College Life

- It has been great having Dr Michael Goheen here at the RTC, teaching a one week intensive on The Drama of Scripture. With about 20 students in the room last week and an internationally regarded expert on biblical theology, it was an excellent way to begin the semester. Students left with their minds stretched and a very big picture of the story of the Bible and God’s mission in this world.
- Regular lectures begin this week. We kick started with a cooked breakfast and Devotions on Tuesday morning. Please pray that this will be a semester of great learning and fellowship for all who have come to study. Please also gives thanks for the new students joining us, both on campus and online.
- Congratulations to our new Business Manager and his wife, Chris and Felicity Bongers, on the birth of their second child – Miriam Sarah – born on 18 July.

New RTC model update

Behind the scenes a lot of work is taking place to put the new RTC model into place. Some of areas currently receiving close attention are:

- Searching for the right property in the Melbourne CBD for our campus that will open there in February next year, Lord willing.
- Securing a permit for construction of the Child Care Centre that will operate from our property in Geelong, and recruiting a team of experts in the field to help map the mission of the centre.
- Developing five-year budgets and funding arrangements for the new ventures.
- Planning the suite of units we will teach in Melbourne and online, working out the schedule for the new program, and investigating the best technologies for delivering online classes.
- Re-designing the RTC website, creating a new RTC logo and developing the marketing strategy for the new model.
- Beginning the design and development of the Discipleship training courses we want to produce for use in local churches.

Please uphold us as we work hard at these ambitious projects. We are blessed with many very capable business people as well as RTC staff who are helping with all this, but we are keenly aware that “unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.” Our great prayer and desire is that this re-shaping of the RTC will position us to be far more effective in equipping people of all generations for Christ-centred life and ministry.

Preaching Conference

Since the first RTC preaching conference back in 2002, this annual event has been right at the heart of the RTC’s mission to support people in ministry with ongoing teaching, inspiration and encouragement. Most years around 100 preachers, past and present students and interested church members gather at the RTC for two days of input designed to fuel biblical preaching ministries. This year’s conference on Genesis promises to be very significant as we examine the book that lays the foundation for the rest of the biblical story.

Murray Capill, John de Hoog and Phillip Scheepers will be joined by guest speakers Paul Harrington and Mike Raiter, for two days of stimulating input. You can Register online [here](#) or call the RTC Office.
RTC Korean Program

About a year ago the RTC entered into a partnership with a group of Korean church leaders in order to help them provide Reformed training resources to the Korean Christian community here in Australia. Since then a group of volunteers have been hard at work translating three RTC units into Korean. These units will be offered on a trial basis at several locations over the next few months. If this trial is successful more RTC units will be offered to Korean churches across Australia.

We are very thankful for the hard work of all the Korean volunteers in bringing the project to this point. Please pray with us that the Lord will grant that Korean believers will be built up and equipped through this initiative.

Book Recommendation
(by Dr Phillip Scheepers)


Migration is obviously very much a hot-button issue at the moment, not only here in Australia but perhaps even more so in Europe, which is in the midst of the largest movement of refugees since World War II. What sometimes gets lost in the midst of the political sound and fury surrounding refugee resettlement is the gospel opportunities (both for showing biblical compassion and sharing the gospel) presented by migration. These are exactly the issues that J. D. Payne attempts to address in his book “Strangers Next Door”:

In addition to placing migration in Kingdom perspective he also provides us with a very helpful analysis of the why’s and how’s of mass migration. In the process, he helpfully points out that we should not see worldwide migration as something monolithic but that there are a vast array of factors at play in motivating people to leave their home countries behind. Many of these factors have profound gospel implications.

Towards the end of the book Payne provides readers with some helpful suggestions for how we can walk through the open door for the gospel presented by migration. He also discusses the implications of what he calls ‘Diaspora Missiology’. I found Payne’s book a very helpful look at mass migration from a Christian perspective and believe that it can be a useful resource for Christians and churches seeking to reach out in love to migrant communities.

Faculty News

• Drs Murray Capill and Phillip Scheepers recently led a professional development day for the staff of a local Christian School, Covenant College. They addressed 115+ staff members on the theme of “Convictions for Christian Education”, covering various aspects of worldview and Christian education.

• A week later, Murray Capill spoke at the CEN (Christian Education Network) State Conference in Tasmania, on the theme, “The Heart in Christian Education”.

• This semester Dr Martin Williams has the privilege of taking study leave. First up he will be involved in a Two-Views event at La Trobe University on August 22 with three other speakers (another theologian and two scientists). Martin will be defending Young Earth Creationism from a theological perspective and will be seeing to demonstrate how theistic evolution undermines the gospel. In his leave he will also be working on an article that will compare Puritan and modern approaches to exegesis and commentary writing. This will then provide the methodological basis for beginning a commentary on Ephesians that will draw on the best of both modern and Puritan exegetical practice. He’ll also be doing some preparatory reading in Christology for a future RTC course.
Ministry Spot: Sharing Christ Across Cultural Divides

(by Dr Phillip Scheepers)

If we are serious about reaching people with the gospel we need to be serious about culture. This is because any message that we deliver will be received through the lens of culture. This statement would probably be fairly uncontroversial in the case of people who are being prepared for overseas cross-cultural ministry. Missionaries recognise that they will have to work hard in making the Christian message understandable in settings where people think and operate very differently from them.

I want to suggest, however, that even gospel work in our own multicultural communities will require a significant level of reflection on culture. This may come as a bit of a surprise because our natural instinct is to simply assume our own culture as normative while those of others are viewed as somehow exotic and strange. On an anthropological level this reality is reflected in the many tribes around the world whose names for themselves translate into some version of 'The People' (in other words, belonging to this tribe is what makes one fully human). This may seem rather extreme but the uncomfortable reality is that this kind of attitude is also quite prevalent in non-tribal cultures.

A non-reflective attitude towards culture (our own and those of others) means that we often do not ask the hard questions that will be necessary if we are to connect the gospel to where people are in terms of their beliefs, concerns and basic assumptions about life. Yet, when we turn to Scripture we see a deep concern for effectively connecting the message of the gospel with the culture that is being reached. We see that, for example, in Paul's different emphases in his preaching to different audiences and his declaration that he strives to become like Jews or Greeks in order to reach them (1 Corinthians 9:20).

Taking culture into account when we think about sharing the gospel is not about changing, watering down or compromising the gospel but rather, attempting to bring an offensive message (i.e. the message of the cross, cf. Galatians 5:9) in a way that is as personally inoffensive as possible so that it will be the gospel itself that offends (and not our methods or cultural assumptions).

By not taking culture seriously we can very easily veer off into one of the twin dangers of syncretism (i.e. uncritically accepting aspects of non-Christian culture and belief systems) and cultural alienation (where no attempt is made to engage local culture, causing some people to view the gospel as a 'foreign' import). It is imperative that we not only think deeply about culture but that we also get the balance right in terms of rejecting and/or accepting aspects of a culture we are seeking to reach. Large books have been written on this subject (a good place to start would be David Hesselgrave’s classic, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally), so what follows is simply a few brief pointers as to how I believe we should approach this vital task.

Critically evaluate your own culture in light of the gospel: A mistake that has been made all too often in the past is for missionaries simply to assume that their own culture is the ideal vehicle for the expression of the gospel. This has led to the export not only of the gospel message but also of the cultural trappings of the missionaries. The impact of this can still be seen in churches around the world. The first step to effective cross cultural communication is therefore not to study the ‘target culture’ but rather to begin with your own culture. Ask the hard questions, perhaps with the help of someone from a different culture, about how your culture relates to the Christian message. In other words, which biblical values are reflected well in my culture and which are by and large rejected by my culture? It is important to note that the gospel affirms and rejects aspects of every single human culture. Recognising this simple fact will hopefully keep us from unhelpfully bundling up our gospel presentation with the uncritical transmission of our own cultures.

Look beyond the surface: It is instructive to note how New Testament gospel proclamations in Acts and the Epistles are based on a deep understanding of the local setting and the wider culture of the people who are being addressed. In fact, Paul told the Athenians that he took the time to study their city before addressing the members of the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34). As modern believers we need to work hard at moving beyond superficial understandings of culture by asking the question: ‘What’s really going on?’ As Tim Keller says: “Every culture assumes a set of answers to the big questions: Why are we here? What are therefore the
**Keep the Word central and absolute:** Whenever we talk about the gospel and culture it is important to remember that we should never give into the temptation to let culture (either our own or the one that we are trying to reach) fully determine our message and methods. These should constantly be tested against the Bible. As Ken Vanhoozer says: “The lived experience of this or that culture, along with the history and tradition of the church as a whole, has a legitimate role to play as a secondary theological source. The primary source, however, must remain Scripture.” By remaining faithful to the doctrines and evangelistic methodologies described in Scripture we will be able to steer a clear course between uncritical acceptance of non-biblical cultural ideas or practices and unhelpful and isolating cultural aloofness.

It is wonderful to reflect on the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not captive to a specific human culture. As Lammih Sanneh says: “Christianity affects cultures by moving them to a position short of the absolute, and it does this by placing God at the centre. The point of departure for the church in mission, is Pentecost, with Christianity triumphing by relinquishing Jerusalem or any fixed universal centre, be it geographical, linguistic or cultural, and with the result of there being a proliferation of centres, languages and cultures within the church.” We can, therefore, confidently share the gospel cross-culturally with the deep assurance that no culture and no people is beyond the reach of the message of Christ, as we look forward to the day when people from “every tribe, language, people and nation” (Revelation 5:9) will praise him as the Great Redeemer.