

RTC Monthly

No. 65 – 12 June, 2013

College News

- This is exam week at the RTC. Students have their heads down, as do the faculty as they spend much time in marking. We are thankful for the semester past and for all the opportunities for learning and growth it has given us.
- Between semesters we anticipate some renovations in the library foyer area in order to create a new student lounge. Until now students have not had their own designated space, so this will be a great improvement for their informal interactions together. Students will be helping with the renovations and are hosting a Trivia evening this coming Saturday night to help raise some funds.

Second Semester Distance Units

The following units will be offered via distance mode during the second semester:

NT302D/502D – The Early New Testament Church
PE301D/501D – Introduction to Christian Ethics
EM426D/626D – Church Planting

These are great opportunities to undertake some theological study from the convenience of your own home. It is the first time our Church Planting subject will be offered by distance mode and it will be of enormous value to those involved in or thinking about church planting.

Please contact Phillip Scheepers at pscheepers@rtc.edu.au for more information on the distance programme.

Faculty News

- Phillip Scheepers will visit Myanmar (Burma) in July, Lord willing, to present a series of lectures at the Reformed Theological College of Myanmar in Yangon (Rangoon). He will also have discussions with members of the RTC Myanmar community to explore ways in which the two RTC's could possibly work together for the advance of the Kingdom.
- Murray Capill will be at the fourth **Advance Together** conference this weekend. It is being held at New Life Church (Blacktown) on Saturday 15 June, where he will also preach on Sunday morning. For more details, go to: <http://www.rtc.vic.edu.au/Calendar/Events/Advance-Together>
- From the end of July, Murray Capill will be away for most of the second semester taking long service leave. It is 12 years since he began teaching at the College. During his absence Dr Bill Berends will be the Acting Principal of the RTC and other staff

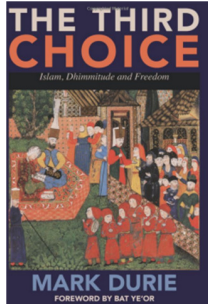
members will also pick up some added responsibilities.

Book Recommendation

(by Dr Phillip Scheepers)

The Third Choice – Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom, by Mark Durie (Melbourne: Deror Books, 2010), 270 pages.

It is fair to say that Islam is never far from Western public consciousness at the moment.



Events like the Boston bombing and the murder of a soldier on the streets of London throw up perplexing questions about an ideology simultaneously viewed as the 'Religion of Peace' by some and as an inspiration to commit violent acts by others. Mark Durie does an excellent job in this eminently readable work to help readers who

are asking questions about the nature of Islam (and specifically its relationship with non-believers) to navigate through the maze of conflicting opinions. A major part of the work is devoted to an analysis (from primary Islamic sources) of the concept of *dhimmitude*. *Dhimmis* were non-Muslims allowed to continue to practice their faith in Islamic societies on the understanding that they were subservient to Muslims and had to pay heavy extra taxes for the 'privilege' of being able to practice their faith. Durie argues that it is impossible to understand modern Islam and the demands that it directs towards the West without taking the institution of *dhimmitude* into account. He convincingly argues that the mindset created by *dhimmitude* informs Islamic attitudes toward non-Muslims to this day. The subject matter may seem a bit dry from my description but I can assure you that it is not. The book is a fascinating read and readers will walk away with an enhanced understanding of the responses of Islam to the modern world.

Ministry Spot

(by Dr Murray Capill)

Humans are remarkably and profoundly integrated beings. Our physical, emotional, spiritual, social and mental well-being are all intimately related. While my mind, at times, wanders off somewhere else, it is not possible for my body to go somewhere without my soul. Body and soul work together, and one affects the other. Our spiritual life is affected by our physical well-being, and our physical, emotional and psychological condition affects our spirituality.

That means that spiritual discipline necessarily involves physical discipline, and it implies that the pursuit of godliness has implications for the way we care for our bodies. We cannot focus on the spirit or soul and ignore the body. In the previous three articles I have explored some perspectives on various spiritual disciplines that are necessary for our growth in grace. But I want to conclude by reflecting on the relationship between spiritual discipline and physical discipline. Godliness, I propose, has something to do with how we eat, sleep, exercise and rest, and where we lack physical discipline we will most likely reap a negative impact in our spiritual life, not to mention our emotional, mental and social life.

In the beginning God created us to rule in his world, enjoying and exploring, filling and governing the material world for his glory. Part of the creation we are to rule is our own body. We are to look after, feed, protect and use it for God's glory. Paul is able to build his command for husbands to love their wives on just this reality: "no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church..." (Eph 5:29). In feeding and caring for our body, we must be careful not to idolize it as our culture so readily does, turning the body into a god. An obsession with how we look, with what others think of us, or with our weight, clothes and appearance is ungodly because it causes us to focus far more on ourselves than on God. Whether we love our body or hate it, an unhealthy obsession with it takes time and energy away from serving God and glorifying him.

Conversely, to neglect our bodies, failing to feed them healthily, protect them adequately, present them appropriately, exercise them regularly or sleep them properly, is also to neglect our creation mandate. Our body is as much a part of the creation as anything else. We are to be stewards of our bodies, keeping them in the best condition possible for godly service. If I'm too tired to think, or so unfit I can't sustain normal activity, then I am not stewarding the most useful resource God has given me in this world – my own body. Of course there are conditions, physical and psychological, that may make it hard for us to keep our body in good order and, in time, we will all experience physical weakness and be faced with our own mortality. The body is a tent that will one day be discarded. But we are to look after the tent as well as we can despite the afflictions that come on it in this cursed world, knowing that ultimately, God is not only redeeming our souls but our bodies also. They are of eternal worth.

To the creation mandate of caring for our bodies there is the added incentive for believers to care for their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. Although our body is subject to decay and is outwardly wasting away, the Holy Spirit has, nonetheless, taken up residence within us. Paul argues this as an incentive for sexual purity (1 Cor 6) and it is, by implication, a motivation to use our bodies in a godly way in every arena of life. If we are not our own but belong, body and soul, to Jesus Christ, then we need to bring our bodies into submission to Christ and make them an honourable home for his Spirit.

We need, then, to enact discipline in the way we steward our bodies so that we honour God with them and maximise them as the best resource possible for serving God with all our strength and for serving and loving others. In view of this, we perhaps do well to ask ourselves some fairly straight questions...

First, do I get enough sleep or am I always tired? Do I give my body adequate rest, allowing it to enjoy the blessing of time off, of recreation and of relaxation? It is not ungodly to rest. In fact God built into creation cycles of day and night, work and rest. Many serious Christians become so committed to ministry and service that they do not know how to stop and they feel guilty if they do. We often measure sanctity by activity. But godliness requires sleep!

Second, do I keep my body as fit as can reasonably be expected? I say 'as can reasonably be expected' because we all have different physical capacities and age and health will determine what is possible. But some level of fitness greatly aids overall well-being and therefore our ability to serve God and other people. Since the industrial revolution, the lives of most people have become far more sedentary. Exercise is not part of our life in the way it used to be, or in the way it still is for farmers, tradesmen and a few other vocations. Many of us need to compensate for the many hours we spend behind a computer or in a car, with some disciplined times of exercise. At least three times a week for at least twenty minutes, says my doctor!

Thirdly, do I eat responsibly? Again, we all have different metabolisms and we cannot set a godly weight limit! But gluttony is a sin and as our culture increasingly cultivates an obsession with food, elevating it far above a life necessity to a lifestyle choice, we are all confronted with daily choices about the quality and quantity of what we eat. If we find ourselves significantly over or under weight, we should do something about it or seek help to do so.

We could explore other areas of physical well-being, but these three are the top of the charts. Rest well, exercise regularly, eat responsibly. Because we are such radically integrated beings, a lack of discipline in these areas will almost inevitably impact our ability to serve God well. It may also reveal a more fundamental problem we need to address. Ill-discipline in an area of life seldom exists in isolation. Where else is that lack of discipline showing up? And if we are struggling in some of the other spiritual disciplines we have looked at, is it because we are undisciplined physically?

Paul urged Timothy to train himself to be godly, noting that physical training is of some value but godliness has value in all things (1 Tim 3:7-8). He describes the perfect balance: physical training *is* of some value and we ought not to despise it. But its value is chiefly realized as it feeds into our concern to be godly. Godliness has value for all things, both in this life, and the life to come, when our bodies will be resurrected and gloriously renewed so that we can serve God fully, forever.