

## Greetings!

The end of the academic year is almost upon us. We have three more weeks of lectures and then students finish up final assignments and sit exams. It can be a pressured time for them, so please remember them in prayer.

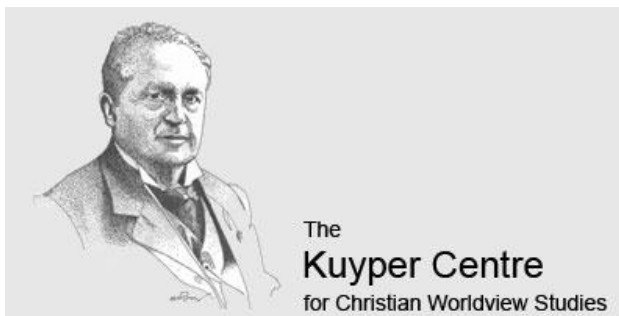
## Preaching Conference

At the end of September the Preaching Conference was a blessing to the 90 or so people who attended. Responses were very positive and the theme of "Preaching Biblical Wisdom" had clearly helped people think about how they can preach and teach more effectively through the rich yet challenging books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. For copies of the addresses, handouts and PowerPoints, contact the RTC Office.

## Graduation 2013

At the close of this semester we will be holding our Graduation Ceremony. The Graduation service will take place, Lord willing, 15 November at 7.30pm. Our speaker will be the past chairman of the RTC board, Rev Bill Bosker. We'd love College friends and supporters to join us that evening.

## Kuyper Centre Launch



On the 31st of October, Lord willing, we plan to launch the Kuyper Centre for Christian Worldview Studies. The RTC was originally set up with a vision to develop the college into a Christian University, where disciplines would be taught from a Christian worldview perspective. Despite repeated efforts to meet this vision such a university never eventuated. We trust that setting up the Centre will meet at least some of the hopes of our founders.

It is fitting that this event should take place on Reformation Day, because it was Martin Luther who first recognised that all Christians are called to their various tasks by God. Later John Calvin and others

broadened this insight to a recognition that we are to live every aspect of our lives to the glory of God. A more systematic approach to a Christian "world and life view" (now simply known as "worldview") was developed late in the nineteenth century by Abraham Kuyper and his followers. It is this approach that we seek to build on, developing a Christian worldview that meets the challenges of our day and age.

The launch of the Kuyper Centre will take place at 7:30 pm of October 31 at the Maranatha Christian School, 146 Kidds Road, Doveton. Our featured speaker, Colin Youl, will speak on "Worldviews: does your north hand know what your south hand is doing?" Following this the Centre's director, Dr Bill Berends, will introduce the purpose and program of the Kuyper Centre. Light refreshments will be served at the close.

You can visit the Kuyper Centre for Christian Worldview Studies at: [kuypercentre.org.au](http://kuypercentre.org.au)

## Fan the Flame

Our annual Fan the Flame conference is back on again from **23 to 25 November**. It is specifically designed for people who are thinking (or should be thinking) about whether God would have them serve in some area of ministry or mission work. In previous years young and not so young people have found this a challenging, stimulating and helpful long weekend. It not only gives an exposure to theological study and life at the RTC, but also helps people wrestle with the gospel need today, with avenues of serving in ministry and mission, with the concept of "a call to the ministry," and with training options.

Please make this conference known to people who you think would benefit from it. Enrolment forms are available at: <http://www.rtc.edu.au/Calendar/Events/Fan-the-Flame---2013>

## Faculty Activities

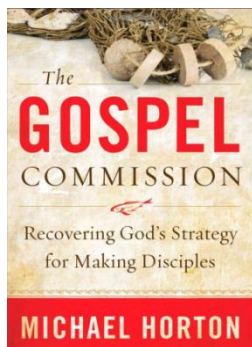
**RTC Israel Study Tour.** Our first-ever RTC Study Tour to Israel and Jordan is due to take off on 17 November. 19 RTC students and 9 others are joining the trip, which will be led by our OT Lecturer Rev John de Hoog. For many it will provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the lands of the Bible, where God did such significant and central work in his plan for the salvation of all his people and the renewal of the universe. Please pray for safety and for a wonderful experience of shared learning.

**South Island Young Adults Conference.** From the 25-28 October our principal Dr Murray Capill will be speaking at the South Island Young Adults Conference being held at Bishopdale Reformed Church, Christchurch, New Zealand. The theme for the weekend will be “Gospel Living.”

**Auckland Reformation Conference.** On the 1-2 of November our NT Lecturer Dr Martin Williams will be speaking at the Auckland Reformation Conference in New Zealand. He will be giving four lectures on the topic: “Justification Then and Now: Why This Great Truth Still Matters.” He will then be speaking at Avondale Reformed Church on the Sunday. (For more information please contact Rev Peter Moelker at [plmoelker@hotmail.com](mailto:plmoelker@hotmail.com)). Martin will then be making his way down the North Island on RTC deputation and will be speaking at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe (Tues 5th), Reformed Church of Hamilton (Wed 6th), Reformed Church of Palmerston North (Friday 8th), Reformed Church of Wainuiomata (Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> AM), Reformed Church of Wellington (Sunday PM).

## Book Recommendation

by Dr Phillip Scheepers



***The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* by Michael Horton (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 316 pages.**

According to Michael Horton one of the most serious issues facing the global church as we reach out with the Gospel is what he calls “mission creep.” This can be defined as allowing secondary activities (sometimes very worthy ones) to displace the primacy of sharing the Gospel and making disciples. The effect of mission creep can, for example, be seen in the thousands of schools and hospitals around the world that were founded with Gospel priorities in mind but have now left any emphasis on sharing the Gospel far behind. Horton (Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary in California) argues in “The Gospel Commission” that a rediscovery of the central call to “make disciples” can act as an effective safeguard against mission creep. He does this by providing a compelling and theologically rich exposition of the Great Commission touching on many relevant modern applications on the way. This book is a must read for anyone involved in mission and those who want to think deeply and seriously about the task of the church in the world. I highly recommend it and will certainly be making good use of it in my “Theology of Mission” classes.

## Ministry Spot

***What's Wrong with Worldly Wisdom?***  
by Rev John de Hoog



We've just finished a preaching conference on the topic “Preaching Biblical Wisdom.” The conference speakers urged us to seek and to find godly wisdom from the Bible. But it prompted a question in my mind: “What's wrong with worldly wisdom?” After all, even a sinful and unbelieving world is constantly building up a vast storehouse of knowledge and wisdom that we use all the time. Here are just three examples from my own experience:

In 2006 my wife Sallee and I visited Uganda for a month of teaching work. When you visit Uganda, you need to demonstrate that you have been inoculated against yellow fever. If you cannot prove inoculation you cannot even enter Uganda. Is that wise or foolish? It seems very wise to me, not only for the visitor but for the country as well.

A few years ago we went camping in a National Park near Canberra. We went with a friend whose hobby was bird-watching. On the second morning we were up early and we listened to the “dawn chorus.” Our friend could identify more than 10 different birds simply by their call. Was he wise or foolish? I consider that a great exhibition of skill and experience.

After the Canberra bushfires in 2003, the CSIRO did some research as to what kind of fence will best protect your property from bushfires. Their conclusion: A steel fence. Get a steel fence for your property if you are in a bushfire-prone area. Is that advice wise or foolish? The examples can be multiplied a million times over. We constantly use and approve the wisdom of the world, don't we! Life would be inconceivable without it.

So why does the Bible reject worldly wisdom, calling it folly? Paul talks about worldly wisdom and godly wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 & 2. “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1 Cor 1:20)

All of us use worldly wisdom all the time. How does that fit with the Biblical emphasis on the folly of worldly wisdom? We need to ask ourselves in what way the knowledge gained by a sinful and unbelieving world is foolishness, and in what way it is wisdom.

Let's summarise what Paul says about this in 1 Corinthians 1 & 2.

**1:17** – the gospel would be emptied of its power if Paul were to preach it with eloquent worldly wisdom.

**1:18** – this is because the wisdom of the world judges **the message of the cross** to be foolishness.

**1:19** – such worldly wisdom is therefore doomed to perish.

**1:20-21** – worldly wisdom is foolish to the extent that **it cannot bring people to God**.

**1:18-24** – God's way of salvation through preaching Christ crucified is the power and the wisdom of God, though it is an offence to Jews and stupidity to Greeks.

**1:25** – So, what the world sees as foolishness is in fact wiser than the wisdom of the world, because it brings people to God.

**2:1-4** – for this reason, Paul avoids the wisdom of the world and centres his message on Christ crucified.

**2:5** – he does this so that faith may rest, not on man's wisdom, but on God's power.

**2:6-13** – this wisdom is wisdom from God, taught by the Spirit of God.

**2:14-16** – He who does not have the Spirit will never have this true wisdom.

The wisdom of the world is foolishness when it comes to the ultimate issues of the meaning of our existence. Paul is not saying that there is no validity in the knowledge of unbelieving people, but he is saying that such knowledge cannot give us any answers to ultimate questions.

He is also saying that this lack in human knowledge is not just a mistake, a kind of inadvertent incompleteness. No, it is a deliberate refusal of the truth. It is caused by human sin and rejection of God. It is being wise in your own eyes. True godly wisdom takes up a Biblical view of reality and goes on with the task of interpreting the world in the light of the gospel.

As Christians we recognise that we do not have exhaustive knowledge. The expert on fences knows more about fences than the average Christian. The expert on bird calls knows more about bird calls than the average Christian. But Christians have answers to worldview questions which give them a framework within which to understand the world. This allows Christians to both affirm what is good and reject what is false about the wisdom of the world.

This understanding of the benefits and limitations of worldly wisdom helps to situate Old Testament Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs) in its ancient Near-Eastern environment. Both Egypt and Mesopotamia

developed significant bodies of wisdom literature. In both civilisations there were professional teachers, sages, who built up and preserved wisdom material. Young men were taught to read and write in the "wisdom schools." Moses was a beneficiary of this tradition (Acts 7:22). No doubt Solomon had significant contact with this tradition (1 Kgs 3:1).

There are many close parallels between some of this literature from Israel's neighbours and the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Many scholars have argued that the Wisdom tradition of Israel was simply imported from pagan neighbours as a pragmatic and secular tool, and gradually given a religious "veneer."

We believe this is not the case and that the wisdom literature is revelation from God. But it does seem likely, in God's providence, that the wisdom literature of the Old Testament did borrow significantly from that of its ancient neighbours. Is that a problem? Surely there is no reason why Israel's "godly wisdom" should not incorporate and affirm what is right and good about the "worldly wisdom" of the ancient environment.

What significantly separates Israel's wisdom from that of her neighbours is **a distinctive worldview**. Old Testament wisdom literature is characterised by four fundamental assumptions:

### **(1) Creation: The Universe is God's Creation**

The whole of what exists was created by the Lord God alone. What exists is known as the "**universe**" for that reason. There is not one god who created this little bit and another god who created another little bit and so on. The Lord God is not the tribal deity of a particular nation, the nation of Israel. The Lord created the universe. See Proverbs 3:19-20.

### **(2) Order: God is Sovereignly Controlling the World**

Not only did God create the world, he continues to uphold and preserve it. God's will from the beginning is that the world should be stable and orderly. It is not driven by erratic or accidental forces.

**Wisdom gives a person skill in living according to God's order. Folly is choosing to live contrary to the order God has placed in the world.** Human thinking cannot be the starting point for knowledge of good and evil, only God can define these things.

### **(3) Rationality: God's world is knowable, but also mysterious**

Because God made the world, and made us in his image, so the world is knowable, at least in part. But wisdom must be sought (e.g. see Proverbs 8:1-11).

There is much in the world that remains mysterious (Proverbs 20:24). The whole Book of Job is an attempt to deal with a mystery, and the writer of Ecclesiastes finds the world a difficult place to understand.

#### **(4) Fear of the Lord: Humans Must Reverence God in Their Lives**

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – see Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 31:30. See also Job's own conclusion in 28:28. And see the conclusion to Ecclesiastes in 12:13. The fear of the Lord is the key principle of Wisdom.

The opposite of fearing the Lord is seen in Proverbs 3:7 – being wise in your own eyes. Wisdom says no to autonomy and places its trust in the Lord. Clearly, biblical wisdom is impossible without belief.

There is still much mystery in the world, but that should impel us to faith in the Creator, for he alone understands life thoroughly. And we can understand why Paul calls Jesus Christ the wisdom of God, for in him God's perfect plan for his universe is worked out.