

faith in focus

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of New Zealand

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*"All men are like grass,
and all their glory is like
the flowers of the field.
The grass withers and the
flowers fall,
because the breath of the
Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are
grass.
The grass withers and the
flowers fall,
but the word of our God
stands forever."*

Isaiah 40:6b-8

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Editorial

It is that time of the year when we are again reminded of what God gave in that greatest gift of all - the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. This was no less than the incarnation of the second Person of the Trinity - God Himself came down. What a gospel to proclaim! And, yet, what will many people hear in church this Christmas Day? Here is one account, "We went to the Christmas service in the local Co-Op church yesterday, 9.30am start, 10.10am finish, the 'message' was an abridged version of a children's story book, "Mr Toomey's Christmas". Followed by communion for all who wished to partake, a special invitation to children to join in! As we left the church the organist played "Snoopy's Christmas"!!"

This person couldn't help but comment, "How thankful we all should be for faithful preachers/churches."

Are we thankful? Do we pray that our churches would keep proclaiming the only way to be saved, in the new year of 2004 also?

In this connection, there is a serious threat to the Biblical character of public worship. I thank the Revs. John Westendorp, Michael Flinn and Robert Godfrey for bringing it out in this issue. Read those articles. And then ask yourself: If this different way of worship is what is allowed for in our churches where will it end? Will it be how the Lord directs us in His Word?

Mind you, there are some who are no longer interested in what the Bible says altogether. One could not help but note this in connection with the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand's decision to authorise a lesbian's application for ministry after rejecting her last year. A commission headed by Sir Duncan McMullin, heard the appeal by Deborah Gordon and Wellington Presbytery. According to a report in the New Zealand Herald this commission decided that "There are currently no specific regulations barring the ordination of homosexuals." It was found, on the basis of a 1994 decision, that there was "no expressed objection in principle to the licensing, ordination or induction of homosexuals as a class." Further, the Assembly Executive Secretary noted that the denomination makes no provision for appeal from a judicial commission.

How can any Bible believing Christian justify their membership in such a denomination? The decision made by our forefathers over fifty years ago, in establishing the Reformed Churches of New Zealand was well founded - that was based on the rock of Christ, not on man's shifting sands.

"On coming to the house, the Magi saw the child with the mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him."

Matthew 2:11

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.

A shepherd's tale

Hans Voschezang

Some time ago psychologist Dr. Jonathan Haidt published some intriguing information on what he calls "elevation," which is the opposite of disgust.

We all know that something disgusts us when we witness hypocrisy, cruelty, abuse or betrayal. We recoil and experience a feeling of disgust such as a tightening in our chest, a clenching of our jaws and the like.

However, witnessing acts of moral beauty also has an effect on us. It elevates us, moves us toward wanting to perform acts of morality ourselves.

Drawing out a desire

How does this affect us? Dr. Haidt has discovered that there is a physical response including a feeling of warmth, a tingle down the spine, tears in our eyes or a lump in our throat. Seeing acts of great moral beauty draws out a desire in us to do likewise, to be that kind of person ourselves. What's more, this kind of elevation is contagious. It rubs off on others. If a story of courage is told well, it can elevate an entire auditorium of people. Indeed, the Christian community has known that for a long time, which is why testimonies to God's grace have so long been a hallmark of believers. If someone can stand up and tell his or her story of "I once was lost but now I'm found," it moves us all.

The shepherds of Luke 2 may well be a good example of this kind of elevation. They had witnessed something of profound moral beauty and had heard a message of radiant hope. The event of that long-ago night quite literally elevated the status of these otherwise despised and dirty men of the fields. More than 2000 years later we still remember them with honour. But even at that time, the message of the angels and the things the shepherds saw in Bethlehem elevated their own hearts to a sphere of hope and joy. They wanted to be different people in the wake of what they saw and heard, and they were. They became the first witnesses, the first evangelists to start telling the gospel story.

The best news

Luke tells us that everyone was amazed at "what the shepherds said" (v18). Their sense of moral and spiritual elevation was contagious. It quickly began to spread. It startled many people. But have you ever wondered just what it was they said?

We are not told. On one level this is an easy blank to fill. They were telling everything we can read in Luke 2:8-20. They told a story of angels and a message of peace and

hope—a story of a baby in a manger, a baby they found right at the place where the angels said he would be. They used the words "Saviour" and "Christ". Luke didn't need to elaborate what the shepherds said— it's obvious! It's the same thing we have been saying and repeating every year since, when Christmas approaches.

The angel told the shepherds that a Saviour was born **to you**, which could also be a way of saying that Jesus Christ had been born **for them**. This particular occasion is personalised. There is a very specific purpose behind this birth, one that will end up affecting these shepherds and untold numbers of others in a very personal way.

This Saviour came to them and for them. They were involved in this person's birth in a way far more dramatic than simply hearing the announcement. It affected their whole personal being—they would never be the same again.

"Today a Saviour has been born to you," the shepherds are told "And this will be a sign to you". We all know what that sign was, "a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger". A "sign" is something that points you in the right direction of something else, just like an arrow showing the way to a wedding reception you are attending.

So, to what did the sign of the baby in the manger point? This sign was not meant to back up what the angels had said, but it was pointing to their actually finding the baby in an animals' feed trough. This fact would

let them know for sure that the angels had been no dream or hallucination.

They believed

And the reaction of the shepherds? They said, "Let us go to Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened which the angel of the Lord has told us about." They were not talking about **if** this was really true, but said right up front that they **believed** it had happened. The reason they had this confidence, even without yet having seen baby Jesus, is because they already believed they had been visited by "the angel of the Lord". So, they didn't need a sign to prove they hadn't been hallucinating.

What did this sign of a baby in the manger point to? They saw the Truth—the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, had been born for **them**.

Suppose the scenario on that famous long ago night had been different. Suppose that those shepherds had been drowsing on those same fabled hills keeping watch over their flocks by night as they did every night. They were roused from their sleep by a Roman centurion on his horse shouting out through cupped hands, "Hey, you over there! There has been born this day, in the city of Rome, a son to Caesar Augustus, who shall be heir apparent to the throne of the whole Roman empire."

Now, I have to ask you to set aside for a moment the fact that a group of shepherds in Judea wouldn't be able to trot over to Rome



very easily. But suppose these musty-smelling keepers of mutton had said, "Let us go over to Rome to see this thing the centurion has just told us." If they would show up at Caesar's grand palace in Rome, do you suppose they would have been let in? If they would have said, "We have come to take a look at the emperor's son," would the palace guard have said, "Sure, come on in, the nursery is to the left?" Of course not.

A sign they had to see

Yet someone vastly more important than any earthly ruler was born, and men such as the smelly shepherds had no difficulty gaining access to this One Whom the angels hailed as the Saviour of the world. He really had been born for **them**.

The sign the shepherds saw in that stable was this: the Saviour and Christ of God had been born right on their level. This "little Lord Jesus", as the children love to sing, had "no crib for a bed", but the shepherds could relate to that—they couldn't remember the last time they had slept in a real bed.

A sign is an arrow that points to something. The sign in the stable pointed to the truth that the birth of the Messiah was for the shepherds and everyone else like them in the world, past, present, and future. Luke tells us that people were amazed at "*what the shepherds said*". The story of the angels lighting up the night sky was part of what the shepherds said, and that amazed people. Probably the fact that the shepherds found in Bethlehem **exactly** what they had been told they would find was part of what they said, and this too properly amazed people.

But the single most amazing thing the shepherds said is also the one thing we tend to overlook in our focus on the glitter and brilliance of the angels, and that is that the Saviour who is Christ the Lord was born **to** and **for** those shepherds. If the shepherds said, as likely they did, "This Saviour came for us," that was a message so full of wonder, joy, and above all of hope that it bursts the boundaries of everything we know or ever thought we knew. And it is that portion of what the shepherds said that affects us most of all—this Saviour was also born **to** and **for** you.

Changed for the ultimate good

Dr. Haidt discovered that seeing acts of great moral beauty can change us, elevate us, make us aspire to be better persons ourselves. In the history of the world, what act has ever been more beautiful than the birth of God's only Son? The Son's condescending to our human, earthly level indeed, His willingness to come down to not just earth but to an impoverished corner of this earth at that, is a sacrifice of stunning power.

This central moment of Christmas is not

something we observe from afar. As it was for the shepherds, so it is for all of us. This Saviour involves us personally because He was born to **you**, to **me**, to **everyone**. Witnessing that Christmas yet again changes us fundamentally and forever.

If you can hear and believe that part of what the shepherds said, then no matter

what happens, you will be able to join those shepherds in glorifying and praising God for all that you have seen and heard. Glory to God in the highest.

That's the spirit—the Holy Spirit!

Based on an essay by Scott Hoezee

Between You and Me ...

A Christmas prior to World War II

Dick Vanderpyl

In my youth there was no such a thing as "Boxing Day," but instead we celebrated the arrival of Saint Nicolaas by a Steamer from Spain with his black servants on the 5th of December. Of course, he did not come all the way from that country. It was just a good tale for the little children. The good Sint, with his entourage (Black Pieters attending on a superior) would traditionally arrive on a real steamboat, placed on a horse, with the black pieters throwing pepernoten to the crowd. That was no problem as there were heaps of rivers and canals. The Saint would climb on his horse and his servants threw 'pepernoten' to the children.

Anyway, let's get on with my story of how we celebrated the event.

It's winter, most times ice-cold, snow or

frozen canals. It's already dark between 4-5 p.m. Almost every home, church-goer or not, gets a choice Christmas tree with all the paraphernalia with lights (candles!?) and mistletoe and ????? Off we go on Christmas day to worship, in remembrance of the birth of Christ.

When it was all over; in those days of my youth, the Christmas trees were placed on the footpath to be picked up by the Council, loading them on their trucks for disposal.

We tried to beat them and carry them quickly to a meadow just out of town. The larger and higher the pile the better. Then came the crunch! Who got the matches? We knew that it was forbidden, but boys will be boys. Once it was my turn to have the matches. It was an awesome fire, huge and hot. Watching in awe, I was totally in the grip of the event. Suddenly I got a tap on the shoulder. And there was our policeman; who was an elder in our church! I looked around and realised I was the only one there. The others had seen him coming on his bike, and quickly disappeared. Who got the matches and started the fire? I admitted I had the matches and lit the fire! I started running to the police station while he followed me on his bike. He put me in a cell, and then went to our home to tell my Mum where I was. That's okay, she said, keep him there for a while.

Our mother was quite laconic about it! It was quite common in those days—there was no stigma.

Once we came from the catechism-class hour on our way home. We walked down the road on our home in a group of about twelve, I think. Being in a group, we got quite mischievous, pushing doorbells and running away. One evening we made a real racket, and that same officer made us turn round and go off to the police station! We were all placed in cells. My younger brother managed to get away, and went home to tell our Mum. It happened that one of our BIG uncles, a brother of my mother, was having a cup of



coffee. He decided to rescue us. Both the officer and our big uncle sniggered, so we heard, and he let us go! We were so proud of him, and he was proud of himself as well!

Unfortunately he did not see a lamp-post on the way home, and his face smacked straight into the post. All of us saw the humour of it and howled with laughter. That made him

quite angry, and he hopped on his bike to ride home!

And such were our days of our youth!

Merry Christmas!

Patricia van Laar

I gazed out the fourth floor window at scudding clouds and thought, "Now, why did the Lord allow this to happen? What lessons does He want me to learn?"

I had come to Auckland the previous evening to spend Christmas with family, not in Middlemore Hospital with a broken ankle! In the morning I remembered that the shower was not 'walk-in', but I forgot that it was also not 'walk-out'. Catching my foot, I landed on my ankle on the bathroom floor. My foot flopped in a northerly direction instead of firmly facing direct east! Three broken ankle bones.

An hour later I was admitted to the hospital, accompanied by a concerned husband and two anxious daughters. Did I have lessons to learn? Timely reminders? Opportunities for reflection? In abundance!

A reminder: God answers specific prayer

When I fell, my daughters sent for an ambulance, then both knelt beside me as I lay on the bathroom floor, and prayed that I would not have unbearable pain. The ambulance attendants, arriving shortly, soon had my ankle supported on a cushion, and away we went to hospital. As we travelled, one attendant commented that my foot was already back in line instead of hanging to the left. The nurse asked me if I had ever had morphine.

"No," I answered, "and I do not want any now." As she looked surprised, I said, "It isn't hurting, so why should I have morphine?" Seeing the quizzical look on her face, I added, "My daughters specifically prayed that I would not have unbearable pain, and I haven't." No one commented, but neither did they give me morphine.

Now, we cannot always expect to be free from pain—after all, Christians are as subject as anyone else to the physical laws of God. Nevertheless there are many cases of Christians who have not suffered as much as doctors anticipated. One friend had a brain tumour successfully removed. He told me, "The doctors were surprised that I had so little pain, far less than they were expecting, but so many people were praying for me. Some would call it coincidence, but we know better, don't we, Pat?" Although not the

invariable experience of Christians, this is certainly not an uncommon one.

Each day in hospital the nurses would bring pain killers and when told I did not need it, would look at my notes in surprise and say, "Oh, no, you haven't had it for three... four... five days." The only time I had any was just before and immediately after treatment, such as the operation and having the cast put on. It was possible to tell some of the staff, a doctor, nurses and an orderly, of my daughters' prayer. Just as in the ambulance, no one ever commented, but none laughed either.

Coincidence? Obviously they were expecting me to need painkiller. Coincidence? We know better, don't we?

A further reminder: God is always present

As I gazed out the window asking my 'why' and 'what', peace flowed over me—peace, and the closeness of God. He left no room for resentment or anxiety. His warmth, His presence surrounded me without and within.

As I had come in so unexpectedly a day passed before my Bible was brought to me, or prayer lists. Then I found the benefit of having used guides throughout the year. I could mentally follow, for example, the Wycliffe Bible Translators list, which is given in alphabetical order. By going through the alphabet, I was still able to pray for these 'friends' (most unknown).

God gives opportunities for service — even to the bed-ridden

My three-week stay in hospital was longer than usual, owing to the serious break, and the absence of some surgical and physiotherapy staff for Christmas and New Year. Amongst my fellow patients were two aged 91 and 99 with broken hips. These ladies were quite confused if they woke during the night. Thinking they were at home, one or other of them on four different nights tried to get out of bed. The noise they made, one by shouting and the other by grunting, woke me in time to raise the alarm. This caused some anxiety, until rails were placed on their beds. Then we could sleep in peace. Both the families, when they heard what happened, expressed their thanks, and quite a 'visiting' friendship developed. Later it was possible for me to send a Bible story book

and Christian colouring books to the grandchildren of one lady—two little girls who drew pictures for the 'Purple Lady', a reference to the colour of my fibre-glass cast (and toe nails, which my naughty daughters painted to match). The oldest patient, a Christian herself, appreciated the couple of times I read to her from the Bible. Maybe this should have happened more often, but it was not always convenient or appropriate in the busy ward.

Reminder: God's saints are everywhere

Visitors were a real joy, and an illustration of the 'communion of saints.' One gentleman from Mangere Church, ('just across the railway line') although he had met me previously only once or twice, came several times to see me. This was so appreciated, as were the visits of Christian friends from student days now living in Auckland. I was moved by cards and flowers from Palmerston North Church, and for visits of friends on holiday from there. The minister and others from Bucklands Beach Church came, and a



stranger who knew my family, the minister of an Auckland Baptist church.

God gives the means and opportunity to witness

Whenever our editor, Rev. Sjirk Bajema, came to see me, he read a Scripture passage and then raised his voice in prayer, including in it prayer for the other patients. They would become quiet, and appreciated his action. He told me he always does this, and has often had thanks from other patients. But he is a minister. What about me?

Books and music! How much do we think about reading matter when we visit friends in hospital? I've never thought much about it at all! Flowers, fruit, biscuits, but reading matter? Thankfully, friends and family did think about it. They brought me some which rescued me from the fate of women's glossy gossip magazines, so often the fare of doctors' waiting room and hospitals. After all, my foot was damaged, not my inner body or my brain! Of course common sense must prevail. Some patients are too ill to cope with

any reading at all, others can cope with only the lightest of magazines. In my case, not being affected above leg-height, my friends brought books for my education and edification! One was on Maori spirituality, one on Islam, a third the story of a Jewish-born Christian woman who had married into the world of black America, and the fourth Philip Yancey's *"The Jesus I Never Knew."* 'Light' reading? Wise and God-guided choices.

The book on Islam by two Moslem brothers, converts to Christ, gave sympathetic insight into that faith, and one of my younger fellow patients was a Syrian Moslem. I could not then discuss Christianity, but I have an invitation to visit her when I am next in Auckland.

A Maori nurse, whose interest had been caught by the transformed lives of her sister and brother-in-law since becoming Christians, was happy to talk to me. I gave her a gospel of John to read, and she took down the title of Yancey's book.

Another nurse discussed with me his studies. His initial training twenty years ago, was simply on physical healing, but lately he had begun a nursing degree which included papers on cultural studies and the spiritual side of man.

"There is now," he told me, "a recognition of the need to address the whole man." He opened up about his background and his own non-religious upbringing, and my reading matter opened the way to suggest lines he could follow in his study, and to point to the need for personal faith.

Yet another trainee nurse spotted the book *"Understanding Islam"* in my drawer and spoke approvingly, for, he declared, "All religions are leading to the same place." He must have seen my expression. Unfortunately he had to hurry away with his training group and I did not see him again, but I did have time to say that Jesus was unique. I only hope that my face and those words helped set him on the way to seek this unique Jesus. I saw the hand of God on these books.

Christmas Day special!

A week after my admission came Christmas Day. I went by wheelchair to the hospital church service. This was difficult—I was uncomfortable, and my leg kept jerking. Wheeled back to my ward by an M.P. who makes a point of attending this service every year, I partook of Christmas dinner (acceptable but not to be compared with home cooked, of course).

The staff arranged for an hour's use of one of the lounges for my family. What a surprise the family had for me! No sooner had they given me my presents and painted my toe nails (well, I couldn't fight them off, could I?) than a young Christian couple, friends from Hamilton, walked in. They had

come early to call on me before meeting an overseas visitor at Auckland airport. Next moment the room was full! A cell group from a church arrived to join the occasion. Dear Chinese folk of all ages. I had not previously met any of them. They bowed to me, greeted me and smiled as if old friends. One old gentleman, face beaming, nodded and clasped his hands, like my mind-picture of an old Chinese mandarin. Now I knew why my family loved them. My two grandsons (eight and ten) and a tiny boy who looked three years younger than his eleven years produced their musical instruments, word sheets were passed round, and to the accompaniment of two violins and a flute, we sang Christmas carols. We found a seat for a Down's syndrome patient drawn by the music, and for his mother who anxiously did 'not want to intrude.' Nursing staff popped their heads in the door, the music drifted along the ward, and for half an hour the praises of the Lord and remembrance of His birth rang through the corridors. The children then played a couple of carols in my room, which was almost too far away for our singing to be heard.

Christmas in hospital? What a day!

Memorable? It was one of the best Christmases I have ever had. It almost made breaking an ankle worth while.

I look back with pleasure and gratitude for the friendship, the love, the spiritual learning experiences, the greater empathy I now have for others with far worse problems than mine. Gratitude for health. The confirmation that wherever we are, whatever the circumstances, the Lord is there, and the renewed realisation that He gives us unimagined, unique opportunities for relationship with Him and for service and witness.

It served to remind me that we should be bold in our faith. Generally, if we show tact and interest, we are treated with respect. The Lord goes before, prepares the way and gives the means, providing with just what we need for particular persons He sends us—in this case, the evidence of freedom from pain as an answer to prayer, and books and music.

Proof of what we all know in theory, that every experience in life has its lessons, and that indeed *'all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according His purpose.'*

Merry Christmas?

Rather say, 'Blessed Christmas.'

*With Praise and thanks to our
Lord we celebrate the*

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Piet and Sjoerdje HEERINGA

MARRIED 19 DECEMBER 1953

Jacob and Marja
Marcel

Steve and Angela
Jacob, Mark, Astrid, Haken, Eric

Rolanda and David
Kate, Thomas, Ben

Peter and Janine
William, Rowan, Timothy, Simon

Paul
Andrew, Johanna, Thomas

Sybella and Edwin
Anthony, Nicole, Jessica, Acacia

Vincent and Sarah
Levi, Toby, Theo, Wilhelmina

*How can I repay the Lord for all his
goodness to me? I will lift up the cup
of salvation and call on the name of the
Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the
Lord in the presence of all his people.*

P's 116 vs 12, 13, 14

Shall we dance?

Some reflections on worship principles and practices

JohnWestendorp

Swan Lake in church?

We entered the Reformed Church worship service that Sunday morning with anticipation and with curiosity but with some reservations too. The reason? Our hosts told us that their congregation had received approval from its Classis to be a little more experimental in its liturgy. In retrospect we found it a delightful and uplifting experience to worship there with God's people that Sunday. My wife and I appreciated the use of sung responses adopted from the Taizé community. The celebration of the Lord's Supper that morning was different but very meaningful, as we stood together in a large semicircle at the front of the church. The preaching of the Word was a very powerful, pointed and persuasive message based on the article on 'Revelation' in the Belgic Confession.

But there was one item in the liturgy that did nothing for me. A liturgical dance was 'performed' by a young lady. No doubt she did very well in ballet school and would have made a fine heroine in Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. But ballet and dance is a little like speaking in tongues—if there is no interpreter, then what on earth does it all mean? I wasn't the only one who found it a distraction that morning, because our hosts told us afterwards that they were not into liturgical dance either.

That memorable overseas experience raised some important questions about the nature of Christian worship. What *must* we do in worship and what *may* we do in worship? Is liturgical dance or drama legitimate in a public worship service? Are these issues 'indifferent' and unimportant? Is this merely a subjective issue—that some are moved to tears by a dance routine whereas for others it does nothing? Is this just my conservativeness? Ballet? Great! But not in church! Those questions need to be asked because increasingly in Reformed Churches too we take on the practices of other churches, and sometimes unquestioningly.

On another occasion, in a Presbyterian Church while on holiday, the pastor dismissed the children and then announced that there would be a drama segment. The 'skit' was forgettable and left me with questions. Why were the children dismissed for whom this might have been especially meaningful? What on earth did it have to do with the rest of the service and with the message that was brought that morning? I may be unfair, but I came away with the

uncomfortable feeling that we had been treated to this skit because it is fashionable now in some circles to have a drama segment in worship.

Wrong worship—dead worshippers

In Reformed Churches we have a strong confessional basis for our worship practices. All of us who are office bearers in the CRCA put our signature to the Creeds and Confessions. So we also sign our name to Lord's Day 35 in which we communally agree not to worship the Lord in any other way than He has commanded in His Word. There we have a regulative principle for ordering our worship service that every pastor and every Session in the CRCA must grapple with when it comes to changes in our worship services.

The principle itself is very clear and unambiguous. It's not we who decide how God is to be worshipped. Almighty God, Who is the object of our worship, has Himself told us how He wishes to be worshipped. This helps explain why our churches struggle with the 'worship wars'. That happens not only because all of us have a vested interest in our communal worship, or because some of us like the old hymns while others like the newer songs. It happens especially because we struggle to do justice to the words of Lord's Day 35 in a changing culture.

The problem though, is that while the principle of Lord's Day 35 is very clear and unambiguous the precise implementation of it is far more difficult to agree on. One difficulty is that this regulative principle is put in the negative: how *not* to worship God.

In the Bible there are certainly some very strong warnings against wrong worship and stories that show what happens when people worship God in ways *not* according to His will.

In the Old Testament, in Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu died when they offered worship contrary to God's prescriptions. In the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 11 some died because their Lord's Supper celebrations had drifted away from what God intended them to be. These few—admittedly extreme—examples show us the seriousness of worship that deviates from what God commands. In them God, as it were, makes the point—but other examples too could be cited to show that God decides *how* He is to be worshipped.

Let's take a collection

The difficulties come especially when we begin to ask about the specifics of worship. How has God commanded us to worship Him? In the Old Testament the regulations for worship were many and minute—even the ingredients for the incense offered in tabernacle and temple were carefully spelled out. In the New Testament there is much less to go by. It nowhere gives us a made-to-measure order of worship that we can adopt. If that were the case, there would not be churches that have had a whole generation of 'worship wars'. What we do have are two things—some prescriptions and some descriptions. Some are things that the early Christian church was *told* to do, and some other things are what they *did*. But even



these things cannot be taken ready-made as if they were components of a liturgy.

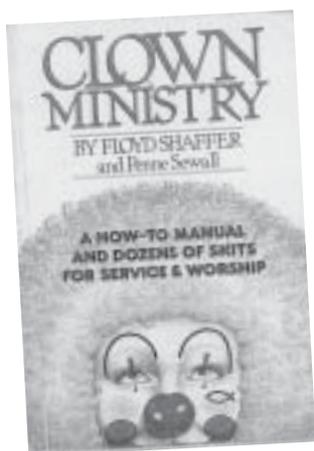
Paul, for example, calls us to speak to one another in "*psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*" (Ephesians 5:19). But the context is hardly Paul's prescription for a God-honouring worship service. In fact, this verse is one of only three New Testament texts that *prescribe* singing. There are another three verses that *describe* singing in the book

of Revelation. That's precious little New Testament data on which to build a theology of song in worship. But then the early Church needed little instruction in singing, because it inherited the rich tradition of the Hebrew Psalms which themselves instruct us in the worship of song, such as telling us to "*sing a new song.*"

The point is that when it comes to God's instructions for worship, the New Testament gives us some principles and some key elements but leaves us wonderfully free as to how to incorporate those principles creatively into worship. Within the limitations of this article we can do little more than give one example. Let's think of taking up the collection. Is it Biblical to take up a collection during a public worship service? 1 Corinthians 16 makes clear that on the first day of the week we are to set aside our gifts as God has blessed us. But how do we do that? Some Reformed churches do not hold a collection as an act of worship—there is simply a box at the door in which the members of the church put their pledges. Most of us will have the plate or bag passed around at some point in the worship service. But should we have it in the worship service and, if so, when in the worship service?

In a recent issue of *Australian Presbyterian*, T.P. Moore took to task those churches which hold the collection *after* the sermon, "*as though having heard what God has to say to us, we will now decide how much that word was worth.*" It's a little difficult to take that sort of remark seriously. I could counter by taking to task those who hold the collection *before* the sermon, as though we first have to pay before we are allowed to listen to the message, and maybe God will not allow the word to be brought with great power if the congregation has been stingy in its giving. Both arguments are absurd.

The reality is that while Scripture calls us to bring our gifts for the Lord's work when we gather on the Lord's Day it does not prescribe to us exactly where in the worship service we are to take up the collection—or



even whether it ought to happen as an act of public worship at all. If we do want to make a case for including it in the worship service, then let's at least try to argue from Biblical principles rather than taking cheap shots at those who do it differently. An argument I would use for generally taking up the collection after the message is that our giving is also part of the dialogue of worship and so we give in thankful response to the word—not

in response to how well the preacher brought the message, but in response to us hearing again the gospel of God's grace to us.

Purity of worship

What help then is the regulative principle of Lord's Day 35? A great deal. In worship, Christians have generally taken either of two approaches. The first approach rejects the regulative principle of Lord's Day 35. It takes the approach that as long as something is not forbidden in Scripture (eg. images and idols), then it is permissible in worship. Many of the 'more liturgical' churches have gone for this option. Since candles and robes in worship are not forbidden in Scripture—they are quite acceptable. On that basis, the introduction of drama and liturgical dance is not a problem.

The other approach is to take the regulative principle seriously—only what God expressly commands may be done in worship. This has often been spoken of as the Purity of Worship principle. However, we face some problems here if we take Lord's Day 35 too literally. As we have said, there is precious little that is expressly commanded by God with regard to the details of worship in the New Testament. In fact the only footnoted text from the New Testament

in my version of Lord's Day 35 is from John 4, where Jesus says that those who worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth—hardly a model for an Order of Worship.

So in practice we work out what should be included in worship by doing the hard work of thinking through Biblical principles and Biblical practices—as we did a moment ago with regard to the collection. Those principles include the idea that worship is a dialogue between the Lord and His people; that worship ought to be God-centred and not worshipper-focused; that worship needs to be distinguished from entertainment. This approach will include not only what is prescribed, but also the practices of the Christian church of the New Testament.

In other words, whatever is done in our public worship services needs to be carefully thought through and justified from Scripture. Coming at it from this perspective does not, in my opinion, per se cancel out drama in worship for me—but it does mean that I will not include it as a 'must-have' drama segment. Instead, as with the prophets of the Old Testament and with the parables of Jesus in the New, it will be to make clearer to the worshippers some aspect of God's Will or Christian teaching that I am taking up in the preaching of the word on that occasion. At the same time, I know how much work it takes to keep a sermon Bible-based and Christ-centred. It takes infinitely more skill to keep a drama Bible-focused and God-honouring. Drama especially entices us to be man-centred.

In the limitations of a single article in this periodical, it is not possible to spell out a whole theology of worship. There is much more that needs to be said. But the point of this article is to highlight again that our churches do hold to a regulative principle that binds our worship practices to the Word of God.

A response

Michael Flinn

I'd like to thank Rev. Westendorp for his informative and interesting article entitled *Shall We Dance?* John points out that Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism says that we should in no way make any image of God "*nor worship Him in any other way than he has commanded in His Word*" and he quite rightly observes that every Reformed pastor and session (also in the RCNZ) must grapple with this when it comes to possible changes in our worship services. In New

Zealand. We call this the "regulative principle". It arises from the second great commandment, which, as we know, is expressed in the negative: "*You shall not make for yourself an idol...*" God is perfectly at liberty to tell His people how He does *not* want to be worshipped and how He *does* want to be worshipped and if we are serious about this, surely we have to listen to Him. One writer illustrated it by pointing to a man who gave his wife tools for her birthday. (Great idea, men!) Why did he do this? Because *he* liked tools and he thought they

would help her. This writer's wife wryly informed him: "Don't you ever do that to me!" Quite right. Again, if we are serious about worshipping God, we have to respect *His* wishes rather than give Him something that we think is terrific.

What we believe

Here is how the Westminster Confession expresses it (in New Zealand, office bearers also subscribe to this when they take office):

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture (Chapter 19).

Earlier in the Confession, it is noted that "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church" which are "to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (Chapter 1, section 6). Thus, not all the circumstances surrounding worship are prescribed in Scripture in so many words. For example, what time of the day we are to hold our services, how many songs we sing, details concerning the order of service, etc. These are things that will vary in time, place and culture. Nevertheless, there are some aspects of worship that are required. The Confession lists "prayer, with thanksgiving", "the reading of the Scripture with godly fear", the "sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word", "the singing of psalms with grace in the heart" and the "due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ." All these are part of the "ordinary worship of God" (Chapter 21, sections 3,5).

Changes are to come from the Lord

So here in New Zealand, when changes are suggested, we want to be able to show how these changes are instituted by God and where they fit in terms of His revealed will for worship. We don't mind working within limitations and sessions are quite willing to say "no" to a suggestion simply on the grounds that they do not see how it is prescribed in Scripture. I believe that this is how sessions in New Zealand would deal with the matter of liturgical dance, for instance: "Show us from Scripture how it is prescribed—required by God. If we can't see this, we won't do it." This might seem a bit negative, but again, we don't want to give our Lord in worship something that He does not want to receive.

John also mentions the "dialogue principle" in his article. This is something that here in New Zealand we want to take very seriously. Worship is all about God meeting with us and us with God. He greets us, and the congregation responds in praise. We bring our offerings (leaving out at what point in the service we do this) and God speaks to us in His Word. This raises an important difference between evangelical worship and Reformed worship. It is explained by Dr. Robert Godfrey in a recent article in *Lux Mundi*, the periodical of the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). Dr. Godfrey is president of Westminster Theological Seminary and a minister of the United Reformed Churches in North America. In his article, he has this to say:

It seems to me that for evangelicalism, God is present in worship, basically to listen. He is not far away; rather, he is intimately and lovingly present to observe and hear the worship of his people. He listens to their praise and their prayers. He sees their obedient observance of the sacraments. He hears their testimonies and sharing...The effect of this sense of evangelical worship is that the stress is on the horizontal dimension of worship. The sense of warm, personal fellowship, and participation among believers at worship is crucial. Anything that increases a sense of involvement, especially on the level of emotions, is likely to be approved.

The Reformed faith has a fundamentally different understanding of the presence of God. God is indeed present to hear. He listens to the

praise and the prayers of his people...but he is also present to speak. God is not only present as an observer; he is an active participant. He speaks in the Word and in the sacraments. As Reformed Christians, we do not believe that he speaks directly and immediately to us in the church. God uses means to speak. But he speaks truly and really to us through the means that he has appointed for his church. In the ministry of the Word – as it is properly preached and ministered in salutation and benediction – it is truly God who speaks.

Looking up before we look around

Godfrey goes on to point out that the stress in Reformed worship is on the *vertical* rather than the *horizontal* dimension, although the latter is not absent. The focus is not warm feelings and sharing—what makes us feel good or emotionally uplifted. The focus is rather on the community as a unit meeting with God. Sometimes this will be a *sobering* experience. God may have something to say to us that we do not want to hear (cf. the letter to the church at Laodicea in Rev. 3:14-21). But He is an active participant in the service and we must humble ourselves and listen to whatever He has to say. Godfrey also observes that the horizontal dimension of much evangelical worship leads to what he calls a "democratic" character. Anyone who is gifted or feels so called can contribute and "share". In Reformed worship, the minister is called to lead worship by the authority of his office. The minister represents God before the congregation. "In the great dialogue of worship, he speaks the Word of God to the people and he speaks the words of the people to God, except in



those instances when the congregation as a whole raises its voice in unison to God." He concludes:

We who are Reformed do not embrace this arrangement because we are anti-democratic or because we believe that the minister is the only gifted member of the congregation. We follow this pattern because we believe that it is biblical and the divinely-appointed pattern of worship.

The scriptural calling of the minister

We agree. And here in New Zealand, we

would therefore have problems with liturgical committees that arrange the details of worship independent of the minister, choosing the songs and arranging the order of the service, overseeing who prays and when. We would also have problems with a variety of people leading in prayer and giving comments and testimonies—people who are not called or set aside by the churches to lead in worship. And here too, we would object to drama items, skits, and a performance by a gifted singer, after which there is spontaneous, if not obligatory, clapping! Musical accompaniment must also support and enhance congregational singing,

not compete with it or drown it out (this comment needs to be borne in mind by the members of a small orchestra on the one hand *and* an over-enthusiastic organist on the other), and the preaching of the Scriptures must continue to figure prominently in the services.

The Rev. Michael Flinn is the minister of the Reformed Church of Dovedale, Christchurch, New Zealand. This article and the Rev. John Westendorp's article are part of a dialogue on worship which the CRCA and the RCNZ are involved in.

Worship: Evangelical or Reformed?

W. Robert Godfrey

One of the challenges of being Reformed in America is to figure out the relationship between what is evangelical and what is Reformed. Protestantism in America is dominated by the mainline Protestants, the evangelicals, and the charismatics. After these dominant groups, other major players would include the confessional Lutherans. But where do the Reformed fit in, particularly in relation to the evangelicals, with whom historically we have been most closely linked?

Some observers argue that the confessional Reformed are a subgroup in the broader evangelical movement. Certainly over the centuries in America, the Reformed have often allied themselves with the evangelicals, have shared much in common with the evangelicals, and have often tried to refrain

from criticising the evangelical movement. But are we Reformed really evangelical?

One area in which the differences between evangelical and Reformed can be examined is the matter of worship. At first glance, we may see more similarities than differences. The orders of worship in Reformed and evangelical churches can be almost identical. Certainly, both kinds of churches sing songs, read Scripture, pray, preach, and administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. But do these similarities reflect only formal agreement, or do they represent a common understanding of the meaning and function of these liturgical acts in worship?

If we look closely, I believe that we will see the substantive differences between evangelicals and Reformed on worship. That difference is clear on two central issues: first, the understanding of the presence of God in

the service; and second, the understanding of the ministerial office in worship.

The presence of God in worship

The presence of God in worship may seem a strange issue to raise. Do we not both believe that God is present with his people in worship? Indeed we do! But *how* is God present, and *how* is he active in our worship?

It seems to me that for evangelicalism, God is present in worship basically to listen. He is not far away; rather, he is intimately and lovingly present to observe and hear the worship of his people. He listens to their praise and their prayers. He sees their obedient observance of the sacraments. He hears their testimonies and sharing. He attends to the teaching of His Word, listening to be sure that the teaching is faithful and accurate.

The effect of this sense of evangelical worship is that the stress is on the *horizontal* dimension of worship. The sense of warm, personal fellowship, and participation among believers at worship is crucial. Anything that increases a sense of involvement, especially on the level of emotions, is likely to be approved. The service must be inspiring and reviving, and then God will observe and be pleased.

The Reformed faith has a fundamentally different understanding of the presence of God. God is indeed present to hear. He listens to the praise and prayers of His people. But He is also present to speak. God is not only present as an observer; He is an active participant. He speaks in the Word and in the sacraments. As Reformed Christians, we do not believe that He speaks directly and immediately to us in the church. God uses means to speak. But He speaks truly and really to us through the means that He has appointed for his church. In the ministry of the Word—as it is properly



preached and ministered in salutation and benediction—it is truly God who speaks. As the Second Helvetic Confession rightly says, *“The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.”*

God is also actively present and speaking in the sacraments, according to the Reformed understanding. The sacraments are much more about Him than about us. He speaks through them the reality of the presence of Jesus to bless His people as He confirms His gospel truth and promises through them.

The effect of this understanding of Reformed worship is that the stress is on the *vertical* dimension of worship. The horizontal dimension is not absent, but the focus is not on warm feelings and sharing. Rather, it is on the community as a unit meeting their God. Our primary fellowship with one another is in the unified activities of speaking to God in song and prayer and of listening together as God speaks to us. The vertical orientation of our worship service insures that God is the focus of our worship. The first importance of any act of worship is not its value for the inspiration of the people, but its faithfulness to God’s revelation of His Will for worship. We must meet with God only in ways that please Him. The awe and joy that is ours in coming into the presence of the living God to hear Him speak is what shapes and energizes our worship service.

The ministerial office in worship

The difference between the Reformed faith and evangelicalism on the presence of God in worship is closely tied to their differences on the ministerial office in worship. For evangelicalism, the ministers seem to be seen as talented and educated members of the congregation, called by God to leadership in planning and teaching. The ministers use their talents to facilitate the worship of the congregation and instruct the people. The ministers are not seen as speaking distinctively for God or having a special authority from God. Rather, their authority resides only in the reliability of their teaching, which would be true for any member of the congregation.

The effect of this evangelical view of office is to create a very democratic character to worship, in which the participation of many members of the congregation in leading the service is a good thing. The more who can share, the better. The many gifts that God has given to members of the congregation should be used for mutual edification. Again, the *horizontal* dimension of worship has prevailed.

The Reformed view of ministerial office is quite different. The minister is called by God through the congregation to lead worship by the authority of his office. He is examined and set apart to represent the congregation

before God and to represent God before the congregation. In the great dialogue of worship, he speaks the Word of God to the people and he speaks the words of the people to God, except in those instances when the congregation as a whole raises its voice in unison to God. We who are Reformed do not embrace this arrangement because we are antidemocratic or because we believe that the minister is the only gifted member of the congregation. We follow this pattern because we believe that it is biblical and the divinely-appointed pattern of worship.

The effect of this view of office is to reinforce the sense of *meeting with God* in a reverent and official way. It also insures that those who lead public worship have been called and authorised for that work by God. The Reformed are rightly suspicious of untrained and unauthorized members of the congregation giving longer or shorter messages to the congregation. In worship we gather to hear God, not the opinions of members. The *vertical* dimension of worship remains central.

Conclusion

The contrast that I have drawn between evangelical and Reformed worship no doubt ought to be nuanced in many ways. I have certainly tried to make my points by painting

with a very broad brush. Yet the basic analysis, I believe, is correct.

One great difficulty that we Reformed folk have in thinking about worship is that our worship in many places has unwittingly been accommodated to evangelical ways. If we are to appreciate our Reformed heritage in worship and, equally importantly, if we are to communicate its importance, character, and power to others, we must understand the distinctive character of our worship.

Our purpose in making this contrast so pointed is not to demean evangelicals. They are indeed our brethren and our friends. But we do have real differences with them. If Reformed worship is not to become as extinct as the dinosaurs, we as Reformed people must come to a clear understanding of it and an eager commitment to it. In order to do that, we must see not just formal similarities, but more importantly the profound theological differences that distinguish evangelical worship from Reformed worship.

The author is president of Westminster Theological Seminary in California and a minister in the United Reformed Churches. This article, slightly edited, first appeared in The Outlook. He quotes the RSV. Reprinted from New Horizons, April 2002.

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A feminine focus

The spiritual discipline of evangelism

Sally Davey

(This is the fifth in a series of articles reviewing and applying Donald S. Whitney's Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life.)

On the afternoon of 18th November 1947 a dreadful fire broke out in Ballantynes' department store in central Christchurch. Many people died, especially on the third floor, where clerical and other staff worked. My mother, who was at school in Christchurch at the time, remembers it well. She was in the city that afternoon, and had an appointment upstairs in Ballantynes for a uniform fitting. Running late, she raced out of Whitcombe's (later Whitcoulls') door into Cashel St, only to be confronted by the appalling spectacle of the fire. She often reflects on how she could have perished that afternoon.

Many years later, a good friend of ours (now a minister in one of our churches) used the story of this fire in a very compelling sermon illustration. What would your reaction be, he asked, if you had been in such a situation? You are shopping on the lower floor, and know there is a fire raging upstairs. In come some customers, unaware of the danger on the upper floor, and they head



Opportunities for evangelism come as naturally as afternoon tea in the garden or helping in a shared task.

toward the stairs. Wouldn't you race towards them, and grab them, insisting they stop at once, warning them urgently of their peril if they carry on? Should they protest, wouldn't you get all the more insistent? And wouldn't you do this because you can't bear the thought of their perishing in such a horrible way?

His point, of course, was that this situation is life. People, though they may not know it, are rushing every day toward certain destruction without knowledge of Christ. We who are Christians, who *do* know what happens when we die, are in a position to warn them. The matter is urgent; and surely if we care about our friends and neighbour and workmates, we will do more than timidly suggest they may like to think about God one day. If we know what we know, and we care at all, we'll grab them by the arm — by the collar if necessary — and beg them to listen while we tell them of their danger.

But perhaps we don't care. Perhaps we are content with our comfortable non-involvement with people outside our circle of Christian friends or fellow church-members?

Disciplines involving others

Sometimes we need to be challenged in this area of our Christian calling, because evangelism can rightly be seen as a spiritual discipline — and something we need to learn, and to practise. It is, in fact, one of the spiritual disciplines Don Whitney writes about. I mentioned a few articles ago that the "spiritual disciplines" are not only about our private, personal walk with God. Whitney's list of things we need to be learning and practising includes disciplines that bring us close to other people and help us serve them. And of course the primary way to serve others is to tell them about Christ, so that they can be saved from their sin, and escape going to hell. What could we do for someone else that would be greater than that? Nothing. So then, what stops us?

This is the big question answered by Whitney in his chapter on the spiritual discipline of evangelism.

Different fears

Many of the reasons we don't share the gospel with other people can be placed under the general heading of fear. Some hesitate to bring up the subject of God, sin and salvation because they feel inadequate. What if that person asks a tricky question I can't answer? I'll wait until I know enough about the Bible to answer any question or objection... Or maybe I'll leave it to the minister... The problem is, writes Whitney,

"that confident day never comes." What if the formerly blind man that Jesus healed in John 9 had thought that way? Would he ever have felt ready to witness to the scholarly, critical Pharisees? And yet, within hours, perhaps minutes, of meeting Jesus he bravely tells them what he knows of Jesus.

Other times we find ourselves "unable" to speak of our faith because we're afraid people will think us odd, and will reject us. I've known this sensation many times. And when I've thought about it, I've realised that the problem is that we *are* strange, at times, in the eyes of the world. We think differently; and because we think differently, we behave differently. We need to. But we don't always need to be so horribly strange as Christians sometimes make themselves. Our Lord wants us to make friends with the lost souls around us; and if we make a few efforts to understand why they think the way they do, and have compassion for the lost circumstances that contribute to their lostness, then that goes a long way towards building a bridge between their world and ours. Paul had this kind of compassionate understanding — read Romans Chapter 1, and 1 Corinthians 1. When he wrote about the effects of sin on people's thinking, he wasn't being harsh and dismissive. He wasn't being sneering and derisive. Nor was he playing intellectual games. No, he was writing with the utmost concern, and with infinite compassion, pointing out that we are all in this hopeless state save for the mercy of God; and that we who are Christians need to take into account the reasons those without Christ are inclined to reject Him — if we are going to be good evangelists.

Sometimes we can be afraid of evangelism because of the methods that we've seen others use — and are terrified that someone might expect us to do the same. Who has thought of cold-call door-knocking in this way? Who has seen open-air preachers on street corners or in Cathedral Square, and shrivelled up inside? Surely I could NEVER, EVER do that, you might have thought! I do remember that that was precisely my reaction when at the end of my first year as a student in the United States, I went to spend a summer on the New Jersey shore to learn and practise evangelism with a group of seminary and college students (a mission work of the OPC). The first night the leaders told us that each evening we would go out on the boardwalk and strike up conversations with perfect strangers, with the idea of interesting them in the gospel. I froze. "You'd NEVER do that in New Zealand!" I declared. "We're far too reserved for that. People wouldn't like it."

Well, my kind — and wise — teachers were not going to listen to such quibbling. They warmly and gently showed me ways to speak to strangers, with some methods of politely taking up openings in conversation to introduce the important truths of salvation. I was amazed at how people on the boardwalk responded; and the lessons I learned that summer have stayed with me ever since. But, while it is true that Americans are usually more willing to talk openly about personal issues with strangers than New Zealanders are, we can still, if we only know how, speak confidently and helpfully with strangers. However, I do think the best situations for sharing the gospel are with people that we've built a friendship with over time. It is then that we are able, in a natural, non-confrontational way, as Whitney puts it, "share the best news in the world with the people that we love the most."

Other reasons

Whitney offers two other reasons we sometimes fear evangelism. One is that it is an incredibly serious thing to do to talk with people about issues of heaven and hell. The eternal destiny of this other person is the issue. We're conscious of the solemn duty to communicate the gospel properly, coupled with an appropriate dread of doing or saying anything that might be a stumbling block in the way of their salvation. Another reason, given sometimes, is a fear of failure. We like to be successful — and we tend to avoid anything that has little hope of achieving the desired result. We are pleasure and comfort-seeking creatures all too inclined to limit our activities to those in which we are most capable and secure. We usually redirect our energies into other areas of spiritual activity that we find more satisfying and in which we are more likely to be successful. Such things may be less threatening than evangelism — but are they as urgent? And in the end, none of this reasoning should have any effect on people who are convinced that God has all our encounters with others, and their salvation, in His hands. To put it simply, we should know it is not up to us, even though our sense of urgency should be as though it were!

Following on from the reasons Whitney believes Christians do not evangelise are one or two others I have come across, closer to home. For some reason, they are often used by women. Sometimes I've heard women say they don't have any special calling to evangelism. An evangelist (they argue) is one of those people listed — with apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11 — as specially set aside for this work. Evangelists need to have special gifts, they say. They need to be bold and articulate, for instance. And I don't have those gifts. Evangelists do evangelism on behalf of the

rest of us in the church. We can support them with our prayers, perhaps...Have you ever heard people talk like this? I have, and I think it's sadly mistaken. Almost everywhere that evangelism is talked about in the Bible we find the command directed to *all* of God's people. Evangelism is expected of everybody. Take the letter of 1 Peter, for example. Peter is writing to a general Christian readership, not to any specific congregation or class of believers. He writes, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God." Chosen for what? To enjoy each other's company out of sight of the world? No, "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) In other words, to be a witness to Him! And then in the next chapter (3:15) Peter goes on to tell us to be "always ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope [i.e. the saving faith] that you have." This is clearly a command to prepare ourselves to share the gospel with all who ask us about it. None of us are exempt, not even the most timid or inexperienced of us! And in respect of having the right gifts, it seems to me that the important gifts for evangelism could be summed up by Paul's description of the attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13, or his list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians Chapter 5. If we have these



qualities, we will want to share the gospel with others, because we'll be motivated by love. And with these qualities, we'll also have the necessary gentleness, patience and consideration for others that makes our communication of the gospel attractive.

Looking for opportunities

Secondly, I've sometimes heard women excuse themselves from evangelism because their focus is their home. What with caring for small children, looking after their

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David Vander Reyden - contact number 02 45765469
(ndavidv@bigpond.com)

husbands, involvement in Christian schools or home schooling, and then church, they seldom or never meet unbelievers. So, obviously they cannot be evangelists? Wrong! I think it is clear that if we almost never brush lives with those who do not know Christ, we should take steps to make sure we do – for their sake, and for Christ's. Donald Whitney writes that as a pastor, he could easily spend twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with Christians, and sometimes has to discipline himself to be with unbelievers. It's the same with some of us. Perhaps a woman at home with young children could join a playgroup where needy solo mothers also go. This would provide a good opportunity to meet with some people for whom you could do a lot — provide company, advice, a welcome into your home — and in a way that is natural, given you have children of a similar age in common. I once asked a young woman from a Reformed church (not one of ours in New Zealand) if she had ever considered doing this, given that she claimed she didn't share the gospel because she never met unbelievers. She answered that she'd never do this, because she thought it important to stay with her own church's playgroup – there would be bad influences for her and her children if she went to one where unbelievers came. It reminded me of the name for the police programme, "Keeping Ourselves Safe", and thought it such a sad answer. If all Christians thought like this, the world would never experience the compassion

Jesus showed when He saw the crowd following him, compassion because they were like "sheep without a shepherd." (Mark 6:34) And what did He do for them? He taught them the truth from God. This is what we should be ready to do too — pass on the great store of Bible wisdom we've been taught from our youngest years, so that others can know the way of salvation as well.

In short, compassion and sound theology should deal with any lurking fears we may have. Yes, love and truth are the basis of evangelism.

Many encouragements

But if we find we could do much more, there are many positive, and helpful encouragements to consider. One is the fact that many Christian women before us have shown that we can, in ordinary, simple, everyday ways, use the opportunities God gives us to share our faith with those who don't yet know Christ. Perhaps in the course of our work? I think of the nanny who told little Anthony Ashley Cooper (later Lord Shaftesbury) about Jesus, so that this poor little unhappy boy, neglected by his parents, came to believe – and go on to be a tireless worker for Christ in the British Parliament in the mid-19th century. Perhaps as a housewife? I think of Edith Schaeffer, who, with her husband, Francis, opened her home in Switzerland to hundreds of young people hungry for the truth in the 1960s and 70s. Perhaps as an invalid? Think of the witness

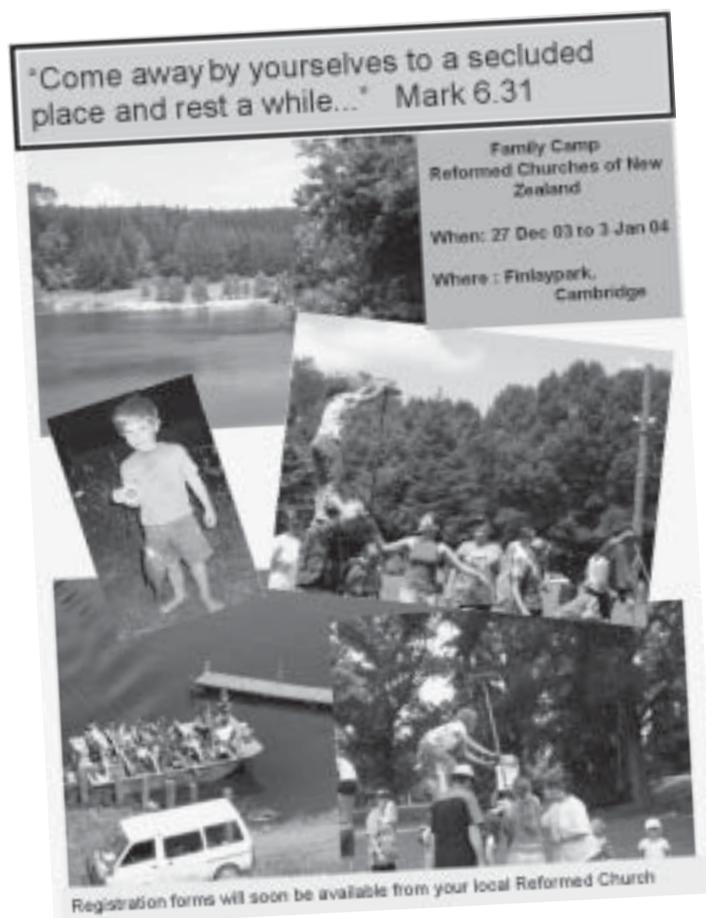
of Joni Eareckson Tada. Even as a supermarket shopper, there are ways. One good friend of ours made a point of always heading for the same "checkout chick" when leaving the supermarket. Brief conversations and friendly smiles led to an invitation home for dinner, and ultimately to the suggestion that this young woman come and board with our friend's family. This she did, and of course it led to extended discussions about the faith over a number of months. I'm sure you can come up with opportunities, given some creative thought — and compassionate desire.

Another encouragement is that there are loads of excellent "helps" to evangelism available these days. There are books that explain how to give away your faith (one actually has that title). One of my favourites, and you'll find this especially applicable if you're also a student (as was the author), is *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World*, by Rebecca Pippert. There are also well-written courses that you can use with your interested friend, such as *Christianity Explained* (which most of you will probably know). Another good one, based on the gospel of Mark, is *Christianity Explored*, by Rico Tice, a worker at All Souls' Church in London (where John Stott was the vicar for many years). A very simple approach, used by many Christians, is simply to invite someone with whom you've had valuable conversations to discuss your way through John's gospel together. John's whole aim is to tell his readers Who this Jesus was, and you'll find that many questions are answered as you work your way through his gospel. I've done this with a couple of women my own age (farmers' wives like me), and with an older lady; and all have shown signs of really believing by the time we've finished. The Word of God has its own effect in people's lives! But I do think it is a great help to use these 'how-tos' in evangelism. One of the major barriers we sense in sharing the gospel is the great gap between unbelievers' thinking and our own. How do we bridge the gap, and communicate effectively? Once we begin to learn, evangelism is no longer such a fearful thing. That was certainly my experience!

You get better by practice

The important thing, however, is that we actually set about *doing* it. Like all the spiritual disciplines, we get better at it by practising it. What are your special opportunities in your life's calling? Seize them!

[*"Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life"*, by Donald Whitney, is available from NavPress, P.O. Box 6280, Christchurch, Phone +64 3 343 1990, Fax +64 3 343 1330, navpressnz@maxnet.co.nz]



"I'd rather have a bottle in front of me, than a frontal lobotomy"

The myths and the facts on addiction

Harry Landkroon

Here are some questions and an answer from God's Word:

*Who has woe?
Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions?
Who has babbling?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?*

And the answer:

Those who linger long over wine, those who go to take mixed wine. (Perhaps we can include all types of drugs here!!)

Solution: *Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly.* (sounds familiar??)

Result: *At last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper.*

At the end of this chapter, Proverbs 23, the writer states that after having woken up, he is semi-conscious. After having beaten himself, he is bruised and battered from another booze binge, and what does he do? He says, "I will go and seek another drink!"

He is like a dog, returning to its vomit, is a fool who repeats his folly. (Proverbs 26: 11).

This is typical—the dry horrors, the hair of the dog, that bit you. Incredible, amazing, after all the insanity drink has caused him. And that also goes for drugs, marijuana, etc. I am sure that in our Reformed Churches around New Zealand, as we have a good look around, we can see that we have this problem.

The way that Solomon describes the dependency on drugs and alcohol—that's the way it is for the alcoholics and drug addicts, and their families: A crazy, insane merry-go-round, of cleaning up the mess, and off course, the denial that there is any problem.

Who I am

Greetings, my name is Harry Landkroon, and I am an alcoholic, I should rephrase that. I am still an alcoholic, but in recovery, I do not drink anymore. It is like saying that I was ones a sinner, but I don't sin anymore! I am now in my twelfth year of sobriety, only by the grace of God, and only He gets the glory!!

Remember that song in the 60s, "Where Have All The Flowers Gone?"

I would like to know, where have all the

alcoholics gone, the Reformed alcoholics? I don't mean reformed, although I would like to hear from those who are recovering alcoholics.

A number of years ago, I wrote an article in this magazine concerning this subject. I remember I had a few letters sent to me commending me on my honesty, and praising the Lord for my sobriety. There was one letter, or phone call, which was from a gentleman who had a drinking problem.

Some myths

Here I would like to blow the froth of a couple of myths.

Some might suggest that this problem does not exist in our churches, perhaps we are all teetotalers? I don't think so—the problem is there all right, with families being affected by drug taking and drinking, especially among our youth.

I AM NOT ADVOCATING THAT IT IS A SIN TO DRINK ALCOHOL ! I AM NOT ADVOCATING PROHIBITION !

I would like to suggest that this is the age for coming out of our closets.

I would like to suggest to all wives, husbands, children, teenagers, to take a good look around your house. Do you see someone who is under this curse, of drinking

a little too much too often, even to the point of getting drunk? Is someone taking drugs? Do you want to keep this quiet? Yes, I think so. Imagine the embarrassment if this sort of thing got out!

That's the way it was in our household.

Those who are under this curse definitely know what I'm talking about, that it is a curse. And most of us who are on this crazy merry-go-round, would rather sweep your problems under the carpet. **Rather than face the reality of having to go without alcohol or drugs FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE !** And that your house remain **DRY** for the rest of your life !

As I have said before, I now have not had a drink for eleven years, apart from cough medicine and the Lord's Supper wine. In other words I have been sober for over eleven years, and I must say that it feels pretty good. No more of this business of: hanging over the toilet bowl, or stating, "never again, mate!" or reaching for "the hair of the dog that bit you"—drinkers will know what I am talking about!

I would like to encourage those who DO see a problem within their family circle, to attend one of many support groups, like AA or AIAnon, or Allateen. You will find these in every phone book in New Zealand. Or have a





quiet word your elder or minister. Or find someone who has been on this crazy drunk, drug-taking, addictive merry-go-round, and by the grace of God has been saved, by getting off.

Are we ready to serve here?

The other observation I have made, and I would like to ask the question: Are our churches equipped to deal with the problem of drug and alcohol addiction, and addictive behaviour? Perhaps we as churches should look outside our church circle to find answers and education for this problem. The biggest hurdle is DENIAL, as I have already said. Of course, the first point of reference is God's Word!!

In a lot of cases, the addiction has been there for 10, 15, 20, or more years, and in that time the problem has rooted itself extremely deeply, and is going to need a lot of counselling, for the addict, but more importantly for those in the family—the wife, the husband, the children, the grandparents, uncles and aunties, etc. These have all been sucked into the addictive whirlpool. And have been involved in the protection process of the addict.

So please, let some people know, make THAT phone call. The problem will not get better. In the case of drinking, it is progressive—that means the drinking, the abuse, the covering up for the addict, etc, gets worse and worse as time goes by. I'm sure this goes for drug-taking as well.

When I look back over my life, the last 5 years of my drinking got progressively more intense, as the cut-off point came closer.

But praise to the Lord, I am now sober. Reparation goes on every day. I am tempted to drink—don't think that I'm not. But in AA they have many sayings. "One day at a time," "easy does it". Another saying is "stinking

thinking"—here one is being tempted to go back the way he came. But praise God, Who gets all the glory, I myself will not go back down THAT road, only by His grace.

So does this article ring a bell? Do you want to rip this page out and throw it in the rubbish bin? Does it cause you to cringe, or scream out that you have this problem, or your loved one has this problem?? And you do not know where to turn??

My prayer for you

I pray that the Lord may equip you with the tools, the wisdom and calmness to deal and accept this, and step out and seek help. Like I said before, the problem will not solve itself—do it now!! The sad part is that I know families who have this problem, and you cannot go rush in there and start the proceedings to aid recovery. All you can do is to stand back, watch and pray, pray and watch that those involved will be brought to their senses and seek help. Or until the wheels fall off! The frightening thing is that this process may take five, ten, fifteen, twenty years, to surface. So you can imagine that within that time frame a lot of damage will be done, to children, to husband, to wife, etc.

People learn to cope with the problem of drink and drugs in different ways. The thought

of admitting to alcoholism and drug addiction within the family is an humiliating affair, and so they just cope with it. This is especially true with parents, who find this problem in their child very hard to accept, and find it extremely hard to call their child an "alcoholic" or a "drug addict". In my experience, parents would rather cling to their child having a "spiritual" or a mental problem, and label them as such. Here the old saying, "call a spade a spade" would be far better used. A bit harsh, I know.

Often we have seen, and been involved with, people who have a drinking problem, and the people prefer to carry on and just learn to cope with the situation every day. Eventually this type of situation WILL explode, and you have it out in the open, after a lot of deep hurt.

Do something about it

So don't let it get this far. Do something about it! If you don't know how to go about it, give us a call. We will be happy to chat with you. Even just having someone to share this terrible burden with makes all the difference—you will feel 10 tons lighter. Only through the power of God, through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 7: 15-20: *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.*

May the Lord guide you, to take these steps.

The first step: We admitted we were powerless over our drinking, and drugging, and that our lives had become unmanageable.

The second step: We came to believe that it is only God Himself who could restore us to sanity.

Hallelujah, praise God from whom ALL blessings flow. Amen.

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*Reprints of articles in Faith in Focus
can be obtained by contacting
the Editor*

World in focus

Dutch Reformed postpone convent in South Africa

August was to be the time for an unprecedented convent for all four major Dutch Reformed denominations in South Africa. The churches designed the convent to be a meeting to talk over issues of church unity and unification. All four churches expressed interest in unification, but they could not all meet the conditions for the meeting.

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) withdrew from the meeting in July. Another participant, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), refused to recognize the ministers of the URCSA. A condition proposed in 2002 for this convent was the mutual recognition of ministerial ordination. Under this recognition, any church in the four denominations could call ministers from one of the others without hindrance.

James Buys, the URCSA moderator, noted that they were not withdrawing from all unification talks. They would proceed with bilateral talks with the other three denominations, including the DRCA.

DRCA moderator, Mochubi Lebone, refused to recognize the URCSA ordination for confessional reasons. Since the URCSA has the Belhar Confession in its basis while the DRCA does not, the two churches do not agree in confessional foundations.

In a meeting in January, representatives from all four churches came. Now it appears the DRCA does not agree to the second condition for the convent.

+ Rev. J.C. Carstens, General Secretary, PO Box 4445, Pretoria 0001, South Africa

The United Free Church

The United Free Church, with 5,000 members and 67 congregations, endorsed a plan to invite ministers from a sister church in South Africa, the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), to come to Scotland to fill a growing number of vacancies. The UCCSA, which covers Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique as well as South Africa, has a surplus of ministers. (RNS)

The United Free Church of Scotland is Presbyterian and Evangelical. The denomination came into being in 1900 with the union of portions of the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church. Both of these arose from the problems caused by state interference in the life of the church and the issue of patronage.

As presently constituted it dates from 1929, when a minority of the Church refused to enter a union with the Church of Scotland on the grounds that it opposed the state recognition of any one particular denomination.

+ *The Church Herald*, 4500 60th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49512 (616) 698-7071
+ Rev. John O. Fulton, General Secretary, United Free Church of Scotland, 11 Newton Pl., Glasgow G3 7 PR Scotland

Closing an ugly chapter in Seattle church history

"We repent." Daisy Tibbs Dawson, 79, had been waiting to hear these words for much of her life. They're two simple words, which are rarely spoken with as much emotion as was evident at Seattle's Madrona Presbyterian Church, where they were uttered not only by church parishioners but by an entire church establishment.

Dawson, a lifetime Presbyterian, is one of only four surviving members of a congregation the local church administration now acknowledges was nearly snuffed out for a simple, albeit painful, reason: Its parishioners were Black. The ugly chapter in local church history dates back five decades.

In the spring of 1953, members of Grace Presbyterian Church in Seattle's Central Area were abruptly informed that their church was to be closed, the land sold. Under the guise of "integration," the local Presbytery directed Grace members to migrate to nearby Madrona, an all-white congregation.

When Grace church members arrived on their first Sunday to sing in the choir, "they were told, 'No, we don't want your Black faces in front of our church,'" recalled the Rev. Boyd Stockdale, current head of the Presbytery of Seattle.

The Grace parishioners, not willing to give up the religion most had been born into, kept coming to church anyway. Within two weeks, all the White parishioners left. "There were 55 of us," Dawson said. Madrona Church became a small, African-American congregation.
+ *Presbyterian Church (USA)*, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202-1396
+ Ron C. Judd, *Seattle Times* staff reporter, (206) 464-8280

Christians in Nepal suffer attacks, arrests

Christians belonging to a small house church in northern Nepal were attacked by Buddhist and Hindu villagers on July 26, resulting in hospitalisation for at least one church member. The mob attacked and destroyed houses and cornfields belonging to Christian villagers.

Buddhist authorities in the village had repeatedly asked the Christians to give up their faith. When the Christians refused, the Buddhists joined forces with Hindu villagers in retaliation. The church, which meets in believers' homes, had been growing rapidly, sources said.

+ *Compass Direct*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250

Eliminating Christianity in Laos

Communist Laos in South East Asia is one of the world's most severe religious liberty abusers, being one of the few nations in the world where the government has expressly declared its intent to eliminate Christianity. Reports indicate that government abuses go well beyond

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Hastings; Phone 06 878 6696;
email principal@hcs.school.nz

systematic intimidation, deprivation, harassment and persecution of Christians. The Lao government is also engaged in the systematic killing of Hmong civilians, militarily, by means of chemical weapons and forced starvation.

+ *Religious Liberty Commission, PO Box 1839, Edmonds, WA 98020*

Ten Commandments visit Washington

Hundreds of Christians chanted, sang, and prayed for the Ten Commandments on Monday, bringing their eight-day, five-state campaign to Washington, District of Columbia, where they called on lawmakers to pay homage to the role of religion in the United States.

The morning rally brought together some of the leading figures in the fight to preserve public displays of the Ten Commandments, such as the 2.5-ton monument in a Montgomery, Alabama, courthouse, installed by state Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy S. Moore, who was suspended for refusing to remove the monument in August.

"We are not here for a political issue, we are here for the very future and survival of our nation," said the Rev. Patrick J. Mahoney, director of the Christian Defense Coalition in a report published by Crosswalk. A Reformed Presbyterian minister, Mahoney continued, "In Montgomery, a fire was lit, and we are taking it to the nation. The church of Jesus Christ is arising."

Mahoney, who led similar rallies at the courthouse in Montgomery, was joined by Christian Coalition of Alabama Chairman John W. Giles, Concerned Women for America President Sandy Rios, Rev. Rob Schenck, president of the National Clergy Council, and Reformed Presbyterian Stated Clerk, Dr. W. A. Church, and more than 500 others.

+ *Rev. Mr. Pat Mahoney, 4019 Duke of Gloucester St., Fredericksburg, VA22407*

A brief history of World Witness

'A Brief History Of World Witness' by Emily van Dalen is an informative, inspiring 36-page account. This book is available from World Witness

and the cost including shipping and handling is US\$4 per copy or ten copies for US\$25. World Witness is the foreign mission agency of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

+ *World Witness, One Cleveland St., Greenville, SC 29601*

Russian Chapel razed after homosexual 'marriage'

The Russian Orthodox Church has demolished a chapel where a priest conducted a "marriage" ceremony between two men. The Chapel of the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God was torn down, apparently after local churchmen decided it had been defiled.

The "marriage" of Denis Gogolyev and Mikhail Morozev in Nizhny Novgorod scandalised the Orthodox Church and created outrage among ordinary Russians.

The priest, Rev. Vladimir Enert, was defrocked after the men said they paid him a US\$450 bribe to ignore a ban of same-sex "marriages."

+ *David Virtue, Virtuosity Digest, 1236 Waterford Rd., West Chester, PA19380*

A new work on New Testament history

The Protestant Reformed Sunday School Teachers' Association has just published a complete explanation of the history of the New Testament in three hardcover volumes. The set is titled "Upon This Rock." Volume one treats "Jesus Christ: His Earthly Ministry," volume two, "Jesus Christ: His Acts Through the Apostles."

The author is a long-time writer of the "Our Guide" Sabbath School materials, Don Doezema. The three volumes publish in book form articles Mr. Doezema wrote years ago for parents to use in teaching older children.

The books arrange the history of the New Testament in chronological order and relate the history in simple, lively, engaging fashion. The books explain the history, bringing out the doctrinal and practical meaning of the historical events.

Doezema does not avoid the difficulties. Where there are legitimate differences of opinion, he gives both possibilities and leaves the issue an open question (although often stating his own judgment on the matter).

Each volume contains a complete textual index with passages on which chapters are based in bold print. There is also an index of subjects.

The price of the three volumes is US\$30 (US\$10 per volume) plus shipping.

+ *The Standard Bearer, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418*

Detained house church leaders located

The Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), 10 October, has learned from a reliable source that two men, Xiao Bi-guang and Zhang Yi-nan "are currently incarcerated at the Detention Center of Lushan County in Henan Province." Zhang's wife, Ding Guizhen, who was arrested two days after her husband, is also being held at the facility. All three have been active in the House Church Movement.

Local officials were not permitted to question the prisoners. The case is being directed from the provincial Public Security Bureau (PSB) headquarters and the Bureau of State Security, the Chinese equivalent of the CIA.

VOM urged Christians to send letters or call the Chinese authorities to protest the detentions. Human rights workers stress these are not isolated cases, in a country where thousands of Christians are believed to be in prisons and labour camps because of their faith.

+ *ASSIST News Service (ANS), PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842-2126 danjuma1@aol.com*
+ *Voice of the Martyrs, PO Box 443, Bartlesville, OK 74005 (918) 337-8015 thevoice@vom-usa.org*

New Sabbath School Curriculum on CD

The Reformed Church in the US has determined that the denomination needs its own Sabbath School material. Elder Harvey De Groot and

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National Youth Camp 2004

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Rev. Howard E. Hart were hired by the Synod of the RCUS to accomplish that task.

Elder De Groot has been involved in Christian education as a teacher, principal, and administrator. Pastor Hart has served and taught in many Reformed churches over the last 42 years.

Synod chose a book entitled *"Promise and Deliverance"* by S.G. De Graaf. The materials produced by De Groot and Hart are workbooks that are to be companion materials to that book. The materials are in an understandable format for children from first to eighth grade.

In order to use these workbooks, each Sabbath School teacher should have copies of De Graaf's four volumes. They are to be used as the teacher's guide in telling the Bible stories.

The student workbooks are not intended to be exhaustive—though they are full. The textbook is no substitute for effective instruction by a competent and church-trained teacher. The writers do not intend that all their material will be covered in a single lesson. The first year of lessons will be available on CD for about US\$50.

+ *Reformed Herald*, 6121 Pine Vista Way, Elk Grove, CA 95758

Religious violence emerges again in Indonesia

Violence against Christians has once again erupted in the region of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, in which nine villagers have been killed, according to Jubilee Campaign USA.

Starting in 1998, conflict erupted between Muslims and Christians devastating entire villages, destroying scores of churches, and killing hundreds. On 11 October 2003, four predominantly Christian villages near Poso City in Central Sulawesi were attacked. They came under fire from machine guns and bombs. Nine villagers died, including a

pregnant woman and a six-year-old girl.

While many gathered in Bali to remember the victims of the 12 October 2002 Bali bombing, the Christian residents of Central Sulawesi were facing a fresh wave of terror by militant Islamists.

The killing and rampaging began in the village of Beteleme just after midnight on Friday 10 October, with a cry of 'Allahuakbar' and a burst of machine-gun fire from attackers wearing masks and ninja-like attire.

They left two Christians dead and others wounded. One of those killed, Mrs Weridina Mbae (55) was a Sunday school teacher at the local Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah (GKST) Church, where Mr L Kamalo (46), one of the more seriously wounded, is an elder. He was shot in the leg and the arm, which was so badly shattered it had to be amputated. Some 200 residents are homeless due to the torching of 38 houses as well as a church. In this mixed village, all Muslim lives and homes were spared, except for four Muslim ones mistakenly burnt. (The militants apologised for accidentally burning these 'wrong' houses.)

In 2001, with the signature of the Malino Peace Accord by leaders of both sides, life was expected to return to normal. However, the peace accord has yet to be fully implemented. Sporadic violations of the Accord have occurred and are escalating at an alarming rate.

Jubilee Campaign USA was founded more than ten years ago by Ann Buwalda and lobbies Congress on behalf of those suffering religious persecution and human rights violations.

+ *The Jubilee Campaign USA*, 9689-C Main St., Fairfax, VA 22031
jubilee@jubileecampaign.org (703) 503-0791

+ *Michael Ireland*, ASSIST News Service, PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842-2126

+ *Compass Direct*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Wally and Jeannette Hagoort from Hukanui Reformed Church are making final preparations for a huge move. In the New Year, while we're enjoying our holidays, they'll be moving to Papua New Guinea to take up missionary work on behalf of our churches. I asked them to describe the changes they're experiencing, and to give us a peek at what's ahead for them. Here's their report...

Moving into Missions

A year is a long time!

If someone asked us just over a year ago what our future plans were, we would have told them that I would continue working as a dairy farmer and my wife Jeannette would continue to manage an early childhood centre. We would save for retirement, watch our three sons marry and have children, and a trip to the Netherlands would be very nice too. Of course we would still be actively involved in the life and ministry of the Reformed Church of Hukanui.

As I said, a year is a long time, and our lives, our focus and our future have completely changed! We are now making final preparations to leave New Zealand on the 15 January, and to go to Papua New Guinea

to serve as missionaries, for an indefinite length of time, on behalf of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

May I introduce ourselves to you, and share with you how the Lord has led us to this position, and what is ahead of us?

I am Wally Hagoort a, 47-year-old ex-dairy farmer. I am married to Jeannette, who is a 45-year-old manager of an early childhood centre at the New Zealand Missionary Training College. We have 3 sons: Damian 21, Justin 20, and Logan 18. I grew up in the Reformed Church of Hamilton, whereas Jeannette came from a non-Christian background. Since our marriage, we have both been active in the church, first at

Aberdeen (Hamilton), and then at Hukanui since it started as a preaching post.

So, what led us to this decision, to change our plans and go to serve in PNG?

The journey started in September last year. I read an article in the September *Faith in Focus*, about the family t'Hart and their work in PNG. At the same time I read more about PNG and the needs there, from the OMB reports that I had received as a session member (deacon). As I thought about both the spiritual and physical needs of my fellow Christians in PNG, I began to consider the possibility that maybe Jeannette and I could go and help.

When I first raised the idea of going to PNG to Jeannette, I was certainly given plenty of reasons why there was "no way" we could go! Jeannette said, "Our sons still need us! It is too dangerous! We have to provide meals for my mother! It is too dangerous! What



about our roles in the church? It's too dangerous! We are needed in our jobs, we are both serving in a Christian places! Oh, and did I mention: it's too dangerous!"

As a result we decided that we would not talk about the subject for a couple of weeks, but we would pray about it, and let ask God guide us.

During that time of seeking the Lord's will for our lives, it was amazing how the songs, Scripture readings, sermons and other people's advice all worked together. They left us with no doubt that God was calling us to go out into His harvest field. Since that time we have seen God deal with all of our objections, open doors, and make us willing and able to obey His call to serve Him.

So, what have we been doing to prepare ourselves to serve in PNG?

We have been blessed with the opportunity to study part-time at the NZ Missionary Training College since the beginning of the year, and I have gone full-time since June, when I finished farming. The college is run by missionaries, for missionaries, and is a New Zealand Qualifications Authority College. It has certainly given us a better understanding about what to expect and how to work with people from other cultures.

By the time you read this article, we should be finishing off our work and studies (5 December). Until we leave we will be busy with last-minute preparations, saying goodbyes and enjoying time with our sons.

When we arrive in Port Moresby, the capital city, we will first learn how to manage the Missionary Guest Home at Mapang. Then, Lord willing, we fly north to Madang

on February 11, for a three-month course which will provide us with cultural orientation, language basics, and more¹. Included in the course is a 2-month village stay, where apparently they do not speak English, and there are no modern facilities!

On our return to Port Moresby at the end of May, we will take charge of the Mapang Missionary Home, and then we will begin to work with and for the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea.

We both would like to express our gratitude to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, for supporting us and we ask you to continue to pray for us, our fellow

missionaries, and our brothers and sisters in Papua New Guinea.

Of bombs and babies

A few weeks ago, I was at the FEBC station in Bali, Indonesia. But rather than contemplating palm trees or Hindu religious festivals, I was thinking about bombs. Or, to be more accurate, the passion of Muslim extremists who think that bombs will bring them to paradise.

In Jakarta during my first workshop, a bomb exploded at the J.W. Marriott hotel. In Makassar during my second workshop, we went to a mall where a bomb had killed 3 people in a McDonald's restaurant just 8 months earlier. Here in Bali, we drove past Ground Zero the other night, and I thought about the carnage caused by terror and misplaced zeal.

All these bombs...all this hurt. Why do they do it? I'm no psychologist, so it's not for me to say. But generally, we're told that Muslim fundamentalists believe they'll go straight to Paradise if they die in a *jihad*—a "holy war." We're also told they hate the West—oftentimes with justification.

The reasons for these bombs are many, I suppose. But one thing these extremists have in common is this: passion. Strong emotion.

I know the passion of terrorists is misplaced—we all know it. Nonetheless I felt very sorry for the man who died trying to wreak vengeance on guests at the Marriott. Now he knows his passion was false, and for eternity to come he will regret his crime.

As I thought about the passion that led to such error, I also reflected on the passions



that are part of the Christian life.

First, think about our own passion for God. It's often swallowed up in the mundane rituals of our daily lives: lunch for the kids, getting to work on time, and so on. Time and again we need what one singer calls a "personal revolution."² Those times when our spiritual passion is weak seem inevitable, but God watches us during those times, and calls us back to our first love (Rev 2:4,5). And even more, He graciously gives us the strength to fulfil that calling (1 John 5:4,5).

But passion for the True and Living God doesn't express itself in bombs hurled at His enemies. It's communicated in exactly the opposite way—a love that reaches out (John 20:21). A love that takes its cue from God Himself—the ultimate Passionate One. The ultimate One Who Reached Out.

God's strong emotion sent Him right out of heaven and onto this sad earth as a helpless baby. The comparison between the position Jesus enjoyed at the right hand of His Father, and the humility and indignity He suffered here on earth, is beyond description. Yet He did it. He came all this way for the love of you and me. That certainly was a strong emotion of cosmic proportions.

As we enter this season when many of us remember the birth of Christ, think about that strong love—the love for us, which led God the Father to loose His hold on His beloved Son. And the strong emotion which led God the Son to obey, and to give up so much. No bomb for Him. Just a helpless baby. Which is more powerful? We know.

God willing, many Muslims will know it too. Pray for workers to brave that scary harvest-field and reach out to people who live in the darkness of hatred. Pray that many will turn from bombs to embrace the Baby Who alone can bring them to Paradise.

MIF prayer notes

The Overseas Mission Board asks us to pray for Rev. **Hans Vaatstra** as he prepares to go on a short-term missions trip to Papua New Guinea in March 2004, to assist Rev Stephen 't Hart. Pray also for the Reformed Churches in Myanmar, and for ongoing fruit of the visit of Rev. **Bruce Hoyt** and Rev. **John Haverland** last month. Pray for wisdom for OMB members as they look into ways of helping Reformed believers in this socialist country.

Wally and Jeanette Hagoort need our daily prayers as they face the huge changes of moving to the violent, dirty mission-field of Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea. Pray that their visas would come through (they had not at time of writing mid-October.) Pray that their personal belongings would be shipped safely

and no bribes expected by customs officials in PNG! Pray especially for good health and strength, and that they may adapt quickly to the culture. Pray also for endurance (and even delight) in what promises to be a strenuous missionary orientation course. Pray for their sons, back here in New Zealand, and for Jeannette's mother, who is not in good health.

Stephen and Dorinda 't Hart would appreciate our prayers for a restful time with family in Australia, where they plan to spend six weeks over Christmas. Pray for restored strength for the whole family, and joyful anticipation of a return to the mission-field

to resume their work in January. Pray for strength to continue ministering to many spiritually-hungry people.

Janice Reid is busy with developing workshops and activities for *Radio Training Services*. She is grateful for your prayers, and asks special prayer that she could finish the drafts of the first set of manuals in good time. Please also pray for her family, in particular her mother, who will miss Janice over the Christmas season.

¹ The Pacific Orientation Course, run by Summer Institute of Linguistics (Wycliffe).

² Charlie Peacock, from a song titled "Personal Revolution."

Troubled by tribulation

Evaluating the 'Left Behind' series¹

Peter & Erica Holtvlüwer

I've just finished reading the first volume of Tim LaHaye's and Jerry Jenkins' *Left Behind* series. Should I keep on reading? It seems very biblical and yet at the same time troubling—what should I make of this scary description of the end times?

Erica: Undeniably, the *Left Behind* series begins with a gripping tale that draws the reader in very quickly. And why not? Many of us wonder about the timing and manner of Christ's return and LaHaye² provides all the answers. What concerns me is that LaHaye's answers are too easy, giving the impression

that we now have an accurate blueprint for the end times. Easy answers to complex issues always make me nervous. *Left Behind* is described as fiction but the reader begins to fully expect the name of Nicolae Carpathia (the Antichrist) to appear in the daily newspaper the next morning!

Peter: LaHaye's easy answers come from the strict way he interprets Scripture, especially prophecy. His '*Golden Rule of Interpretation*' guides him: "*When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, but take every word at its primary, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.*"³ LaHaye's key emphasis is on

LEFT BEHIND

A brief plot summary

Captain Rayford Steele's day takes a bizarre turn when several passengers disappear off his plane in mid-flight. When he radios ahead, the Captain learns that these disappearances are happening all over the world. Millions have suddenly vanished. What on earth has happened?

When Steele finds out that his devotedly Christian wife is among the missing, he starts putting the pieces together and heads to church to find more answers. When he gets there he discovers only one member of the staff is left—Bruce Barnes, the assistant pastor—and he's busy watching a video recorded by the church's leading pastor. On the video the pastor explains that the disappearances are part of something called the Rapture, in which Christ takes all the believers with him to heaven, with the unsaved "left behind."

Barnes, Steele and his daughter, and a reporter named Buck Williams, band together to learn more about Jesus Christ. This small band of new believers soon has to confront the coming Tribulation. Their further adventures lead them into direct conflict with an Anti-Christ figure, Nicolae Carpathia, who plans to use the UN to establish one world government.

the “literal meaning,” while he allows only rare exceptions for some symbolism. The exceptions come at his discretion, when “common sense” dictates. LaHaye pays no attention to *types* or *genres* of writing such as poetry (e.g. Psalms), narrative (e.g. 1 Samuel), prophecy (Isaiah), wisdom literature (e.g. Ecclesiastes), apocalypse (e.g. Revelation) and others. Imagine trying to interpret Ecclesiastes *literally*, in the same way you would interpret 1 Samuel—we’d all be hopeless pessimists (literally!).

But LaHaye is too busy with end-times prophecy to notice the trouble with his principle of interpretation.

By understanding apocalyptic visions in literal terms instead of symbolic (though still very real) terms, he arrives at a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth preceded by a seven-year period prior called the Tribulation. He also concludes that during this Tribulation the physical nation of Israel will largely be converted to Christ, and that identifiable individuals known as the Man of Lawlessness and the Antichrist will dominate.

Erica: Actually, it’s LaHaye’s dogged concentration on the Tribulation that I find so affronting. All the books in this series deal with this so-called seven-year period of Tribulation, even though the *church* is not in it! He never says much about what is going on with the church that was raptured up to heaven—that would have at least been pleasant reading! LaHaye seems fixated on the time of great trouble on the earth. He describes the horrifying events of the Tribulation with such arresting detail that it gives me the chills and leaves me feeling uneasy about the future.

Peter: That’s part of LaHaye’s intention. LaHaye is a “Pre-Tribber,” which means he believes in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.⁴ Despite the fact that the church from ancient times has confessed only *one* return of Christ,⁵ LaHaye thinks that Christ will return to the earth twice: once to take up all believers, past and present, unto Himself on the clouds (i.e. the Rapture) and take them back to heaven. This begins the seven-year Tribulation for those “left-behind,” all of whom are unbelievers. At the end of this seven years, Christ will return a second time to initiate the 1000-year reign in Jerusalem. He believes this Tribulation is so frightening that anyone who learns of it will not want to live through it. That is, it should basically scare people into believing in Christ now, today. In the *Left Behind* series, God’s grace and mercy are very much overshadowed by

God’s wrath—a rather unbiblical balance.

Erica: Scare tactics seem to be one of LaHaye’s main tools, even *within* the Tribulation itself. For example, one by one, central characters like Rayford Steele “receive” Christ.⁶ Bruce Barnes, the spiritual leader of what eventually becomes the quartet of individuals known as “the Tribulation Force,”⁷ says to Steele in one of their first meetings, “I’m not going to push you into something you’re not ready for, but...don’t put it off. What would be worse



than finally finding God and then dying without him because you waited too long?”⁸ LaHaye and Jenkins have expertly captured the dramatic tension in this passage and that makes for a compelling story. But it sent a shiver down my spine for quite another reason. Where is the doctrine of God’s sovereignty here, the comfort of His electing power? There is a notion of a spiritual transaction that has to take place between God and man, and this transaction better be completed soon...or else!! And the impetus for this transaction seems to rest solely with mankind.

Peter: The future sure would be scary if it depended on our decision to choose for Christ. But, sadly, that is the working assumption of LaHaye, which makes him a true Arminian. God’s sovereign control and eternal plan of election for this world and His people are essentially denied by LaHaye in calling it God’s experiment: “The Tribulation is a fitting consummation of the grand experiment of the ages from Adam to the second coming, giving individuals an opportunity to worship God voluntarily.”⁹

There is also an internal contradiction in LaHaye. Thought of the Tribulation is supposed to be a motivator for conversion, but **this same theology holds that those left behind after the Rapture will have a second chance to convert!** The Tribulation may not be pleasant to live through, but what real “pressure” is there for either the church to evangelise or unbelievers to convert *now*

when everyone knows that once the Rapture has taken place, there is still seven years to change your mind? Besides, the Bible never speaks about a “second chance” either after death, or after the Lord returns.

Erica: There are other examples of false teachings in this series, namely the salvation of all infants. After the Rapture, there are no children left on the earth. Speaking on videotape to those left behind, fictional “raptured” pastor Vern Billings says, “Up to a certain age, which is probably different for each individual, we believe God will not hold a child accountable for a decision that must be made with heart and mind, fully cognisant of the ramifications.”¹⁰ Where in all of the passages in Scripture concerning Christ’s Second coming does it speak of the wholesale salvation of children?

Peter: That’s a good point. This ties in with LaHaye’s Arminian underpinnings, for clearly he has no concept of total depravity. The fact is, all people are conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51:5), are children of wrath (Eph 2:3) and therefore subject to death and condemnation (Romans 5:12). It’s only true believers, brought to faith by the Lord, who receive His covenant promises of forgiveness of sins, adoption as sons, and cleansing from sinfulness. God, out of mere grace, extends these promises to children of believers in His covenant of love (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 7:14), but nowhere does He extend the same to the children of unbelievers. For a literalist like LaHaye, this is a major flaw. His theology here clearly rests on his emotions and not on God’s Word.

Erica: And yet the books continue to sell and the authors keep on churning out sequels. I suppose a lot can happen in seven years, so we shouldn’t be surprised by the endlessness of these “end times!” Nevertheless, from a purely literary point of view, the series already begins to lose dramatic steam in Book Two. The vivid descriptions of unheard-of events and the driving sense of urgency found in Book One, begin to fizzle out early in Book Two. Nicolae Carpathia’s ever-growing capacity to devilishly hypnotise the world becomes tiring and, quite frankly, more than a little unbelievable. Even the heroic Tribulation Force in their struggle against the Antichrist falls victim to flatness and predictability of character. They display only unwavering faith and commitment in the face of mounting evil and oppression—when they’ve only been Christians for all of two weeks by the beginning of Book Two!! At this rate, it’s going to be a painfully long series.

Peter: There’s a quick way to ease your pain—take a pass on the rest of the series! It’s just not worth it. Between LaHaye’s insidious Arminianism, unabashed literalism, and unapologetic pre-tribulationism, there’s not much to be said in favor of continuing.

Add to that a plotline that is solely driven by sensationalism coupled with weak characters, and there is every reason to leave behind the *Left Behind* series.

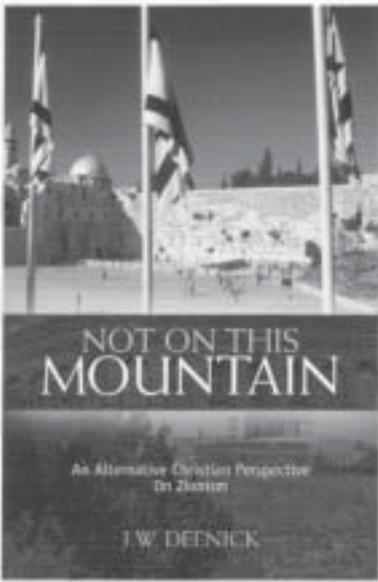
As pastor and pastor's wife, Peter & Erica Holtvlüwer live in Aldergrove, BC, serving in the Canadian Reformed Church there. This article originally appeared in The Reformed Perspective, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995). This is a fictional novel depicting events near the end of time. After the success of this first volume, the authors have gone on to publish numerous sequels now known collectively as the *Left Behind* series. Volume Eleven has recently been issued.
- ² Tim LaHaye is the main author and theological brains behind the *Left Behind* series.
- ³ Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvester House Publishers, 2002) p.238. In this book, LaHaye specifically sets out to provide an explanation and defense of the theology that lies behind his popular fiction series, *Left Behind*.
- ⁴ Pre-Tribulationism is a sub-set of Pre-Millennialism, which is the basic belief assumed throughout the *Left Behind* series. For more on Pre-Millennialism in comparison with Post- and A-Millennialism, see P.H. Holtvlüwer, "Millennialism Explained," *Reformed Perspective*, Volume 22, No.4, February, 2003: p.28-29.

- ⁵ All three ecumenical creeds – the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian – speak simply and only of Christ coming again from His Father's right hand to judge the living and the dead. There's no coming, going, then returning for good. There's no hint of a double-return or, as LaHaye calls it, a "two-stage" return.
- ⁶ *Left Behind*, p.146.

- ⁷ Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Tribulation Force: The Continuing Drama of Those Left Behind* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1996). This is the second volume in the series.
- ⁸ *Left Behind*, p.148.
- ⁹ *The Rapture: Who Will Face the Tribulation?* p.66.
- ¹⁰ *Left Behind*, p.153.



An Alternative Christian Perspective on Zionism

For centuries, Jewish people extended to each other the hope that 'next year' they might meet at Jerusalem. For more than one third of the world's Jews this hope has become reality; but how happy are they seeing each other at Mt Zion? Is any other nation as catastrophically divided as the Jewish people are?

Christian opinion is uncertain about the place of Israel in God's plan for world redemption. Judaism has no such doubts. The world still depends on Jewish orthodoxy to guide it to reconciliation with the Almighty.

As a 'Righteous Gentile,' the Australian author examines Christianity's doubts and Judaism's claims regarding the Jews as God's people. He also wonders about the future of Israel as an ethnically qualified nation.

He sees no hope for Israel in the Middle East unless the Jews surrender their Zionist ambitions and enter the new world of the twenty-first century.

Author: J. W. Deenick
ISBN: 1-57921-627-7

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

We congratulate Mr Steven & Mrs Stephanie van Garderen with the birth of a baby, Joshua Michael, brother for Ashley.

Bishopdale

This morning we have the privilege of seeing the profession of faith of Marcel and Alice Vlaanderen and the baptism of their daughters Eva and Nina. This is a joyful day for them, for their families and for us as a church. If you are here today for this occasion we are glad you have come. This ties in with a Family and Friends Service and we welcome all who are visiting today. If you have any

questions about the Christian faith or the church please don't hesitate to speak to me or to any member of the church.

I preached my first sermon in the church in Dunedin in 1979 and since then have kept a careful record of what I have preached and where. This afternoon I'll be preaching for the 2000th time! That's a milestone – and a lot of sermons! As I look back over the years of ministry I'm very thankful that the Lord has called me to this work of being a pastor and a preacher. There is nothing I would rather do and it is my prayer that the Lord will use me to be useful to you. Harriet and I are grateful that we have been able to spend almost 13 years here in Bishopdale together with our children and for the way all of us in the church have been able to encourage each other in serving our God.

This morning again we have the privilege of witnessing the baptism of another covenant child, Conner Vanderpyl. We are thankful for the way the Lord passes on salvation from one generation to the next and we pray that He will give Mark and Mandy grace and

wisdom as parents. In the sermon we'll consider how the Lord is at work building the Christian home.

Bucklands Beach

This morning we extend a warm welcome to Dr Murray Capill who will lead us in worship. He is in Christchurch visiting his family. Dr Capill served his vicariate in the Reformed Churches of Christchurch and Bishopdale in 1990, was the pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach from 1991-2001, and is now the Pastor of the South Barwon Reformed Church in Geelong, Australia and the lecturer of Practical Theology at the Reformed Theological College. We are glad to have you with us today.

Many of us are still buzzing over the Holiday Club. The weather sometimes tried us, but proved utterly ineffective in dampening or blowing out the glorious work that was going on. God is faithful and surely answered our prayers. Pray that the seed sown, the truths that were described in story, song and by example, may, on God's terms and for God's glory, bear fruit that will remain.

Christchurch

We remember. A notice we received this week informed us of the death of John Hoogerbrugge, a former member for many years of our church and much appreciated for his faithfulness in helping where needed. He went back to Holland 12 years ago as he still had 5 brothers. He was 82 years old. The death notice has the heading "I Know that My Redeemer Lives."

Dovedale

Kate Willemse is doing very well and Angie is much better now. Antony is very much the proud father, and why shouldn't he be? The date for Kate's baptism as been scheduled for 19th October.

Dunedin

Today we witness the sign and seal of the covenant of grace in the baptism of Adriana Jean Miller.

Marriage Banns. Geert Tepper and Jessie-May Park have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. They want to begin their life together in the name of the Lord and in the presence of His people, and to continue it to His glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at the Reformed Church in Oamaru on Saturday 11 October at 1:00 pm.

Oamaru News. Following discussion at our Annual General Meeting, preparations have been made to introduce a food bank service at our church. We will have provision by way of a blue bin situated inside the entrance of the church, for people to donate non-perishable items each week. These will be passed on to the Salvation Army for use in their food bank. With 15 members in our church, we have calculated that if each member donates two items per week, the bin should be full each fortnight. Please support this effort to show the love of God to the needy in our community in a practical way.

Hamilton

Warm congratulations to Arie and Jeanne Boer who celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary yesterday.

Masterton

Our pastor and brother Leo Hendrikse will be traveling to Geelong, Vic. in Australia this Wednesday and returning on Saturday. They will be attending a two-day workshop on preaching being held at the R.T.C. Please pray for safe travel and a blessing from the workshop.

Nelson

As you're aware, Session has asked the Rev. Dick and Mrs Mary Wynja from the U.S.A. to fill-in for Jetje and I during my long-service

leave. Just to give you some insight into Rev Wynja's ministerial life, he graduated with the M. Div. degree, from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) and was ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Our N.Z. churches have had happy dealings with this denomination in the past, in the case of the late Rev. Ray Zorn and others. Rev. Wynja ministered for many years to a congregation in Thornton, Colorado. After retiring, he has recently served in an interim capacity in the North Shore (RCNZ) congregation during Rev. John Roger's long service leave, where he was very well received.

North Shore

We praise the Lord with John and Marielle Posthuma and their family on the healthy birth of Isaac Johannes. Isaac was born this past Wednesday morning, and weighed 9lb 10 oz. Both mother and baby are doing well. What a blessing to receive so many children from the Lord. May He grant John and Marielle all that they need to raise their family in His ways.

25th Anniversary of our First Service: On Reformation Day, 31st October, twenty-five years ago, the first service of what, a few months later, became the Reformed Church

of the North Shore, was held in the Sunnynook Community Hall, conducted by the Rev Arthur Palmer. Since so many others are celebrating their 50ths at present, we'll keep our celebrations humble! We'll have a Church luncheon on Sunday, 2nd November, after the morning Service.

Silverstream

The Lord has been gracious to Richard and Nicola Wharekawa in the quick and safe birth of Jethro Parakura. He weighs 8 pounds 4 ounces. Jethro was born on Sunday 21 September. Nicola and baby are "home" at 71 Fraser Cres, and if you would like to visit please come between 1-3.30pm or telephone first.

Wainuiomata

For All Music Lovers! Tonight at 7.30 pm you are invited to Sjirk & Hermina's place to join us to listen to Handel's Messiah on DVD which is just over 2 hours long.

Wellington

In this mornings service Martha Elisabeth Meister will receive the sacrament of Baptism. We rejoice with the Meister family here and Miriam's family in Denmark, at the arrival of their first grandchild. May the Lord grant His choicest blessings on this little one.

Jubilee Festivities at Bucklands Beach

Bucklands Beach hosted its Jubilee festivities over the weekend of 13 and 14 September 2003. And what a festive occasion it turned out to be!

The weekend literally kicked off with a

very enthusiastically-supported afternoon of fun and games in the Pakuranga College gymnasium. Old and young combined to give this event a true family-fun flavour. We teamed up and competed in all kinds



Some of the early families of the Bucklands Beach Church

of ways, like blowing table tennis balls across the width of the gym floor—on all fours.

In typical World Cup tradition the younger ones showed us how to be colourful team supporters with painted faces galore. It was good to have just about all the young people from our congregation taking part in this fun-filled event.

The Saturday-evening dinner party was a superb treat, prepared by Ann Hunt's Team from Avondale. These brothers and sisters are superb caterers and know how to give that special effect to an evening meal such as our Jubilee one. We were also entertained to some excellent music, humour and a video on the 'Fifty Years of Grace' that marked the history of our congregation.

Sunday was set aside for the Worship Service, led by our previous minister, the Rev Murray Capill, who came all the way from Geelong to spend the weekend with us. He shared great truths from Psalm 92 with a fully-packed auditorium, following which we had a shared lunch and a great time of fellowship with the many visitors who came from as far away as Palmerston North to be with us.

We look back on a wonderful and blessed weekend, which again reminded us of the faithfulness and unending love of the Lord for His church, without which our fragile little body of believers would not have lasted half a century. Our prayer is that He will continue to carry us through the good and the not-so-good times of church life. To God be the glory.

Jim van Rensburg



Jubilee Festivities at Bucklands Beach

*Top Right
The Bucklands Beach Choir*

*Middle
The Sunday School Choir*

*Bottom Left
The congregation at the thanksgiving service*

Focus on home *continued*

RTC Preachers' Conference

Excellent.
Very helpful!
Exceeded expectations in all areas.
Very stimulating. Informative. Good stuff!

The workshop gave great opportunity for focussed reflection in a way that is simply not possible in the context of the day to day work of ministry in a church.

It has highlighted the invaluable work of the RTC, the gifts of the lecturers, and the necessity to hold in prayer the work done there. What an encouragement for the many preachers of God's Word!

These were just some of the comments received from the more than ninety participants at the 2003 RTC Biblical Preaching Workshop. The theme for the conference was "Preaching Christ from Old Testament Stories." The specific challenge was to demonstrate how the Gospel can be preached from the book of Judges.

The conference spanned Thursday and Friday, 2-3 October. Not only was the attendance up from last year, the range of participants was also most encouraging. They came from most Australian states. Several even crossed the Tasman from New Zealand. The number of denominations represented was also impressive. While the majority in attendance were Reformed and Presbyterian, there was also a smattering of Anglicans, Baptists, Church of Christ, Pentecostals, Uniting, and Seventh Day Adventists. All came with a common love for the Word and a shared desire to have it preached effectively.

Old Testament lecturer, Alastair McEwen, introduced the major themes of Judges. The failure of the church, the faithfulness of God and the promotion of a king recur time and again and in a variety of ways. With each judge the story goes through the cycle of disobedience, discipline, distress, and deliverance. This dreary repetition of the cycle is highlighted by the refrain, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (17:6; 21:25; cf. 18:1; 19:1).



Murray Capill

Israel's lack of a king ultimately points us to Jesus Christ, as the perfect mediatorial king.

Dr Allan Harman, retired Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne, addressed the gathering on the Thursday afternoon. He spelled out some of the major principles

that need to be observed in preaching Christ from OT narrative. He reminded his hearers that OT revelation is progressive, prospective, and preparatory. These narratives are an integral part of the history of the people of God and hence part of *our* history.

Book launch

Allan Harman also had the pleasant task of launching Murray Capill's book. He warmly commended *Preaching with Spiritual Vigour* for its emphasis on passion and appealing to the affections. The hearers obviously took the exhortation to heart. The fifty copies of the book obtained for the occasion almost totally disappeared! Released by Christian Focus Publications earlier this year, *Preaching with Spiritual Vigour* is now readily available in Australia. It retails for less than \$20.00.

By Thursday evening the conference was ready to move from theory to practice. To an audience now well tuned to the ways of the judges, Murray Capill preached a moving message on Jephthah from Judges 10-12. From one of the most difficult passages in the book came a Christocentric sermon with pointed and powerful application. The next morning Alastair McEwen did the same from chapters 17-21. With insight and passion he successfully navigated us through all five chapters!

Closing the conference was Murray's double session that came with the tongue-twisting title, "Shaping a Sharp Sermon from Judges." He reminded his listeners that preaching from Judges is hard work. Yet God obviously knew what he was doing when he put so much biblical revelation in narrative form. There is universal appeal to a good story. It has a way of putting flesh on abstract concepts. Most significantly, narrative is not so much a device as a statement about the nature of reality. In short, God acts in history.

Future topics

Before they left, participants were also asked to leave their suggestions for

Calling all country boys and girls to become

NETWORKERS



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!

NETWORKERS is for children aged 9-15 years old, and you would be a correspondence member with the closest club, able to attend camps and any club functions that you could make.

Your counsellor and cadre would be your correspondent friends and leader.

INTERESTED?

Then write to me -
**Cr Rob Wierenga, 35 Humber Street
Island Bay, Wellington**

topics for future preaching workshops. Their recommendations should supply enough themes for the next five years! Evangelistic preaching, New Testament biblical theology, preaching from Apocalyptic (especially Daniel and Revelation), Isaiah, Lamentations and the (imprecatory) Psalms, addressing a post-modern audience, preaching the whole counsel of God

and prophetic preaching were just some of the suggestions! Clearly the RTC faculty has its work cut out for future conferences.

All in all the 2003 Preaching Workshop was a time of rich blessing from the Lord. Prayers were answered beyond expectation. Lord willing, this is a tradition we can continue. The next conference is already being planned for the

same place and the same time in 2004.

Steve Voorwinde
(Conference Chairman,
RTC Lecturer in New Testament)

(CD's of all the proceedings are available from the RTC at a cost of \$25.00. For details see advertisement.)

From the D.A.'s Office ...

50 Years — Reformed Church of Palmerston North

This month, on 15 December, the Reformed Church of Palmerston North celebrates 50 years of the Lord's blessing. Over recent months snippets of the church's history have been appearing in their local bulletin. Here are a few extracts from those bulletins, which you may find interesting:

50 years ago, a document was signed, called 'The Protocol,' by 18 persons starting the Reformed church of Palmerston North. Two of those are still members of the church today. They shifted away for a few years but came back to live here again—Jan & Miep Vroegh. The official start had 15 communicant members and 3 baptised members.

Three years later these numbers were 26 communicant and 25 baptised members, all living in the wider Manawatu area, with quite a few in Foxton.

Like everyone else, the Church needs accommodation, and so did the people of the newly-instituted church in Palmerston North.

They rented a room in a building belonging to the National Party in Rangitikei Street, which was standing on the spot where we now find the tall construction of the State Insurance building. Later, when the National Party changed its venue to a building in Cuba Street, the whole church went along with them. (True blue ??)

Two more changes of venue took place—the 'Orange Hall' and finally the Jaycee House—till the day was there (after 11 years) to be able to construct our own church building. (203 Grey St).

On 2 October 1964, a dedication service was held in the new building. Rev. L. Zwaan, (our pastor at that time) preached on Revelation 21:22: "I saw no temple in the

city, for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb."

During this service the Bible was brought into the church and so were the 'tools' for the administration of the sacraments.

Taking part in this were elders Jan Vroegh (still a member here); Harry Van Echten (now a member in Foxton); Albert Reitsma (also in Foxton) and Harry Howells (now departed in glory).

The communion set was donated by the Reformed Church (GKN) of Woerden in the Netherlands, and the baptismal font was paid by 'savings' donated to the church. The Evening Standard issue of Monday Oct. 4th reported the following:

The baptismal font in the new Palmerston North Reformed Church building is a silent, tragic tribute to the generosity of a small boy.

Eleven year old Kem van Echten, a junior church member, saved his pocket money so that he could give 5 pounds towards new church equipment. Two weeks later he died suddenly. The pastor of the church (Rev. L Zwaan) gave thanks for Kem's gift at the first service in the new building.



The Palmerston North Congregation in the 80's



The new Palmerston North Church

203 Grey St was now 'our home' for the next 35 years

When Foxton became an instituted church on 1 April 1984, we had empty pews for a while—membership went down by 45%!! Yet by the grace of God these pews found new 'sitters' as people moved to Palmerston North, and we had a number of visitors and students from time to time. In 1990 the session gave a mandate to the B.O.M. (Board of Management) to investigate the feasibility of extending the present church building in 203 Grey Street.

Eventually in September 1999 we sold 203 Grey Street while having an option on 'Harmony House'. The congregation was 100 % in favour of this move. While negotiations were taking place we had our services in the A.O.G church in Ferguson Street, and sometimes in a community hall in Rangiora Avenue. Meetings and Catechism classes were held in the rooms of the Congregational church, and in March 2000 all papers were signed and Harmony House belonged to the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

A LOT of work had to be done....and only 3 weeks later, on 9 April 2000, we held our first worship service in the chapel we are using to-day.

Many alterations and changes faced us. A new car park was one of these...an order from the City Council, and subject to a licence to use the premises as a church. Yet 18 months later on 27 October 2001, we had a large gathering of members and friends attending the official opening of Harmony House (we decided to keep this name). And we sang, and still sing today,: "*Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!*"

Talking of pews: In 1964 a firm in Hastings (Furniture & Woodware Ltd) manufactured 12 pews for us at a total cost of 263 pounds (\$526), or \$44 each. Eleven years later 2 more pews of the same design were purchased for \$225 each. We were told a while ago that today's 'wood' value on these solid seats would be at least \$300 each. Well, they ARE solid AND heavy AND beautiful, an 'asset' for our church.

When we shifted to Harmony House, the pews went along too. More were needed to fill up the roomy chapel we now occupy and our Reformed Presbyterian Church in Bucklands Beach had surplus pews, so these are the 10 pews with 'padding in the auditorium...

When the church was instituted, attempts were made to 'fill the pulpit'. Yet it took 8 years before the first minister answered a call with Yes.! This was the Rev. Laurens Zwaan, who was our pastor from 1961-1967. He was a real gentleman 'dominee,' and loved by many. He now lives in the Netherlands.

Next we had Rev Nilson (1967-70). He left for the U.S.A., where he came from, and took up a position in education.

Then we were vacant for 8 years while several counsellors helped out (Rev. Bert Reurich was prominent among them) until we called Bert Kuipers, a bachelor candidate.

When the session gave him permission to go to the Family camp (note: NOT the 'single convention'!!) Bert came back engaged to Ria. The congregation was delighted. They left in 1983 for Tasmania, where he is the minister in Launceston.

Our next pastor was Syd Cooper (1985-87), who decorated his sermons as a baker ices a cake! Syd is retired now in North America.

Then in 1988 John Rogers came on the scene (his first charge), and the first minister in Palmerston North who had a special announcement from the pulpit that Sheryl (his good lady) was expecting twins! The congregation gave him a cheering applause. John & Sheryl now live in Auckland, where John serves as a minister at the North Shore congregation. He served us until 1996. The twins have since grown into good looking teenagers.

Within a few months after John left, we welcomed Chris and Julie Kavanagh—Chris' first congregation as well. This was in 1996. We all had to get used to his Lancashire/Liverpudlian accent.

One more minister to mention is Gary Milne, a member of our church and our session who serves as a Home Missionary stationed in Wanganui.

The Lord has richly blessed us, and used us. Many who have once been part of us are found throughout Christ's Church on earth. And we continue to witness to His grace here where He's placed us.

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The Close of the Year

The Lord, our salvation and light,
The guide of our strength and our days,
Has brought us together tonight,
A new Ebenezer to raise:
The year we have now passed through,
His goodness with blessings has crowned,
Each morning His mercies were new;
Then let our thanksgivings abound.
Encompass'd with dangers and snares,
Temptations, and fears, and complaints,
His ear He inclin'd to our prayers,
His hand opened wide to our wants:
We never besought Him in vain;
When burden'd with sorrow or sin,
He helped us again and again,
Or where before now had we been?
For so many mercies receiv'd
Alas! what returns have we made?
His Spirit we often have grieved,
And evil for good have repaid:
How well it becomes us to cry
"Oh! who is a God like to Thee?
"Who passest iniquities by,
"And plungest them deep in the sea!"
To Jesus who sits on the throne,
Our best hallelujahs we bring;
To Thee it is owing alone
That we are permitted to sing:
Assist us, we pray, to lament
The sins of the year that is past;
And grant that the next may be spent
Far more to Thy praise than the last.

John Newton

