

faith in focus

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*"As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and
flourish,
so that it yields seed for
the sower and bread for
the eater,
so is my word that goes
out from my mouth:
It will not return to me
empty,
but will accomplish what I
desire
and achieve the purpose
for which I sent it."*

Isaiah 55:10,11

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Editorial

In this column you will see a photograph. It is a picture taken of one of my catechism classes. A distinctly teaching situation. But you are also part of one of my classes, too. You might not quite think of it that way but through Faith in Focus my teaching ministry extends a lot further than one of my classes here as part of the Mangere congregation. Let's pray then for a fruitful year together, one in which we all learn, and that includes the teachers among us! For the day any of us stops learning is the day we need to check our pulses, for we could well then be dead!

That is my challenge to you this year: Learn! You might think it's nothing new, but then heed the word of the apostle Peter, "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have." (2 Pet.1:12.)



This year we are able to introduce at least one new column - Focus on Home. This will help us in our local Home Mission work, congregationally and personally. And so I warmly welcome on board the Rev. Hans Vaatstra, our southern-most (clergy)man!

Also in this year we hope to have a series on different world religions. We begin in this issue with the Sikhs, a religion making its appearance in more than our taxi stands! Their temples are appearing all over the place, and so it is warranted that we are better informed about what they believe and how we can witness to them.

And there is an old column which is getting a revamp. Andrew Reinders has taken on the 'gleanings' from our church, using the marvellous modern resource of emailed church bulletins. Hopefully all our churches have put Andrew on their address list when they send out their Newsletters every week.

Please pray for us. Pray that this magazine would serve to better inform and build us all up, and so draw us closer together in the Lord. It is His publication. And so is each one of us!

*An education is a conquest, not a bequest;
 it cannot be given - it must be achieved.*

Elbert Hubbard

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.

Fantastic!

It's not out of this world

Benjamin Hoyt

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. We are not told much about how He did it, nor are we told why; but we are told that He did it, and that it was good. From the dust of this earth the Maker created us in His image and likeness; thus we are little makers, and to honour Him we must make and enjoy works of our own. That sentence alone is the basis for a wholesome outlook on the reading and writing of Fantasy.

Sometimes we are wary of Fantasy, and perhaps rightly so: it is a type of writing that is too often used wrongly. Like music, wine, or sex, Fantasy can be abused; but when used rightly it is a great blessing. Abuse never precludes proper use—and I believe Fantasy can be used properly. More than that, I believe it is *necessary* for us to read or write good Fantasy.

Strange as it may seem, the purpose of good Fantasy is to help us better understand the real world. We step into Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and meet splendid trees that can talk: when we step out again, we are better able to appreciate trees that cannot. We step into C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and meet the powerful yet fatherly lion Aslan, king of the beasts: when we step out, we realise that Lewis has been teaching us about the lion Christ, King of the world. Good Fantasy forces us to stop and think about the greatness of creation, about right and wrong, about faithfulness and love, about strength and beauty.

Fantasy is founded in reality

The only reason this works is because Fantasy is founded in Reality. In both we have sun and moon, day and night, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, wisdom and foolishness, God and His

enemies—all the great themes in life. Nevertheless, it is not hard to tell the difference between Fantasy and Reality: If we really could not distinguish between a frog and a prince, we would never have invented the tale of the frog-prince. But the fact is, we can distinguish. Good Fantasy, then, is not "deceit" or "lies," but rather an expression of life's truths, and a call for us to wake up and see the trees clapping their hands in praise of God (Isaiah 55:12).

As we look at the reality of this world and then make worlds of our own, we are imitating our Maker's Creation. Francis Schaeffer said that "Art is a reflection of God's creativity, an evidence that we are made in the image of God," and I believe this also applies to Fantasy and to stories. Still more importantly, a Christian's life should be his greatest and most imaginative story. It should be one which speaks volumes of truth, beauty, and goodness; it should be one which directs people to God Himself.

C. S. Lewis's story *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* pictures a boy whose imagination had not been cultivated. Eustace Scrubb had stumbled into a dragon's lair, but had no idea what it was: "Most of us know what we should expect to find in a dragon's lair, but, as I said before, Eustace had read only the wrong books. They had a lot to say about exports and imports and governments and drains, but they were weak on dragons."

We Christians talk often of governments, but rarely of dragons. And the irony is that the Holy Bible has a lot to say about dragons and giants, but very little to say about exports and drains. The True Story of Scripture is ten times closer to Lewis's so-called "fantasy" than to a book of "101 science facts." What modern "true book" has talking snakes, great giants, sea monsters, talking trees, virgin births, and lions sleeping next to lambs? But God's Word

does, and God's Word is truth.

Several examples

Some specific examples might be helpful.

First, the Scripture constantly uses metaphors and pictures. Christ is the Lion of Judah, and also the Lamb that was slain. The Church is Christ's bride. Every few verses in the Psalms contain a metaphor of some sort. Daniel and Revelation are full of pictures. Wisdom is a lady (Proverbs 8). Jesus (who is *the Truth*) constantly spoke in stories. Trees even talk: in 2 Chronicles 25, Jehoash king of Israel tells a Fantasy about a thistle talking to a cedar. Strange tales are told so that strange truths may be taught; and that is exactly what happens in worthwhile Fantasy.

Second, Fantasy, or what we would usually call Fantasy, abounds. Satan appears as a snake who speaks to Eve (Genesis 3). Giants inhabited this earth (Numbers 13:33). Pharaoh's army is destroyed in the Red Sea, just after Israel has passed through the same sea dry (Exodus 14). A great carpenter-turned-preacher changes water into wine (John 2). This same Man is then crucified, dies, is resurrected, and in so doing saves the world.

In a very real sense, the Bible is a dragon-slaying story on a cosmic scale. God's enemy starts out as a good angel, then becomes the evil serpent of Genesis 3, and finishes up as the full-blown dragon of Revelation 20. Christ came to earth as King and Dragon-slayer, crushed the beast's head, and now rules over the earth. If we are to imitate and follow Him, we must learn about great kings and evil dragons, and about giants and talking trees.

Like most anything, Fantasy *can* be bad, used for evil purposes, or simply low quality. The thousands of churned-out "science fiction and fantasy" books are probably good examples of this today. Churning out novels is



far from the standard Philippians 4:8 gives: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." For us to even *think* about it, our Fantasy must match up to all that. The sky is not the limit; the sky must be our starting point!

The place to start is with the classics, and it so happens that the classics are Christian. The more you discover about the worlds of Lewis and Tolkien, the more Christian symbols

and themes you find, and the more truth they teach you. So open the wardrobe to Narnia, and set foot in Middle-earth. Hear the beasts, learn about Aslan, fight the battle against evil, discover the courage of Peter and the kindness of Lucy, talk to the Ents, and make Sam's loyalty your own. Then take note of our own world and praise the Lord!

As we know well, the greatest book ever written is the Holy Bible. It is a *fantastic* book (with all meanings of that word involved), and in it God has arranged the marriage of History and Fantasy. Our stories, which are much lesser

ones, are the children of that union. And so we must make them living and creative works which imitate His story in a fantastic way. This is no small task, so *may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*¹

¹ I owe a lot in this article to J. R. R. Tolkien, especially his essay *On Fairy Stories*, to Francis Schaeffer's short essays in *Art and the Bible*, and to Douglas Wilson's book *Future Men*. Tribute should also go to C. S. Lewis's superb septilogy *The Chronicles of Narnia*, especially *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Students of any or all of these men will easily notice how much I gleaned (and copied) from them.

A feminine focus

Elisabeth Elliott – No-nonsense commitment

Sally Davey

I don't know why I never read Elisabeth Elliott's books until a few months ago. Among Christian women of the late twentieth century she deserves special honour for the witness of her life. And her writings have quietened, encouraged and instructed many fellow believers weathering the storms of life for over forty years. Yes, I had a treat in store for me when someone urged me to read *Through Gates of Splendour*, Elisabeth's first book. Being the type of reader who tends to "binge" on finding a good author, I quickly read most of the rest of Elisabeth's books. Soon I discovered that I was being shown the story of her whole life, glimpse by glimpse, as she revealed, through her words of wisdom to others, what God had taught her in the crucible of her own sufferings. And it is a wonderful story.

Her background

Elisabeth was born in Brussels to American missionaries serving on a short-term assignment in Europe in the 1920s. Her parents had a deep passion for missionary work; and in her home in New Jersey (just over the river from the city of Philadelphia) the children grew up on news of overseas missionaries, prayer for missionaries, and interest in the cause of the gospel all over the world. As a little girl, she thought the calling of overseas missions work to be the highest possible.

When she went to Wheaton College (a Christian undergraduate college in Chicago) in the 1940s, Elisabeth intended to prepare for service overseas as a "pioneer" missionary. That meant taking the gospel to previously-

unreached people, and often, living in primitive conditions. She was already deeply and steadfastly committed to Christ, and was prepared for sacrifice. So she took courses in the Bible, including Greek and Hebrew, as preparation for translation work. In her senior (final) year, a classmate attracted her attention. This young Brethren man, Jim Elliott, was also preparing for pioneer missionary work, and was in many ways as steely in his commitment to Christ as was Elisabeth. As she wrote much later, many girls found Jim Elliott—a handsome and athletic man—intensely attractive, but seemingly unattainable. Some even wondered if he disliked girls. In actual fact, he thought girls delightful—but expensive and distracting! On coming to college, having made it his priority

to serve God, he decided to "delete them from his life." When Elisabeth once asked him to sign her college yearbook, he added "2 Timothy 2:4" with his signature. "How long do you think it took", she later asked, "for me to get to my room and open my Bible and find that verse?"!! It was not the cryptic message she had been hoping for.

In love

However, Jim was also falling in love with Elisabeth and one day at the end of her final year he confessed it to her—not knowing what they should do about it. Both of them, serious about the calling to pioneer missionary work, had grave doubts about the possibility of marriage. Faithful to the call to purity, they decided—with struggling hearts—to "lay on the altar" their love for each other. What followed was five and a half years of waiting on God while they continued their preparations for missionary life, and worked out where they should serve—singly. Elisabeth records these years of waiting in her book *Passion and Purity*. It was a remarkable story of painful, but trusting, putting of God first in two young people's lives. How many of us today would sacrifice self in such a way? How many would defer, or even deny themselves marriage to one we loved with all the intensity that Jim and Elisabeth loved each other? And their self-denial was no asceticism—it was real flesh-and-blood living for the only thing worth dying for.

Called to service

As it turned out, both were called to missionary service in Ecuador, to work with Indian tribes which had recently been reached by Protestant missionaries. After studying Spanish in Quito,



Jim and Elisabeth's wedding day, October 8, 1953

Jim and Elisabeth went their separate ways to their different tribes in the jungle hinterland of the country, and remained in intermittent contact. For Jim, the final test of whether they ought to marry or not was whether his work in such primitive conditions could be done by a married man who would need to care for his wife. Months went by. Finally, one day in January 1953, Elisabeth, at work in the western jungle, received a message that Jim was waiting for her in Quito. The next day, after she arrived, Jim asked her to marry him and gave her the engagement ring he had bought for her. In October that year, they were married. One can only imagine the joy of finally belonging to each other, of their delight in each other. The text on their hearts that day? Isaiah 25:9, "*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him.*"

Jim's new and dangerous work

Jim built them a house to live in the jungle, and at first they continued Jim's work with the Quichua. However, within months he and friends from Wheaton College who were also serving in Ecuador developed a deepening interest in the Auca Indians, a fierce, stone-age tribe who resisted all attempts to reach them, killing all who entered their territory, including Jesuit priests who had tried to bring them Catholicism. Patiently, through a series of gifts dropped into one of their villages from a plane, these five men managed to generate interest and build some sort of rapport with the Aucas. Finally, in January 1956, they decided to go in themselves, and stay inside Auca territory to see if they could share some parts of the gospel with their few words of the Auca language. On their last night together before they left their families these five men sang the hymn, "*We trust in Thee our shield and our defender*". Jim kissed Elisabeth and their baby daughter, Valerie, good-bye as he ran to the waiting plane that was to land them in Auca territory. One week later, all five men were dead, killed by Auca spears.

The love of the Lord

Can you imagine what these young wives felt on hearing this news? Especially Elisabeth, who had waited all those painful years for Jim, only to lose him after 27 months of married life! How did she manage? Did her faith falter? Of course, as she wrote later, there were dreadful, stabbing moments of pain as yearning for Jim swept over her. But she found, as her loving mother wrote to her shortly afterwards, that the years of longing for Jim before their marriage had actually prepared her for this calamity. She had learned to rest in her Saviour, and found him, in this desperate time, just as true to her as before.

During the next two years she carried on their work with the Quichua, and courageously wrote the story of the five missionaries' attempt to reach the Aucas and of their death. It was entitled, when published, *Through Gates of*

Splendour, after the hymn they had sung together on the night they had set off. Elisabeth also wrote a life of Jim, which included many extracts from his journals, revealing him to be a strong, manly Christian, passionate about his Saviour, who loved the great hymns of the faith and would often express his thoughts in lines of hymns or in verses from the poets of past ages.

Going to the same people

Then came an opportunity to live in an Auca village with Jim's sister in order to learn their language. A huge step of faith! She took it, and went to live with the Aucas, taking little Valerie. For this she received strong criticism as well as encouragement, but the two years' listening to the Aucas resulted in the commitment of their language to writing for the first time. She recorded this work in her book *The Savage, My Kinsman*.



Betty Elliot with Valerie. Shortly after Jim's death.

Some years later—perhaps due to disillusionment with missionary organizations (hinted at in her novel, *No Graven Image*)—Elisabeth returned to the United States with Valerie, living until the late 1960s in New Hampshire. She continued writing, her first two books having been read all over the world. More than ten years after Jim's death she remarried, to Addison Leitch, a theology professor at Gordon Seminary near Boston. Addison was 60; Elisabeth then 42, and when he proposed he wrote her what he called his "geriatric letter", lest she entered into marriage to an old man with her eyes closed. He predicted that the day would come when she would need to clean his glasses, and take over the driving and even more onerous duties. His closing line, she wrote, was unforgettable. "Yet here I am,

all of me, for you, forever. *But what kind of an offer is that?*" His predictions came true sooner than they thought. Within three years Addison was diagnosed with cancer, and in those days treatment was radical, painful, and often grotesque. Mutilating surgery was suggested, and Addison made many uncomfortable visits to hospital. Elisabeth's faith was tested in new ways. She woke in the small hours, imagining things worse than death itself. An Episcopalian (American Anglican), familiar with the language of the *Book of Common Prayer*, Addison talked in his final days of his "vile body", longing to be with Christ in heaven. When he died (in 1973), Elisabeth was relieved for his sake.

A ministry of suffering

But what could she make of this suffering? Someone wrote to her soon after Addison's death that he thought God must have given her a "ministry of suffering." But as Elisabeth pondered this, she concluded that she had not suffered much—not compared with many others. I've thought about this, and wondered at her seemingly extraordinary understatement. Why would she say this? I think she said it because she understands suffering. Certainly, Elisabeth has experienced suffering, and from a young age. But it's more than merely *experience* of suffering—she knows what suffering *means*, so much so that she is clear and straightforward about its logic in life to the point of humility, of matter-of-factness concerning it. When it comes, you simply trust, and obey; knowing that God will work out His purposes in it. She knows that sometimes God puts us in difficult situations, when He calls us to deny self and follow Him. Of the choice Eric Liddell, the Scottish athlete, had to make on finding his race in the 1924 Paris Olympics had been scheduled for a Sunday, she said: "the decision had already been made... It may have been hard, but it was perfectly clear what he had to do."

I've met several people who have heard Elisabeth speak (she has spoken frequently, about her life and her experiences, for many years), and they have called her "straightforward", even perhaps a little harsh. Another has called her "not at all relational." Elisabeth herself has said that people must have thought her a woman of steel—she shed no tears at the memorial service for the five slain missionaries in 1956. I've only heard her on tape, and certainly she is calm, straightforward and clear in her challenge to young people to make up their minds to live for God and "stay out of bed"—as she and Jim did. But does her directness, her expectation of high spiritual standards, make her actually unfeeling, or cold? Having immersed myself in her writings for a while, I would say, definitely, NO.

Sincerely honest

The books she has written in the last 30 years show her to be a woman of empathy and

compassion as well as one of wisdom and challenging directness. Since her return to the United States Elisabeth has obviously been moved by the erosion of manhood, womanhood and marriage. In many of her books she has written outspokenly about what it means to be feminine as a Christian and as a wife; and in encouragement of manliness and gentlemanliness in Christian men. During the 1970s and 1980s she was vigorous in her witness against the distortions of the feminist movement. However, her writings on the subject avoided all of the harsh, sneering stridency sometimes found in anti-feminist writings today. Elisabeth wrote with warmth, gentleness and humour. She wrote about things she knew first-hand; and with the common sense of a Christian who knows the realities imposed by the struggle against personal sin. Perhaps some of you who are older enjoyed *Let Me Be a Woman*, addressed to Valerie when she was about to be married—or *The Mark of a Man*, written for her nephew, Pete, as he reached young manhood. But if you are just reaching

that stage of life now, and have not read them, let me assure you these books are treasures that haven't dated, because their subject has never bored *any* generation!

A particular book

One of Elisabeth's most sensitive books is *The Path of Loneliness*. It comes from the depths of the sufferings of her heart in the times when she was twice widowed. She knows what it means to be "out of place" among married couples. She knows what lonely hours in the middle of the night are like; and when, to a widow, the memory of the sound of snoring is the "sweetest sound there is." It is this insight that has prompted Susan Hunt to suggest that young wives need the company of older widows, to share with them the dear memories of their husbands, and thus encourage these younger women to treasure what God has given them. But as Elisabeth has known all her life, the path of loneliness is for the Christian the path toward finding our sufficiency in God: "...the answer to our loneliness is *love*—not our

finding someone to love us, but our surrender to the God who has always loved us with an everlasting love. Loving Him is then expressed in a happy and full-hearted pouring out of ourselves in love to others."

And the ending to Elisabeth's story has indeed been happy and full-hearted. Soon after Addison's death a man named Lars Gren, widely loved as a delightful Christian, made Elisabeth's acquaintance; and over five years or so they became good friends. She greatly appreciated his gentlemanly respect of her past sufferings, and the fact that he didn't try to "rush" her into romance. By the end of the 1970s, however, they were married; and the wonderful conclusion to her story is that they are still enjoying each other's company!

As many people say, and as is so obvious from her books, everything Elisabeth says and writes is validated by the clear credibility of her testimony. She has been a steadfast, courageous follower of her Saviour through thick and thin. I would love to meet her: while unlikely in this life, it will be a joy in heaven!

Between You and Me!

A Personal Memorial Drive!

Dick G. Vanderpyl

On my recent memorial drive through the North Island during the months of May and June, turning back the clock, I was reminded of many incidents. For two months I travelled willy-nilly well over 5,000 kilometres, recalling incidents and stories of the years gone by.

Many years ago my wife and I travelled along the Coast, passing through Tauranga, where the petrol tank needed to be filled again! We stopped at a BP station, and a very cheerful attendant filled up the tank. I suggested also that the oil be checked, and removed the cap and checked the oil-stick. The guy had a glowing, smiling face and as we both leaned under the bonnet, I asked him why he looked so happy! I was about to say that he must have found a wife, or a new baby had arrived. He hesitated for a moment, looked at me and blurted out that he had found Christ! "Wow, congratulations, wonderful, I too am a believer in my Saviour Jesus Christ." Spontaneously we embraced each other, thumping each other's backs. My wife wondered if we had found some treasure under the bonnet! I told her the story, and we drove off rejoicing!

While I was in Whangarei, where I stayed a few days, I parked the car in the shopping centre for a bite. As I neared a corner I saw an elderly gentleman handing out evangelistic leaflets. Being curious and wanting to know of

his experiences, I started a conversation with him and observed that various people knew and greeted him, getting into a conversation about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had got to know him and trust him. Over the years he had befriended these passers-by who were willing to ask questions and/or have a good discussion, and listen to him as he shared the gospel of salvation.

I asked him what church he attended and he told me that he was converted about nine years ago by a Pentecostal neighbour, and hence had joined their church. He did admit that he was not very good at raising his hands, but he felt at home with their church, where he made many friends. I asked him what material he was using. He told me to get myself a cup of coffee across the road and wait for him, calling out that the second cup was free! At the coffee shop I got into conversation with an elderly Dutchman, born and bred "below the Rivers" of Holland. During the Reformation many Catholics fled to the south part of Holland. "Of course you must be a Catholic," I said. Sure enough, so he was! I asked him if he attended church. "Nah", he said, "old Peter will pull me in!" I was flabbergasted and tried to have a bit more serious conversation, but he was not ready for that.

It was time to leave Whangarei behind me and let my Hyundai take me to Dargaville, a good hour from Whangarei. I parked the car,

stretched my legs and went for a good walk through the township. Further down the road, I spotted another evangelist handing out literature. He sure had picked a good spot! There he stood at the door of the local pub, handing out his leaflets. I got one also! I asked him what his rate of success was, making contacts. "I just leave that to the Lord," he said. Fair enough—after all, it's not that easy! Asking what church he belonged to, he told me that he belonged to the Exclusive Brethren. He was not as forthcoming at sharing his experiences as the evangelist in Whangarei.

Finding a motel unit for the night, the young lady at the counter told me she had come from Holland and had married a Kiwi. She too had come from "below the Rivers".

"I'll bet you're a Catholic," I said. "That's correct!" she said. "Going to church?" I asked. "Never", she said, "but I am still a good Catholic!"

Over the years our churches have had plans and ideas about evangelism via synods, presbyteries and sessions, but all these ideas and thoughts did not bring us to the real issue of bringing the Gospel of Salvation! I do remember in the early stages of our churches half a century ago, that our minister at that time regularly spent time knocking on doors bringing the gospel and offering a free Bible from the World Home Bible League, on condition they promised to read it. That gave

us the opportunity to call on them again and ask them two questions: "Have you been reading it?" and "Are there any questions we could help you with?"

The other minister of those early years gave half of his "free" day, and also did his door

knocking. We did get a family to come to our church! I vividly remember what this pastor said: "It sharpens one's mind to answer awkward questions, and helps to make the preaching more real in this world we live in."

Our ministers should pick up the challenge,

and follow the example given by the two preachers in this story! This would surely enrich their ministry, and enable them to share the Word more effectively with their experience in their communities!

How about it?

Focus on home

The mandate given to your Home Missions Committee by Synod is to investigate means of spreading the gospel, evaluate evangelism material and glean and share ideas between the churches for mutual encouragement. As a committee we have decided that the best way to facilitate this mandate is to publish regular installments in Faith in Focus. By doing so we hope to raise awareness amongst the churches for the importance of the task as well as encourage more of our members to be involved in home missions. We are after all a priesthood of all believers.

This first installment comes with compliments of the churches in Wellington and Bishopdale. Marianne Bos of the Reformed Church of Wellington's Home and Overseas Missions Committee (HOMECEC) has provided us with a report of the work the committee has been doing recently. Do take note of Marianne's suggestion to share resources. Rev John Haverland has also given us a summary of recent evangelistic activities conducted by Bishopdale members and a helpful evaluation of the "Living Proof" evangelism course.

Hans Vaatstra

From Wellington

The last two years we have run a Holiday programme for the children in the community. The first year we borrowed the "Secret Agents" material from the Nelson church, and this year we borrowed the "Light Factory Kidz Club" props and programme from Buckland Beach. We are hoping to run another programme again next year. It would be very useful to have a register of what programmes have been run by the other churches and what resources are available. Not having to make props saves a lot of time and energy, and suggestions and ideas of what worked and what didn't are most useful. We would suggest that this register be put on the Reformed Church website for ready access and ease of updating.

The last three years we have had stalls at the local community fair selling Christian children's books from Geneva Bookshop, which we subsidise, as well as plants, pots and a game stall. It is a great way to get Christian books into the community as well as making people more aware of our presence. We have had

positive feedback and plan to do it again this year. We also hand out information on our church and the programmes we run— eg cadets, youthclub, 2:7 course, etc. We find that we are in need of a "People Friendly" pamphlet. Could you suggest a good source for tracts or websites that would be helpful? These also could be placed on the denomination website as links.

The HOMECEC also do a bi-monthly mission slot during a service where relevant information on mission activities is supplied to the congregation. We focus on activities which we encourage the congregation to be involved in. This currently includes Operation Friendship, Bible distribution to Laos via the Bible League, and our local community fair.

We also produce a Missions newsletter to the congregation every quarter.

We have at our disposal the following resources which we'd willingly share with other churches of our denomination. These include:

- A extensive collection of hand puppets (large size) complete with a collapsible stage, selection of scripts and comprehensive instructions for use (These puppets have in the past been used by our youth to do performances at church functions, in the children's ward of Wellington hospital, at a retirement home and at youth and outreach camps).
- The Holiday Programme "Go for Gold" which was written by Scripture Union, UK. (Sorry no props).

Marianne Bos

Secretary, HOMECEC Wellington Reformed Church

Bishopdale

Over the last two years church members have run three "Crafty Kids Clubs"—a three day holiday programme that runs from 9.30 - 11.30 am based around craft activities, Scripture songs and a Bible story. This has been enormously popular. We follow this with an evangelistic 'family and friends' service the next Sunday, and also give all the parents a pamphlet explaining the beliefs and activities of the church. Further information can be obtained from Linda Vanderpyl or Robyn Bosma. We have two pamphlets for visitors explaining what the church believes, and what the church's activities and programmes are. A very useful tract is

"Christianity: A Pocket Guide", written by Kim Hawtrey and distributed by Matthias Press. A very useful booklet about the gospel is "Ultimate Questions" by John Blanchard. It should be available in most Christian bookstores. We have also found "Living Proof" a good tool in encouraging personal evangelism. A summary and evaluation of the course follows: "Living Proof" is a twelve session video and discussion course that aims to encourage, motivate and assist believers in the work of personal evangelism. It has been developed by the Navigators and the Christian Businessmen's Committee of the USA. Each session takes about an hour and a half, and commences with a 15-20 minute video segment followed by a discussion based on a workbook.

The opening sessions examine the gap between the Christian and the non-Christian, and then suggest ways and means of bridging that gap by finding common ground. Another session explains how conversion is usually a process involving a number of small steps (mini-decisions). Further sessions suggest practical strategies to help Christians in their personal witnessing such as "raising the flag" and telling "faith stories". Later sessions explain how to lead a Bible study for non-Christians and what is involved in genuine conversion.

I have taken three groups through this course over three consecutive years and have found it a useful tool in raising awareness for evangelism as a lifestyle. The course provides helpful practical suggestions for witnessing, and helps motivate and encourage Christians to be more evangelistically-minded. Those who have taken the course have found it very helpful and have responded positively. The course does have some weaknesses. The most obvious is the omission of the role of the church and the preaching of the gospel. The course does not oppose the church and preaching, but rather ignores the central role these have in evangelism. Group leaders should make participants aware of this weakness. Currently the cost of the course is \$199 for the two videos and one workbook and leaders guide, plus \$12.50 per work book. It is available from : Mr Lawrence, Allpress, 47b Arthur Street, Riccarton, Christchurch. Ph 343 1990.

John Haverland

Bishopdale Home Missions Committee.

Seeking the Sikhs

A look at a religion settling in our country

Tony Zekveld

My aim in this article is to help fellow believers relate to the Sikh people. Much of what we see or hear about the Sikh people tends to frighten us. We, therefore, distance ourselves from this seemingly 'warrior' strain of people, the most unreached people in our Canadian homeland.

But I submit to you that much of our discomfort, fears and prejudices with respect to the Sikh people arise from a lack of understanding of who these people are. Who are these people? What do they believe and why do they believe what they believe? How do we communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their particular context? How do we go about developing relationships with them so that we can begin to understand who they are, what they believe and how to communicate Christ to them?

After six years of ministry among the Sikh people, I am still a student of the Sikh culture, of their customs and mores and I find that I still grapple with how to communicate Christ to them in their particular context. What I want to share with you are some of the insights I have learned in our ministry among the Sikhs. I trust that, for the sake of Christ and for the expansion of His kingdom, these insights may be of benefit to you and to the church of Jesus Christ as a whole.

Who are the Sikhs?

The word 'Sikh' comes from the Punjabi word 'sikhna' translated 'to learn' in English. A Sikh, therefore, is one who is a learner, a disciple. Perhaps T. Sher Singh, a columnist with the Toronto Star, expresses the meaning of Sikh most eloquently when he says, "to be a Sikh is to keep on seeking. The day that you think you have found the answer you are lost."

The term 'Sikh' is applied to a people originating from the north-west state of the ancient land of India, the Punjab. In this region, a religion called Sikhism developed over a 200 year period [AD.1469 - 1708] under the guidance of ten successive gurus (enlightened). I'd like to limit my discussion here to their first guru (Nanak) and the last guru (Gobindh Singh). I refer you to the bibliography appended at the end of this series, if you are interesting in reading a more detailed history of the ten gurus of the Sikhs.

Guru Nanak and Guru Gobindh Singh are the two most prominent gurus in Sikh history. If you enter into the home of a Sikh, you will

often see a portrait of each of the two 'soldier-saint' gurus placed on the wall, usually in their living room.

Guru Nanak [AD 1469- 1539] is known as the first guru or the founder of their path. During this formative period of history, the Mughals (Muslims) had invaded North India. There were frequent skirmishes and battles between the Mughals and the Hindus. In this socio-political context, Nanak, who wanted to see an end to the religious warfare and create unity from this division, claimed to be 'blessed' with a vision of the Almighty. In this vision, he was told to proclaim one singular message: "there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim . . . so whose path should I follow? I should follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim and the path which I follow is God's path." The primary aim, said he, is the worship of the one God. He called all



to share in the same creed whether Muslim, Hindu or non-Hindu. His message was simple [translated into today's terms]: 'the oneness of God and the brotherhood of all men.' This explains why Sikhs are egalitarian in principle today. There are no essential differences between the religions, no essential difference between clergy and the congregation or between men and women.

Because Nanak was Hindu in his background, the Sikh religion is essentially Hindu (not Islamic) in its world view. But in trying to bring together Islam and Hinduism, he also preached against ritualism (with its images and gods), the system of priests and clergy, polytheism and the caste system. In this sense, Sikhism is regarded as a reform movement within Hinduism. In the place of Hindu ritualism, Nanak stressed what is now called the three pillars of Sikhism: worship, work and sharing (service).

For fifteen years, Nanak travelled across India preaching the 'oneness' of all peoples

and religions. His writings, along with the writings of the gurus who followed, were preserved in what would later become Sikh scripture: the Guru Granth Sahib Jee which is considered the 11th guru. Of each of the ten gurus who followed, it is said, "the divine light is the same, the life form is the same. The king has merely changed his body.[reincarnated]" This is why the ten gurus are at times called Nanak 1, Nanak 2, etc. Through these human gurus, it is taught, the Word of God was made manifest to mankind.

During this period of the ten gurus, the Sikh religion was consolidated, a new language and script arose (Gurmukhāi), a distinct philosophy was established and a code of conduct was defined. With the arrival of Guru Gobindh Singh [AD 1666-1708], we see the official beginnings of Sikhism as we see it today. During his guruship, the religious name 'Singh' (translated 'lion') was given to the male followers and the religious name 'Kaur' (translated 'princess') was given to the female followers. All Sikhs today, by the way, adhere to this custom.

What was his purpose? His purpose was to show their equal standing (regardless from which caste system they came) within this one community called the Sikh panth. To strengthen this struggling panth, due to the many wars, and to mark their identity as a panth, Gobindh Singh ordered the wearing of the five K's : 1) the kirpan (sword, as a mechanism for self-

defence and fighting injustice], 2) the kara (bracelet, a reminder not to do wrong), 3) the kanga (a small wooden comb worn in their hair at all times, signifying tidiness and surrender to God), 4) the kes (unshorn hair, signifying saintliness) and finally, 5) the kach (long under shorts, as the outer garments were often cumbersome in times they needed to run). These 5 K's identify them with the Khalsa community, the community of 'the pure ones' or the 'saint-soldier.' Notice, for the Christian, our armour is internal and spiritual, not external and physical (cf. Ephesians 6:10-20)!

Shortly, before his death in 1708, Guru Gobindh Singh, claimed that he received a vision and was commissioned to bestow the status of Guru upon the collective writings of the ten gurus. This is known today as their 11th and permanent guru - the Guru Granth Sahib Jee. Their scripture today is seen as the continuing, living and eternal guru and also as the visible body of the guru. There is a divine presence, they claim, in this book. The Granth

is the shabad, translated 'word.' And this word is even considered God Himself. Their third guru, Amar Das, said, "The exalted guru's word is God Himself and it is through the word that man obtains union with God." This explains why the Granth Sahib is always placed on a high platform in their temple (called the gurdwara, 'the doorway to the guru.').

In the gurdwara, you will not see the images or idols as seen in the Hindu temple or in the Roman Catholic church. You will see, however, a different kind of image. The Granth is placed on a manji (bed) with a canopy over it. Worshippers offer food offerings before it. At night, the granthi (the one who reads the granth) places the granth in a rumala (linen sheet) and puts it to sleep in the chamber. In the early morning he wakes it up. Daily, behind the Granth, the granthi recites the Granth and three ragis (liturgists) play the instruments as the Granth is recited. All worshippers bow down before the book. The Granth is known as their spiritual guru, the pure and perfect guru, through which one can find the God within.

So, what do Sikhs believe?

About God: The most basic, fundamental principle in Sikh belief is that 'God is One.' On the surface, it appears that we as Christians agree. After all, the Holy Bible says, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD' (Deuteronomy 6:4).

But the question is: 'Which One?' The similarity is only formal because there is no common agreement as to who this one God is.

As you probe a Sikh's understanding of God, you soon begin to understand that Sikhism is not a monotheistic religion but a monistic religion. The Sikhs, with whom I have spoken, deny the Creator-creature distinction. In other words, all is one. According to Sikhs, everything exist within the God or is a part of the God.

Perhaps, the illustration of the spider will help illustrate the Sikh concept of God. Just as a spider emits the thread from itself and draws the thread back into itself, so the universe is created (emitted) by God and will be reabsorbed into God one day. When the Sikh speaks of God having 'created', what he really means is 'emanated'. And why God created, 'No, one really knows.' I hear from time to time, "Don't waste your time on such ridiculous questions about where do I come from? Where am I going? And why am I here? History is not important; neither is the future. What is the most important is the moment, the here and now, and that is to serve humanity."

About Revelation: Many Sikhs with whom I have spoken say that God is unknowable. You cannot know Him. You can only experience or feel Him from within. In my class on Sikhism at the University of Toronto, T. Sher Singh put it this way: "We have hundreds of names for God and that just gives us a minuscule idea of who God is. Now add all the understanding of God of all the other religions - there is a greater

degree of understanding - maybe 2%?"

The names and attributes of God, according to the Sikhs, do not belong to the essence of His Being. They are only man's way of describing Him, not who God is in Himself. This is why Sikhs often call God 'Sat Naam' translated 'True Name.' Naam is the summary expression or covers all His names and attributes.

In light of the above, one can see that the Sikh understanding of revelation is fundamentally different from the Christian. According to the Sikh, God has not objectively unveiled Himself or made Himself known to us. This would presuppose the Creator-creature distinction. Rather, God, according to the Sikh, is one who subjectively reveals Himself and can be experienced by us and in us. The soul which is part of the Great Soul is inside every human. All you need to do is 'get in touch' with the God 'inside you.' Meditate on the Naam. Nanak himself writes, "Looking around in four directions, I searched my inner self. There I saw the invisible true Lord, the Creator."

About the Human Situation: Human birth, according to the Sikh, is especially valuable. Now opportunity is given to remember the Naam, an opportunity you did not receive when you were, perhaps, an animal in your former existence. Now you have opportunity to gain liberation from the cycle of (up to!!) 8.3 million rebirths or reincarnations. And yet, they say, many do not seize the opportunity within their lifetime to gain liberation.

Why don't they see it?

First of all, because of past karma. In one's birth he brings with him the results of previous lives known as karma. If you have done something 35 times before, the 36th time is hard to break a bad habit. Your karma tends to push you in a certain way.

Second, because of ignorance. Man's problem is not his sin which has separated him from a holy God (remember, Sikhs do not believe in the Creator-creature distinction!). Man's root problem, according to the Sikh, is his spiritual ignorance. He is deluded into thinking that this present world is all that there is. His problem is self-reliance - that is following the will of the self rather than the will of the God.

This begs the question, of course. If there is no objective revelation of God, how can they speak of the will of God, of self-reliance, of 8.4 million lives, etc.?

About Salvation: Sikhs have no eschatology or teaching about the future. In general, I find that, because of this, Sikhs have a great interest in what the Bible says about the future, questions about the coming of Jesus, about heaven and about hell.. This is one way to call their attention to the difference between the Christian faith and Sikhism.

For the Sikh, the final aim of human life is to attain salvation. Salvation from what? Not

from sin but from the continuous cycle of rebirths. To attain salvation means for them to emerge into the divine.

But the question is 'how?'

Sikhs teach that they must get 'in touch' with the God within. Here the guru (the Granth) comes into the picture. The guru is their guide. The guru dispels the darkness of delusion and self-reliance through:

- 1) remembering the Naam (Name) via
 - a) corporately, by hearing the gurbani (the granth) in the gurdwara (the gurdwara is open daily for this purpose) and also
 - b) personally, by their daily prayers (call nitnem) five times a day.
- 2) service (sewa). Service teaches a Sikh to be humble, tolerant, and genuine as this brings an end to the ego.

Both of these, remembering the Naam and service, are said to contribute to the release from the cycle of rebirths.

In time, as our relationships develop with the Sikhs, we need to show them that in their condemnation of self-reliance they condemn themselves. They themselves rely on remembering the Naam and sewa (service) to obtain salvation.

An internal critique of the Sikh world view

1. *The problem of religious language*

The Sikhs, as Hindus and Muslims, are very religious people. The religious language of Sikh religion and the Christian faith is similar. Take, for example, the Mool Mantra, the basic creed of Sikhism. On the surface, except for a couple of articles, who could argue against it. Who could argue against, for example, that 'God is One.' The Bible teaches the same in Deuteronomy 6:4. Some Christians may argue that they are already halfway in the kingdom. They simply need to add Jesus!

But there is a problem. When Sikhs, for example, say 'God is one,' what do they mean by 'God?' What do they mean by 'one?' Or 'is?' Something entirely different. This is because they have a different world view, a different grid or circle by which they interpret reality. The similarities are only formal but in reality there is no common agreement. In fact, in principle there is an absolute antithesis between the Sikh world view and the Christian world view. It's not that Sikhism has some of their facts straight. For even those facts that appear 'straight' are interpreted in light of an anti-Christian world view. This leads us to a second consideration . . .

2. *The problem of an inherently arbitrary and contradictory world view*

All religious and secular world views outside of the Christian faith are inherently arbitrary and contradictory, including Sikhism.

Let me explain. According to the Bible, all men know in their heart of hearts the true and living God, the God of the Bible, as their Creator

(Romans 1:18-25). . They know Him by virtue of His witness in the creation, His power and His majesty. (Sikhs are aware of the Creator-creature distinction despite their apparent denial of this distinction!). What may be known about God is clear to them (v.19). They know Him by virtue of the fact they are created in God's image, the moral law is written on their hearts and they know they are responsible to Him. The problem is that they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. What the natural man does is take the truth and twist it to his own way of thinking. Consequently, they have no apologetic for their religion(v.20). Indeed the existence of false religion presupposes the truth of Christianity in order to falsify it.

Therefore, what they know deep down and what they profess are two different things. We call this self-deception. And this is what we want to point out. Their self-deception expresses itself in contradictions and arbitrariness. In so doing, our aim is to silence their mouths and show the glory of Christ, the way, the truth and the life! Always, we must have in mind the apostolic strategy in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5!!

We want to expose the contradictions and arbitrariness within their own system of thought with the view of tearing down their house. We consider, now, several of their many contradictions:

a. The Sikh has no objective basis to claim what he claims.

How can the Sikh answer: what is real? How can he know what he knows? How can he live his life? He has no objective basis to claim what he claims. He does not believe in a Personal God who objectively reveals Himself in His Word (inscripturated or incarnated). If God and truth are mystically experienced, how can truth be articulated in rational ways and put in words? By what authority does he say that the soul wanders through 8.4 million lives? Why 8.4 million? Or the creation is the emanation from God? Not only is his religion wholly arbitrary but contradictory. In the Sikh world view, there is no objective basis why he should not murder, commit adultery, steal, lie or cheat. Yet in his heart of hearts, he knows he is accountable to the God of the Bible, that he is created in His image and living in His world. Therefore, he behaves and acts on the basis of God's revelation. This is what we want to point out with gentleness and respect.

b. Sikhism, in spite of its claims to the contrary, is an exclusive and intolerant religion.

How can Sikhism claim to be a common creed for all men and claim to adopt Jesus too? Yet, they exclude the Jesus of the Scriptures! They must, for Jesus says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6)." This, they do not tolerate!

Moreover, they claim to respect all other holy books, even the Bible, but how do they account for the contradictions between their holy book and the Christian's Bible? If they are tolerant of other religions, why then did their guru Arjan write in their book, "may the mouth burn which it is said that the Lord became incarnate."

One begins to see that all must unify under Nanak's terms rather than under Christ's terms.

c. Despite claims to the contrary, their guru is not living.

If their guru is the 'living' guru as they say, then why does he not eat their offerings which are placed before him? Why does he need to be put to sleep every night? Why does he need to be dressed? Why does he not talk to them? How those words of Habakkuk 2:18-20 ring so true! We testify to the Living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God [Sat Naam] who became Man, died and arose again from the dead as our Living Lord! Therefore, only Christ is able to cleanse us from our sins (1 John 1:9). In Sikhism, there is no cleansing.

d. Despite the intent of their founding Guru, Sikhs are chained by rigorous ceremonies and rituals. Consider their hukam namas (their Code of Discipline/Ethics).

e. Self-reliance is condemned yet self-reliance is the means to achieve liberation

In their scripture, the Granth Sahib, the grace of Waheguru (God) is exalted again and again. By the grace of the Guru He is known. Self-reliance is condemned, yet in time, as our relationships develop with the Sikhs, we need to show them that in their condemnation of self-reliance, they condemn themselves. They themselves rely on remembering the Naam and sewa (service) to obtain release from the cycle of rebirth and oneness with God.

3. Using familiar Sikh concepts to accent the differences

In bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Sikh, keep in mind two key concepts in the Sikh religion: Shabad (word) and Sat Naam(True Name). One place to begin with Sikhs is the Gospel of John, especially John 1:1-18. Here Christ is proclaimed in light of eternity and in the history of redemption.

1) Consider the use of the word 'Shabad' (pronounced as shbd) to declare the truth that JESUS is the living Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). A version of John 1:1 is found in the Granth Sahib but they use 'shbd' to refer to the Granth Sahib, what they call their 'eternal, living guru.'

But the Word is identified with Jesus in John 1. John 1:14 tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld

His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (cf. also 1 John 1:1-4). The incarnation is one of the chief stumbling blocks to the Sikh. At this point, we must stress the difference between Sikhism and the Christian faith.

Their denial of the incarnation is the very reason why Sikhs do not know this one God. However, we point out the glorious truth from John 1:18 that, "No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." He, the eternal Word of God, Jesus, has made this one God known to us! One gentleman whom we have been discipling stumbled across this truth in his reading of the Gospel of John when Jesus says to Philip: "he who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, Show us the Father" (14:9)?

2) Moreover, point out that the Sat Naam is Jesus Sat Naam (or True Name). is another one of their ten summary statements of their religion in the Mool Mantra. This one God is the True Name but what is His Name? Another helpful passage from Scripture to show them is Acts 4:12: "nor is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (see also Philippians 2:4-11). The Lord Jesus Christ is the true Name, the only Name who has revealed the Father to us.

4. Accenting three key differences between Sikhism and Christianity.

First of all, we must press the Creator - creature distinction. We must bring to them, with all clarity, sincerity and love, the Biblical doctrine of God. The true and living God, the God of heaven and earth, is distinct from all His creation, including man. One's view of God determines one's view of sin and salvation. It all hangs together. In our aim to dismantle their world view (re: view of revelation, man, sin and salvation), we must aim to dismantle their view of God. This is what the apostle Paul did in Acts 17. 22-34. He proclaimed God and His glory to Athenians - beginning with creation and concluding with a call to repentance toward God and faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ who will come again as Judge at the end of history.

Second, we press the exclusivity of Jesus. In response to their challenge that Jesus is the same as the gurus, I will gently counter their position by asking: "Is Jesus the same as the gurus?" How do you know? Let's investigate who Jesus is and find out. I will then give them one of the Gospels. Victories are achieved when I hear "Jesus is different from our gurus. Jesus has a lot of power!"

In distinguishing Christ from the gurus, we must make clear that He was and is divine, unlike the gurus and prophets of all other religions. And while a few of their gurus died as martyrs Christ did not die as a martyr. He

died as the Saviour, the Substitute and the Sacrifice for sinners. Therefore, He is the only way for all people for all times. In response to the claims of Sikhs that all roads lead to God, Leslie Newbegin writes, "All roads lead to the precipice but in Christ, He shows us the way."

Third, we press the reality of heaven and hell. Another example of a difference between the Sikh religion and the Christian faith is the concept of heaven and hell. Sikhs have no eschatology. There is no such thing as heaven or hell in Sikh thought. The reality of hell, as well as heaven, must be emphasized. Hell is a dreadful, fiery place with no exit. Like-wise, we must communicate John's glorious description of heaven in Revelation 21:1-5. Heaven must also be proclaimed in all its beauty and glory.

Indeed, we are dependent on the grace of God. We offer the proofs, only His Spirit persuades.

Concerns confronting the North American (and Australasian) church

1. Apologetical: the Western church is facing a new kind of war. The war, to be sure, continues to be fought against liberal and heretical fronts within Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church (within Christendom). But now our war is also being fought on an additional front — the war against the major world religions - Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. In our teaching and preaching, we must not only expose and be able to refute false teachings within Christianity but also the major world religions which are at our doorstep.

We must be able to defend the Christian faith lest we are intellectually ambushed. Titus exhorts elders in the churches to hold fast to the faithful word as has been taught and that they may encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. Note: encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (1:9). How shall we refute unless we know something about the stratagems of our enemy? Also Peter says to the believer, "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Believers, as well, must be ready with a defense, an articulation.

How do we do that? I tried to illustrate from above that every world view outside of the Christian faith is either contradictory/arbitrary. By exposing and refuting we indirectly prove the truth and certainty of the Christian faith. To use computer language, knowing how to defend the Christian faith is our fire-wall, our line of defense. It detects all the bugs and immunizes us from invasion. Moreover, we are always ready to extend the stakes of our tent and broaden our tent as God uses our reasoning for the salvation of many.

2. Doctrinal: Another concern confronting the NA church is that with the rise and expansion of the major world religions in the West, the tendency is then to minimize the doctrinal differences within Christendom. After all, the various branches in Christendom in NA are now joining hands in our apostolic confession. The danger is doctrinal indifference and a lowest common denominator type of Christianity. The true Biblical faith may end up being abandoned all together. We must continue to the fight on both fronts — seeking to propagate the Biblical faith and acknowledging that the Calvinistic/Biblical faith alone can truly handle and refute the gainsayers.

3. Liturgical: What I want to say here is that the NA church needs to recover the simple, plain Jesus in worship - basic dialogical worship. Nothing glitzy. This is when His glory is seen. Candles, pictures of Jesus, manger scenes,



thanksgiving displays do more to hide Jesus than to reveal Him. Paganism and false religion (for eg. Sikhism) is ritualistic and ceremonial. By their rituals and ceremonies, they try to placate their gods and bring them near.. But our God is a covenant God. He is near us in the living Lord Jesus Christ. We don't want to communicate the message that we need candles to feel Jesus' presence. . We don't put food up in front of the pulpit (for eg. Thanksgiving displays) because we don't feed our God. And if we do, He won't eat it anyway. Our God has no need. Rather, He feeds us. Moreover, Sikhs display the pictures of their gurus. They are Punjabi.. But we do not want to give the message that Jesus is a white man and is only for North Americans. God has given us a word-ruled picture of Jesus in His Word and He is the Saviour of ALL who believe on Him.

4. Practical: The Sikhs cremate their dead. Cremation is a pagan practice, historically. The pagan nations surrounding Israel burned their dead. And all throughout history, cremation has been a pagan practice. It's now a practice which is confronting our churches and it needs to be

discussed and addressed. Over 70% of the people in Toronto now cremate their dead. Certainly, we recognize situations in the world where cremation is the only legal option. The motives and reasons for cremation also vary. Yet, the example given us in Scripture is burial for believers.

Appendix: How to go about developing relationships

Developing relationships with Sikhs is relatively easy. Generally, they are a warm and hospitable people. Many will respond very warmly to your love especially as many of them feel ostracized because of the way they look. It is important to remember, however, that the women often talk with the women and the men with the men. Get to know them as you meet them on the street, or at work or as you see that they need a helping hand. Ask them questions about their religion and culture. Ask them how they are doing.. They too face many problems and sorrows within their own families!

Sikhs take great interest in talking about religion. The challenge, however, is to guide the conversation so that you end up with Jesus: who is He? So many times we talk about karma, life after death, and doing good. Avoid getting trapped in philosophical arguments and debates. I make a point to preach the Lord Jesus theistically and illustrate through the stories from Scripture the abundant mercy and forgiveness found in Christ. Don't attack their religion or their gods. Let them draw

their own conclusions. Over time, once you have conversed a lot with them, you may then call them to abandon their false gods and to serve the Living and True God.

When you come to know one person, you may in time be introduced to his/her household. They think in terms of family units so that if you are a friend of one in the family you often become a family friend. Be sensitive towards their customs and culture. We don't want to be an unnecessary stumbling block to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sikhs do not eat beef (including beef fats). Some are vegetarian. Do not serve alcohol or desserts with alcohol in it. At the same time, if they offer you food, do eat the food even if it is too spicy or too sweet. You may ask them if you can have a little taste first.. To reject their food is to reject them. The way to the heart is often through the stomach. In this regard we do well to remember the words of the apostle Paul, "I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (1 Corinthians 9:19).

With respect to the Holy Bible: Do not place it on the floor or anywhere below your waist. They may never listen to you again. They respect the Holy Bible as they do all the

scriptures of all the religions. And because Sikhs believe all ways are valid and all roads lead to God, many are also very open to reading the Holy Bible. Many will receive a copy of the Holy Bible and other Christian literature, especially if it is in their language (Punjabi - Gurmukhi script). Be advised when reading the Bible after you eat, that you feel out the situation whether or not they expect you to wash your hands. Again, in the beginning, we want to avoid any unnecessary controversy so that we will gain a hearing from them. Ask them if there is any particular need or problem for which you can pray. Usually, they respond very positively to your prayers for them. Make specific mention, as well, that you pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Many do receive

answers to their prayers and begin to pay attention to the Word of Jesus!

Hospitality is very important. Sikhs do not only want to meet you but also your family. 90% of what they hear of the Gospel is what they see. They are very observant people. They observe family relations. They observe what we wear: is it modest or immodest? They observe that we open and close with prayer and read Scripture at the dinner table. They observe how we discipline our children.

Generally, we are more skilled at reaching the adherents of cults, not those of the world religions. Those from world religions are more difficult to reach because they come from ancient civilizations. Remember the key is - LONG TERM.

Reaching the Sikhs take much patience, prayer and perseverance. Many of them are a 'hearing' people but only the Lord can grant them the spiritual ears to hear. May the Lord continue to bless His church as she seeks to gather in all the nations!

Rev. T. Zekveld is a missionary church-planter among the South Asians, especially among the Sikhs, in the Greater Toronto Area. He lives in Toronto with his wife Arley-Ann and five children. He can be reached at The Hope Centre, 1620 Albion Road, Suite #305, Etobicoke, Ontario, M9V 4B4, Phone: (416) 740-0543 or E-mail: hopecentre@reformedtoronto.org

World news

Study biblical counseling with Dr. Jay E. Adams by extension

The Institute for Nouthetic Studies makes it possible for pastors and Christian leaders to study Biblical counseling at home under Dr. Jay E. Adams, founder of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation in Philadelphia, Penn. Adams seeks to renew "confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit and the sufficiency of God's Word to equip the man of God to help his people with problems of living and relationship." Learn about a Certificate Program in Nouthetic Counseling—how it works, reasons for studying the course, FAQs, cost and more. Courses are available by DVD; readers can also read online "Grist from Adams' Mill," a collection of essays by Adams—topics include "Balanced Judgment," "Christian Physicians," "Guidance" and "Alliteration."

+ Institute for Nouthetic Studies; www.nouthetic.org/

Premature baby saves mom's life

We've all heard of that will-of-the-wisp, an abortion to save the life of the mother. Here is a Canadian newspaper story about a child birth that saved the mother's life.

Last year, Patrizia Durante, now 27, learned she was suffering from acute myloid leukemia when she was two-thirds of the way through her first pregnancy.

She told the Gazette in a story that appeared last weekend, "It was terrifying, she recalled. "I was afraid for the baby. I was afraid of dying and not being there for my daughter. It was very stressful and difficult for my family."

When she did not respond to moderate doses of chemotherapy, the doctors induced labour at 26 weeks so they could crank up the dosage without hurting her baby.

On Sept. 2, 2001, Victoria was born. Weighing 3 pounds and two months premature, baby Victoria was placed in an incubator while Mrs. Durante renewed her chemotherapy.

By March, however, Mrs. Durante was so ill that doctors at Royal Victoria Hospital could wait no longer for a suitable donor for a bone-marrow transplant. At that point doctors took a calculated risk.

They infused Mrs. Durante with Victoria's umbilical cord blood, which had been frozen. (According to the Gazette, "Umbilical-cord blood is usually banked for later use by the child should it develop a life-threatening illness such as leukaemia.")

While clearly Mrs. Durante's body might have rejected the blood (because Victoria's blood was only a half-match; it carried her mother's

genes as well as her father's), this might work to Mrs. Durante's benefit.

As Dr. Pierre Laneuville, director of haematology at the McGill University Health Centre, told the Gazette, "[I]n this case, the incompatibility—that is, the genes that the baby's dad contributed—theoretically could have been very beneficial in this transplant. There was the possibility that the immune system of the baby may identify the leukemia as foreign and attack.. Which is exactly what happened.

As the Gazette described it, "The stem cells also flooded Mrs. Durante's bloodstream and stuck to her bone marrow—the part of the body that manufactures the blood—and began rebuilding her blood system..

The stem cells also destroyed residual cancer cells, and seven months after the infusion Mrs. Durante is in complete remission.

"We're elated," Dr. Laneuville told the Gazette. "This is the best-case scenario we could possibly have imagined... From a doctor's point of view, the chances are she's cured..

What makes umbilical cord blood so useful is that it is plentiful in the haemopoietic stem cells that can rebuild a blood system that has taken a beating from mega-doses of chemotherapy. Preliminary results from animal studies to determine whether stem cells derived from cord blood can repair damaged heart and brain tissue are "promising," the newspaper also reported.

For pro-lifers, who've argued ceaselessly that there are morally unobjectionable alternatives to lethally extracting stem cells from human embryos, one of Dr. Laneuville's concluding observations is especially poignant: "We are now in an era where we are realising scientifically and medically that we have sources of stem cells that can become other tissues and can be used therapeutically, he said. "And the most accessible source and the one we're throwing in the garbage all the time are these cord cells..

+ Dave Andrusko, *Today's News & Views*, 10-30-2002; www.nrlc.org/news_and_views/index.html, dha1245@juno.com.

Bibles behind the facade in Iraq

As President George W. Bush rallies international support for the possible need to disarm Iraq by force, a dwindling minority of Christians in Iraq wonder if the West has forgotten them, while they enjoy freedoms that Christians in many other Middle Eastern countries would envy.

"The evangelical churches in Iraq are as evangelical as any evangelical church in America, says Norm Nelson, president and host of "Life At Its Best," after returning from a recent Middle East trip. "They love Jesus Christ and honour him and they worship in freedom, he says. "You can walk or drive to church on Sunday and carry your Bible openly.

In the heart of Baghdad, Mr. Nelson found a vibrant church with a worship atmosphere that was "deeply reverent, conducted with decorum and order. With a membership numbering 400 families, their Sunday evening service "was so packed that some were forced to stand in the back."

While their worship is free, there are some restrictions imposed by the secular government, largely controlled by Sunni Arabs. "They are not free to proselytise outside their church property," Mr. Nelson notes.

Still, the contrast could not be more striking with Saudi Arabia, one of the United States' most important allies in the region. "Christians in Saudi Arabia worship in conditions they refer to as 'the catacombs,'" Mr. Nelson says. "They have to be secretive in Saudi Arabia," he says.

Many would be surprised to learn the Bible is so readily available in Iraq. "I know two Bible organisations that distributed a half million New Testaments to the government schools in Iraq, and the government of Iraq allowed them to be distributed in the schools," Mr. Nelson says. "You can't do that in the United States," he says.

"Christians in Iraq said, since the Koran was being distributed free of charge to students, they felt the New Testament should be distributed in schools," Mr. Nelson says. "The government acquiesced and allowed it," he says. The Middle Eastern Bible Society and the Bible League supplied the Bibles to the schools within the last three years.

"We have a colleague in Jordan who takes Arabic copies of the Life Application Bible and distributes them to 18 cities and towns up and down the Tigris River in Iraq, Mr. Nelson says. "When he takes Bibles to the Baghdad book fair, the Bibles are the most popular book he takes," he says.

Mr. Nelson feels moved by the spiritual hunger in Iraq, also evidenced by reports from a Christian radio network operating in Amman, Jordan. "They found the most spiritually hungry country in the Middle East is Iraq," he says. "They get more response from their Christian broadcasts in Arabic to Iraq than from all the countries in the Middle East combined."

"When I go to Iraq the reaction is amazing because the Christians there feel forgotten," Mr. Nelson says. Christians comprise less than two percent of the population of Iraq [other estimates range from 2 to 10 percent—ed.], which is overwhelmingly Muslim. "They say, 'We thought you forgot us.' They hunger for recognition and affirmation that American Christians care about them..

Unfortunately, geopolitical considerations have blinded the eyes of many believers in the West, Mr. Nelson believes. "Evangelical Christians have so politicised their outlook on the Muslim world, that most of the time we don't see the people of these countries with the eyes of Christ," he says. "We see them in terms of the political objectives of the United States of America, but not in terms of the priorities of Jesus Christ."

+ Mark Ellis, Assist News Service, 10-28-02; assistcomm@cs.com; www.assistministries.com.

Ivory Coast conflict context

The Ivory Coast conflict is related to the broader issue of resurgent Islam, and may be a bellwether for much of west Africa. The following analysis is excerpted from a report provided by Elizabeth Kendal of the World Evangelical Alliance, Nov. 5: "A tense peace presently hangs over Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast in French, the common tongue among west African peoples), as a truce now moves into its 18th day. Meanwhile in Lome, the capital city of Togo, intermittent peace talks are continuing between the rebels' political representative, Guillaume Soro, and representatives of Ivoirian President Gbagbo. The prospects certainly look grim as the primary rebel demand is the resignation of President Gbagbo and fresh elections, and this is not an option the government will consider.

"Most analysts now believe the uprising must be either state-sponsored or network-sponsored. It appears that Christianity in Cote d'Ivoire is not up against a few disgruntled or aggrieved local Muslims, but a monstrous, wealthy, powerful and deadly serious foe. The funds involved are way beyond any purely local group.

"This is tragic because the ultimate losers will be all citizens of Cote d'Ivoire who have lived in relative peace and who could no doubt have solved their problems through dialogue and democratic means.

"Various analysts suspect France, neighbouring Burkina Faso, al Qaeda, and more recently, it is alleged by independent French media that Libya's Moammar Gadhafi is funding or arming the rebels.

"There is most surely a drive from the wider Islamist community to claim Cote d'Ivoire for Islam. This should come as no surprise in this post-Sept 11 age, where an embrace of militant Islam is often more of an anti-West protest statement than a religious conviction.

"The radicalization of many of Cote d'Ivoire's Muslims however, goes back further and is more subtle. Because they have studied in Arabic, graduates of CI's Koranic schools have been unable to enter Cote d'Ivoire universities. Instead, these Koranic graduates have in recent decades travelled to Egypt and Saudi Arabia for advanced study.

"They have then gradually replaced much of Cote d'Ivoire's folk or moderate Islam with educated Koranic Islam. Reuters and AFP photographers are now photographing rebels and northern Muslims sporting T-shirts with a picture of Osama bin Laden's face over a map of Cote d'Ivoire.

"It has also been established that the rebels have access to a seemingly limitless supply of sophisticated arms, including armored vehicles. It is alleged that large quantities of arms and ammunitions were brought into northern Cote d'Ivoire and stored in mosques and homes in advance for this uprising. Rebel leader Guillaume Soro has even boasted that the rebels could fight the government for two years without a supply problem.

"Cote d'Ivoire is like many other nations in Africa, with a large Christian population, non-Muslim government, growing church, freedom of religion. Yet Cote d'Ivoire and other nations can become vulnerable through economic crisis or ethnic tensions, to the exploitation and infiltration of men with ambitious visions (like Colonel Gadhafi) or nations with religious designs (like Saudi Arabia) or organizations with political purpose (like al Qaeda). If Cote d'Ivoire goes down, it could set a precedent for much of Africa, which is equally unstable..

+ Elizabeth Kendal, eliz@alphalink.com.au, World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Email Conference.

NZ Conference on Reformation Theology

Video and Audio tapes of this Conference (in its Wellington manifestation) are available. The videos, with plastic covers, can be purchased for \$30.00 and the set of audio tapes (7 in total) can be purchased in a nice plastic folder for \$20.00. You can order by contacting Gary Milne at (06)3444291, or writing to G. Milne, 57 Totara St, Wanganui; or by email gmilne@xtra.co.nz. This conference was widely appreciated and these tapes would make an ideal gift to someone. The clearly set out many of the great truths of the Reformation and also interact with modern doctrinal positions which conflict with the teaching of Scripture.

50 Years of Institution — Reformed Church of Christchurch

The Reformed Church of Christchurch looks forward to celebrating its 50th anniversary.

In order to express our gratitude to God for His faithfulness, a general invitation is hereby extended to join with us in worship in a Thanksgiving Service on Sunday, 16 March 2003, 3:00pm at the Aurora Centre, cnr Greers Rd & Memorial Ave, Christchurch.

Some social events are also being planned for the preceding Saturday, including a Picnic at The Groynes, Saturday 15 March 2003, 12:00pm.

For further details please contact Mr Johan Janssen ph. (03) 358 5745 or email Mrs Sarah van Leeuwen at esvanlch@xtra.co.nz

2,000 participate in PCA Global Missions Conference

The first Presbyterian Church in America Global Missions Conference drew nearly 2,000 participants from churches all across the PCA to downtown Atlanta, Nov. 8 - 10. Sponsored by Mission to the World, the conference theme was "Grasping God's Grace Personally to Give God's Grace Globally." Rev. Joe Novenson, senior pastor of Lookout Mountain Presbyterian in Lookout Mountain, Tenn., and Dr. Paul Kooistra, MTW coordinator, were the plenary speakers.

The conference featured 40 tracks and almost 200 workshops in diverse areas of ministry, such as partnering, missionary preparation, Muslim ministry, short-term service, and ministry to street children, all focused around MTW's central goal of church planting. In addition, there were tracks for medical professionals as well as separate conferences for children and teens.

+ *Mission to the World, Presbyterian Church in America, 1600 North Brown Road, Lawrenceville, GA 30043-8141*

Bible translation and the TNIV

"Systematic Pattern in the TNIV" by Vern Poythress...opens by saying that "the central problem with Today's New International Version (TNIV) does not lie in this or that verse that has been translated in less than an ideal way. It lies in a pattern, a systematic policy, namely that it avoids using a male representative or example to communicate a general truth" (emphasis in original). A footnote explains that the same issue "lies behind the gender-neutral Bible controversy of 1997." Poythress recommends resources related to the earlier disputes that are both pro and con.

+ *Westminster Theological Journal, 64:1 - 2002, pp185-192, www.wts.edu/publications/wtj*
+ *Dr. Dominic Aquila, Editor, Presbyterian Church in America News, www.pcanews.com*

Over 200 learn Muslim views on female modesty in Nigeria

The hosting of the Miss World competition, particularly during Ramadan, inflamed the zeal of Islamists who threatened to disrupt the pageant. On 20 November, the Nigerian newspaper This Day challenged Muslim objections and suggested the prophet Mohammed would not have been offended by the pageant but rather would probably have chosen a wife from among the contestants. Muslims were offended and the paper issued an apology. However, the Islamists who had threatened to disrupt the competition used the article as justification to riot.

After burning the newspaper offices, Muslims targeted Christians for killing. One BBC reporter was caught in the riot. "Some were saying I was a Christian," he said. "I had to shout Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Muhammad Rasoul Illah

(God is great, God is great, Muhammad is the prophet of God) before they would let me go." In Kaduna more than 200 are dead, 1,000 injured and 12,000 left homeless, with 22 churches and 8 mosques burnt down.

+ *Evangelical Alliance of Australia, PO Box 175, Box Hill, Victoria, 3128*

Montagnard Churches being closed

Information is pouring out of Vietnam about a recent wave of government repression against Montagnard evangelicals in Vietnam's Central Highlands.

Documents acquired in October by religious and human rights workers and correspondence received in recent days confirm that by the end of September, 354 of 412 churches had been forcibly disbanded in Dak Lak province alone. By mid October, about 50 Christian pastors and elders in this province had been arrested or had "disappeared." It is expected that the remaining 58 churches in the province will soon be closed.

Montagnard churches—"Montagnard" means "mountain people" and is a collective name for Vietnam's many minority tribal groups inhabiting the Central Highlands—were historically part of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South). Last year, 26 years after the country was reunified under communism, the ECVN(S) was granted legal recognition. However, only a handful of the many hundreds of Montagnard churches were allowed to identify with the ECVN(S).

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

Gong Shengliang reprieved and then resented

Gong Shengliang, the 47-year-old founder of the South China Church, was sentenced to death in December 2001 by a court in Hubei for "using an evil cult to undermine the enforcement of the law" and raping some of his followers, according to The Washington Post Dec. 6.

Observers suggest rape charges are commonly added to justify death sentences.

As a visit of China's president to President Bush in October approached, Hubei's highest court threw out the death sentence along with the cult charges. In a retrial, Gong was given a life sentence Oct. 10.

Visitors allowed to see Gong in March said cuffs on his wrists and legs "were so tight, and had been on so long, that you could see bones." "His whole face was bruised and swollen, and his mouth and lips were broken."

Gong led a Protestant group that reports about 100,000 members. Since its beginning in 1991, the South China Church has dispatched missionaries throughout China and is known to be active in 10 provinces, according to The Post. The church operated a seminary, a publishing house and a bimonthly magazine contrary to Chinese law.

+ *Baptist Press, Southern Baptist Convention, 901 Commerce #750, Nashville, TN 37203 901 (615) 244-2355*

Aborting babies does not cure Parkinson's

A study of transplanted cells obtained from abortions has failed to show a therapeutic benefit in Parkinson's disease patients, according to the Wall Street Journal. For the study, which involved 34 participants, Mount Sinai School of Medicine and University of South Florida researchers infused brain tissue from up to eight aborted babies, ranging from six to nine weeks old, into 23 patients. Brain scans of the participants indicated the cells functioned "normally," but researchers were unable to "find any measurable improvement on tests of motor and other skills."

Side effects included uncontrolled limb movement in 13 patients; three required stabilization surgery.

+ *Mr. Steven Ertelt, Women and Children First, PO Box 4433, Helena, MT 59604-4433*

Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ creates diaconal services

The Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ [ERCC], found primarily in central Nigeria's Nasarawa State, created a Diaconal Services ministry at its 2002 Synod. Persistent drought has plagued many ERCC members who are substance farmers. Halfway through the growing season there are no visible crops. Nasarawa has a high rate of HIV/AIDS infection. Ethnic conflicts and surging Islam also afflict the area.

The South African branch of Sudan United Mission began the ERCC in 1916. Some 152 pastors serve 267 congregations and 1,500,000 members and adherents. The church maintains 31 rural health clinics.

The denomination belongs to the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

+ *Rev. Nuhu Idzi, PO Box 104, Akwanga, Nasarawa State, Nigeria sumc@cyberspace.net.ng*
+ *Dr. Richard L. van Houten, Reformed Ecumenical Council, 2050 Breton Rd. SE Ste 102, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-5547*

GKN gives eleven-year grace period for church property

Congregations of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKN) will have seven years to opt out of a proposed church union and keep local property according to REC News reports. Currently, GKN congregations own property locally.

Under the projected Church Order, all property will transfer to the Uniting Protestant Churches in The Netherlands and local congregation will not be free to withdraw. Mounting unrest moved the GKN Synod to adopt a transition regulation allowing departure in the first seven years.

The GKN, founded in 1892, have 859 congregations. Some 1,219 ministers and 35 evangelists serve 668,000 members.

+ *Dr. B. Plaisier, De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, PO Box 8399, 3508 RM Utrecht, The Netherlands*

Reformation Translation Fellowship at 50

The year 2002 marked the 50th anniversary of the publication in Chinese of Loraine Boettner's "Reformed Doctrine of Predestination." In November China Ministries International conducted a seminar on "Review of the Development of Evangelical Churches Established by Foreign Missions in Taiwan, 1952-2002." Across that period Reformation Translation Fellowship published 120 books and booklets of which 82 titles are in current circulation. Today RTF has become one of the main publishers of theological literature in Chinese.

Berkhof's "History of Doctrine" and the five-volume "Essentials Teachings of the Christian Faith" have been picked up by government-approved presses and can be obtained openly. + *Reformation Translation Fellowship, 302 East First St., Bloomington, IN 47401*

Church builder Clarence Werkema, 82

Rev. Clarence Werkema died Oct. 2, at age 82. A navy veteran from World War II, Werkema graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1954.

After five years serving the Reformed Church in America, Werkema transferred to the Christian Reformed Church and served five congregations until retirement in 1983.

Subsequent to formal retirement, Werkema served the Nelson Reformed Church in New Zealand for two years. The Champlain Valley United Reformed Church in Vermont, the Reformed Heritage Church of Holland, Michigan, and the United Reformed Church in Allendale, Michigan, also benefited from his vision of retirement as the United Reformed Churches emerged.

+ *Reformed Fellowship, 2930 Chicago Drive, SW, Grandville, MI 49418-1176 (616) 532-8510*

Our churches in focus

Bulletin Gleanings

by Andrew Reinders

Bishopdale

Preparation For Worship: We sing two psalms or hymns before worship to help us focus our attention on the Lord. Please look out for the person making the announcements about five minutes before the hour and give him the quietness he needs to announce the songs. The session also encourages you to be on time for the services so we can begin together. This will also assist your own preparation for worship rather than rushing in at the last minute.

We welcome as members Mr and Mrs Don and Helen Capill who are familiar faces to some of us over many years and who have been worshipping with us for a while. We are pleased to have you join the congregation and trust you will be encouraged in your faith and that you will be of blessing and help to others.

Check Your Shelves Please! I have quite a number of books out on loan to various people. I'm calling for my annual book return – no questions asked – no late fees charged! J.H.

Christchurch

Peppermints for Project Philip Project Philip is a Bible League project which provides bibles for people who complete some introductory bible studies. Reuben Posthuma wants to raise money for this project and has sourced peppermints to sell. At \$1.00 a 100g bag they are good value! He will have them available at the Sunday School breakup. Stocks are limited so be quick.

Dovedale

Postmen, Postwomen and Postchildren wanted!! Time again to deliver leaflets around our church neighbourhood inviting people to attend the Christmas Church Service. You could also use the leaflets to invite your friends and the neighbours in your home area. Please see Raymond or Neville for your lot of leaflets and delivery area. It will only take 20 minutes or so to deliver 100.

Dunedin

Planning for your pastor's trip to PNG is progressing steadily. Fares have been booked and immunisations given for various tropical illnesses (just another reminder that we'll be

going into a vastly different climate and culture). Since the trip is to be primarily exploratory, the kinds of things I'll need to report back to the Overseas Mission Board (OMB) on are as follows: The costs of living in PNG and safety issues, the ability to work with the existing Reformed Church in Port Moresby, scope for liaison with the Canadian Reformed Church missionary Stephen t'Hart, church planting opportunities, and opportunities for working amongst the student population in PNG. The OMB will meet later this month in order to finalise any further instructions they may have for me.

Please pray for our church group as they prepare to lead their first service in the prison on 18 December. Pray that the Lord will touch the hearts of those that attend.

Hamilton

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT. A religion confined to the closet, the cell, or the church, therefore, Calvin abhors. With the Psalmist, he calls upon heaven and earth, he calls upon all peoples and nations to give glory to God...Wherever man may stand, whatever he may do, to whatever he may apply his hand, in agriculture, in commerce, and in industry, or his mind, in the world of art, and science, he is, in whatsoever it may be, constantly standing before the face of his God, he has strictly to obey his God, and above all, he has to aim at the glory of his God. Abraham Kuyper

Hastings

The special collection following the celebration of the Lord's Supper this morning has been designated for the work of the Reformed Church of Nelson. The Nelson congregation is the smallest in our denomination, being less than a third the size of our congregation. Despite its small size, it seeks to be a witness to the grace of our Lord in Nelson. May we give generously, so that our abundance may become a supply to their need at this time, that there may be equality (2 Cor 8:14).

Palmerston North

The Cadet and Calvinette camp went very well last week-end. Many thanks to all the counselor's, who gave generously of their time, energy, and sleep. The Cadet and Calvinette group at church is much appreciated by all who attend, and is a good organisation for our young people to belong to. For further enquiries, please see head Counselor John Fransen.

Pukekohe

There will be a men's breakfast this Saturday morning, 21 December, 7:00am at the church.

Advertise your

Happenings and

Church events in

faith in
focus

Wainuiomata

The congregation voted on our building proposal last Monday and we are thankful for the enthusiasm behind our new building project. 93 per cent of us were in favour of the entire plan in principle. Then 89 per cent voted in favour of Stage One—enlarging and beautifying the sanctuary. Finally, 58 per cent voted for the fancier (turret) roof line. Let us work and pray. We trust that this project will be good for our congregation as we work more closely together.

Wellington

On Thursday evening at 9pm the Lord took brother Johan Boessenkool home. It had been a difficult journey of suffering for him, and for his family too. For them there is still the road ahead in this very fragile life, and we pray the Lord will grant His many mercies, also through the love of His people. Pray for this one-parent family, for wisdom and strength for Ilse, and for each one of the children. Thank God for the encouragement and help from Ilse's father and Johan's sister Susan.

The Goris family will also leave for overseas, D.V., due to fly out of Wellington on Tuesday. This is for the long service leave due, last year. The family will spend most of the time in Malaysia, but during that time there will also be an ICRC missions conference in Thailand.

Session has been able to secure the services of **candidate Nigel Cunningham** from Hastings for the bigger part of our pastor's absence. He and his wife and son will arrive this week and stay in the manse.

AUCKLAND PRESBYTERY

The Auckland Presbytery met on Friday evening, the 29th of November, 2002. A special welcome was extended to the delegates of the newly instituted Reformed Church of Hukanui.

With the Rev. W. Wiersma in the chair for this meeting, the agenda was adopted and the minutes of the two previous meetings, 28/6/02 and 30/10/02, were approved (the second being the special meeting to deal with the departure of the Rev. Dale Piers).

Presbytery then spent some hours considering the report of the committee appointed by Presbytery to consider the request from the Bucklands Beach session regarding guidance and advice on matters and issues that have arisen from a sermon preached by the Rev. D. J. van Garderen at Avondale on the 19th November 2001. Given the nature of the mandate and the time given to deal with it, the Committee restricted itself to a study and summation of the exegetical material. Their report was formulated as a response to the assertions raised by the Bucklands Beach

Session, rather than a detailed report. After much discussion upon each of the recommendations, the Presbytery decided to:

1. Receive this report;
 2. Concur with the Committee's concern that the Rev van Garderen based his sermon on a possible but unconvincing understanding of tongues speaking as unintelligible utterances;
 3. Concur with the Committee's findings (particularly in the current context) that due to this exegesis certain pastoral applications were made which were both unhelpful and insensitive;
 4. In the light of Rev van Garderen's retractions, deem this matter as sufficiently dealt with;
 5. Discharge the Committee.
- The Committee were thanked for their work.

In a further decision, "Presbytery noted with concern the manner in which this matter was communicated to a wide audience by parties outside this presbytery. Presbytery is particularly concerned about the negative perception that was created with regard to the ministry and good standing of Br van Garderen."

Various other reports were received, including one from the Rev. Carl Larsen regarding the work of the National Diaconate Committee, particularly in connection with the C.A.R.E. Christmas Appeal.

The Rev. W. Wiersma was appointed the Counsellor for the Pukekohe congregation.

It was mentioned that the Auckland Reformed Church has its 50th Anniversary on the 1st April 2003, and plans are underway to invite the Rev. Bill Deenick, the founding minister at that time, to be present at that occasion.

A discipline matter was raised by the Hamilton church, with Presbytery concurrence being received for the next step of discipline.

Presbytery warmly thanked Br Cor Feyter for his work as the Clerk of Presbytery for the past five years, and wished him a happy 'retirement'.

Reporter: Sjirk Bajema

CHRISTCHURCH PRESBYTERY

The Christchurch presbytery met at the Reformed Church of Dovedale on Saturday 9th of November, 2002. Rev Michael Flinn took the chair, noting that this was the third Presbytery meeting he had attended in the last two weeks (The presbytery declined to award any special medal for this but did express thanks to him for being our itinerant representative!) The chairman led a devotion on issues of leadership arising out of the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17.

Nelson reported on their needy financial

situation, and expressed thanks to the churches of the presbytery and some North Island Churches for their financial support. The Needy Churches Fund has declined to give financial assistance to Nelson. Presbytery decided to write again to the Needy Churches Fund to clarify when the fund could be activated by a church in financial need.

It was decided to discontinue the role of the Youth Liaison Officer because the job description provided goes well beyond a liaison role, and also because this task can be adequately covered by the sessions.

One of the three Christchurch Sessions on rotation will provide spiritual oversight of the Youth and Cadet camps that are organised by members of more than one congregation.

Presbytery went into closed session to deal with a matter of correspondence.

Rev Michael Flinn gave a report about the Overseas Mission Board. Rev Hans Vaatstra is preparing to go to Papua New Guinea from 21st of January to 21st March 2003 for an investigation of the work. He will be examining church planting opportunities with Rev Stephen t'Hart as well as exploring other avenues of work.

John Haverland will draw up a preaching roster for 2003 that will have the three Christchurch ministers preaching once each in Dunedin, Oamaru and Nelson during the year, following the normal practice.

Rev Michael Flinn drew our attention to items of interest from the minutes of other presbyteries from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and reported on his attendance at the Auckland and Wellington Presbytery meetings in October 2002.

Church Visitation Reports were received and discussed. Special attention was given to giving further assistance to the outlying churches of the presbytery. John Haverland is to supply a list of readers who are available to lead services in Dunedin, Oamaru and Nelson that these churches could draw on.

Rev John Haverland was appointed as the representative of the Christchurch Presbytery on the National Publications Committee.

Reporter: John Haverland

Books in focus

A brilliant find

During lunchbreak at the October Reformed Conference in Auckland I browsed through the books on display at the rear of the church. Amongst them I found a book with an intriguing title, "Light in the shadow of Jihad." I kept on thinking about this title, and that made me pick this book up again the following morning. I started reading inside the front cover, and my attention was caught.

The author, Ravi Zacharias, is asking some searching questions about the terrible acts of terrorism perpetrated in New York and Washington.

For people grappling for answers and searching for the truth in the shadow of Jihad, Ravi Zacharias puts in perspective why we ask, and what we ask. God's imprint is not only in the answers, but also in the questions themselves.

If we find those answers, they will spell life, steadying the soul even though the heart still aches. Ravi Zacharias was born in India, and at the age of 20 he immigrated to Canada.

He earned a Master's degree of Divinity at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and began a speaking ministry worldwide as a recognized authority on comparative religions, cults and philosophy.

He briefly outlines the events in New York on September 11, 2001

The world came to a stand still. How can we ever forget? This act of mass murder by a handful of merciless killers has reminded us of the hell a mind and will devoid of conscience can unleash upon the world.

People of all walks of life question why these terrible events have taken place.

Why do they hate us? Is it because of our foreign policy? Why does a God of love allow these things to happen?

People are subjected to so much through the media—shootings, bombings, letter bombs, hijackings, etc. We hardly take notice, because it is always somewhere else in the world and we return to our normal lives. Somehow it is not our problem, and it has not been personal for most of us.

Then, the World Trade Centre, the symbol of Multinational Prosperity, and the Pentagon, the symbol of National Security, were in a moment smashed by our own instruments of technology at the hands of people scheming for our destruction.

At that very moment this has become our war: every one of us has been attacked. We can not say anymore, "It is not our problem".

Having received such a staggering blow that awakened us from our illusion of security, we must now ask who we are as a people. What makes this nation of the USA what it is? What do we believe about life and death? How we answer those questions will determine whether we stand or fall.

During a discussion in Washington on anti-American sentiment and the persecution of Christians, attended by Ravi Zacharias, the question was asked, "Is there anything these persecutors fear?"

Ravi Zacharias replied to this question by saying, "Yes, there is something they fear—a moral, strong America. They firmly believe that an America without moral conviction can easily be run in to the ground, but an America that has deep moral convictions is formidable. America, at its core, is a nation birthed in a faith in God."

Ravi Zacharias believes that the answer to the question that has been prompted by this event will reveal not just a sliver of light to us, but the bright daybreak of conviction, hope, and meaning, which is worth living and dying for.

A strong hand of faith can pull us from the darkness of the rubble of hate and violence we find ourselves in. That is my prayer of hope, which will be a battle that can be won. This is a war between good and evil, and a struggle between truth and falsehood.

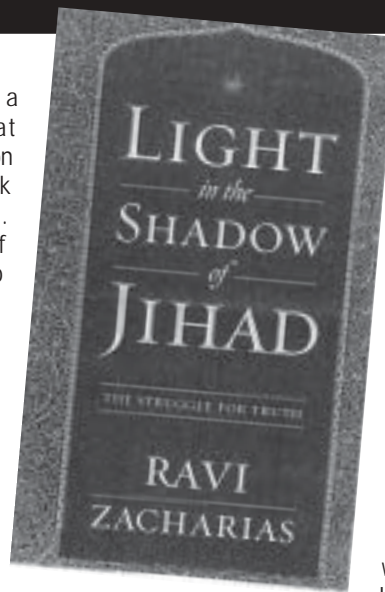
Ravi Zacharias explains through history and with the Bible the differences between the nations in the Middle East who claim Abraham as their forefather, and the conflict between those nations, up to this very day.

The Bin Ladens of this world, who seek earthly kingdoms and who hate others because of their national identity, speak a different language from that of God's Word.

They seek the destruction of thousands of people—it doesn't matter who.

But those who struggle in their own wisdom to find a way to God will find out that the ultimate struggle took place on the cross of Calvary, some 2000 years ago.

From that cross comes a different message and a different Kingdom. It is a Kingdom of love and truth which is ultimately personal, not national. The message of Jesus is a message of forgiveness and peace that



the world cannot give or take away.

Bin Laden and his murderers have the power to kill, but Jesus has the power to raise us up again. His presence is within us. That is what personal communion with Him brings, and no terrorist can take that away from us.

"A mighty fortress is our God" is a stirring reminder that devilish wills can never bring down His Word. Just as the cloud of hate unfurled by

diabolical acts was dispelled by acts of mercy and love, so our pain and grief were brought to the Lord of all strength and healing.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing;
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

This is a spiritual battle, and we must know both what we are up against, and what our greatest strength must be.

At the end of his book Ravi Zacharias concludes with Ps 73:16-17:

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

That sanctuary of the soul, no aircraft can destroy. Those are sobering and comforting words. He who went to the cross gives us His own pillar of cloud and pillar of fire to protect and to lead us amidst the darkness with which doers of evil seek to blind us.

May our churches bring hope and seriousness to what God wants both as a people, and as individuals. Only in Him can we find peace and confidence, knowing there is a destiny towards which we all move.

This book can maybe clarify some aspects you struggle with. It certainly was an eye-opener to me. It will help you to stay focussed on the firm foundation we have in Jesus Christ. Apart from Him we have no hope.

This book is obtainable in any good Christian bookshop, or at the booktable at your church, as I found it.

Hans Voschezang

Missions in focus

Country profile: Senegal



Senegal is mainland Africa's most westerly state—an arid country with few natural resources: the main exports are peanuts, fish and phosphates. And yet Senegal is home to some 10 million people. There are over 52 ethnic groups; the official language is French, but the common language of trade is Wolof. Only some 33% of Senegalese are literate. Senegal became independent from France in 1960. It has a multi-party democracy and enjoyed a peaceful transfer of power to the former opposition in 2000. However, the separatist conflict in the south-west province of Casamance has caused disruption and distress, with 60,000 local people becoming refugees.

Pray for Senegal:

1. Islam has grown from about 45% of the population in 1900 to over 92% in 2000. It is the religion of almost all the Wolof, Fulbe and Mande peoples. Religious freedom is a source of pride to Senegalese—possibly because so few Muslims have ever come to Christ. Pray for a new receptivity to the gospel and the preservation of freedom of religion.
2. The Casamance in the south has been troubled by a guerilla war. Pray that there might be the political will to reach a just settlement for all involved. Christian and economic activity has been disrupted for a decade.
3. Christians are mainly confined to sections of the Serer, Jola and Cape Verdian peoples. Their influence is disproportionately great through their input into health services and education. Sadly most are nominally Catholic and from a non-Muslim background. Their lifestyle often does no credit to the cause of Christ, and few know real freedom in Christ and victory over sin. Muslims refer to Christians as 'those who drink' rather than those who follow Christ.
4. Christian leaders are few, but an increasing number of young men are completing theological training at various levels. Pray for more long-term church planters to serve in this needy but open land. Pray also for encouragement among the missionary

- teams; most are young, inexperienced and short on leadership in a difficult, unresponsive field.
5. Major areas of the country are still very much pioneer situations. Pray for more missionaries and national believers to begin work in these areas, especially:
 - a) *The Senegal River Valley in the north and northeast.* Only a few missionaries are working on this strategic frontier with closed Mauritania. There are some small groups of believers but no viable church in the entire area.
 - b) *The central and eastern areas of Senegal are sparsely populated and unevangelised,* as is the territory along the frontier of inland Gambia.
 - c) *Young people.* Many have flocked to the cities in search of education and employment. Their commitment to conservative Islam is not so great, and YWAM, Gideons and some churches are seeking to reach them. Pray for an impact for God to be made on children and young people.
 6. Unreached peoples. Pray for the planting of strong churches among the various tribal groups, and especially for freedom from traditional religions and the all-consuming fear of the spirits.
 7. Pray for the progress of Bible translation. Six long-awaited New Testaments were published in the 1980s and 90s; work on 19 other New Testaments is in hand.

(Footnotes)

- 1 Information from *Operation World CD-ROM*, Copyright ©2001 Patrick Johnstone. Used with permission.

AVOIDING missionary service

Wanting to steer clear of missionary service? Feeling you don't want to support mission work? Here are some good ways to make sure you don't get trapped!

1. Skilfully avoid the command in John 4:35 to take a long, hard look at the fields. This is not only depressing but unsettling, and could lead to genuine missionary concern.
2. Have a good, healthy, socially legitimate target ahead of you, such as higher qualifications, promotion, bigger home or better car.
3. Stick to generalities. Never allow the stark needs of specific mission fields to make an impact on you.
4. Never expose yourself to personal contact with missionaries. Their testimonies are disturbing, and the situations they describe tend to contrast with the materialistic living in the western world.
5. Develop a 'national church can do it' attitude. Never investigate

- the percentage of the population they constitute, or the severe limitations of their resources.
6. Focus your attention on the evils of your own society. All fair-minded Christians will applaud your concerns about the 'unsaved right here in our own country'. Mission begins at home. Make sure it finishes there, too.
 7. Always keep in mind your past failures. It is unreasonable to expect that you will ever get any better and besides, you're not ready to go yet...maybe never will be. Of course, ignore the examples of Peter, Moses and Paul.
 8. Always look at those involved in mission as super-spiritual people with extraordinary gifts and saintly characters. This will heighten your sense of inadequacy, and remove any guilt complex about trying to be like them.
 9. Avoid all books that emphasise the ability of the Holy Spirit to change lives and to provide power for service.
 10. Go right away without any training at all. That way you will be back soon, and can say you tried.
 11. Insist that you must find a slot that is exactly tailored to your qualifications. That way, you'll never find an opening.
 12. Start worrying about money and the impossibility of surviving in a country with an annual 100 per cent inflation rate. The Lord couldn't possibly cope with that.
 13. Never sing the hymn '*Onward Christian Soldiers*'. Always substitute with this version: '*Mark time Christian heroes, Never go to war. Stop and mind the babies Playing on the floor. Wash and dress and feed them, Forty times a week. Till they're roly poly, Puddings so to speak.*' (CT Studd)___

Source: Australian CMS Checkpoint magazine, 1998. Used with permission.

Final words on options for living

Patricia van Laar

This series has covered a range of options for the elderly. There are doubtless some solutions which have not been mentioned, such as the provision of just a bedroom for a parent in a child's home, in which case the parent lives entirely as part of the family. Even here it would be nice, if possible, to have the bedroom big enough to contain an easy chair or two, so that the parent may entertain his/her own visitors, or just be on his/her own for a while. This arrangement has been known to work well in some families. For example, John's mother in Holland lived with his sister for three years, and Pat's aunt even longer with Pat's cousin in Gisborne. Both had just a bedroom of their own. There was a case in Christchurch where a family moved rent-free into the home of a delightful, white-haired and white-bearded old gentleman. They cared for him for twenty or more years, so that he was certainly a 'grandfather' to the children, although never called that—he was always, very respectfully, 'Mr. Williams' to the whole family, as customary in those days. Being a kindly and gentle person, as were also the mother and father of the family, and being of the same nationality, with much in common, everyone was very happy. On his death, according to arrangements made years earlier, his house went into the possession of the family who had cared for him so well, with the full agreement of his own son and grandchild.

What stood out

There are some notable aspects of the interviews with the older church folk who featured in the series. First is the expression of spiritual values and trust. Their trust in the Lord and committal to Him shines through in

the twilight of their lives.

A second notable feature has been the emphasis of responsibility of one generation to the other. This responsibility is not just from the younger to the older, it is a two-way responsibility, including also the responsibility of older to younger, the latter's consideration of the younger's situation, and the best solution for both. This has resulted in a variety of actions, none of which should be criticised by outsiders. What suits some will not suit others. What may be wrong for some may be right for others, and this is so in every case that has been discussed, from a room for the elderly parent in the son/daughter's home, through granny flats, caravans and retirement villages to intensive care rest homes. Let each family make its own decision. Sometimes an idea or suggestion from the outside may be helpful, but let us avoid expressing dogmatic opinions to and about others.

Older people—don't leave it too late to make changes. While you are still active and capable is the time to do this. It is sad for families to see old folk struggling and to hear the family say, "They should have made a change long ago, but now it is too late."

Families—don't try to force the older members of your family to do what you think is best for them, rather than what they themselves would like to do, unless the time comes when their own mental ability to make decisions is impaired, making it essential that you take matters into your own hands.

Don't force or persuade them into homes which make them lonely, regretful, dissatisfied. Above all, examine your own motives. Is what you encourage them to do, for their own benefit and in accordance with their own wishes, or is it, in all honesty, for your benefit (convenience or financial) now or in the future? If you realise

you have perhaps been guilty, can you make amends?

One instance is that of a lady who wanted to go into a retirement village, but the family persuaded her, owing to the initial cost of purchase (which she could meet) and the final deductions that would come from her estate (which would affect them, not her), to go under their roof instead. She deeply regrets this. The family go away each day, parents to work, children to school. Being in a new neighbourhood of young people who also go off to work, and having no car, she sees only the postman all day, and such visitors who happen to call on her. It was her money that would have bought her village home, not the family's, but for the future of her family's financial gain, she has forfeited the chance of village companionship. In the story of Ben and Willy's village, deductions made on leaving a village were discussed, but only as a cautionary measure. Be aware of these, but they should not be the motive behind a decision, or the deciding factor.

Parent: If you decide to live with a child, respect his privacy. One family extended the house with an en suite, bedroom and lounge for the mother, but she almost never used her own lounge. No matter what the household activity, who the visitors, there was mother in the midst, expressing her opinion and often dominating the conversation, to the despair of her son-in-law. On the other hand, physically handicapped and with extremely limited capabilities and activities, she was afraid to purchase for her own use in her own room a TV, because the son-in-law disapproved. So, in a sense he only had himself to blame for her continual presence! Sort all such things out beforehand, with a clear understanding of individual rights, expectations, privileges and

responsibilities.

Legal considerations: Look into the legal side of your arrangements in good time. If you leave no will, the government may take over disposal of your estate, and appoint the Public Trust or similar as executors. If you become incapacitated the same thing is likely to happen. Not only make a will, appointing executors of your choice, but also give power of attorney to a person (or preferably two people) of your own choice to take care of your affairs. This can be worded with limitations, only coming into effect under certain conditions. Some have done this in time of absence overseas, so that incoming debts (electricity charges, rates, insurance etc.) can be paid by the attorney, and the letting of a home or other decisions can be made on behalf of the absent owner. A power of attorney may be also be worded to come into effect only in cases of mental incapacity or coma.

Churches: Look closely at the situation of your elderly. Do any of them need help in any way?

Checking up

Set up a daily check system for members of the congregation who live alone, not necessarily just the elderly, either, but anyone who does not go out regularly to employment. It may be a telephone system—one person’s responsibility to ring a single every morning for a short chat. Have a set time for calling, say nine in the morning.

Occasionally invite your single member for a meal. She will appreciate that. I say ‘she’ advisedly, for men seem to be invited frequently—and the same comment applies to the absence of a wife in hospital or away from home—everyone rushes to ask the husband to a meal, often so much that he cannot accept all the invitations, but women are often neglected. It is assumed that a wife, as the usual cook, can look after herself. True enough, but she too would be glad of an invitation to dinner and the company of others.

Single people: Do not be too proud to accept help offered, or the daily telephone check up. It could mean instant aid in case of sudden illness or accident, or even save your life. The value of the telephone system is illustrated by an incident in one of our churches. A single lady failed to answer the daily call, so the person telephoning rang another church member who lived round the corner from her. Within five minutes, she was checked. Happily,

in this case, the solo member had gone into the garden and forgotten the time, but we have all heard of people who have lain in their houses for days until a neighbour has set the wheels in motion to investigate why there had been no sight of that person for a week.

Church members: Don’t let a false piety interfere, either. One authentic case occurred in a church with very strict rules of living and

Sabbath. He also reminded us that on the Sabbath day even a cow may be rescued from a ditch.

Being a neighbour

And, neighbours—while you don’t neglect single church members, and invite them for a meal, how about also your neighbour? Have you singles in your near neighbourhood? Even if they do not belong to your or to any church, keep an eye on them. Last year, a forty-nine year old was not seen for a couple of days, so an alert neighbour rang a member of the Salvation Army, his church. It being the busy Christmas season, with many regulars away and many visitors present, no one at church had noticed his absence. He had died suddenly, and if it had not been for the neighbour, would not have been found for a week, or maybe longer.

We had an old, partially crippled neighbour whose mail we took into his house each day. One Saturday we were delayed by visitors, and instead of going as usual before lunch, went in at four in the afternoon. He had plugged his cell phone into the wall socket to be recharged at breakfast time, then had fallen and was unable to reach it. Crawling through the house, he had only managed to cover himself with a quilt pulled from his bed. He had lain on the floor, cold and distressed, the whole winter day. After that incident, his family insisted on his getting a medical alarm around his neck, connected to the ambulance. A record is kept at the ambulance headquarters telling where a key for entrance to the house is hidden. He did have to use this service on a couple of occasions.

At his funeral a year or two later, his family told us that he could not have remained in his own home if we had not been keeping an eye on him

A lonely neighbour might welcome an occasional invitation to a meal. It may open the way to show the love of Christ verbally as well as practically, although this should not be the prime or only motive!

And finally

A final observation: In all these activities, think. People hesitate to ask for help, especially the independent ones. Sometimes we need to notice and act in spite of this. Don’t omit the ‘odd’ ones, either. They may be ‘angels in disguise.’



Sunday observance. A single man in the congregation always attended church, both morning and evening services, never missing year after year. He was present as usual one Sunday morning, but for the first time in anyone’s memory, missing in the evening. Although the congregation discussed amongst themselves after the service what could have happened to him, incredibly, because it was Sunday, and the rule of their church was no visiting and no telephoning on Sundays, it was Monday morning before someone took action. In his home they found him alive but taken seriously ill the previous afternoon. An ambulance rushed him to hospital, where he died a few hours later. The Lord said that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the