

Grace Alone

Women at GTC

Highlights

- ◆ Women at GTC:
 - Articles
 - Profile of student Alison Gray
 - Book review
- ◆ The Jones' conferences on Paganism and Women in the Church
- ◆ Principal's travel

Grace Alone

is the newsletter of Grace Theological College, a non-denominational evangelical and reformed theological college in Auckland, NZ.

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FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Traditionally theological colleges have been thought of as a man's domain. They have been institutions devoted exclusively to training men to be pastors and teachers.

Attitudes in this regard have changed in recent times. For one thing, churches have recognized that there are more ministry roles than those of pastor and teacher. For another, they have seen that it is not only pastors and teachers who need training – others do as well. And this has opened the door for women to study theology seriously and be equipped with ministry skills for their distinctive roles within churches.

While GTC has a primary focus on training pastors, and believes that only men can be pastors, it has nevertheless always aimed at equipping Christians generally – including women - for ministries in the church. The number of

women attending classes, especially in lay counselling, is one of the striking features of College life this year.

For that reason we have focused this issue of *Grace Alone* on Women at GTC. Alison Gray, a full-time student at the College, shares her experience of College life, Louise Ploeg and Geraldine Loef reflect on the value of College studies to them as women, Sue Bracefield reviews a recent book encouraging women to study theology, and Peter Reynolds tells of how women are benefiting from the Lay Counselling course he and his wife Margaret teach.

We have also included a brief report of Peter and Rebecca Jones' visit to Auckland earlier this month. Peter's "Spirit Wars" seminar and Rebecca's "Women in the Church" conference were of great help to many in the College community. *Andrew Young*

GTC co-hosted recent conferences in Auckland by Peter & Rebecca Jones, pictured here with Andrew & Nola Young.

See p2 for more details





Dr Peter Jones

Dr. Peter Jones and Neo-Paganism

Over the weekend of May 2-5th we were privileged to co-host a visit of Dr. Peter Jones and his wife Rebecca to Auckland. This was the last stop on what had been – to use Peter’s own words – an “excruciating yet exhilarating” six-week visit to Australia and New Zealand. Their intense speaking schedule had made it excruciating, while the appreciative listener response had made it exhilarating.

Peter Jones, formerly Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California, was on a mission to awaken Christians in Australasia to the growing force of neo-paganism in Western culture. He became aware of the dramatic influence of a new spirituality in the cultural life of America in the early 1990s when he returned to the USA after spending 18 years in southern France. To his surprise, he discovered that America’s Christian heritage had been supplanted by a new religion, one that he refers to as “neo-paganism.”

Neo-paganism is essentially a resurgence of the ancient practice of creation worship. In one sense, it is as ancient as the Fall and has characterised all man-made religions throughout history (Rom. 1:25). But in another, it is new, a product of the radical rejection of Christian values in the 1960’s. In America especially, this new spirituality is being championed by intellectuals and educationalists, and is exerting major influence among global strategists.

At heart this new paganism (sometimes called New Age spirituality) declares, “All is one and one is all.” The universe as we know it is all that exists, and everything within it is part of a single spiritual organism. That means that all people are one, and all religions are one.

However, at present, we do not see everything

existing harmoniously as one. This constitutes the problem of the universe. And this problem, it is argued, is traceable to the tendency that has existed throughout history (due largely to Judeo-Christian dogma) to make distinctions – between people, beliefs, moral values etc. If it is to be overcome (and universal peace and harmony experienced), all distinctions (between gender, right and wrong, sexual preference etc.) have to be removed. The way to achieve this, neo-paganism says, is to abandon the rational use of the mind and to look within (through various meditation techniques etc.) for ultimate reality and higher consciousness.

Dr. Jones’ many illustrations and citations made it easy to see how well this analysis fits our cultural and religious situation here in New Zealand. He challenged us to develop a more apologetic approach to our Christianity – to be more aware that the gospel is facing an assault of enormous proportions today, and to meet that assault directly and biblically.

Meanwhile, as Peter was enlightening people of conflicts raging in the spiritual realm today, his wife Rebecca was encouraging women to exalt their God-given role in the home and the church. Many women today feel pressured to downplay their femininity, and almost embarrassed to admit contentment with the role of homemaker, wife and mother. Rebecca encouraged women to glory in the structures God has established for human society, and to find fulfilment in their distinctive gifts and roles.

Audio and video recordings of Peter and Rebecca’s respective conference ministries in Auckland are available. Write (or send an e-mail) to us here at GTC if you would like to obtain a copy of these.



Rebecca Jones

Preparing Women to be Effective Encouragers in the Body of Christ

Counselling Lecturer *Peter Reynolds*



In the Lay Counselling class at GTC women are being prepared, equipped and trained in a special aspect of pastoral care within the body of Christ, the ministry of encouragement.

Encouragement is a ministry that seeks to bring the comfort, direction, and hope of the gospel to believers. It is a ministry that belongs to the whole body of Christ (1 Thess 5:14; Heb 3:12-14, 10:24-25), and one in which women often excel.

At GTC, women are learning how to listen well, and how to use conversations to communicate understanding and empathy. They are learning how to build a bridge of love into people's lives a bridge that will be strong enough to bear the weight of truth, the weight of gospel promise and exhortation.

By way of a self-counselling project they are also learning about aspects of their own lives that block effective encouragement from taking place when they are talking to a Christian friend. With integrity and increasing insight they are growing in their understanding of themselves as they seek a growing understanding of others.

The class has the opportunity each week in interactive groups of three, to encourage one another with the insights they are gaining from the course. In this way encouragement is already taking place - there is no need for them to wait until graduation! Newly discovered ways of encouraging others in Christ are already bearing fruit in the classroom, and in the families and relationships these women belong to.

At the end of the first term the class filled in an evaluation questionnaire. Here are some of the things the thirteen women in the class had to say. (There are six men in the class who are also learning much about biblical encouragement - great training for potential elders!).

-I have enjoyed the practical help being matched

with the Biblical insights

-The material is extremely helpful, better than my expectations.

-The Lord has been speaking to my heart about the ways I shut people out of my life

-The material is immediately applicable to church and family

-I have been challenged about my attitudes towards others when I'm listening to them

-I did not expect to be dealing with my problems, issues and behaviour - this is REALLY great!

These women are becoming "ground floor" encouragers. Ground floor encouragers are not professional counsellors. They are people indwelt by the Holy Spirit who have committed themselves to having a ministry of encouragement with everyone they meet. A ground floor encourager will often call on "upper floor" encouragers in the local church, the pastor and elders, for assistance. Conversely, upper floor encouragers will welcome an array of ground floor encouragers they can call on to share the burden of pastoral care.

A busy pastor, for example, was heard recently to lament the fact that a whole day of appointments and study was lost ministering to the urgent needs of a woman in the church. How he wished there had been other women in his church he could have passed this struggling parishioner on to. That is the exact need the Lay Counselling course is seeking to meet.

One of the women in the course, Julie Melville-Smith, wrote in her term paper that she would like to see churches developing a counselling side to their ministries that would serve the leadership in helping to meet pastoral needs, while at the same time training others with these encouragement skills. What a wonderful vision, and what an opportunity it would create for women to be increasingly active in pastoral care within the body of Christ as ground floor encouragers.

Why Women Should Study *Louise Ploeg and Geraldine Loef*

Louise Ploeg is a member of the Reformed Church of Avondale. She works full-time for a fire and general insurance company in downtown Auckland, and is currently undertaking part-time studies at GTC. Louise is enrolled in Biblical Theology I on Wednesday mornings and Lay Counselling on Wednesday evenings. These courses contribute toward completion of the Certificate of Biblical Studies.

Geraldine Loef is a member of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe. She is an accountant working full-time for an engineering consultancy firm in central Auckland. Geraldine is currently completing the Lay Counselling course on Wednesday evenings. Both Geraldine and Louise have also attended the Tuesday evening lectures on 1 & 2 Thessalonians.



Louise Ploeg and Geraldine Loef

The purpose of this article is to outline some of the reasons for studying theology and to encourage all women (whether younger or older; qualified or unqualified; working or at home) to consider taking up the challenge of becoming involved in this exciting area of spiritual growth.

- ◆ We need to know the Bible and its theology *in order to live God-pleasing lives*. The Word of God is sufficient for Christian living. In other words, it is all we need for living a godly life. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, for example, states that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”. This highlights the importance of knowing God’s Word so that we will be fully equipped for acts of service.
- ◆ To be well grounded in the Word is *essential for an unwavering faith*. Objective truth, doctrine and sound theology provide stability. Studying the Scriptures helps us to stand firm in our faith so we will not drift away or get entangled in emotive fads. As women, created with special emotional sensitivities, we think this is a special benefit of serious study. It helps us to “...stand firm and hold to the teaching we passed on to you...” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).
- ◆ Studying the Scriptures also enables us *to be more discerning in our everyday lives*. It helps us understand what we see happening in the world about us each day and enables us to be careful in what we think, say and do. It also helps us to test the soundness of what we hear in the church - like the Bereans who “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).
- ◆ Knowing the Scriptures and their theological truths *equips us to pass on our faith* to other women and younger generations, as directed in Titus 2. It helps us become like the woman who “speaks with wisdom” and has “faithful instruction on her tongue” (Proverbs 31:26).
- ◆ It is also a key to *keeping our minds actively thinking on heavenly things* and constantly planning ahead so as not to be idle (2 Thessalonians 3:11ff). The Bible teaches us how to live practically. Proverbs 31:17 states “She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.”
- ◆ Finally, the more we are familiar with and soaked in the Scriptures *the better fitted we are to witness to and evangelise the lost*. It helps us to be fully “prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks to give the reason for the hope we have” (1 Peter 3:15).

We don’t for a moment think that everyone has to

be a great theologian. But we believe that we are called to live “self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:12), and how better to do this than to study God’s Word which will teach, correct, rebuke and train in righteousness.

Alison’s story

Alison Gray is a first year student at GTC. She and her husband Caleb came to Auckland at the beginning of this year to prepare themselves to serve the Lord in church-related ministries in the years ahead. We asked Alison to share her early impressions of her student experience at GTC.

To be honest, it wasn’t my idea to come and study at Grace Theological College. In fact, it took some persuading from my husband to get me here. Initially, when the idea of coming to Auckland to study was raised, I thought that it was just an idea that would soon pass. We were both working, had bought a house less than a year before, and were close to family and friends. Why would we want to leave the crisp, clear air and space of Dunedin, to go to the hustle and bustle of Auckland? However, as the year went by, and we discussed the option of Bible College on several occasions, I gradually came around to the idea. So, here I am!

Now that I am here, I find being a full-time student at GTC really enjoyable. It is fantastic to be able to take the time to focus on studying God’s Word, and to be built up in my faith. After only one term here, I already feel like I know so much more than when I started. One thing I particularly appreciate about Grace is its emphasis on not simply growing in knowledge, but on knowing Christ better through that knowledge.

My goals in studying are to gain a better understanding of God’s Word and to have a closer relationship with Christ. Through this I hope to be better equipped to encourage others, and to serve more effectively in the church. I also see studying at Grace as a way of building a strong biblical

We would love to challenge and encourage you (especially women) to consider theological study at GTC so you better know the truth and be equipped for works of service to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Blessings to you all, Louise and Geraldine.



Alison Gray

foundation in our marriage, as well as equipping us for bringing up godly children in the future.

I am studying four subjects this year - Biblical Theology, Practical Christianity, Lay Counselling and Church History. Biblical Theology has helped me to see how the whole Bible fits together, and this has helped me to understand it more fully. Practical Christianity and Lay Counselling are (as the names suggest), very practical in nature. The thing that has really struck home to me in these classes is our need to be fully devoted and committed to Christ. It is only as we experience the love and grace of Christ in our own lives that we are able to encourage others with this same love and grace. Church History is proving to be really interesting as well. From it I have gained an understanding of how Christianity came into being, as well as seeing how God has acted throughout history to achieve His purposes.

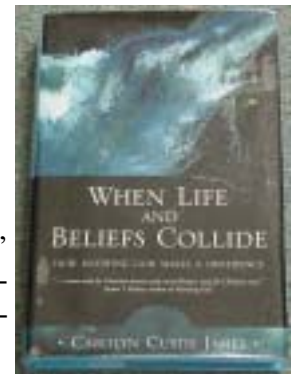
I would love to encourage anyone - especially women - to consider studying at Grace Theological College. Bible College is not just for men. Although men and women are created differently and have different roles, the role of women in the church is just as significant as that of men. And there is a great need for women in the Body of Christ to know and handle correctly the Word of God.

Book Review:

When Life and Beliefs Collide:

How Knowing God Makes a Difference

by Carolyn Custis James



We neglect theology at our peril! This is the thrust of Carolyn Custis James' helpful and readable book *When Life and Beliefs Collide* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002). What makes her message startling and unusual is that it is addressed to women.

It is a sad fact that both traditionally and in our day, women have neglected the serious study of theology. Yet, Carolyn James claims, this neglect is unbiblical. Jesus himself took time to teach women, even rebuking Martha for trying to remove her sister Mary from the place of learning. Indeed Carolyn shows Mary of Bethany to be a great example of the value of women knowing theology. Jesus' teaching helped her understand the crisis of his delay at Lazarus' death and later enabled her to minister to Jesus in a way that he wants remembered forever (Matthew 26:13).

Besides being unbiblical, the neglect of theology by women has serious practical effects. It robs women of the spiritual strength they need to meet the troubles of life. Carolyn shows how an informed faith helps enormously as people wrestle with things like grief and tragedy. Besides looking at this in the life of Mary of Bethany she gives many contemporary examples taken from her own life and the lives of others. Her study of both Scripture and life lead her to the following conclusions:

- ◆ Women need theology *for themselves*. They need it especially when life and beliefs collide - that is when troubles come upon them (as they inevitably do). Good theology is needed to make sense of these troubles, to learn from them and move on. Poor theology leaves a woman's faith weak and floundering, affecting her relationship with God, the way she lives, and her witness to the world.
- ◆ Women need theology *for others*. The cost of poor theology is also very high in terms of relationships with others. Its effects spill over into marriages, families and relationships. Weakness in any part of the body (the church), no matter how small or insignificant, is a burden to the whole (1 Cor 12:26). The neglect of encouraging women (who probably make up at least 50% of church members) to develop their theology has led to atrophy and malnutrition in the church today.

Why is it that women so commonly neglect theology? Carolyn James believes that one important reason is a misunderstanding of the very nature of theology. It is often thought of as an abstract, intellectual discipline that has little relationship to life. When this is the case, it holds little attraction for anyone, but especially for women. But this is not what theology is about. True theology, Carolyn James insists, is about knowing God. It is not just a matter of head-knowledge, but it is relational and practical. Because of this, it nurtures, transforms and shapes a woman's life and her ministry to others.

This book has received high praise from many. In fact, one of the first things to strike me when I began to read it was the number of reviews and endorsements it contained – 14 in total! Among the 7 men and 7 women to commend the book were well-known names like J.I. Packer, Jerry Bridges, R.C. Sproul, Susan Hunt and Joni Eareckson Tada. All were unanimous about the book's value for women, and several of the men strongly urged men to read it as well.

What happens when your life and beliefs collide? Let this book challenge and encourage you to know God in deeper and richer ways so that your life will honour him in greater measure.

(Reviewed by Sue Bracefield)

College News

* A series of Insights on Evangelism are being produced and distributed via e-mail this term. These are helpful notes and quotes designed to encourage and equip people – church leaders especially – in evangelism. If you would like to receive these contact us on enquiries@gtc.ac.nz

* GTC Principal Andrew Young enjoyed a full and fruitful visit to Melbourne in late March. Andrew is currently preparing to travel to the USA and Britain in June. He will be visiting Jackson (Mississippi), Birmingham (Alabama), and Bridgend in Wales. While in Wales he will be engaging in research and speaking at a Word and Spirit Conference sponsored by the Evangelical Theological College of Wales.

* College faculty enjoyed stimulating interaction with Dr. Peter Jones, former Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California, during his recent visit to New Zealand. Links will be maintained with the hope of further visits in the future.



1. Presbyterian College in Melbourne
2. Conference attendees



Principal's Visit to the UK and USA

On Thursday June 12th I will farewell my long-suffering family and take to the skies again for another month abroad. This time my journey will take me first to Jackson, Mississippi, then to Birmingham Alabama, and then to Bridgend in Wales.

The requirements for my PhD study are the immediate occasion for this trip. The University of Wales requires that I make regular visits for on-site supervision and research, and most of my time away will be spent engaged in doing just that, at the Evangelical Theological College in Wales.

Also in the USA I will be renewing contacts with faculty and friends at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, and making use of its extensive library for research. More meetings with the faculty of Birmingham Theological Seminary are planned for Birmingham, Alabama, along with an interview with Dr. Scott Krietzer, a possible visiting lecturer at GTC for the next year or two.

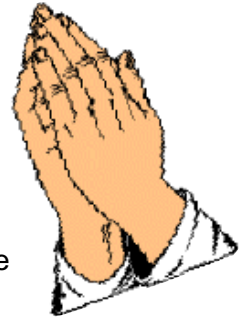
The bulk of my time, however, will be spent in Britain. My plane is due to arrive at Gatwick Airport on Friday morning, 20th June, and from there I will need to make my way immediately to Bridgend in Wales in time to preach at the end-of-year service at the Evangelical Theological College of Wales the next day. The following two weeks will be spent in research consultation and study, before a final week participating in a Word and Spirit Conference (providing 4 addresses) sponsored by the College.

I imagine that it will be one dazed and disorientated College Principal that disembarks from his marathon flight home from London via Bangkok and Sydney mid-afternoon on July 13th. However, with the Lord's blessing, relationships with overseas seminaries and colleges will have been further strengthened, new friends made, people helped and strengthened through ministry of the Word, and the research project on persuasive preaching moved forward a giant leap. Do join us in praying that these results – and others the Lord may be pleased to give – will flow from this trip.

Please join us in....

Thanking God for

- ◆ Encouragements from Andrew Young's recent ministry in Melbourne
- ◆ Peter & Rebecca Jones' stimulating conferences
- ◆ GTC's 14 women students– we hope many more women will take up the challenge of theological education in the years to come



Praying for

- ◆ Andrew as he has writing to finish in preparation for going to ETCW in Wales
- ◆ Fruitfulness and safety for Andrew's travels to America and Britain which include both research and speaking engagements
- ◆ Peter Jones in his ministry of awakening Christians to the growing force of neo-paganism in Western culture

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