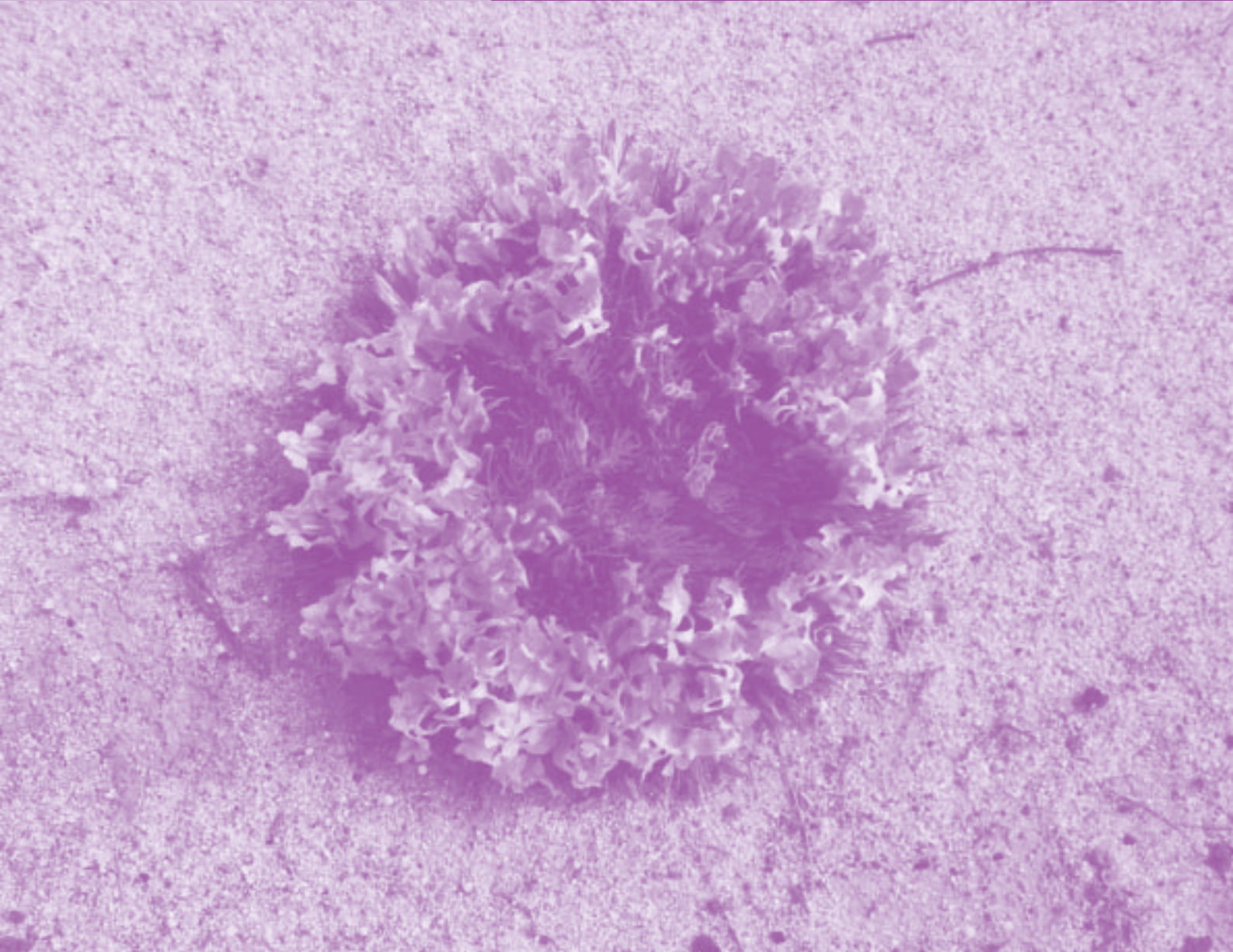


faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 29/11 DECEMBER 2002



The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will
rejoice greatly and shout for joy.

The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the
splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the
glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God."

Isaiah 35:1,2

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Cover – Desert Wreath Flower (Western Australia); pp9,10 – Hans Versluis

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Copy Deadline:
 Six weeks preceding the month of publication.

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:
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Subscription per volume:
 \$40.00 (eleven issues)
 Bulk Rate: \$35.00
 Overseas: \$60.00
 Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:
 Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag
 Design & Layout: Matrix Typography
 Printed by: Flying Colours

Editorial

We come to the end of another year - the year of our Lord (Anno Domini) 2002. Another year of striving and working to the very best of our abilities and strength for the Lord’s service.

Or was it? Shouldn’t I more truthfully say: Another year where we have constantly failed to live up to what we were saved and called to be in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? You know it, and I know it. We simply haven’t shown it.

It is always easy, in this regard, to point the finger at someone else. But as someone quipped, “Point your finger at someone else and there are three fingers pointing back at you!” So any reflection needs to start within. So while New Year resolutions may have become more a vehicle for humour than anything else in the wider community, let it be for us an opportunity for reflection and re-focus. We pray that the various camps being held will help to stir up those there in this way, and also, through them, our churches as a whole.

But let’s especially re-dedicate ourselves to the regular things. In the words of the book reviewed later in this issue, “Too often, in pursuit of a spirituality of instant gratification, believers miss how useful public worship is in living the Christian life - they look for spiritual things that appear to be more substantial and make a bigger impact. But to miss the blessings of the ordinances that God has ordained is to forget that God is wise and knows what is best. The diet he has prescribed may not satisfy spiritual taste buds that have become accustomed to other forms of devotion. But the diet set before believers in worship is guaranteed to be nourishing because God himself has promised to bless and cause his face to shine upon those who worship him through the means of preaching, sacrament, and prayer.”

+ + + + +

Why Jesus is better than Santa Claus

Santa lives at the North Pole - JESUS is everywhere.
Santa rides in a sleigh - JESUS rides on the wind and walks on the water.
Santa comes but once a year - JESUS is an ever present help.
Santa fills your stocking with goodies - JESUS supplies all your needs.
Santa comes down your chimney uninvited - JESUS is always there for His own.
You have to wait in line for Santa - JESUS is as close as the mention of His name.
Santa lets you sit on his lap - JESUS lets you rest in His arms.
Santa doesn’t know your name, all he can say is “Hi little boy/or girl, what’s your name - JESUS knew our name before we did;
Not only does He know our name, He knows our history, and future, and He even knows how many hairs are on our head.
Santa has a belly like a bowl full of jelly - JESUS has a heart full of love.
All Santa can offer is HO HO HO - JESUS offers health, help, and hope.
Santa says “You better not cry” - JESUS says “Cast all your cares on me, for I care for you.”
Santa’s little helpers make toys - JESUS makes new life, mends wounded hearts, repairs broken homes, and builds mansions.
Santa may make you chuckle, but JESUS gives you joy that is your strength
While Santa puts gifts under your tree, JESUS became our gift and died on a tree
It’s obvious there really is no comparison
We need to know WHO Christmas is all about
We need to put CHRIST back into CHRISTmas
JESUS is still the reason for the season
 Yes, JESUS is better, He is so much better than Santa Claus!

Anon

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

The Great "I AM"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"
(John 8:58)

The announcement of Jesus' birth was so dramatic because the baby who was born was the eternal God breaking into our time encrusted world.

This is the message of the Bible that must be accepted in faith. The opening of John's Gospel contains the declaration that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity (John 1:1,8). The baby the angels told the shepherds about was the Son of God become flesh.

John 8 is the record of Jesus' tense conversation with leaders of the Jewish religion. The Jews were proud of their ancestor Abraham, and they mistakenly thought they were safe because they were Abraham's children. Without denying Abraham's importance, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58.)

Now then, what are you going to do with that? It is shocking that anyone would claim this for himself. Think of what it would have meant to the Jews who heard it first. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He said, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." (Exodus 3:14.)

The Bible calls God the one "who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev. 1:4). God is the great I AM. And Jesus is God.

This is why His glory destroyed the night when He was born. God,



"The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds" 1639 (detail) by Govart Flink.

the great I AM, had been born a man. "O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

Joel Nederhood

The Faith in Focus Committee recently met, and, after a review of increased costs and their extent, have decided to increase the subscription rates. These have not been increased for 3 and a half years, and with large rises in postal charges, and an increase in prices for printing, it could not be left any longer. The increase is a significant one, but Faith in Focus is yet at a cost comparable to other denominational magazines.

On the other side of the coin, Family Notices will now be able to be published gratis, subject to space being available and confirmation by the Editor, while Reformed Church-related activities and ministries will continue to be able to be promoted free. Faith in Focus is also looking to further development, particularly in providing a more extensive coverage of church news from around the country.

Exactly what year was Christ born?

An historical perspective

E.M. Blaiklock

It was in AD 525, we are told, that the Abbot Dionysius Exiguus, at the Pope's command, instituted the system of computing the years from the birth of Jesus Christ. With the means and material at their disposal, it is remarkable that the chronologists employed established the beginning of the Christian Era so close to the correct date.

And the correct date? It must be confessed that the exact time of the famous census-night in Bethlehem is difficult to determine. Even to say that it was in such and such a year that the decree "went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed", takes no account of the time which may have elapsed between the edict and the execution, and of the local situation, disturbed in many ways, which in remote Palestine could postpone the processes of government.

The date, however, is worth some attention. The "first enrolment" which took place while "Quirinius was administering Syria", was

obviously not the enrolment to which Gamaliel referred, and which occasioned an unpleasant revolt. That enrolment took place in AD 6 or 7 and it follows that the earlier occasion was 8 or 7 BC. Papyrological evidence has established a fourteen year cycle for the census in Egypt, and there is no reason to suppose that it was different in Palestine.

Luke's worth

A knotty historical problem thus arises which can find solution only if firm support is given to Luke's claim to be writing authentic history. Luke's accuracy and historical worth has long since been abundantly vindicated, and his reference in his Gospel to an earlier census of Quirinius, and, indeed, an earlier period of authority in Syria, must be taken seriously. Nor does it require distortion of known facts to fit established history into Luke's scheme of events.

Luke's language is consistent with an extraordinary command in the East for Quirinius some ten years before his regular governorship of Syria. It was established Roman practice to appoint able officers to such extraordinary posts of authority to deal with some local situation beyond the power or ability of the man on the spot. A century of history had taught Augustus to be wary of placing too much power in the hands of a frontier governor, and the whole history of the Roman principate was to demonstrate how wise such caution was. Hence the use of special commissioners for tasks involving resources and responsibilities which the Emperor chose to keep closer to his hand.

If Quirinius was employed on such a mission when he supervised the census in Palestine, Luke's language is preserved. He was not to know that so much historical evidence was to vanish with the passing of the centuries, and leave historians wondering why he spoke of Quirinius as the governor of Syria, when it must have been common knowledge that Quinctilius Varus, he who, in AD 9, was to lose three legions for Augustus in the Tentobery Forest, was governing Syria between 7 and 4 BC.

These years are significant, because enough is known of Publius Sulpicius Quirinius to make it certain that, if his extraordinary mission took place, it must have been in the years 6 and 7 BC. An inscription found near Tivoli in AD 1764, seems to confirm both the appointment and the date.

The inscription is without a name, but almost certainly refers to Quirinius. It describes a nobleman who twice governed Syria for Augustus, and who received the military honours due for the successful pacification of

the Empire's enemies. The same man had governed Asia.

Herod's position

The reconstruction of events would therefore be as follows. Varus came to Syria, an untried man, in 7 BC. Augustus was engaged in the ordering of his frontiers, and, impressed by the difficulty which Tiberius and Drusus, his own sons, had encountered in subduing the Alpine tribes of Europe, judged it wise to relieve Varus of the task of clearing the mountains of Phrygia. Sixteen years later, trapped and killed by Arminius in Germany, Varus justified such hesitation. Quirinius successfully subdues the Homonodeuses, and was told to turn his attention to Palestine, where the census, due in 8 BC had not yet been taken. There were reasons for this. Herod I had recently lost the favour of Augustus by ill-advised hostilities against Syllaeus, the vizier of the Nabataean King Obodas. This person, perhaps with a shrewd appraisal of Herod's growing domestic difficulties, had abetted a Beuin raid into the borders of Trachonitis, and was also disputing a public debt owing to Herod by his own country. In 9 BC the quarrel erupted, and Herod, seemingly with the consent of the legate of Syria, invaded Nabataea. The expedition roused Augustus' suspicions, and in unusually firm language the Emperor renounced his old friendship with Herod. He would treat him henceforth, he intimated, "as a subject": This was about the year 8 or 7 BC. In the latter year Herod executed his two sons provoking Augustus' Greek pun that he would sooner be Herod's pig than his son.

Disaffection almost immediately arose in Herod's army, suggesting that a coup d'etat was not remote. It spread to the country, and Herod's position was precarious. He had weathered the storm from Rome with difficulty, and only because Aretas IV had succeeded his enemy Obodas in Nabataea, and had no love for the vizier Syllaeus, who had found a way to Augustus' ear. Herod, too, appears to have pacified Augustus by establishing an oath of fealty to the Emperor, which was fruitful among the Jews. It is easy to see with what desperation Herod would endeavour to avoid an enrolment, that irritating reminder of Roman domination to which the world, least of all the Jews, was not accustomed. It seems more than likely that Augustus, sensitive in a new fashion to what was afoot in Palestine, was determined, perhaps with something less than his usual wisdom, to bring Herod to heel. His patience exhausted, he now bids an able officer to supervise the process. There was almost no

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limit to the processes of delay which Herod, by repeated and repetitive embassies to Rome, could multiply. The more relevant consideration is how long Quirinius would require to reach the scene of his special task, to subdue the mountain tribes, to proceed to Syria, and to put in train the necessary arrangements.

Comparing dates

Ramsay is of the opinion that the autumn of 6 BC was the time. It is more convenient to the task of reconciling the date of the Nativity

with the fairly certain date of 29. AD for the Crucifixion, if the autumn of 5 BC is chosen. Quirinius took up the governorship of Asia about this time, but Luke's reference could well be to the final days of the supervision of Syria's external policy. Quirinius made his dispositions, set in order all necessary precautions for a popular explosion, and moved to his next task. Herod had seven months to live. They were filled with a madman's cruelty.

If Christ was born about October, 6 BC, he would be "about thirty" in the fifteenth year of

Tiberius. And it agrees with this that when he was in Jerusalem at the beginning of His ministry the Herodian Temple, begun in 37 BC had been forty-six years building. It is a tradition as old as Eusebius that Christ suffered at the age of thirty-three. The year most likely is AD 29. The fixing of the Nativity at 5 BC conserves the position.

(The late E.M. Blaiklock was the professor of classics at Auckland University, and a well-known evangelical speaker and author)

Change with-inn!

Another inn in another place

Patricia van Laar

The oasis and the inn were a glad sight for three weary English women and their muleteers when they caught sight of them from the desert, though they knew full well what to expect. Life frequently led them from inn to inn as they took the gospel message to this remote region of the earth. How different this one would have been from another inn, approached by another weary woman, the inn of Bethlehem nineteen hundred years earlier. That inn would have been clean and tidy, regulated by the health and cleanliness laws of God's privileged people, the Jews. That inn would have been a haven, if only there had been room for her.

Our Christmas ponderings in sermon, meditation and drama have sometimes included the innkeeper of Bethlehem, his thoughts and his feelings when confronted with a woman about to give birth and with nowhere to go. Not so often do we think about the innkeeper's wife. I wonder if she knew of the impending birth, or did her husband forget to tell her in the busyness of his day? In any case, would she have any inkling of the importance of the event about to take place just outside her door; an event which was to change the world? Certainly she would not. She, like her husband, would be too busy to give it much thought.

A first visit

The particular inn the desert missionaries entered was little more than a shack, a filthy hovel, like so many similar inns they had experienced in the oases of the Gobi. Perhaps this one was somewhat worse than usual. When the visitors arrived, the innkeeper, with a besom of stiff desert grass tied to a stick, was making a half hearted attempt at cleaning out the rubbish left by the last guest, making dust rather than cleaning. His was a sordid life, but even worse was the life of his wife. She herself was the daughter of an innkeeper, and

had been born in a similar home in a similar oasis. At fifteen, without having any say in the matter, she was handed over to be the wife of the eldest son of this inn, taken from the drudgery of her parent's home to the drudgery of her husband's. In the custom of China and Tibet, she served her mother-in-law for many years until the death of the older woman.

Clothing was to her nothing more than protection from the cold and covering for her nakedness. Apart from the inn and this protection from cold, little else concerned her in life but food, and the birth and care of her children. What else could there be for her? But even her children brought little comfort and joy, for by the time of the foreign women's visit her family had reached adulthood, and her grown sons had all gone away to look for a better existence. Indeed, who could blame them?

Such men and women were a concern and a challenge to the three missionaries. Was it not for such that the Lord had called them away from their own country to this desolate area of deprivation? In the face of such hopelessness, they "attempted much for the Lord," as they put it. In this inn, oddly called 'The Inn of Peace and Unity', a scarcely appropriate name give it by its owner, they declared God's message of Peace and Reconciliation with God, and of Security in Him, to both the innkeeper and his wife. After a few days they moved on, seed sown, but what hope for harvest?

Their return

It was two years before they returned to that spot once more. A woman who was somehow different met them at the door. It was, yes, the innkeeper's wife, the same woman as had attended them before. She was as poor as ever, but surely there was something different. Wasn't she cleaner? Her place was certainly tidier.

The most radical change that struck them, however, was in her expression and bearing. The sultry look of resignation was gone. She

held herself differently. Her movements had acquired a certain dignity. She was changed.

She greeted them gladly. She led them straightway through the inn to her own private room. She pointed to a picture—a picture which hung on the wall over the mud bed, a picture that they had given her on the previous visit. It showed a lotus flower, its roots buried deep in the mud of a pool, but its pure petals opening towards heaven. Under the lotus was printed a question from an ancient book of her people, a book of wisdom, 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?'

The answer was given from that greatest Book of Wisdom, the Book of the God Who is Wisdom, an answer in the form of a prayer, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God.'

"It was two years ago on the third day of the last moon that you were here before," the woman said. She remembered the exact day!

They all gazed silently at the picture.

After a pause, she added, "I have never smoked opium since then."

Seeing the astonished, wondering look on the missionaries' faces, she explained, "You said I was displeasing God by doing so, and I could not go on displeasing Him."

She looked again at the words on the wall, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God.'

"Yes, I say that prayer every day."

(This was adapted from the account of a visit to a Gobi Desert Inn by Mildred Cable and Eva and Francesca French, famous missionaries of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.)

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Between You and Me!

How hot are we for Christ's return?

Dick G. Vanderpyl

Have you ever had a moment or a thought, "I wish He would come now"? Come, Lord Jesus, come now! Have you ever said: "Man, oh man, what's the delay?"

No more death, no more mourning, no more wiping away tears, no more hankies?

In our life, waiting can often be a pain in the neck! Waiting can make us restless, impatient, angry, anxious, and so on!

When Christ returns, there will be no more digital watches to give us the right time or church bells to call us to worship!

Eternity means to live for ever and ever! No more past tense, or planning for tomorrow and worrying about one's future!

No time tables, no tiredness, no sickness, no more climbing into bed to recover our energy, no more making up beds, no more shopping!

Maybe there will be sunsets?! No more seas. No more loneliness, no jealousy, no coldness of heart. No more wasting time because time has gone forever and ever. Just imagine: we'll live in the eternal NOW—total timeless. That's eternity, isn't it!

So, in the final analysis, the best is still to come! It's impossible to visualise that reality in the here and now.

Are we ready, are we willing to let go what we have gathered in the Bank or in Property or a Hyundai Accent? Would you be keen to look forward to be with our Father in Heaven and our Brother Saviour Jesus Christ?

What do the Scriptures tell us right at the end of His Word? **Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Peter urges us to "do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts." (2 Peter 1:19).

In the opening verses of Revelation, the apostle John gives us the good news that Christ's return is imminent—that's soon—the time of his return is near!

I mentioned once in conversation to an elder and friend that I couldn't wait for it and he found it rather odd. His retort was, "Are you depressed?"

"No, I'm not," I replied. "I am ready and even keen to meet up with the Lord Jesus."

Don't you have these moments and times?

We would love to know what heaven is like, wouldn't we! For one thing we know that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has promised each one of us a mansion, already prepared, waiting for us! Just imagine that! What a comfort to know this now, already! And what will we be doing there? To serve God day and night! Don't you believe me? Check what the apostle John writes in Revelation chapter 7, about "The Great Multitude in White Robes": especially in verse 15 where we read, "Therefore they are before the throne of God **and serve him day and night in his temple**; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them."

It is God, our Father, who says so! No ifs or buts! We'll have brand-new bodies!

As Paul spells out among other things, "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us."

Our Heidelberg Catechism concludes: "This is sure to be true! It's even more sure that God listens to my (and your) prayers, than that we really desire what we pray for."

Amen and Amen!

A feminine focus

Catherine Tait

Keeper of Heart and Home

We certainly admire efficiency, don't we? We admire the person whose house is always tidy and clean, and the one who always seems to get things done on time. I always wanted to be like some of my friends at university, whose lecture notes were well-organised, whose essays were written in beautiful handwriting, and who had one of those colour-coded time-planners on the wall with due dates for their year's assignments all written in. They could tell you a month out from final exams what subjects they were going to study each half-day to prepare best for each of their courses. Yes, a well-ordered way of life is something to aspire to! It's true, Christians *should* be good managers of their lives and their time. Countless biblical passages tell us this—and Proverbs 31 reminds us women, in particular,

that time management begins at home.

The more important thing

But it doesn't end there. In fact, good organization of our work, home and families (if we have them), while profitable, pales into insignificance beside the primary task of keeping a watch on our souls. Are we maintaining our daily walk with the Lord? How are our habits of prayer and bible reading, and our personal battles with sin? This is the kind of watchfulness writer Elisabeth Elliott had in mind when she called her latest book *Keep a Quiet Heart*. What she meant is maintaining those careful habits of trust, patience, forgiveness, repentance and contentment that enable us to weather all life's trials and sorrows – and even little disappointments – with

equanimity. She who looks to her heart as a daily practice will be quite ready for the sudden trial when it comes. Let me introduce one woman who kept both her heart and her home in a state of readiness.

Catherine Tait is a woman we know about because her husband had a very important role. But her life's story bears many similarities to other women of her time—and its lessons can be applied in our time, to our own more ordinary circumstances. She lived in prominence, with privileges and comforts, but her life shows that daily, faithful living equips all of us for the troubles the Bible tells us are "common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

A believing background

Catherine grew up in a happy home, and was still very young when she came to understand the truths of the gospel, and to believe them with all her heart. She wanted to serve Christ in every way she could. In her day, living in a well-off family in Victorian England, the usual way of devoting your life to others was to help the poor and needy in the

community around you. Godly women would visit poor labouring families, taking them food and medicine, looking after them when they were sick, and reading the Scriptures and praying with them. They would also teach children the rudiments of reading and writing, in little schools organised by their church—all on a voluntary basis, of course. As a girl Catherine did all of these things, in a desire to share the Christian faith with others.

Still quite young, she married Archibald Campbell Tait, who was then headmaster of Rugby school, one of the best-known English public (in New Zealand we would call them private) schools. Her household was a busy, and not very secluded one! With her husband, she lived in the midst of the school's activities—and she included the boys in her household. She made it a large and generous one, for their sake. Seventy boarders lived in the school—as one biographer put it, “in her husband's house”—and hundreds more day-pupils lived nearby. Young as Catherine was, her kind, motherly influence was felt by all these boys. When any were ill she saw to their needs as if they were in their own homes. If any lost a loved one she made sure he would know straight away that he was not alone among strangers. It was her custom to have the little boys for tea in their household; and the older boys she invited for dinner in the evenings, talking with them about many topics of interest.

A well-ordered life

Catherine's daily routines, from her early years, were well-ordered. She left her bedroom soon after seven (very early for a woman of her situation in life!), and at eight went to the nearby parish church to attend morning worship. (It was the practice for Anglican churches to hold daily services of prayer, Scripture reading and singing) She loved her church. After this she had some private, quiet time for prayer in her own room, then came downstairs to family worship. This was the normal habit of British households at this time, when the family, including the servants, would gather, and the husband as head of the house would read Scripture and lead the family in prayer. Over breakfast she joined in conversation with guests over whatever the topics of the day were, and by ten she would be about the house, planning household affairs with the cook and other servants. On certain days she would be available for poor people to come to her at her house, and she would talk to them about their needs, noting them all down and arranging for them to be met. Everyone noticed that Catherine used her time well—as my source on her life puts it, “No time was lost, and therefore she always had time to spare.” How did she use this spare time? She went out riding with her husband on his days off, she helped him prepare his history lessons for the boys or, if she had a spare half-hour, she would spend it in reading.

These habits continued as her family grew. She and Archibald had seven children, and by the time the youngest of these was born Archibald was Dean of Carlisle—which meant that he had responsibility for the affairs of the cathedral in that town. She took a keen interest in the children's education as they grew up, often helping them with their lessons in the schoolroom where they were taught at home. She also took very seriously the task of teaching them the faith. She helped them memorise Scripture, especially the Psalms, and often they would learn the great hymns of the faith, whose words, of course, teach us its central truths. At family prayers Archibald would question the children about the Scripture passage he had read, to make sure they



Archibald Campbell Tait, husband of Catherine, whose heart trusted in her (Proverbs 31:11)

understood it well. The children grew up knowing the Anglican liturgy well, and they loved Sundays and church as much as their parents did. Catherine would explain the Scripture readings assigned for each Sunday of the year (there was always an Old Testament reading, and a portion from the gospels and the epistles). As one of her friends said, Catherine “lived the Christian life with her children; not so much sending them on, or even going before them and calling them on, but going with them every step of the way, in prayers and thanksgivings and little loving services to all around.”

The bigger family

But her life had a wider focus than her children. She took a full interest in all her husband's church activities, attending openings of new parish churches, going with him wherever he preached—“her deepest interests were ever mine”, he wrote. She also continued

her work with the poor and suffering, having them in her home, teaching them in schools, and spending hours in the workhouse (charitable institutions set up to house the really destitute). Her children helped her in all this work. The poor loved her; and it was noticed by all that she was as much at ease with them as she was at a dinner party with cabinet ministers, lawyers or bishops.

Tested by suffering

The family were well-prepared, through these ordered habits, for the blow that came to them. In those days it was not uncommon for infectious diseases to come in epidemics in certain places. There was no medication to treat them, or vaccines to protect against them. Hundreds would die of outbreaks of cholera in large cities. Scarlet fever was another. These diseases, though often hitting the poorer, less well fed and housed families of England, also struck the better-off as well. In the spring of 1856, the Tait family endured a tragedy that is hard even to imagine. Within the space of five weeks, five of their little girls died of scarlet fever. They were left with their only son, Crauford, and a baby girl. The strength of their faith was tested to the limit by this terrible trial. That they endured it and enabled their daughters to die trusting in the Saviour's love had much to do with the steadiness of their family's spiritual habits. The comfort they were able to give their daughters on their sick beds was, in reality, the same truth they had been teaching them all their lives. Even these little girls were able to apply the things they had always been taught to their sickness—and even their death. As one of the little ones was dying, her mother prayed old familiar prayers with her. Little Catty followed every word with her lips, and after the prayers Catherine said the words of a familiar hymn:

*“Jesus, Saviour, Son of God,
Who for us earth's pathway trod,
Who for us became a child,
Make me humble, meek and mild.
I Thy lamb would ever be;
Jesus, I would follow Thee;
Let me love what Thou dost love,
Let me live with Thee above.”*

She followed every word, and fixed her eyes on her parents with a look of love they never forgot. Soon after, she pointed her finger upward toward heaven, then stretched her hands upwards as she breathed her last. It was obvious that old, familiar, oft-repeated words were a great comfort to both mother and daughter as little Catty died.

Further labour

But they laboured on with all that the Lord had for them to do. Later that year Archibald was called to be Bishop of London, and the family moved there to continue their labours

as before, though with new responsibilities. Catherine continued to do all she could to help the poor and needy, establishing a home for orphans near their house. As before, the prominent and cultured were welcomed into their home as well; and to all, Catherine was warm and gracious. They were blessed with two more children, and with their family of four they made their final move to Lambeth Palace when Archibald was made Archbishop of Canterbury, the most senior position in the Church of England. He was much-loved by Queen Victoria, who made his appointment herself, because she sympathised with his conservative theological views. So, Catherine now had occasion to stay as the guest of the Queen as well as to visit orphans. She managed it all!

In the mid-1870s, as one of the duties of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archibald convened the Lambeth Conference, which was a meeting of Anglican bishops from around the world. There was occasion for welcoming bishops from the furthest corners of the world into their family circle, and this Catherine did. But it was at time of great cost: they had just lost their only son, Craufurd, who died suddenly in his late twenties. One of the bishops, an American, watched her fortitude as, pale and sorrow-stricken, she cared for the multitude of guests. He said that he could scarcely believe such courage and self-constraint were possible. It was very possibly a last, gallant effort that was too much for her strength. Six months later, Catherine herself became very ill. Soon she was dying. Again, words she knew well were her comfort. Archibald read the prayer of commendation to God from the Book of Common Prayer at her bedside—the very words they had prayed together as their daughters had died: “... *We humbly commend the soul of this Thy servant, our dear sister, into Thy hands, as into the hands of a faithful Creator, and most merciful Saviour; most humbly beseeching Thee, that it may be precious in Thy sight... And teach us who survive, in this and other like daily spectacles of mortality, to see how frail and uncertain our own condition is; and so to number our days, that we may seriously apply our hearts to that holy and heavenly wisdom...*” Then they sang, “*Jesus, Lover of My Soul*” (the hymn of Charles Wesley) as she passed from this life. Catherine looked forward to the presence of her Saviour, where all tears would be wiped away.

This Christian's character

What I really admire about Catherine is her calm steadiness of character. It was this steadiness that led to her choosing a regular, ordered pattern of daily activities. But more than that, she chose the best of daily activities available to her as Archibald's wife, and in her own church and cultural setting. The ones she chose gave her and her family readiness for troubles when they came. It is important that

we choose carefully what we make “regular” in our lives. We need to ask ourselves—are our habits conducive to godly thinking and living, or not? Do they measure up to Philippians 4:8, where Paul is giving advice on what we make our regular subjects of thought?

We can adapt Catherine's example to our own lives very easily. Of course, regular habits of bible study and prayer on our own are important for growing in our walk with our Lord. They also give us immediate armour against the troubles and temptations of the day ahead. Catherine, as a faithful Anglican, knew her church's liturgy (the *Book of Common Prayer*) extremely well—and this was good. Much of it is Scripture, and the prayers written in it are models of clarity and conciseness. It is obvious from Catherine and Archibald's lives that the words of this liturgy came to them from their memory as a great comfort in time of need. It was the same with the great hymns of the church throughout the ages: they were a wonderful repository of truth, hope and encouragement for this family. We can do the same. There are passages of Scripture we can memorise and ponder over until we know them inside out. But what about our creeds and

catechisms? There is wonderful truth in them that will strengthen us for service and comfort us in trouble. How about the Apostles' and Nicene creeds? How about Question and Answer One of the Heidelberg Catechism? Do you know good hymns (the best of the faith, passed down to us through the ages) well enough that their words come to mind easily? They are full of truth that we can rely on when we're tempted, taunted or troubled. Why not make it a project to go over some of these treasures of the faith at home with your family? It could become a regular habit!

Finally, I'm sure Catherine knew that one of the things the Saviour wants us to do is to be busy in His service day by day, week by week and year by year. He wants to find us this way when He comes for us. And of course, that doesn't just mean when He returns, suddenly and unexpectedly, “like a thief in the night.” It also means when each of us dies, and is called into the Lord's presence. Catherine was ready for this because of the daily patterns of devotion and of doing good that she established early in her life. Are we equally as ready, when we consider what we do, and think, each day of our lives?

How to help a friend

...by being one first!

Sjirk Bajema

The Mangere Ladies asked for this topic so as to be better prepared to help those close to them. In doing my research, though, I have come to realise that this is a bit more than it seems. Actually, it covers everyone you could ever come into contact with. The Bible is very clear on this. It is not only someone we have a distinct relationship with, it is anyone we meet. Like one quote goes, “There are no strangers here - only friends you have yet to meet!”

The Hebrew word for friend, *rea*, appears 187 times and is used for friend, neighbour, or associate - whether close or occasional. Our Lord Himself showed the extensive breadth of this word when he quoted Leviticus 19 verse 18, “*You shall love your rea as yourself.*” We know *rea* as neighbour - but it's this same word for friend.

So when we have the subject of helping friends, we are really talking about being open to helping anyone at all. And isn't that what stands out about Christians most of all? Shouldn't those around us see, even in a brief encounter with us, the difference there is in us?

I think we are all too painfully aware of the reality. We aren't like that at all. Some of the

situations raised by our Mangere Ladies show where we have failed to be true friends.

Does that mean, though, we're trying to do the impossible? Rather than end up hurting some one else again, shouldn't we leave any help up to the professionals? There are other people a lot better at helping with those problems than we are.

That's the view many people take. They are like the priest and the Levite who make the choice to pass by on the other side. Their own personal comfort is what counts - whether they do that deliberately, or, as is more often the case, they do that without realising they're doing that.

Where true friendship begins

Naturally we turn to God's Word for this. And it is in John's Gospel chapter 15, the verses 9 till 17, that we see the Lord pointing out a distinctive change that is occurring in His relationship with His own people - those who would part of the Church. The change is such that Jesus now calls us His friends and not His servants, which He described believers as being before.

The reason why lies in what our Lord Himself is about to go through. It is His doing and dying for us which brings us into the fullest fellowship

with Him - a fellowship in which we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be as Christ Himself is to the world.

Note that - **as Christ Himself**. What the Old Testament believers could only have a glimpse of we share completely in. Where the Old Testament believers needed to go to certain spirit-filled people in order to have God's guidance and be able to go His way, we have in our very selves. The Temple of God is no longer on top of a hill in Palestine - it's on the hearts of all believers.

That's why we're friends now. We are able to share. And we are able to share nothing less than the Gospel itself - the good news Jesus Christ came to proclaim and to fulfil in Himself.

Yet it may seem that these verses aren't exactly helping us learn to be friends. That's true. These words tell us, though, that we are true friends because we are friends with The Greatest Friend.

There are no options here. If we truly believe, we have to truly love. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died in a concentration camp because he was Jesus' friend, "He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon no longer be listening to God, either."

Where the Bible deals with this most

We have seen the basis for being friends. This is not an option. This is what we are. So - let's be this. Let's turn to the scripture which deals most with what being a friend is. Could anyone hazard a guess to where that might be? Where would we most likely find the wisdom on this? (That's a clue by the way!)

Yes, it's one of those books of wisdom, the Book of Proverbs. And as we find in the nature of Proverbs, it's a teaching that is found in those little proverbs dispersed throughout this book.

Many of us would be familiar with many similar proverbs that crop up during Proverbs. It doesn't have the kind of structure that we in the western world have, but consists of different collections of sayings, mostly from Solomon, but also from others too.

As we look up "friends" in Proverbs, through the word *rea*, we come across on 32 occasions. Looking through these we find that most bring out a particular attribute which helps those we have some acquaintance with - whether close friends or right across the range to your neighbour next door.

When we look at those a little closer we can divide those attributes describing a good friend in to four areas.

These four areas describe a good friend as being faithful, truthful, fruitful, and tactful. Let's look at each of these and match up our own life experiences against them.

A good friend is faithful

In Proverbs 14 verse 20 we read, *The poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.*

But let's not stop there. Proverbs 19 verse 4 says *Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man's friend deserts him.*

Then a couple of verse down there are the verses 6 and 7: *Many curry favour with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of the man who gives gifts.*

A poor man is shunned by all his relatives - how much more do his friends avoid him!

Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.

These four verses are not exactly extolling the faithfulness of a friend - are they? We would say that these friends are fair-weather friends. They're not really friends at all. And that's precisely it! Proverbs shows us what a good



friend is like by pointing out the bad friends.

There are many of those around. Like the prodigal son, whose friends left him when his money ran out in that far away country, so there are these sort of people today - even in the church!

Do you know someone like that? Perhaps you've been like that. It's all hunky-dory when things are going well, but as soon as there's a crisis in that family you stay well away.

I have seen a number of friendships change forever when a difficult situation hits a family. Those who were their friends couldn't handle it. Things were a little too uncomfortable for them.

And who among us likes it when a husband and wife separate, or a child suddenly dies, or a serious life-threatening or life-changing illness strikes?

This type of friendship is better described as a 'me-ship'. It's all fine until it doesn't suit me anymore.

So let's see what faithful really means. We turn now to Proverbs 18 verse 24: *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

Here we see the fair-weather friends and

the faithful friend. I think we know which one we would rather have - don't we? Mind you, we're not always wise enough to know. I have known a colleague in the ministry who failed to recognise this essential difference and it later resulted in much trouble for his ministry. For that "friend" was friendly only to serve his own interests. If he had listened to the other leaders in the church it would have saved much heartbreak. King Zedekiah was warned of this too, as we can read in Jeremiah 38, but it was also in vain.

Let's learn some more, then, about the faithful friend. That will at least help us to distinguish more clearly the difference, and so know a good friend - and even better, to be a good friend.

We go to chapter 17 verse 17: *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

This reminds me of the saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" It's true - isn't it? When times are hard, then you know who your friends are. So are you there for your sister in the Lord when she's pulled out of the Ladies Fellowship altogether?

But let's make it a bit harder - you see, you had quite a difference once. It got a bit personal. And it's kind've a relief she's not coming anymore. You certainly wouldn't call her a friend. But, then, were you a friend?

Proverbs is not saying either that we can't be unfairly imposed upon. The next verse, verse 18, is clear enough about avoiding being abused. Still - has it hurt our pride a little to try?

In connection with this, there is what we read in chapter 27, verse 10: *Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you - better a neighbour nearby than a brother far away.*

This is talking not about what we receive from a friendship but especially what we give. This is faithfulness. Referring to that old friend of the family is about loyalty. He or she may be droll company compared with some of the newer or younger folk in your congregation, and they were your parent's friends after all, but they're still there! And they keep on being there!

A good friend is truthful

Secondly, there is the attribute of being truthful. Again, let's see this negatively first of all.

We turn to chapter 29, verse 5: *Whoever flatters his neighbour is spreading a net for his feet.*

Flattering isn't just saying some nice words to someone about them. It is entangling that person by the craving it induces and by the ill-judged actions it invites. You see, we would like to believe it is true, and we are such a person. By a continued association with that person we allow ourselves to get caught. Like my colleague was drawn into a situation where he ended up feeling obligated to share

completely confidential information altogether. And it had started because of the nice words that other person had said about his preaching.

What is happening in 29:5 is the telling of a lie. A good friend however is careful to be truthful.

This we see in chapter 27, verse 6: *The kisses of an enemy may be profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend.*

Even though a friend may hurt us by the truth, we accept it from him because he is good friend. He's not trying to trick us - in fact, by being brutally honest with us, he's putting his friendship on the line!

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, in 1 Kings 1, the example stands out of how David had not been honest with his son Adonijah, that he wasn't meant to reign after him. Even when Adonijah was obviously preparing himself to be king, by gathering together a suitable number of chariots to herald his coming, David still failed to be truthful.

While we should be a lot more suspicious when someone who hasn't been so close to us suddenly becomes quite chummy, we usually end up trusting him or her more at first than we do our old friend. This is the entanglement process all over again. Wasn't it Judas who in betraying Jesus kissed Him?

So if you have been very honest to a friend, you also need to understand that she probably won't realise it for a while. As it says in chapter 28, verse 23: *He who rebukes a man will in the end gain his favour than he who has a flattering tongue.*

A good friend is interactional

We consider now the third general area of being a good friend. This is that a good friend is interactional. Something I'm sure we would all see as quite obvious. Friendship is something that we do with someone else. As humans we thrive on social company. Without it we literally shrivel up and die.

This aspect of being interactional though is different. You see, it's not what we immediately think of when we think of being a friend - you know, like remembering someone's birthday or another special occasion. Yet it couldn't be more important to being a friend.

Let me explain. There are two sayings in chapter 27 which give us two ways to being interactional. Two ways which show two sides of the same coin.

First there is verse 9: *Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.*

Here there's a cheering effect to the fellowship we have as friends. You give a reassurance: "That's great"; "You're on the right track"; "You know, I'd do the same"; "Don't be down - put it in the big picture"; "Look at what you've done so far!"; "Where would we be without you."

This is specific too. We identify what we're supporting. We even make a point of helping

them or being there if that's appropriate. Corrie Ten Boom described this encouragement with these words, "If God sends us on stony paths, he provides strong shoes."

And how about this example from 1st Samuel 23: *While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this." (v15-17)*

Now wasn't that a word in time? It's a part of what being a good friend is about. So - do we look for when it's the right time? When someone we know well enough, because we know the difficulty they're going through clear enough, do we go out of our way to encourage



them?

This is being interactional. And if you're afraid that they might not like you seeming to "interfere" then may I suggest you need to hear about the second side to being interactional.

We find this in verse 17 of chapter 27: *As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

This is certainly interactional, though not now on the warmly supportive, encouraging, side of this. This is stimulating contact. Here is when a friend will take your friendship as an agreement that you need to be worked on.

I have a friend in Perth who specialises in this. He saw it as his particular task to work on this 'jonge broekje'. We often had our sessions where he would openly argue a point with me. I miss him. Sometimes I would like to pick up the phone and ruffle his ears over there. But I know he would then challenge me to find that kind of company here, and I have. Though it's not quite the same as him.

Do you know someone like that? Are you someone like that? In our wimpy modern age, where society is so very politically correct and everyone is said to have the absolute right to do their own thing, the church is missing this

element to friendship. Perhaps in the past it may have come with a Dutch gruffness. Maybe the words could have been better phrased. But surely we know our friends - don't we?

The aspect of being interactional in a good friend is both reassuring and bracing. It also very appropriately did away with a nice alliteration that I was trying to have in this talk!

A good friend is tactful

We come to the last of our four aspects to what makes up a good friend. A good friend is also tactful.

Being tactful means respecting someone else's feelings. Being tactful means refusing to manipulate someone else's feelings. Proverbs gives us some clear examples of tactlessness. Like in chapter 25, verse 17: *Seldom set you foot in your neighbour's house - too much of you, and he will hate you.*

This is something I have learned in ministry - at least I hope I've learned it! It is better to leave someone in hospital or at their home while they'd still like you to stay longer, than for them to wonder when you're ever going to go. My ideal time for a hospital visit in ten to fifteen minutes. What more would be helpful in that kind of place. Mind you, that has to go along with popping in regularly if they stay in hospital becomes a long one.

I also recognise this when I preach or give a talk like this. There is a sense of being here on your invitation and I shouldn't overstay! One comment I appreciate is when folk say to me after a church service, "You know Mr Bajema, for me you could have kept on preaching for a lot longer."

So if friends say that to you, "You know I could've had you stay longer," I think you're being tactful.

Let's turn to another side to being tactful. Chapter 27, verse 14: *If a man loudly blesses his neighbour early in the morning, it will be taken as curse.*

Have you met that person? Perhaps it was on a church camp, just as you were struggling to meet the world on a cold winter's morning. And there you meet him or her - the Regimental Sergeant Major - beaming from ear to ear and demanding to know why you're not doing the same. "The suns shining, the breeze is fresh, you're healthy - why are you looking like that?" they virtually bark at you. Not very tactful.

But, then, how about chapter 25, verse 20: *Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.* This is so tactless it is even cruel. But that's what we can be like to each other. If we can be concerned as to how cruel children can be to each other, where do you think they learned it from?

To pour vinegar on soda is deliberate provocation. I know someone who likes vinegar on a lot of things, but even that little man wouldn't put it on his lemonade!

Out of this failure to be tactful there comes

such things as what we see in chapter 26, the verses 18 and 19: *Like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows is a man who deceives his neighbour and says, "I was only joking!"*

A good friend thinks about what they're doing. They put themselves in the shoes of the other person. In the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans, chapter 12 verse 15, they *Rejoice with those who rejoice and they mourn with those who mourn.*

And how do we know which way they feeling? We listen. Not the kind of listening which is a brief moment until we can start to dominate the conversation. This has to be the listening where we really get to hear what they're going through. We are aiming to have the kind of relationship in Ecclesiastes chapter 4, the verses 1 till 12. That's a Christian connection, because we actually cross ourselves off.

We really can't get away from identifying with those around other than as Jesus showed us

in His life among us. The wisdom in Proverbs was personified in His life and especially in His death. In the words of 1st Corinthians 1, He "has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." (v30)

(This was originally presented as an address to the Auckland Ladies Presbyterial, on the 8th of April 2000, in the Reformed Church of Mangere.)

World news

Sandbagged Churches preceded mass slaying

In September, less than a month before the elections, police in Karachi, the huge port city of Pakistan, arrested 23 members of Harakat ul-Mujahedeen Al-Almi, a militant group believed responsible for deadly attacks on Westerners.

During the arrests, police found maps of two churches and a Christian school in Karachi, along with weapons and explosives, Interior Ministry officials have said.

That discovery prompted authorities to remove signs from around some churches set up in private homes throughout Pakistan, and to fortify other Christian sites with sandbag bunkers.

This was the context in which the militants then pulled off the execution-style slaying of seven Christian workers at Idara-e-Amn-o-Insaf (Peace and Justice Institute), a Pakistani Christian charity in Karachi, on Sept. 25. + Afzal Nadeem, Associated Press; via Washington Post, 9-25-2002: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A63675-2002Sep25.html>.

Rev. Henry Coray (1904-2002)

Rev. Henry Coray died Oct 20, at the age of 98. Mr. Coray was (along with Carl McIntire, who died earlier this year at 95) one of the few persons still living who knew J. Gresham Machen personally, having studied under him. A missionary to China, Coray was instrumental in the development of several Orthodox Presbyterian congregations. He is survived by his wife, Betty, who is 96.

In 1940, Coray left the mission field in Manchuria to settle in Long Beach, California. Local people ready to leave the theologically drifting PC(USA) to form a new church in the OPC secured Coray to become their organizing pastor.

First OPC (now Faith OPC) originally met in a storefront on the outskirts of Long Beach. Before long, the mission moved to another storefront in North Long Beach, a more unchurched area. But growth was slow during

those early years. "People find it easier to go to a church that's already established," Mr. Coray says, referring to the storefront.

By 1951, First Church was growing rapidly, and had to make plans to enlarge its existing building. That year, Mr. Coray heard of another church-planting opportunity in nearby Whittier, where several interested families resided.

Assisted by James Moore, who later participated in founding the Presbyterian Church in America, Coray began holding a midweek Bible study in Whittier, while still pastoring at Long Beach. Over the years these congregations went on to spread into a large cluster of strong confessional Presbyterian churches.

+ Rev. Donald J. Duff, Stated Clerk, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Box P, Willow Grove, PA, 19090-0920 (215) 830-0900

Beards, cassocks, and head-dress to remain compulsory

No crew cuts and jeans for these priests while on duty. Leaders of the (Orthodox) Church of Greece have rejected a request by priests to be allowed to dispense with traditional beards, cassocks and head-dress. The church's Holy Synod decided to preserve the traditional dress after considering arguments made by some clergy that these were uncomfortable and lacked "relevance" in current times.

+ Ecumenical News International, PO Box 2100, CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Stunning new evidence that Jesus lived

The discovery of an inscription which seems to mention James, the brother of Jesus Christ, was announced at a news conference in Washington, D.C. on October 21.

The inscription is in Aramaic, one of the languages of the New Testament period, and says "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." It's carved on the side of an ossuary, a box carved out of soft limestone, typically used as a bone container in the tombs of first century A.D. Jews.

"This discovery fits in well with the increasing understanding of scholars that the

Christian faith is deeply rooted in the Judaism in which Jesus and his early followers were participants," says Professor Keith Schoville, professor emeritus at the UW-Madison Department of Hebrew and Semitic Studies.

The ossuary had been in the private collection of an Israeli citizen for about 15 years. When the owner was asked why he didn't recognise it, he said, "I never thought that the Son of God could have a brother."

The owner got it from an Arab antiquities dealer, and paid a few hundred dollars for it. The antiquities dealer told him it was found in the section of Jerusalem called Silwan, just

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south of the Mount of Olives. It's an area that's pockmarked with burial caves.

Experts consulted by Biblical Archaeology Review seemed satisfied that it is a 2,000 year old artefact. Ben Witherington, professor of New Testament, is intrigued as much by the beautiful cursive Aramaic of the inscription as by what it says. Handwriting analysis also helps date the ossuary to right around A.D.

62, the traditional date of James' death.

"It certainly supports the view that Aramaic was still very much a living language amongst early Jews, including some of the followers of Jesus," he adds.

He also sees implications for some Catholic doctrines in this discovery, especially traditions about the perpetual virginity of Mary. "The dominant Roman Catholic tradition is that

the brothers of Jesus are actually cousins because Mary didn't have any more children, or they were step-brothers in that they were Joseph's sons by a previous marriage," he said. "This inscription could call into question that doctrine."

Watching West Papua

The recent fatal attack near the Freeport mine in Papua (Irian Jaya) could be far more significant than it initially appears. There are several groups with a vested interest in suppressing or even annihilating the overwhelmingly Christian indigenous Papuan community. The Indonesian government wants control of resources; the Indonesian military wants control of power, and the Islamists (both inside out outside the security forces) want to consolidate Papua as part of the Islamic world.

On 3 November 2001 Osama bin Laden made a public broadcast on Al-Jazeera satellite television. In his statement he condemned the granting of independence to East Timor, which he had considered to be "part of the Islamic world." While the Laskar Jihad has been building its troops in Papua since 2000, there has been a huge influx of mujahideen since April 2002. As in East Timor, Maluku and Central Sulawesi, they operate in collusion with elements of the Indonesian security forces.

Here follows a report by the Rev. John Barr, Executive Secretary for Unity and International Mission, Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly. His report sheds frightening light on the Freeport incident.

"On Saturday 31 August, at 1:40pm, a group of unidentified gunmen ambushed a convoy of cars travelling between the Papuan regional centre of Timika and Tembagapura, near the Freeport copper and gold mine. Those

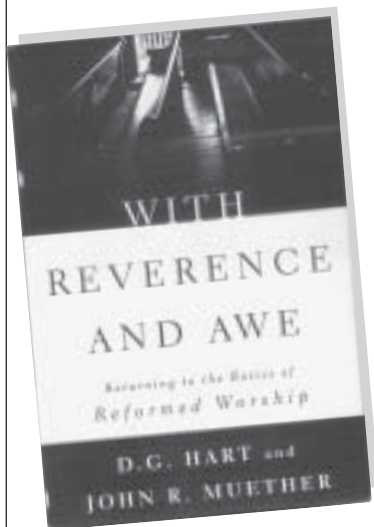
Books in focus

"With Reverence and Awe"

by D.G. Hart and John R. Muether
(Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002)

One of our young adults passed on to me a book she thought I might be interested in reading. She had not read it herself but no doubt thought its subject matter would be interesting to me. As indeed it is. Because it is a book about public worship in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. A book which strongly advocated a 'high view' of the church in this matter.

At first sight, this might sound like something to do with the more Catholic-wing of the Anglican Church. They are 'high church', while the evangelicals are 'low church'. But reading further, this is about something quite different. Because this is about how we see the Church in the Lord's scheme of things. As they write on page 44, "The church is no human invention. God ordained it for the task of the Great Commission that Christ gave to the apostles. For this reason, we can be sure from Scripture that, despite their million-dollar annual budgets, parachurch organisations...cannot fulfil their missions. This is because they have usurped tasks that Christ has given to his church. We dare not replace the church with a vehicle of our design, no matter how much more efficient it may seem to operate. Christ offers his heavenly authority and protection only to his church, and only her ministers. Calvin wrote, "might confidently expect to be victorious over the whole world."



For me, this book was a timely confirmation of the reformed-biblical distinctives in public worship. We are not to be caught up in the ceremonies of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches, nor are we to become lured away by the seemingly democratic 'priesthood of all believers'. It is a concept Reformed-Presbyterian churches have had to struggle to maintain over the centuries. For myself, personally, it was a strong emphasis in the concern of the Rev. P.G. van Dam, my mentor during my vicariate. And it is certainly strongly pronounced in such classic works as R.B. Kuiper's "The Glorious Body of Christ." They, and many others, have been most concerned to make Christ's Church be Christ's Church, and keep it as Christ's Church.

Hart and Muether bring this same biblical perspective into our modern maelstrom. And they do it in a clear and helpful manner. Leaving the more controversial 'Songs in Worship' subject deliberately till last, they outline all the different aspects involved in the public worship of God's people, basing it throughout on the principle that it must be derived by good inference from Scripture, and that it is a dialogical communication on a vertical relationship between God and His people.

This is a book which should be in every church library, and on the shelves of many of our members.

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Hunua, Auckland

Watch out for details & enrolments coming soon!

killed were Americans Ted Burcon and Rickey Spear (both travelling with their wives), and Bambang Riwanto, an Indonesian. Nine foreign nationals, seven of them Americans, and three Indonesians were injured. Ted Burcon was the Principal of the Tembaga Pura International School and the others in the convoy were teachers. "We are pretty devastated, especially the children at the school," one teacher said to the Associated Press. "Basically all the staff are wiped out. We are all wiped out."

The Indonesian military has been very quick to blame Papuan separatists. It is known

however, that the separatists have never, in thirty-nine years of resistance, killed one foreigner. They are also now strongly committed to non-violence and have over the past year resisted extreme provocation, such as the murder of their leader Theys Eluay in November 2001. On 1 December 2001, the fortieth anniversary of the end of Dutch colonial rule, the Papuans celebrated their Independence Day not with flags and defiance but with prayer ceremonies.

The separatists are primitive, poorly organised and generally armed with spears or bows and arrows. This attack, however, was

highly organised, perpetrated inside secure boundaries (no security posts were attacked or violated) and the gunmen used M-16 A1 automatic and SP-1 semiautomatic rifles, which are standard issue for Indonesian soldiers and police personnel.

The police and military have launched a major operation to hunt down the attackers. One Papuan has already been killed. There are reports that the security forces have been detaining and interrogating Papuans, although the military denies this.

A sad decision

Senior living options

One of the most difficult decisions for a spouse or a family, is the one to be made when a husband or wife, or a widowed parent, needs continual nursing or full supervisory care. The parent has become quite incapable of caring for him/herself, through physical or mental illness. There may come a time when an elderly wife, owing to the limitations of her own old age, can no longer look after her husband; or a child, owing to his/her own situation or is not able to undertake the intensive care needed by the elderly father or mother. A change must be made. Sometimes the problem may be resolved by the use of home care and district nurses, but there are cases when even this help is not sufficient. The full-time care of a nursing home is the most satisfactory answer.

In cases of physical disability the patient may make this decision himself. It is now that a gracious acceptance of his position will be such a comfort to the family. The patient sees that caring for him is becoming harder and harder, and decides that it is time a nursing home was found for him. More often, it seems to be a decision that must be made by others, usually the members of the family. This is frequently with great reluctance and qualms of conscience. You hear it said, "I felt so guilty, putting him in a home."

The first thing to say is, no one in this situation should have a guilt complex. If this is an action dictated by an almost impossible situation, after weeks and months or perhaps years of faithful service to your loved one, then it should be committed to the Lord, and the remaining partner or the family should rest satisfied that the best solution has been found. Nor should others criticise. Unless we have experienced it ourselves, we have really no idea of the kind of burden that can be on another's shoulders. Who are we to say what another, at a very difficult stage of life, should do or should not do?

It should also be realised that such a change is not always to the detriment of the patient, either. One person had the experience of hesitating to put her father into a full-time care home, for she thought he would then just give up altogether, and deteriorate rapidly. Eventually accepting the inevitable, she found a well-run, suitable home, and reluctantly the family put him into residential care. To their surprise, shed of the responsibility and burden of caring for himself, the father settled in very happily, and vastly improved in his outlook, health and general well being. It was not the end, but a new beginning for the last years of his life.

Having made such a decision, the next question is, which home should we seek out for the placement of our loved one? There have been some horrific stories of homes where patients are neglected, food is inadequate, hygiene non-existent, abuse rampant. Fortunately, these are not common. The home chosen should be, if possible, one with a Christian foundation (such do exist). Otherwise, certainly look for one of good reputation, and one where visitors are welcome at any time of the day, so that the family can be assured by their own observation, of the standard of care given. It should be reasonably close to home for this to be possible.



Again, the question of finance may arise. Nobody in our churches is destitute, but it is obvious that some of us will have more financial difficulties than others. This is not to be thought of as a matter for shame. Look how our Lord not only commended the poor widow for her gift, but even drew attention to her plight. He noticed, and certainly would not have allowed her needs to go unaddressed. I hope we are not ashamed to look squarely at this topic. Nursing care is not cheap, and many 'old people's homes', as they were once commonly called, have a weekly charge which is more than the New Zealand superannuation. Some folk will have sufficient income from investments and properties to cover the extra cost involved. The government will also subsidise payments, but only after the patient's assets have been reduced to a fairly low level. A government can seemingly reach out to grasp the assets and savings of years.

Some families may perhaps find they are able to let the house of the patient (if single or widowed) as a supplementary income, although this could have income tax ramifications. (A lawyer in our midst may prepare and publish advice on the present law and its effect on all this.) Other families, especially if there are several children to share the cost, could be in a position to contribute financially when necessary, but not all can, especially those with

growing children, tertiary students and mortgages. Perhaps the deacons may be able to make discreet inquiries, to see if church aid is needed. Some Christians have even been known to express the opinion that the church should undertake full responsibility for all such needs, as did the Israelites of old. This is a high ideal, but the modern way of life and society, government taxation and the system of social welfare, make it difficult to see how this could be accomplished, nor the necessity of churches bearing such a burden. It is hoped that no offence will be taken with these remarks, nor from the other occasions in this series when finance has been discussed!

The question of visiting now arises. It goes without saying, that the patient confined to a rest home should not be ever after neglected by family and friends. This has been known to happen: some poor old folk never seem to have visitors. Put in a home and then forgotten! Our Christian faith precludes such happening. But the question arises, how often should we go to see them, especially those who seem unaware of life?

Some spouses have felt it their pleasure and their duty to go every day to take their loved ones for outings, for a walk round the grounds, or just to sit in their presence. This is an admirable commitment, but takes its toll, especially in cases where there can be little or

no communication, and where there is the heartbreak of a patient who does not recognise even the closest relatives, or who displays a change of personality. Yet we should not be critical of those who do not feel they should, or can, make this commitment, but who find it better to limit their visits to fewer occasions. What is sad, is a gradual decline of those who were formerly great friends, in taking their place at the side of the patient. At the onset of the illness many come to see her, but as time becomes months and years, fewer and fewer bother, until even a brother's or sister's family may rarely come. This too has been known to happen. Surely we can continue to visit with reasonable frequency, or even organise a church roster system. We can relieve the burden on the family,

arranging to go on a day when the latter could do with a break, or needs a day off for attending to other matters.

Are these visits just a waste of time? Who are we to judge that? Even people coming out of a coma have been recorded as saying they were fully aware of what was going on. Don't let us be put off by not knowing what to say, either. If that is the case, do not say anything: your quiet presence for half an hour or so may be just what is needed. While we are about it, why not go prepared with a short Bible reading, or a devotional to share with the patient, or a card with a short hand-written (legible!) message? What does it matter if there is no apparent response? The Lord brings blessings of which we, ourselves, may be quite unaware. Who are we to say that it does not mean anything to our listener?

Let us also not neglect the spouses. Be sympathetic to their needs too, practical and emotional. Sometimes they may need a shoulder to cry on.

One wife, who found it necessary to put her husband into a nursing home, expressed some of her difficulties. The onset and gradual progress of Alzheimer's disease caused the trouble. Her husband was a big man, physically strong. She cared for him until she was no longer able to cope.

"In some ways," she said, "it is worse than if he had died. That would be final." (As Christians, we know that our believing loved one is with the Lord.) "As it is, we are still together in life, yet we are apart. I go almost every day to be with him, but there is no communication. That makes it so difficult."

Another man whose wife had had a brain haemorrhage said that the worst thing for him was that his wife, who had been an extremely intelligent woman, although aware of all that was going on, and able to recognise everyone, could no longer converse with him. She did seem to enjoy it, though, when he read to her.


See that these wives and husbands of patients are not neglected. Give outward expression to your, 'I believe in the communion of saints.' This communion is not just a knowledge of the church, visible and invisible, but is also the love and compassion shown to other saints, including a sufferer and the sufferer's spouse and family. Let us profess our belief with our mouths, and live it out in our actions.

If you are one who has had to make this sad decision, do not feel guilty. 'Commit your ways to Jesus, your burdens and your cares. He from them all releases, He all your sorrow shares.'

'May Your unfailing love be my comfort, according to Your promise to Your servant.' Psalm 119:76

Calling all country boys and girls to become

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If you have always wanted to be a Cadet or Calvinette but live too far away from a club, we would love to hear from you!

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"Let's have a chat"

The dilemma of internet communication

Michael Flinn

"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters."

You have to admit, that was pretty good advice—especially for Timothy as a young pastor. Paul knew that if you wanted to reach people, the matter of approach was important. "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone," he says in another place (Col. 4:6). Some people like salt on their meals. Some like more. Some like less. Some like none at all. But this is precisely Paul's point. Our conversation should always be gracious. We have to realize that the other person is important. We need to know who that person is and how he or she is responding to what we are saying. If necessary, we must change our approach. In still another place, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1Cor. 9: 23). As a missionary, Paul knew that you don't win many Jews by offering to explain who Jesus really is over a ham sandwich. Nope. Sorry. That approach just won't do. Likewise, you don't win many older people to your point of view by being arrogant and know-it-all-ish as a young person. Ridiculing older folk doesn't go down very well. Much wiser to appeal to an older person carefully and with grace and respect, as you should treat a father. All in all, if you want to communicate effectively, you have to know who the other person is, where he is coming from, and you have to figure out which kind of approach is most likely to bring about the response you are seeking.

Enter the internet chat room, or bulletin board. Of course, the apostle Paul never knew of such a mechanism for "keeping in touch" and disseminating information. I suspect that he would have been happy to remain blissfully ignorant of the wonders of 21st century technology. Not that Paul was a technophobe. I doubt it anyway. He sure made use of those Roman roads in the service of the gospel, and they were fairly "modern" in his day. But Paul knew too much about effective communication to be excited about the internet as a medium, even if the World Wide Web had been around in his day. At least, that's my theory. But before you accuse me of falling off my rocker—or my moderately high-tech office chair—let me explain what I mean.

Not face-to-face

The internet is a very artificial means of communication. It is quick, fast, brief—just the thing to add to the stress of the businessman by making him answer 40 emails before morning tea. In the "good old days" he would maybe get round to one or two letters, painfully written out in long-hand before lunchtime and then sent off for editing and typing by a very helpful secretary who would fix up all his gaffs. But carefully composed snail mail is out these days, and zippy emails are in. Of course there are advantages to email communication, but this article is about the disadvantages and traps of this means of communication, so I'm going to stick to those.

Here are some things to consider: First, because it is brief and terse, by its very nature, email communication is not conducive to

voice to listen to. There are just words—short—terse—often written in a hurry—and often with very little thought to how these words might be interpreted—or misinterpreted—by the other person. It is very easy to get the wrong idea and overreact, or not react at all, to the disappointment and frustration of the other. And then there needs to be a phone call or a meeting with a person to sort things out afterwards ("if only I had spoken to you earlier! I'm glad that is cleared up"). Sessions, please take note. Getting out the minutes of the meeting and the correspondence by email is great. Fantastic. But in Dovedale we have had to remind ourselves a couple of times that what we must not do is try to discuss or debate an issue via email. It simply doesn't work. There is no substitute for the old process of actually



solving conflict and reaching resolutions. In fact, I've observed quite a bit of conflict produced by email interaction. You see, in ordinary conversation, there is a great deal of information that we process about the other person's speech and how our own speech is being received. We do this naturally, often without thinking about it, and in so doing, we can often prevent misunderstandings from occurring before they get off the ground. This is one of the things that makes social interaction so difficult for autistic people. It is because they cannot "read" social situations and body language and intonation easily that conversation with others becomes so difficult (and frightening!) for folk with this disability. With email, there is no body language to read and there is not even an intonation or tone of

meeting with brothers face to face, listening carefully to the discussion, putting one's own point of view, and then reaching a resolution together. In the end, there are far fewer misunderstandings when the older process is used. The tortoise is not so slow, after all.

No accountability

So far, we are speaking of direct emails to people you already know. The situation is vastly complicated by bulletin boards and chat rooms in which you do not even know the other person on the other end of your correspondence. And just to muddy the waters still further, pseudonyms are often used in these forums. How can you possibly know how to "speak" to someone on the other end of a bulletin board if you are speaking to anonymity? We would

just have to say to Paul, "Sorry, you gave good advice to Timothy in 1Tim. 5:1,2 but mate, you are behind the times. On a bulletin board, you don't even know whether you are dealing with someone older or younger, male or female. On the internet, the playing field is level." Yes, and I suspect that is why many people, especially young people, are attracted to it. Anonymity. Say what you like. Say what you would not say in ordinary conversation. No accountability. Adopt a persona. Wind someone up. See how others react. It's fun! Well, not really. I've seen relationships harmed by internet conversation. I've seen people misunderstand each other, talk past each other, and display insensitivity to each other. I've seen even older, wiser people have to admit with egg on their faces that they said something in haste—that they hit the "send" button too soon. And I've seen younger, not so wise people, do the same thing but refuse to admit it, probably because of their pride.

Not a 'real' world

Still another potential byproduct of the email discussion group for Christians is an undermining of confidence in the views of the people around you—parents, elders, ministers, and in church structures. The "real" camaraderie and fellowship is experienced between like-minded, faceless folk on email in various parts of the country or even the world, rather than with actual brothers and sisters with whom we live and serve the Lord in our local congregations—people whom the Lord calls us

to love. Parents, have you ever felt that your son or daughter invests more time in email conversation with his "internet buddies" than with his actual brother or sister or with the people in your congregation? Then you know what I mean, and the result can be more tension in your home when you confront this. All too frequently, real relationships can be harmed or even ruined by this unreal form of communication. Something is wrong here.

While we are on the artificial nature of the medium, there is a more sinister note that must be sounded. I saw a TV documentary recently where a psychologist was explaining the dangers of internet chat rooms for young teenage girls being preyed on by older middle-aged men. She pointed out that because the medium is fun, exciting—and unreal, young people are inclined to share inner thoughts and secrets. They type and send off statements that they would never say in ordinary conversation (for which they are accountable) and they thus develop a level of "intimacy" with an individual that they do not know from a bar of soap, as the saying goes. It's thought to be "safe" and "secure" because they may not even be using real names. But before you know it, there is a "relationship" developing, a "romance" with a person that the young girl knows nothing about. It happens time and time again. The psychologist pulled no punches. Her message was: Beware of the internet chat room. Enter at risk. The fact is, you don't know who you are dealing with and the reality can be very

far from the perception.

Words but not the Word

There is something else that this medium lends itself to—opinions. In fact, some of the most opinionated writing I've ever come across has been on internet bulletin boards. In a way, you can understand why. There is only time for expressing an opinion about a subject. You can't develop an idea at any length or reason through an issue carefully using the principles Paul speaks of in 1Tim. 5:1,2 and in 1Cor. 9. No, all you have time for, sometimes late at night, is reading the last few contributions with which you might agree or disagree, and zapping off a quick reply. If it's caustic and witty, so much the better, you might pick up more of a following that way. In the past few years, I've been on two or three bulletin boards, and in the end, I've unsubscribed them all. Frankly, I don't have time to wade through all those opinions. I'd rather read a book that an author has laboured over and researched carefully and that some publisher has thought is worth investing some money in. Even then, there is a great deal of junk around. But there is much more lightweight opinion on the internet.

I believe that students are especially vulnerable here, not only because this tends to be the medium of choice among students, but because students are eager for knowledge and there is so much material out there on every conceivable subject, that the internet is viewed as a goldmine by many. And sure, you can get some information on that subject you are researching. It's there. You'll find it. But is it of substance? Is it authoritative? Is it worth reading and studying? Students run the risk of becoming surfers of the web, dabblers in the chat room, partakers of the bulletin board – and less knowledgeable in the process. You've heard the expression – a jack of all trades and master of none. That's what I mean. For real scholarship, you need depth rather than breadth. And for Christians, you need careful and detailed study of Scripture. Less time surfing the net and more time in Bible study and reading quality literature on biblical subjects will serve us well.

And don't forget actually taking the time to sit down with someone—a real conversation with family or friends. This is what will build up relationships and strengthen our faith in the Lord. It is also what will build up your local congregation. Put the time in and make the effort. It's worth it. Once again, in conclusion, I'm not opposed to email or bulletin boards. I've used both. But there are dangers that we should be aware of. That's why I wanted to "chat" with you about this subject in this article. I hope you find this particular "contribution" of some use. I'm just about to send it off to the editor of this magazine—by email, of course!

(The Rev. Michael Flinn is the minister of the Reformed Church of Dovedale, Christchurch)

TEACHER

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E-Mail: scs@actrix.gen.nz		
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New Zealand Conference of Reformation Theology

We have just completed a successful conference held at three venues in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. This conference was overseen by a small steering committee based largely in the Wellington Presbytery and which placed itself under the oversight of the Wellington, Masterton and Wainui Sessions to ensure some accountability, since we were using the "Reformed" name. Money was generously given by a small group of individuals and some sympathetic churches in the Wellington Presbytery. This ensured that we could afford to bring out Dr. Joseph Pipa, President of the Greenville Seminary in the US. Dr. Pipa has written several books and is an accomplished speaker and preacher. Other local speakers, including Dr. Michael Flinn, Dr. Paul Archbald, Rev. John Rogers and Dr. John Haverland all spoke on different aspects of the "alone" or "*Sola*" statements of the Reformation and were well received. Dr. Flinn also gave two addresses on the "New Perspective" on Paul, which has been espoused by neo-liberals in recent years. This view effectively dismisses the Reformation as a mistake, especially rejecting the great central truth of the Gospel, forensic Justification by Faith Alone and seeks to unite Protestant and Roman Catholic with a new Gospel unheard of until some modern academics invented it in the twentieth century. Dr. Pipa's addresses on the *Solas* were also well received and were a blessing to many. The universal conclusion, by those who attended, was that the conference was most worthwhile and there is encouragement to continue them either annually or bi-annually. The Committee will meet early in the New Year to discuss our next conference and so we ask for the prayers of our churches to give wisdom as we contemplate what theme to adopt next time. We know that the Dunedin folk would like the conference down in their neck of the woods as well, so have to consider those kinds of issues too. Attendances ranged from around seventy in Auckland and Christchurch to over two hundred in Wellington. In addition there were a number from outside the Reformed churches. Our aim has been to serve our own churches, but also the wider church by bringing to the nation's attention the great truths of Reformation (and therefore biblical) theology and thus promoting the cause of modern reformation.

If anyone wants more information about the conference they can log onto our website at www.reformedconference.org.nz or email gmlne@extra.co.nz. Videos and tapes can also be ordered by writing to NZCRT, P. O. Box 31334 Lower Hutt, or by contacting the above

email address. Thanks has to go to the many folk who volunteered their time and resources to make this conference a success at each venue.

Gary Milne (Convenor)



(From left) Rev Dr Michael Flinn, Dr Joseph Pipa, Rev Dr John Haverland, Mr Paul Davey



Dr. Joseph Pipa addresses the conference in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale, Christchurch

Our churches in focus

Church news

The news was heard from Wellington Presbytery that Vicar Nigel Cunningham, presently serving in the Hastings congregation, sustained (passed) his preliminary presbytery examination. He is now available for call.

Report of the Auckland Presbytery Meeting held 30th October, 2002

This was a special Presbytery meeting called to consider one item of business, viz, the request of the Rev. Dale Piers for release from the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the Pukekohe Reformed Church under Article 16b of the Church Order which reads, "Where an intolerable situation exists and no grounds for discipline are apparent, a peaceful severance may be endorsed by Presbytery with the concurrence of the Synodical Examiners. The Presbytery must ensure that adequate support is provided if needed and that there are no grounds for discipline."

The meeting was chaired by the Rev. Dirk van Garderen and, after considerable discussion, made the following two decisions:

- i) an intolerable situation did exist;
- ii) there were no grounds for discipline.

After further discussion in closed session, the meeting then concluded that to release brother Piers with his credentials as usual would not apply as those credentials envisage a situation of transfer from one ministerial calling to another (see Office-Bearers' Handbook, p.3-15). It was therefore decided to provide brother Piers with a letter notifying him, and the session of the Church to which he was returning, of his release under Art. 16b with the grounds appended. A pastoral letter

would accompany this. To all this the Synodical examiners, the Revs John Goris from Wellington and Michael Flinn from Christchurch, concurred.

In closing, Rev. Dirk van Garderen then expressed the grief of the meeting to both the Pukekohe Session and congregation and the Rev. Dale Piers and his wife, Tami, over the difficulties leading up to this situation and prayed for both parties. The Piers family will be returning to their former congregation, the United Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado (Lord willing).

Reporter: John Rogers

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Missions in focus

BACK TO AFRICA –

"The Muzee and Maama are back!"

Liana Havelaar

In December, 2001 I returned to New Zealand after spending a year in Mbale, Uganda, where I was working as an associate with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church mission. Several other OPC missionaries returned to the States at the same time, and it was uncertain whether the OPC work in Mbale (especially that of the theological college, training students for the ministry) would be continuing. But it *has* continued this year, and we can pray that it *will* continue for many years, and that God will continue to build His church in Uganda.

Many of you readers will have heard that Rev. Barry James and his wife Anne have returned to spend nine months in Mbale. I can well imagine that many of the Mbale Christians who got to know Barry and Anne when they were in Uganda previously have welcomed them

back with the cry at the top of this article: "The Muzee and Maama are back!" (*Muzee* is the respectful term used for an older man, and *Maama* is probably self-explanatory.)

Why have the Jameses gone to Uganda?

Barry writes, "Anne and I are back in Mbale for the third time, and for the same work as before—I am occupying the position of 'fill-in' lecturer at the Westminster Theological College, Mbale campus. The principal of the college is Dr. Tony Curto, who set up the Mbale campus in 1996. This year, Tony has been the *sole* lecturer at the college, so he and his wife Kathleen were much relieved that we were able to 'come over and help'! This was conditional, of course, on Silverstream again calling and supporting us, with the backing of the OMB. We have again been made very welcome here,

by both expatriate and indigenous Christians."

Running a theological college sounds like a pretty big undertaking. What's the College like?

This college is not quite like the tertiary institutions we are accustomed to in New Zealand. All the classes are held in one or two very basic and simple rooms, on the same property as the church and Christian primary school. At the moment there are about 12 students in the combined 1st/2nd year class, and about 8 in the 3rd year class. Barry and Tony are lecturing in several courses each. There are many challenges facing both lecturers and students, including the huge variation in spiritual maturity, amount of prior education, and academic ability among the student body. Students have their own Bibles and paper; but no textbooks. Some of them make use of the College library: a bookcase of theological books at the back of the classroom.

Professor James says, "The lectures are two hours long—taking some energy to deliver, and certainly some to receive! When a student approaches one of the lecturers, it is invariably with the opening gambit of 'Professor, I have a problem...!' This problem may be related to the student's house and family (he may well need financial assistance for a sick family member); he may need money for transport to get to classes (many students come from villages several kilometres away); he may be sick with malaria himself and still struggling to come to lectures. Or, his 'problem' might be what a professor would initially expect: he might have a question about the material being taught in the lecture.

Where do the Jameses go to church on Sunday?

Most of the village pastors now serving in the Presbyterian Church of Uganda are students or graduates from the theological college. A visit by *bzungu* (white people) to a village church is always welcomed. Barry and Anne continue to visit and worship in some of the village churches, as they have on previous times in Uganda. They report on one change in the actual church buildings since the last time they were there:

"Most of the church buildings are extremely 'jerry-built', brick-and-cement rectangular affairs, with galvanized roofs and pressed-dirt floors: Since we were last here, lock-up doors and windows (iron-barred, often without glass) have been added, so that the furniture (rough wooden forms and a table for the preaching desk) does not have to be brought in for each service. Uganda is very much a thieving society, with anything not securely under lock-and-key liable to be 'lifted'! Everywhere you go there are a profusion of locks, even on the most flimsy doors—attached to the most ramshackle structures!"

What's a Ugandan Christmas like?

Readers, don't expect to hear about any traditional Ugandan Christmas celebrations, songs, or foods! "Christmas as a time of elaborate spending is unknown in the villages, where people are engaged in a daily struggle to get enough to eat," writes Barry. "In Mbale



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- 1. A *Mzungu* checking out the fresh produce at the local market.
- 2. Westminister Theological College graduation, 2001. Some of these men were students whom Barry James taught in 2000.
- 3. Ronald – a graduate in 2001, but still studying hard now! He is the caretaker of Mbale church and primary school.
- 4. Music-making after a church service.

and other main centres there is some attention on the part of traders to capitalize on the 'season'. At the top of the main street in Mbale there is a big tree, and a *couple of days* before December 25th it is draped with a few streamers, dotted with a few balloons, and even adorned with a few lights—thus becoming **THE** attraction for the locals! In some of the village churches there are 'Christmas' services, but we don't know how widespread this is—the day itself just isn't a big thing."

Perhaps this is a 'plus' for the church and the missionaries working in Uganda. Maybe the absence of the western-style, secular Christmas celebrations will make it easier to focus on the first Christmas Day, when the Saviour of the world (including the people of Uganda!) came to earth. May the truth about Him be spread in Uganda, in New Zealand, and to the ends of the earth!

MIF Prayer Notes:

The **National Diaconate Committee** values your prayers for the ongoing work of C.A.R.E. India—a Christian ministry to those suffering from HIV/AIDS. Rev Bert Kuipers from the Australian churches travelled there in September last year, and took video footage of his trip. The NDC has edited this down to a 15-minute presentation that is available in MPEG format on a CD-ROM. One copy of this presentation has been sent to each session throughout New Zealand. If you would like to see it, and have a computer to play the CD on, please ask your deacons. The NDC's Christmas *Special Collection* is to be sent to C.A.R.E. to assist with this valuable work.

The **Overseas Mission Board** asks for prayer in these areas:

1. For Hans and Lisa Vaatstra, as Hans prepares to visit PNG to assess the feasibility of mission work in the capital city Port Moresby.
2. Pray for safety for Hans, and also Lisa and Eden as they join him later.
3. Pray that Hans may be able to learn sufficient Tok Pisin (the common language) to be able to communicate effectively.
4. For the Reformed Church in Port Moresby, that they would be zealous for spreading the Gospel of Christ and the doctrines of grace.
5. For the bookstore project, that the Lord may bless it and that it may become a powerful ministry among the people of Port Moresby.
6. For Barry and Anne James in Mbale, and their respective ministries—Barry in teaching and preaching, and Anne in diaconal assistance amongst the churches.

Rev Stephen and Dorinda 't Hart need our prayers, especially for safety as they continue their ministry in Papua New Guinea, strengthening the churches there. Pray for the safety of local believers, especially as pressure from Muslim groups increases.

Janice Reid is busy reviewing the *Hands On Training* resources that FEBC provides for program managers as they train their staff. Pray for effective updating of the materials, and for good communication between Janice and local Country Coordinators who do the training in various parts of Asia. Pray for preparations for January's Congress—FEBC staff from different countries will gather in the Philippines to share fellowship and resources. This gathering is the first of its kind, and is much needed, as staff get to know one another and build a strong sense of their unity in the mission of bringing *Christ to the world by Radio*.

Country profile: *Italy*



Italy has a population of around 60 million, which includes more than 4 million expatriates, and up to half a million illegal immigrants. Deep cultural differences divide the north and south of the country.

Italy was united as a single state in 1870, with republican democracy since 1946. There has been a succession of 60 governments since World War II, most of them weak and unstable, but the underlying social stability holds the country together. Italy is a member of the European Union. It is the world's 7th largest economy.

Roman Catholicism ceased to be the state religion in 1984. All religions have equal freedom before the law but not in practice. More than 80% of the population claims to be Catholic, but less than 1% are Protestant.

Pray for Italy:

1. Most Italians are Catholic in culture, but deeply cynical about the Church. Pray for the removal of barriers that conceal a true understanding of the gospel.
2. The Roman Catholic Church has lost over 10 million members to New Age thinking, cults, the occult and materialistic secularism. Church attendance is decreasing, as are the number of priests. Yet Catholic traditions and mindset continue to permeate every aspect of national and personal life. Pray for Italians to turn from dead tradition to the living Lord Jesus.
3. Pray for co-operation between evangelical churches to reach Catholics with the Gospel.
4. Pray for mature Italian Christian leaders, of which there are far too few.
5. Pray for those involved in church planting. Only 1,500 of Italy's 33,500 communities have an established evangelical witness.
6. Pray for Italy's unreached minorities: ethnic groups in the northeast; Greek and Croatian minorities; Albanians; Muslims (a rapidly growing group, especially by illegal immigration); Africans (especially Eritreans fleeing war and famine).

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