

faith in
focus

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How shall the young direct
their way...?

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Editorial

ATTENTION ALL YOUNG PEOPLE! "How shall the young direct their way? What light shall be their perfect guide? Thy Word will safely lead, If in its wisdom they confide" These are the opening words to Psalter Hymnal selection 237 (psalm 119). Familiar words that remind us that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. At all times the Christian man and woman must be governed by God's will as revealed in His Word. That means our thoughts, words and deeds must be in conformity to God's Word – no easy matter even for the most sanctified among us.

Discerning God's will for our lives in matters of faith and life are relatively cut-and-dried. Right? All we have to do is read the Scriptures and learn to apply God's truth to our lives in a practical way. It is as simple as that!

What about things that are not mentioned explicitly in the Scriptures, specific choices that young men and women need to make? Should I get married, join the Air Force or Army, become a doctor or nurse, study linguistics, become an engineer, study for the ministry ...? The list could go on. For our young people today their late teens and early twenties can be a time which is both confusing and frustrating without the right guidance. In the years of my youth, young men and women also struggled with these questions. I am thankful for the sanctified common sense of my parents, which helped me to make some good choices and secure a vocation after leaving school.

Our contributors look at the question of knowing God's will for our lives by applying what the Scriptures say about these things – and throw some very sanctified practical suggestions into the mix.

Mr Daniel Wilson shows the wrong way and the right way of discerning God's will.

Mr Michael Flinn gives some insight into how the book of Proverbs may help in discerning God's will.

Mr Julius Ehmann reviews *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach To Finding God's Will*, by Kevin DeYoung. Mrs Liana Havelaar and Esther Smith join forces to review the "Big Guns" on guidance in Boice's *Foundations of the Christian Faith* and Packer's *Knowing God*.

For our Reformation Day articles, Mr Leo de Vos writes on Martin Luther and his conversion and Mr Wes Bredenhof informs us about the other confession of Guido de Brès.

Mrs Sally Davey encourages us to use our influence well, as Selina, Countess of Huntingdon did throughout her life.

Mrs Harriet Haverland keeps us up to date with events which shape the day-to-day lives of our churches.

Mr Graeme Zuidema reflects on the practicalities of why men thinking of pastoral ministry should consider a ministry internship.

Cover image: Mrs Sally Davey

Images: p3 Mrs Sally Davey

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How shall the young direct their way ... (1)

GUIDANCE:

Practical principles for finding God's will

Daniel Wilson

Have you ever heard the story about the woman trying to discern God's will? She would frequently open her Bible to a random place and blindly place her finger on the page. She read the verse where her finger landed, and then interpreted that verse as being God's voice speaking to her directly. Well, one day, this woman needed some urgent guidance. Instead of seeking godly advice, or making a decision based on biblical principles, she resorted to her old standby method... However, this time she got the shock of her life. She flipped open her Bible and placed her finger on Matthew 27:5, "So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself." Obviously, this couldn't be God's message for her, so the woman tried again. This time she found Luke 10:37b, "Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'" By this time, the woman was quite disturbed, and she frantically tried to get some more clarity from her Bible. But she was thrown into despair when, on that third time, her finger landed on John 13:27b, "What you are about to do, do quickly."

For all I know, that story is fictional, but it realistically illustrates how superstitious and silly Christians can be when they are trying to find out God's will. I know a young man who tries to find God's will in this exact fashion. When I shared this story with him, he replied, "God would never actually do that to one of His children. He would never let that woman turn to those three verses in a row." I think God **would** give someone an experience like that – if only to show them how foolish they were being! My friend was flabbergasted and asked me, "How could a loving Father do that to His child? Would **you** do that to one of *your* children?" I believe his last question was intended as a rhetorical proof and conclusion... but I honestly replied,

"Yes! I would certainly do that to one of my boys in order to show them that was NOT the way to find God's will!"

I can almost see some of you squirming in your seat as you read that conversation... you are thinking, "But if God allowed that lady to read those verses, what would happen if she went out and hanged herself?! Wouldn't God have been responsible for her suicide?!" No, He wouldn't be responsible – she would be! You see, most of us would agree that if we randomly placed our finger on 2 Samuel 13:14 (where Amnon raped his half-sister) that God is not telling us to

do the same. In fact, even most superstitious Christians would automatically start over, and try to shake better advice out of their magic eight-ball, I mean, Bible. And that goes to show that such Christians recognise that there is a standard by which Christians must judge any evaluation of God's will. The clear teachings of God's Word define what is and is not acceptable in the life of a believer, and that is a principle that you most likely already know and practise!

Perhaps that example doesn't particularly apply to you... Perhaps you aren't one to be superstitious in the way you

“Not every opportunity or “open door” is a valid door through which to walk.”



turn through the Scriptures. However, do you see the opportunities of life (open/closed doors) as God's guidance? When a new job opportunity comes or you meet a potential spouse, do you view those opportunities as God divinely leading you? On one hand, we must admit that God has sovereignly ordained that opportunity to be there, but on the other hand we must be careful how we interpret God's providence. Just because an opportunity is available, doesn't mean it is the best option or even a biblical option. For example, there will be occasions when you have the perfect opportunity to steal from your employer or friend. They might leave a large amount

look at the Biblical principles of finding God's will.

Before we can ask **how** to find God's will, we first must ask, "What is 'God's Will?'" There are two common uses for that term: 1) God's declared/revealed will (*ie the Bible*); 2) God's secret will (*whatsoever comes to pass in time/space*).

God's revealed will is His Law and Gospel. The Bible gives us God's standards and expectations for mankind – especially for His redeemed people. This is the part of God's will which we can know for certain. The Bible even defines God's will for us in two ways. *First*: we must repent and believe in the Gospel – that is the greatest aspect of God's re-

all the words of this law." Therefore, we must base our lives completely on God's revealed will – not speculation about His secret providential plan. Part of the reason we are so worried about "finding God's will" is because we misunderstand His providence. God doesn't have two wills for you. There isn't (as some wrongly say) a "best life now" version of God's will, and then a "you screwed it up" version of God's will! Sadly, too many teach that you can "fall out of God's will for your life." No, you might disobey God and receive God's just chastisement for your errors, but you can't escape God's overarching providential will for your life. If you get married, then you know for certain that God intended you to marry. It may have been an unwise choice, but you can't divorce your spouse or annul the marriage because you came to the conclusion that you were "out of God's will." That kind of approach to the Christian life will result in all manner of sin and dishonour to the name of Christ!

So, how are you supposed to find or follow God's will for your life? The most fundamental thing is to base your life decisions on God's Word through faith in Christ. If you aren't a Christian, then you have no hope of finding God's guidance for life's decisions. You must first and foremost obey God's clear guidance to repent and believe. Only then will you have the presence of God's Spirit in your heart/life, and through the Holy Spirit the Bible will come alive to your understanding. Through the Spirit, you will gain wisdom from God's Word to guide in life's decisions.

Some of you are thinking, "OK, that is nice and all... but the title of the article is 'Practical Principles for Finding God's Will.'" Where are the practical principles?" Good question. Up to now we have merely been preparing the ground and laying the foundation – now it is time to build the house. We most often recognise our need for God's guidance when we are faced with a particular question, such as: Which job should I take? Which university should I attend? Which man/woman should I marry? Which house/car should I buy? And so on... The best way to make such decisions is to use the paradigm of the "three legged stool" of God's will. A three legged stool is an ideal illustration, because if you remove any of the 3 legs, the stool falls over. The three legs are: 1) Biblical Principles; 2) Opportunities, Abilities and Desires; 3) Godly Counsel

“There will be times when you have several biblical, well-advised options. In such situations, you can confidently choose whichever option you want, knowing that God is in control.”

of money on the desk; there are no cameras, no one watching... they may have even told you that it is an unknown amount of money. You have the perfect opportunity to steal, and yet, from God's Law you know that you shouldn't steal! So, is that a God-given opportunity or not? Yes, God put you there, but not to encourage/tempt you to steal (See James 1:13-15). I use such an obvious example to help you understand that not every opportunity or "open door" is a valid door through which to walk. Sometimes, God places us in situations with the intention of refining and strengthening our faith as we resist that tempting opportunity (see Genesis 39 & Judges 3:1ff).

Are **you** superstitious in the way you seek God's will? Do you believe God gives new revelation through the way you read the Bible, or by the opportunities available to you? Do you believe that God speaks to you in a still small voice in your head? If you are quiet enough, can you hear God leading you? All of these questions are intended to highlight any errors in your thinking BEFORE we

vealed will (see Mark 3:35, John 6:28-29, Gal. 1:4, 1 John 2:17-25). *Second*: as believers, we must humbly and gratefully obey God's law (see Rom. 12:2, Eph. 6:6, 1 Thess.4:1-8, Heb. 10:36, 1 Peter 2:15ff).

God's secret will is His specific plan for all things – that plan which He created before the foundation of the world which He is implementing in time/space. There is no "Plan B" with God. God is in control of **all** things (Psalms 104,105). What man intends for evil, God intends for good (see the life of Joseph, Gen. 50:20). He can work all things together for the good of His people (Rom.8:28).

When we come to making decisions in life, we ask: "What is God's will for my life?" We are often asking God to reveal His providential plan to us in some way. But God has already told us that we can't know His secret will. In Deuteronomy 29:29, God says, "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow*

and General Wisdom. The Seat (which holds everything together) is Prayer.

The first leg: biblical principles.

To rightly evaluate this first “leg,” you must ask questions of God’s Word – such as: What does God’s Word say about this decision? Is this action/opportunity forbidden by God’s Law? Are there any questions about my stewardship of finances, time, or other resources? Can this action/work be done to the glory of God? If this *is* a valid option, are there any *other* options that are more God-honouring? What does the Bible say about my motivations/goals with this decision? Such questions can be difficult to ask/answer if you don’t know God’s Word very well! This is yet another encouragement to be diligent in studying the Bible daily. Furthermore, as we will see in a moment, this “leg” of the stool is connected to both of the other legs.

The second leg: opportunities, abilities, and desires.

Sadly, most people place far too much emphasis on “open/closed doors” in life. However, as we have already seen, not all opportunities are valid. Neither are all abilities valid. Some people have great skills in lying and fighting, but that doesn’t mean they were destined by God to be a criminal! Romans 7, James 1 and

James 4 are all passages which show that we can’t trust our desires either. Therefore, when we evaluate our opportunities, abilities, and desires we must first test them by the Word of God. Before making important decisions, write down biblical reasons why you should: take/deny a particular opportunity; cultivate/mortify a particular ability, encourage/repent of particular desires. Only count as valid those options which have not been struck down by God’s Word.

The third leg: godly counsel and/or general wisdom.

AFTER doing all the hard work of searching the Scriptures, and evaluating your opportunities, abilities and desires – take all that information to a number of trusted Christians for advice. Depending on how important the decision is, you should talk to your elder/pastor, your parents, your siblings, respected older members at church, and your wise friends. There is safety in asking for Christian advice (see Proverbs 1:5, **11:14**, 12:15, 19:20-21, 24:6). Be careful not to choose people who you know will agree with your decisions. Try to ask for advice from those who think differently, or who are much older. You can learn a lot by asking members of another generation, because they don’t have the same blind-spots and prefer-

ences as the current generation.

As you work through each of these “legs,” you must bathe the whole matter in prayer. Pray over God’s Word. Pray over your evaluation of your situation. Pray about whom to approach for advice, and then pray for wise advice. And after you have done all of the above, pray again for wisdom to make the right decision. There will be times when you have several well-advised biblical options. In such situations, you can confidently choose whichever option you want, knowing that God is in control.

Obviously, you won’t always have time to work extensively through this whole process, but the more you approach life’s questions from this vantage point, the faster and more wisely you will live! So, avoid all types of superstition and Pentecostalism, and seek God’s revealed will in His Word. I have endeavoured to cover only the most important elements of following God’s will, and I want to leave you with one final encouragement from Proverbs 3:5-6: prayerfully acknowledge and honour the Lord in all your decisions, and He will make your paths straight!

Mr Daniel Wilson is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Nelson.

How shall the young direct their way ... (2)

God’s will as expressed in Proverbs

Michael Flinn

My father used to say: “You can’t put an old head on young shoulders”. As I was growing up, I remember Dad would shake his head and encourage my mother with this particular pearl of wisdom when she was frustrated with the childish thinking and behavior of my siblings and me.

Dad was right. You can’t put an old head on young shoulders. But you can try. You can try to impart wisdom to a younger generation by speaking to children and young people about the things of life and about the way God would

have us respond to circumstances and the views and lifestyles of others. This is precisely what wisdom literature in the Bible is designed to do, not just for young people but for all, whether younger or older.

There is an important distinction to take note of here. Wisdom in the Bible is not the same thing as knowledge. Imagine an encyclopedia that contains factual information about all sorts of subjects, fields of study, and periods of history. If you could memorize that encyclopedia from start to finish, and then call up that information at will, there is no doubt that you would be

a very *knowledgeable* person. But you would not necessarily be a *wise* person. In the Bible, a wise person is one who knows how to make decisions in life that are pleasing to God and consistent with the truth of God’s Word. Wisdom is about what constitutes righteousness as opposed to wickedness in any given situation or set of circumstances. It is about how we are to serve the Lord in a good but fallen world.

Here is how Ecclesiastes 12:13,14¹ puts it:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear

“God’s purpose, which supersedes the purpose of every human ruler, will infallibly prevail and be worked out to his ultimate honour and glory.”

God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

It sounds such a simple prescription. If you want to be wise and make decisions that are in accordance with God’s will, fear God and keep his commandments, remembering always that God will bring every act into judgment. There you have it. Go to it. But here is one of the characteristics of wisdom literature. Profound truths are often stated in simple ways that are easy to remember and apply. In this case, the writer of Ecclesiastes, who describes himself as “the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1) has already explored what the world has to offer in terms of “wisdom” and “righteousness”. As the book unfolds, it is clear that he has considered the world’s literature, pleasures, toil and ways of living, and his conclusion throughout is this: all that the world

has to offer is “vanity” or “meaningless”. Some young people are deeply attracted to the world’s thinking and ways of living. They may want to “kick against the pricks” of God’s commands, which they find stifling and constraining. But here, a wise and very experienced teacher is attempting to put an old head on young shoulders. He is saying: “I’ve been there and done that. I’ve considered all that the world has to offer in terms of thinking and ways of living and I’ve come to the inevitable conclusion that if you want to live like this, you are simply chasing after wind. Your life will be empty and void of meaning. Only God gives true meaning and significance to life, and only deep respect and honour for God and his commands will make a person righteous and wise.”

In that light, let’s consider the book of Proverbs as a source of wisdom. Walter C. Kaiser points out that proverbs are brief sayings that “possess a fullness of meaning with a wide application”. They

also have “a bit of a kick or bite to them to ensure their saltiness and continued usefulness”.² Think, for example, of the “ring of gold in a swine’s snout” as a description for a beautiful woman who lacks discretion (11:22) or the dog that returns to its vomit as a picture of the fool who repeats his folly (26:11).

Proverbs convey general principles that are applicable across a wide range of instances, but they are not unbending rules to be applied in every conceivable situation. The classic example of this last point is Proverbs 26:4-5

Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.

Here one wise saying seems to contradict another. What should we do, then? Should we answer a fool according to his folly or not? The first proverb warns against engaging with the fool on his own terms. If we enter into his argument, and we are not on our guard, we might find ourselves being persuaded that there is nothing wrong with his lifestyle. So watch out! The second proverb says that we should be prepared to correct a fool by pointing out the foolishness of his thinking or he will conclude that his own position is wise. If we say nothing, the foolish person might think that our silence means agreement with his point of view. The point is that both proverbs contain wisdom that we need to think about and apply if we want to know what God’s will is in a given situation.³

It is also important to consider the Proverbs overall, and to view particular proverbs against the teaching of Scripture as a whole. For example, Proverbs 21:1 says: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases”. It might be concluded (wrongly) from this statement that every decision that “the king” or civil leaders make necessarily meets with God’s approval because he has directed the heart of these authority figures “like a watercourse”. However, the Bible makes clear time and again that civil leaders can and do make decisions that are contrary to God’s revealed will. Think of the Pharaoh’s attempt to wipe out the Israelites by ordering that infant boys were to be killed (Exodus 1:15,16). Clearly, this directive was contrary to God’s 6th commandment, and would ultimately lead to a great judg-



ment coming on the Egyptian nation. Does this mean that the proverb is untrue? Not at all. The proverb teaches that all decisions made by civil leaders are under the sovereign control of the Lord. Heads of nations, no matter how much authority and power they seem to have to make decisions and carry them out, can never act independent of the Lord. Civil leaders are firmly in the Lord's hands and will answer to him for every decision that they make. When appealing to an authority figure, we can ask God with confidence to direct the decision made by this ruler. And even if the decision is against God's revealed will, we can rest secure that the decision is part of God's providential plan and purpose for us and for the nation. God's purpose, which supersedes the purpose of every

human ruler, will infallibly prevail and be worked out to his ultimate honour and glory. That's something to remember when dealing with those who are far more powerful than we. This gives us boldness, confidence and security no matter what the outcome is.

If we want to know what God's will is in any given situation, the book of Proverbs is a veritable goldmine. Virtually every area of life is covered.⁴ Master these, and you will have wisdom beyond your years. In other words, you can have an "old head" even on "young shoulders".

Notes

1 The book of Ecclesiastes is part of group of writings in the Bible that come under the category of "wisdom literature". Other writings in this

category are Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, and some of the psalms. The book of James in the New Testament is most like wisdom literature in terms of style and content.

2 Walter C Kaiser, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Zondervan, 1994, p. 99.

3 A modern example of this would be the English proverbs: "Look before you leap" and "He who hesitates is lost". Both sayings express wisdom, but on the surface appear contradictory.

4 Steve Voorwinde's helpful topical arrangement of the book of Proverbs, published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. lists, among many more, the following areas of life: adultery, alcohol, anger, deceit, friends and neighbours, giving, kindness, parents, pride, self-control, suretyship, work.

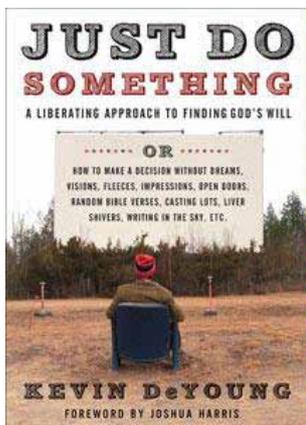
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Books in focus

Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach To Finding God's Will

by Kevin DeYoung (Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2009).

Reviewed by Julius Ehmann.



What is God's will for my life...? Am I making the right decision? What if God wants me somewhere else?

These are questions that are often on our minds. Young people, especially, face a world of opportunity and choices and have to ask themselves: what is God's will for my life? I for one am often worried and uncertain as to whether I'm making the right decisions. We want to please God and want to walk the path he has set before us – no wonder we ask God for direction in the choices we make.

But why is it so difficult, and how can we make decisions without regrets, worries and uncertainty? Here is a book that helps unravel some problems and explode some myths about discovering God's will. *Just Do Something*, written by Kevin DeYoung, brings an encouraging and liberating approach to an important matter. Kevin DeYoung is Senior Pastor of the University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan. He also wrote the book *Freedom and Boundaries*, and is coauthor of the books *Why We're not Emergent* and *Why We Love the Church* with Ted Kluck.

He begins this book by explaining the difference between God's sovereign "will of decree"; which is his foreordained, perfect plan for the whole universe including our short lives (in its smallest detail); and God's "will of desire" which he has given us through his Word. He supports this skillfully with Bible passages like Deut. 29:29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of his law." Therefore, he points out, God is not a "horoscope", telling us at every intersection which way to take. We should, rather, trust in his sovereign "will of decree", walk after his "will of desire", and simply go ahead and make our decisions.

DeYoung then goes on to deal with our day-to-day struggle in discovering God's will. It frustrates him to see so many of us waiting around for a signal from God to show us what to do. We seem to search for perfect fulfillment, and often consider too many choices. Anxious about going the wrong way or making the wrong decision, we stop in uncertainty, waiting for a sign from God. We should "stop pleading with God to show us the future, and start living and obeying like we are confident that He holds the future." (p.42)

With amusing bluntness DeYoung goes on to expose the errors in the conventional, oft-encountered ways of figuring out God's will. He points out that "God's will" or the "promptings" of the Holy Spirit even become the ground for poor choices. Waiting for them can act as an excuse for putting off hard decisions. But what should we do instead?

"Is there a better way to walk in the will of God? The answer is a resounding yes!" DeYoung finds his answers in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what will you eat or what will you drink, ... For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them

all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (p.55) Christ himself tells us here in no uncertain terms: seek God's kingdom and righteousness first; and the rest will be taken care of.

The book then takes some Pauline passages to show us that God's will is for us to grow in Christian maturity. (1. Thessalonians 4:3; 5:16-18; Colossians 1.9-12) Or; as the author summarises it: "the will of God is pretty straightforward: Be holy like Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, for the glory of God."

That's all well and good, you might think, but how does God help me now – with my constant requirement to choose? Isn't he interested in the details of my life? Answering these questions, DeYoung analyses Hebrews 1:1-2. How does God guide his people? He comes to the conclusion that God guides us by his invisible providence at all times (see also Ephesians Ch.1) according to the counsel of his will. He guided his people in the past through many means and still speaks to us today by his Son through his Spirit in the Scriptures. Furthermore, God doesn't promise to use any other way to guide us. He may still guide us extraordinarily in rare instances, but we should not expect him to. The author points out that even Paul in these extraordinary early church days mostly made his own decisions about the non-moral, day-to-day matters of his life. This discussion concludes in the chapter "The Way of Wisdom", giving further advice and insight on how to gain wisdom through "searching the Scriptures, seeking wise counsel and praying to God."

The last chapter gives very practical and helpful advice on how to apply all this in our day-to-day life, especially in our big choices, like career and marriage.

All in all the book is a concise help with a difficult issue. I especially liked DeYoung's forthright approach to the problems particularly young people (like me) have. He writes interestingly and capably, and supports his reasoned statements with Scripture. He gives heaps of practical advice and really tries to encourage the reader. Sometimes his statements can seem extreme – but that is due to his efforts to shake up the reader. For some people he might shoot over the top, but for other people the same statements may be just what they need for their encouragement.

I highly recommend this book. It's not

only for people who struggle with this matter, but also for everyone else who is interested in God's will for their life (which should be you, too!) It's a must-read for young people – and it has only 122 pages. So there is no excuse for book-phobics! Thumbs up!

Mr Julius Ehmann is an agriculture student from near Stuttgart, Germany. Over the past year he has been getting farming experience in New Zealand; and has been attending the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

The "Big Guns" on guidance

Reviewed by Liana Havelaar and Esther Smith

James Montgomery Boice's *Foundations of the Christian Faith* and J. I. Packer's *Knowing God* are both comprehensive works on the person and work of the Godhead. So what do they have to tell us about guidance?

"Knowing the Will of God" – a chapter on God's guidance from the book *Foundations of the Christian Faith* by James Montgomery Boice

(Downers Grove, Illinois, 1986)

In *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, James Montgomery Boice has written a readable systematic theology for the lay Christian. As you would expect from a systematic theology, this is a book (or rather, four books, but available in one volume!) about God – who God is, what he has done and is doing in salvation history, and how we are to relate to him.

In Book Three, Boice looks at aspects

of the Christian life. One short but very helpful chapter is entitled "Knowing the Will of God." Boice first clarifies: we cannot know God's will, in the sense of knowing his hidden purposes and plans. But we can know God's will, in the sense of knowing what pleases him. God has revealed much about that in the Bible.

Boice goes on to lay down three principles to follow when we are seeking to determine God's will in the specific circumstances of our life:

1) We must be willing to do the will of God even before we know what it is. So often the difficulty is with us: do we actually want to do what pleases God?

2) God has revealed his will in Scripture. The Bible limits our options and gives guidelines by which we may operate. But what about when it's still not clear what to do from Scripture? Boice answers this by discussing how we are not under law but under grace; how all things are permissible but not all things are helpful (for ourselves or for others); and how we should seek to choose the best.

3) We must cultivate daily and hourly fellowship with the Lord.

As we come to know God more and more through the study of his Word, and as we cultivate fellowship with him, we are following our Guide: God himself.

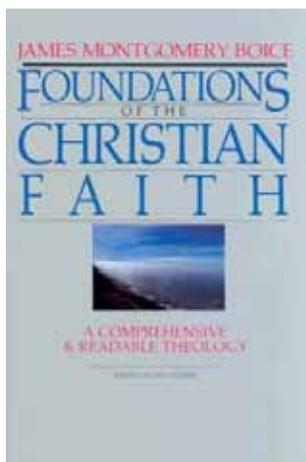
"Thou Our Guide" – a chapter on God's guidance from the book *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer

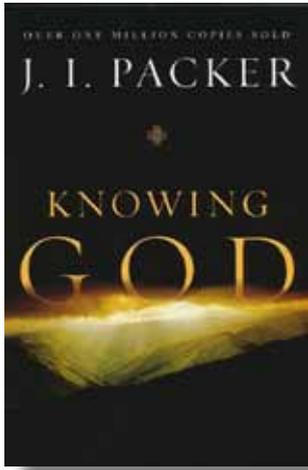
(InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1973)

J. I. Packer's *Knowing God* has been described as a "contemporary classic" and is a book many of us have on our bookshelves. Hopefully we have read it! As the title implies, Packer encourages his readers to really know who God is and how he works, dealing in a very readable way with many wonderful spiritual truths.

Packer's chapter on God's guidance is entitled "Thou Our Guide". He begins by acknowledging the topic to be difficult, and our propensity to get it wrong! Packer then calls our attention to two "foundation-facts" upon which belief in divine guidance rests. Firstly, God has a plan for us. Secondly, God is able to communicate his plan to us. Given the evidence of these two facts in Scripture, we can be confident that God will indeed guide his people.

How then do we receive guidance? Well, by knowing God. Packer writes that "the fundamental mode whereby our rational Creator guides his rational





creatures is by rational understanding and application of his written Word ... not a matter of inward promptings apart from the Word but of the pressure on our consciences of the portrayal of God's character and will in the Word, which the Spirit enlightens us to understand and apply to ourselves."¹ It is not enough therefore to search the Scriptures for yes/no answers

to choices before us, and, where one is not directly given, to turn to our inner inclinations and call it the work of the Spirit. We must earnestly seek to know God's character and will in the Word, so that we may strive to make good, godly choices for His glory.

Packer then helpfully goes on to deal with why and how things so often go wrong, particularly when it comes to choices where there is no clear right or wrong. He outlines six common pitfalls which are worthwhile considering: unwillingness to think, unwillingness to think ahead, unwillingness to take advice, unwillingness to suspect oneself, unwillingness to discount personal magnetism, and unwillingness to wait.

Packer reiterates that there are no simple answers and that "it does not follow that right guidance will be vindicated as such by a trouble-free course thereafter"². We need to continue to walk with God, treating trouble as a call to consider one's ways and yet also re-

membering that walking in God's way is not necessarily going to be a walk in the park.

Finally, Packer reminds us of our great comfort if we feel like we've got it wrong somewhere along the line. "Our God is a God who not merely restores, but takes up our mistakes and follies into his plan for us and brings good out of them."³ How gracious He is!

Putting the two chapters together

We cannot fully know God's sovereign will, but we can know God as he has revealed himself in Scripture. If we seek to know him as he reveals himself to be, we are going to learn more and more what pleases him and what we should be doing to bring glory to him, in this way being led by our loving Father.

Notes

- 1 Page 236.
- 2 Page 239.
- 3 Page 241.

The just shall live by faith: the conversion of Martin Luther

Leo de Vos

Martin Luther is one reformer whom I would have liked to have met. He was at ease having conversations with his family and students, all sitting around the table. These conversations were recorded by students as "Luther's Table Talk". Reading some of these talks, one finds the conversation colourful indeed! Luther was an earthy man; he would walk to the pulpit with manure on his boots.

A painting in the Rijksmuseum shows the reformers around a table. A burning candle pictures the way the Reformation, by the light of the Word, uncovered the darkness which had obscured the gospel. In the foreground are two prominent reformers: Luther and Calvin. God raised up Luther in the fullness of time to re-discover the gospel. *Every reformation in the church always begins with a work of reformation in the soul of him who is called to reformation. Luther's reforming was the fruit of reformation in his own heart. Luther could say, I have believed; therefore I speak.*¹ We need to look at

Luther's conversion; for only then will we understand his work of reformation.

I. Coming to the Light

Childhood and early education

To understand Luther, we must understand that his conversion was not an isolated event in his life. We can trace Luther's development in grace from his boyhood. And in tracing this work of God, we see the riches of the covenant of grace and the wonder of God's providence.

Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10th, 1483. To commemorate the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth, Dr. Robert Godfrey taught a special course on Luther at Westminster Theological Seminary in California in 1983. I was privileged to attend this course. The *National Geographic* printed an excellent article on Luther in October, 1983 and the Post-Master General of the USA issued a postage stamp commemorating Luther's anniversary in the same year.

Luther came from a peasant family, his

mother was a pious Catholic. She, especially, instilled the fear of God into her strong-willed son. Martin entered school at age five. He was a good student, learning Latin, which was basic to the curriculum. Martin had to make a mark on a slate each time he did not know the lesson or failed to obey his teacher. At the end of the week this slate was wiped clean, but only after the teacher spanked him, one blow for each mark. The student who performed the poorest had to wear a donkey mask from noon to the end of the day, the other students addressing him as a donkey.

University education and monastery

Martin entered the University of Erfurt when just seventeen years old. The curriculum was the *trivium* which included: 1) grammar (study of classical texts) 2) rhetoric (public speaking) 3) dialectic (logic). Luther became so adept at logic that he was nick-named "the Philosopher".

Four years later, in 1505, Luther entered law school. For a graduation gift his father gave him a copy of *Corpus Juris*

Civilis, the main textbook of law at the time - an expensive gift! His parents expected him to earn a law degree so he would qualify for a good position. He could then marry into a rich family, and support them in their old age.

But God was about to change their plans with His plan. Six months later Luther went home for a visit. Walking on the road to Stotternheim, he encountered an awesome thunderstorm. Thrown to ground by the force of the storm, Luther cried, *St. Ann, help me! I will become a monk.* He called upon Saint Ann for she was the patron saint of miners, his father's occupation. After returning to law school he threw a party for his friends. He then announced that they would never see him again, and gave away his possessions, including the legal text book from his father. Not long after, Luther knocked on the foreboding doors of the Black Cloister, the home of the Observant Augustinian monks in Erfurt. We should ask why Martin Luther made such a drastic change, apparently so suddenly.

Luther was a deeply religious person; and from youth on, the question often

arose in his heart, *Oh, when for once shall I become holy and do enough in order to receive the grace of God?* He sat under the penitential preaching of his day which was a continual preaching of hell and damnation. Penitential preaching placed a heavy burden of guilt on the hearer from the curse of the law, but never lifted this burden with the grace of the gospel. This abuse of preaching goes a long way to explain why Martin Luther later almost separated the law from the gospel. The church taught that the wrath of God can only be propitiated by man's good works, by holy living. His picture of God was that of an angry judge, like the picture he saw every Sunday as a boy in the stained glass window of the church of Erfurt. Here Christ was painted as in John's vision in Revelation, with a double-edged sword coming out of his mouth. He understood nothing of the grace and mercy of God for sinners.

The monastery offered peace for his tortured spirit. Even the vow to become a monk was comforting, for it was meritorious. By it one brought the highest offering to God. Just as baptism symbolises a rebirth, so becoming a monk

meant being born again to live a holy life before God.

If a monk did the very best he could do, then God would give him His grace as a reward. The thunderstorm only confirmed a decision which had been percolating long before in Luther's tortured mind.

The monk

Within the walls of the Black Cloister on the picturesque banks of the Gera River, Luther sought peace for his troubled heart. If salvation could be found in this way, Luther was determined to find it. He was one of the monks who sought to take heaven by storm. He often fasted, prayed, and slept without blankets. Sometimes when he was satisfied with himself, doubts would arise:

Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough? Of his life in the monastery Luther said:

I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.²

In the year 1510 Luther was ordered to go to Rome to settle a dispute which arose in the Augustinian order. He was excited to go, for now he had a great once-in-a-life-time opportunity to earn merit for himself and his family. We must understand the Roman Catholic system of merit and indulgences. In the Catholic system some holy men and Christ died in the black. This meant that they were better than they needed to be for their salvation. Of course, the average person died in the red! The Catholic Church taught that the Pope had the power to transfer some of that surplus merit to the average person's account. This transfer of merit was called an *indulgence*. Such a transfer was given when the receptor performed certain good works or paid a sum of cash. No one questioned whether the pope could transfer credit to remit penalties for sin on earth. For example: a pilgrim who prayed before Elector Frederick the Wise's famous relic collection in Wittenberg would have 2,112,151 years and 205 days less purgatory to suffer.³ The big question of the day was whether or not the Pope could mitigate the pangs of purgatory for those who had already died. So Luther was



Luther in 1533 by Lucas Cranach the Elder. en.wikipedia.org/wiki

busy in Rome, a treasure house of relics. While he visited all the important relics, he also saw the awful corruption of the Church. The Italian priests could say six masses when he was still on the first. Then they would scold him with "Passa, Passa"; get a move on! They mocked the sacrament: *Bread thou art and bread thou wilt remain*. When climbing the stairs to Pilate's palace doubt suddenly flooded his mind: *Who knows whether it is so?* A picture in the *National Geographic* shows the intense emotion on the faces of those who are still climbing these stairs today.

Nevertheless, at this time Luther remained still a devout son of the church. He said, "I was so drunk, yes, submerged in the pope's dogmas that I would have been ready to murder all ... who would take but a syllable from obedience to the pope".⁴

II. Struck by the Light

The Professor

After his return, Luther was transferred from Erfurt to a monastery in Wittenberg. Here, by the providence of God, Luther's break-through came. It all had to do with the sacrament of penance. One had to confess all his sins to a confessor, who would then grant him absolution. This meant that the confessor would declare his sins forgiven. Luther confessed daily, sometimes for hours at a time. His confessor grew weary, and finally told him to commit a serious sin worth confessing. Luther's problem was that he could not remember all of his sins.

He realised that he did not even know all of his sins. He was like the Psalmist who pleaded:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24)*

Luther discussed his problems and concerns with Johann Von Staupitz, vicar of the Augustinian order and his confessor. Like all effective ministers, Von Staupitz, himself, was aware of the struggles of the soul. He thought that Luther was dwelling on himself too much, so he urged him to seek forgiveness in the blood of Christ. But this was the problem for, to Luther, Christ was the terrifying judge! Then Von Staupitz took the most

unusual step. He told Luther that, being the learned doctor he was, he should begin preaching; and that he should assume the chair of theology at the University of Wittenberg. Luther balked; he told Von Staupitz that this amount of work would kill him. "That's all right," Von Staupitz replied, "God has plenty of work for clever men to do in heaven".

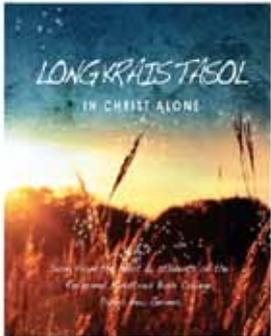
The Gospel

Luther began to lecture to university students on the Scriptures, beginning with the Psalms in 1513. In Psalm 22, he was struck by the words, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" What could this mean? Christ was forsaken by God, Christ suffered torment, but why should Christ have suffered such torments? Luther could understand why he should suffer as cast off from God, being the weak, sinful and undeserving man he was. But Christ was divine, pure, entirely without sin! The only answer was that Christ suffered in his place. Luther was discovering the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.

Luther lectured in Romans from 1515 to 1516. Very soon came to these words in the first chapter:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:16-17).

He left the large room where the monks socialised and went up into his study in the monastery tower to ponder the meaning of these words. He puzzled over the meaning of the phrase *the righteousness of God*. What did *righteousness* mean? To him it meant the *justice* of God as an attribute of God. He prayed, and pondered as to how the justice of God was revealed in the gospel. He read and studied further and came to: The righteous man [*just* in many translations, but it is the same word as righteous, *dikaios*] shall live by faith (Rom.1:17b). Luther's scholarly eye saw that this was the same Greek word used in verse 17a! Then he began to see the true meaning of *the righteousness of God*. Formerly he understood righteousness of God to be an active, punishing righteousness, which demands that man keep the whole law of God. He was looking at righteousness as the divine attribute of perfect justice which is *in* God. Now he understood that the righteousness was called *of* God, for it came *from* God. This way of righteousness was demonstrated through Christ's work on the cross. If a sinner places his faith in Jesus Christ, he is justified; he appears before God just as if he never sinned. Luther understood that the just shall live by faith means not by their own works of righteousness. This faith brings one to Christ who is perfectly righteous and who justifies the sinner.



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Born again

This understanding was Luther's breakthrough! Listen to how Luther describes his conversion:

I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.⁵

We must realise that the full doctrine of justification by faith was not worked out immediately in Luther's understanding. Like most of us, Luther's knowledge grew gradually over the course of many years. Luther expresses the doctrine of justification by faith most clearly in his commentary on Galatians. He began lecturing on Galatians in 1516, but his commentary on Galatians was not published until 1535. This doctrine of justification by faith alone is the heart of the Reformation. Any compromise with Rome on this doctrine compromises the heart of the gospel.

III. Obedient to the Light

Ninety-Five Theses

In 1517 a Dominican monk named Tetzel tried to enter Frederik III's territory selling indulgences. Luther did not object to indulgences, but he objected

to these indulgences because they promised to alleviate the suffering of loved ones already in purgatory. A spoof on indulgences went as follows:

*As soon as the coin in the coffer rings
A soul from purgatory springs.*

The pressing issue was that money was needed for the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Tetzel preached three highly emotive sermons; first he preached on hell; then on the pains of purgatory (He urged parents to listen to the cries of their little ones who had died.); then he preached on the comfort of heaven. Wouldn't it be worth paying few hundred dollars to give them this comfort now?⁶

To protest at these indulgences, Luther wrote ninety-five theses. On October 31, 1517, in the university fashion of the day, he nailed them to the church door of Wittenberg. Nailing ideas to the church door was like posting an internet blog today. This meant Luther wanted to debate this issue. When his theses were soon published they caused a sensation throughout Germany. They attacked the authority of the Church of Rome, and therefore the authority of the Pope himself. All of this furor would have died down quickly, had the Pope reformed these greedy indulgences. Instead, the pope censured Luther's works and summoned him to defend his ideas before the authority of the Church.

Here I stand

In 1519 Luther was challenged to a debate with a great Roman Catholic defender, John Eck. Eck had a large, booming voice, and a mind like an iron trap. Luther had met more than his match. At this debate Luther stated that popes and councils had erred throughout the centuries. He rested his case on the final authority of Scripture. Eck accused him of harboring the same errors as John Hus, who was burned at the stake in Bohemia a century before.

It became increasingly clear that Luther's views were a serious threat to the authority of the Church in Rome. The Pope ordered that a papal bull be written against Luther condemning him. The bull was called *Exsurge Domini*, the full English title being, *Rise Up, O Lord, A Wild Boar Has Invaded Your Vineyard*. When Luther received his copy of the bull, he burned it publically. He then appealed to the Emperor for protection. In 1521 the Holy Roman Emperor,

Charles V, called the Diet of Worms; which was an official meeting of the Holy Roman Empire.

We must realise that Luther was summoned to stand before the most powerful person in the world: Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. A painting shows us an overwhelming scene – Luther is a sweating monk before the great ones. At this meeting, John Eck pointed to a pile of books on a table: *Do you admit that you have written these books? And do you defend them all, or are you ready to recant what you have said in them?* Luther answered: *Yes, the books are mine; I deny none of them. But the second question I can't answer at this time. It has to do with faith and the salvation of souls and the Word of God. Therefore I humbly beg Your Imperial Majesty to give me time to think, so that I may answer without violence to the Word of God, or danger to my soul.* He was granted 24 hours to think this serious matter over.

The next day before the great of the world and the church he stood and stated in boldest terms:

Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning – and my conscience is captive to the Word of God – then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.⁷

Frederick ordered that Luther be seized on his way home, in order to protect him. He was captured and went into hiding in the Wartburg castle. Here he disguised himself, becoming Duke George. At the castle of Wartburg, he worked furiously, writing volumes and even finding time to translate the New Testament into German. This translation enabled the common man to read the Bible, a very important impetus for the Reformation.

IV. Dispersing the Light

Reformer in the Church

Soon much of Germany was experiencing reformation and turmoil. Images were destroyed without any discretion, many monks and nuns married, and many excesses appeared. The Zwickau prophets taught that, since they had the Spirit, they did not need the Bible

at all. Luther corrected such abuses by preaching and training preachers. He finished translating the Old Testament into contemporary German. Sometimes Luther and his helpers would spend two, three, or even four weeks to find the right way to translate a single word. While working on the Book of Job they once used four days to finish three lines. Luther said this about the Old Testament prophets: *We are now sweating over the prophets. Oh, what a big job to force the Hebrew writers against their will to speak German! They do not want to give up their Hebrew and speak in everyday German. It's just like trying to force a nightingale to give up her beautiful song and imitate the cuckoo's monotone.*⁸ Soon the Bible was found in most homes in Germany, and many learned to read and to love the Word of truth.

Reformer in the home

Luther gives us a rich, refreshing view of the Christian's calling in all of life, especially in marriage and domestic life. He believed that it was far better for a priest to marry: *Leaving a housekeeper and man alone is like bringing fire and straw together, and trying to forbid blaze or smoke.*⁹ At the age of 42 he married 24-year-old Catharine Van Bora, a former nun who had been smuggled out of a nunnery in an empty pickled herring barrel. He called marriage the *school of character*, because no other institution shapes the characters of those who enter it so much.

Martin and Catharine had six children, but experienced the sadness of losing two daughters. Elizabeth died before she reached her first birthday. He said, *My little Elizabeth is dead ... it is strange how sick at heart this has left me, so much do I grieve for her. I would never have believed that a father's heart could be so tender for his child. Elizabeth said good-bye to us in order to go with Christ through death unto life.* Fourteen years later Magdalena became very sick. Shortly before she died, Luther stood at her bedside, fighting back the tears. *Magdalena, he asked, his voice quivering, "would you like to stay here with your father, or would you willingly go to your Father in heaven?"* Magdalena looked up at him, trying hard to smile. Finally she answered, *"Dear father, I'll do whatever God wills."* Later Luther wrote: *My dearest Magdalena has been reborn into Christ's eternal kingdom. Yet, though my wife and I ought only to rejoice and be thankful at such a happy*

*journey and blessed end, we cannot. So strong is our love that we must sob and groan in heart under the power of killing grief.*¹⁰ Martin and Catharine made home life together a great joy. They practiced hospitality generously – he always giving everything away – she always struggling to balance the budget!

Reformer in society

Luther was convinced that the Reformation could succeed only if there were strong Christian schools to train children to be God-fearing citizens of both church and state. Few in those days went to any school, so Luther urged the princes to establish schools in their towns.

Not everyone agreed with Luther. Parents said that they needed the children at home to help out and that they were capable of teaching them all they needed to know. Luther's response was that too many parents fail to teach their children, because parents don't want to be bothered, don't know how, or don't have the time. He observed that most children were idle and wasted hours at games.¹¹

Luther's greatest failure was to keep balance in the peasant revolt. They read his *Freedom of The Christian Man* and received fuel from his ideas. But Luther failed to give them any support and urged the electors to crush the peasants. Luther's character flaw of a blind stubbornness was most black during this sad time. Sadly, his strong stubborn nature did much harm to unity of church in later days, particularly over the issue of the Lord's Supper.

Luther: The Christian experience

Throughout his life, Luther experienced recurring anxiety and depression, which contributed to his struggle of faith. He called these trials *anfechtung* (this word expresses more than anxiety - a deep tribulation and struggle of the soul). When he felt overcome by *anfechtung*, Luther found much comfort in the Scriptures. The Psalms and the book of Jonah were especially comforting. He could relate to Jonah, crying out to God in prayer from the belly of the whale. In 1527 Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress is our God". This hymn was born out of his own struggles and victory. For Luther, solid ground was always found again on the Word of God and in Christ's work. Luther was musical and played the lute for his family. Of music he said, *The devil doesn't stay where there's music! Music is the greatest gift, indeed it is divine. It puts to flight all sad thoughts.*¹²

Luther was a colourful character. When a fellow pastor left for the farm he opined, *What wouldn't I give to look into the eyes of friendly cows, than have to look into the faces of those in my congregation!* Luther was fond of his dog, Tolpel (Blockhead). He describes Tolpel eyeing a piece of meat in his hand, his eyes absolutely riveted on the meat. *Ah, says Luther, if only I could pray the way that dog watches that morsel, all his thoughts concentrated on it!*¹³.

Conclusion

Luther died in Eisleben, on February 18,

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1546, at 63 years of age. He is buried beneath the pulpit in the Wittenberg Church. How remarkable that through his great flaws and gifts, God used him to shake the church to its very foundations. How do we summarize such a complicated character? Luther found it easier to begin a reformation than to consolidate one.¹⁴ Calvin was the man needed to write a systematic theology and to organise the entire Reformation. Luther was a wild flowing, rushing torrent; Calvin a quiet, gentle river running to the ocean. Melancthon put it this way: *Some have complained that Luther was too severe. I will not deny this. But I will answer in the lan-*

guage of Erasmus: Because the sickness was so great, God gave this age a rough doctor If Luther was severe, it was because of his earnestness for the truth, not because he loved strife or harshness.

Luther was freed because he was captured by the Word of God. May the same be true for all of us.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Kuyper, *De Kerk Hervorming*, p.36.
- 2 Bainton, Roland, *Here I Stand: A life of Martin Luther*, p.34. I highly recommend this volume as one of the best biographies on Luther. One can find a large hardback version in some used Christian book stores.
- 3 National Geographic, Volume 164. No.4, October 1983, p.442.

- 4 Kittleson, James M, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*, p.60.
- 5 Bainton, pp. 49-50.
- 6 Nohl, Frederick, *Martin Luther, Hero of The Faith*, pp.29-30.
- 7 Kittleson, p.161
- 8 Nohl, p.101
- 9 National Geographic, p.444
- 10 Nohl, p.115
- 11 Nohl, p.103
- 12 National Geographic, p.455.
- 13 National Geographic, p.455
- 14 National Geographic, p.450
- 15 Nohl, p.149

Mr Leo de Vos is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Wainuimata.

The Other Confession of Guido de Brès

Wes Bredenhof

Last year we celebrated the 450th birthday of the Belgic Confession. Many people know that Belgian Reformer Guido (or Guy) de Brès was the author of the Belgic Confession. What few realize is that this was not the only confessional document that he was in-

involved with preparing. There is another confession.

Background

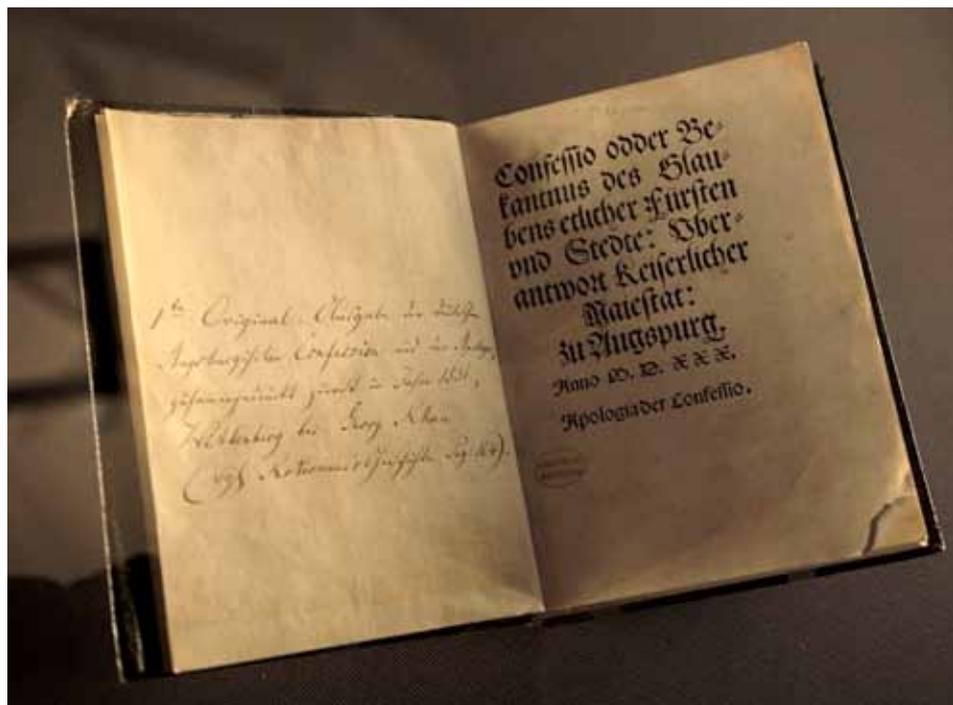
In 1564, de Brès was serving in France as a chaplain for the Duke of Bouillon, Henri-Robert de la Marck. De la Marck was well known for his Huguenot sympathies. The Duke sent him on a mission to

Brussels to meet with certain high level political officials, one other Reformed minister, and a Lutheran delegation. The goal of this conference was to unite the Reformed and Lutheran churches in the Low Countries (and hopefully elsewhere) so as to present a united front against the power of the Roman Catholic Church.

The conference concluded without any agreement. However, de Brès went home with a copy of the Wittenberg Concord of 1536. This had been drawn up in a meeting of Reformed and Lutherans as a way to resolve their differences, particularly on the sticky subject of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. De Brès was charged by the Duke to study the Concord and to give his opinion.

A new confession to bridge the gap

In a letter to the Antwerp consistory in 1565, de Brès wrote that, at first glance, the Wittenberg Concord might appear to be a bridge too far, but he was confident that it could be used partly as the basis for unity with the Lutherans. But there were other outstanding issues and those led de Brès to meet with two other Reformed pastors, Jean Taffin and Pierre van Ceulen. Meeting in Metz (in northern France), they drafted a confession dealing with baptism and absolution. De Brès had high hopes for this confes-



First edition of the Augsburg Confession and Apology. Wittenberg. Spring 1531. Photographed by Paul T. McCain. June 2006. Wittenberg, Germany. en.wikipedia.org

sion and according to one biographer (Braekman), he was even willing to risk his life for it. It was sent to Geneva for review and then also to the Reformed churches of the Low Countries.

In the end, it was all for nothing. In Geneva, John Calvin had been dead for a year, so it fell to his successor to review this new confession. Theodore Beza was not all that impressed with it. In the Low Countries, it was decided to focus on unity with the Reformed churches in France, rather than with the Lutherans.

Unfortunately, the confession does not appear to be extant. No one has ever found it. There are two sources that mention it. The main one is the July 10, 1565 letter of de Brès to the Antwerp consistory. The other is the August 24, 1565 letter of Beza to Jean Taffin.

The episode is insightful for it reveals the sentiments of de Brès with respect to the Lutherans. Yes, it would have been politically expedient for them to unite, but more than that, they belonged together. Throughout his writings (including the Belgic Confession), de Brès emphasized the antithesis between true and false religion. The Anabaptists and Roman Catholics were essentially the world, on the dark side of the antithesis. Not so for the Lutherans. The Lutherans were regarded as close allies in the work of Reformation. There were outstanding issues between them, but these were not viewed as insurmountable.

Comparing the Belgic and Augsburg Confessions

This is particularly evident when we compare de Brès' first confession with the Augsburg Confession. The Augsburg Confession was the earliest Lutheran confession, dating back to 1530. It had originally been written by Philip Melanchthon as a testimony to Emperor Charles V. Later Melanchthon revised the Augsburg Confession in an effort to reach out to the Reformed churches. This 1540 edition, commonly called the Variata (changed), was palatable enough to John Calvin that he subscribed to it when he was working in Strasbourg. The main difference between the Variata and Invariata (the original) has to do with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. The original Augsburg Confession said that the "body and blood of Christ are truly present and distributed to those who eat the Lord's Supper." The Variata stated that the body and blood of Christ are truly exhibited with the bread and wine to those who eat the Lord's Supper. This

Please join us at the...

Christchurch Reformation Conference 2012

2-3 November

Theme: "Contemporary Challenges/Opportunities Facing the Evangelical and Reformed Churches"



Guest Speaker:

Dr. Cornelis Venema

*President and Professor of Doctrinal Studies Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dyer, Indiana, U.S.A., and author of **The Promise of the Future, Getting the Gospel Right, Children at the Lord's Table, The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ, among other titles.***

Venue: St. Christophers Church, Avonhead Rd.

The conference will provide opportunity for instruction from God's Word, singing praises, and fellowship with one another as we rejoice in our common Reformation heritage and are challenged to live out the supremacy of Jesus Christ today.

Friday, 2 November

7:30 pm: Lecture 1: "Challenges to Preaching as the principal means of grace"

Saturday, 3 November

9:15 am: Lecture 2: "Challenges to the churches in evangelism"

11:00 am: Lecture 3: "Challenges to the understanding of Christ's Kingship" (a.k.a. the "two kingdoms/natural law" debate).

12:00 pm: Question & Answer

- A book table (used/new) will be available (opens 6:30 pm Friday – closes 1 pm Saturday).
- A light supper Friday evening, and Saturday morning tea.
- Limited billeting will be available for the Friday evening.
- The fee for this conference is \$15 if registered before October 12th or \$20 at the door.
- To register for the conference visit <http://www.crefc.org.nz>
- To enquire about billeting email crefc@gmail.com

is not far from what the Belgic Confession says in Article 35: "Yet we do not go wrong when we say that what we eat and drink is the true, natural body and the true blood of Christ."

The doctrine of salvation is also a significant commonality. Both the Augsburg and the Belgic Confession give the true biblical doctrine of original sin. Both confessions recognize the dire situation of fallen man and the need for the gospel. When it comes to the solution, both confessions sing harmony off the same page. Both confess the same doctrine of justification by faith alone through Christ alone.

When it comes to the response to our salvation, sometimes it is said that Lutherans deny or minimize the third use of the law, the law as a guide for our thankfulness. But this is certainly not found in the Augsburg Confession. Article 6 states it plainly: "Our churches teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruit. It is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will." And again in Article 20, "... we teach that it is necessary to do good works. This does not mean that we merit grace by doing good works, but because it is God's will." The Belgic Confession speaks in the same way in Article 24.

Good works are necessary and inevitable for believers, but "they do not count towards our justification."

Now, as mentioned, there were still some differences. But the fact that Calvin could sign the 1540 Variata Augsburg Confession is telling. The Reformed and at least some of the Lutherans were as close at that time as they would ever get. With the passage of time, theology continued to develop and the Lutherans expanded their confessional library. If Calvin and de Brès had been alive to read the 1577 Formula of Concord, they might not have been positive about the possibilities for unity between the Reformed and the Lutherans. The Formula of Concord entrenched several distinctively Lutheran positions in extensive detail.

Conclusion

Where does that leave us today? In God's providence, the Lutherans and the Reformed went their separate ways in the sixteenth century. Yet in the sixteenth-century Low Countries, faithful Lutherans were regarded as allies, not foes. They were regarded as estranged brothers to be sought out. When de Brès wrote Article 29 regarding the true and false church, he did not consider the

Lutherans to be the false church or a sect. Rather, de Brès was thinking of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptists with those appellations.

Today there are nearly 500 years of history behind the Lutherans. Many things have changed and many who go by the name "Lutheran" would send Luther himself into a cardiac arrest. There is much unfaithfulness among Lutheran churches around the world. Yet, thankfully, there are still those where the pure gospel is preached – where the good news of Christ is clearly and powerfully proclaimed. While the doctrines of the sacraments are not as biblical as one would wish, there are Lutheran churches where they are still administered as Christ commanded. And yes, some Lutherans still do practice church discipline as well. When we encounter such Lutherans, we do well to remember our church history and the efforts of Guido de Brès to reach out to these estranged fellow believers.

Mr Wes Bredenhof is pastor of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario wbredenhof@bell.net

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Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Use your influence well

God has placed us in a network of relationships. He uses these relationships to work his grace in us – with the help of other people we are drawn to him, come to believe in him, and are sanctified by him. He does us good through other Christians; and in turn he does good to others through us. The network includes many kinds of relationship – we have mothers and fathers; we have all manner of other relatives; we have friends, we have employers, classmates, colleagues, fellow church members, teachers, suppliers, customers and neighbours. All of these relationships present an opportunity to say a word to someone about Christ. Some Christians, in the history

of the church, have been particularly effective in their use of these opportunities. Let me introduce you to one such woman.

Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, lived in England in the eighteenth century. She was born into aristocratic society, and married an earl. Thus, she was near the top of the social hierarchy, and moved easily in the highest circles. She was a fine Christian woman, but I can hear you asking -what's her relevance to us, in our more ordinary circumstances? The stand-out feature of Selina's life is the creative way she took opportunities to help everyone in her path. She used her influence well; and that is the connec-

tion between her life and ours.

Selina's childhood was not a very happy one – her parents separated when she was only six years old, and she grew up without her mother. However, her own marriage was very happy indeed. The affectionate letters between her and her husband Theophilus are proof of this. Neither of them grew up in believing homes, but in her early 30s she was greatly attracted when her sisters-in-law, responding to the preaching and friendship of the early Methodists, came to believe. For some time she had been seriously convicted of sin – the kinds of things, like failing to keep her word, that we might take lightly but which grieved

her deeply. The advice she got from her fashionable friends failed to satisfy her. In the summer of 1739, after a stay with her sisters-in-law, Selina came to trust in Christ with full understanding that he had died for her sins. She was overjoyed – all her anxieties were gone. She and Theophilus began to study the Scriptures eagerly, and spent helpful time with evangelical preachers.

At this point Selina was the mother of five young children, and expecting a sixth. As the wife of a large landowner, she took an active role in the management of several large houses. She was responsible for the oversight of a huge staff. For years she had taken this seriously as a weighty trust, and had tried to do good by distributing Bibles and prayer books to the people on the earl's estate. But now, converted and with a much clearer spiritual purpose, she began to use her considerable energies to serve the cause of Christ among those she supervised.

For a long time Selina had been wearied, and discouraged, by the emptiness of high society – with its focus on the frivolous and material, and its supercilious attitude to evangelical religion. She mixed freely among such people, and now she began to turn this opportunity to spiritual good. It had become a great pleasure for her, when in London, to attend worship and hear the newly-converted John and Charles Wesley preach. So she invited her titled friends to join her. Of course she was rebuffed at times: the Duchess of Buckingham found the teaching of the Methodist preachers “repulsive It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This highly offensive and insulting ...” But she did agree to go, nevertheless. It is sobering to realise that shortly after writing this, the Duchess died.

After George Whitefield's return from America, he became one of her closest friends, helping her reach a much more biblical understanding of salvation and sanctification. He was especially important after she suffered the greatest personal blow of her life: when Selina was 39, and the mother of four children (two had already died), Theophilus died suddenly of a stroke at the age of 50. For the rest of her life she grieved for him.

But Selina was an activist by nature, full of schemes for useful work – and within six months she was busy looking for opportunities to do spiritual good for

“I dread slack hands in the vineyard.”

others. In fact, as she wrote to minister Philip Doddridge, “I dread slack hands in the vineyard.” With Whitefield now one of her personal chaplains, she filled her house with politicians, aristocrats, actors and writers to hear him speak. As Whitefield wrote at this time: “Last Sunday evening I preached to a most brilliant assembly indeed. They expressed great approbation and some, I think, begin to feel. Good Lady Huntingdon is indeed a mother in Israel. She is all in a flame for Jesus.”¹ Those thereby converted, such as Lady Fanny Shirley, also invited Whitefield into their homes to preach to friends. Other converts included Lady Chesterfield, wife of a dissolute lord; and

two sisters, Mrs Carteret and Mrs Cavendish, who had married into leading noble families. A man of great influence and a future Colonial Secretary and President of the Board of Trade, Lord Dartmouth, also came to believe as a result of these occasions at Selina's home. Overall, Selina's influence was great. Despite the probability that the number of the nobility who came to put their trust in Christ may not have been large, her example in embracing the gospel and living it out faithfully was important for the future. Her biographer, Faith Cook, comments that “the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century might never have gained the acceptance that it did apart



Selina, Countess of Huntingdon by William Hogarth, 1697-1794. Detroit Publishing Company Photograph Collection.

from the endeavours of the Countess of Huntingdon ... The Countess used her unquestionable influence in the highest circles of the land and even in the royal court to throw the cloak of her protection over the prominent preachers of the day and over the fledgling Methodist movement itself." Furthermore, "by this means Christian doctrine with its resulting standards of morality influenced the mindset of a people well into the Victorian era and beyond." 2

Selina was a great encourager of the young Church of England preachers associated with the Methodist movement. As they set out all over England and Wales, taking the gospel to the poor and forgotten in isolated places, she prayed for them and wrote innumerable letters to them. She took a great interest in their work, and did all she could to persuade bishops to ordain evangelical men so that the new believers would have faithful pastors to build them up in the truth. As the years passed, there came to be a shortage of clergy for the preaching posts she had helped establish. Selina applied her organising skills and financial resources to activate a solution that had been formulating in the minds of her ministerial friends. She established a college for training ministers in Trevecca, Wales, which opened in 1764. For the rest of Selina's long life it was the project perhaps nearest her heart.

Over the years the churches she encouraged, and helped support through her giving, formed an informal kind of fellowship known as "The Countess of

Huntingdon's Connexion". She was able to build chapels for many of them, in places the Church of England would not, and this she was able to do through the protection guaranteed by the Toleration Act of 1689. Thus they were outside the Anglican communion. All her life the Countess had been devoted to the Church of England and never intended to encourage the founding of a new denomination. However, in her later years she was virtually forced out of her church because of her involvement in a chapel she had begun in east London; support of her chaplain there meant she had to depart.

Some suggest her imperiousness played a part in this outcome. Certainly she was a woman who expected to get her way. As a busy, organising activist with social rank she could tend to be rather a bulldozer. Like many such women, she could be bossy. But nevertheless she was kind, and would do all within her considerable power to help a friend, especially a harassed clergyman, in genuine need. At the end of her long life (she died at 84) she was greatly mourned. As one who had known her well, faults and all, said at her death: "Thousands, I may say tens of thousands, in various parts of the kingdom heard the gospel through her instrumentality that in all probability would never have heard it at all; and I believe through eternity will have cause to bless God that she ever existed. She was truly and emphatically a Mother in Israel, and though she was far from a perfect character, yet I hesi-

tate not to say that among the illustrious and noble of the country she has not her equal."³

There is no doubt that Selina was an extraordinary woman; and that God gave her opportunities to do good on a wider stage than many of us would believe ourselves to occupy. Yet her stewardship of these opportunities is full of application for us if we look closely. If we think in terms of authority, there are people whom we can influence for good. If you are a mother, there are always your children – your example, and your instruction, are possibly the greatest single influence in their lives. Use it with all your strength. Perhaps you are an employer – and especially if you employ some unbelievers (hopefully, you do) – there will be many ways your staff will see and hear you acting as a Christian – or not. Let them see your concern for their souls, by speaking with them. Selina was unabashed in doing so. Once, she was warning a tradesman about the need to repent and make peace with God. He seemed to pay little attention – but years later, she heard that another workman had overheard the conversation, leading to his own conversion. Then there was her enormous correspondence. She encouraged, exhorted and gave spiritual counsel many thousands of times through her letters. Can you write a letter, a card, an email – or even a well-constructed text message?

Selina was always generous with her material resources – and lived relatively simply herself. For instance, she made sure that the students at the Trevecca College had decent clothes to wear, often providing respectable suits to wear for preaching. Small – and large – kindnesses were her trademark, and she went to some trouble to learn who had a need and what it was. This took effort, discretion and creative imagination at times. What forms does our kindness take? Are we inclined to give the leftovers, things we don't want – or do we take trouble to find out just what someone needs, and go to some trouble to give them exactly what would suit that need? Are we imaginative in our generosity, or do we have a charity-bin approach?

Selina also took genuine interest in all the projects she had helped initiate. The College received far more than just her money. She visited often, and even had a little set of rooms built for her to stay in while she enjoyed fellowship with the students and enquired about

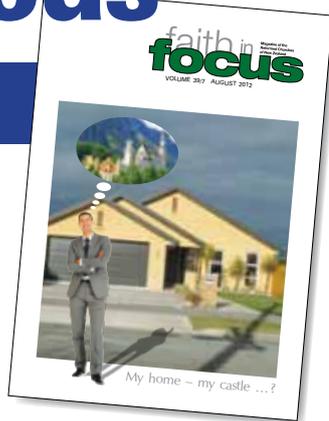
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their spiritual progress. She often went with them on trips around Wales to hear them preach. This is a good principle. We'd do well to do more than contribute some money to support a missionary. Why not commit ourselves to write to that missionary at least once a month, say? Other Christians crave more than our money. Our interest, our prayers, our letters, our visits, are even more important.

Selina was famous for her tireless energy. She was a whirlwind of activity, engaged in a multiplicity of projects, and keeping up with a very great number

of people. She became very much the go-to person for anyone – especially clergy – who were in need of help. But she only became that person because she was so willing to help. One would assume, especially since she lived to such an advanced age, that she had a robust constitution. But in fact she was frequently ill, especially after busy periods. Somehow, though, she managed to keep her correspondence going – and over time she made close friends of various young women who lived with her and eased the burden of some of her regular work. Doing so, she disciplined them as

well. That is the way God often uses us! Make Selina one of your own cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1); and follow her example with kindness and vigour. Take note of her faults; but thank God for the fruits of the Spirit so evident in this good and faithful servant of Christ.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Faith Cook, *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon: Her Pivotal Role in the 18th Century Great Awakening* (Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2001), p. 115.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 128
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 422

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

BIRTHS

Aarsen, Olivia Grace – a daughter born to Ewout and Louise (Nelson)

Grosscurt, Johan Jan – a son born to Fred and Katrina – August 2nd (Pukekohe)

Ketchen, Hayley – a son born to Nathan and Melissa – August 6th (Palmerston North)

Kloeg, Jon Josiah – a son born to Jerome and Alice – July 31st (Pukekohe)

Loef, Meisha Juliet – a daughter born to Justin and Louise – July 27th (Pukekohe)

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

Foxton: Eric Dijkstra

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

Brooks, Phil & Elisabeth – 55th anniversary on August 10th (Bucklands Beach – 51 years in the one house!)

DEATHS

Hagoort, Roel – aged 82 on August 17th (Hamilton)

Kroon, Lyntje (Lyn) – aged 86 years on August 14th (Wanganui) – widow of Rev Bill Kroon

Nieuwland, Riek – August 10th (Hastings)

van Ameyde, Fo – aged 78 years on July 25th (Bishopdale)

van de Waardt, Hendrik (Henk) – aged 83 years on July 23rd (Wanganui)

van den Berg, Simon – aged 87 years August 14th (Avondale)

FROM THE PASTOR

Oamaru: Bruce Hoyt

Today is Reformation Day, the 493rd anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle church door. We remember that day as the beginning of the Great Reformation from which we take the name Reformed. So we trace our church history back through the Medieval and Patristic church. But

sadly the church had become so corrupt that it refused to be reformed, despite the valiant efforts of many to call it back to faithful adherence to the Scriptures. Thus a break occurred which we trace to that 31st of October, 1517, when Luther's action led to an upheaval in church and culture which he could not have imagined. Luther and others with similar concerns about the unbiblical doctrine and practices of the Roman Church were excommunicated and so the Protestant churches had their beginning.

There were three streams that came from the Protestant fountain: the Luther-

Family Camp

2022



27th December to 3rd January
Finlay Park, Cambridge

The theme for this years camp – **OLYMPICS**

The devotional leaders are:
Rev John Haverland (mornings) and
Rev Pieter van Huyssteen (evenings)

Enrolments via the rcnz website – rcnzone.com/familycamp

All fee information etc available online.

A great place for fun and fellowship.

an, the Reformed and the Anabaptist. We in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand trace our roots back through the Reformed stream and beyond that to Scripture as given to us by God through the Prophets and Apostles.

We stand firmly on the Word of God with Luther. When he was called to recant his beliefs, he replied, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Rev. Leo de Vos declined the call to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach

Dunedin: What a joy to have the Stolte family with us at last. We extend a hearty welcome to Erik and Gina and their children, Juliette, Johanna, Jacob, Rebekkah, Georgia, Phillip, Emmaleigh and Judah. We hope you will settle in

and very quickly feel right at home here in Dunedin. May the Lord richly bless your time with us.

North Shore: The Session has had a positive response from the Rev. Thomas Tyson, a retired minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of the USA, to our request for him to minister to us while John Rogers takes his Long Service Leave next year. We would expect to have him and his wife with us from February through to half way through April. Tom Tyson served the Bucklands Beach and Hamilton congregations from 1964 to 1971 and few years ago served the Dovedale congregation for a few months.

Graeme & Amanda Zuidema. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Bishopdale congregation for your continuing care and generosity towards us throughout this year, but also to inform you of where we are at. I have now been working as a ministry trainee for a period of 6 months. The Session and the South Island Presbytery have approved and endorsed me to be a student for the ministry. Therefore, preparations for our move to Geelong (Reformed Theological College) are in full swing. It is bitter sweet for us as we love it in Bishopdale Reformed Church

and we know the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few! Nevertheless, the call to pastoral/preaching ministry is upon our hearts.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

North Shore: In our discussions with the architect regarding our building extension, we decided to include in our mandate the installation of a fireproof safe so that all church records can be properly and safely housed.

EVANGELISM

Hukanui: Ladies @ 8 will be preparing boxes for Operation Christmas Child. Please start collecting up bits and pieces when you see them. There will be more information on the types of things you can put in the boxes. Please note that we also need money (\$9.00) for each box that we send away, so if you would prefer to give money, then that is also very helpful.

North Shore: The mainly music team have arranged for the showing of the film *How Great is our God* on Friday night 10th August starting at 7.30pm. in the church. We are encouraging our mainly music parents to attend and we are hoping to use it as an evangelistic outreach. Some folk have seen the film and it is very informative, so please join us and bring friends along as well. A short time for questions will be available at the end of the film after which we will provide supper. The evening will conclude about 9.00pm. Flyers will be delivered to the valley and some will be available in the church foyer if you wish to circulate them between your friends.

MISSIONS

Avondale: Do you have a heart for making the name of Christ known in our community? Do you have a desire to encourage greater awareness within the congregation of how we can support our missionaries and the cause of missions at home and abroad? The Missions and Evangelism Committee has been established to provide encouragement to the various outreach ministries of the congregation as well as to encourage the congregation to be intimately involved in the support of missions. This committee will seek to serve as an encouragement to the congregation to *pray for, support financially, and participate* in the work of the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5,6



We give thanks to God for our parents, grandparents and great grandparents

Rinze and Ties Gjaltema

as they celebrate their
60th Wedding Anniversary

Married in Auckland on 23 October 1952

Symen & Michelle
(Singapore)

Ben & Joyce
Monique & Raymond and Zack
Aaron †
Paul & Satu (Finland),
Amanda & Piet, Madison and Stephanie

John & Sylvia
Correne
Stella
(Australia)

Helen & Arnout
David
Michael
Andrew

Edward & Melanie
Jack
Hannah
Marcus
Joel

Rodney & Dianne
Luke
Liam

PRISON MINISTRY

Christchurch: On the first Sunday of the month, the *Prison team* goes into Christchurch Men's Prison in the evening. Please remember this ministry in your ongoing prayer that as the Word of God is proclaimed lives might be changed for His glory. We give thanks to the Lord that this opportunity is available to proclaim His Word.

Pukekohe: Our Prison Ministry is about to enter a new phase with four of us becoming special support visitors to two inmates in Springhill Corrections Facility. This will be similar to the visiting we have been doing but more focused on prisoners with special needs. Please pray for us and those we visit.

DENOMINATIONAL

eBook Documents: Rev. Bruce Hoyt has finished preparing a set of documents that are designed to be used on Kindles or other eBook reader devices. They are in the ePub format and include the Bible, Lord's Prayer, Creeds, Confessions, Psalter Hymnal and Sing to the Lord, liturgical forms, and the church order.

The **Denominational Archives** have been stored for some years in the 'walk in' safe at Harmony House, the Palmerston North church complex. As part of the Palmerston North building upgrade, the 'walk in' safe is to be demolished, along with the rest of the building and so a new storage facility was sought for the archives. The Hastings Session offered to provide the storage temporarily as we have the space, although perhaps not the security that such archives deserve, and so our offer was tempered with the suggestion that digital archiving be considered. Our offer was accepted and tomorrow we expect to have the archives delivered and stored in the 'Bulk Store' in the meantime until a room can be fitted out to house these documents and artefacts.

CAMPS & CONFERENCES

Auckland Reformation Conference 2012: Here at the Reformed Church of Avondale, we are eagerly anticipating hosting Dr. Cornelis Venema of Mid-America Reformed Seminary (near Chicago, Illinois) to our Reformation Conference to be held later this year on the weekend of October 26-27. Dr. Venema, whose father served as a pastor here in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand some years ago, is the President and Professor of Doctrinal Studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. His special interest

lies in Reformation theology, particularly the work of the Reformers John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger. Dr. Venema will be delivering 3 lectures (Friday evening – Saturday morning) on the theme: "The Supremacy and Finality of Jesus Christ."

Dunedin: Attention All Senior Youth – Keep the weekend free for our annual Big Weekend! Start planning for a weekend of fun and fellowship starting on Saturday morning. Now is your chance to start thinking about some great and innovative ideas on costumes for our Enchanted Forest banquet on Saturday night.

National Youth Camp: Book your flights, scribble in your diaries and update your social media, because NYC2013 is just around the corner. From January 4th-11th, and at a brand new location in the sunny Hawke's Bay, this camp is going to be a good one. To enrol online or for more info, 'like' the Facebook group or browse to thewryc.wordpress.com.

CLASSES & COURSES

Dovedale: A marriage seminar will be hosted here at the church. It will be based on the book, *Love and Respect*, by E. Eggerichs. If you would like to participate in this seminar, please let Pastor Andre Holtslag know so the books can be ordered as we will need to read them as couples before the seminar.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Bishopdale/Christchurch: Barn Dance, 1 September. Mark this in your calen-

dars! The Cadets and Calvinettes will be hosting a barn dance at Papanui High School on the night of 1 September. Tickets will be \$10/adult; \$5/child and \$30/family. Bishopdale is fundraising for the next Cadet National camp. Christchurch is fundraising effort for their Mission badge 2012 – supporting Jair and Laretta Duinkerke in the Solomon Islands.

The Christchurch Cadets & GEMS are selling their fertiliser again ready for the spring. Free home delivery. Orders close on Wednesday 22nd August.

North Shore: Our Cadet Club is having its annual garage sale on the 27th October. Please support us by setting aside saleable items over the next three months. Things that sell well include: kitchen items, clothing, furniture, toys, books, tools, plants ... in fact you would be surprised what we can sell! We are fundraising for several things: our mission project, Su'u school in the Solomon Islands, Annual camp and Seniors camp.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale: Please also mark your calendars for the Reformation Celebration. This will be held November 3. This year the evening will focus on John Calvin so now is a good time to start reading a biography on him!

Avondale: The talent quest and culture night should be a great night of fun, food and fellowship! Please bring food to share for the potluck meal (and dessert too if you can) and feel free to dress up

Masterton Reformed Church

*Invites former members and friends
to come and celebrate with us
25 Years of God's faithfulness*



Date: 24th November 2012

Place: Masterton Reformed Church, 37 Herbert Street, Masterton

Time: ❖ 2pm for a family afternoon tea and games for everyone.
❖ 7.30pm for a semi-formal coffee and dessert evening reflecting on the past 25 years. Adults and youth over 15 are welcome.

RSVP: by 31st October 2012 to hdatema@clear.net.nz or Ph 06 378 9341

"For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness." Lam 3:22b-23

Please join us at the...

Auckland Reformation Conference 2012

26-27 October

Theme: "The Supremacy and Finality of Jesus Christ"



Guest Speaker:

Dr. Cornelis Venema

*President and Professor of
Doctrinal Studies
Mid-America Reformed Seminary,
Dyer, Indiana, U.S.A.*

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

The conference will provide opportunity for instruction from God's Word, singing praise, and fellowship with one another as we rejoice in our common Reformation heritage and are challenged to live out the supremacy of Jesus Christ today.

Friday, 26 October

***7:30 pm: Lecture 1:** "The Supremacy and Finality of the Word of Christ"

Saturday, 27 October

9:15 am: Lecture 2: "The Supremacy and Finality of the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ"

11:00 am: Lecture 3: "The Supremacy and Finality of Worship Through Christ"

12:00 pm: Question & Answer

*A book table (used/new) will be available (opens 6:30 pm Friday – closes 1 pm Saturday), light supper Friday evening, and Saturday morning tea. Limited billeting will be available for the Friday evening. There is no fee for this conference but a \$20 donation is suggested per attendee to cover conference costs. For planning purposes, please contact Lisa Moelker if you plan to attend or would like to inquire regarding billeting. 09 828 8979 or plmoelker@hotmail.com

in cultural clothing. If you can make it food that represents your culture, that would be great! Also, please bring any flags you might have.

Bishopdale: Junior Youth Group meets at church this Friday night from 7.30-9.30pm for a night of service for the community and games. We plan to do as much baking for the soup kitchen as we can followed by games and supper. All families will be asked to donate some of the ingredients. You will be emailed with those details.

Bishopdale: Coast to Coast IX – Another year rolls by and Coast to Coast is fast approaching. There is just 95 days for you to prepare for 250 km of adventure from the West Coast to Sumner Beach. The course involves cycling, tramping/running and rafting/kayaking. A good level of fitness is required. Enrolments are now open for this event which will be held over Canterbury Show Weekend, 15-17 November 2012.

Dovedale: Talent Evening – Come along to the church for a time where we can show each other the talents God has given us. Please bring hymnals as there will be a chance for all of us to sing together.

Hamilton: Prison Care Ministries Fundraiser – Saturday 13th October (6.00-9.00pm). As part of our involvement with Prison Care Ministries (PCM) you are invited to come and experience a mock typical "prison day" condensed into 3 hours including meals. Turn up here in tracksuit and sneaker type dress ready to submit to prison law & order. There will also be various items presented by some of the men involved with this ministry. Entry and participation: \$20pp. Join us for a fun learning experience.

Hukanui: Games Night – Let's enjoy our old favourites and discover new ones, games, that is, and perhaps friends too. All are invited to a games night at Hukanui – soup and buns will be served. Please bring a game and a snack to share.

Masterton: Calling all energetic people (ages 15-20something) – There has been an exciting and most unique social event planned for just you, with kai being provided (even better!). To make it even more mysterious, could members who have access (legitimately) to video cameras, and are willing to use them, please take them along. See you there!

Why men thinking of pastoral ministry should consider a ministry internship first

Before diving in to explain and defend my title from the outset, I won't assume that all who read *Faith in Focus* know what a ministry internship is. Let me first give you an overview of a ministry internship, how it was implemented by the Reformed Church of Bishopdale (RCB), the ministry intern's programme and why it is a worthwhile investment.

What is a ministry internship?

Ministry internships are becoming common practice around churches today; however, there are variances across the evangelical church as to what one is. Ministry internships range from preparation for pastoral ministry (i.e. ministers of the Word), youth ministry, women's ministry, and mercy ministries, etc. Nevertheless, it is ordinarily a role in which one can be tested and test their gifts for future ministry or further studies, usually (but not always) in a one-year, full-time paid capacity. This past year I have had the opportunity to serve as a ministry intern in the RCB, focusing on preparation for pastoral ministry.

Background to our ministry internship

So how did the RCB begin this process? In 2008 the RCB appointed their first ministry intern, who served for a period of six months. Perhaps unknowingly, this ministry intern cleared the way for future ministry interns such as me. In 2011, the Session (elders and deacons) agreed on a renewed programme and budget for future ministry interns.

Up to this point, coinciding with the formulation of the ministry internship, the Session had been meeting with my wife, Amanda, and me about the internal call to pastoral ministry. In one of our conversations with the elders, the proposal of a ministry internship came up and we were asked whether we would consider it. We said we would, and as time passed from that initial conversation, certain doors were opened for us personally, which left us in a position to consider prayerfully a ministry internship. Then in September 2011 we of-

ficially made known to the Session that we would be interested in a ministry internship, and the Session began with concrete preparations.

In November 2011, the Session put the ministry before the congregation. In the information that was sent to the congregation via a letter, the following points were covered: 1) the ministry internship programme; 2) the candidate; 3) whether or not to ordain the candidate as an elder; and 4) whether or not to approve the financial commitment for the ministry internship.

When the congregational meeting was held, it was a simple yes or no vote for the ministry internship as a whole. The result came in, and the congregation voted in favour, which meant I would begin the ministry internship in February 2012.

Programme for the ministry intern

February 2012 was quickly upon us, and the ministry internship had begun. So what would a ministry intern do? Perhaps the question should be better phrased, what wouldn't he do? The Session had organised a well-thought-out programme which included the following.

First, to further equip the ministry intern with a greater knowledge of the Bible: The chosen part-time course was that of Tim Training (<http://www.timtrainingcourse.org/>). The Tim Training Course was established in 2011 in Christchurch and is run along similar lines to the Cornhill Training Courses in the United Kingdom. The course aims to equip Christians to understand the Bible accurately, to teach the Bible effectively and to apply the Bible appropriately. Alongside this training the ministry intern was to learn the basics of the Greek language with one of the pastors.

Second, to give the ministry intern an opportunity to teach: This would include teaching Year 12 Christian History and Thought classes at Middleton Grange School, catechism classes, Bible in schools and, on occasion, at the evangelistic After School Kids' Club.

Third, to serve as an elder: The ministry intern wouldn't have his own

fellowship group as perhaps a traditional elder would. Nevertheless, he would be required to fulfil all other obligations an elder would normally undertake, such as home visitations, session meetings and general elder duties.

Fourth, to conduct pastoral care: The ministry intern would be active in pastoral visitation, discipling and in the fellowship groups.

Fifth, to practise writing sermons and preaching: Under the guidance of the Session, the ministry intern would write his own sermons (four in my case), which one of the pastors would examine. He then would lead worship and preach his sermon(s).

Sixth, to be active in service and in evangelism: The ministry intern was to be active in service and evangelism in the areas assigned to him by the Session.

Seventh, to sharpen time management: As probably any pastor would tell you, time management is crucial, so the ministry intern should manage his time well. This would include time with the Lord, time with his family and time for the church.

The ministry internship is a worthwhile investment

This comprehensive programme would serve well for the ministry intern. However, the overarching purpose of it was not necessarily what the church can squeeze out of the ministry intern (a "bang for your buck" mentality), but rather what the church could invest into the ministry intern, namely the furthering of God's kingdom by training workers for the harvest.

Throughout the year, the ministry intern is being tested and can test his gifting. The church has undertaken the important role of equipping the ministry intern. That, therefore, is exactly what the ministry internship should set out to achieve. It is the discipling of the ministry intern, guiding him in the programme and investing in him with ongoing love and prayer. This is regardless of whether or not he continues further theological studies; it is a worthwhile investment.



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

Why men thinking of pastoral ministry should consider a ministry internship first

So I have covered what a ministry internship is, our background, the ministry intern's programme and the worthwhile investment of a ministry internship. This leads well into looking at "why men thinking of pastoral ministry should consider a ministry internship first."

The ministry intern will be carefully evaluated throughout his term by different groups and individuals, such as:

First, by his family and friends: This would include his wife, children, parents, siblings and close friends who are the closest to him, as they can see whether he can handle the pressure of a comprehensive programme as described.

Second, by his pastor(s): The pastor(s) is probably the one who will be most closely working with the ministry intern. His ongoing counsel, critique, training, encouragement and prayer are of utmost importance.

Third, by his Session: In the RCB we have 16 office bearers. The number of office bearers is not of vital importance for the evaluation of the ministry intern; nevertheless, they all in some way can be actively involved with the ministry intern, be it with home visitations, meetings and the like.

Fourth, by his own congregation: It is one thing to be evaluated by the Session, or by your pastor(s), or by your own immediate family and friends; yet it is quite another thing to be evaluat-

ed weekly by the whole congregation.

Fifth, by his wider Presbytery: If the ministry intern is given the opportunity to work with other churches in the Presbytery, by leading studies at a youth group outing etc. those churches can also give helpful objective comments to the ministry intern and to his local Session.

Sixth, by himself: If the ministry intern is not evaluating himself through this testing stage, then he is being dishonest with himself, his family and his church. He should listen to his session while seeking confirmation and advice throughout his ministry internship.

What one should realise is that having all these layers of evaluation is not a negative, far from it. Rather, by God's grace it can strengthen the ministry intern's confidence in his call. It also confirms for the congregation that they can send the ministry intern to further studies knowing he has been carefully evaluated.

There may also come a time during the course of a ministry internship when the Session deems they cannot endorse the ministry intern, or it becomes clear to the ministry intern that pastoral ministry is not his calling. At this point the church can also say they have invested wisely with their time and money. This, importantly, will save all parties from future heartache and therefore adds extra weight to the reasons men thinking of pastoral ministry should consider a ministry internship first.

It is not a silver bullet

However, the fact of the matter is, within the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) most of the pastors who are faithfully serving have never completed a ministry internship. In addition, there are faithful men who have been sent without completing a ministry internship. This is where those who are very much in favour of ministry internships must be careful not to change the "should consider" to a "must do". A ministry internship isn't a silver bullet for making a fail-safe progression for future faithful pastors 100% of the time.

RCNZ churches, it's time to make ministry internships easily available

Nevertheless, even though I wouldn't want to make it an absolute for men considering pastoral ministry, I am convinced the RCNZ churches, regardless of their size, have a responsibility to these men to make ministry internships more easily available. To reiterate again, a ministry internship will allow them to be tested, to test their gifts, and to get a taste of full-time ministry. As a denomination, let us invest in these men's preparation prior to further theological studies and at least give them the option of a ministry internship.

Where to for this ministry intern?

As one who had the privilege to do a ministry internship, our future rests in the Lord's hands. We are busily preparing for our shift to the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. By God's grace we will strive to rest on His amazing grace for us in Christ, whatever our future holds. We pray that the Lord may continue to open doors, but His will be done.

We acknowledge and give sincere thanks to the RCB for giving us this opportunity to serve them in the capacity of a ministry intern. Their generosity to us as a family will be remembered fondly.

My desire for the RCNZ is for faithful men to be raised up and to be tested. May we be a denomination which embraces the words of **2 Timothy 2:2**. "... And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others ..." for the furtherance of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and to the glory of God.

Graeme Zuidema

Ministry Intern – Reformed Church of Bishopdale.