

## College News

- Each year it takes a few weeks for our student numbers to settle. We now have 47 people enrolled in RTC courses, and another 20-30 taking courses through Sola. Of the 47 RTC students, 19 are full-time and 34 are studying on campus. Nearly half the students are enrolled at M.Div level. We are thankful to God for the students he has given us and pray that their time at the RTC will equip them in a great way for their future service of God.

## Dr Scheepers' Trip to India

Towards the end of last year I had the opportunity to be involved in a conference for church planters from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. These church planters work in very difficult circumstances and most of them have very little training. A local Presbyterian missionary organises week-long conferences to give them some much needed time away from the demands of ministry and to provide them with training. I spoke on Apologetics, Ministry to Muslims and Theology of Mission. It was a great joy to see the enthusiasm of these brothers for the work to which they have been called and to hear their stories of how the Lord is growing his church in India. After the conference I also spent some time at the 'Grace and Truth' Bible College near Tambaram south of Chennai (Madras). My lectures there focussed on the same topics that I dealt with at the conference and it was wonderful to interact with a group of very keen students on these issues. I was also impressed to see that the college has many students from other Indian states and even from other countries in the region (Nepal, Burma and Myanmar).

I am very thankful to have had this opportunity to serve the Indian church and would like to urge all of you to pray for God's people there as they seek to serve Him in the midst of a society where preaching the uniqueness of Christ is perceived as deeply counter-cultural.

## Faculty News

- Murray Capill has just been in WA for the weekend, participating in the **Advance Together** conference. This is a collaborative project of the CRCA Ministry Development Coach, and the Youth and Children's workers, along with the RTC. The one day event was a great opportunity to encourage and strengthen churches in their disciple making ministries. The conference will also be run in Victoria on 27 April, Queensland on 18 May, and NSW on 15 June. For more info, go to the RTC website.

- Dr Phillip Scheepers will be in New Zealand shortly to speak at the Hamilton Easter Convention. He will present five addresses on the theme of *Seeking the Glory of God Among the Nations*. For details visit the RTC website.

## Visit of Dr Michael Goheen

Michael Goheen is the new professor of missiology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. For seven years prior to this he held the Geneva Chair of Worldview Studies at Trinity Western University and also taught missions at Regent College.

Michael will be visiting Australia in May to address the pastors and church leaders of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Before that he will visit Victoria to speak on the importance of a Christian Worldview for the Christian's life in society. He will be speaking in Melbourne on the evening of May 1<sup>st</sup>, and at the RTC at midday on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. If you are nearby you are warmly invited to attend.

We are pleased that Michael has agreed to speak to us on this area of his expertise. For further information consult the RTC website at [www.rtc.edu.au](http://www.rtc.edu.au)

## Book Recommendation (by Dr Phillip Scheepers)

***Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration and Mission* by J. D. Payne** (IVP, 2012, 206 pages).

As Christians we are called to have a vision as wide as the world. With this work J. D. Payne effectively reminds us that 'the world' can sometimes be right on our doorsteps. Payne uses the first part of his book to place immigration and migration in kingdom perspective before going on to discuss the history of migration and the way in which it has changed western societies over the past few decades. He also analyses the characteristics of different types of 'people on the move' (e.g. refugees and students). The most valuable part of the book, in my opinion, is where he brings all of this data together in order to formulate some guidelines and strategies for reaching 'strangers' next door. In the process he encourages individuals and congregations to ask some searching questions about how they can be more effective in cross-cultural witness. This is not only a matter of local importance. Payne constantly cites examples of how effective Christian witness in the West has had significant positive outcomes in the countries of origin of a variety of migrant groups. Cross-cultural witness to migrants could therefore be viewed as an integral part of the global mission of the church. I highly recommend this book to church leaders and individuals who are keen to think through the implications of being Christ's witnesses in our multi-cultural society.

## Ministry Spot

(by Dr Murray Capill)

Last Month, in writing about the place of discipline in the Christian life, I observed that while godliness requires discipline, discipline does not automatically lead to godliness. It only leads to godliness when our discipline is focused on bringing us into relationship with Jesus Christ. Discipline is needed to place ourselves in the current of God's grace and foster fellowship with Christ. And it is that alone which leads to our growth in grace.

Relationship, of course, is always cultivated by communication. To build relationship with another person we need to spend time with them, talking and listening to each other. Similarly, to build relationship with God we need time talking and listening to him. That is why prayer and Bible reading surface as the two most foundational spiritual disciplines.

We must be careful, however, to think of these two disciplines relationally not mechanically. When I think mechanically, I say to myself, 'I should do my Bible reading; I should spend more time in prayer.' It's a duty, a responsibility, maybe even a chore. But when I think relationally my whole perspective changes: 'I want to spend some time with God. There is so much I need to talk to him about, and I need to hear him speaking to me, giving me renewed perspective on life.'

It is, of course, an enormous privilege to spend time with the eternal God. It is one of the foremost blessings of the gospel that we, with our all sin, messiness and confusion, can come to God and call him 'Dad', relating to him personally. Because of the work of Christ we come to him just as we are, not needing to formulate perfect prayers, but simply talking to him in the most real terms about where we are at, our sins and struggles, the things we sense we need, the concerns that burden us, the people and situations we care about, and the good things we are thankful for.

Prayer is designed for ordinary, messy people, who get distracted while praying and put together confused prayers that jump all over the place. If relationship with God was easy and natural we wouldn't have needed a mediator like Jesus, or the interceding groans of the Holy Spirit, or the commands of Scripture urging us to prayer, or the simple model of prayer given by Jesus. The Bible gives us every encouragement and opportunity to come to God with all our 'stuff' and ask for his help.

I was helped in thinking about this by some addresses on prayer I heard at the beginning of the year, given by Dr Gary Millar, Principal of the Queensland Theological College (they can be found here: <http://www.taschristianconvention.org.au/talks/>). In a seminar session he spoke of two questions that are a great way to begin time with God each day. First, ask yourself, 'How am I going?' Reflect on where you are at in life and with God. Write a paragraph answering that question, being very honest before God. Then talk to

him about the realities of your life. Second, ask, 'What is God saying to me in his Word?' Read a passage of the Bible and allow God to speak to you. Then write down what you understand his Word to be saying. That will most likely prompt further prayer. The simple practice of writing a few sentences each day about how you are going, and a few sentences about what God is saying to you in his Word, is a powerful tool for cultivating relationship with God.

For those of us in ministry there is a danger that whenever we turn to God's Word we find a message for other people. We see a sermon, a bible study, an article. But we will not grow spiritually if we are not hearing God speak to our own hearts. We need to read the Bible to ponder what God is saying to *us*. We need to hear him challenge us, teach us, encourage us, reprimand us. And we want something to stick, so that as we continue our day, biblical truth is on our mind. That's why distilling a truth and writing it down is helpful.

Around the disciplines of prayer and Bible reading there are other disciplines that God's Word commends: meditation, fasting, Scripture memorisation, in-depth Bible study, and so on. The Bible gives few rules concerning how to do these things so we are free to experiment with what helps us grow in our relationship with God. What works for one person may not work for another. You don't have to have a morning devotion; you don't have to close your eyes to pray; you don't have to spend a set amount of time with God. But you do have to develop some disciplines, otherwise your relationship with God will not develop.

Once we have formed some useful disciplines we begin, perhaps not immediately but over time, to experience the enormous blessings of walking with God each day. Relationship with him has a way of re-ordering our messy minds, putting things in perspective, taking the focus off us, lifting from us some burdens, renewing our hope, refreshing our more godly resolves, cleansing our souls from the filth of sin, and spurring us on to godly living. By myself I cannot grow in godliness, but by spending regular, intentional time with the holy God I come under the powerful influence of his renewing grace. The discipline of 15, 30 or 60 minutes with God proves to be the most rewarding time investment of the day. The measure of our devotional life is whether it has turned from being something I should do to something I want to do.

But significant as cultivating personal relationship with God is, it is not sufficient for a healthy spiritual life. We are designed to know God in community, so next time we will consider the place of corporate spiritual disciplines.