



MONTHLY

May 2019 Issue #122



College News

Our Melbourne campus was buzzing last week with two intensive classes: Murray Capill's *Christian Worship* unit, and Phillip Scheepers's *Christian Ministry in Islamic Contexts*. It was great to initiate and renew friendships with students from a range of churches and locations (including Tasmania, Queensland and New Zealand) who study using our various flexible modes of delivery.



The week before, Chris Parker from Christian Education National (CEN) spoke at our iLife event. Chris delivered a challenging talk for young adults, helping us reflect on the way social media is shaping our lives and how to respond to that as disciples of Jesus. With more than 110 attendees, the event turned out to be a great occasion to introduce RTC to young Christians in the Melbourne area.



We are coming toward the end of the semester. After two more lecture weeks our students will have to dig deep and prepare for exams. Please pray for them that they would have strength, determination and encouragement to finish well and, more importantly, that they would not lose sight of God in the midst of all the busyness.

Faculty News

Murray Capill is currently visiting Perth, WA, for a half-day event for CRCA ministry leaders on Saturday 18th, preaching on Sunday, and a full-day preaching conference on Monday at Trinity Theological College. For more information about Murray's preaching conference at Trinity, please visit <https://ttc.wa.edu.au/event/ministry-matters-murray-capill/>

All the RTC faculty were present at the CRCA ReCharge Conference and thoroughly enjoyed the time of refreshment as well as valuable networking and fellowship opportunities with ministry colleagues. Immediately afterwards, Murray and Phillip enjoyed being at the Organic Outreach conference held at our Melbourne Campus. The training given by Kevin and Sherry Harney was extremely valuable for local churches wanting to strengthen their evangelistic work in very natural, everyday-life ways. A vast number of very useful resources are available on the Organic Outreach website.

Events

Fruitfulness on the Frontline



**SEMINAR WITH
MARK GREENE**

Developing a whole of life
discipleship model for your ministry

Tuesday July 9, 9:30am-3pm

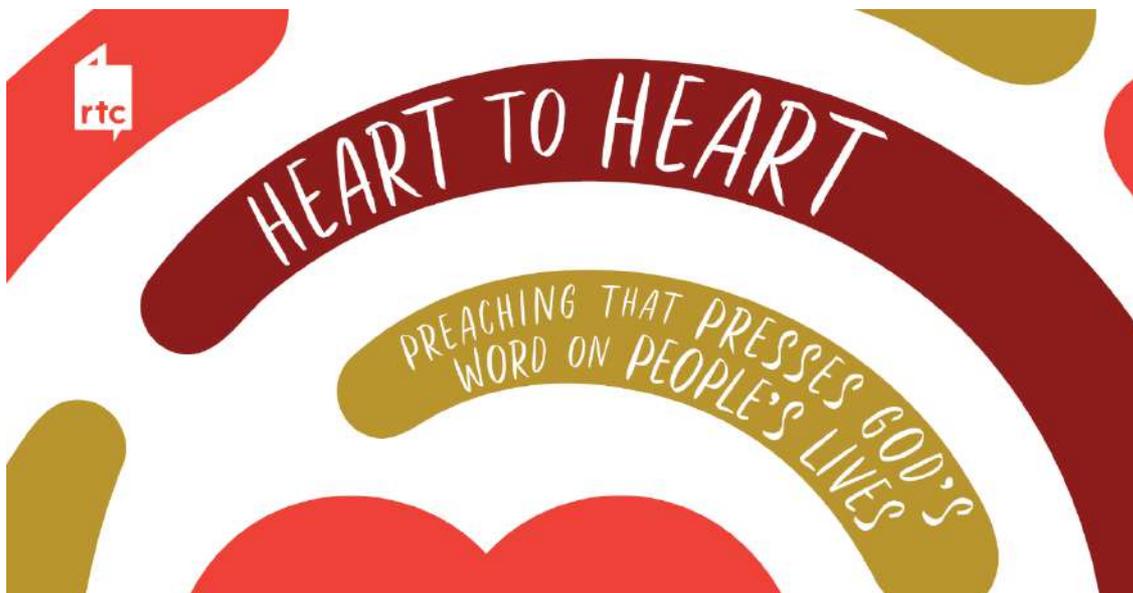
**FRUITFULNESS
ON THE FRONTLINE.**

Presented by

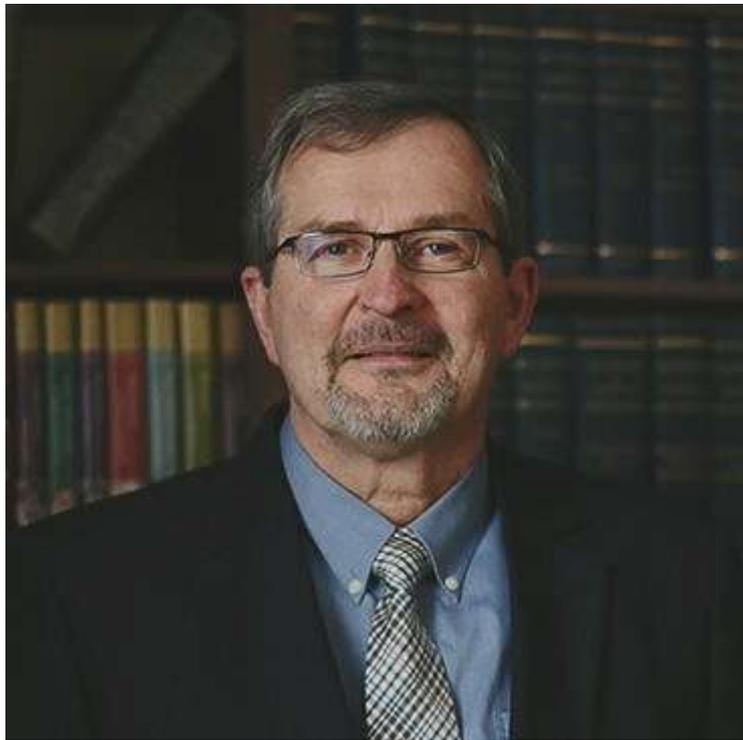


How do we develop a ministry that trains members for whole of life discipleship? How do we shape them so that they equip Christians to live out their faith and be fruitful for Jesus on their everyday “frontline”? Join UK author and LICC director Mark Greene as he, along with local presenters, explain how this might be possible.

Heart to Heart: An Afternoon with Dr Joel Beeke



There is a kind of preaching that is not only biblically and doctrinally rich, but also rich in its application of truth to life. It is preaching where God’s Word is preached from the heart to the heart. This kind of preaching has been a hallmark of the Reformed and Puritan traditions in the past and has much to challenge and inspire preachers today.



Dr Joel Beeke

In a special afternoon with Dr Joel Beeke, *Heart to Heart* gives preachers and those who love God's Word a chance to learn from and interact with one of the world's foremost advocates of Reformed experiential preaching. Dr Beeke is an experienced pastor, scholar and author and has recently written, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People*.

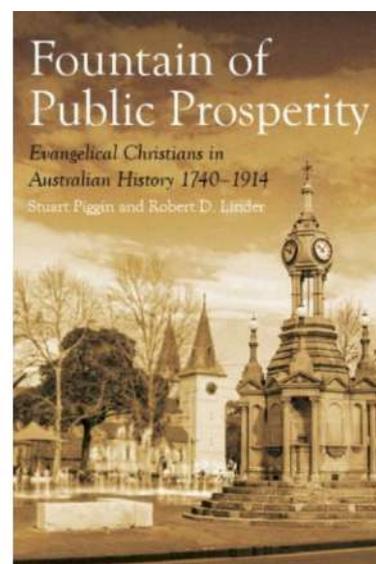
For more information about RTC's events, please visit rtc.edu.au/events

Book Review

by Dr Phillip Scheepers

The Fountain of Public Prosperity – Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740–1914 by Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Linder (Monash University Publishing, 2018, 674 pages)

With this monumental work Stuart Piggin and Robert Linder make a very significant contribution to our understanding of Australian history. They do this through telling the “untold story” of how evangelical Christianity played a vital part in the forging of Australian institutions and of Australian identity. In the process they take readers through a broad sweep of Australian history, showing how Christians were involved at almost every turn to bring the values of the Bible to bear on a developing society.



The book is particularly interesting given the current debates about the role of religion in public life here in Australia. The implicit message conveyed by Piggin and Linder is that we forget where we came from at

our peril.

In a follow-up volume the authors hope to bring the story up to date (i.e. from 1914 to the present). Given the quality of the first volume it is anticipated that the two volumes will provide the definitive history of Australian evangelicalism and its interaction with wider society.

Due to its length this is obviously not a book that most readers will be able to skip through in an afternoon, but it will certainly repay the effort of working through it with a new appreciation of Australian history in general and of the Australian church in particular. As Dr Geoff Treloar (Director of Teaching and Learning at the Australian College of Theology) says: “The sparkling prose and deep insight into the interplay between this form of Christianity and the national story will engage the general reader and challenge the professional student. After this landmark book, it will no longer be possible to dismiss or minimise the role of religion in the rise and development of modern Australia.”

Ministry Spot: Doing Good to Those of the Same Faith

by Rev John de Hoog



John de Hoog teaching at RTC

I don't know about you, but for some time I've been puzzled by Paul's words in Galatians 6:10: "So, then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (ESV). The word "especially" (*malista*) is not hard to understand, but I find it hard to apply. The use here suggests something like "do good to all, *but especially* focus on fellow believers." It sounds inward-focused.

I can understand the rationale for this approach. I am to do good to *everyone* because all human beings are made in the image of God. I am to do good to *fellow believers* especially because I share with them not just being made in the image of God, but also being remade in a *renewal* of the image of God. With fellow Christians, I am united with Christ. We are one body, the body of Christ. When one member suffers all suffer; when one member rejoices, all rejoice.

When I forget that all human beings are made in the image of God, I can fall into racism, sexism and other kinds of evil prejudice. How dreadful if such attitudes

were to be found within the body of Christ! The church is meant to be a witness to the character of God, and the world will know that we are Christ's disciples by our love for one another. So, I can understand the *rationale* for the priority. The difficulty for me comes in the *practical application* of this principle. It's easy to understand, but difficult to apply in practice.

I wonder if a good dose of Old Testament background might be useful. A biblical-theological approach to God's design for the place of Israel amongst the nations and how that flows into the New Testament might help.

Israel's relationship to the nations that surrounded her was meant to be threefold. First, Israel was called to *honour the name of God* amongst the nations. That means they were to enhance God's reputation in the world. God's concern for his holy name is the chief reason why he sent Israel into exile and then redeemed them from exile. In announcing what he is about to do for exiled Israel, the Lord says he is going to redeem them "not for your sake but for the sake of my holy name" (Ezekiel 36:22-32). God's priority for Israel was that they bring him glory. In the words of the Lord's Prayer, the hallowing of God's name comes first. They were to be God-focused.

The second way Israel was to relate to the nations around about her was to be a *model community*. The nations were meant to look in on Israel and be amazed at their wisdom, understanding and righteousness (Deuteronomy 4:6-8). Israel was to be God's paradigm for the world. The book of Deuteronomy is full of commandments about how the model community was to operate, but it was always a "heart and hand" commitment. For example, "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor... you shall not *harden your heart* or *shut your hand* against your poor brother" (Deuteronomy 15:7). Soft hearts and open hands were the order of the day. The model community was to operate in a way that would astonish the nations. The purpose of their community was a significant outward focus.

One feature of the "model nation" was to be how they dealt with the poor and vulnerable. The classic formulation identifying those who needed special care is "the sojourner, orphan and widow," a phrase found throughout Israel's law and prophets and even in their worship (e.g. Psalm 146:9). The phrase implies responsibility not just for "insiders" but also for "outsiders" who happened to be passing through or "sojourning" in Israel. Many aspects of the law were to apply to sojourners in the *same way* as to Israelites. Even laws as central as the Ten Commandments were applied to "outsiders" as to "insiders" (see Exodus 20:10), and many other provisions were explicitly commanded to be applied in that way (e.g. Leviticus 24:22). In the words of the Lord's Prayer, Israel was to demonstrate how God's kingdom comes and how his will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

The third way Israel was to relate to the nations was *avoidance*. That is, Israel was to be certain to steer clear of the pagan idolatry and lifestyle of the nations they lived amongst. As the Israelites were entering the Promised Land, the Lord warned them that they were receiving the Land not because they were so righteous, but because of the wickedness of the nations who lived in the Land (Deuteronomy 8:4-5). Leviticus 18:26-28 vividly expresses the need for avoidance; the Land would vomit them out if they failed.

The history of ancient Israel makes it clear that the nation mostly failed to live up to these three purposes. Instead of *avoiding* the pagan idolatry and lifestyle of the nations, at times Israel became a *leader* in iniquity (e.g. see Ezekiel 16 and 23, and 2 Kings 21) such that the Lord's verdict is that they were *worse* than the nations (Ezekiel 5:6-7). The Land vomited *them* out. Because of the "Canaanization of Israel" (Daniel Block's summary of the theme of Judges) the envisioned *model*

society utterly broke down. The Prophets are filled with accusations about the failure of Israel's moral and social code. Instead of *hallowing God's name*, God says he hates their idolatry and hypocrisy (e.g. Amos 5).

The nation of Israel failed. But within national Israel was believing Israel. Some Old Testament believers, by the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives, were dedicated to loving and obeying God. We catch glimpses of them throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. These believers looked forward to a day when God would perfectly fulfil his purposes for Israel. They were straining forward by faith to what God would do in Jesus Christ, the perfect Israelite, the long-awaited Messiah. He would not only fulfil the promises of God; he would also embody the three purposes of God for Israel in his own life and work. Jesus honoured God's name, he gathered around him an "Israel in miniature" (twelve disciples) who would become the core of the new "model community," and he exposed the hypocrisy and idolatry of the Israel of his day.

Christians today are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. The three purposes of ancient Israel feed into our purposes (1 Peter 2:9-12). So how does a review of God's purposes for Israel in relation to surrounding nations help to answer the question we began with? By pointing to the urgency of being God-focused and world-focused.

We must reflect God's concern for justice, righteousness and love within the "household of faith." That is to be a priority. But the reason it is a priority is *not inward-looking*. It is a priority so that we might bring glory to God, to hallow his name. It is a priority so that we might be a model community that shows others how good it might be to belong to Jesus Christ. It is a priority so that we might strengthen each other's hands for the work (Nehemiah 2:18) rather than get caught up in the paganism of the world. *None of these three purposes is inward-looking*. Israel's three purposes in relation to the nations develop into our purposes in the world.

Galatians 6:10 urges us to pay special attention to the good of fellow believers. But in God's purposes, that becomes a primary way of doing good to everyone when the community of believers is outward-focused to the glory of God and the astonishment of the world.

