He is also calling His sheep out of the Congo to love and follow Him, so that we may all be one flock under one Shepherd heading for one glorious future.

In the eyes of the world, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is just another failed state. Yet in the eyes of God, this vast country – a quarter of the size of the US with 70 million people – is an object of His mercy. While foreign powers and tribal factions have fought for its rich minerals for ages, and life expectancy is short – 47 years for males, and 51 years for females – we have over 14,000 brothers and sisters there, spread over 198 churches, with only 23 ordained pastors to shepherd them. We cannot forget them.

“In the eyes of God, this vast country – a quarter of the size of the US with 70 million people – is an object of His mercy.”



A ladies Bible study.



The United Reformed Church in the Congo; a church service.



With the children baptised during the worship service.