

faith in
focus

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LIVING the
biblical LIFE

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Editorial

What does it mean to live the biblical life? I am confident that such a question would solicit a variety of answers. I could have simply said, that it is to serve the Lord in every area of life, and that would be correct, but I think there is more. Here are some of my thoughts

In living the biblical life we need to be conscious of the fact that we are uniquely and inextricably united to Jesus Christ. In Romans 6, our union is described as being baptised into His death (v3), raised from the dead ... to newness of life (v4). So we are united with Him in the likeness of His death, ... we shall also in the likeness of His resurrection (v5). If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him (v8). Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Our lives should be lived in the light of the gospel. The Word of God should be what directs our thoughts, words and deeds – "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom ... (Col 3:16), be thankful for an amazing deliverance from sin and respond by loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourself. Then there is our transformation by the renewing of our mind and not being conformed to this world, but presenting our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God.

There should be a love for the Word, treasuring it above everything else, and learning to fear the Lord because that is the beginning of wisdom.

Is there more that can be said? Yes, much more

We all love Reformed theology, but there are practical implications for really and truly living it out in our lives – and this is what our writers will be addressing this month.

Mr Andrew de Vries considers the sovereignty of God.

Mr Daniel Wilson encourages us to investigate the old foundations.

Mr Neil and Mrs Jan Gilmour write about their journey to a Reformed Church.

Miss Simone Buob (our guest writer for Outward focus), tells us how, as a Christian, she teaches in a state-run school in Switzerland.

Mrs Jenny Waldron considers living within the margin.

Mr Andrew de Vries reviews the film *Heaven is for Real*.

Mr Berwyn Hoyt reviews *Preaching and Preachers* by Martin Lloyd Jones. Mr Larry E. Wilson reviews *Schaeffer on the Christian Life: Countercultural Spirituality* by William Edgar.

Mr Jonathon Van Maren addresses those struggling with pornography.

World in focus offers us some news from abroad.

Missions in focus visit some Christians schools in Mbale, Uganda, which are closely associated with the Knox Theological College and the OPC missionaries.

Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Sola Christus, Soli Deo Gloria

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In this issue we are exploring some of the important teachings of the Reformed faith – but not as points in a systematic theology. Rather, our writers aim to show how some of the biblical truths we call “Reformed theology” have vital effects on our lives. In this we are following the idea worked out by Dr Robert Godfrey in his very helpful little book, *An Unexpected Journey*. In his introduction Godfrey noted that:

“Today we continue to see the fruit of Calvinism in various denominations and theologies. But the appeal of historic Calvinism seems significantly diminished in our time. Many Christians have no knowledge about Calvinism as a great spiritual expression of the faith. The few who have are likely to know it only in relation to theology or scholarship”

In the rest of the book he shows how he himself came into Reformed thinking from the outside, and came to understand that being Reformed is a way of life, not just an “inherited tradition” or an “expression of intellectual theology”. Our writers hope you will agree!

“God in Control”

Andrew de Vries

Sometimes we have a negative view of people who can be a little too controlling. We all know people who want to be in charge of every little detail, they want to work everything out beforehand, they can't let go of anything. We call them 'control freaks'. And it's not a complimentary term. That's how some people view God's control of the world. The thought of a Sovereign God who's in complete control is repugnant to them. They won't have it, they fight against it, and try to live as if they are in control. And if we are honest, we too sometimes bristle at God's control of our lives. He directs us to places we sometimes don't want to go. He takes things from us that we would rather hold on to. But the teaching that God is in control, complete control, is one of the most delightful truths of the Scriptures. It is what makes our God so praiseworthy. It is what makes the trials and tribulations of this life bearable. We have a God who is in control. And the Scriptures call us to have a very positive view of this.

Pervasive control

What is the extent of his control? Well, as the children's song puts it, 'He's got the whole world in his hands.' Some people picture God as if he's a cosmic chess player, reacting as best as He can to how we humans run the world. But for God to be 'God', he must be in complete control. There can be nothing outside his governing hands. Both Augustine and Calvin agreed that if there is anything that can happen outside God's control, then 'the whole world revolves at random'. God's control must be all-pervasive.

This is what the Bible teaches. God controls all things. Isaiah 45:6-7 says 'I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster, I the Lord, do all these things.' God controls

the big events in human history – he makes nations great or destroys them (Job 12:23), he determines the boundaries of the nations (Acts 17:26), he directs the hearts of those in power (Proverbs 21:1). But it is just as true that the Lord controls the small details of our individual lives – the hairs of our heads are numbered (Matt 10:29-30), he measures the number of our days (Job 14:5), he determines the success or otherwise of our plans (James 4).

The thought of a human controlling the world is not particularly comforting. We've seen what happens when mere men establish control over nations. They can wreak havoc and destruction because of their selfishness and pride and unfettered power. So, coupled with the teaching that God's control is pervasive, must be the recognition of the kind of God He is. He is a faithful and loving God, full of compassion and goodness. The Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that all things come to us not by chance, but from God's 'Fatherly' hands. He's the God who controls our lives with his good and tender fatherly hands. That's

“God's beautiful plan for our lives is a lot grander than our own personal happiness and prosperity.”

why His control is a source of comfort and strength for us. As Eric Liddel's father stated in the movie "Chariots of Fire", God may be a dictator, but 'Aye, He is a benign, loving dictator.'

Perplexing control

This recognition that God controls all things is often coupled with our response that God's control can appear at times to be very perplexing. Sometimes the way he orders this world is difficult for us to understand. Isn't that true as you look at the terrible plight of Christians in Iraq and Syria. Isn't that true as you consider the suffering of someone in your church, who just seems to have one setback after another. I know it is true of the suffering I've experienced in my own life – the pain of miscarriage, the death of a cousin in childbirth, dealing with seasons of bodily pain and discomfort. I know God is in control, but sometimes I just can't comprehend what he's doing.

The prophet Habakkuk experienced the same difficulty. As he looked at the terrible violence that was occurring among the people of his day, he was perplexed at God's seeming indifference to it all. He cried out to God. He wanted to know 'how long' the Lord was going to allow this situation to continue. He wanted to know 'why' the Lord wasn't doing something. The NIV entitles this section Habakkuk's complaint. This gives the impression that Habakkuk was having a bit of a whinge at God. However, Habakkuk was not trying to pass a verdict on God's mysterious ways. Rather, he was verbalising his difficulties because God's governance of the situation perplexed him greatly. In faith

he was seeking understanding of God's mysterious ways. It's a pattern for us to follow.

Habakkuk provides a very instructive way of dealing with his perplexity. In the midst of his disorientation about the situation, he recalls some of the attributes of God. He remembers that God is 'from everlasting', that he is the 'Holy God', that He is his 'Rock' (1:12-13). He is not doing this simply to remind himself of the doctrine of God. He's struggling with what he doesn't know – the 'why' question. So he begins to remind himself of the things he can be absolutely certain of. The 'who' question. He falls back on the character of God when he's perplexed about God's control.

Pastor Saeed Abedini was imprisoned in Iran. He had been imprisoned already for three years, and he wrote a letter to his daughter on her birthday. He wrote: 'My dearest Rebekka Grace, Happy 8th Birthday! You are growing so fast and becoming more beautiful every day. I praise God for His faithfulness to me every day as I watch from a distance through the prison wall and see pictures and hear stories of how you are growing both spiritually and physically. Oh how I long to see you. I know that you question why you have prayed so many times for my return and yet I am not home yet. Now there is a big WHY in your mind, you are asking: WHY Jesus isn't answering your prayers and the prayers of all of the people around the world praying for my release ... The answer to the WHY is WHO. WHO is in control? ... The confusion of 'WHY has all of this happened' and 'WHY your prayers are not answered yet' is resolved with un-

derstanding WHO is in control ... God is in control, and He knows better than us what He is doing in our lives and all around the world.' What's Pastor Abedini doing? He's telling us in all our perplexity, let's recall what we do know. We know WHO is in control. Our faithful God.

Purposeful control

Our faithful father also exercises a very purposeful control over our lives. We hear today that God has a wonderful plan for your life. People usually mean by this that God wants to make you happy and healthy and give you lots of good times. But God's beautiful plan for our lives is a lot grander than our own personal happiness and prosperity. God's control of all things and his purposes for his people are linked together in Romans 8. It's not as if God controls all things to make our lives difficult and miserable. He has an overriding purpose through the good and the bad he brings into our lives. The purpose is that we would be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29)

We see this purpose also clearly articulated in James Chapter One. There James talks about the place of trials in the Christian life. He concludes that God sends these trials so that 'you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:4).' The idea is that God wants us to be the complete package as Christians. We talk in football terms about a player who is the complete package. They have the physical strength, the mental toughness, and the breadth of skills so that they can adapt to any circumstance in the game. Through our trials the Lord intends to make each of



us the complete package as Christians. This doesn't mean we'll become people with profound doctrinal knowledge, or with many spiritual gifts. It means we will grow in Christlike character.

Our natural response when we face trials and hardship is to ask God a question. One of those questions is 'why'. However, James would have us ask a different question: 'In what way will this trial make me more mature in Christ?' When I really can't stand my job, when I don't get into the University course I would have liked, when the guy or girl I'm interested in does not reciprocate my affection, when I can't sleep at night, then I can ask: What character trait is God refining in me? Is there an idol in my heart that this trial is exposing? Is God teaching me to trust him more in a certain area of my life? What can

I learn about the grace of God in this trial? That's the wonderful purpose God has in exercising his control – to bring us into Christian maturity.

Praiseworthy control

The fact that God is in control is also a reason for praise. In Romans 11 Paul reflects on God's sovereignty in election. His response is not to express disappointment with God's control. His response is not to tie himself up in knots because he just can't figure out how God's control works. His response is not to cry out 'It's just not fair!'. His response is not disappointment, but delight. He explodes in praise of God saying: 'Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways ... For from him and through

him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen' (Rom 11:33, 36). The God who is in control, should be praised for it.

A young boy who had been converted under George Whitefield's ministry was lying on his death bed. He had been struck down by an incurable disease and death was drawing near. His Father asked him: 'Son, do you fear death?' The child replied 'No Father'. The father asked: 'Why?' The son said: 'Because I want to go to Mr Whitefield's BIG God.' We serve a BIG God. A God who's in complete control. This doesn't repulse us, but kindles in us heartfelt praise, and a desire that one day we might be with our BIG God.

Mr Andrew de Vries is a minister in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.

Living the biblical life (2)

Foundations in the past

Daniel Wilson

Do you like history?

When I was little, I loved history, but hated history class. I know that sounds strange, but some of you know what I mean. There is a big difference between actually learning from history (which I loved) and all of the classroom work of memorising dates (which I despised!). I am still bad with dates, but I love learning about the people and events of the past more than ever. Edmund Burke is quoted as saying: "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it." The more I learn history, the more convinced I am that Burke was right! History is vitally important if we want to serve God wisely in this life. God teaches us that fact in Psalm 78.

Psalm 78 is a *maskil* of Asaph. *Maskil* is related to the word "instruction", and so it is thought that this title means the psalm was intended to teach a lesson. Psalm 78 is an excellent example of this

Psalm 78

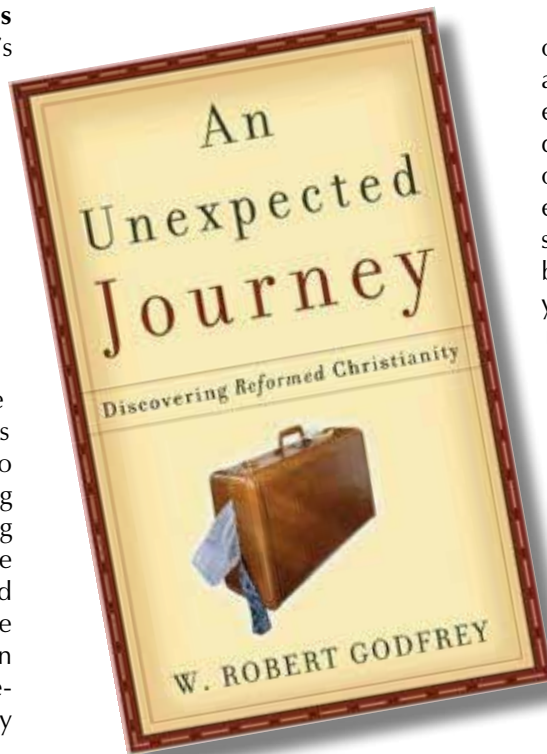
- ¹ My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.
- ² I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old –
- ³ things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us.
- ⁴ We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.
- ⁵ He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children,
- ⁶ so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.
- ⁷ Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.
- ⁸ They would not be like their ancestors – a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.
- ⁹ The men of Ephraim, though armed with bows, turned back on the day of battle;
- ¹⁰ they did not keep God's covenant and refused to live by his law.
- ¹¹ They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.

type of psalm, because it begins with a note about teaching. As you can see in verses 1-2, Asaph wrote this psalm to teach the reader/listener by “speaking in parables” and uttering hidden “things from of old.” He wants us to learn something from the past ... particularly the history of how God has worked and done marvellous deeds in previous generations (see vs. 4). Asaph goes on to tell us that God decreed laws for the people of Israel to teach their children, so that each generation would teach the next about God’s Law **and His deeds** (vs. 7). Now if we talk about God’s deeds, about what are we talking? We are talking about history! Here Asaph is explaining that it is important for God’s people to teach their children about God’s Law/Word, but it is also equally important for them to teach their children about history and God’s mighty deeds in the past. I love that old wordplay – history is HIS Story – God’s Story of His power and faithfulness! And if we don’t learn those lessons of God’s power and faithfulness from the past, then we might have to learn them the hard way: by repeating the mistakes of the past and suffering the consequences. Read through the whole of Psalm 78 sometime soon, and learn from the mistakes you read there – for we still forget God, grumble when things go wrong, get greedy for something better, and put God to the test by our faithlessness.

History is vital for your Christian walk, and mine. There are more lessons to be learned than you might at first realise. You can learn about God’s power to save and provide, and you can learn about sins to avoid. But that isn’t the sum of it. You can also learn about things that God’s people have done right, which are worth copying. You can learn more about what churches have done right/wrong to spread the gospel: worship practices, leadership styles, outreach philosophies, and missions projects. And the more you learn of the church of the past, the more comfortable and content you will be in the Reformed Church in particular!

In Robert Godfrey’s book *An Unexpected Journey*, he writes of how God brought him to the Reformed Faith. Dr. Godfrey had an early interest in history which God used to confirm his growing Reformed convictions. And church history played a similar role in confirming my faith as well. My father was a Reformed/Presbyterian minister in

the States, and I grew up being taught the Westminster Confession. However, I also attended a Dispensationalist Baptist school. I was one of only half a dozen Reformed/Presbyterian children at the school amongst hundreds (including the entire faculty). I was often pressed about my beliefs and had to really grapple with what I believed vs. what my friends and classmates believed. It led me to history – to search out from where different ideas and theologies had come ... and



that strengthened me in the foundations of the Reformed faith. These were not new ideas; they were ancient, they were true ... I realised that I wasn’t part of some novel system of belief. I believed the genuine biblical truth as it was passed down through the early church fathers and restored to its glory again by the Reformers of the Protestant Reformation.

Reading church history confirmed this for me, and can do the same for you. It is important to be forearmed against heresies and lies which have already been condemned in the past. I am sure many of you have heard before that modern day Mormonism is just a repackaging of the ancient Arian and Manichean heresies.¹ Jehovah’s Witnesses represent the ancient heresies of Gnosticism and Arianism.² The modern Pentecostal, Charismatic, and New Apostolic movements are all related to the ancient heresy of Montanism. This last one is probably the one most pertinent for us ... Montanus was a recent convert who began

to prophesy in the second century A.D. – supposedly from the Holy Spirit. Those that followed Montanus believed that these new revelations superseded the Scriptures, and so new revelations could lead to all sorts of strange things. This sounds strikingly similar to a lot of Charismatic churches today! The ancient church eventually rejected this false theology and the practice of seeking ecstatic visions/miracles because of their destructive effects ... it would do the modern church good to learn the same lesson.

Too often, we can look around at other churches and see them thriving and growing – and we can become envious. We start to question why we do things “the Reformed way” instead of like these other churches. We can easily look at these sincere brothers and sisters in Christ and ask, “Why can’t we be like that?” And if you don’t know your Bible, or your Church history, you might be led astray from that which is true and biblical. Now, please hear me on this – I am NOT saying that only Reformed Churches are true churches. I am not saying that if you aren’t Reformed then you aren’t Christian. I am not saying that! Rather, what I am saying is that there are movements in other churches that are founded on ungodly ideas. Some of these ideas have been recognised as false and condemned as heresies for hundreds of years. Forewarned is forearmed. If you learn from church history, you might be spared a lot of heartache and trouble by not repeating the mistakes of the past!

So, what do you do, if you agree with me? Where do you start? I have recently purchased a number of beginners books for Church History to review and recommend to members of the Nelson congregation. The first set that I purchased (which I haven’t finished reading yet) is *How to Read Church History* Volumes 1 and 2 by Jean Comby. I have read good things about it. Some other very accessible places to start are introductions to church history, such as *Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce Shelley or *Church History Made Easy* by Timothy Paul Jones. With any book apart from the Bible, you need to read with discernment. These books were well-reviewed online, but each had its particular weaknesses. The key here is that after you read one of these histories, you then must strive to connect that history with God’s Word. Comparing God’s commands to the successes and

failures of our fathers in the faith can help you learn a lot of lessons the easy way. Such lessons are a major part of growing to maturity in the faith! **So get reading!**

Notes

1 The Arians denied the deity of Christ, and the Mormons claim that Christ only *became* the Son of God (instead of being eternally God the Son). The Manichean heresy is the idea that

good and evil are in a constant equal struggle in the material/spiritual world – as if both are equal/dual forces at work. Christians do not believe in such dualism, but recognise God as supreme, and evil as being a rebellion against God (which is nonetheless within God’s ultimate control and is doomed to be destroyed by God). There is much more to be said, for whole books have been written on this topic such as *The God Makers* by Decker and Hunt.

2 Gnosticism is the heresy which placed an emphasis on the spiritual above the physical to the point that physical sin didn’t matter because the

spiritual was more important (thus destroying the need for repentance and change of life). It also had a strong emphasis on knowledge and “higher truth” which made Gnostics superior to others – this is strong in the JW movement. As above, there is much more that you can find on these topics online or in various books on the subject.

Mr Daniel Wilson is the minister in the Reformed Church of Nelson.

Living the biblical life (3)

Journey to a Reformed church

Neil and Jan Gilmour

Our road to becoming members of a Reformed Church started a long time ago. Both of us grew up in Zimbabwe: Neil comes from a very formal Anglican background and I come from a Roman Catholic background. Both of us left the churches we were brought up in, in our late teens and early twenties, as we found the services repetitive and without meaning. By the time we met we were worshipping in a Presbyterian Church. The teaching was good and there was more of a community spirit, but we only worshipped on Sundays and for whatever reason never joined the Bible study groups or became involved in any other church activities. We just seemed to feel that we only needed to go to the Sunday service and then head back out to our everyday life for the rest of the week.

Once we got married we lived on a farm and we joined the Bindura Christian Fellowship, which was a church planted by The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) in USA, although the pastor was a Zimbabwean. It was at this church that we both made a commitment to live as Christians, seeking the Lord in everything that we did and not just be “Sunday Christians.” Later TEAM planted another church nearer to where we farmed, called Mazowe Valley Christian Fellowship, and we with some of our friends who farmed in the area were members up until we finally all left the



Neil and Jan Gilmour

area and sadly had to close the church down. We moved to Ireland and three of the other families moved to Wanaka, Temuka and Woodbury in New Zealand.

When we relocated to Skibbereen in Ireland it took us the best part of two years before we found Bantry Christian Fellowship. For over a year we travelled the 86kms to Cork City to worship at a Rhema Church, and also visited many Protestant churches in West Cork. We found the first two years in Ireland quite difficult as we did not have a church to worship and fellowship in.

The move to New Zealand was easy compared to our move from Zimbabwe to Ireland. Neil had a job waiting for him, both our sons were grown up so there were no schools to have to consider, and we were able to rent out our home in Ireland. We did have a couple of concerns, though, and asked our friends at the Bantry Christian Fellowship to pray for two things for us. One, that we would be able to find a house

“The welcome, the friendship and the caring of the congregation that made us feel immediately at home those first few months was what kept us coming back each week, right from the beginning.”

to live in, as Christchurch had a great housing shortage after the earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, and two, that we would find a good church to worship and fellowship in.

Imagine our great relief when the prayers for a house to rent and a place to worship were answered almost immediately the last Sunday Neil was in Ireland. A lady visiting Bantry Christian Fellowship that Sunday morning came to Neil after the service and said she knew a family who lived near Christchurch who might be able to help, and put Neil in contact with Paul and Sally Davey. They worshipped at Dovedale Reformed Church and collected or found other worshippers to help Neil attend services until he managed to get his own transport. Paul also put Neil in contact with a friend from Bishopdale Reformed Church who had a small house for rent! In less than 3 weeks Neil was happily working in Christchurch, had a house to rent and a wonderful church to worship and fellowship in! God is good.

It would be another five weeks before I arrived in Christchurch, by which time Neil was fairly well settled into his new life in New Zealand. The highlight was the Sunday service at Dovedale Reformed Church. Everyone made an effort to speak to him and introduce themselves to him and over the next month or two he was invited out to lunch after nearly every service. We spoke often and he would tell me about the services and the people and how much he enjoyed the teaching.

When I arrived, I was overwhelmed by the genuine respect and care that everyone showed each other at Dovedale. The mix of all the age groups, both old and young, big and small families and lots of young adults and university students gave the church services a great atmosphere of people coming to hear from God. Everyone seemed to bounce into church as if they really wanted to be there and everyone seemed to feel at home.

Then there is the singing! Everyone sings and everyone seems to be enjoying the singing. Everyone has their own hymn book so there is no mumbling of the words. The singing is so good that I nearly always wish the hymns were longer as I don't want them to end.

We are in church to “hear from God” so the Bible readings are usually long and from the Old and the New Testament. I like it that nearly every week we read some or all of the Ten Commandments.

The sermons are Bible-based and there is usually a theme over a few months. The sermon notes make it easy to look up passages from the Bible later and to follow the teaching which is always good.

When I first arrived in Christchurch I found the “Ladies Bible studies” a great place to fellowship with like-minded ladies; and although we now attend the family Bible study in the evenings because of work, I really miss the friendship and fellowship of the ladies over a cup of tea. In the first 2 or 3 months as well as the worship and fellowship which was so good, I got to know the ladies and they helped me with applying for jobs, where to find certain shops, where to get a car WOF and generally navigate my way round Christchurch and all the traffic cones as well as where to find some of the best coffee shops in town.

After our first Christmas in New Zealand and into 2014 we both felt we would like to become members of Dovedale Reformed Church. We were visited by two elders who chatted to us about our Christian journey to date and explained the basic beliefs of the Reformed Church. Later our Pastor, Andre, suggested we join the Catechism classes he was running at the time for the “Young Adults” who were hoping to make “Professions of Faith.” This was a great time for us both. We learned so much and possibly for the first time in our lives examined our beliefs biblically. Young Christian adults are great to spend time with also. They have an enthusiasm for the Lord that is often dulled over the years in adults.

It was such a happy day for us both when we stood in front of the Dovedale Reformed Church and made our Profession of Faith. We were congratulated by the whole congregation that day and a special cake was served with the tea after the church service. When we look back on that first year it is hard to know now what, if anything, influenced us most in making us want to become a part of the congregation. The teaching every Sunday was always good, the singing was amazing but the welcome, the friendship and the caring of the congregation that made us feel immediately at home those first few months was what kept us coming back each week, right from the beginning.

Mr Neil and Mrs Jan Gilmour are members of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Teaching in a public school

Simone Buob

God has put a calling into the lives of us all – my calling is to teach children. When I was five years old I used to tell my Mum that I wanted to be a shepherdess. Being high up in the mountains and guarding a flock of sheep seemed wonderful. Not quite two years later I changed my mind – I wanted to become a primary school teacher. That desire has never left me: it has grown stronger, the older I became.

Now I've been teaching for nearly 10 years in total, and realise that a shepherdess and a teacher must be very much alike. For teaching kids is similar to watching sheep. You're so much involved in the lives of these children that teaching them isn't simply comprised of explaining maths or German grammar or English to them – it means being part of

their worries, their fears, their joys, just about everything that concerns them. And as their teacher it's my desire to do the best I can to lead them and guide them. The younger they are, the more they follow you wherever you lead them. They see their teacher as a kind of hero, as somebody who knows all things and can do all things. All the more responsibility that we lead them with care and help them to see that nobody is a hero, that nobody is complete. There is only one, who is and was complete and that is Christ.

I teach kids that are 11, 12 and 13 years old, in a small public school in the east part of Switzerland. As it is in all Swiss schools, we have the kids for longer than just a year. Normally we teach the same class for two years, and sometimes even for three. We teach them all subjects – from handcrafts, to

swimming, gymnastics, maths, grammar – just everything.

Having lived in the US for 4 years I've not only learned that their system is very different, but also that in general they have a lot of private schools. And many of those private schools are Christian schools. It's not so in my country. I don't know of any Christian schools, and only a very limited number of private schools. Public schools are the schools I grew up in, and public schools are the schools I am now part of.

Some have asked me in the past: "How is it as a Christian to teach in a public school? How can you be a witness? And what about the subjects you have to teach, but might not believe in, like evolution?" It is those questions I'm going to try to answer.

God calls us to be shining lights in the darkness. But God also tells us that He



A scene in a typical Swiss primary school. Fotolia.com

is the one who is changing the heart of a person. Those two things are very important to remember. As a teacher in a public school I don't have the freedom to tell my kids about God and His Word the way a teacher does who is teaching in a Christian school. To know, then, that it's God's work alone in the heart of these children is important. Even if I would have the freedom to tell them all I want, it wouldn't save them any more or any less – for God's work can not be thwarted. But what I can do is be an example for them. Shining as a light so that they might wonder, that they might ask. That one day they might remember and start to seek themselves.

When I teach Evolution, I teach them Creationism at the same time. It's important for all men to know that these two world views exist. And it's certainly not wrong to teach this in a public school. I would overstep my bounds if I said that Creationism is the truth and Evolution is untrue. I can't do that and I wouldn't do it. What I do is show them that some believe in the one and some believe in the other; and that one day they will have to chose either one side or the other. My kids naturally ask me which side I have chosen, and so I tell them. But at the same time I emphasise that they can't pick sides simply based on what somebody else believes. They themselves have to question, and one day they will have to choose what they believe to be right.

Isn't it what God does with us?

Bunyan has this wonderful illustration in the second part of his *Pilgrim's Progress*. There is a man that is gathering sticks and dust with his muck rake, while at the same time somebody is offering him the celestial crown. But because he is so busy gathering the sticks, he never looks up and pays no attention to the crown. God is offering it to us, but He is calling us to choose. Unless we knock, nobody will open. In the same way I can show my children that there are differents paths, I can even tell them what I believe to be true if they ask, but they are the ones that have to choose. That's not my responsibility, it's theirs.

Not long ago I had to teach them in biology how new human life comes into existence. One boy raised his hand and said: "If you abort a child, it's murder, is it not?" So I sat down with them and said: "Well, let's think about it. Murder is if you kill a human being. So the question would be – when is a fetus a human being? Is it a human being from the very beginning when the egg and the sperm conflate into one, or is it a human being when it's a few weeks old? Tell me, what do you think?" They all had different convictions. Some believed it must be a human being when it already looks like one and others were convinced it's a human being from the very beginning. What I did was challenge them. To those that believed it's a human being when it looks like one I simply said "Then what was it before?" We discussed this for an entire hour. My questions caused

them to think and rethink. Finally one boy raised his hand and said "What do you believe and why?" So I gave them my answer but at the same time I said "Remember, something isn't right just because I said so. I believe abortion is wrong and I told you why, but you have to work through this question yourself."

With the news being full of Islamic State and their terror activites right now, children have come to me and have asked me what Islam is all about. Most of my children are Catholics and so it was a good opportunity to write down what we believe and why we believe it and where the differences are. They told me all they've learned about Catholicism, I told them what I have learned about the Reformed faith and also, what I know about Islam. We did it without making judgments. The aim was simply for them to realise that different convictions exist. Catholics have the Mass and the Reformed don't. Catholics believe in Holy Mary, the Reformed don't. And so realising that there are differences, the children naturally ask why those differences exist and how they all came about. It's my opportunity to tell them about Luther, about Calvin and Zwingli, about Mohammed and what the Muslims believe about Christ. And again – the children will have to work through it.

One day they will remember that there was a difference and one day they will hopefully work through it and either knock or walk away. In my position I can do no more than show them the path. That narrow and straight one – while at the same time I am discussing with them the highways. They know which path I have chosen and they know why – but they need to decide for themselves whether they take the highway or the narrow straight path. It's my prayer that they will.



"The gospel is good news. But Jesus never said it was easy news."

Charles Colson





"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."
Prov 1:7

Teacher Vacancy

Silverstream Christian School is seeking the services of a Reformed Primary/Intermediate School Teacher for the 2015 school year. Silverstream Christian School is a school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed Faith. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed Faith and Reformed Christian Education. This is an opportunity to be a part of a vibrant covenant community.

If you have any questions or wish to apply please email:

board@silverstreamchristian.school.nz
or phone **Koen van der Werff on (04) 5297 558**

Feminine focus

Jenny Waldron

True rest – living within the margin

Have you noticed how the world today screams at us to accomplish more and more things in a day? Our houses have to have magazine-perfect decoration and our meals are to be of restaurant quality? However, we frequently feel too tired to do even the most basic of housework and cooking. We may be tired from being kept awake with a teething or sick child, we have come down with a cold, we wait up late for a husband to come home from a meeting, we have an aged parent we need to look after, we are struggling in our marriage, we might be pregnant and have 2 toddlers or we are burning the candle at both ends. There are times when we feel overwhelmed, exhausted and at the end of our tether.

When this happens (and we all experience times like these, where our resources, physical and emotional, are stretched to extremes) we need to rest.

True rest

'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'
Matt 11:28-30

This is a text most Christians know very well and yet, in the busyness and

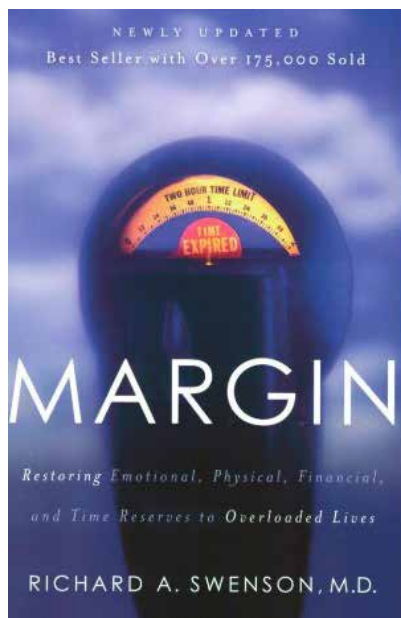
exhaustion of life, forget so quickly. Jesus Christ is our rest. He offers to teach us gently in His ways, and to take our burdens from us. When we have an opportunity to rest, whether it is an hour, a day or a week, we will find true rest when we put Jesus first, in our thoughts, reading and prayer.

Rest from busyness

'It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.'
Ps 127: 2

Are you just too busy? For many years now, my husband, who knows





me all too well, tells me when he thinks I am taking on too much. In my mind I think I can handle one more Bible study, one more visit, or some other project, and yet, it may be the one thing that can tip the scales into becoming exhausted. Do we just have too much on our plates? How are we going to cope with anything outside our usual busyness? An excellent book, by Richard Swenson, entitled *Margin*¹ talks about not becoming overloaded in our lives:

'Margin is the space that once existed between ourselves and our limits. Overload is not having time to finish the book you are reading on stress. Margin is having time to read it twice. Overload is fatigue. Margin is energy. Overload is red ink. Margin is black ink. Overload is hurry. Margin is calm. Overload is anxiety. Margin is security. Overload is the disease of our time. Margin is the cure. Margin is the space that once existed between ourselves and our limits. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations.'

How many times have we had no "margin" in our lives for the unexpected situation and feel overwhelmed? Are we, and our families, running on overload?

Stop and re-evaluate your schedule. Look for activities that are pushing you into overload and tiredness.

Daily/hourly rest

*'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.'* Ps 23:1-2

Sometime ago I was having a "mental health" day. The oldest child was working and my dear husband took the two noisy boys on a very long hike. I had been looking forward to having a quiet day for a while, so the night before, in preparation, I wrote a to-do list of things I wanted to do and some things I needed to get done (like the washing and the dishes). Although there were several creative things on my list (like writing and making jewellery), first and foremost, at the top of the list, I wanted to spend some quiet time with the Lord, to ground my rest in Christ. When we spend time with our Lord Jesus Christ, in quiet and peace, we truly find rest.

If you are a mother of a very little baby, the general and very good advice is to sleep when the baby sleeps; but this can be more difficult if you have toddlers as well. If the children are all trained to have a quiet time/sleep on their beds (with books/toys) after lunch, this can be a time of rest for a busy mum, too. Don't be tempted to use the time to rush around tidying up or catching up on social media. Rest. A mother's rest time may be more important than folded washing and toys strewn over the floor or cooking a full dinner (baked beans on toast is food!) The washing, cooking, feeding, cleaning still need to be done, but they get done quicker and with more joy when we are rested. Train/teach the children to help with chores, they can help carry the folded washing to their rooms and to tidy up all the toys off the floor at 4:30-5:00pm before Dad comes home from work. Start your hour of rest by spending some time thinking about and thanking God for the hard-earned eternal rest that Christ won for us on the cross. As we focus our eyes on Him and on what Jesus did for us because He first loved us, we will be deeply refreshed.

Nightly rest

'In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.' Ps 4:8

Establish a bedtime routine, much the same way we do for our children. Each day should be routined and planned so that, as the day winds down, we look forward to rest. A child who has been busy discovering the world, learning new things and running around needs a routine that starts quietening his body, mind and spirit down, ready for sleep. So it is with adults, too. We need a routine in the evenings to help our bodies, minds

and spirits to quieten down and prepare for sleep. So often adults have little or no routine, and drag themselves to bed whenever. If something catches their attention on TV or on the internet or in the garage or craft room or they are reading a riveting book, any kind of set bedtime flies out the door. This sort of lifestyle is not conducive to getting the rest we need to function well the next day. Some people go to bed when they feel tired, which usually means that one spouse regularly goes to bed before the other. As a normal routine, plan to go to bed at the same time as your husband, and vice versa. This is very important for a good marriage. There may be times when this doesn't work out, like when one is ill or had an exceptionally busy day, or your husband has a late meeting. However, in general, a pattern of going to bed together is recommended. As part of your bedtime routine, you might enjoy a bath or spa together, a hot drink, reading a book quietly together, spending time reading God's Word and praying together. I usually have a cup of "sleepy" tea. I don't know if it actually brings on sleep, but it helps me to think "bedtime". If you have difficulty either getting to sleep or waking during the night, pray! Pray specifically for the person/people or situation that is keeping you awake. Pray for your family members, for church members. The Lord calms us and gives us sleep.

Weekly rest

'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God'. Ex 20:8-10

God rested! God, who created us in His image, who needed no rest,² set a pattern for us, to rest. One of the blessings of being a Christian is that we are commanded to rest one day a week and we use that day to worship our Lord and Saviour.

Everyone needs rest to regain the strength and energy to complete the tasks set before us. What is to be the focus of our day of rest? To observe a holy rest, to worship and do works of mercy.³ Be prepared for a day of rest. Prepare the house and food the day before. This may not always be possible when you have unexpected guests, but in general, much preparation can be done the day before. Set the day apart from the rest of the week for worship and fellowship with our Christian family.

Yearly marital rest

'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. ' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.' Mark 10:7-9

Many of us take annual holidays to take a break from our work, but do we spend time investing in our marriages? Do we rest together as husband and wife? We need to plan time for our marriages. To spend time on our marriages daily is essential, but it is also very helpful if, at least once a year, you plan to go away together for a weekend without

the children. It helps you to remember that you have actual names other than Mum and Dad! So often we are so busy and tired that families and our spouses, in particular, get the dregs of our energy and attention. Even when your children are young, and no longer being breast-fed, you can plan this time away. The children may experience a small amount of separation anxiety but when they see happily married parents throughout the year then they feel secure, and any anxiety will soon be forgotten. Plan your time away to be together, to bond your relationship closer together. You may like to use this time to plan the next year for your family, house, future holidays, ministry etc, and/or praying about the direc-

tion you believe the Lord is leading you.

Do not listen to the world to see what you should be achieving but look to the Lord. Keep yourself from unnecessary busyness. Plan times to rest your weary soul and body so that you may accomplish all that you are called to do. If you are married, rest with your husband and remember that God gives a rest that is deep and refreshing when we abide in Him. Take on His yoke which is easy and He will give you rest.

1 *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*
by Richard Swenson Published by: NavPress

2 Gen 2:1-3

3 WCF 21.8

Films in focus

Of course Heaven is for real!

Andrew de Vries

I was in my local video store this week and was surprised to see three copies of 'Heaven is for Real' sitting on the new releases shelf. Of course, Video Ezy is not known for its great discernment over what constitutes quality viewing, so I really shouldn't have been surprised. My concern was alleviated somewhat when I noticed that all of the available copies were still on the shelf and had not been rented out. You might believe that was a very uncharitable thing to think. You might believe this movie is just a bit of harmless fun. That it may even help people come to faith. However, given the underlying premise of this movie and other accounts of the same genre¹, it is more than likely going to undermine faith and lead people away from Christ.

If you haven't heard of the movie, it's based on the book of the same name. The subtitle tells you all you need to know: "A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back." It is written by a pastor who tells the story of what his four year old son Colton claimed to have experienced. Colton

suffered a burst appendix, underwent emergency surgery, and it was during this procedure that he allegedly had a little visit to heaven. Quite inexplicably, he waited several months to tell his parents about this. Then after around 6 years his parents decided to record it all in a book. That book has sold millions and now the story is being shared with an eager movie going public.

This is all terribly disturbing. If you are a Bible believing Christian, you should find this terribly disturbing. It's disturbing because it undermines the authority of the Bible. The great catch-cry of the Reformation was Sola Scriptura. Scripture Alone. It is Scripture alone that determines what I am to believe concerning God and the way of salvation. It is Scripture alone that determines what is right or wrong and how I am to live. Scripture alone is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice.

Sola Scriptura is slowly being displaced in our age by what one pastor has called 'Sola Experientia'². Experience Alone has become the ultimate authority for many Christians. If you've experienced it, or someone else has experienced, then that

is the ultimate truth and must be believed and obeyed without question. So if someone claims to have visions where they can see into the future, who are you to question such an experience. And if someone tells me that they strongly feel that God wants them to become a minister of the gospel, then I can't question such an experience. And if little Colton Burpo tells me that he's been to heaven and back, then who am I to question such an experience. Sola Experientia has trumped Sola Scriptura.

The message of the movie is that you can now believe that heaven is for real because little Colton has been there and is willing to tell you all about it. His experience is the thing that validates the reality of the place called heaven. Surely this runs contrary to biblical faith. We don't believe in heaven because Colton has been there and come back to tell us about it, but because the Bible tells us that heaven is real. I think a little Sunday school song illustrates the point I am trying to make. See if you can finish the verse. 'Jesus loves me this I know, for the _____ tells me so.' The modern version of this would go something like

this 'Heaven is for real you know, because little Colton tells me so.' How did Christians ever believe before this spate of books on heaven? They believed because they had the word of God.

You might think I am just one of these nit-picking theologians who enjoys exercising my critical faculties a little too much. But I am writing as a pastor. I have

“What is interesting about the visions of heaven in the Bible, is that they have a very distinct focus. The focus is clearly upon glories of our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father.”

a profound pastoral concern that believers have a solid place to stand when it comes to what they believe. What is going to dispel your doubts when you begin to wonder 'will I really hear my master say "well done good and faithful servant."' What is going to anchor your soul with the hope of the life to come when you lay on your death bed? Where can you go to find rest when you have that longing to be re-united with a husband or wife who has died in Christ? Are you really going to find a firm place to stand by resting on the testimony of a four year old boy? A four year old boy might be an authority on all things Thomas the tank engine, but they are no authority on the afterlife. If you are going to rest on someone's experience, what are you going to do when someone else has a different experience? Australia's richest man, Kerry Packer, was clinically dead for four minutes after which he famously declared that there was nothing there. No heaven, no hell. Experience is shaky ground to anchor your faith upon. If you want a firm foundation for your faith, you must rest in the word of God.

You might say, yes that is a valid concern, but at least the movie is getting people to talk about heaven! But is it the heaven of the Bible that people are talking about? The heaven Colton allegedly visits is inhabited by people with wings (except for Jesus). The people also have halos? Nowhere in the Bible is life after death pictured like this. It seems that these images have come from children's picture Bibles and from early Greek art rather than the Scriptures. It should also be remembered that when we die, our souls go to be with Christ,

but our physical bodies are in the ground until the great day of resurrection. It seems odd that the place Colton allegedly visits is a place where everyone has corporeal bodies. He even alleges that he sits on Jesus' lap. But the place where believers will have new physical bodies is in the new creation. How could Colton visit the new creation, when it hasn't yet come into existence? Wherever Colton seems to be, is neither heaven (the intermediate state of being with Christ while we wait for our resurrection bodies), nor the new creation.

What's more, the Bible doesn't give us any indication that our God will take people on a guided tour of heaven during a near death experience. The Lord didn't see fit to record even one little visit to heaven and back in the entire Bible. What we do find, are visions of heaven or the new creation. Isaiah (6) and Ezekiel (1) in the OT receive visions, as do John (Revelation 4-6) and Paul (2 Cor 12:1-4) in the NT. What is interesting is that Paul is not even permitted to recount his experience. It is clear that none of these men were dead when they received their visions. They were very much alive. Obviously a vision of heaven is rare enough. But an actual visit to heaven is unheard of. Except for in one case. Jesus said 'No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man' (John 3:13).

What is interesting about the visions of heaven in the Bible, is that they have a very distinct focus. The focus is clearly upon glories of our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father. Those who experience such visions are overawed and seem to come apart at the seams just from these



little glimpses of the majesty of God. Clearly this is different from what we get in 'Heaven is for Real' and other books like it. The overwhelming sense of the glory of God is missing. Instead we get Colton petting Jesus' rainbow coloured horse, Jesus wearing a crown with a pink diamond, and a description of the holy spirit being 'kind of blue'. We get the kind of trivialities and pointless details that do nothing to fill us with awe for the Lamb slain for sinners.

The NT doesn't speak of believers going to heaven when they die. It says we go to be 'with Christ' (Phil 1:23, 2 Cor 4:8). That is the essence of heaven. Samuel Rutherford uses the illustration of a bride's delight on her wedding day to illustrate this. Her delight and her greatest thrill is not her dress, the flowers, or the guests. Rutherford writes that 'the life to come ... shall not be so much affected with the glory that goeth about us, as with the bridegrooms joyful face and presence.' It is he whom we long to see in heaven. Jesus is the light of heaven. But that's not the impression I was left with from this movie.

Some will still argue that this is a real opportunity for the church in terms of evangelism. I'm old enough now to remember the same claim with other movies. The movie 'Passion of the Christ' was meant to create an insatiable interest in Jesus amongst the public and was the greatest opportunity for evangelism the church had yet seen according to the supporters. The promises were far greater than the reality. Who knows what believers did for evangelism before these movies came to the big screen? I think we all know what they did. They declared the truths of the gospel as taught in the Bible to any who would listen. They didn't ask people to rest their faith on their own experience, but on the word of God which speaks of Christ's life, death, and resurrection for the salvation of sinners. This alone is sufficient to convince sinners to turn in faith to the Saviour and rest in him. If you don't believe the Bible, you won't believe even if someone comes back from the dead and tells you all about it. They are not my words. That's what Jesus said: 'If they do not listen to Moses

and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead' (Luke 16:31). If you want to be assured in your faith. If you want to really know what heaven is like. If you want to convince others of the glories of heaven and the only way to get there. Direct them to the Bible. Sola Scriptura!

1 There is a whole genre of 'I've been to heaven and back and now I'm going to write a book to tell you all about it' books. It has been labelled the 'heaven tourism' genre. Examples include *My Journey to Heaven: What I Saw and How It Changed My Life*, by Marvin J. Besteman; *Flight to Heaven: A Plane Crash . . . A Lone Survivor . . . A Journey to Heaven—and Back*, by Dale Black; *To Heaven and Back: A Doctor's Extraordinary Account of Her Death, Heaven, Angels, and Life Again: A True Story*, by Mary Neal; *90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death and Life*, by Don Piper; *Nine Days In Heaven*, by Dennis Prince. There is little indication that the appetite for these types of books is on the decrease.

2 Pastor Erik Raymond. See <http://www.ordinarypastor.com/?p=14376>

Mr Andrew de Vries is a minister in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.

Books in focus

Preaching and Preachers

by Martyn Lloyd Jones

Reviewed by Berwyn Hoyt

Many an elder has wondered "What exactly is preaching?" or "Why is it different from a lecture?" The key distinguishing mark of preaching developed in this book is that preaching is **conveying God's burden from the text of the Bible**. That's it in a nutshell. Now you can read my final paragraph and you'll be done.

This is a classic and thorough book on preaching by Martyn Lloyd-Jones – himself a master. How is preaching done? What are its characteristics? How does it interact with preacher, hearer, and God? Full of illustrations and anecdotes that make it engaging (if long-winded). There's a lot of gold in here and this review may help you locate it quickly.

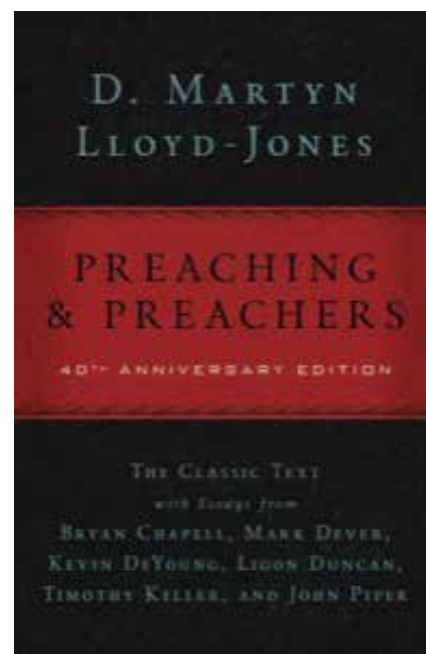
Preaching is primary: The book begins and ends with a scriptural proof of the importance of preaching. The

first two chapters argue by Scripture that preaching is the most important means of kingdom growth. Chapter two argues theologically that man's very nature necessitates preaching to open blind eyes. Pertinently, the final chapter attests Scripturally to how the Spirit works powerfully through preaching to make dead men alive.

God's power: Chapters 3 through 5 talk about the nature of preaching. Chapter three explains that preaching is a message from God via an ambassador. And it is an important life and death topic. As such, it is not a frivolous matter that we can debate or assess from a human point of view. Humility is required. The power in preaching comes from God – the Spirit working through the message of the Scriptures carefully and passionately presented. Thus inadequate presentation of God's message is what is responsible for powerless preaching.

How preaching differs: Chapter 4

is extremely helpful. It explains what preaching looks like, how it differs from lectures, essays, and expositions. It is a



message from God, and it must convey not just some truth but the burden of the Lord to the heart. That is the reason for application. Expanding on that basic character, chapter 5 shows how preaching must be genuine, authoritative, serious, zealous, warm, urgent, lovingly persuasive, and powerful. This is to achieve a sermon that is both enlightening and moving. Chapter 8 elaborates these character themes – at times, I think, overstating the case.

A calling? In Chapter 6 the author argues that the preacher must be both able, and called to the task; thus making it wrong to suggest that any Christian may preach. Unfortunately the reasoning is not supported Scripturally and thus the point made is weak. This leaves some doubt that the Scripture requires an inward mystical call described as a “spiritual consciousness of pressure” (p103). But these are deep waters beyond our scope here.

Significant preparation required: Chapters 9 through 12 talk about the preparation for a sermon. Chapter 11 is a good caution to anyone wanting to lightly take up preaching as a job, and is intimidating to any who have to preach or even present a smaller Bible talk. It recommends extensive knowledge of the Bible, reading of theology, preaching, church history, apologetics, etc. The value of these is clear, but it is a life-long task.

Shaping a sermon: Chapters 10 and 11 very practically and helpfully talk about preparing and shaping the sermon itself: the main point, the original context, the outline and the flesh on the bones. Chapter 12 tries to strike a balance in the use of communication devices: humour, illustrations and eloquence. And then chapter 13 gives some good advice from an experienced pastor on common pitfalls.

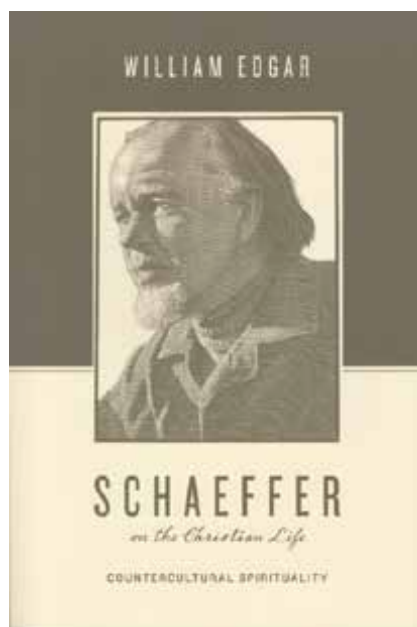
Pitfalls and wrong pressure: The discussion of pitfalls culminates in chapter 14 about the dangers of calling for decisions. This chapter is really about exerting wrong kinds of pressure on the hearers, and it helpfully concludes that the appeal of the sermon must be in the truth itself. Any other pressure by emotion or guilt must arise out of the truth of what is presented or it may be false and cheapen God’s own work through it in the heart. This harks back again to the book’s original premise that preaching is by *nature* the presenting of God’s glorious, saving truth to darkened minds and dead hearts.

Highlights: Chapters 4, 10, and 11 are helpful in very practical ways. I would recommend these chapters to any elder involved in the oversight or evaluation of preaching. These chapters alone are worth the price of the book. Finally, the overarching perspective that **preaching, is conveying God’s burden** is a very helpful way to think about preaching for both preacher and listener because it prevents side-tracking from God’s passion.

Schaeffer on the Christian Life: Countercultural Spirituality

by William Edgar
Crossway, 2013. Paperback, 206 pages, list price \$17.99.

Reviewed by OPC pastor



Larry E. Wilson

It is all too easy to judge figures from the past as if they should have known what we now know (with 20/20 hindsight). This is no less true of Francis Schaeffer, who figures – in a checkered way – in our own church’s history. His was not the last word on any subject. But William Edgar, in *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, shows that God used Schaeffer in his time and that he did say many things that are still helpful today.

Edgar was converted by Schaeffer and experienced his ministry at L’Abri (as he relates in this book), and also studied (and teaches) at Westminster Theological Seminary. This enables Edgar to sort out Schaeffer’s complex relationships with Machen, Van Til, McIntyre, and others. He is also able to clarify (and sometimes correct) Schaeffer’s unique

lingo, so that its essentially Reformed substance is more apparent.

In his endorsement, Os Guinness rightly calls this “an objective but affectionate portrait.” Edgar sought to portray Schaeffer not only with gratitude and love, but also “warts and all.” This book is well written and down-to-earth enough for the average person to enjoy and profit from.

Schaeffer on the Christian Life consists of three main parts. Part 1, “The Man and His Times,” recounts the genesis and growth of L’Abri. It surveys Schaeffer’s overlapping history with our own, which – to put it mildly – is a bit knotty. That knotty history turned out, however, to play a significant role. It led to a spiritual crisis. Schaeffer became convicted that he was judgmental and unloving, and that he lacked “reality” in his walk with the Lord and his people.

Schaeffer’s repentance gave rise to the emphases explained in Part 2, “True Spirituality.” Edgar discusses sermons and lectures that Schaeffer gave (some of which were later published as the True Spirituality), calling attention to the present supernatural working of Christ in a believer’s life. Schaeffer believed that this was at the heart of everything that he did at L’Abri and beyond.

In Part 3, “Trusting God for All of Life,” Edgar shows how Schaeffer worked out his “countercultural spirituality” with respect to prayer, guidance, affliction, church, and society. Particularly in the last two areas, Schaeffer might disappoint us. But Edgar does not swerve from recounting Schaeffer’s teaching and activities. He faces and evaluates such disappointments with integrity and charity.

This volume joins the ranks of many books on Francis Schaeffer. But as far as I know, this is the only one that hones in on Schaeffer’s message of “countercultural spirituality.” And that is a message that we need now as much as ever. Many, perceiving a sterile, functional deism in their Reformed churches, become attracted to “charismatic” approaches to the Christian life. Edgar makes clear that Schaeffer’s approach to the Christian life was nothing like that. Perceptive readers will instead recognize Schaeffer’s “true spirituality” as sincere Reformed piety, which is the antidote both to the practical unbelief and to the “super-spirituality” into which God’s people too readily lapse.



STOP “STRUGGLING” WITH PORNOGRAPHY

DON'T JUST TALK ABOUT IT – DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

by Jonathon Van Maren

I'm very frustrated. Over the last several years, I've done quite a few presentations in different Christian communities (Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta) on sexuality and pornography. Each time I've given the presentations, I've changed them quite a bit, adding things I've learned, tweaking it based on the needs of the community and the feedback I've gotten. I've gotten anonymous emails detailing the struggles of porn addicts in Christian homes and had anonymous letters stuck in the door of my home. The more I hear from the men and women and youth in the communities where these topics are presented, the harder I actually find it to speak on those topics.

Many of the things I hear make me angry.

While it is legitimate to be angry about the use of pornography – it's much worse than just lust, it is sexual cannibalism, the one-sided consumption of a human being created in God's image for personal pleasure – one must be very careful not to slip into the sin of pride. When dealing with issues of sexuality, we can never say, "Well, that's not a sin I struggle with and thus I am somehow better than those who struggle with these sins." After all, in John 7 we see how the Lord Jesus dealt with those guilty of sexual sin, after challenging those who sought to stone a woman taken "in the very act" of adultery: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." One by one, they left, "convicted by their own conscience." Jesus then said to her, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no

more." Pride, we see in the New Testament and in the ministry of the Lord Jesus, was condemned far more harshly than sexual sin. We have to assist each other in becoming free from sexual sin, not set ourselves above other people.

Don't overestimate your strength

My frustration is not simply the result of seeing just how widespread the use of pornography is, and how damaging it is. As I heard one speaker put it, those who do not think they are susceptible to sexual sin are saying they are stronger than Sampson, wiser than Solomon, and closer to God than David, the man after God's own heart. What frustrates me is that time and time again, men I speak to refuse to do what it actually takes to kick porn addiction and purge their minds of this scourge.

“Those who do not think they are susceptible to sexual sin are saying they are stronger than Sampson, wiser than Solomon, and closer to God than David.”

In all cases, pornography is by its very nature predatory, perverted, narcissistic, and in direct opposition to how God created sexuality. It is, simply, self-inflicted destruction that contributes to the external destruction of so many of the lives that make up those dehumanized pictures. This is not just our culture, our church, our own “little lust problem” or “bad porn habit.” This is people consciously deciding to consume other people like a product, destroying their own relationships, twisting their perceptions of the opposite sex, and creating neural pathways in their brain that will often prove almost impossible to subvert.

Don't just talk

Porn flourishes because people can nurture their obsession in private. No one looking over their shoulder, no one is seeing what they're seeing, and they have the opportunity to make whatever material they viewed virtually untraceable after the fact. That's why the one filter I always push for those who want to leave their porn addiction behind is an accountability filter (for example, see www.CovenantEyes.com) – a filter that sends your Internet history every week to someone who will hold you accountable for what you viewed in the week past. I recommend this type of system to everyone who tells me that they're struggling with pornography, but it never

ceases to amaze me at how many want to talk about their porn problem, but don't actually want to kick it.

If you want to stop looking at porn, sign up for an accountability filter, and make your accountability partner – the person receiving your weekly history – your pastor, a church leader, one of your parents, your wife, your sister. Do you really think that you'll browse some filthy porn site if your minister, or a church elder, or your mother or wife, will see at the end of the week what you've looked at? Perhaps in some cases, there will be slip-ups. But it's generally very unlikely. With people you love dearly and respect much “looking over your shoulder” when you're on the Internet, it's almost guaranteed that you'll view your “porn problem” quite a bit differently – imagining how your wife or mother would feel if they realized what you were looking at would change your own view immediately and drastically.

When I suggest this step, I'm often told it's “drastic.” No, it's not. Looking at porn is disgusting and predatory, and this solution is not at all “drastic” when put into the context of the problem. If you think that porn consumption is not a big enough deal to take “drastic” steps to get rid of it, then you haven't realized just how big of a deal it is. Yes, people can get around filters. You can decide to take one of your devices (cell phone, iPad) off of the accountability filter. But that's a choice – a choice to continue the sexual consumption of other human beings. You don't just “fall” into looking at porn.

Let me explain: I smoked cigarettes for close to ten years. For me to “fall into” smoking cigarettes again, I would have to get in my car, drive to the store, purchase the pack, take a cigarette out, and then light it. There are at least five conscious decisions that take place before I “fall into” smoking cigarettes, and am “struggling” with it again.

The same applies to watching or looking at pornography again. You have to go home, or someplace where you can be alone, boot up your laptop or device, log on, search for whatever porn you're “struggling” with, and then view it. There are multiple decisions taking place here. While pornography addiction is incredibly powerful, you do not simply “fall into” viewing porn again when you're trying to kick the habit. You make a series of decisions that result in you viewing porn. You may be addicted, but you're not helpless. And

I do get frustrated when I hear from guys that they're still “struggling,” but they still haven't taken the drastic steps necessary to kick this habit. I'm sorry, you only get to say you're “struggling” if you're actually taking all of the necessary steps to get free.

Conclusion

Sexual sin is, in this day and age, one of the most common and destructive of sins. I understand that many people get hooked as the result of simply stumbling upon imagery on the Internet, or being exposed to it by friends, or even, in many cases, being exposed to it at a very young age in the home. But there are ways to free yourself from this addiction. There are people who want to help you get free of it, and people who won't judge you or think that they are somehow better. To say to someone struggling with sexual sin that those who struggle with different sins are somehow better would be to defy what the New Testament tells us. But you do have a responsibility to cease this destructive and disgusting habit. The help is available. The choice is yours.

You can download an accountability filter at www.CovenantEyes.com. This article was first published in January 2014, on the ReformedProlifer.com blog, then in Reformed Perspective in April 2014 and is reprinted here with permission.

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Religious affiliation in decline in New Zealand

According to a New Zealand Herald article on 10 April this year new research shows that New Zealand is one of three countries where the non-religious are projected to outnumber the religious by the year 2050.

In 35 years New Zealand will join the Netherlands and France as having a majority group who have no affiliation to any religion – referring to atheists, agnostics and those who do not identify with a religion.

By contrast, there will be an increase in Christianity and a steep rise in Muslim populations in most other countries.

See more at: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11430295

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Islamic State activates operation in Pakistan

by Katey Hearth

March 24, 2015

Pakistan (MNN) – We’ve been telling you about the Islamic State’s presence in Pakistan for months. Now, ISIS is officially launching its terror campaign.

Before and after bombing a Shi’ite mosque on Friday, the Islamic State handed out hundreds of notices on official ISIS letterhead. National pastors shared a copy of one with *Forgotten Missionaries International’s* Bruce Allen.

“You must embrace Islam or be ready to be killed.’ That is the message going out in Pakistan in recent hours from ISIS,” he reports.

Believers from Youhanabad are already on the run.

Youhanabad

Translated as “John’s Land” (named for the John of the Gospels, Allen says), Youhanabad is reportedly the largest Christian community in Lahore, Pakistan.

“Youhanabad is about 300,000 people; 97% of the people are Christian,” says Allen. “80% of the population has fled—they’ve left the city. Some are staying with relatives in other towns while others have just left.”

Those remaining in the city are likely

staying close to loved ones who survived last week’s attack, Allen adds. The death toll is now up to 44, and approximately 20 victims are on life-support in the hospital.

FMI’s National Director in Pakistan, Nehemiah, is on the ground in Youhanabad and has been sharing regular updates with Allen.

“I know some stories now from the survivors of the blast, the people who have lost loved ones in the attack,” Allen shares. One of those stories centers on a young man serving as a church security guard.

“He saw the suicide bomber coming, and he pulled him back out from the church area so the blast would occur more in the street [instead of within the church],” Allen says.

“He was the sole provider of income.... He lives with his parents, along with many other siblings. They’re dealing with the emotional loss of a son or a brother, as well as with the loss of income.”

Violent terrorist attacks like this one have long-term, traumatic effects, especially on young children.

“They do not speak for weeks or months,” shares Allen.

“It’s not because there was some physical trauma to their vocal cords, but emotionally and mentally their psyche has just been so damaged that they cannot speak.”

FMI Pakistan

Forgotten Missionaries International (FMI) exists to support indigenous pastors in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan who are telling unreached people groups about Christ and planting churches in these communities.

Because they focus on unreached, usually rural, communities, FMI-supported Gospel workers have been largely unaffected by terrorist attacks targeting Christians. But, that doesn’t mean the national believers are unprepared.

“They’re coming to grips with that [the ISIS operation], and they’re leading their congregations through Bible study saying, ‘This is how Christ wants us to respond to our enemies. This is how we prepare for opposition. This is the hope

that Christ gives us,’” Allen shares.

“Someday in the future—maybe not too far in the future – if the threats of the Islamic State are realized, if they take over the country, the Christians that live there will have a very, very difficult time.”

FMI-supported missionaries are finding ways to share Christ’s love with the families of people killed in last week’s attack.

“We want to reach out, whether it’s to Muslims or to other Christians in this society, and help nurture them,” says Allen.

Delhi protest marks 300 days of BJP in India

PM’s record: 300 days, 168 attacks on Christians

By Anto Akkara

Two dozen Christian and Muslim groups were joined by secular activists and political leaders at a protest in New Delhi on March 19 to mark 300 days in government for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party, or Indian People’s Party.

A report was circulated, which listed 168 incidents of anti-Christian violence and harassment since Modi took power, and 222 occasions of “hate speech and media campaigns” from Hindu fundamentalist outfits.

Long banners were unfurled from the podium, listing the atrocities, as the author of the report, outspoken Christian activist John Dayal, took to the stage alongside opposition party leaders and activists.

“What we have compiled is perhaps a tenth of the actual number of incidents,” said Dayal, whose report is titled, ‘300 DAYS – Documenting Hate and Communal Violence under the Modi Regime’.

“Desecration and destruction of churches, assault[s] on pastors, illegal police detention of church workers, and denial of Constitutional rights of Freedom of Faith aggravate the coercion and terror unleashed in campaigns to [force converts to Christianity to return to Hinduism],” states the report.

Since May 2014 – when the BJP, under Modi’s leadership, assumed the mantle of the Indian government after



“You must embrace Islam or be ready to be killed.” (Photo courtesy of FMI)

its landslide victory – “there has been a marked shift in public discourse” on several counts, Dayal notes.

“Mr. Modi came into office riding a promise of development, his election campaign fuelled by unbridled hate against Muslims and Christians. Development remains a mirage, but the hate has fuelled violence across the country.”

Dayal told World Watch Monitor that, in total, there have been over 600 cases of violence, 168 targeting Christians and the rest against Muslims.

“We have not yet [received] the list of atrocities on Muslims,” said Dayal, who is also the spokesperson for the United Christian Forum, which tracks atrocities against Christian minorities.

“There has been a relentless foregrounding of communal identities [by Hindu nationalists], a ceaseless attempt to create a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them,’” the report adds.

“Hate statements by Union [federal] and state ministers, threats by Members of Parliament, state politicians, and cadres in saffron caps or Khaki shorts [symbols that have come to be associated with the Hindu nationalist movement, Hindutva] resonate through the landscape. But, most cases go unreported, unrecorded by police.

“The Prime Minister refuses to reprimand his Cabinet colleagues, restrain the members of his party or silence the Sangh Parivar [Hindu fundamentalists] which claims to have propelled him to power in New Delhi.”

“I am standing before you not as a Christian but as a citizen of the country. The state of affairs is dangerous,” said Archbishop Emeritus Vincent Concessao of Delhi, addressing the protesters after the report’s release. “We have to raise our voices against what is happening.”

“The attacks on minorities have a larger agenda,” said Digvijaya Singh, a senior leader of the Congress party that led two successive governments before the BJP assumed power.

“This is a question of ideologies. A fascist ideology is trying to replace the secular ideology of the nation,” said Singh, who is also General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee.

Ali Anwar, a socialist member of the Indian Parliament from eastern Bihar state, said there is a danger that India could become a fascist state in the mould of Hitler’s Germany.

“Attempts are being made to break up the people and the nation on the basis of religion. This is a threat to communal

harmony and the unity of the nation,” said Anwar.

“Christians and churches are being attacked. It is not the question of one community. Everyone is worried,” said Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, a Hindu and cabinet minister in the previous government.

“If this is the state of affairs after 300 days, Singh said, “What will be the condition after five years? The nation is not built with bricks and cement, but with the unity of minds and hearts. If the unity of the people is destroyed, there will be no progress.”

Amarjeet Kaur, National Secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress and senior leader of the Communist Party, noted that, apart from the attacks and hate crime against religious minorities, Modi’s government is trying “to replace history with [Hindu] mythology”.

While heads of historical and educational institutes have been replaced with those subscribing to Hindu nationalist agendas, attempts are being made to glorify even the man who killed Mahatma Gandhi – Nathuram Godse – known for his Hindu nationalist moorings, said Kaur, a Sikh.

Several speakers at the seven-hour protest, which took place at the Jantar Mantar demonstration area near Parliament, condemned the brutal gang-rape of a 74-year-old Catholic Mother Superior on March 14 at the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Ranaghat, 75km from Kolkata.

The gang-rape of the nun, they said, has sent shockwaves throughout India and the world.

“Protect not just cows, but human beings also,” was the opening sentence of the report, a reference to the comments of Cardinal Baselios Cleemis Thottunkal, President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, who visited the nun in hospital after she had undergone surgery.

The reference to cows came in the wake of the recent ban on the sale or consumption of beef in Maharashtra State, governed by the BJP.

PCA and EPC in response to PCUSA Marriage Definition Change

In response to the 17 May 2015 ratification by a majority of Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) presbyteries to a redefinition of marriage that allows homosexual weddings, both the Presbyterian Church in America and the Evangelical Presbyterian

Church reaffirmed their commitment to biblical marriage.

+ *Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)*

34,000 Black Churches break ties with Presbyterian Church USA

A 27 March 2015 *Charisma News* article by Anthony Evans titled “34,000 Black Churches Break Ties With Presbyterian Church USA” reports that the National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African-Americans, has broken fellowship with the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) because of the PCUSA’s recent ratification of a constitutional change to the definition of marriage that allows for homosexual marriages.

NBCI President the Rev. Anthony Evans commented: “NBCI and its membership base are simply standing on the Word of God within the mind of Christ. We urge our brother and sisters of the PCUSA to repent and be restored to fellowship.”

“PCUSA’s manipulation represents a universal sin against the entire church and its members. With this action, PCUSA can no longer base its teachings on 2,000 years of Christian scripture and tradition, and call itself a Christian entity in the body of Christ. It has forsaken its right by this single wrong act.

“Apostle Paul warns us about this when he declared in Galatians 1:8 that there are those who will preach another gospel.

“For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. ... For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

“No church has the right to change the Word of God. By voting to redefine marriage PCUSA automatically forfeits Christ’s saving grace. There is always redemption in the body of Christ through confession of faith and adhering to Holy Scripture.

“In this case, PCUSA deliberately voted to change the Word of God and the interpretation of holy marriage between one man and one woman. This

is why we must break fellowship with them and urge the entire Christendom to do so as well.”

+ *Charisma News*

+ *National Black Church Initiative*

PCUSA Church ordains first married lesbian couple as ministers

A 22 March 2015 *The Christian Post* article by Anugrah Kumar titled “PCUSA Church Ordains First Married Lesbian Couple as Ministers, Days after Denomination’s Marriage Amendment” reports that just five days after a majority of Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) presbyteries voted to change the PCUSA Constitution’s definition of marriage to include homosexual marriage, Kaci Clark-Porter and Holly, a lesbian couple who “married” three years ago, on 22 March 2015 became the first homosexual couple to be jointly ordained as ministers for respectively the First and Central Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware, and the Big Gay Church which operates at First and Central.

While in seminary in their twenties, the women “came out” and divorced their husbands.

+ *The Christian Post*

US ban on dismemberment of unborn babies should be considered in Australia

22 Apr 2015 | *Written by MCD Editor*

Moves by Oklahoma and Kansas to ban the abortion practice of dismembering unborn children should be considered in Australia, according to the Australian Christian Lobby.

Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin recently signed the Unborn Child Protection From Dismemberment Abortion ACT which prevents abortion practitioners from tearing unborn babies limb from limb. This follows Kansas passing similar laws earlier this month.

According to the Oklahoma and Kansas legislation:

“‘Dismemberment abortion’ means, with the purpose of causing the death of an unborn child, knowingly dismembering a living unborn child and extracting such unborn child one piece at a time from the uterus through the use of clamps, grasping forceps, tongs, scissors or similar instruments that, through the convergence of two rigid levers, slice, crush or grasp a portion of the unborn

child’s body in order to cut or rip it off.”

ACL spokeswoman Wendy Francis said abortion was a bad option for a woman with an unsupported pregnancy and the practice of dismemberment of their unborn baby would be abhorrent to most women.

“It is very difficult to understand why Australia continues to allow this practice which is now banned in two states of the US.

“We can do a better job of providing real choices for women who find themselves with an unsupported pregnancy,” Ms Francis said.

Some scientists believe unborn babies feel pain as early as 20 weeks¹ yet dismemberment and late term abortion are allowed without the administration of pain relief.

In Victoria and Tasmania abortion on demand is allowed to birth and medical practitioners are outlawed from exercising their conscience in not referring a woman to an abortion practitioner.

Ms Francis said all Australian taxpayers assist dismemberment and late term abortion practices through their Medicare levy.

¹ See more at: <http://www.mychristiandaily.com/index.php/aus/172-news-item-4-australia-nz/14197-us-ban-on-dismemberment-of-unborn-babies-should-be-considered-in-australia#sthash.qjWWuie0.dpuf>

WorldWatch Monitor – Catching Our Eye

Migrants fear home, not death

Another 700 Africans attempting to reach Europe by boat are feared dead after their boat sank yesterday (19 April) 60 miles off the Libyan coast.

At the time of writing, just 28 had been rescued by the Italian coastguard, and 24 bodies recovered.

Record numbers of would-be migrants have drowned in European waters this year, following the EU’s decision not to replace the Italian-run operation, Mare Nostrum, which saved 100,000 lives in 2014 but was thought to be lining the pockets of smugglers and only increasing the flow of migrants.

But the flow has not subsided.

Collins Ima, a 23-year-old Nigerian, told RFI that, after working in Libya for 11 months without pay, he was so desperate to reach Europe that he didn’t care if he lived or died.

“Either I was going to die, or I would survive,” he said. “I thank God [that I survived].”

As pressure mounts on the EU to reconsider an alternative to Mare Nostrum,

Prolife facts

It is likely that most of the population, including euthanasia supporters, would be completely unaware that the proposed legislation by the NZ Voluntary Euthanasia Society contains clauses that would allow anyone over the age of 18 to request assisted suicide, based on perceived insurmountable mental or physical difficulty. NZ already has a problem with teenage suicide. It is not disputed that suicide can be linked to a perception of insurmountable difficulty in the circumstances the individual is facing at that time. Where, rather, is the help? In 1992 the World Medical Association stated that “physician-assisted suicide is unethical, and must be condemned by the medical profession.” A patient’s right to decline medical treatment remains in place. One of the co-founders of the 2002 Netherland’s euthanasia law reform, Theo Boer, served as a member of one of the supervising regional panels. However, he has now recanted his support for any euthanasia law. Seven years ago, Professor Boer argued that a “good euthanasia law” would produce relatively low numbers of deaths. He now recognises that the very existence of a euthanasia law turns assisted suicide from a last resort into a normal procedure. (UK DailyMail July 9, 2014). The Netherland’s euthanasia death rate had doubled within six years, and was expected to treble by 2014. For more information on pro-life issues, phone Voice for Life on (09)4430995 or visit www.voiceforlife.org.nz.

one smuggler told The Guardian he had not even heard of the now-defunct rescue operation, and that migrants were not concerned about whether or not they would be rescued.

"I've not heard of [Mare Nostrum]. What is that – from 2009?" he said. "Many people would go on the boats, even if they didn't have any rescue operations."

Which begs the question: just how unbearable must be the lives of these migrant hopefuls?

In 2013, WWM published a report after another boat sinking in which more than 200 migrants drowned – 90 per cent of whom were thought to be Christians from Eritrea and Ethiopia who were

fleeing persecution or conflict at home.

"Scratch beneath the surface and for many of the migrants, their stories are not only of wanting a better life. Often they will be of fleeing persecution or conflict at home, and paying their life savings to smugglers who promise their passage to the safety of European shores," WWM reported at the time.

Sources: BBC, The Guardian, RFI

Iraq Christians 'lost everything'

Iraqi Christians have "lost everything", according to the so-called 'Vicar of Baghdad', Canon Andrew White.

"We have been through incredible

persecution. So many of our people have been killed," said the former pastor of St. George's Church in Baghdad, speaking in London yesterday (19 April).

"My people have lost everything. But as one of my young people said, when asked why she looked so happy ... Once you've lost everything, Jesus is all you have left."

White, who said Iraqi Christians have fled to neighbouring countries en masse, finally left himself last year, after acknowledging his own life was at risk.

"Basically, I'm more use alive than dead," he said in November last year, as reported in the *Huffington Post*. White is now based in Jordan, having first relocated to Jerusalem.

Focus on home

South Island Presbytery Short Report

The South Island Presbytery met on 14th March 2015 on the premises of the Reformed Church of Dovedale in Christchurch. Our chairman, the Rev. David Waldron, ably led the meeting. After the opening formalities there was opportunity to hear, from three of the churches, what the Lord is doing amongst them.

Dunedin reported that the preaching of the Word was being well received and that people continue to grow under the means of grace. There is great encouragement with increased attendance at corporate worship services, with a healthy number of university students coming to them this academic year. There is also an increase in the numbers of young families, and covenant children born into the church, as well as growth in maturity of the young men in the congregation.

Christchurch reported great thanks to the Lord for the blessings he has given to them. The session has started a number of new initiatives: each session member is discipling another man in the congregation, there is an informal Q&A time after evening worship, sermon content is rotated between evening and morning worship, and the congregation is being encouraged to encourage other members

to attend evening worship. The delegates enthusiastically listed many items of thanksgiving to God. However, like many of our South Island congregations, they continue to plead to God for him to raise up much needed men, zealous for the gospel and able to serve as leaders in the church.

Bishoptdale reported the Lord's goodness to their congregation. Many people are speaking to one another about the sermons and services after worship. There continues to be a number of children born to the congregation as well as couples getting married. God continues to send them regular visitors and new people. The session is also heartened by so many in the congregation being willing to serve and desirous to see the growth of God's kingdom.

After each report some time was spent in prayer for the individual congregations.

The Rev. Robert van Wichen gave a report on the work of the Overseas Mission Board. We were told about the heavy work load of the missionaries in Papua New Guinea and the need for prayer for them. As a presbytery we must soon start the process of appointments for the Board in view of its move to the South Island. As always, the report was helpful in giving some idea of what is going on within the OMB.

Our youth liaison, the Rev. Andrew de Vries, reported on the postpone-

ment of the Easter Youth Camp due to the unavailability of a speaker. This was met with some disappointment from the delegates. Realizing our responsibility to the committee and campers, the Presbytery appointed a committee to work through the repercussions of this news.

The Christchurch delegates brought a proposal for a Preaching/Word of Edification Training Group. The concept of a Training Group is to provide an active learning environment for ministers of the Word, and those training for ordained ministry. There would also be opportunity to learn for those actively delivering a word of exhortation as part of evangelistic outreach into prisons, community and overseas mission fields, camps and Bible Study groups. The Presbytery encouraged the Christchurch delegates to pursue this initiative further.

At the request of the Bishoptdale session, the Presbytery approved a committee to evaluate Mr Andre Posthuma as a student for the ministry. Andre is currently doing an internship in the Reformed Church of Bishoptdale, studying three days a week through the RTC and two days working in the life of the church. We thank the Lord for this desire in the heart of Andre and look forward to the committee's report at the next presbytery meeting.

Reporter Erik Stolte

Christian schools in Mbale

The Reformed Church of Silverstream has had an association with the Knox Theological College in Mbale, Uganda over a period of 10 years or more.

The congregation have had the opportunity to send Mr Barry James and his wife Anne on several occasions to teach in their theological college and preach in the churches of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Uganda. On other occasions Messers Archbald and Rogers have been able to go on a limited tour to teach and preach while the OPCUSA missionaries have been either on furlough or needed

to leave due to family commitments.

As a result of such visits and the work that has been carried out, good relationships have been built, which has opened up opportunities for further support of the Christian community in that area.

Last year the Silverstream congregation had the opportunity to give financial aid to help support teachers in four Christian primary schools in the Mbale area. This came about through contact with the OPC's missionary, the Rev. Eric Tuininga, who not only teaches in the theological college, but also has come to see the needs that

exist in such a community as Mbale.

Following is a summary of progress in the schools that was sent to Silverstream by Mr Tuininga, who was accompanied on his visits by Mr Mark Bube and Mr Nathan Trice as they visited three of the four schools in the district. **(Ed.)**

Eric Tuininga writes ...

Kachonga school has a trained retired teacher who is also an elder in the congregation, who looks like he knows what he is doing. He had the class well organised and was using sticks and bottlecaps to teach addition. The students



Class from Kachonga.

seemed to be learning. They have nursery and P1. The sanctuary is divided in half. Each class has a blackboard, and all the students had notebooks. The nursery students were copying shapes from the

board into their notebooks. Kaiti school is full of energy and life. They have expanded up to P4 and are using three buildings – the church sanctuary (divided into two sections), a brick house next door

(two rooms), and a temporary structure they put up near the church. There were many students, and many teachers. They seemed to keep records well. For example, the record book indicated

that all students were required to bring 10kg of posho and 5kg of beans, and most had done so. They seem to have a competent and well-organised deputy head master. The students all had notebooks, and there were some textbooks for teacher use. I was impressed with what I saw in Kaiti. They seem serious, dedicated, and full of zeal. I'm sure it could be blessed by advice and coaching on ways to improve.

We did not visit the Kama school, but I hope to do so. Knowing the organization and energy of the Kama congregation, I have hopes for that school. With help from some Japanese friends, they have four classrooms constructed (mud and sticks with iron sheet roofs), and a small football field.

In Christ,
-Eric

(report has been abridged. Ed.)



Students and teachers from Kaiti.



A class in Kakoli.

Photos by Mr Mark Bube