College Life

- We are very thankful to the Lord for answering our prayers for more students. Enrolments are up on last semester, with a growing number of students opting for part-time study and intensive units.
- Classes are being held in a range of delivery modes, including live video-conferencing. On Friday's Dr Peter Adam is teaching theology to students both in class and by Skype. Dr Martin Williams is doing the same for his Greek exegesis class, as is John de Hoog for Hebrew. These are great early steps in the new RTC model.
- New carpet has been laid in many rooms in Barkley Hall following the February flood. Please pray for our House Parents, Stuartt and Tamara, as they help make Barkley Hall a good home for the students who live there. Please also pray for some more residents as we have several vacant rooms.
- About 35 people attended the Preaching Clinic put on at the RTC by the Centre for Biblical Preaching. Mike Raiter, the Director for the Centre, gave helpful input to preachers on core preaching convictions and the use of illustrations.

Pastoral Ministry in Reformed Churches

We are currently preparing for a new intensive that will be offered next semester. *Pastoral Ministry in Reformed Churches* has been designed as a key component of the training for Reformed Church ordination students, but it will also be a great in-service training option for elders and potential elders, ministry workers and even pastors in the RTC’s supporting denominations.

The course will include consideration of:

- The call to ministry, gifts for ministry and the theology of ordination
- The pastoral task, realities of pastoral ministry, the spiritual life of the pastor and causes of burnout and stress
- The history of Reformed churches ‘down under’, along with current trends, trajectories and challenges
- Leadership patterns and paradigms in Reformed churches
- Key emphases of reformed theology, the reasons for holding to reformed confessions, and discussion of theological hot potatoes
- The classic practices of Reformed churches
This team-taught unit will begin on 25 July with four weeks of online study, following by a one week intensive from 22-26 August. The non-credit and no assessment (audit) price for elders, church workers and others interested in this unit is $300. Please contact the RTC for more information.

Positions Vacant

The RTC is currently seeking to fill three positions: Business Manager, Promotions Office and Discipleship Training Coordinator. Details are available on the RTC website. Please pray that the Lord would provide the right people for these key positions.

RTC Faculty

- Murray Capill is continuing to travel to the main cities around Australia to talk to pastors, church leaders and potential students about the new RTC model. He will be in Sydney this weekend (18-20 March) and will be preaching at New Life Church on Sunday morning and Sutherland CRC Sunday afternoon.
- Phillip Scheepers has been overseeing a growing relationship we have with some Koreans based in Sydney. We are working with them to make some of our online units available in the Korean language in order to serve and equip the large Korean population in Australia. Several of our online units have been divided into shorter courses and are currently being translated into Korean. The first units will be available in April. This is an exciting venture that we pray might grow significantly in the future.
- We were delighted to be able to host two seminars, one in Melbourne and one in Brisbane, by Dr Kevin Harney. Kevin also spent some time with the RTC Faculty, talking to us about ‘organic outreach’ – an approach to evangelism that helps believers share their faith naturally with the people around them. Kevin is a skilled and engaging speaker and his passion for evangelism is infectious.

Book Recommendation

(by Dr Phillip Scheepers)


Dr Bernie Power is very well placed to compare the two major figures in Islam and Christianity. He spent years in the Middle East as a missionary and did advanced academic work on the ahadith (Islamic traditions). He is currently heavily involved in Christian outreach to Muslims in the Melbourne area and beyond and teaches Arabic and Islamic studies at the Melbourne School of Theology. ‘Understanding Jesus and Muhammad’ is the fruit of years of scholarly research and of many hours spent preparing for public debates with high profile Muslim apologists.

This is a wonderful resource for those wanting to share their faith with Muslim people. Bernie carefully studied the foundational texts of both Islam and Christianity and the result is a very clear overview of the differences between Christ and Muhammad. As such it provides some great talking points for conversations with followers of Islam.
Something I personally found very helpful was the summary diagrams that contrast and compare Jesus and Muhammad on a variety of issues. In the process the main teaching points are powerfully reinforced.

I am convinced that this work will soon become a go-to resource for those who would like to understand how Muslims view Muhammad, and also for those who are called upon to respond to Muslim objections to Christian convictions on the nature and ministry of Jesus.

**Ministry Spot: Worship and the Triune God**
*(by Dr Martin Williams)*

Is your worship Trinitarian? Another way to ask that question is, Is your liturgy shaped by your theology? The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks:

**Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one?**
  **A.** There is but One only, the living and true God.

**Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?**
  **A.** There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

The way we think about God (theology) should influence the way we worship him (doxology). The Christian faith at its heart is Trinitarian. Therefore the way in which we correctly respond to the truth of the doctrine that God is one in three and three in one is that we as Christians worship none other than the Triune God. Another way to say it is this: If our worship is to be God-centred and God-glorifying, and if this God is Triune, then Christian worship should be Trinitarian in shape. We worship the one God who *is* Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the Athanasian Creed (c. AD 500) says, “We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.” The Creed goes on to point out that “the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity.”

The apostle Paul captures this Trinitarian emphasis in Ephesians 2:18: “For through *him* [Jesus Christ] we both have access in *one Spirit* to the Father.” Another way of saying all of this is to say that our worship is to be shaped by and in response to the gospel. The gospel is the good news of salvation that comes from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. In our worship we approach God by the same pathway: to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. In this way we see what some theologians have called “a double movement of grace.” Salvation is all of God and so is worship.

**Enjoying the Triune God**

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks:

**Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?**
  **A.** Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

Praying to the Father in John 17:25-26 Jesus says, “O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” That is to say, the Father sent the Son so that the love that the Father has for the Son may be in us, and that we might delight in the Son as the Father always has (see Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 69). As Reeves says, “The Father so loves that he desires to catch us up into that loving fellowship he enjoys with the Son. And that means I can know God as he truly is: as Father. In fact I can know the Father as *my* Father” (71). And as Paul points out in Romans 5:5, we experience this love
in the Spirit, “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been
given to us.”

**The Shape of Trinitarian Worship**

The focus of worship then, is not first what I bring to God, but is rather “the gift of participating through
the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father... By his Spirit he draws men and women
to participate both in his life of worship and communion with the Father and his mission from the Father
to the world” (Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Trine God of Grace*, 30, 31). Thus, as Torrance
points out, at the centre of New Testament worship stands not our own experience, decision, worship
practices, etc., as important as these all are, but rather the unique relationship between the Father and
the Son by the Spirit. As Reeves says, ”It is by the Spirit that the Father has eternally loved his Son.
And so, by sharing their Spirit with us, the Father and the Son share with us their own life, love and
fellowship” (*Delighting in the Trinity*, 96).

In Trinitarian worship there is only one high priest through whom we draw near to the Father (Hebrews
4:14), one Mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5), and one offering that is acceptable to God
(Hebrews 10:14; 13:15): Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Thus our worship is participation by the
Spirit in Jesus Christ (his person), his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection (his finished work), his
priestly intercession for us before the Father (his continuing work), and in his ongoing, loving
communion with the Father (his enjoyment). Thus the starting point for all theology and worship is not
“What?” or “How?” (questions our pragmatic Western culture likes to ask), but “Who?” Who is God?
Once we sort out the “who” (theology) the “how” will begin to fall into place (liturgy). The problem is
we tend to settle for utility (what works) instead of beauty (the enjoyment of God). We need to come
to God and enjoy him for who he is, the Triune God of all grace and glory and beauty. That is the
essence of worship.

**Changing Our Worship Habits**

How then can we make the worship of the Triune God more prominent and more pronounced in our
worship services? Here are a few ideas to get you started.

- We need to remember that Jesus is our Great High Priest and ultimate Worship Leader who leads
  us into his enjoyment of the Father by the Spirit. As Calvin says, because we cannot ascend to God,
his descends to us (in Jesus Christ) and draws us to himself (see Calvin’s commentary on Psalms
24:7 and 42:4).

- We need to pray to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. Jesus taught us to pray to the Father
  (Matt 6:9; John 20:17), and as the Puritan theologian John Owen says, this “invocation is to be by
  and in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ, through the aid of the Holy Ghost” (*Works*, 1:112; Calvin,
  *Institutes*, 3.20.5; 1.13.18).

- We need to pray to each of the three persons. Owen (*Works*, 2:229-30), says that “the Holy Ghost,
  being God, is no less to be invoked, prayed to, and called on, than the Father and the Son.”

- We need to worship each of the three persons. We should sing the great Trinitarian hymns (e.g.,
  “Come, Thou Almighty King”; “Holy, Holy, Holy”; “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name”; “All Glory Be to
  God on High”; “All Glory Be to God Alone”; “Father, Most Holy”) that magnify the Triune God in all
  his mystery.

- Our invocations should often mention the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For example, following the
  pattern of Calvin in his prayer following the Lord’s Supper we can sometimes finish our prayers in
  the name of the Triune God: “Through Jesus Christ our Lord; Who with you, O Father! and the Holy
Ghost, lives and reigns in the unity of the Godhead, world without end. Amen” (Genevan Psalter, 1542).

- The public confession of sin draws attention to the fact that worship involves the movement from God the Father, through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit to us in grace before we can even think of approaching him in acceptable God-honouring worship. Sinners have nothing to commend themselves before a thrice holy God. Moreover, in their sin they actually have no hearing of their prayers before God. Calvin writes, “Unless they are founded in free mercy, prayers never reach God” (Calvin, Institutes, 3.20.9). This divine deafness is overcome only if believers’ prayers are grounded in the mediatorial work of his Son applied by the Spirit.

- We can rehearse the doctrine of the Trinity with our congregations by publically expressing our faith through one of the great creeds (Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Apostles’ Creed) or portions of our confessions (Westminster Confession and Catechisms, Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism).

- A series of sermons on the implications of the Trinity for understanding the nature of our salvation, the church, worship, prayer, and mission might be a great idea too!

Having considered the worship of our triune God, my next “Ministry Spot” will focus on John Owen and how we can commune with the Triune God.

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