

# faith in focus

Magazine of the  
Reformed Churches  
of New Zealand

VOLUME 35/6 JULY 2008



“They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish.”

Psalm 107:37

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**Copy Deadline:**

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.  
Church and family notices are free, subject to  
sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and  
payment of subscriptions to:

**The Secretary:**

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**Subscription per volume:**

\$40.00 (eleven issues)  
Bulk Rate: \$35.00  
Overseas: \$60.00  
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

**Production Staff:**

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

**Editorial**

As Christians we are continually warned about the influence of the secular society around us. This world is not a friend to the Lord and we can easily be taken in by Satan's devious attacks through it. But also, we must be aware that much of Christendom is not a friend to the gospel either. Much as it pains us to say it, the wiles of the evil one have largely overtaken much of what purports to be Christianity. We see that right across the board — from the liberalism of the mainline churches, the continued ritualism of Rome, right through to the 'health-and-wealth' which has displaced the gospel in many charismatic churches. Many of us have seen this first hand as we've worshipped with other churches in places where no like-minded churches were found.

The influence of these unbiblical movements in Christianity won't leave us untouched. They will come subtly and covertly, much as they have already come to what used to be strongly evangelical churches. But they will come — and then what will you say?

I pray you have already been saying it. Much as open and rigorous debate is not the world's flavour-of-the-month, we must lovingly speak the truth. If we are wrong, or have misunderstood, then we must be honest. And always we must be humble. This is not about any of us — this is about the Lord.

Tell me, do you pray for biblical revival? Do you plead with God to stir men's souls to faith through His Word and Spirit? Are you concerned about the eternal welfare of your neighbour?

May the theme articles in this 'Faith in Focus' encourage us God's way in this.

*'Let us now see what is meant by the due  
worship of God.'*

Its chief foundation is to acknowledge Him to be,  
as He is, the only source of all virtue, justice, holiness, wisdom,  
truth, power, goodness, mercy, life, and salvation.

In accordance with this,  
to ascribe and render to Him the glory of all that is good,  
to seek all things in Him alone,  
and in every want to go to Him alone.

And so prayer rises us, and also praise and thanksgiving —  
these being evidence to the glory which we give Him.

This is that genuine sanctification of His name  
which He requires of us above all things.'

**John Calvin**

Photo Credit:

Cover — *Waiheke Island* by John Holtslag

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# Worship: What Is It?

## R.O. Zorn

Theological definitions could be given for 'worship' but these may be unfamiliar to the average pew-sitter. So let us be practical and down to earth, at the level of the pew-sitter.

On any given Sunday, one will find all types of people present at the worship service (tradesmen, businessmen, wives, children, university students, the young people and the retired folk). Why are they at the worship service? What do they expect from it? Are they conscious of the fact that they've come to church to worship the Lord?

One would suppose that the answer is 'yes' to this question. Even so, what is worship for the various people who attend the worship service?

### Is it a matter of feeling?

For some, worship is gauged by the way it makes them feel. Worship, like anything else that is good, should be a positive experience and make one feel good. If it lacks this important element for them, they are soon dissatisfied and before long begin to cast about for something more to their liking.

It is not difficult, however, to see that the fallacy of identifying worship with feeling good is that an important element of worship may be the necessity of making the worshippers feel bad (due to needed conviction of sin, failure to keep God's law, disobedience to the divine will, etc.). Feelings, therefore, both positive and negative, may play a part in worship but it is obviously more than just these.

### Is it a matter of taste?

For others, worship is considered largely a matter of taste which a person or group may have. Some may like stately liturgy, complete with forms which people read from, sonorous organ music, etc, and so such people go to an Anglican church or one similar. Others prefer a lively, informal type of worship service, perhaps with guitars, musical instruments and drums, hand-clapping perhaps, and other forms of audience participation, including the giving of testimonies, etc. So these people seek out charismatic churches. Some people may

like a service to be something between these two extremes and so they gravitate to services offered by Reformed churches. But it's all simply a matter of taste, these people say.

Moreover, if people in the congregation increasingly become dissatisfied with the type of worship service held in their particular church, and would like changes to be made, the prudent thing to do would be to make the changes they want before the church undergoes the risk of losing these people to another church whose worship service is more to their liking.

But is a given worship service largely a mere matter of taste? Sure, there are certain elements that make the worship service what it is and therefore must be present if worship is to be such.

### Is it a matter of entertainment?

An increasingly number of people, although they might deny it, confuse worship with entertainment. This is so easy to do in an age of mass communication where those in the media are polished speakers, where gospel singers are professional musicians; where there are television evangelists and other glib salesmen of the gospel, all of whom have as their aim to captivate their audience, with entertainment being an important ingredient of their methods.

By comparison, the preacher of the local church may well come across as dull; the singing rather commonplace; and the

format of the worship service anything but entertaining. How dull and boring, say such people. Do we have to endure something which turns us off? Why can't we have something that's interesting (but not too long, mind you; we have other important things to do on Sunday besides coming to church). In the meantime, if changes we want aren't forthcoming, please excuse us if, when we come, we doze off or amuse ourselves in other ways as best we can or just make as plain as we can the showing of our boredom.

But surely it doesn't take much thought to come to the conclusion that worship and entertainment are not the same thing. In fact, the elements of worship, rather than being there for entertainment, are the means by which we have communion with the living God! Wouldn't recognition of this basic concept immediately shift the focus of worship away from any notion that might confuse us with entertainment?

### Is it a matter of participation?

Few would deny that worship involves participation by the worshippers. In fact, how can one worship God without participating the act of doing so? But how does one participate in worship? The answer to this question is increasingly becoming a matter, not just of diversity but of dispute. For a popular notion about participation in a worship service means that people must somehow be actively involved; whether it



be singing, reading of Scripture, playing a musical instrument, or perhaps just hand-clapping. Unless one is making some kind of contribution for the benefit of others, one cannot be considered to be participating in worship. And so the minister, committees on worship, etc., continually wrestle with the problem of how more of this kind of participation can be put into the worship service. Is this the right track to follow?

If worship is communion with the living God, then I participate as I, together with the community of God's people who have gathered for that purpose, talk to Him and He talks to me/us. When I sing, together with others, confess my faith, pray (in adoration, confession of my sins, thanksgiving for His mercies, and intercession on behalf of others), I am in conversation with the living God. Since everyone cannot pray his own prayer in a worship service, I recognise that someone must do this on behalf of us all, and that he is usually the minister who competently brings the collective needs of God's people to the Throne of Grace. And since the time of worship is limited and some skill must be exercised if all the elements that make up worship are to be given their proper place in the service, I am glad to concede that the minister, who is trained and qualified

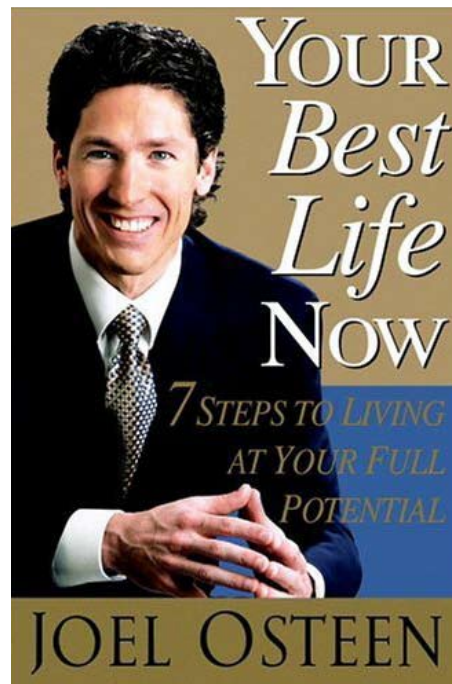
to do so, should lead the congregation in worship.

**What matters is Him**

But even more than my talking to God (with the worshipping congregation) is God talking to me/us. He does so by means of His Word as it is read and preached. If this is the case, how important it is that Scripture be read clearly and accurately by someone who takes the pains to see that this is properly done.

Moreover, if God speaks to me as His Word is preached, then I want what is preached to be an accurate reflection of His Word, both in what it says and how it applies to me. Obviously, someone whom God Himself has called and equipped for this task must do this, especially since Satan is always busy to deceive and to sow the seeds of error. I can also see why the sermon is the chief part of the worship service. How could it be otherwise if God is speaking to me/us in it? In fact, I realise that when I sometimes grumble about its length, I may be revealing by this action that I'm not always as interested in what God has to say to me as I am in considering my own desires on His day.

As I see worship in this light, I realise how great the demand is that I participate




in it as it is defined in this way. I need the Lord to tell me what He wants me to do with my life on the days of the week as I seek to live for Him. I need my faith in Christ kindled, nurtured, and strengthened, and in His Word and sacraments He promises that He will more than do so. I need rebuke for my continuing sins, encouragement for my continuing weakness and frailty. I need instruction about how I am to train the children in my care. So I'll be listening as the minister expounds and applies God's Word, with the prayer as he does so, 'Speak Lord, for your unworthy servant wishes to hear You, and moreover needs the grace which you have promised to give in the fulfillment of the things You ask of Your people.'

**Conclusion**

What is worship? It is not a matter of feeling, or taste, and not at all to be identified with entertainment. It is a matter of my having active dialogue with my heavenly Father in Christ. Anything that detracts from this central purpose or leads me to the doing or thinking of something else when I'm present in the worship service will be recognized as such and turned away from.

*The late Rev. R.O. Zorn was a former Professor and Principal of the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Australia. He is the author of 'Christ Triumphant: Biblical Perspectives on His Church and Kingdom,' Banner of Truth.*


*This article was originally published in THE CALL, August 1993.*



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# Worship: Evangelical or Reformed?

**W. Robert Godfrey**

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

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

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

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

## The presence of God in Worship

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

It seems to me that for evangelicalism,

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

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

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

the means that He has appointed for His Church. In the ministry of the Word — as it is properly preached and ministered in salutation and benediction — it is truly God who speaks. As the Second Helvetic Confession rightly says, 'The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.'

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

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





please Him. The awe and joy that is ours in coming into the presence of the living God to hear him speak is what shapes and energises our worship service.

### The ministerial office in worship

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

The effect of this evangelical view of

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

The Reformed view of ministerial office is quite different. The minister is called by God through the congregation to lead worship by the authority of his office. He is examined and set apart to represent the congregation before God and to represent God before the congregation. In the great dialogue of worship, he speaks the Word of God to the people and he speaks the words of the people to God, except in those instances when the congregation as a whole raises its voice in unison to God. We who are Reformed do not embrace this arrangement because we are antidemocratic or because we believe that the minister is the only gifted member of the congregation. We follow this pattern because we believe that it is biblical and the divinely appointed pattern of worship.

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

dimension of worship remains central.

### Conclusion

The contrast that I have drawn between evangelical and Reformed worship no doubt ought to be nuanced in many ways. I have certainly tried to make my points by painting with a very broad brush. Yet the basic analysis, I believe, is correct.

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

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

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

## The Scoop'a on NOOMA

### Part 3

**Greg Gilbert**

### Here's the scoop on the Rob Bell video series storming through youth rooms and sermon series across the country.

Here's a list of the NOOMA videos I was able to watch, with a brief comment on each:

#### 001 | Rain

This is a really compelling message about

God's love for those who are broken, sinful, ashamed and afraid. Bell tells the story of being caught in a thunderstorm with his one-year-old son. Walking toward home with the baby crying in fear, he held his son close to his chest and whispered over and over again to him, 'I love you, buddy. We're gonna make it.' That's what God does for us when we come to him. He holds us, comforts us, and promises us that we're going to make it. This video has a strong statement of our sinfulness and God's love, but the gospel is presented as 'God loves

you even with your brokenness.'

#### 002 | Flame

Bell starts a bonfire in the forest as he talks about the 'flame' of love. This is one of the best of the NOOMA. Bell distinguishes between the Hebrew words *rayah* (meaning friendship), *ahavah* (meaning commitment), and *dod* (referring to sexual love). All three are necessary for the kind of love between man and woman that God intended. Bell's thoughts about what you end up with when any one of

these is missing are very interesting and very true.

### 003 | Trees

Planting trees along a dirty-looking sidewalk in the city, Bell says that he wants a God who is interested in the here-and-now, who cares about what happens in this world and doesn't just tell his followers to look forward to the next one. This is one of the most important videos for understanding the kernel of NOOMA's version of the gospel. Being a disciple of Jesus is about being a person of peace and justice, and about joining God in his purpose to make this world a better place. To sum it up: 'My understanding of Jesus' message is that he teaches us to live in the reality of God now — here and today. It's almost as if Jesus just keeps saying, 'Change your life. Live this way.'

### 004 | Sunday

Sitting in the Rainbow Café, Bell says that God is not concerned about our religious rituals. He wants our hearts. Taken alone, this is a good video, keying on Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees, and encouraging people to *live* as Christians, not just *be* Christians. Taken as part of the whole NOOMA package, you realise that the good exhortation here to live in a certain way is not well backed up by any true gospel.

### 005 | Noise

This one is different from the other NOOMA, because Bell doesn't say much. After introducing the video with a story about how difficult it is to find silence in our world, the screen goes black, and white text asks the viewer if there is too much noise in his or her life. Do you want to hear the voice of God? Is it possible that you don't hear because there's not enough silence in your life? Jesus had disciplines of silence and solitude, so he could hear the voice of God. As usual, the production is fantastic — the viewer is staring out of a TV at Bell sitting on his couch, at least until he turns the TV off.

### 006 | Kickball

Bell refuses to buy a weird toy at a mall kiosk for his young son, because he has in mind another, better gift at a different store — a kickball. This is a good meditation on a hard question: Why doesn't God always give us what we ask for? Bell gives the same answer that Lewis does in his 'holiday-at-the-beach versus mudpies-

in-the-slums' illustration.

### 007 | Luggage

Everybody has wounds, Bell says in this video. Some of them are small and petty; others are large and devastating. The message of this one is about resisting the impulse to revenge. Bell says that to forgive is simply to give to another what has already been given to us (see part 2 of this series for a discussion on why that could be confusing to non-Christians). This is where Bell says, quite off-handedly, 'The cross is like God saying, 'I don't hold your past against you.' He also says that forgiveness is more about setting the 'forgiver' free, rather than the 'forgiven.' The video ends shockingly with the woman we've been following through the airport getting



into her car, driving out of the airport, and promptly getting crushed by a dump truck — the point being that you don't have forever to forgive someone.

### 008 | Dust

This is Bell's rethinking of the story of Peter walking on the water. After giving a pretty fascinating account of how the Jewish rabbi system worked, he concludes by saying that the unique thing about Rabbi Jesus was that he didn't pick 'the best of the best of the best' to follow him. He picked guys who didn't make the cut. But the fact that he picked them meant that he thought they had the ability to do what he did. Peter thought so, too; so he got out on the water. The reason he sank was not that he lost faith in Jesus — it was that he lost faith in himself that he could be like Jesus. Faith in Jesus is good, Bell says, but what about Jesus' faith in us? He chose us, so obviously he has faith that we can live the kind of lives that he wants us to live. *Dust* is one of the most questionable of all the videos. Is it really

a good idea to recast faith as Jesus' faith in us to be good? That's pretty kindergarten, if you ask me — banal moralism, as I called it earlier.

### 009 | Bullhorn

A call to love people, and a gentle shot across the bow at people who believe in the traditional Christian doctrine of hell. Bell asks what conversion and condemnation have to do with the message of Jesus, and he says that the way we usually preach the gospel makes hell sound like a threat and heaven like a carrot. In the background is a very plain man in a white, short-sleeved dress shirt making preparations for something. At the end of the video, he gets out of his car and starts shouting at people about hell through his bullhorn on a busy crosswalk. The point of the video is that we're to love people — disagreeing with them sometimes, yes, but always loving them. The subtext is that somehow talking about hell, judgment, and conversion is antithetical to that goal. I'll just let Bell take that up with Jesus, who didn't seem to agree.

### 010 | Lump

Bell's son gets caught in a lie and rushes upstairs. A few minutes later, Bell finds him hiding under the covers of his parents' bed, ashamed. What he doesn't realise is that his father is there waiting to forgive him. Bell says that given enough time, sin will always find us out, and he calls people to come out from under the covers and stop hiding in shame from God, who loves us in spite of what we've done. However, Bell gives no strong call to repentance. The focus is definitely on God's love for us regardless of our sin, and not on repentance, as it is in all the videos.

### 011 | Rhythm

This is one of the videos in which Bell tries to define what the gospel is. He says he doesn't particularly like thinking of God in theological categories, but rather when he thinks about God, he thinks of a song. That song is playing throughout the universe, and the question is whether we're living in tune with that song. 'Living in tune' means living a life of love, justice, and compassion. He lightly shoves aside people who insist on thinking of God as immortal, invisible, omnipotent, and all the rest, saying that he finds it easier to look at how Jesus lived and then live like that. 'I can play *that* song,' he says. The video ends with 'May you realize that you *are* in

relationship with the living God.'

#### 012 | Matthew

Bell tells the story of his friend Matthew, who died in a car accident. This video is about dealing with grief. We find hope, Bell says, in God's promise that he will restore the world.

#### 013 | Rich

Bell is waiting for his car to get an oil change. This is a fairly straightforward Sunday School lesson on materialism. Here in America, we are fantastically rich, and God has given us these things so that we can do good works and join him in repairing and restoring the world.

#### 014 | Breathe

Set in a subway terminal, this one is a fascinating meditation on breathing, the spirit, and the name of God. God's revealed name YHWH, Bell says, is believed by some rabbis to be the sound of breathing. When we're born, the first thing we do is say the name of God, and when we can no longer say the name of God, we die. This video contains some confusing theology about the words 'breath' and 'spirit' being the same. Bell rightly says that every human being has breath and a spirit, but he seems to equate all that with the Spirit of God in the New Testament. I'm not positive, but it sounds to me like he is saying that every human being possesses the Spirit of God, who sanctifies and leads into truth.

#### 015 | You

This video starts out by showing how many of the central facts of Christianity — Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and

divinity — were already being used by mystery religions in the Roman Empire. Those things wouldn't have been too surprising to people, and wouldn't have caused much of a ripple in the Roman Empire. What would have been surprising and controversial was Jesus' call to live a life of love and compassion. The point isn't made very strongly, but one wonders: is Bell really saying that the focus of Christianity ought to be Jesus' ethical teachings, and not his death, resurrection, and identity? The gospel is about making a better world, he says. It's the good news that God hasn't given up on the world. God heals broken people so they can join him in healing the world. The cross was about Caesar reacting to Jesus' life of love, and the resurrection overturning Caesar's hostility. The video ends with 'May you realize that you are the gospel.' Here is the gospel according to Bell, in all its moralistic incompleteness. 'Live like this. That's what's important.'

#### 016 | Store

Bell talks about dealing with anger as a man encounters frustration after frustration in a grocery store. Straightforward, well-done message on handling anger and frustration, and redirecting that energy toward being angry at the injustice and suffering in the world.

#### 017 | Today

This video includes more about Jesus' resurrection than any other, but it focuses on Jesus telling Mary Magdalene not to hold on to him when she sees him. Bell's message is that people tend to get hung up on the past — either celebrating or mourning it — but that God wants us to let go of the

past and live in Today. He says at the end, 'May you receive from God a new spirit, one for here, now, today.' It makes one wonder: does Bell *know* he's using biblical language in a thoroughly unbiblical way?

#### 018 | Name

This is easily the weirdest of the NOOMA videos. It's a series of shots of different people taking off one t-shirt to reveal another and another, with a word on the back of each that presumably describes the person — 'lonely,' 'stylish,' 'envious,' 'listener,' 'anorexic,' 'GED,' 'HIV+', and on and on. There's no discernible progression; the words seem mostly random to me. At the end, all the people take off the last t-shirt, and the word 'name' is stenciled on each of their backs. Over all this, Bell is telling the viewer to learn to be comfortable with who God made them to be, to be comfortable in their own skin. Really? Comfortable with envy? Comfortable being jaded? What does that mean? And what does it mean to have 'name' stenciled on your back when you get all your shirts off? And what on earth does Bell mean when he says at the end, 'May you do the hard work of the soul to discover your true self?'

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## World in focus

### Dr. Dobson's Broadcast nominated to Radio Hall of Fame

Devon Williams reports that Dr James Dobson, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family, has received a nomination for induction into the National Radio Hall of Fame.

Every year, the National Radio Hall of Fame Steering Committee, which includes radio executives, academicians, trade journalists and members of the National Association of Broadcasters, chooses nominees based on recommendations

from the public.

The committee nominated Dr Dobson in the 'national active' category, alongside Bob Costas, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, and Howard Stern. To qualify, a broadcaster must have contributed to the radio industry on a national level for at least 10 years.

Dr Dobson's internationally syndicated radio program is heard daily on more than 3,000 radio stations across North America. It also airs in 27 languages in more than 160 countries.

*+ Focus on the Family Action Inc., 8605 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80920*

### Academic freedom in the balance

On March 26, 2008, the Institute for Creation Research Graduate School (ICRGS) submitted documents to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) in Austin, Texas, in response to a request to provide institutional documentation that describes the Master of Science in Science Education program offered by the school. These documents were subsequently reviewed by the THECB as part of the ICRGS application for a Certificate of Authority to grant degrees in the state.



At the THECB Commissioners meeting on April 24, 2008, Commissioner Raymond Paredes and his board voted to deny the ICRGS authority in the state to grant the M.S. degree in Science Education. Dr. Paredes read into the record his recommendation at a committee meeting the day before, expressing his belief that the ICRGS promoted a viewpoint different from perceived science standards in the state, based on his non-public consultations with yet-to-be-identified science educators.

The ICRGS believes that the decision by the state of Texas unnecessarily discriminates against Texas residents seeking the type of education that the ICRGS can uniquely fulfil and has successfully offered for more than 25 years to students throughout the country.

+ Institute for Creation Research, 1806 Royal Lane, Dallas, Texas 75229

## 42 Episcopal Priests deposed since 2004 by liberal Bishop

David W. Virtue reports that since 2004 when he first took office as the Bishop Co-adjutor of Florida, Samuel Johnson Howard has deposed a total of 42 priests in his diocese, with very few orthodox priests surviving his 'ecclesiastical holocaust.' It is the largest single deposition of priests in the history of The Episcopal Church.

Virtue characterises Bishop Howard's ecclesiastical oversight as heavy-handed and as a 'reign of terror.' He describes Howard as demanding that all parish assessments were to be sent to him with no local options to redirect part of the assessment to other entities, and how the bishop threatened and then retaliated against parishes going against his mandates; including one parish that, because it did not pay the bishop the mandated 10% of its budget was forbidden to obtain a loan to renovate its church organ.

+ VirtueOnline, 1236 Waterford Road, West Chester, Pennsylvania 19380

## Charges shift against Christian Bookstore owner in China

An advocacy organisation reported this week that Chinese authorities now accuse a Beijing businessman of being a 'dangerous religious element' — which a long-time friend dismissed as contrary to Christian bookstore owner Shi Weihai's gentle, patriotic nature.

Authorities have been slow to reveal charges against Shi, who after his original arrest for 'illegal business practices' on November 28, 2007 was released on

January 4 due to 'insufficient evidence.' He was re-arrested on March 19, according to his wife Zhang Jing, for printing Bibles and Christian literature.

Until last week, he was denied a visit by his attorney. Following that visit, China Aid Association reported on Monday (April 28) that authorities were holding Shi at the Beijing Municipal Detention Center as a 'dangerous religious element.'

Shi's wife has said she has been prohibited from bringing the 37-year-old father of two any food or change of clothing since his re-arrest.

Operating a bookstore located near the Olympic Village, Shi had never had any problems with authorities before his arrest last November, according to Sharpe.

+ Compass Direct News Service, Post Office Box 27250, Santa Ana, California 92799

## Reaching out to the Romas

Chris Meehan reports that David Pandy-Szekeres has mixed his missionary work with chronicling through photographs the harsh life of gypsies — also known as Romas — living in a corner of the Ukraine called Sub-Carpathia.

A Presbyterian missionary in Eastern Europe, Pandy-Szekeres stopped in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the week of 4 May to talk about the gritty but evocative photographs he has taken of the gypsy town in which he helps run an elementary school on behalf of the Hungarian Reformed Church.

With the photo exhibit, he wants to let people in the Christian Reformed Church know more about his ministry to the Roma people.

Christian Reformed World Missions has been active in Eastern Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. At that time, it began sending Christian teachers to various schools in Hungary, Romania and the Ukraine. Under communist leaders, many schools had been closed.

Persecution of Protestants during the counter-reformation, harassment by the Nazis, and subsequent communist rule damaged and challenged the Christian church in his part of the world, and yet the gospel has always triumphed, says Rev. Daniel Szabo, a seminary professor and evangelist who is a colleague and mentor of Pandy-Szekeres, who is also in the United States to help talk about the work going on in Hungary and surrounding countries.

Discrimination has followed the gypsies, a traditionally transient population found in many areas of Europe, throughout the ages

across the world. Today, very few gypsies lead the nomadic lifestyle for which they have been known. Instead, they have been forced to settle down.

In the Ukraine, Roma children are sometimes denied access to public education, says Pandy-Szekeres. As a response to this, the Hungarian Reformed Church helped to launch the small school in Nagydobrony.

We are teaching them about the Lord and the Bible, says Pandy-Szerkes. We are holding bigger gatherings for spiritual learning and fellowship. We are trying to help them as they undergo the often painful and frustrating process of assimilation into the larger Ukrainian community.

+ Christian Reformed Church Communications, 2850 Kalamazoo Avenue Southeast, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49560

## A massive crisis in Lebanon

When Lebanon's US-backed government took bold steps against Iran-backed Hezbollah on 6 May, Hezbollah responded with lethal force.

While the Lebanese Army watched on, Hezbollah blockaded all the roads to the

## Interested in teaching English as a Second Language?

Expressions of interest are wanted from people interested in teaching English in China or North Korea.

This is a new project and is in the early stages of development. People with a missions outlook are sought.

You must be 18 or over.

You must have a university degree.

You should have an ESOL qualification.

You should have ESOL teaching experience.

You must have good pronunciation.

You must be a member in good standing of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Please email

Paul Goodenough (North Shore)  
[paul.g@callplus.net.nz](mailto:paul.g@callplus.net.nz)

airport, shut down all pro-government media and seized control of western Beirut. Dozens have been killed in the fighting.

The whole Middle East is now facing a massive crisis as Lebanon teeters on the brink of civil war. If that happens, it will really be a regional war waged by proxies and exploited by terrorists on Lebanese soil, and Lebanon's one million-strong Christian minority would be caught in the middle. The security of Israel is also at stake as Iran's goal is Israel's elimination — a feat that would secure its position as the leader of the Muslim world. Please pray for Lebanon.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 478 | Wed 14 May 2008

### Tajikistan reviewing religious laws

Last winter was enormously cold in Tajikistan. Accompanied by an energy crisis and lack of water it brought more disease, death and suffering. While the country is recovering now from the disastrous winter, the Christians continue to face other serious problems. They are expecting further restrictions in religious legislation as the Centre of Strategic Studies is developing new religious policies. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture stopped the importation of 100,000 Bibles. The Christians in Tajikistan

want to use the time they have to work more effectively while it is still possible, but have a great need for Bibles, transport and finance. Please pray about the legislation and that the Church in Tajikistan will be adequately resourced and empowered by the Holy Spirit to minister effectively.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 479 | Wed 21 May 2008

### Algerian Court pressures woman to renounce Christ

An Algerian public prosecutor has demanded a three-year sentence for a convert to Christianity in western Algeria for practicing her faith 'without license.'

Habiba Kouider, 35, was plucked off an inter-city bus outside of her hometown of Tiaret on March 29 when police found several Bibles and books on Christianity in her handbag. Held for 24 hours and interrogated by police regarding her conversion, Kouider was eventually brought before a state prosecutor.

'You reinstate Islam and I will [drop the case]; if you persist in sin you will undergo the lightning of justice,' the prosecutor told her, according to French daily *Le Figaro*.

Passed in February 2006, a law governing non-Muslim worship has been cited in a number of arrests and trials of Algerian Christians this year. The law, known as

Ordinance 06-03, outlaws proselytism of Muslims, as well as the distribution, production and storing of material used for this purpose.

A total of 10 Christians visiting or residing in Tiaret have been detained or tried on religious grounds since January. More than half of the country's 50 Protestant churches, many of which meet in homes, have been ordered to close down.

'For several months there has been a hunt for Algerians who converted to Christianity,' wrote *el Watan* columnist Taybe Belghiche on 22 May 2008. He said that Kouider's case was one example of the hunt, which he described as a violation of the freedom of worship enshrined in the constitution.

+ *Compass Direct News Service*, Post Office Box 27250, Santa Ana California 92799, 949-862-0304

### Westminster Seminary California News now comes to you

Westminster Seminary California information technologist Adam Claus has made available a free news feed for Google, Yahoo, and other blog readers.

+ *Westminster Seminary California*, 1725 Bear Valley Parkway, Escondido, California 92027, 888-480-8474

## Feminine focus

# The feminine virtue of discernment

**Sally Davey**

Some advertising appeals to our vanity. I'm sure you've heard the kind of thing: 'Discerning shoppers will recognise the quality of our rugs...' 'One glance the cut of our garments will convince the woman who understands style...' and so on. Years ago, when I was a student in Philadelphia, I was fascinated with the way a large city could support a whole range of different radio stations, each catering to a different type of listener. Advertisers were cognisant of this, and you would hear quite different sales pitches to match the kind of listeners

and their tastes. I used to enjoy listening to WFLN, the classical music station, and remember hearing advertisements for luxurious Persian carpets, spoken in soft, cultured tones. These advertisements were for people who knew a good thing when they saw it. I was about to learn that I didn't. Back then I never even realised that shoes could be made out of material other than leather, and so I bought a nice, cheap pair of boots — only to wonder, later, why my calves swelled up horribly every time I wore them. (Vinyl does not let your skin breathe). As a buyer, I had not been discerning. Discerning shoppers, which probably many of you are, know the difference between soft, fine wool that drapes beautifully — and cheap, rough synthetic that inevitably sags and develops snags. You check the labels on food and consider things like country of origin, whether sugar has been added, the fat content, and

the reputation of the company that has manufactured the product. Consumers in our world have so many choices. It is not enough to be merely thrifty, one must also be discerning.

### A mark of godly maturity

It is the same in the Christian life. Discernment is vitally important. It is one of the marks of mature, godly womanhood; it is one of the surest evidences that a woman has put priority on her walk with Christ as the years go by. Such a woman has learned to recognise the difference between right and wrong, between what is true and what is false, and between what is really wise and what is just plain foolish. A woman who has done this faithfully will have become adept at seeing even the more subtle distinctions between the good and the bad — distinctions that tend to be lost on the young in the faith. She will have

become like the woman of Proverbs 31, who 'opens her mouth with wisdom' (v.26). She will know when to speak and when it is better to remain silent. She will be one who stands firm in the shifting sands of social change: she will know what trends are wrong, and what may not be tolerated. She will be like an anchor to those being tossed around by every wind of doctrine in the storms of church controversy. She will know how to advise the floundering, encourage the faltering, and speak comfort to the suffering. She can usually be counted on to have the right thing to say in all sorts of difficult situations. She is the kind of lady every church would like to have around!

When I pause and look around me at the society we are fast becoming, I am grieved by my own lack of discernment, as well as by the sheer folly of what goes on among women today. Too often I say the wrong thing or speak when I shouldn't. Far too often I fail to think of the right thing to say, quickly enough. But what about the women around us? It seems, sadly, that we live in a culture that lost the art of wise thinking and courageous speaking a long time ago. Consider these examples. How often have you heard older ladies (grandmothers) commenting on the way their granddaughters live? Perhaps they have moved in with their boyfriends. Grandmother observes: 'Young ones in our day didn't do that – but then it's all such a different world now. Things have changed.' Or, 'Her boyfriend – oops! You're not supposed to say that now; it's 'partner', isn't it?' Oh, grandmother! Where is your outrage? Where is even the willingness to say something is *wrong* at all?

### A modern example

I have a close relative who is a member of a social and educational group for retired women – the sort of organisation you find even in small towns. The leaders of her group recently invited a man to speak, but did not inform the members beforehand what the topic was. This man had decided to have sex-change surgery, and eventually left his wife and children. He was full of pride about his decision – gleeful, even, to share with these elderly ladies his bold new venture in life as a 'woman.' Apparently he spared no grisly details, and regaled them with all he had undergone surgically and pharmaceutically. But what of his family? Apparently some of them had had 'difficulty accepting it'; and his son was still mad with him. The ladies were invited to sympathise with this speaker – it's difficult, you know, to face opposition from those close to you.

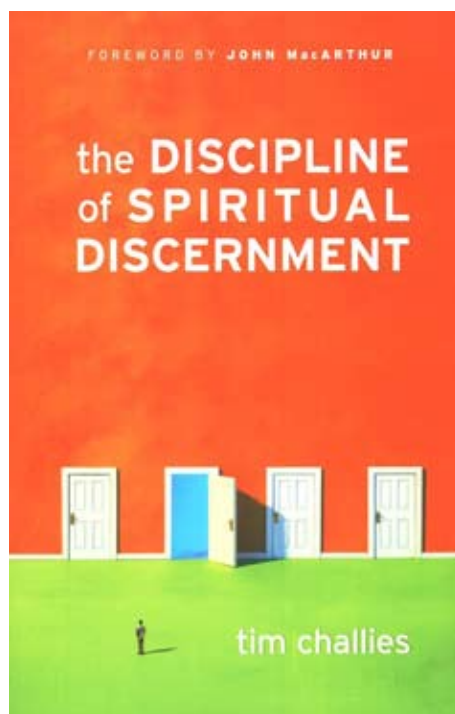
My relative was just appalled. How could these women invite such a man to say what he did? How could the other women sit and listen to such dreadful things? (As it turned out, others were also shocked). How could that man be proud of his ghastly actions, and fail to see how he had hurt his wife and his children? But so degraded has our reasoning become, even the older women among us do not recognise evil and call it what it is.

### The same trend amongst us?

Our Christian sisters are uncomfortable with much of this kind of thing, and most can recognise immorality when it stares them in the face. However, there are worrying trends, indicative of today's growing biblical

concern us? There is also the matter of dress. So often we don't think through what message our appearance gives. When we cross the boundaries of propriety and dress immodestly it reflects on our husbands. We don't always consider what is appropriate for the occasion, either. Something might be a little sparkly and festive, fine for a party perhaps, but quite inappropriate for worship. Likewise, turning up for a wedding in gardening clothes is an insult to the bride, the groom and their parents, who have lavished time and attention on preparing for this solemn and joyful occasion. But many of us don't seem to see it. Somehow, attempts to explain fall on deaf ears. People have trouble grasping the key principles involved, let alone making the particular applications necessary for their own situation.

This lack of discernment owes a lot to a lack of biblical input. Many Christian women simply don't give enough effort to studying the Scriptures carefully and comprehensively, year in and year out, on a daily basis. They don't think through the application of Scripture to their lives in a consistent way, either. Doing this means knowing how to interpret the Bible correctly, and then how to translate the principles to the specifics of your life. But we also need to go further than looking for quick solutions to the simple practical problems of life. We need to become sufficiently familiar with biblical teaching that we recognise it when flavour-of-the-month ideas contradict it. We need to be able to weigh up false teaching, recognise error, and identify foolish behavior as foolish. Often in life we don't have a lot of time before we need to respond, so thinking biblically needs to become instinctive, reflexive, and sharp. It saddens me when I hear women wondering out loud whether there is really anything the matter with Roman Catholicism, for instance. 'I mean, surely it's great that she's still in a church, isn't it? I know they do some things differently in a Catholic service, but, after all, Catholics do have the Bible, and they're against abortion, aren't they?' But ... what about purgatory, transubstantiation, indulgences and the infallibility of the Pope? Have these dear ladies considered that quite a number of central Roman Catholic teachings oppose important biblical doctrines about our salvation? How can anyone slide over them as if the specifics of what you believe don't matter? I'm also concerned about philosophies of child-rearing, the sway of popular psychology and the tendency to idolise 'big



illiteracy. Christian women are not always the wisest when choosing what they will fill their minds with. For instance, many of us want our reading 'light, please.' Something that is *nice*, that doesn't contain swear words, has enough romance to give the reader a rosy glow of happiness, perhaps a bit of history to create an exotic setting, but nothing so heavy it will make me *think*. And we're happy for our teenage daughters to immerse themselves in this sort of thing. I wonder how many of us ask if it is good for them, or what view of life they are developing? Is it setting them on the path to mature Christian womanhood? Is it giving them the spiritual nourishment they will need to weather the storms of life, and to become discerning? Does it

leaders' in Christian ministry.

### Style or substance?

Then there is the basic question of how we reach our conclusions. So many women, Christians included, are attracted by peripheral things, making choices on the basis of style rather than substance. Warm smiles and a kind gesture or two seem to go far further with many women than the sort of sound, gritty teaching that will provide a real foundation for facing trials or defending the faith. (Think about that next time you are quick to praise a speaker, preacher or author). We need to give a lot more attention to what really matters; to the solid and important principles that should direct our choices in life. We Christians, of all women, should be properly discerning.

The Scriptures have a lot to say about discernment. Discernment may be seen as a godly skill, something to be worked at until we gain increasing mastery of it. According to Tim Challies, who has written a very helpful book on the subject, it is 'the skill of understanding and applying God's Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.'<sup>1</sup> You might wonder why, if it is a skill, I should include it in a series on *virtues*, but to my mind, at least, discernment is a necessary feature of any godly woman's life. To call a woman *discerning* is to make a most favourable compliment about her character. A mature woman who is able to discern between good and evil, wisdom and folly, right and wrong, is a woman clothed with strength and dignity (Proverbs 31:25). And she is a lovely sight.

### It's hard work

But any woman who wishes to achieve this state must work at it. It requires diligent effort, pursuing the means of grace that God has given us, and profiting from tests and trials over years of faithful walk with Christ. A discerning woman has learned, also, from observing the lives of others; both the wise and the not-so-wise, listening to their speech, seeing their actions, and noticing the effect they have on others. Gaining discernment is not an option, however – something you leave up to a few wise people in your midst. It is for everyone to work at. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews is quite severe on those who are too content with their lack of it: 'About this [Jesus' high priesthood] we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be

teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.' (Hebrews 5:11-13). Solid food, the more advanced truths of the Scriptures (which we all should want to be able to digest), is the right food for 'the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.' (v. 14). We should all aim to become discerning, and so profit from solid food. It has been the earnest desire of faithful ministers throughout the history of the church that their people gain discernment. Such ministers also know it takes time and effort to acquire it. Paul knew this when he told the Philippians in Chapter One of his letter:

*'... it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.'* (Philippians 1:9-11).

I think this prayer says just about all there is to say about the means of gaining discernment, its usefulness, and the glory it brings to God when we exhibit it. Amen.

### A part of Christian character

Tim Challies has some helpful comments to make about the character of a person who practises discernment.<sup>2</sup> They are a helpful reminder that we can't be discerning without regard to other important graces in our lives. We are an integrated admixture of qualities; and what we lack in certain graces will detract from our exercise of others. And so it is with discernment. For instance, we need to practice discernment with a humble heart. This means recognising our own sin and lack of discernment at times. It means leaning on God for help and guidance in order to be discerning. It means asking God for insight, for the ability to distinguish correctly between the right path and the wrong one. It also means being humble enough to realise that others may actually have more discernment than us on a certain point. This will encourage us to learn from others, to seek their wisdom and advice – and even to ask for their correction at times.

We should also be compassionate with others who stumble, and struggle. We need to realise that it is very easy to be led astray into error. The devil is subtle.

He does not usually present folly or evil to us in a blatant way; he often makes it attractive by conveying it though seductive means – warm and engaging speakers who have nice faces or who write appealing, funny books that are easy to read. Have a care for those caught up in wrong ideas because they are young in the faith, slower of understanding, or less gifted with insight than you may be.

We need, also, to be gentle and loving in manner. This is particularly important when we are shocked and outraged at something we've come across. It is very easy at such times, aroused as we inevitably are, to react too quickly and too forcefully. We rush to the telephone – or our email – and speak hastily and strongly, much more vehemently than we would if we slept on it, thought about it for longer, or more importantly, prayed about the matter. Anger and harshness may crush the person acting wrongly, but they won't win her over to the right. (Not unless she is a particularly humble and gracious person!)

### Dangers to avoid

There are also some dangers for the discerning person to avoid.<sup>3</sup> They arise partly because the truly discerning become so skilled at recognising error, and partly because we are so prone to over-emphasise one quality and minimise the importance of others. Let me explain. It is easy, once we have mastered the basics of God's truth and move on to the deeper truths, to get carried away with the breadth of understanding, the perspective and insight they bring. We get sharper and more incisive in our discernment, and quicker and quicker to recognise what is wrong and why. The pitfall then is to become more and more exact in our criticism of people and their ideas. If we're not careful we spend far too much of our time and energy pointing these things out, and looking for the holes in others' reasoning. (Have you ever read blog sites where people do this – spending what must be an inordinate amount of time doing so?) It all gets rather ugly. If we find ourselves becoming consumed by a critical spirit, it is a good idea to remind ourselves of the principle of love in 1 Corinthians 13, which bears, believes, hopes and endures all things. Love puts the best construction on others' actions and words. At the very least, it is slow to form harsh judgments and careful before it confronts and rebukes.

Secondly, it is easy for the discerning to become proud. Having developed good skills

of recognizing foolishness and evil, it is a great temptation for the discerning to think more highly of themselves than they ought, and to look down on others who are slower to pick it up. The attitude of 'if you can't see it, then I can't be bothered explaining it' is so disheartening to the person thus brushed off. It tempts her to grit her teeth and become angry. The discerning person is also tempted to enjoy the admiration of others, who may have begun to look to her for opinions on things, ask her to give judgment or tell them how to think or respond. All this is actually quite dangerous to the people who ask, since they may become too reliant and fail to learn how to develop the skills of discernment themselves. It is far better, for these people's sakes, that the friend who is asked for advice takes the time to show the askers how to work out the answer using the principles of Scripture for their guide. Our aim should be to see all our friends grow wiser and more discerning. It is also a good thing for the discerning person to admit her mistakes, and to explain her limitations. All these things help to keep us humble, and to prevent pride and idolatry. None of us – nor our friends – should think of ourselves more highly than we ought. Few of us are as wise as we imagine!

Finally, there is the danger of discouragement. Have you ever reached the point of sheer frustration, because you've been able to grasp quite clearly what is going wrong in a church situation, or in a disagreement between friends, or perhaps with a trend in

your work or classroom or in wider society, and you (and perhaps only one or two others) have caught on? You may almost be in tears of exasperation because it all seems so obvious. You can point it out clearly from the Scriptures, you can analyse the problem and describe what the likely outcome will be, but no one else wants to listen. You've even examined your heart to root out any pride in your attitude: you've chosen your words carefully, and have spoken gently. What can you do? I think it's very tempting for Christians in such a situation to feel like giving up, just remaining silent, retreating and withdrawing, and simply keeping out of the fray. We may seek solace and encouragement from reading books or talking only to others completely removed from the situation. We may retreat into a world of our own. But of course, this is not the answer. Whatever gifts we may have are given to us by God for the benefit of the Church, the body of which we are a part. We have a duty to involve ourselves with others, and try to encourage them as God gives us opportunity. What's important is that you stay involved. Keep attending church meetings. Keep on talking to others, showing hospitality, and being a good, humble example of helpfulness. If they don't want to listen to you, why not pray for them? Pray that God will give them wisdom and understanding; pray even that He will soften their hearts to read and believe the Scriptures, if you are concerned that they are being disobedient to the Word. And perhaps – also – it would be important to

reflect on the attitude of the Old Testament prophets, who were dealing with this very kind of frustration. (Though no doubt they were more entitled to be indignant than we are.) They identified with God's people, and knew that they themselves were not exempt from the taint of sin. Hence Isaiah: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips...' (Isaiah 6:5). He did not withdraw and leave them to it, though no doubt he felt like it at times. Responsible, loving leaders and friends stick with the ship and continue doing all they can to save it from sinking.

### Conclusion

In the end it comes down to whose we are, and whom we serve. What are your desires? Do you want discernment? Do you want to see God using it in your life? Is it your earnest purpose to bring Him glory through it? May this be the motivation from now until eternity.

### (Endnotes)

- 1 Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* (Crossway Book, Wheaton, Illinois, 2007), p. 61
- 2 *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, pp. 159-162.
- 3 Some of what follows is inspired by Challies's comments in Chapter 8 of *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*. I highly recommend Challies's case-study of how to exercise discernment in practice. (He analyzes the lyrics of a song he has heard, and brings biblical principles to bear in developing his conclusions. It is a careful and most illuminating exercise. (See Chapter 10).

## Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

# Gleanings from our bulletins...

### Avondale

Opportunity to serve Due to internal movement, a unique and rare opportunity has arisen to show off your impeccable washing and ironing skills. The responsibilities of this autonomous role are to launder the Lord's Supper table cloths after their

monthly use. The successful candidate(s) will have strong acumen for hygiene and have excellent time management skills to ensure that the table cloths are cleaned well in advance before the next Lords supper. Apply within or see any member of the BoM (Henk & Elizebeth Kwakernaat, Rene Voschezang, Paul Jefferies or Pieter Smilde).

### Bishopdale

Today is Pentecost Sunday—the day on which the Holy Spirit was first poured out upon the Church. Traditionally, Pentecost Sunday has been the day on which people publicly professed their faith. So it is fitting that today, Matt Vannoort will profess

his faith in Jesus Christ as His Lord and Saviour. It is also our privilege to celebrate the Lord's Supper together this morning.

Pastoral It is our privilege and joy to witness the profession of faith of Brad McConchie this morning. Welcome to family and friends who come especially for this occasion. Please stay behind after the service and have a cup of tea or coffee with us.

Counselling Course: If you are interested in starting a distance education course on counselling through Christian Counselling Education Foundation, please see Robert van Wichen. Registrations for the current intake close on 15 May so you will need to move quickly if this is of interest to you.

Report of session meeting. Opening: Tim Kuipers read from Luke 17:11-19 and shared a devotion on our attitude of thankfulness and gratitude which can so easily develop into one of complaint and even rudeness towards what we have been given in our lives.

Calling: Session voted in favour of presenting to the congregation a motion to Call Rev Reinier Noppers. A two thirds majority will be needed from the congregation to gain approval to go ahead. Voting will take place on Sunday 25 May after the morning service.

Prayer point – Middleton Grange OPC Team (Adventure Racing Team) Some of you will be aware that this weekend the Middleton Grange OPC Team have left for Turangi on the Central Plateau to compete as a team in the 2008 Hillary Challenge. This is a 5 day skills and endurance event for the top 12 Adventure Racing schools teams in NZ. Middleton has made it into the final every year for the last 6 years, since the event's inception, and is the only Sth Is. team to have competed, achieving consistently in the top three or four places. Apart from that, on a yearly basis, Middleton has earned the reputation for being what the other competitors and instructors have called "the God team", due in no small part to their unashamedly Christian witness in both word and deeds, displayed as they both compete and interact with others. The staff there have been 'blown away'

by their faith and commitment over many years. The event is once again staged around the OPC Centre in Turangi where the recent tragic canyoning disaster took place. The team has been praying for it's continued witness this coming week and that they may have much opportunity to share their faith in that place. Several of our young people are part of this team of 8 - Tim Couprie, Annelise Posthuma, Rowan Nugteren, Josh Vlaanderen, Leon Vannoort (Dovedale), - Andre' Posthuma & Nathanael Craven are the coaches of the team for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, having previously competed themselves, and Mr Andy Given is the teacher in charge. Please remember this Team in your prayers this week as they navigate their way across rivers, lakes, mountains and wilderness areas in all sorts of weather conditions – that they would be kept safe, make good and wise decisions and that God would be glorified through them being part of the event. Their Team verse which is on their uniforms is Isaiah 40:30,31 "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint'.

### Buckland's Beach

Pastoral. It is difficult to know where to start. So much has happened in this past week. God's comfort and love was demonstrated over and over again. Many have been touched by the Spirit of the living God and have begun to think, pray, speak and act on deep spiritual issues that they have tried to keep out of sight and mind. What happened to Anthony Mulder and the others who died with him is surely being used by God. May this very special experience serve to challenge, enrich and bind us ever closer to the Lord and to one another. May the Lord protect and keep us from a spirit of bitterness and a desire to strike out and apportion blame. May the Lord enable us to continue to embrace one another and also to open our hearts and arms to those who are seeking him. Brothers and sisters, the generosity and love which has been shared both to and through our fellowship is surely evidence of God's nearness and abundant comfort. Let us learn and be strengthened through this and thus be able to say that this moment was a special moment through which God drew even closer to us. Remember and remind one another of this in the weeks and months to come.

130th birthday? Yes - a combination of 80 (Phil) and 50 (Martin) Vlaardingebroek, aka Brooks! Our warmest congratulations on having been blessed so wonderfully. We do thank God for you and your families and the part that you have been able to play in the life and experiences of our fellowship for most of its existence. Just think - Phil Brooks was there in 1955 helping to build the original building and Martin has been a part of this church family all his life! Much to celebrate and give thanks for.

### Christchurch

Youth Group Happenings. A couple of Saturdays ago we had our annual photo rally. This year it had a different spin with it being a 'careless' photo rally so we all got a lot of exercise. We raised \$55 for Janice Reid. We met in the Botanical Gardens and took photos from around the area to do with different categories that we were given e.g. "photo with a tourist", "Shakespeare scene". The photos are on the notice board in the church hall – please take the time to have a look.

Pastoral. We give thanks to the Lord for the safe arrival of Sasha Helena Begg, born to Iain and Anna this past Thursday. All are doing well.

Early morning bible study. One program I'm keen to run while with you is a Pastor's Bible Study where we can do a little more in-depth work with the Scriptures. I've suggested to Session that I take a weekly Bible Study on "The Church". I need to know how many copies of the workbook to bring with me so if you are interested in joining please give Ed Havelaar your name. BTW this is not for the faint-hearted I want to take this Bible Study at 6.30 in the morning so it doesn't tie up yet another night in our busy schedules. It will go only for a little over an hour so that people can still go off to work. Because I'm not sure what morning would suit people I'm going to be so bold as to suggest that we start on Thursday mornings and we can move to another morning if need be. We'll begin right away on June 5th. The venue at least initially will be the home of Graham and Alice Posthuma, 65a Middleton Rd Upper Riccarton. Pastor John Westendorp

### Dunedin

News from Papua New Guinea. Rev Stephen 't Hart, who has been working in PNG for about 10 years, has accepted a call to a church in Perth. This will mean big changes both for the 't Hart family and for the mission work in PNG, including the

## Family Camp 2009

**Family Camp  
is on again this  
year!**

**The camp will be held at  
Finlay Park from Saturday 27<sup>th</sup>  
December 2008 – Saturday 3  
January 2009.**

**Lord willing, Rev Kloosterman  
will lead the morning studies,  
and Rev Michael Flinn the  
evening devotions.**

**Please note there will be an  
increase in camp fees this  
year. Watch this space for  
more details!**

Bible College in Port Moresby. While the 't Harts will not be leaving immediately, we can pray for them and for the other missionaries and the Reformed Church in PNG during this time of transition. We should also remember the Doumas as they continue their preparations for serving in PNG from the beginning of 2009.

**Pastoral Notes.** Our warmest congratulations to Kees and Lidy Campfens of Oamaru who yesterday celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. God is good. Congratulations also to Ron and Michelle Blankestyn who celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary last Wednesday. We wish both couples the Lord's richest blessing for whatever the future holds.

### Foxton

Fellowship news and prayer items: Congratulations to John and Willy Biersteker, who celebrated their 45<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary yesterday. May the Lord bless you and grant you many more years together.

### Hastings

Leadership training. This Friday evening beginning at 7:30 p.m. and going through Saturday 3:00 p.m. David and I will be holding a leadership training course that we are calling Godly Leadership. This course is geared especially for men, young and older, but women are welcome to join. The main topics will be:

1. Men Were Created to Lead,
2. The Nature of Godly Leadership,
3. Practical Leadership in the Home, and
4. An Introduction to Leadership in the Church.

Ladies, Lassies, Shielas, Girls, Women! This Friday night 16<sup>th</sup> of May at 7.30pm at the church is the "Life is Like a Box of Chocolates" evening. We are looking forward to seeing you all there! – The committee.

From Pastor Hoyt. Yesterday we were able to give thanks for the life of Janny van Veen who turned 86 last Monday and passed from this life into the presence of her Saviour on Wednesday evening. Those of you who spoke with Janny in her mother tongue will have heard her testimony on many occasions of her trust in the Lord Jesus as her Saviour and of her desire to go and be with her Lord. God has granted her desire. So yesterday at her funeral we could rejoice that she was with her Lord as we remembered her life with us as a congregation. It is the anticipation and confidence of meeting our Saviour that

takes away all fear of death for us who "belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ". The fear of death comes from our sin which makes us guilty before God and therefore subject to His eternal punishment. But we who trust in Jesus know that "He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood". Since He gave Himself for us, we know that nothing can separate us from the "love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39).

### Hukanui

**Pastoral.** A warm welcome to family from Ross and Jessica Darlington who are here to celebrate the baptism of Trisha with them. What a wonderful opportunity to again appreciate the grace of God this morning as Trisha receives the sign and seal of the covenant in the sacrament of baptism. May God guide and bless you, Ross and Jessica, as you seek to guide your four daughters to a living and vibrant faith in Jesus Christ, and also all of us as we seek to live and guide by example and Scripture.

**Pastoral:** It was almost exactly ten years ago, on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1998 that the first service of the Hukanui Reformed Fellowship was held at the Hukanui School hall. From those humble beginnings, we have seen many rich blessings of the Lord, who has been faithful throughout those ten years in both joy and sorrow, gain and loss. Yet that is exactly what we would expect from our God, who has promised to uphold us, provide all our needs according to His riches in glory, and be with us even to the end of the age! Jesus promised in John 14 that He would not leave His disciples as orphans, but would come to them, to His church, by providing a counsellor who will be with us and live in us. It is therefore fitting and appropriate that we may celebrate this anniversary of our church on the same date that we remember the formation of the New Testament church: as the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles: as the promise of Jesus was fulfilled and is still true today!

### Mangere

**Pastoral.** The Reformed Church of Nelson have informed me that they meet early this coming week to consider whether to place a duo of myself and Rev Reinier Noppers before their congregation, or a single nomination of either one of us. In the meantime, I have received a call from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

*With joy and thankfulness to God  
we celebrate the*

## 50th Wedding Anniversary

*of our parents and Opa & Oma*

# Henk and Alie de Ruiter



*Married on 19 July 1958  
Wellington, New Zealand*

*Congratulations and love  
from your children and  
grandchildren*

*Eddy and Julie de Ruiter  
Jacob, Lewis, Reanne*

*Barry and Angela de Ruiter  
Shaun, Alyssa, Katie*

*Ian and Lena van der Meulen  
Nicola, Krista, Ella*

**67 Mandel Mews  
Lower Hutt**

congregation at Narre Warren, a suburb of Melbourne. They are a sister church of ours who are also members of the International Council of Reformed Churches with the RCNZ. Your prayers are very much appreciated in this time.

### Nelson

Duo for Minister, Session at its meeting on Tuesday endorsed both Rev Sjirk Bajema and Rev Reinier Noppers as suitable men who would serve our congregation well, voting will take place next Sunday after the morning service to discern the Lords will to which man we should call.

### North Shore

News & Announcements. This coming Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> May, Sheryl & I will be in Wanganui as they conduct 'due diligence' and will visit the Palmerston North/Wanganui session on Monday evening, returning home on Tuesday for my Catechism Class at 6pm. JR.

News & Announcements. We congratulate Bert & Rebecca Borger on the safe arrival of Lillian Ruth on Thursday 1st May at around midday and weighing in at 6lb

11oz. We ask the Lord's blessing on the parents as they bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and to walk in His way always. James and Miriam are totally enchanted with their new sister. We also congratulate Don and Jenny and Alies on the arrival of their newest granddaughter.

### Palmerston North

We welcome John and Sheryl Rogers to Wanganui today. Rev Rogers will be leading us in both the services. We pray that we may have a blessed time together. There will be a time of questions with afternoon tea after the second service. Session will also meet with John on Monday night in Palmerston North (DV).

From the Pastor. Next Lord's Day, we rejoice with Ben Gordon Minnee as he professes his faith during our morning worship service.

Attention Ladies young and not so young! On Thursday 8th May, 7:30pm all those available, able and willing are called to meet in the church for a night of fellowship and fun, devotions, activity, and supper. To help make the night a success (apart from your lovely presence) could you bring with you things like sandpaper, pencil, ruler, paper and fabric scissors, pins, needles and threads, any cotton fabric scraps, plasters for pricked fingers (optional) cardboard from cereal boxes and a sewing machine if preferred. All this so we can make a gift together. Also, a couple of bikkies, cake, or chockies to share for supper would be great. We would love to see you there to share this night. And also whet your appetite for the next event which is already in the planning stages. Queries to Tina F.

From the Pastor. Warm congratulations to Steffen and Jant Akkerman (Wanganui) on the birth of Olivia Sarah this past Monday.

### Pukekohe

Harriet and I were in London for two Sundays and we worshipped with William and Rachel in the Anglican church they are attending. The vicar of the church is enthusiastic for the Lord and faithful in his preaching. He preached in the four services we attended and his sermons were Biblical and well applied. That congregation worships in a large cathedral-like church building that is about 100 years old. Sadly, the morning congregation, numbering about 100, fills less than a third of the

building and, even more sadly, the evening congregation numbered only about 20. I felt sorry for the vicar who put a lot of work into his sermon to preach it to so few. It was good to return to Pukekohe last Sunday and see the afternoon service well attended. Having said that, our afternoon attendance could be better. Let's make every effort to gather for worship in the morning and afternoon, to begin and end the day with the Lord and with each other. We need to do this in obedience to God, to encourage one another, and for our own spiritual well-being and growth. JH.

Community workers seminar: A Holtslag reported on the contact he had made with the community constable, the Salvation army major, and Jill Dean, the manager of the Family Support Centre. They are happy to talk to our congregation about needs in our community. We will seek to arrange this for an evening in June.

Wedding banns. David Bryant and Sarah Loef have signified their desire to be united in holy matrimony. If no lawful objections are received the wedding will take place on Saturday 14 June, 1pm at Mangere Reformed Church, 22 Rosella Road, Mangere, followed by an afternoon tea. The congregation are warmly invited to attend.

### Wainuiomata

Announcements. A very heartfelt Thank You to all who helped make Holiday Bible Club another success. We had 64 children attend and we managed a very busy program well. The smooth running can be attributed to the Lord's blessing and the many hands that have helped over the week. What a blessing to see such teamwork.

### Wellington

Youth Group Dinner. This is a note for all Wellington church goers. This year on the 19th July the youth group will put on a dinner for the church. Babysitting will be provided!! More information will be given out in posters and invitations soon. Please keep this date free as it will be an excellent opportunity to get to know each other and especially the youth. Eddy Oosterbaan, Wellington Youth Group.

Membership. Hector Westfold recently indicated a desire to become a member of our church, and the elders agreed to allow Hector to re-affirm his faith in two weeks time (June 8th).



## Books in focus

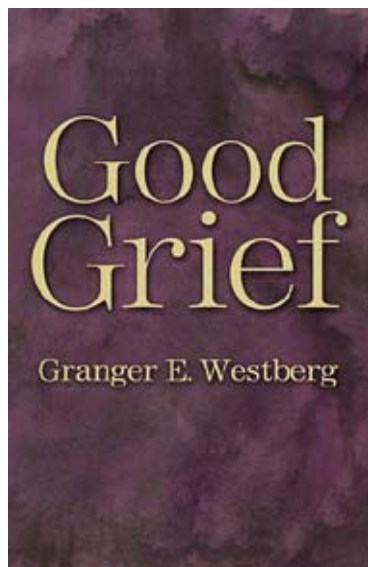
**Good Grief**, by Granger E. Westberg (*Fortress Press, 1962, 1971, 1997*)

As can be seen from the original date of publication, this is a little book that has been around for over 45 years. During that time it has proven its worth through having been republished numerous times, together with a revised edition on its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of publication.

It was a booklet recommended to me early in my ministry and it has been a most valuable help. It's something which is a useful guide for the Christian seeking to minister to those grieving and a good gift for those grieving. I have used it in personal counsel, and, just recently, as a very relevant resource in a Senior's Fellowship study.

Westberg outlines ten possible stages in the grieving process and gently guides us in seeking God's will through them at such devastating times. As can be seen from the titles he gives each of these stages, they are very applicable to those going through the loss of a loved one – We are in a State of Shock, We Express Emotion, We Feel Depressed and Very Lonely, We May Experience Physical Symptoms of Distress, We May Become Panicky, We Feel a Sense of Guilt about the Loss, We Are Filled with Anger and Resentment, We Resist Returning, Gradually Hope Comes Through, and We Struggle to Affirm Reality.

We have had a number of such times among our churches of late. There are a number affected by the loss of a loved one dying in a quite unexpected and



sudden way – whether one who was a young adult showing so much promise, or a middle-aged adult who was so busy in the Lord's work.

May this sensitive, clear, and yet deep booklet be a help to those going through such a time in their lives.

*Reviewed by the Editor.*

**End Time Delusions** by Steve Wohlberg (2004)

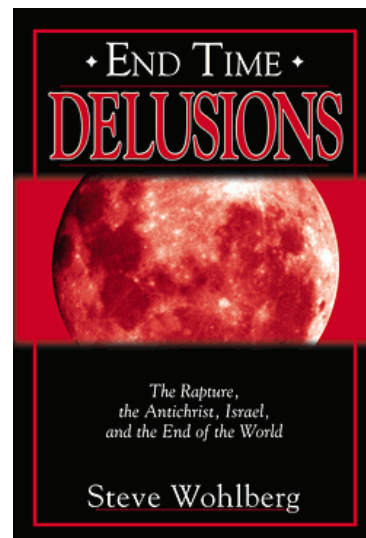
In today's Christianity I sometimes have the impression that Christians are engaged in the battle of Creation vs. Evolution. It is a relatively easy battle in that it is fact vs. stubborn ideology.

There's another battle going on within Christianity itself. Of course, there always have been and always will be. The battle that raged 500 years ago was against the tyranny of Rome; and the victory was the release of the Scriptures to the masses.

Today the Bible is the most available book almost anywhere, but sadly it is also misinterpreted by most of Evangelical Protestantism, not to mention Romanism.

The author, Steve Wohlberg, grew up in L.A. in a normal Jewish family. He was called of God in 1979, through the introduction of friends. The first book he bought in a Christian bookshop was Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Though it raised his interest, his Jewish ancestry and Biblical scrutiny created doubt in his mind about the 'prophecies' contained in this book. A thorough study of the Bible, Church History, and the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation, led him to the conclusion that all teaching about the so-called rapture, Armageddon, the importance of the present state of Israel, and the building of the temple in Jerusalem were nothing but delusion which can be traced back to the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. This Counter-Reformation was devised after the Roman Catholic Church licked its wounds from the effect of the true Reformation. For the next three centuries, the Protestant Churches were almost immune to its teaching; till in the early 1800s, it was picked up by such Protestants as Edward Irving, John Darby, Cyrus Scofield and others.

In short, it's nothing that we as Reformed Christians didn't already know.



*End Time Delusions* is an in-depth study with hundreds of references to chapter and verse, that sets out to systematically disprove the dispensationalist position. It ought to be in every church library and in the possession of anyone who wants to show the Biblical perspective to that erring dispensationalist brother or sister, so that he or she may live a fuller and richer walk with God.

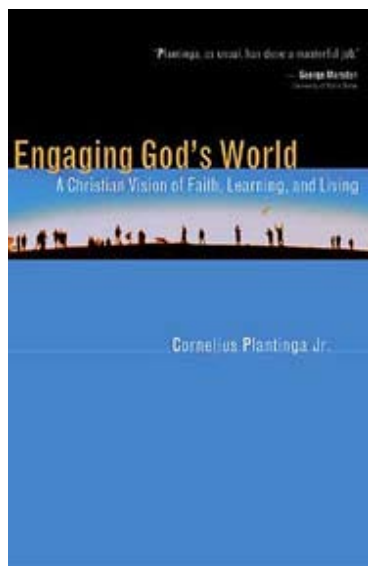
It can be ordered online at [www.whitehorsemedia.com](http://www.whitehorsemedia.com)

*Reviewed by Henk den Hartigh*

**Engaging God's world: A Christian vision of faith, learning, and living**  
Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (2002, *Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans*)

So your daughter's about to go to university? Or your son's already there? Or perhaps you're thinking about enrolling as a 'mature' student yourself? But isn't Uni the place where people lose their faith? Can Christ and Chemistry mix?

Cornelius Plantinga's short book, *Engaging God's world: A Christian vision of faith, learning, and living*, provides a helpful discussion of these matters. His insights are liberally illustrated with quotes from various writers and theologians, as well as from the Reformed confessions. Although directed primarily to students enrolling in a Christian College in the US, it provides useful reading for all young (and not so



young!) people as they engage in the affairs of life, and will benefit any Christian: university student, tradesperson, or worker at home.

In the preface, Plantinga tells us that the idea in the book is to lay out some main themes of the Christian faith and to show how Christian higher education fits inside a view of the world and of human life that is formed by these themes. In the first chapter he feeds in with the ideas of longing and hope, of a desire for *shalom*, as basic to our human condition, and as a motivator for study. He writes:

As a student you may have any of a

number of goals for your education. Perhaps one of them should be to expand the number of things that excite your longing. Not just any things. Not just any longing. Not what corrupts or diminishes you as a person made in God's image. I'm thinking instead of 'whatever is true... whatever is pure, [whatever is] worthy of praise' (Phil 4:8). I'm thinking of the visual arts, music, drama, landscapes, poetry, and friendships that can arouse human desire for sheer goodness, and finally for the One who is its overflowing fountain.

However, the world in which we live presents at best a marred image of this One. We yearn for *shalom*, and yet live in hope. For a Christian, such hope focuses on Jesus Christ, the One through whom God is pleased to reconcile all things to Himself.

In successive chapters Plantinga discusses creation, fall, and redemption. The originally good creation groans because of the fall, but is being redeemed. The Kingdom of God has 'come near' but has not yet 'come home'. Plantinga then concludes with a discussion of vocation.

A Christian's main vocation is to become a prime citizen of the Kingdom of God – and this is true of every Christian, of artists and engineers as well as ministers and evangelists. All are called to mesh their kingdoms with those of other citizens in order to work together inside the kingdom of God.

All believers have this vocation, this calling. So what is the place of tertiary studies? Plantinga suggests that:

'Seen at its broadest reach, Christian higher education equips us to be agents of the kingdom, models of the kingdom in our own lives and communities, witnesses to the kingdom wherever we go in the world. In a fallen world, Christian education is a powerful engine for ministering to the world along the same line that we hope for the world.' (p. 143).

Now you might be thinking that this is all good and well in the United States. Plantinga writes as the President of a Theological Seminary, having previously taught at a Christian College. Problem: we don't have any Christian Universities in New Zealand. So how is this book of any value to us Down Under? Let me make a few suggestions.

First, regardless of whether Christians attend a Christian or a secular institution, they are still Christians. Their standard is still the word of God, their motivation should be the love of Christ, and their goal the kingdom of God. It certainly is more difficult to operate in a secular context, particularly one that is perhaps not so much overtly hostile, as overly tolerant and hence indifferent. To do so requires one to be well-equipped. Plantinga's book

*continued next page*

## Letter to the Editor

### Letter in reply to Pieter van der Wel's letter

*Dear Pieter,*

Thank you for these instructive comments and the opportunity to continue the discussion. I hope no-one thinks I was suggesting that we should all be beating our children to a pulp every five minutes. The question of who is responsible for children is indeed central and should be argued most fiercely, and wholesome discipline is primarily constructive and verbal. Perhaps we should be more active in promoting those ideas. But the civil government has a serious responsibility to punish genuine evildoers, so we do need to talk about what it is and is not

evil to do. I am no Hebrew scholar and stand to be corrected, but I don't think this is a side issue, because the government has that responsibility and is using it as a weapon against parents' responsibility. We might apply Martin Luther's words here, about the faithful soldier standing firm at the exact spot where the enemy is pressing. Our failure to do this — our embarrassed reluctance to defend the minute particulars as well as the important principles — has allowed our culture to slide, slip by tiny slip, into a state which is now recognized as post-Christian. That is why I wanted to suggest that we need to be very, very wary about trying to get on side with popular opinion, even when it appears to agree with broad general Biblical principles. And honestly, the Biblical position is more than anything embarrassed by the fact that most

Christians already allow the government to train their children in heathenism.

The people who are in power consider the murder of thousands of innocent children a matter of complete indifference, and pretend to be willing to overlook a little human frailty and imperfection in parents, but the idea of correcting a child — even believing that a child could stand in need of serious correction — is anathema to them, because to do so is to testify that there is such a thing as right and wrong, and ultimately that there is a God who has spoken. In a very real way, this is what the whole debate is about. But there are so many things that come into it, it would take a whole library to deal with it adequately. Anyone got some good books?

In Christ,

**Tani Newton**

is one aid to this end.

Second, Plantinga paints an inspiring vision of what our redemption and the Kingdom of God could look like. The concept of calling includes more than just our occupations and the pay packets they bring. It points to the goal of service, and of a pursuit of *shalom* here on earth. When choosing a field of study, or labouring over that 5,000-word essay, this vision of future service may provide a spark of enthusiasm, lest all hope be abandoned. Citing from

his own college's Statement of Purpose, Plantinga suggests that, 'As faithful workers in this Kingdom, Christians struggle to align themselves with the redemptive purposes of God in this world.'

Third, the book might be used by a group of students or others to provoke discussion on what it means to live as a Christian in this world, and particularly how the life of the mind might be brought captive to and for Christ's sake. The 'Talking Points' appended to the book provide useful dis-

cussion starters for such a group.

Cornelius Plantinga has provided a contribution that is not only helpful, but is also a pleasure to read. As one reviewer put it, 'Reading Plantinga on loving God with our minds is like listening to Louis Armstrong play jazz... A master craftsman is at work.' May all students, along with all believers, be encouraged to learn at the feet of the much greater Master.

*Reviewed by Rob Vosslander*

## Missions in focus

*by Janice Reid*

# The Mukhanyo Institute

*John Rogers*

On our last day in Pretoria before Sheryl & I flew to Uganda, we drove north-east to KwaMhlanga in Mpumalanga to the Mukhanyo Theological College and Mukhanyo Community Development Centre. Mukhanyo is Zulu for light. This is located in the old KwaNdebele Homeland and is a very, very poor area – two million people served by one hospital. The Principal, Dr P.J. (Flip) Buys, told us that 50% of South Africa's population is under 18 years of age. There are two million AIDS orphans in South Africa and Flip believes that if the Church can reach these orphans and hence much of the younger generation, maybe they can turn the tide of the whole country. 70-80% of Africans claim to be Christian yet 45% of them still worship their ancestors and visit witchdoctors (who, by the way, may soon be registered with the Health Department as health providers!). But why not visit the witchdoctor? For AIDS is seen as a spiritual curse; hence only spiritual means will heal it. Well, indeed, as the disease began, it is a curse on sin, and the preventative is spiritual/moral (even though now the disease has moved out and may now be caught by a much wider section of the population). But unless the Lord would heal in answer to prayer, any healing will be through the normal means he gives us.

Mukhanyo's motto is Revelation 19:6-8 which speaks of the bride of Christ making herself beautiful as she dresses herself 'in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.' By such deeds, 'as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering' (Colossians 3:12), says Flip, we will show the beauty of Christ to the world.

### **The Theological College**

300 churches are planted in Africa every week but they are full of syncretism. In Third World countries, Christianity is growing at 5% p.a., twice the rate of population growth, but of the two million pastors among them, less than 1% have had one day or more of theological training! For years, the Reformed Churches of South Africa ran the Hammanskraal Theological College for black students. This was closed some years before the new regime was introduced and the students incorporated into Potchefstroom Theological School. However, there was still a need for a lower level of in-service theological training – and there was a lot of potential for other work in the area also. So in 1994 Flip Buys was called by the Mission Board of the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (CRCN), who were doing mission work in the area and began the Mukhanyo TC. It is accredited through Potchefstroom and presently offers three levels of education. The basic course is a four-year Diploma in Theology. Bridge courses are offered for men with no high school education. Alternatively, if a student has matriculation (University Entrance) he may do the B.A./B.Th. programme that Potchefstroom offers and is the basic training for all RCSA

ministers. An M.A. may also be taken at Mukhanyo. Students study three days per week and then over the weekend preach in the local churches, do pastoral work or even community development work. They go to any church that will have them – with two million people in the area there are numerous 'churches' and they are welcome in most. The TC has its own statement of faith based on the Reformed Confessions but structured round the Five Solas of the Reformation (Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Christ Alone, Faith Alone and the Glory of God alone) and they are even beginning to influence some of these churches in a reformed direction via this means. There are presently five full-time lecturers and seven part-time. From five students in 1995, it now has about 50 full- & part-time, sometimes the more advanced students in the B.A./B.Th. stream teaching the lower levels of the diploma course. One of the early students, Thabiso Moeketsi, is now director of student affairs and secretary of the executive committee.

### **The Community Development Centre**

This was begun in 2003, working with AIDS patients and orphans (or orphans for whatever reason) and job creation. Presently 1000 orphans are under their care and 350 terminally ill patients (most by HIV-AIDS). For the terminally ill with no one to care for them, they run a hospice which last year took in 85 patients. Through some basic nursing and good food, about 30 left on their own two feet. Many of the other 55 came to Christ as he is witnessed to them in word and deed, and died in peace. Flip told us of one such lady who testified that her last few days on earth in the hospice were the best days of her life. How sad



Mukhanyo Theological College



Signing of the Mukhanyo-MT3 Agreement



Graduating Class of 2008



Having a well-earned break between lectures.

is that? And yet, how wonderful.

The Centre has developed five day-care centres run by churches trained by Mukhanyo. They give children two meals per day and they are helped with their homework. A 'home' in KwaMhlanga may consist of 10-20 children living with a grandmother – Flip knows of one 87-year-old woman who cares for eighteen children; or perhaps 15 children living on their own. Centre personnel work with some of these 'caregivers' and some are converted. He told of one 'family' of about five children – the youngest about two, the oldest thirteen – who existed by shooting birds with a slingshot and cooking them over a cow-dung fire. The thirteen-year-old is now in his second year of an engineering degree at Pretoria University.

As well as the above, there is a garden project, supplying food for distribution but also providing income and teaching skills of gardening in very dry conditions. I would have been proud of such a garden! There is a more or less permanent building team which renovates old buildings for community centres or other use. It makes its own bricks. There is a computer training room attached to the theological college to give basic computer skills to young people to help them get work in the city.

This is a truly wonderful work. To all appearances, it is very well financed. There is a lot of scope here also for short-term mission work for any of our young people interested in such. I asked Flip about this and his reply showed that they are used to such and are geared up for it properly. They give some basic orientation first. There is work here for any building trade, teachers, any health professional, horticulturalist, computer technician — you name it.

**Postscript:** As usual, I sent this to the source to check my reporting. Flip replied thanking me for the visit and article and simply made the additional comment: 'The Mission Board of the CRCN has informed us that they have to withdraw their financial support ( 40 000 p.a.) to Mukhanyo Theological College by the end of 2008, because of the decline of giving for missions in their Churches in the Netherlands. That is quite a blow for us. We'll have to prayerfully look for other supporters to fill that gap.' 40,000 euros translates to NZ\$80,000 +/-, a lot of money. If anybody feels an inclination, it is a worthwhile work. A number of the part-time lecturers at Mukhanyo are ministers of some of the RCSA churches in Pretoria whom I know personally. It will be good instruction that is being given.

*The Rev. John Rogers is the minister at the Reformed Church of the North Shore, in northern Auckland*

**Planning a mission trip? Let us pray for you!**

If you or somebody you know is planning a mission trip—short or long—please let us know. We want to pray for those on mission trips overseas, but we cannot pray if we don't know that you're going! Deadline for submission of articles to Faith in Focus is 6 weeks before the month the magazine comes to your church. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at [reid4radio@gmail.com](mailto:reid4radio@gmail.com)