

0 Death, where is your

STING?



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

Copy Deadline:

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

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

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Subscription per volume:

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

Editorial

Ever heard the adage, “there are two things in life that are guaranteed – death and taxes”? Neither one of them is a popular subject. Death is doubtless the less palatable, since its consequences far exceed those for tax issues.

However, when it comes to this subject, many have an opinion based on their feelings, philosophy or religion. What likely makes it an unpleasant subject to broach with many in a secular world is the problem of unbelief and/or fear.

Unbelief blinds people to the impending judgement to come, with all that it entails. Fear seems to paralyse people psychologically. You can see it in the incessant advertising of health and beauty products, which are supposed to keep you healthier and more youthful for longer. An advertisement for a funeral insurer has a policy holder joking about him having a good send-off and everyone having a good time eating and drinking afterwards. Quite flippant, I think. I have heard it said that the wife (of the deceased) should just think about her (dead) husband as “being in the next room”! That’s like saying “he hasn’t died, he has just gone on a permanent holiday overseas and won’t be back”. In the face of what the Bible has to say about the subject, that is pretty daft.

Then there are those who believe that there is nothing wrong with death, it is part of the natural cycle of things. Atheists, of course, claim that there is no God and therefore there is nothing to worry about. Really!

However, biblical Christians, more than anyone, know about death. It isn’t natural! It is a result of the sin of our representative head – Adam. (Rom 5:12ff) And as a consequence, we all, Christian and unbeliever alike, will pass from this life and face the great Judge, the King of kings, Jesus Messiah. (Rev 19:11) We must look at death positively, as passing from a life hindered by sin, being translated into the freedom of the glory of the children of God, (Rom 8:21) and with the sting of death removed!

Our contributors open up the Bible on this topic and provide some very useful instruction.

Mr Pieter van Huyssteen explores the teaching of Scripture on this topic.

Mr John Goris provides useful pastoral instruction on how to prepare ourselves for death.

Mrs Jenny Waldron suggests ways to be an encourager.

Mr Shane Lems looks at the all too common problem of erratic church attendance.

Mr Tim Challies reviews *The Whole Christ*, by Sinclair Ferguson and *Tying the Knot*, by Rob Green. Prof. David VanDrunen reviews *A Treatise on True Theology: With the Life of Franciscus Junius*, by Franciscus Junius, translated by David C. Noe.

World in focus and *Focus on home*, with the *Gleanings*.

Mr Peter Kloosterman reflects on his time at the Asia-Pacific conference of the ICRC.

Mr Albert Mohler analyses our cultural crisis in a four part series.

The Reformed Church of Dovedale host their very own presentation of Handel’s Messiah.

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

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O Death, where is your sting? (1)

Death: a very abnormal thing

Pieter van Huyssteen

“Dying is part of living” is a saying which has been on the lips of many people – perhaps even for many centuries. Well, the lesson behind this saying is clear, i.e. to make people see that everyone who lives should make peace with the reality of his/her eventual death – also the eventual death of a loved one. Now, although this saying and its message might have been known for a very long time, it was particularly emphasised by the Swiss-American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, author of the book *On Death and Dying* published in 1969.

It seems that very quickly some of the ideas and things expressed in this book influenced the vocabulary used in medical publications in the USA and England. One such publication says about death: “Death is a normal part of life,

and its inevitable outcome. Ultimately we must all accept the inexorable demise of ourselves and those around us.”¹

“Death is normal...” it says. But is it really so that death is *normal*?

After all, gauging by what we all experience and, looking at what God’s Word says, death is anything but normal! So, what does God’s Word say about the origin and end of death? Well, let’s start at the beginning...

Death’s Origin

Gen 2:16-17 gives God’s prohibition to the first human couple: “*The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die”* (NASB).

That is the prohibition, and from Gen

2 and 3, it is clear that both Adam and Eve understood that were they to disobey God, death would come upon them not as a mere *normal* thing – not as something which was at first a created reality – but as something greatly abnormal, and as the result of their disobedience to their Maker!

Now, one should not stare blindly at the *nature* of God’s prohibition – the fact that it prohibited the mere eating of a certain kind of fruit. That’s not the point! Indeed, God could have given any kind of prohibition (e.g. murder) and that would have made no difference, for the point is just this, that by a prohibition, God wanted to test man’s love for His Creator. If man really loved God, he would obey Him even in the small things. After all, God could have created man as a robot and programmed him to have only one option, i.e. to



“Our Lord feared, yet willingly suffered, death’s sting, for that was the only way to remove death’s sting for His loved ones!”

obey God. But what sort of obedience would that have been? A love-less and cold connection. So God made our first parents with the ability to sin, yet also *not* to sin. Of course, that is a capacity which we don’t have. But they did have that capacity. Thus our first parents were able to *truly* love and obey, and not because they were hard-wired or programmed with only one option. That is the background to the prohibition – a prohibition whose transgression promised death as the inevitable result; yes, death which was not even *existing* before the Fall, let alone being described as *normal*.

Well, we know that Adam and his wife fell in disobedience when they were tempted by Satan. Much can be said about this temptation, but suffice to say that Adam and his wife failed God’s test. They chose to disobey their loving Creator. Thus they sinned against God.

Here, very briefly, is their Creator’s verdict: God cursed the serpent, and regarding the woman, He greatly multiplied her pain in childbirth and placed her under the rule of her husband. Regarding Adam, God made it harder for him to obtain his food, because the ground was now cursed with thorns and thistles, and man would have to earn his food through the sweat of his face. But then – *and here’s the crunch* – God’s verdict pronounced the ultimate punishment over man, i.e. *death*. This is what God said: “... *Till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return*” (Gen 3:19).

Well, it is clear isn’t it? Unlike people say, death is not to be described by the word “normal.” At first, death did *not* exist. Then it came for a reason, i.e. as the ultimate punishment for man’s shocking disobedience to God.

But, back to God’s verdict, for it was not yet finished. In fact, the worst punishment of all was still to come – expulsion from God’s presence. Genesis 3:23 says, “... *God sent him out from the Garden of Eden ...*” Verse 24 makes it even stronger: “*So He drove man out ...*” Then, to make sure that man would not in his own strength try and come back into God’s presence, God placed the cherubim with flaming swords at the gate to guard the way back to God and to the tree of life!

Devastating! Is death to be described by the word “normal?” Not at all. As a Christian brother once said at the funeral of my mother, “Death should never have been!” Death is so *abnormal* and so devastating. But what’s more: death has a *sting*! What is this sting?

Well, here is how *people* might describe death’s sting. They might say that death’s sting sits in the fact that death is so *final*, or that *life stops at death*, and, having died, you will *never return* to this life. That may be why death has often been described as a prison which keeps its occupants. Well, that is how *people* might describe death’s sting.

But *God’s Word* describes death’s sting as far more serious – as of eternal consequence. It says, “*The sting of death is sin ...*” (1 Cor 15:56). What does this mean? After all, if *sin* is death’s sting, and we know that sin came into the world through our first parents’ disobedience to God, then does it not follow that death’s sting is still valid and applicable to *all* human beings?

Thankfully, the answer to this question is, “No!” For, you see, when God’s Word says, “*The sting of death is sin,*” it has in mind *unpardoned* sin. Thus, if there is unpardoned sin in your life, well then death’s painful sting – a sting with eternal consequences – is indeed still active and applicable to you. You ask, “But how can I then be pardoned?” “How can sin (which is death’s sting) then be removed from me?” Well, the answer is found in God’s grace.

God’s Grace

Even though God’s verdict over our first parents was perfectly just and in accordance with the prohibition which He had given them up front, His verdict con-

tained many signs of *grace* among which the so-called *protevangelium* (first seed of the Gospel) is the most prominent, i.e. that evil (and death!) would not rule forever, but that from the woman’s seed (offspring) someone would one day come to crush, not the serpent’s *tail* or *body*, but his *head*. In other words, the promise is that Satan – the cause of death – would one day be not merely wounded, but destroyed.

Well, after many centuries, yet in God’s perfect timing – and in fulfilment of this gracious promise – came Jesus Christ, born from Adam and Eve’s offspring. Indeed, the Bible does trace the seed of the woman from Adam and Eve down to Jesus Christ (cf. Lk 3:23-37).

Thus, in Jesus Christ, born from the promised offspring of Eve, *God* came, having clothed Himself with humanity without losing His divinity. By this way, and this way only, was a *man* able to crush the serpent’s (Satan’s) head. Yes, by this way – not by way of remote control but by “getting His hands dirty” – God did, in His grace, step right into man’s world; not as a king (although He is King of the universe), but as a servant – a *suffering* servant. And His *suffering* was indeed, the only way death’s sting – which is unpardoned sin – could be removed!

Said in another way: in Christ, the *second Adam* came, for the first Adam was a *type of the One who was to come!* (Rom 5:14).

And, like the first Adam, so Christ too, was tempted by Satan.

What’s more, Christ’s circumstances were much worse than those of Adam. Unlike Adam in *well-stocked Paradise*, Jesus was in the *wilderness* and was *famished* because He had just finished forty days of fasting (Mt 4:2). Exactly at this stage, when Jesus was extremely hungry, Satan came and told him, “*If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread*” (Mt 4:3). But Jesus resisted the temptation. Satan came a second and third time tempting Christ to fall for power and pride – the same sins by which Satan once tried to elevate himself above God. But Jesus said, “*Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’*” (Mt 4:10). Greidanus says it well, “Unlike Adam, Jesus withstood Satan’s temptations. But Satan still had that poisonous bite that could strike the heel of the seed of the woman. So, at Satan’s instigation the people killed Jesus. It looked like a defeat for the seed of the woman; the

seed of the woman died.”²

A question: was Christ, just like all human beings, also scared of death’s sting? Indeed, according to His humanity, our Lord dreaded the suffering of death on the cross. His blood-like sweat and prayers in Gethsemane are proof of His agony! But the sting of death which was the climax of His angst, was no doubt *sin* – not His own sin, for He had none – but the sins of all His loved ones. He willingly and self-sacrificially took their sins upon Him. But remember: sin, i.e. death’s sting, *separates from God*. No wonder that, when the Father, not wanting to look at sin, thus *separated* Himself from the sin-bearing Son during that darkest hour on the cross, our Saviour cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Thus, indeed, our Lord feared, yet willingly suffered, death’s sting, for that was the only way to remove death’s sting for His loved ones. That was His death on the cross, which was the end of death. As someone so beautifully said: “The death of death was the death of Christ.”³

Death’s End

Here is a stunning thing. Matthew (27:51) tells us that at the very moment Jesus was breathing His last, the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. And do you remember what figures were embroidered on this curtain? The *cherubim* (Ex 36:35)! Yes, pictures of the very same creatures God had placed

at Paradise’s gate to bar man from entering the presence of a holy God! Yet, when Jesus died, atoning for the sins of all God’s loved ones, then, by an act of God, the curtain was torn in two and the cherubim no longer blocked the way to God’s presence.

Thus Satan’s seeming victory turned into his defeat. Why? Because in Christ’s self-sacrificial death He had just finished *atoning for the satanically-instigated sins* of His loved ones, i.e. He had just *removed death’s sting for them!*

Here is a question: have you received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord of your life? If your answer is yes, then your unpardoned sin – i.e. death’s sting, a sting with eternal consequences – has been removed for you! Now, unless Christ returns soon, *death will still seize you but it will not sting you, and cannot hold you in its power!*⁴

But wait! There’s more to Christ’s victory over death. Apart from removing the very powerful *sting* of death, our Lord also brought about the *eventual end of death* altogether. Is that not why God’s Word tells us that, when Christ returns and has raised to glory from their graves the bodies of all those who have died; yes, when at that very same time He has also transformed and glorified the bodies of those who are still alive (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16,17), then He will wipe away all their tears and *death will be no more* (Rev 21:4). Death, which came as the just result of man’s disobe-

dience to God, will be no more!

Thus, after all that has been said, *should* we – as the general saying goes – accept death as *normal*? No, for God’s Word tells us that death is *not* normal! However, can we have peace in our hearts and minds regarding our own death (or the death of a loved one)?

Of course, we can, provided that he/she who dies, dies in the Lord, for it is only when one dies in the Lord that death’s sting – sin and separation from God – has been removed. How applicable in the life of the believer are, as Greidanus reminds,⁵ the words of the third stanza of Joy to the World:

*No more let sin and sorrow grow
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.*

1 <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/medical-education/publications/psychology-in-medicine/Chapter18.pdf>

2 GREIDANUS, Sidney. 2007. *Preaching Christ from Genesis: foundations for expository sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI : William B Eerdmans. p. 84

3 cf. OWEN, J. (apud Raymond, L.J. 1998. *A new systematic theology of the Christian faith*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TE : Thomas Nelson. p.662).

4 Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 2276). Peabody: Hendrickson.

5 Greidanus (ibid:85)

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O Death, where is your sting? (2)

Preparing for the hour of death ...

John Goris

It will come ... the hour of our death ... unless the Lord’s return will precede it. But even that will mean that there is a need for readiness. Some people live as if tomorrow never comes, others are sitting in a “rocking chair”, as if prepar-

edness means there is nothing more to be do than wait, wait, wait! However, the Scriptures teach us that we should “redeem the time” for we live in days that are evil (Ephesians 5:15). So the apostle Paul teaches us that in such circumstances we must “walk in love” (Eph 5:2), “walk as children of light” (5:8) and

“walk as wise people” (5:15).

That means, we must not sit back, but move on towards the goal that God has for our lives. And surely, that includes that we must be prepared for D-Day.

In his study of the Puritans, James I. Packer, in “A Quest for Godliness” (p.13) states that they made us more conscious

of the transitoriness of this life. Readiness to *die* was the first step in learning to *live*. In the midst of life they could still be just one step away from eternity. Let us give this some more thought. There is a need for an awareness of what can be called proper preparation for the hour of death.

An awareness that life, as it is, is brief and certain to end

I remember that a friend was given a wall-plaque for his birthday with the words “A Round Tuit” written on it. Undoubtedly this was a reminder that there are things in the lives of many people of which they know that they don’t get “around to it”. Some things in life seem always to end up on the backburner. Let’s face it, if something is important, don’t let it end up at the bottom of the “to-do” list. And that leads to the next thing we need to bear in mind.

An awareness that in life we experience “regrets”

These regrets can build up towards the end, when opportunities to make reparations will be running out. An admirable man of God, Adolphe Monod, who lived in the first half of the nine-

teenth century, was diagnosed with a fatal illness in September 1855. He died six months later. Monod was one of the foremost Reformed preachers in France at his time. No longer able to preach from his pulpit in Paris, he spoke almost every Lord’s day from his bed to a circle of friends until the day of his death. These meditations have been preserved and are published under the title, “Adolphe Monod’s Farewell”. Among these meditations we find five that are headed as “A dying man’s regrets”. Despite his very active and dedicated life in God’s service, Monod still found areas of regrets, viz. (1) His desire to live more to the glory of God; (2) His study of the Word of God; (3) His use of time; (4) His prayer-life; and (5) His pre-occupation with petty interests.

I think we can all identify with these regrets, and possibly add more, such as e.g. time spent meaningfully with loved ones, lost opportunities to share the good news, a life filled with more praise to God. You see, preparing for the hour of death does not have to start when you have been diagnosed with cancer. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 1:7), and to die well, we need to live well and wisely.

An awareness that death brings us into God’s presence means a readiness to face that reality

I can think of at least two Scripture passages that are helpful in this regard. The first one is from Isaiah 6:1-8. Here the prophet is confronted with a vision of the glory of God. Do read that passage often and give thanks to God that He makes us fit to serve in His presence. The second one is from Romans 8:6,

“What is more precious in this vale of tears, than to be conscious of being bonded with Christ?”



viz. "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." The older translations spoke of "carnal mindedness" and "spiritual mindedness". Romans 8 is a great chapter to focus on often. When we are born again, our lives are motivated and seek to give expression to the renewing drive of God's Holy Spirit.

Though we are conscious of the fact that we live in this human body, we are, in fact, becoming more conscious of it, when this body begins to show wear and tear. Yet, our driving force is not the physical, but the spiritual. Paul also reminds us of this in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5.

The great Puritan theologian, John Owen, wrote a classic work (1681) on this topic of spiritual mindedness. The simplest and deepest training for a spiritual mind-set is experienced by "keeping our eyes upon Jesus", and to "walk with the Lord". We don't need to devour a whole library of "classical literature", though that may be stimulating. The chief thing is to keep in touch with the Lord. In days of accelerated long-distance communication, keeping in touch with heaven is not all that "fanciful".

Keeping in touch with heaven also implies that we should observe the presence of sin in our lives, and especially those sins that most frequently beset our path. Richard Baxter reminds us that we need to be alert to any known sin. This drives us all the more to God, and to His grace. Not only that: every opportunity for worship, and every Lord's day, becomes a stepping stone to an eternity of worship and fulfilment.

An awareness that dying can be prepared for by an assurance that Christ has opened heaven's gate for us

Departing as well as parting has an element of sadness in it. However if it means promotion to glory, the parting is put in a different light. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you!" (John 14:3). Meanwhile He also sent His Holy Spirit to equip us for life and death. The Holy Spirit is not called the Comforter without reason. Besides that, He is also called the "Sanctifier", for He makes this life more fit for heaven. However, we can become so earthbound and flesh-oriented, that the spiritual part of our new nature stands in the shadow. Then the appetite for the heavenly begins to wane, and our earthly dwelling seems more permanent. So sickness and suffering then may have to shock us into the

heavenly reality again. Indeed Romans 8:18ff must come to the rescue again.

An awareness that the one thing I will never lose is my bonding with Christ

And surely Romans 8 again proves to be the reminder of that amazing truth. Says the apostle, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ..." (Romans 8:35-39). Loved ones I may be cut off from, whether temporarily or eternally, but Christ will ever be there for me. To what extent shall we recognise loved ones in heaven? Lazarus is seen in Abraham's bosom (Luke 16). David said of his young son who died, "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam 12:23b). The fullness of that recognition we must leave in the hands of our loving Saviour!

One thing is sure, and we confess that in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism: "I am not my own, but belong ... body and soul ... in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ". This bonding with Christ was so precious to the godly Robert Murray McCheyne, that young Scottish pastor who went to be with his Lord at the age of 29 years in 1843. Well before his death McCheyne had been experiencing the joy of communion with God, through delighting in God's Word, through frequent prayer, through fellowship with the Spirit. Said McCheyne, "A calm hour with God is worth a whole lifetime with man".

What is more precious, in this vale of tears, than to be conscious of being bonded with Christ? Surely the Psalmist put it well, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

An awareness of the fact that although the 'removal van' (i.e. the hearse) may soon turn up, our new address is a better dwelling place by far!

The apostle Paul says, "For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this dwelling we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling ..." (2 Cor 5:1,2)

Even though there is also much to be enjoyed in this life, it is undoubtedly true that "the best is yet to come". We may well ask ourselves whether we have that sentiment of which the apostle speaks,

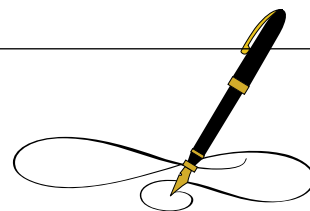
“Surely the Psalmist put it well, ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me’.”

when he says: "Longing to put on our heavenly dwelling", viz the body of our eternity.

So when it comes to *preparing* ourselves for the hour of death, and for that heavenly dwelling, what incentive keeps us mostly occupied? Think for a moment what happened that first Christmas Day. He who inhabits eternity in all its perfection and holiness, is prepared, yes, "*prepared in the fullest sense*", to come to this hurting, unholy, "restrictive" life on earth ... so as to bring us to His glorious Home! And He came for you and me, sinners that we are, to give us an inheritance for saints, in His presence. No wonder the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" And on the night before He died that cruel death for you and me, He said to His father in heaven: "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3) The apostle, even that doubting Thomas, had to exclaim: "My Lord and My God!" And should not we?

I cannot wait to see Him!!

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Encourage | in'kəri:j |

Encouragement is important business. It demands our careful attention, not only because Scripture tells us directly to encourage one another and build one another up (1 Thess 5:11) but also because building up one another in the Lord is a unique aspect of Christian fellowship.

The Church is far more than a social group. As Christians we are called the “body of Christ” and the “family of God”. As we interact with each other and as we serve the Lord together, we are called to encourage one another so that we are drawn closer and closer to our God, whom we love and serve. This does not happen when our conversations are merely social ‘chit-chat’. Any group of people that have something in common can enjoy time together. However, we are sons and daughters of the Most High God, therefore we are called to focus our words and actions on encouraging one another to love the Lord and to serve Him with all our hearts, minds and souls. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the

habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”(Heb 10:24-25)

Our lives can be likened to a race. Sometimes we are exhausted and tired and want to give up, but a friend comes along and motivates and inspires us to pick up our feet and continue running the race toward everlasting life. It is like young Johnny running a race at school and he is close to exhaustion. He sees his parents watching from the side lines. As he nears them, his parents start yelling to him to “keep going, Johnny, you are doing really well”, “you can finish the race”, “you are nearly there!” Amazingly, Johnny finds the strength to not only finish the race but to run even faster as he sprints to the line. How can we inspire, embolden, energise, and revitalise those around us who are running the race set before them? (Hebrews 12:1)

We are reminded in Hebrews 3:12-14 that difficulties along the path of obedience can weaken our determination to follow Christ – and therefore we should encourage one another. We are to motivate each other to walk with the Lord more closely, encouraging one another to live out the truth of our standing in Christ by loving others and doing good.

Encourage is a verb that means to get alongside. It includes a sense of giving help or aid. Interestingly, “parakaleo”, the Greek word for encourage, is the verb root of the “parakletos”, the Greek word used for the Holy Spirit (Helper, Comforter). The English word, encourage, means literally “with heart”. The other Greek word often translated “encouraging” is “paramutheomai” which is “encouragement with an emphasis on activity. Christian encouragement must not become an anaesthesia that puts us to sleep. It must be a stimulant that awakens us to do better.”¹ What a wonderful thing we are called to do; to get alongside one another and have an eternally significant impact on each other.

Building up the Church

When someone is doing something for the Lord, however well or “badly” in our eyes, we should encourage them. They are endeavouring to serve the Lord, to their best ability, so let's help them. For example: when someone is asked to lead a Bible study for the first time, we shouldn't fire off and let them know all the mistakes they made, rather our aim is to encourage them, support them and be patient with them. We may need to get alongside them and teach them and mentor them. Praying publicly is difficult for some. If you know someone is praying for the first time, tell them something you appreciated in their prayer, focusing on God's work in their life and yours. Embolden them to keep going. If someone is playing an instrument, they may need motivation to practice and increase their skill. Sometimes, what they are doing, just isn't their gifting. At times like these, we need to humbly and gently guide them into areas where they may be more suited to serve the Lord.

Encouraging those in leadership

As someone becomes more proficient in leading, whether it be Sunday School, Cadets and Gems, youth group or in whatever capacity, we should continue to support them and offer encouraging words that will spur them on his/her walk and service with the Lord.

Encourage all the men; the pastor, the readers, the visiting minister or the upcoming vicars, who preach the Word on Sundays. Focus on the sermon and how God spoke to you or challenged you through it. Encourage the Bible study leaders, the guest speakers or missionaries. Encourage everyone who is ministering for the Lord. Sadly, many people who would serve the Lord in some way have quit or never tried again, due to being criticised, discouraged and/or demoralised.

“We are to get alongside one another and stimulate each other spiritually with encouragement, comfort, and help.”

What encouragement isn't

We all know the damage our tongue can do. It is like a fire that can set a whole forest ablaze and is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (James 3:5,8).

Going back to the running analogy, Johnny, as he was getting close to the end of the race, hears his parents yelling, "you look really tired, I think you should stop now," or "your technique is no good and your breathing will not get you to the finish line." "You are just useless, Johnny. Go home!" Do you think Johnny will be inspired or will give up? "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen". (Eph 4:29)

Often I hear people say that they don't want to say anything encouraging because (a) the person will get a big head! Or (b) it sounds so insincere, or (c) it's flattering a person. If you are encouraging someone to continue in Christ then the person will not "get a big head", instead they will be spurred on to continue the work God has set before them. Telling someone that you appreciated the card they wrote to you when you were sick, won't give them a "big

head" but will motivate them to continue doing something good and valuable. If you think you might sound "insincere", consider the purpose that you are trying to achieve in the Lord; to build up the saints. Think about something you can be truly thankful for. Flattery, on the other hand, is when you say something "nice" to someone, but do it for your own selfish means. For example, a politician may flatter voters so that they vote for him, or a salesman may use words to coax, manipulate and close a sale. If you offer nice words to someone in the hope that they will praise you, or you want them to do something for you, that can be flattery. Sometimes people feel that if they point out the faults, coated with "speaking the truth" then that will encourage them to "do better!" However, this usually has the opposite effect, especially if a preacher has to suffer the ignominy of being berated for a poor sermon as he is shaking hands at the door. We have all listened to sermons that were less than desirable. Let's encourage our ministers, and pray for them. There is a time for asking questions/offering comments about the sermon and the closed door or his day off isn't that time. If you would like to find other ways to encour-

“The Lord is to be the focus of our communication with other Christians as we strive to build up one another in love.”

age your pastor, John Piper has written a very good article on "encouraging our pastors without exalting them."² Let's focus on whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, any excellence, or worthy of praise. (Phil 4:8)

How can we be encouraging?

Written: This can be in the form of letter, card, text or email. Texts are usually small, quick and easy to send



off. A text with a Scripture written out can be very encouraging. Some time ago a family was hit by a particularly hard time. They received many texts with “praying for you” or a Scripture and they felt helped, loved and supported by their brothers and sisters in Christ. A quick text saying thank you for a meeting with a Christian friend can be reassuring and heartening.

Receiving a beautiful card with specially chosen words can bring such a lift to the day and be a real encouragement. Writing a letter or a card means that you can think carefully about what you want to say. Including a suitable Scripture verse facilitates the ministry of God’s Word. For example, a dear old lady in Palmerston North wrote many, many encouraging cards to a vast number of people. This may be a ministry that you could do.

Verbal: Say “thank you” to people who serve the Lord and you. This could be said at the door after a preacher or speaker at a conference has spoken. Or you could ring someone with a message of encouragement. Maybe you missed them at church, or you have seen them

serving coffee at church diligently. It doesn’t need to be long or drawn out, but sufficient for the person to know that you care about them. You may see someone struggling, or straying, make time to talk to them. Get alongside them, comfort and console them. Speak kindly and gently to them.

Physical touching: Sometimes people just need a hug! Especially people who may be grieving, or going through a tough time. Holding someone’s hand when they are bedridden can also convey love and tenderness. Touching someone’s arm or shoulder when you talk to them can be reassuring and comforting.

Serving: Serving someone in a practical way can be tremendously helpful to them. A woman might be preparing lessons for her Bible study or for a talk. You could encourage her by offering to do some housework for her so that she is freed up to do the necessary preparation. There are many avenues we can serve in a practical way that energises and strengthens them to do what God has called them to do, whether it is motherhood, mission work, teaching, or

whatever or however in life they serve the Lord.

Sharon Betters writes in *Treasures of Encouragement*³, “Authentic scriptural encouragement is a response to God’s work in our lives. Because of what Christ has done for us, we are to encourage others.”

As Christians, as we run the race set before us and remember all that God has done for us, we are called by Him to spur one another on, with words and actions, to love Christ and one another, and to do the good works God has for us. We are to get alongside one another and stimulate each other spiritually with encouragement, comfort, and help. The Lord is to be the focus of our communication with other Christians as we strive to build up one another in love.

¹ Wiersbe, W: *Bible Exposition Commentary*. 1989.

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-ways-to-encourage-your-pastor-without-exalting-him>

³ Sharon W. Betters – *Treasures of Encouragement – Women Helping Women in the Church*. P22 Published by P&R Publishing

Letter to the editor

Dear Sir;

It was very refreshing to read your February 2016 article about Tim Keller’s infatuation with Roman Catholicism and with practically all the adherents, doctrines, and practices of that odious religion! Because, in this age of “ecumania”, most people who still have the nerve to call themselves Evangelicals are soft on Popery, plus all false religions and irreligions. We are told that doctrine divides: all we need is love; so the ideas of John Lennon have been adopted all over the former Christian and Protestant world.

Anyway, those pseudo-Evangelicals are now legion, curry favour with the Pope and his lot, worldwide, and don’t know what the Reformation was essentially all about. In the essentials of what is necessary to salvation, everything is just as it was at the Diet of Worms in 1521: Luther firmly proclaimed salvation (justification) by faith alone, in Christ alone: Rome still believes what she taught then

– “synergism”, the idea that it’s by a combination of faith and good works, plus the sacraments, of which she says there are seven, not just the two instituted by Christ. Further, the Decrees of Trent (1564), still official Roman doctrine to this day, say just that, and pronounce an anathema on anyone who says salvation is by faith alone. As John Wesley rightly said in the 1750s, about Protestants who say that Rome is a true Church, her manifold superstitious practices and notions are to be seen as mere blemishes, this cannot be true: Rome’s plain teaching, that denies salvation to be by faith alone, is what makes her a false Church; though we must also condemn those “blemishes”.

However, if informed Evangelical Protestants point this out to those self-styled “Evangelicals”, we just get a volley of invective, calling us unloving, uncomprehending, “judgemental”, bigoted, outdated, and all the rest – but of course

with no evidence to refute what we have said. It’s an unfortunate fact that most “popular religion” is derived from emotion, sentimental fiction and movies, inaccurate historical novels, etc., and not from the Bible or sober history. I’m telling the people, brainwashed by such silliness, to drop it, and read the Bible, to read some works by the best Protestant writers (not necessarily Calvinists, as the Arminians Wesley etc. also wrote some sound works), and to read some plain history, and forgetting that romantic rubbish. Yes, I’m aware there are some Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox who are saved people; but that’s because they DON’T believe their Churches’ doctrines of salvation, but what WE believe on that essential doctrine. They OUGHT to leave those false Churches, but somehow don’t always do so, alas.

Hector Westfold
(Reformed Church of Wellington)

The dangers of neglecting the assembly

Shane Lems

“Do we have to go to church today?”

This is a question my parents remember me asking more than a few times when I was growing up. When I was eleven, there were times when I would have preferred to stay home on Sunday and play with my Lego bricks, rather than go to church. I knew that going to church was a good thing to do, but it seemed to me that going to church once or twice a month was *good enough*. That was my logic as a child in a Christian home.

One problem in the Christian life is that some adults use this same logic: going to church is good, but going once or twice a month is good enough. It's one thing for a child to reason this way; it's a very different thing for an adult to do it. I know there are legitimate reasons why some people can't meet for worship regularly (illness, emergencies, etc.), but there are also illegitimate ones (sports, TV shows, video games, etc.). For now, I want to answer the following question using Scripture and biblical principles: What is wrong with habitually neglecting public worship?

1. It is against God's will

In Hebrews 10:25, Scripture clearly rebukes Christians for “neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.” Without debating the number of worship services these people were missing, it is safe to say that the early church was *regularly* meeting together to worship Christ (see Acts 2:42). But later, when Hebrews was written, some in the church were very *irregular* in their attendance, and they were clearly called out for skipping church (see WLC 119). It is displeasing to God when his people habitually neglect public worship services; it does not bring him glory and honor, because it is against his will.

2. It is harmful to the Christian's faith

God has promised that through his Word he will powerfully bless his people. Faith

in Christ comes through hearing his Word (Rom. 10:17), and that faith is strengthened through the same Word. The Word of God's grace is “able to build you up” in faith (Acts 20:32; see also Ps. 119). We call preaching an ordinary means of grace because it is one of the primary ways in which God showers his grace upon his people (see WLC 154). If we habitually neglect preaching, we habitually neglect God's showers of grace (the same can be said of the sacraments). And neglecting showers of grace allows the seed of faith to wither, rather than making it grow in our hearts. So think of habitually neglecting to worship like habitually neglecting to water and fertilize a garden in an arid climate. The plants will not grow. Likewise, our faith will not grow if it is not regularly watered by the Word and sacraments.

3. It hinders Christian fellowship

Hebrews 10:24–25 not only talks about attending worship services, but also talks about Christian fellowship in the same sentence. Alongside the exhortation to stop missing worship services, the author of Hebrews tells God's people to stir one another up to love and good works,

and also to encourage one another in the faith as we await Christ's return. Assembly, encouragement, love, and good works go hand in hand. This kills our self-centered, individualistic attitude and helps us think and live in a more covenantal, corporate way. After all, Christianity is not a solo endeavor, nor does it square with the individualism of our culture. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 nasb). A true Christian doesn't say, “I love Jesus, but not the church.” If a person frequently skips worship, he is questioning the importance of fellowship and love for God's people (see also WCF 26.2).

4. It diminishes God's praise

The Bible is full of examples of God's people publicly singing praises to his name and honoring him together. For example, Psalm 34:3 says, “Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (cf. Ps. 95:1–2, 6; Rev. 19:7). When we rarely sing praises to God with his people, it diminishes our praise of him – praise that we should want to give him, together with his people: “I was glad when they said



<http://danreiland.com>

“If a person makes a vow in church, and then bails on the church by habitually forsaking worship, that person is not keeping the vows he made.”

to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Ps. 122:1). Habitually missing worship services means habitually neglecting to praise God with his people. This even sets a bad example for unbelievers, who might begin to think that one can be a Christian without attending public worship services. Indeed, it is inconsistent for a person to call himself a Christian, but not care about praising the Lord with other Christians.

5. It confuses other Christians

Christians have been called “churchgoers,” and this is a biblical way to think. When a Christian frequently skips worship services, other Christians may begin to wonder why this person is not going to church. Or, if a child in a Christian family notices that a certain other family never comes to worship, that child might wonder why that family is not worshipping. The Bible teaches that if a person is truly a Christian, he sticks with God’s people (1 John 2:19). In other words, if a Christian frequently skips church, he is setting a poor example for other Christians and causing them confusion (rather than building them up as he should). Perhaps people who frequently skip church need to think more about how this might harm other Christians. Habitual neglect of public worship is a blemish on a Christian’s profession of faith that can cause other Christians to stumble.

6. It obstructs true piety

In the church’s liturgy, God’s people learn the rhythm of the Christian life: praise, confession of sin, forgiveness of sin, prayer, hearing God’s word, and learning how to live for him. These elements of worship help keep our Christian life oriented in the right direction; liturgy is like a Christian “recalibration.” Habitually avoiding worship services makes us forget the right way to walk as disciples, casts confusion on morality, messes up our consciences, makes us prone to shame and guilt, and throws a fog on the realities of God and his grace. As a friend recently reminded me, the psalmist’s confusion about reality was cleared up when he went into the sanctuary of God (Ps. 73). Neglecting worship services gets in the way of true Christian piety.

7. It makes pastors’ and elders’ tasks difficult

God has called the pastor(s) and elders of a local church to care for the flock, to pay attention to it, to love it, to set good examples for it, to pray for it, and so forth (see Acts 20:28–31; 1 Tim. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:1–3). Church leaders are accountable to God for how they lead and care for the flock (Heb. 13:17). When a person habitually neglects public worship, the pastor cannot preach to that person, and the elders begin to worry about that person’s faith and life. Certainly pastors and elders should do their duty even outside the public worship service, but it is very difficult for them to do their task of shepherding when someone constantly misses worship services. In fact, Hebrews says that Christians should “obey” their leaders, “submit to them,” and “imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7, 17). When a Christian constantly dodges the worship services that the elders have called for, he is not obeying and submitting to his leaders or showing honor to them (think also in terms of the fifth commandment). Despite the fact that most Americans don’t like authority figures, the Bible is quite clear: we must honor the elders and pastors that God has put in authority over us. Neglecting worship services makes pastors’ and elders’ jobs difficult.

8. It is making light of membership vows

Although some churches today care little about membership, historic Reformed churches have membership vows that are taken from various places in Scripture (cf. Deut. 6:13; Ezra 10:5; Pss. 50:14;

116:14). When a Christian joins one of Christ’s churches, he makes certain covenantal, public promises. In the OPC, a person vows, among other things, “to participate faithfully in this church’s worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline.” If a person makes a vow in church, and then bails on the church by habitually forsaking worship, that person is not keeping the vows he made. Here is where the ninth commandment comes into play (see also WCF 22.5).

9. It is a sign of apathy in the faith

If a person loves the Lord with fervency, loves his Word with passion, and loves other Christians, he will want to worship Christ with other Christians (cf. Ps. 122:1; Isa. 2:3). I don’t know of any Christian who fervently loves Jesus, but never sings to him with his people and doesn’t care to sit at his feet with his people to hear his Word. I do, however, know of Christians who grow lazy in the faith and would rather watch a football game or relax on the deck than sing to Jesus with other Christians. John Newton once wrote a letter to his congregation on this very topic. Among other things, he said, “Most of you agree with me that Scripture is God’s revelation. But do not some of you act inconsistently with your acknowledged principles? Your business and entertainment indispose you for due observation of our church services. You have other things to do, so you miss many sermons.... Many people can give their attention to trivial entertainment for several hours without weariness, but their patience is quickly exhausted under a sermon where the principles of Scripture are applied to the conscience.”

10. It invites Satan’s temptations

I once saw a clip on a nature show on hyenas and how they hunt for food. They often look for and hunt the antelope that is a bit removed from the herd, since there is protection in numbers. Similarly, Satan and his demons often attack Christians at a vulnerable point: when they are alone, not accountable to anyone, not hearing God’s word regularly, and not benefiting from Christian strength in Christian numbers. Satan is no idiot – he knows the best times to attack. It is no coincidence that Peter says Satan is like a hungry lion on the prowl (1 Pet. 5:8). The church is Christ’s flock, and straying from the flock is spiritually dangerous. To remove oneself from the assembly is

to expose oneself to Satan's attacks and invite his arrows of temptation.

11. It is a step down the road of apostasy

The track record of apostates is to go to church for a while, then less frequently, then not at all. Hebrews 10 doesn't just command us to worship regularly with the assembly; it also warns of the hellish punishment awaiting those who forsake Christ. If someone is truly a Christian, he will not leave the flock. However, those who left for good "were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19 nasb). William L. Lane wrote this on Hebrews 10:24–25:

The writer regarded the desertion of the communal meetings as utterly serious. It threatened the corporate life

of the congregation and almost certainly was a prelude to apostasy on the part of those who were separating themselves from the assembly. The neglect of worship and fellowship was symptomatic of a catastrophic failure to appreciate the significance of Christ's priestly ministry and the access to God it provided. (*Hebrews 9–13*, p. 290)

I realize that more could be said on this subject. I also know that many people have very busy lives and find it hard to manage their time. It takes commitment, resolve, a sense of duty, and self-discipline to worship regularly with God's people. This is something we should all pray about and ask God for grace to carry out. Thankfully, when we do go to church, we hear the gospel of Christ and are refreshed and renewed in the Christian faith.

Since my list above is a negative one, I'd like to end on a positive note. Using

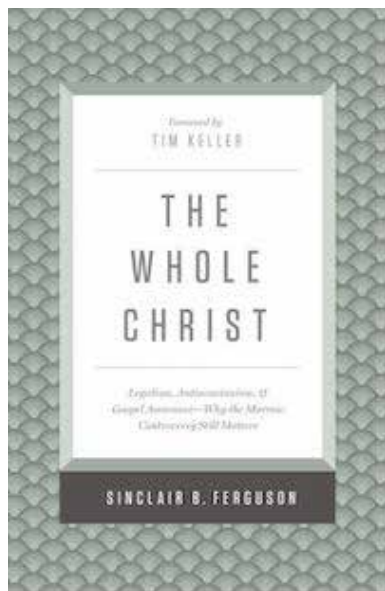
the same points as above, we can positively say that regularly attending public worship services (1) is God's will for you, (2) strengthens your fellowship with other saints, (3) helps you praise God better, (4) is beneficial for your faith, (5) builds other Christians up, (6) helps keep Satan's attacks at bay, (7) keeps you from straying off the path, (8) inflames true piety, (9) makes the pastors' and elders' jobs easier and more enjoyable, (10) helps you keep your church vows, and (11) is a sign of strong faith.

See you on Sunday!

The author is the pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Hammond, Wis. Unless otherwise indicated, he quotes the ESV.

Reproduced from New Horizons, September 2015.

Books in focus



The Whole Christ by Sinclair Ferguson Reviewed by Tim Challies

If you keep up with Christian publishing for any length of time, you will eventually spot a curious phenomenon. Every now and again a scholarly book will show up and a lot of people will get really excited about it. It will be a book that, under

normal circumstances, would be known among only the scholars. And yet this one will be released with accolades assuring the non-scholarly readers (like me!) that they, too, can benefit from it. This year's first such book is Sinclair Ferguson's *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance – Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*. It has received those accolades and, just like they say, it is definitely worth the read.

The Whole Christ begins more than 250 years ago with a theological controversy that erupted in a small Scottish town – hardly the stuff of your average Christian book. The Marrow Controversy centered on Edward Fisher's book *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* and pitted two groups of theologians against one another. The core issue was whether or not a person must first forsake his sins in order to come to Christ. The Marrow Men, those who agreed with Fisher's book, believed that this demanded works as a precursor to faith and was, in that way, opposed to the free offer of the gospel. Their opponents taught that the gospel should only be offered to those who were beginning to show evidence of being among God's elect. This syl-

logism describing their view may bring clarity: "Major premise: The saving grace of God in Christ is given to the elect alone. Minor premise: The elect are known by the forsaking of sin. Conclusion: Therefore forsaking sin is a prerequisite for saving grace." Ferguson points to "The subtle movement from seeing forsaking sin as the fruit of grace that is rooted in election, to making the forsaking of sin the necessary precursor for experiencing that grace." But here's the problem: "Repentance, which is the fruit of grace, thus becomes a qualification for grace. This puts the cart before the horse. It stands the gospel on its head so that the proclamation of the gospel, with the call to faith in Christ, becomes conditional on something in the hearer. The gospel thus became a message of grace for the credentialed, not an offer of Christ to all with the promise of justification to the ungodly who believes."

This was the starting place for the Marrow Controversy, but as the controversy unfolded it unearthed a whole host of related issues. *The Whole Christ* navigates them through "an extended reflection on theological and pastoral issues that arose in the early eighteenth

century, viewed from the framework of the present day." In other words, Ferguson looks at this controversy, dissects it, and then applies it to our day. And, as it happens, we, too, are struggling with issues related to legalism and antinomianism. That makes his book perfectly timed and a valuable contribution to the discussion about the role of the law, the role of obedience, in the Christian life.

And this is where his book takes off. Now Ferguson is going far beyond church history and bringing clarity to the way we are to live the Christian life. He is moving beyond history to do the work of a pastor. He carefully discusses how we become Christians, how we live as Christians, and how we can have assurance that we are Christians. With great precision he describes legalism and antinomianism, bringing clarity to their definitions and showing that they are not so much opposites of one another as they are "nonidentical twins that emerge from the same womb." Antinomianism is, in its own way, an expression of legalism. "The antinomian is by nature a person with a legalistic heart. He or she becomes an antinomian in reaction. But this implies only a different view of law, not a more biblical one."

This is a book full of treasures. Some of the treasures are on the surface waiting to be picked up, among them Ferguson's one-line summaries of great truths: "It is misleading to say that God accepts us the way we are. Rather he accepts us despite the way we are" and "antinomianism and legalism are not so much antithetical to each other as they are both antithetical to grace." Many of the other treasures yield only to care and effort, and in this way the book demands a fair bit from the reader. I suspect I would need to read it through once or twice more to have an advanced grasp of its subject matter. I would like to go back and do that very thing.

Ordinarily, we might assign a book like this to the bookshelves of the scholars and enthusiasts of church history. But *The Whole Christ* has too much to say to us to allow that to happen. It speaks too clearly and too urgently to issues that are every bit important to us as they were in the seventeenth century. I don't think Derek Thomas is exaggerating when he says, "For my part, this is one of the most important and definitive books I have read in over four decades."

www.challies.com

February 2016

Tying the Knot

by Rob Green

Reviewed by Tim Challies

The best things in life are rarely the easy things, are they? The best things in life tend to require the most commitment, the most effort, and the most sacrifice. By that measure, marriage is one of the best things we can experience. Marriage brings such joy, but the joy comes only through the dedication and the work.

Aileen and I have been married for almost eighteen years now, and every now and again we start to think that we're beginning to figure it out. One thing we always agree on, though, is that we would have benefitted from some good pre-marriage counseling. We were Christians when we got married and deeply involved in a church, but somehow were never offered any significant pre-marriage counseling. I just don't think it was part of our church's tradition. In fact, the only pre-marriage counsel I remember receiving was from a friend who was married a few weeks before us. The sum total of his counsel was this: "You probably want to lower your expectations for sex on your honeymoon..." That was helpful, I suppose, but hardly sufficient.

We could have used a book like Rob Green's *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage*. Even better, we could have used a book like this and a mature married couple to go through it with us. "The purpose of this book," says Green, "is to help you prepare for a lifelong, strong, and lasting marriage." He does that by showing first how Jesus needs to be at the center of everything. The opening chapter calls the reader to ensure that

he or she is truly following Jesus. Not only that, but the reader must also be convinced that his or her future spouse is truly following Jesus. The second chapter deals with love, elevating love from culture's trite description to the Bible's deep and compelling example best displayed at the cross. From there Green dedicates a chapter to each of the following: problem solving, roles and expectations, communication, finances, church community, and sexual intimacy. In other words, he offers wise, biblical counsel on the joys of marriage and also on the most common challenges.

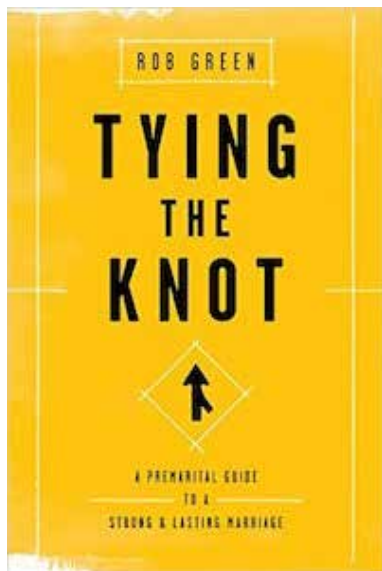
There is much to appreciate in Green's book. Here are a few of its strengths.

The book is practical. *Tying the Knot* is meant to be practical and succeeds well. Every chapter concludes with homework discussion questions that are actually engaging and helpful. They are meant to be completed individually, then shared with the fiancé(e), and finally shared with a marriage mentor. There are also advanced homework assignments for those who want to do a little more.

The book is appropriate. The chapter on sexual intimacy is discreet and appropriate. It is meant to provide the framework for sexual intimacy, but not to go too deep into the details. (It may be wise to supplement with *Intended for Pleasure* or another book that can help couples who are struggling with issues related to sexual intimacy and pleasure.) Green gives lots of biblical counsel in the areas of sex and money management, but rarely gives specific counsel that goes beyond the general truths Scripture offers.

The book is timely. I have long noticed that pre-marriage counseling books do not always age well. For example, some of the books I have looked at recently demand the envelope system of money management, rather difficult in an age where cash is being replaced by electronic transactions. Some of the books never mention the importance of discussing pornography or other issues unique and crucial to a twenty-first century context. *Tying the Knot* is up-to-date, discussing issues that are important today.

The book discusses the issue of local church commitment. It is surprisingly rare to find a pre-marriage book that discusses the importance of a serious commitment to a local church. Even Christian books seem to miss this important component of a healthy marriage. But this one does not and I was glad to see Green give it an entire chapter.



Tying the Knot comes endorsed by a long list of trusted leaders and deservedly so. Looking through the blurbs, I think I most appreciate Andy Naselli's words: "I would have loved to read this book with my wife while we were engaged. So practical, so wise. Engaged couples, listen carefully to Rob Green." The ultimate tests of a book like this are whether or not I would have wanted to use it for my own pre-marriage counseling and whether I would use it today in counseling an engaged couple as they prepare for marriage. In both cases my answer is that I absolutely would. For those reasons I gladly commend it to engaged couples as they prepare for marriage and for pastors as they look for a pre-marriage resource to recommend to others.

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February 2016

A Treatise on True Theology: With the Life of Franciscus Junius

by Franciscus Junius, translated by David C. Noe

Reformation Heritage Books. Reviewed by Prof. David VanDrunen

This volume consists of an English translation of *A Treatise on True Theology*, written by early Reformed theologian Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), preceded by a translation of Junius's autobiography and an introduction by the late Willem van Asselt, an eminent Reformed historical theologian.

Translator David Noe has provided the Reformed community with a valuable service. Junius was quite an important Reformed theologian, and many later Reformed luminaries embraced his understanding of the nature of theology as explained in this *Treatise*. Yet in recent years most Reformed theologians have been only vaguely aware of Junius's work, and most Reformed believers have been completely unaware of his existence.

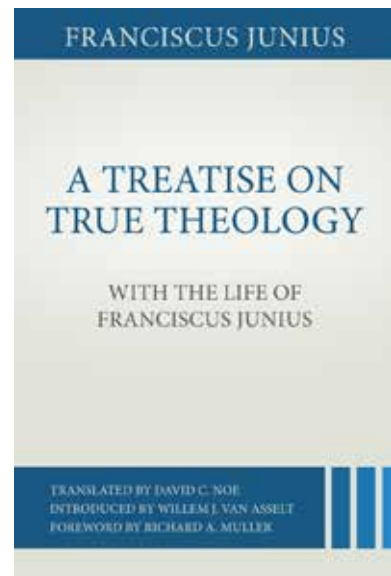
Junius's autobiography alone almost makes the book worthwhile. Written about ten years before he died of the Black Death, it recounts a life story that makes the experience of almost every contemporary Reformed pastor and theologian seem dull by comparison. Junius's frank recollections of his family life (a mob murdered his father, a prominent French civil official), education, temptations, self-deprivation, persecution as a Protestant, and ministerial labors display

a piety, discipline, and love of learning that should be an inspiration for us today.

Ordinary readers will find the autobiography interesting and easy to read, but the *Treatise* itself requires slow and careful reading that those without a good theological education may find difficult. The translator, however, has provided many helpful footnotes that explain not only some of his translation decisions but also a number of Junius's obscure words and references.

The *Treatise* is organized around thirty-nine theses answering the question, What is theology? The question is important. Disputes between the Reformed tradition and other traditions revolve not only around different views of sin, salvation, the church, etc., but also around different views of theology itself.

I have space to mention only a few highlights of the *Treatise*. Junius says that true theology is divided into the archetypal (the wisdom of God himself) and the ectypal (the wisdom finite creatures have about God). Junius goes on to distinguish different forms of ectypal theology, including that communicated to Christ as the God-Man, that of the angels and saints in heaven, and that of revelation communicated to human beings here and now (which he calls "our theology"). He divides revealed theology, furthermore, into natural and supernatural. Another important distinction is between our theology stated absolutely and stated relatively. The



former refers to the wisdom of divine matters sealed infallibly in Scripture through the prophets and apostles, while the latter refers to theology as present imperfectly in us. It is in this latter sense that we may be called theologians.

While readers may wish to engage Junius critically at one point or another, this is an illuminating book that enriches our understanding of classic Reformed theology and promises to sharpen our own views of what theology is. If nothing else, the *Treatise* encourages both a confidence that our theology probes the truth about God and a humility about the limits of our knowledge in this present age.

New Horizons, January 2016

World in focus

EU puts 'genocide' tag on Islamic State

The European Parliament has declared the violent campaign by the so-called Islamic State against Christians and other religious minorities to be genocide.

"Daesh commits genocide," according to the resolution passed 4 Feb. by a show of hands from representatives of the 28-nation European Union. Daesh is an English representation of the Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

The vote in Strasbourg, France, comes eight days after the Council of Europe, a legally non-binding human-rights consortium, adopted a largely similar resolution.

Religious-freedom advocates have been lobbying Western governments to formally apply the term genocide to Islamic State's 21-month drive to impose a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam upon northern Iraq and Syria. Under multinational human-rights agreements, formal recognition of genocide heightens the obligation of participating countries to respond.

“Daesh is committing genocide against Christians and Yazidis, and other religious and ethnic minorities, who do not agree with the so-called ISIS/Daesh interpretation of Islam,” the resolution reads.

“This therefore entails action under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; underlines the fact that those who intentionally, for ethnic or religious reasons, conspire in, plan, incite, commit or attempt to commit, are complicit in or support atrocities should be brought to justice and prosecuted for violations of international law, notably war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.”

The resolution urges the United Nations Security Council to seek an International Criminal Court investigation of “violations committed in Iraq and Syria by the so-called ‘ISIS/Daesh’ against Christians, Yazidis and religious and ethnic minorities.”

The vote, which carries legal weight among EU members, calls upon all nations to heed the UN’s 1948 anti-genocide convention “to wholly fulfil their legal obligations under the convention and such other international agreements.”

ADF International, a religious-freedom legal organisation that has European Parliament accreditation, applauded the move.

“It was high time that the EU responded to the undeniable evidence of this genocide which includes assassinations of church leaders, torture, mass murders, kidnapping, sexual enslavement and systematic rape of Christian and Yazidi girls and women, destruction of churches, monasteries, and cemeteries,” Sophia Kuby, the legal group’s director of EU advocacy, said in a prepared statement.

In late December, more than 60 members of the British government sent a letter to UK Prime Minister David Cameron urging him to lobby the UN to classify IS atrocities as genocide. Also in December, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an advisory body to the U.S. Congress, issued a similar request to the American administration.

Hillary Clinton, former U.S. secretary of state and a Democratic Party candidate for president, said in late December that she’s convinced.

“What is happening is genocide deliberately aimed at destroying lives and wiping out the existence of Christians

and other religious minorities,” Clinton was quoted by *Reuters* as saying.

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The Queen shares her faith on the eve of her 90th birthday

The Queen has spoken of her thankfulness to God for his “steadfast love”, in a new book to celebrate her 90th birthday.

Writing in the foreword to ‘The Servant Queen and the King she serves’, Her Majesty also says she has seen God’s faithfulness over the course of her life.

The book has been written to coincide with the Queen’s birthday, which is being marked later this year.

She comments: “I have been – and remain – very grateful to you for your prayers and to God for his steadfast love. I have indeed seen his faithfulness.”

The Queen also references her many different experiences over her record-breaking reign, saying: “The extent and pace of change has been truly remarkable” and: “We have witnessed triumphs and tragedies.”

The book has been published by The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, HOPE and the Bible Society.

A twelve-page version for schools is being made available by Scripture Union.

The Queen has often used her traditional Christmas message to speak of forgiveness, Jesus’ sacrificial life, the fact that no one is beyond God’s love and the example that she herself takes from Jesus Christ.

Last year she noted that the world “has had to confront moments of darkness”, but, “the Gospel of John contains a verse of great hope, often read at Christmas carol services: ‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.’”

In 2014 she referred to Jesus as the Prince of Peace, and in 2012 she said that God “sent his only son ‘to serve, not to be served’”.

The Christian Institute

Houston repeals Transgender Bathroom Bill

Voters in Houston voted in a landslide in November to repeal an ordinance that gave people who identify as transgender the right to use the restrooms, showers, and changing facilities of the opposite biological sex. The controversial measure punished businesses that refused to allow biological males to use women’s facilities with a \$5,000 fine per infraction. Family

Research Council President Tony Perkins stated: “Americans are tired of seeing their freedoms trampled in a politically correct stampede to redefine marriage and sexuality. They will not allow the government to flush away their money, and more importantly, their values and religious liberties.”

Lifelines, Hutt Valley Branch

Victoria bans prayer vigils

Recently the Victorian state parliament passed a law banning anti-abortion prayer vigils or sidewalk counselling within 150 metres of an abortion clinic. Columnists in the Melbourne paper *The Age* welcomed the ban describing the protesters as “vile”.

Lifelines, Hutt Valley Branch

No space for Jesus at NASA facility

NASA has been accused of ‘blatant discrimination’ after it allegedly banned a group of Christian employees from mentioning Jesus in internal communications.

According to reports, NASA told the Johnson Space Center Praise and Worship Club that the name Jesus could not appear in an announcement for the daily newsletter – which is sent to all employees.

Management claimed that the announcement was inappropriate because it could be construed that NASA was endorsing a religious belief.

In May last year the group sought to advertise a praise and worship event with the theme “Jesus is our life” but were prevented from doing so.

They turned to *Liberty Institute*, an organisation which seeks to defend religious freedom, for legal representation.

Senior Counsel for *Liberty Institute*, Jeremy Dys, stressed that it is illegal for the US Government to censor the name of Jesus from communications written by employees.

“Preventing a religious club’s announcement just because it contains the name of Jesus is blatant religious discrimination. We call on NASA to end their censorship and apologize”, he said.

NASA – the National Aeronautics and Space Administration – has in the past respected the religious speech of its employees.

In 1969 it defended astronauts who read Genesis 1 while in orbit, after court action was taken by an atheist activist.

Spokesman for NASA Karen Northon claimed that the organisation “does not prohibit the use of any specific religious

names" in internal communications.
+ *The Christian Institute*

Judge orders employer to pay man \$115,000 for not letting him use women's bathroom

ST. PAUL, Minnesota, February 2, 2016 (*LifeSiteNews*) – A judge has awarded \$115,000 to a man whose employer did not let him use the women's bathroom.

Minnesota-based Deluxe Financial Services, the largest check printing company in the U.S., is paying the settlement and apologizing to a Mr. Austin, who now goes by the female name "Britney."

Mr. Austin was hired and employed as a man in the Phoenix offices of Deluxe, but in 2011, he announced to his supervisor that he considered himself a woman and began dressing as a female at work. His supervisor would not let him use the women's community bathroom, and, according to the lawsuit, co-workers "intentionally us[ed] the wrong gender pronouns to refer to" him. Deluxe also refused to change his name to "Britney" on company records, because he had not undergone cosmetic surgery to make himself appear female.

Austin also complained that Deluxe's health insurance for employees did not cover such surgery.

Terms of the settlement included Deluxe writing Mr. Austin a reference letter, paying for transgender care in its health insurance for employees, creating a written policy against transgender "discrimination," conducting training sessions every year for all employees against transgender "discrimination," and annual accountability reports to the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) showing compliance with settlement terms.

The Obama EEOC brought the lawsuit. EEOC attorney David Lopez explained that the Obama administration is committed to "securing the rights of transgender individuals," and "[w]e hope that employers will take notice and begin to take proactive steps to prevent and eliminate discrimination against their transgender workers."

"This is an example of Obama bullying companies into embracing the trans agenda," Peter LaBarbera of *Americans for Truth* told *LifeSiteNews*. "Obama has stacked the EEOC."

This is the third lawsuit filed by the Obama EEOC supporting the delusions of

gender-confused individuals. Most have been cases where the employer concedes and settles out of court. A Florida eye clinic was forced to pay \$150,000 in April 2015 to a man who wants to be called a woman, and another similar Obama EEOC lawsuit is pending against a Detroit funeral home.

"Our concern is that these social issues are not even being discussed in this election cycle," LaBarbera added. "Perhaps these transgender rulings can be reversed when we have an administration with some sanity to it, but we have to talk about these things. Where is the debate on this in the public square?"

"I think they overwhelmed us," LaBarbera said, "and they are trying to do all they can before Obama's term is over."

The words the Obama EEOC uses to describe both the lawsuits and the transgender plaintiffs are significant. The district EEOC director in Phoenix, Rayford O. Irvin, described employers' refusal to allow men in women's community bathrooms as "being forced to face the indignity and danger of using a restroom inconsistent with [Mr. Austin's] gender identity."

Irvin describes natural gender as "subscrib[ing] to sex stereotypes" and states that the concerns of all non-transgender employees are irrelevant. "Employee and customer preferences based on stereotypes [sic] are not a legitimate reason to discriminate."

Satanists to deliver prayer invocation at Phoenix City Council meeting

by Geoffrey Grider January 2016

Satanists of a local satanic temple are scheduled to give the opening "prayer" at a meeting of the Phoenix City Council next month, triggering a controversy about religious freedom and whether a satanist invocation is appropriate.

If someone would have told me just ten years ago that Satanists would be given a voice and a platform in this country to spread their devilment, I would have thought you were crazy. Absolutely nuts. But in 2016, Satanists like the LGBT are on the rise, empowered, and looking for a fight. Why? Because the Bible says that in the end times darkness and evil will rise as the professing Church of Jesus Christ grows ever more lukewarm. Welcome to the end times.

Satanists Michelle Shortt and Stu de Haan submitted a request to give the invo-

cation at the February 17 meeting of the council, reports *AZCentral.com*. Though members of the city council objected to such a "prayer," the city has decided to let the satanists continue as scheduled.

Phoenix City Attorney Brad Holm released a statement Thursday evening, defending the city's position on the issue.

"Consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court's direction, the city cannot dictate religious viewpoints or the content of a prayer," Holm wrote. "In addition, government may not exclude a denomination or a religion from praying under these circumstances."

The invocation at the start of Phoenix City Council meetings has been given by representatives of various faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Sikhism.

De Haan, who resides in Tucson, said he submitted the request to give the invocation to ensure representation by minority voices. He said his satanic temple does "not believe in a literal satan" but instead views the biblical satan as "a metaphor for rebellion against tyranny."

"We're citizens of this government and we would like our voices to be heard," de Haan said. "If they don't want to accept, constitutionally what must happen is that all voices must be taken down from the public forum. It's basically all voices must be heard or none at all."

De Haan added the satanists "don't intend on doing anything offensive."
www.nowtheendbegins.com

The Thought of God – Maurice Roberts, Pg.225-226

Hell is that place where all pleasure is gone forever because there men are banished from God's 'presence' [2 Thess 1:9]. And where God is not enjoyed, either directly or indirectly, nothing is enjoyed. Without God there is nothing to enjoy. The supreme excellence of the Christian's happiness in heaven will be that there at last he will enjoy God fully All our joys here are limited and fading but there they will be endless Not only so, but our pleasures will ever widen and increase. Heaven is not a static state. What is perfect may still develop and grow The more the saints in heaven know of God, the more they will desire to know. Enlargement in their enjoyment of God will be matched by an enlargement in their capacity to know him. The pleasures of heaven are ever fresh.

Reflections on the Asia-Pacific Conference

The Asia-Pacific Regional Conference of the ICRC met 13-16 October in Seoul, South Korea. It was ably hosted by the Independent Reformed Churches of Korea. The hospitality of the hosts was memorable as they provided three meals a day (breakfast, lunch and dinner) with morning and afternoon tea and supper. They worked hard and made the delegates feel welcome. There were about 70 delegates in attendance and approximately 100 observers. The subject of the conference was "The Sacraments". The speakers for the conference were: Professor Mohan Chacko from India; the Rev. Dirk van Garderen from New Zealand; and Professor Hae Moo Yoo from South Korea. There was a special emphasis upon the use and function of the sacraments in the context of the churches of the Asia-Pacific region.

This was certainly a multi-national and multi-cultural conference. There were churches from Indonesia, Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Burma, India, New Zealand, Australia, Turkey, and the Philippines represented; and even from beyond the Asia-Pacific region, including from the Netherlands, the U.S., Canada, and South Africa. The delegates were accommodated in the Hoam Faculty House at Seoul National University. The days were long and the conversations were many. We left our accommodation at 7:00 am and returned at 11 pm. The format of the conference was well planned. The conference opened with the first lecture in the evening. The evening lectures were open to the public and many members of the Independent Reformed Churches attended to learn about the sacraments. These lec-

tures were followed by discussion. There were three discussion groups in English and two in Korean. Thus all delegates and observers received an opportunity to interact with the lecture presented. The hosts assigned a report for each discussion group. The next day the reporters relayed mid-morning what each group found helpful and what further clarifications were needed from the speakers.

The mornings started with devotions and then a one-hour Bible study for each group. These Bible studies focused on the biblical theology behind the sacraments. Interspersed between the lectures, the Bible studies and the meals were introductions from the churches represented. The afternoon sessions were reserved for meetings about mission work of the churches. One afternoon we were given a tour of the first Independent Reformed Church in Seoul and the publishing house that is run by that church. This was followed by a tour of



IRC(K) printing ministry in the basement of the church belonging to the denomination's founding congregation.



Welcome sign outside the church.

a cemetery where numerous foreign missionaries are buried. This cemetery is a national memorial in Seoul.

I will conclude with some personal observations. This was the first conference of the ICRC that I attended. I was truly blessed to represent the RCNZ. The topics were well-presented and generated good discussion with the participants. Some of the delegates spoke about the misuse of the sacraments among the churches in their countries. Some mistaken ideas that flourish in countries represented were: missionaries have a quota of baptisms that they need to perform each month. This quota is an expectation of the sending organisations. There is pressure for reporting vast numbers of baptisms because it suggests an effective ministry and helps maintain their financial support. Some delegates spoke of the confusion that exists among many non-Reformed churches regarding the Lord's Supper. The delegates and observers spoke of how encouraging this conference was for them because of the common commitment to God's Word and its teaching about the sacraments. They don't have such encouragement in their home countries,

rather they are questioned and often scorned for strong convictions about the sacraments.

An impression that remains with me is the rich heritage we have as the RCNZ and the need to encourage and teach others about the fullness of God's Word and worship reflected in the sacraments. The time at meals was wonderful for meeting and networking with those who serve in the Asia-Pacific regions. It reminded me of how Christ's church constantly struggles to be a beacon of light to the lost and how we diligently need to maintain the sacraments and our confessional distinctives regarding the sacraments. We have much to be thankful for in our confessions. Lastly, the hospitality of the Independent Reformed Churches of Korea was remarkable. Whenever I expressed gratitude to the hosts for their provisions, they responded with thanks for allowing them to serve us and to be in attendance at the conference. May the Lord continue to bless and build His church through the fellowship of His people and through opportunities like this conference to listen and learn from God's Word about our service and worship of Him.



Delegates visited a central-city cemetery commemorating the sacrifice of missionaries who brought the Gospel to South Korea.



Conference organisers and keynote speakers.

more images next page ▶



Rev Peter Kloosterman hears about the IRC's wide-reaching ministry through the printed word—their most popular publication is the Westminster Confession of Faith.



Dr Mohan Chacko and Rev Dirk Vangardenen



John Goris in the foreground with conference delegates.

Secularization and the sexual revolution: evangelical theology and the cultural crisis (Part 1)

Albert Mohler

This post is the first in a four part series on Secularization and the Sexual Revolution.

In the face of the sexual revolution the Christian church in the West now faces a set of challenges that exceeds anything it has experienced, of a similar magnitude, in the past. This is a revolution of ideas – one that is transforming the entire moral structure of meaning and life. These challenges would be vexing enough for any generation. But the contours of our current challenge have to be understood over against the affecting reality for virtually everything on the American landscape, and furthermore in the West. This revolution, like all revolutions, takes few prisoners. In other words, it demands total acceptance of its revolutionary claims and the affirmation of its aims. This is the problem now faced by Christians who are committed to uncompromising faithfulness to the Bible as the Word of God and to the gospel as the only message of salvation.

The scale and scope of this challenge are made clear in an argument made by British Theologian Theo Hobson. As Hobson acknowledges, “Churches have always faced difficult moral issues and they have muddled through.”¹ Some will argue that the challenge of the sexual revolution and the normalization of homosexuality is nothing new or unusual. He says, “Until quite recently I would have agreed,” but he also says “it becomes ever clearer that the issue of homosexuality really is different.”²

Why is such a challenge to Christianity different? Hobson suggests that the first challenge is what he recognizes as the either/or quality of the new morality. I agree with him that there really is no middle ground in terms of the church’s engagement with these hard and urgent questions. Churches will either affirm the legitimacy of same-sex relationships and behaviors or they will not. And the churches that do not will take a stand

on the basis of a claim that God has revealed a morality to his human creatures in Holy Scripture.

The second factor Hobson suggests is what he calls “the sheer speed of the homosexual cause’s success.” As he describes it: “Something that was assumed for centuries to be unspeakably immoral has emerged as an alternative form of life, an identity that merits legal protection. The demand for gay equality has basically ousted traditionalist sexual morality from the moral high ground.”³ That is a profoundly important point. Hobson is arguing that this revolution, unlike any other, has actually turned the tables on Christianity in Western civilization.

The Christian church has always enjoyed the moral high ground, understood to be the guardian of what is right and righteous, at least in Western societies. But what we are seeing now is a fundamental change. Hobson is arguing that this moral revolution, having turned the tables of Christianity, now robs the Christian Church of the moral high ground it had previously claimed. The situation is fundamentally reversed. For the first time in the history of Western civilization, Christianity appears to be on the underside of morality, and those who hold to biblical teachings concerning human sexuality are now “ousted” (to use Hobson’s word) from the position of high moral ground.

Hobson also rightly observes that this vast change in attitudes towards same-sex relationships and behaviors is not simply “the waning of the taboo.” As he explains:

It is not just a case of a practice losing its aura of immorality (as with premarital sex or illegitimacy). Instead, the case for homosexual equality takes the form of a moral crusade. Those who want to uphold the old attitude are not just dated moralists (as is the case with

those who want to uphold the old attitude to premarital sex or illegitimacy). They are accused of moral deficiency. The old taboo surrounding this practice does not disappear but ‘bounces back’ at those who seek to uphold it. Such a sharp turn-around is, I think, without parallel in moral history.⁴

Hobson’s main point is that homosexuality “has the strange power to turn the moral tables.” And so what was previously understood to be immoral is now celebrated as a moral good. As a result, the Christian church’s historic teachings on homosexuality – shared by the vast majority of the citizens of the West until very recently – is now understood to be a relic of the past and a repressive force that must be eradicated.

This explains why the challenge of the moral revolution threatens to shake the very foundations of Christianity in the United States and far beyond. And yet, even as we understand this revolution to be a new thing, its roots are not recent. As a matter of fact, the church has seen the sexual revolution taking place turn by turn for the better part of the last century. What now becomes clear is that most Christians vastly underestimated the challenge this sexual revolution would present.

Article citations

1 Theo Hobson, “A pink reformation,” *The Guardian*, February 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/feb/05/apinkreformation/>.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

www.albertmohler.com

Handel's *Messiah* at Dovedale

Andre Holtslag

In the middle part of 2015 I received an email from the conductor of the Garden City Orchestra in Christchurch. He was keen for the orchestra to perform Handel's *Messiah* in December at a public concert. What he needed was a choir. His plan was to contact many churches and choirs and see if they would join together to form a massed choir for the concert. Well, here at Dovedale we had a choir previously, but we did not at present. However, I knew that one of our members, Julia Knol, would be enthusiastic for us to re-form with this opportunity in mind. So advertisements were placed in the bulletins of the three Reformed churches in Christchurch and in August about 20 of us met for the first time. The conductor was present and he told us we were the first choir to begin rehearsals. We were eventually joined by 6 other choristers who were friends or who were part of other choirs that had been invited to sing but decided not to join. So these joined our rehearsals as they were eager to sing *Messiah*. Initially we practised weekly but as the concert drew near we increased this to twice a week. Not all of us were able to read music, so we spent many hours in re-

hearsal. Jeremy Watson was our patient but exacting vocal trainer and conductor, and Stephen Watson was our other vocal trainer and organ accompanist (with Judy Snoek deputizing at the organ when Stephen was unavailable.) At one stage, the conductor informed us that we might be the only choir for the concert as no others had committed. However, eventually, several other choirs and choristers committed, so we ended up with a massed choir of around 55 singers for the concert. The soloists for the concert were from the voice department of the University of Canterbury's School of Music. The concert was held on the 5th of December at St. Michael and All Angels church in Christchurch. It was a wonderful evening that gave us an opportunity to praise the Lord and around 300 members of the public attended the concert.

Prior to this concert, however, we had decided that it would be a shame to do all this work for just one performance. We have a new housing development next to the church and we have been busy visiting our new neighbours to make ourselves known to them. We have been able to get to know several residents of a nearby retirement village quite well also. So we were quite sure that they, and others from the community, would

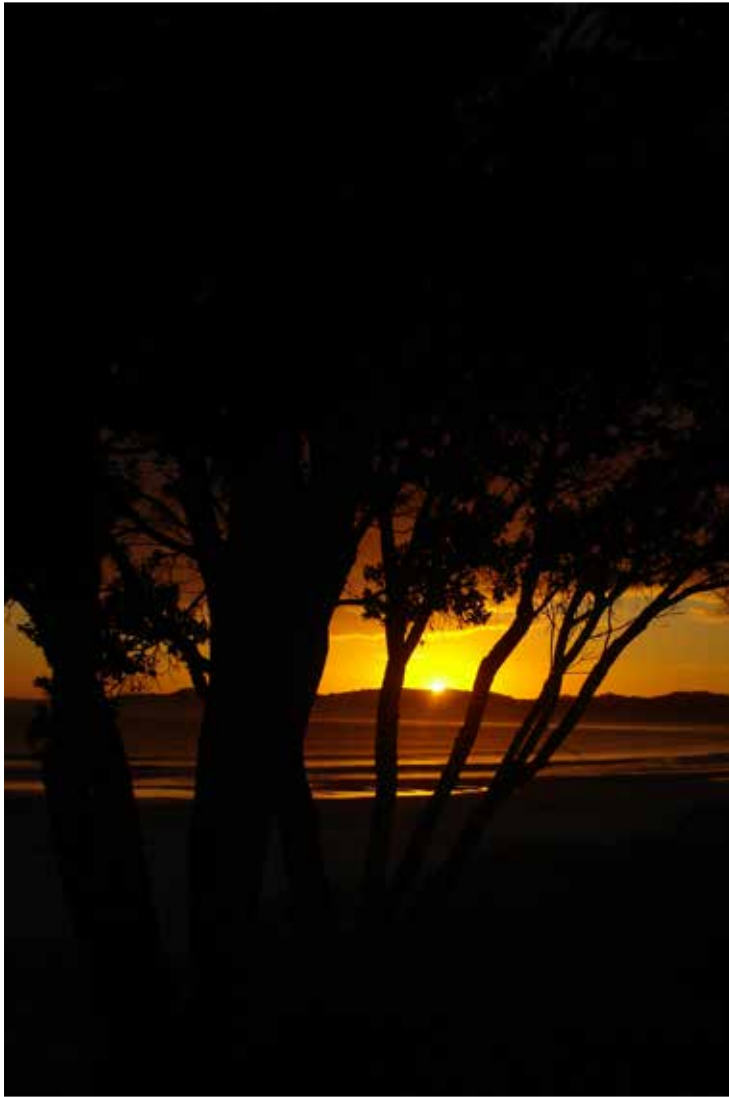
be keen to come to the church for a free concert in the days leading up to Christmas. Several of us absolute amateurs began practising some of the solos from *Messiah*, and we began advertising our concert in many different places. Early in the week of our concert, it was mentioned in the 'Live Diary' on RadioNZ Concert and in the main newspaper in Christchurch. And so, the day arrived – Wednesday, December the 16th. I received several phone calls during the day from people who had heard or seen the advert and who wanted to know more. What is a *Reformed Church*? Where is it? And the concert is *free*!!!! Ben Post from the Christchurch congregation had set up several cameras to video the concert, while Matt Landkroon and Willy Maffey worked on recording the audio. Choir members contributed baking so we could have supper afterwards. But who would turn up? Well, the church auditorium seats about 170 when it is packed, and it was packed! And maybe 75% of those in attendance were not from our churches. The moment to begin arrived. I read an introduction explaining the history of Handel's *Messiah*, but also a declaration that we were not just performing some music but were singing praise to God who sent the Messiah to be the Saviour that sinners need. And what a memorable evening it was! It was such a privilege to share the gospel in this way. Just a couple of weeks earlier we had an evening of Christmas carols at the church which we advertised also. But sadly, no one from the neighbourhood attended. So we are glad that Handel's *Messiah* caught the interest of so many. Are there enough singers and musicians in your congregation to consider doing this, or something similar perhaps? Singing Psalms and Hymns as we do makes us well-prepared to sing such a beautiful and excellent and God-honouring piece of music. We had large numbers of orders for a CD that was produced and most were keen to be told when the Dovedale Chamber Choir will sing again. Perhaps another concert at Easter-time? May God be praised.





From the rising of the sun
to its setting The name of
the Lord is to be praised.

Psalm 113:3



Images by Mr Carl Leenders