

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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"The grasslands of the desert overflow;



the hills are covered with gladness!"

Psalm 65:12

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Editorial

'Faith in Focus' is a denominational magazine. So one of its purposes is to inform us on what's happening amongst our churches and sister churches. This is why we have columns such as the 'Focus on home' (Gleanings), 'Missions in focus', 'Home mission in focus', and 'World in focus', together with reports of various Camps, Conferences, and so on. This is also why I have endeavoured to re-instate a 'Youth in focus' column, and why we are still looking for someone to edit a children's page.

But this is also an area where you personally can participate. For you will have noticed the various Wedding Anniversary notices which appear in 'Faith in Focus'. These are free to those in our churches - no cost to you (including the photo!). But you can also place engagement notices, wedding announcements, and death notices. These can include photographs. All for the same charge - nothing! You do need, though, to get your Notice in to us at least six weeks before the issue of the magazine in which you would like your Notice to be placed.

Another area in which your help would be appreciated - if you can help - is with articles and photographs of special church events. Perhaps it's of a church picnic, maybe a conference at your church, a youth club night, the Sunday School presentation, or even coffee after church. If you have a digital camera, great. But please make sure you get your photo(s) reduced before you send it to me, otherwise it can take a lot of time to download. If you have normal photographs, you could send them to me at the address below.

Let's make 'Faith in Focus' both a journal of record and an encouragement to us all in the Christian walk. Read a good book? Review it for us. Heard a good sermon or talk? Ask the minister or speaker to zap in a copy. Or have a capable person type it off the tape. In this way we can all get to enjoy the blessing.

*"But to each one of us grace has been given
as Christ apportioned it."*

Ephesians 4:7

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

A real googlie

Not quite what it seems!

Sjirk Bajema

It came in a plain A4 envelope, the kind I often get, much the same as with the many Christian magazines and promotional literature ministers and churches receive. It seemed the usual multiple mail-out — our address, like yours too no doubt, must be on hundreds on mailing lists by now — with the usual return address in the top left hand corner.

Yet it appeared like a magazine many of us would warm to. It was concerned — as its high quality, multi-coloured pages beamed forth — for those things we are sometimes wondering about.

That concern came very close to home as its subject was about the attack against religion, and Christianity in particular. Figures were simplified in easy-to-follow charts showing the decline in church attendance, the growth in secular psychology and psychiatry, and the attack on the family in society today, especially from this modern counselling philosophy.

Sounds good

All this is manna for a conservative Christian. These are the right sounds, coming from an apparently respectable looking name, quoting reputable theologians, and endorsed by prominent religious leaders. Or so it appeared.

And that's just it! For when looking a little at the fine-print (actually not so fine in this case) who was the publisher? Another arm of the Church of Scientology! It's a religious organisation, founded by a L. Ron Hubbard, also known as an author of science-fiction books. But don't think it's either a church or scientific. A Church believes in God, which Scientology doesn't — and this publication avoids God's Name to the extent of a few quotes from scripture, subtly separated from the actual text. Certainly there's no mention of the saving grace found alone in Jesus Christ. And a science is a system which is verifiable and open to all examination, something which scientology is the exact opposite of. A much more plausible reason for the Church of Scientology would be what Hubbard stated before he founded the 'Church of Scientology' in 1954, that: *"If a man really wanted to make a million dollars, the best way to do it would be to start a religion."*

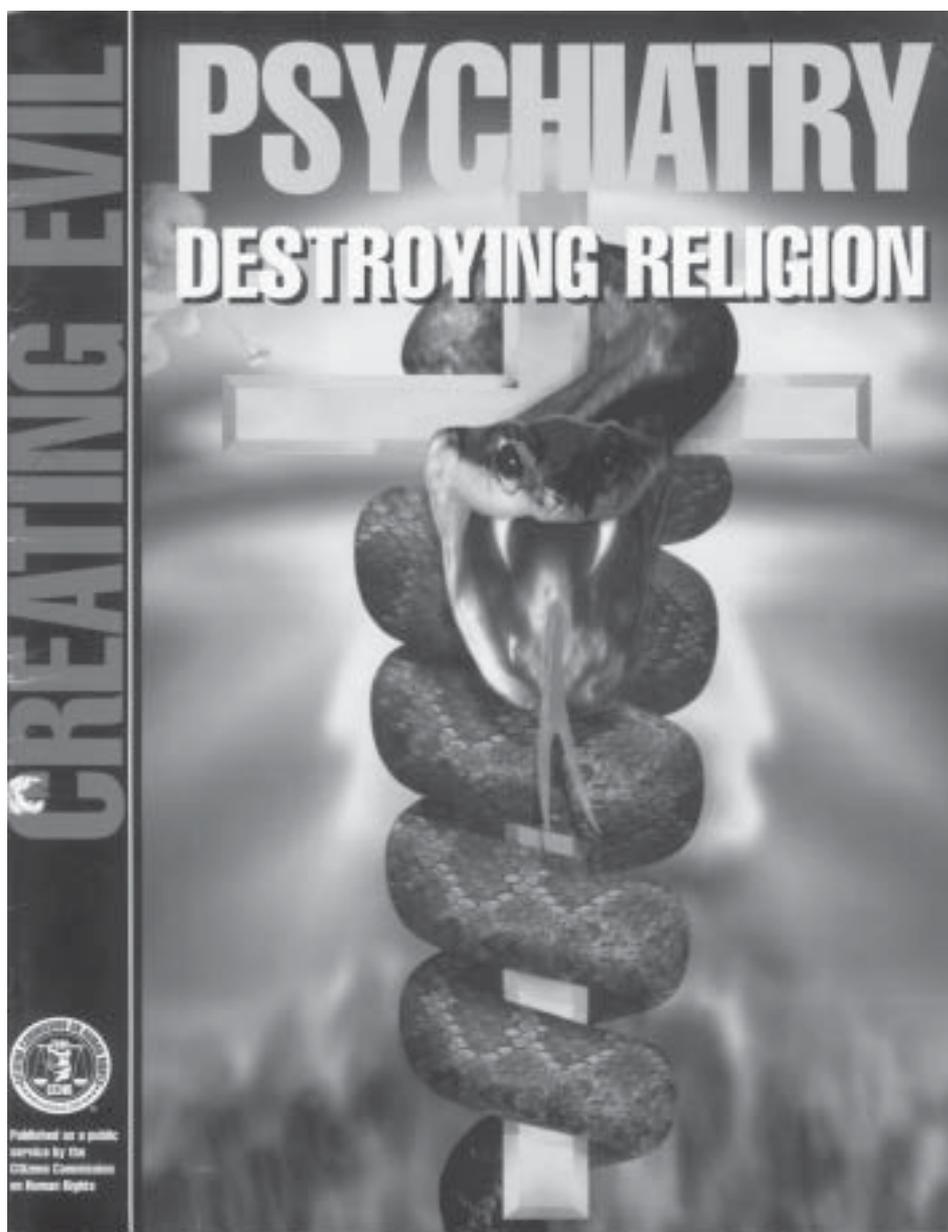
But it was interesting to read this blatant attack of modern psychology and psychiatry from an organisation which itself practices an outdated and largely discredited form of

psychology itself. For in Scientology one moves from one level to another, passing through a series of 'clears' (with the use of a so-called 'E-meter' which is alleged to measure the changes in electrical conductivity of the skin that occur at moments of even slight excitement or emotional stress), until they can say that they have completely rid themselves of all negative influences. Along the way there's a huge smattering of eastern reincarnation ideas thrown in. And it's not cheap. There are enough documented cases of folk who have had their life savings spent in pursuing this treatment.

It has the stars

Scientology is more known nowadays by the famous Hollywood actors and the singers who support and endorse it. A few among these are John Travolta, Priscilla Presley, her daughter, Tom Cruise, and Nicole Kidman.

The glossy publication, however, could be seen through. Aside from the subtle twist of not mentioning God, or our Lord Jesus Christ, its character as a turgid attack on modern medical treatment was quite obvious. For while we should be concerned about these influences in society, as soon as anyone begins to paint them in conspiratorial tones the alarm bells should be ringing. That is



devilish. One lie was the use of a current secular psychologist to discredit another, without mentioning that the one being quoted was himself a psychologist, although with a different theory of practice. It's a devious move for respectability in mainstream religion, not unlike what the Moonies have been doing just as subtly, seducing a number of prominent American church leaders along the way.

It's not free at all!

And I have a thing about the bright and

beautiful magazines. I always wonder who has paid for them. When you know the way Scientology produces its income, you know you're dealing with a cult which is no different than the Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. The last thing they do is free anyone, let alone make them truly 'clear'. Like the Judaizers the apostle Paul condemns in Galatians, they only blind people even more by entrapping them through a man-made set of hoops they have to jump.

The magazine was a real googlie. Perhaps you know this name — 'googlie' — for the

cricket bowl which changes direction at the last moment. It's not what it at first seems. And we can become tricked. A sleight of hand takes place on a mental plane. But let's be alert. Let's help them see Jesus Christ instead, because we are being led by His Spirit.

Recommended reading:

"The Bare-Faced Messiah", by Russell Miller (Michael Joseph, UK, 1987)

"The Challenge of the Cults", by Maurice C. Burrell, IVP, 1981

Banner of Truth Conference

Sydney 2004

Chris Kavanagh

The Banner of Truth is well known as a Christian Publisher, and promoter of Calvinistic and Reformed literature, having since its formation in the 1950s done a great service to the Church by reprinting the Puritans, Evangelical Revival authors, and others, and commissioning many new works too. The Banner also organises conferences in the UK, USA, and Australia. The Australian conference is held in the last week of February every two years, and this time was attended by Rev. Leo de Vos and myself, and our wives Carol and Julie. The

conference, which is mostly attended by ministers and elders and wives, and other Christian workers, was a great time of fellowship, encouragement and learning.

It was held at Collaroy, one of the beaches in northern Sydney (the surf was too high when we were there, and the beach was closed some of the time – not that we would have surfed anyway!). The Collaroy Centre itself is an excellent facility, which caters for conferences and school groups throughout the year. It is owned and operated by the Salvation Army, and is the traditional venue for the conference.

The speakers

The speakers were Murray Capill, Noel Weeks, Iain Murray and Stuart Olyott. Several years ago Murray Capill was the minister of the Reformed Church of Bucklands Beach, and now teaches practical theology at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong. He also ministers at the Christian Reformed Church of South Barwon, Geelong. He gave two talks on the pastor as preacher, and the preacher as pastor, concentrating on the dual interaction of these two roles. It is the theme of his book "*Preaching with Spiritual Vigour*", which itself is a study of Richard Baxter. Noel Weeks, also a CRC Australia member, and





Iain Murray

author, spoke on preaching from Old Testament narratives. He emphasised the need for balance between an exclusively historical redemptive approach and an exemplary one*.

It was good to meet Iain Murray. He had ministered in Sydney at a Presbyterian Church and lived in Sydney for a total of nine years, and so was regarded as a local by the conference. He is known to many for his work with the Banner of Truth, and as an author and biographer. He has written, among many other titles, a two volume biography of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and more recently a sensitive and sympathetic biography of John Wesley, and some of the Methodists who followed after him. He spoke on some features of the apostolic church in Acts, and gave a very fine

account of justification, illustrated from the works of Spurgeon.

Stuart Olyott is from Wales, and unknown to many of us except by name. He ministered for many years in Toxteth, central Liverpool, and was there at the time of the riots. He has also ministered in a French-speaking church in Lausanne and taught at Bryntirion College, Bridgend, in South Wales. He currently works for the Evangelical Movement of Wales, as a pastoral advisor to pastors and churches in Wales. He did not seem at all worried at the thought of being a Reformed Baptist Daniel in a den of Presbyterian and Reformed lions; he told us he loved the Westminster Shorter Catechism and fully agreed with 106_ of its 107 questions and answers. And indeed, Reformed Baptists were also represented among the attendees at the conference. He gave three addresses from 2 Corinthians on the work of the ministry, that being a minister was glorious, humbling and radical.

A good encouragement

All in all a great time. Those new to Sydney had had a chance to look around the beautiful city. Or it was just a time to meet new people, and enjoy and profit from the conference. The CD of the talks would make a great resource for office-bearer training sessions, and church libraries, and for ministers and elders unable to attend the conference. For the colloquium doctum, and more information, contact The Banner of Truth, PO Box 29, Sylvania Southgate, NSW 2224, Australia.

E mail: ajp162@bigpond.net.au

The Rev. Chris Kavanagh presently serves the Reformed Church of Palmerston North



Rev Chris and Julie Cavanagh



Rev Leo and Carol de Vos

- * Should we treat the characters and events of the Old Testament as examples (exemplary) only to us, of human nature and God's dealing with people. Or should we only seek to see in the Old Testament the types of Christ and the Lord's preparation of His people for the coming of Christ (historical redemptive approach).

World in focus

A place in the mountains

In southwestern Montana, near the Elkhorn Mountains, lies Helena, the state capital. Here, close by the banks of the Missouri River, where Lewis and Clark passed through in 1805 and 1806, is Elkhorn Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a new mission work of the Presbytery of the Northwest. Helena began as a wild and roaring gold camp in the nineteenth century; rarely has it ever had a meaningful Reformed/Presbyterian ministry—until now.

The church had its beginnings in the spring of 1998, in the living room of Ron Ellis, a church planter with the Presbyterian Church in America, as a community Bible study group. By late 1999, the group had grown to seven families. An agreement was made with the

local Seventh-day Adventist church to rent their facility for Lord's Day services, commencing on January 1, 2000. Worship and outreach continued until May 2002, when the PCA's Rocky Mountain Presbytery terminated Pastor Ellis's call, citing the group's lack of growth.

The core group continued to meet for Bible study and worship, led by guest preachers. In September 2002, contacts were made with OPC ministers in the area. Representatives of the group then presented their case at a meeting of the OPC's Presbytery of the Northwest. Arrangements were made for Dr. Richard J. Venema, who was finishing his work at Wasilla, Alaska, to visit Helena. The Elkhorn group petitioned the Presbytery to be received as a mission work, and that petition was granted on December 2, with Dr. Venema to

serve as stated supply. The core group has been very gratified by the OPC's interest in, and support of, their efforts to establish a viable Reformed and Presbyterian ministry to the glory of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Pastor Venema has had broad experience in various ministries in the Christian Reformed Churches and since 1994 in the OPC.

Elkhorn OPC currently consists of ten family groups. It has been reaching out to the people of Helena through radio broadcasts, newspaper advertising, Bible study groups, and personal contacts. It provides a full Sunday-school program.

When you visit Montana, plan to worship and fellowship with Elkhorn OPC at 24 10 Beltview Drive in Helena (tel. 406/4588163). Pray that the group will grow and mature, and

that its ministry will bear much fruit through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Pray, too, for Pastor Venema's health and strength, for he is now in his eighties.

By James Weaver. Reproduced from "New Horizons", the magazine of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, February 2004. It is good to have news of the Rev. Richard Venema, whom some will remember from his days in New Zealand.

MOVIEGUIDEÆ Awards

This year's MOVIEGUIDEÆ Awards were the centerpiece of the 12th Annual Faith and Values Gala, presented by the Christian Film and Television Commission™. The event was taped for later telecast on PAX TV and the winners are: \$25,000 Epiphany Prize for Most Inspiring Movie of 2003†— the Gospel of John, distributed by Visual Bible. \$25,000 Epiphany Prize for Most Inspiring TV Program of 2003 — Love Comes Softly, broadcast by the Hallmark Channel. Ten Best 2003 Films for Families: Finding Nemo, Visual Bible: the Gospel of John, Piglet's Big Movie, Spellbound, Peter Pan, Cheaper by the Dozen, Secondhand Lions, Spy Kids 3rd: Game Over, Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas, Pirates of the Caribbean: the Curse of the Black Pearl.

Ten Best 2003 Films for Mature Audiences: The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King; Gods and Generals; Master and Commander:

The Far Side of the World; Luther, Tears of the Sun, In America, Seabiscuit, X2:X-Men United, Matchstick Men, The Matrix Revolutions.

+ Christian Film and Television Commission, 2510-G Las Posas Rd., #502, Camarillo, CA 93010

The Journal of Modern Ministry

A new resource for pastors, counselors, and church leaders has just been created. It is called "The Journal of Modern Ministry" (JMM). The first issue is scheduled for May delivery, the second for October. Future issues will be printed three or four times a year. Dr Jay Adams is the General Editor. The purpose of JMM is to be a Bible-based resource for ministers, elders, deacons, and key Christians that will provide helpful, practical material for their information and growth so that they will minister the Word more effectively. The "Journal" will take a firm evangelical stance.

While scholarly, it seeks to be interesting, non-academic in tone, and easy to assimilate.

I am seeking writers (doctors, nurses, pastors, care givers, missionaries, patients, philosophers, and others) to address medical topics in ways that will help equip churches of all sizes to minister with greater understanding, skill, and compassion.

I would like to invite you to contribute to

JMM in several ways: 1) by writing an article, 2) by providing topic ideas for articles, or 3) by referring others who might like to write. The next deadline for the submission of articles to the General Editor is in August.

+ Steven Vogel, MD, 2109 17th St., NE, Rochester, MN 55906 svogel@charter.net

Six Orthodox clergy depart New Westminster

Five priests and one deacon of the Anglican Church of Canada's Diocese of New Westminster have resigned from that diocese over Bishop Michael Ingham's support of same sex unions and the consecration of V. Gene Robinson, an non-celibate homosexual man, as Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire. Four of the group are now under the oversight of the Most Rev. Emmanuel Kolini, Archbishop of Rwanda, and have formed the Anglican Communion in Canada (ACiC). Although their administrative head is the Rt. Rev. T.J. Johnson, Missionary Bishop of the Diocese of Rwanda and a part of the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA), the group has not affiliated with AMiA at this time.

Although Bishop Ingham no longer considers the priests to be in good standing, their wardens and the vast majority of their parishioners support their actions.

+ Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr.

Iraq's Constitution gives protection

Iraq's transitional constitution gives some protection to Christians, but how long will it last? The Barnabas Fund reports: Iraq's interim constitution, known as the Transitional Administrative Law, states in Article F, "Each Iraqi has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice. Coercion in such matters shall be prohibited."

This is good news for Christians and other religious minorities. Also, Islam is to be considered "a source of legislation" rather than "the source of legislation" (Article 7A). The same article also "guarantees the full religious rights of all individuals to freedom of religious belief and practice."

However, these encouragements are tempered by another statement in Article 7A which runs: "No law that contradicts the universally agreed tenets of Islam... may be enacted." For example, all schools of Islamic law agree that an adult male Muslim who converts to another faith should be killed.

Indeed, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, certain freedoms exist on the books, but "the tendency has been for covert abductions and for converts to disappear without trace."

+ The Barnabas Fund, Wiltshire, U.K.; info@barnabasfund.org; www.barnabasfund.org.

Doing more with less in Cuba

For over a decade, Cuba has endured shortages of everything from food and clothing

IN TOUCH

Subscriptions to the IN TOUCH magazine are available. This is an opportunity for those interested who do not have access to or have joined a Cadet and Calvinette Club (Cadets and Calvinettes will continue to be supplied through their clubs). The costs is \$15 per year for four issues.

This is a Reformed Churches of New Zealand children's magazine especially written for 8 - 15 year olds.

It is filled with stories, photographs, puzzles, Bibles studies, Cadet & Calvinette Club news, competitions, poetry, crafts, cooking and Camp News.



If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ15 (or \$AU15), with your details, to the National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven, Upper Hutt. (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)

to jobs and transportation. However, the evangelical Christian church in Cuba has learned to survive, sustaining a high rate of growth.

Pastors report that the Castro regime has shown more tolerance toward Christians in the past five years. However, they caution that the changes are not necessarily permanent. "The law has not changed. What has changed is the spirit," a pastor told Compass. "What's more, it depends on the spirit of local authorities." Restrictions on worship, evangelism and Christian education are still in force. Policy regarding foreign visitors has the net effect of limiting contact between Cuban believers and Christians from overseas. And though leaders see a "notable improvement" in the availability of Bibles, Cuban Christians still face a critical shortage of Scriptures.

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

What can be preached?

In Canada, there is growing concern that preaching against homosexuality may soon be considered a crime. Many have been keeping a close eye on political developments in Canada over the last few years as homosexual rights are increasingly being written into law. Now the director of the International Bible Society (IBS) in Canada is predicting that the federal government could soon add homosexuals to the list of groups protected by laws against so-called "hate propaganda." Donald Brooker of IBS says the bill could permit Canadian officials to ban parts of the Bible as hate literature.

If the bill becomes law, as expected, Canada's Supreme Court may have to decide if homosexual rights are more important than religious liberty. Brooker notes that Canadian judges have already ruled that the nation's constitution gives homosexual couples the right to marry.

+ International Bible Society, National Headquarters, 1820 Jet Stream Dr., Colorado Springs, CO

Covenant Seminary launches "Help Me Learn More About"

Located on Covenant Seminary's website (<http://www.covenantseminary.edu/>) is a searchable database called "Help Me Learn More About," making hundreds of its audio messages and articles on virtually every topic accessible in moments. Covenant Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri) is responding to the numerous requests over the years for copies of messages and articles covering such topics as acting with integrity in the workplace to facing a miscarriage in the family. Whether you are seeking information on a particular topic, preparing a Sunday school lesson, or striving to share the Gospel with a friend, "Help Me Learn More About" is a wonderful way for Covenant Seminary professors to answer your questions.

+ Covenant Theological Seminary, 12330 Conway Rd., St. Louis, MO 63141 (800) 264-8064

Partial-birth abortion ban passed by Congress and taken to Court

In spite of public opposition to killing partially-delivered live babies, abortion providers and advocates have taken the new law to court. The figures come from a Gallup poll conducted in November, 2003. It found that even among those describing themselves as "pro-choice," opposition to partial-birth abortion was 50 percent.

The ban became law in November, 2003. At least three abortion rights groups filed suit in federal courts. Judges in various locations in the US responded with temporary injunctions. The first judicial hearings was scheduled for March of 2004.

+ Presbyterians Pro-Life, Research, Education and Care, Inc., PO Box 11130, Burke, VA 22009

GKNs group agrees to institute federation

GARDEREN, the Netherlands - A group of at least eight local churches of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland-synodical (GKNs) which say they "at this time" can not go along with the church merger of May 1, 2004, is forming an emergency alliance (noodverband). About twenty local churches attended a very recent meeting called by the consistory of Garderen's GKNs. Most of the other churches (perhaps as many as 60) are still awaiting the outcome of their appeal to GKNs synod. The decision will be announced before May 1.

Opposition in the GKNs to the SoW-merger (Samen op Weg, Together on the Way) which joins it with the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk (NHK) and the Evangelisch Lutherse Kerk (ELK) into the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN) has only surfaced in recent years. The church at Garderen played a prominent role in channelling the resistance.

Opposition to the merger caused GKNs' synod to create a transition period during which former GKNs churches can leave the new denomination if they so choose. However the Garderen group calls this idea "not very principled," saying it still can join the PKN in the future but that they currently do not have this freedom.

Garderen also has set up a contact point for scattered members of merging GKNs elsewhere in the country who can not follow their merging congregation into the KPN. Members in such circumstances are invited to register themselves with the Garderen group of churches for assistance.

The group wants to remain Reformed, to be governed according to the Reformed church order and bound by the Reformed confessions. It sees the PKN as a pluriform denomination which has also adopted historic and contemporary Lutheran confessions.

A group of NHK churches also says it cannot join the PKN. It, too, is instituting itself

as a continuing church. While GKNs churches are separate legal entities and own their property, a number of NHK congregations have sought a court ruling on their legal status, but potentially could lose all their assets. In the NHK, title to properties belongs to the 'entities' part of the denomination. However, the church order of 1951 has not been tested on that point. (the Windmill Herald, April 7 2004 issue)

+ Albert van der Heide, Vanderheide Publishing Co. Ltd. windmill@godutch.com www.GoDutch.com

Koreans moving to ARP

A group of 10 Korean-language churches in the New York City area is interested in affiliation with the ARP Church. Presbytery agreed to allow these congregations to unite with Pacific Presbytery but requested that they maintain fraternal contact and relationships with Northeast.

Delegates voted to respond with words of encouragement and interest to a church-planting proposal for southern Orange County, California. The principals involved are being invited to attend the June meeting of Presbytery at Bonclarken <<http://www.bonclarken.com/>>. Dr. Peter Lee was examined and received upon letter of transfer from the Eastern New York presbytery of the Korean American Church. Delegates approved the validity of his call to serve as pastor from Holy Grace Church in New Hyde Park, N.Y. + Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, One Cleveland St., Greenville, SC 29601

Entire evangelical families arrested in Eritrea

Eritrean authorities began raiding the private homes of evangelical Christians last week, arresting and jailing entire families caught praying and reading the Bible together. In two separate arrests on 17-18 March, families (including children) from the Rema Charismatic Church in the capital of Asmara were arrested and sent to prison. In another arrest on 23 Feb., ten believers from the Full Gospel Church in Asmara were taken to jail. Of the 51 evangelicals from Asmara's Hallelujah Church who were arrested in mid-February, 46 remain in military prison. Criminal charges and punishing fines were being ordered against these "outlawed" Christians.

All of Eritrea's independent Protestant denominations were closed by Government order in May 2002 and their congregations forbidden to worship, even in their homes. At present, at least 373 Protestant Christians are confirmed jailed and subjected to severe torture.

+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799 (949) 862-0314

Persecution in Nigeria

Religious violence has erupted in the Nigerian state of Plateau and has resulted in the deaths of eight pastors and 1,500 Christian

believers, and the destruction of 173 churches. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) released the names of the martyred pastors who served Baptist, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Assemblies of God and the Evangelical Reformed congregations, as well as the Church of Christ in Nigeria and the Evangelical Church of West Africa. Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency reported that religious violence in Plateau and Nasarawa states has resulted in the displacement of 25,000 people.

Compass Direct reports: "About 50,000 displaced persons who managed to escape the hostility have temporarily relocated to some parts of this state," placing enormous pressure on local resources. On 28 March, Muslim-Christian violence broke out in the state of Nasarawa, reportedly claiming the lives of 15 Christians.

+ PCA News, Presbyterian Church in America, 1700 N Brown Rd. Suite 105, Lawrenceville, GA 30043(678) 825-1000

African churches just say "No"

In a move that may result in serious financial hardship, Africa's Anglican archbishops voted last week to refuse funding from any diocese that supports homosexual clergy and to refuse to work with any missionaries who support the idea. The primates also suggested that the Episcopal Church USA be disciplined and given three months to repent of the consecration of

V. Gene Robinson, a non-celibate homosexual man, as Bishop of New Hampshire. If no action is taken, the African Anglicans state that they will take whatever actions are necessary, although there are no plans to break from the Anglican Communion.

Speaking about the decision, Archbishop Peter Akinola, Archbishop of Nigeria and Chair of the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa, said, "If we suffer for a while to gain our independence and our freedom and to build ourselves up, I think it will be a good thing for the church in Africa. We will not, on the altar of money, mortgage our conscience, mortgage our faith, and mortgage our salvation"

+ Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr., *Christian Observer Correspondent*

PCN chooses first officers

The Protestant Church of The Netherlands (PCN) acquired its first officers in March, a few weeks before its formal May 1 beginning. Each of the three churches that will form the new denomination held their final synods, finishing their business and reflecting on their past. The joint trio-synod also met for the final time, finishing off the last transitional matters.

The following day, the PCN synod met for the first time and elected Jan-Gerd Heetderks as its first moderator. Heetderks was also the last moderator of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKN). Elected by the GKN in 2003, Heetderks had been steeped in all the final votes and moves toward church union.

The new PCN adopted a new logo for itself. A cross, a dove, and a circle are the main elements, representing salvation, peace and unity. They also blended the form of the cross with the Greek letter O.

About 50 congregations of the Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK) filed suit in a Dutch court claiming the right not to join the new denomination. The NHK responded by sending a letter warning notaries that, pending the outcome of the case, they should not honour any attempts by these congregations to transfer any property rights.

Including those who went to court, 64 congregations have now given official notice that they will not join the new church. The last NHK synod received the notifications. The synod warned these congregations that their properties and assets still belonged to the NHK. There is a possibility that a transition team would make some provision for such congregations, but the law did not require it.

The synod also warned that such congregations could not expect an associate membership of some kind. Since the objectors would not accept the confessional basis of the new PCN, the synod pointed out they could not accept congregations that viewed the PCN as a false or heretical church.

J. Stelwagen, chairperson of the denominational board that mediates church conflicts, said "the problems are greater than [had been] foreseen. Congregations and families are being torn apart. Things are happening in congregations where opinions are divided that are a disgrace for the Church of Christ."

Heetderks called on the dissatisfied congregations to remain a part of the new church. "We don't want to form a new church without you. There is plenty of room within the united church to preserve one's own identity and give witness to it.

The PCN will have more than 2,200 congregations. The abstaining congregations represent about 3 percent of the total. (SoWkerken, Reformatorische Dagblad, ENI)
+ *The Reformed Ecumenical Council*

Stamps For Mission

The OMB wishes to thank Mrs Gill Goodin of the Reformed Church of Masterton on behalf of the churches for her work in processing stamps for mission. Many of you have saved postage stamps from envelopes, and sent them on to Gill for processing to raise money for missions. Each year a few hundred dollars is raised this way and donated to the OMB.

Gill has asked the OMB if we could find someone who would be willing to take over the task of processing the stamps. If you would like to do this, please contact me and I'll arrange for you to take it up. The task would involve receiving stamps from the churches, and taking them or sending them to a dealer, at present in Otaki. The stamps come from ordinary envelopes. Each one is worth very little by itself (even special editions and overseas stamps) and we are paid by the kilo.

Careful preparation of the stamps is needed before sending them to the collection person. They should not be soaked off the envelope, but trimmed to leave 10mm of envelope all round, before you send them to the collection person, who then takes them to the dealer. This is essential, as the dealer will only accept them this way. Many hands make light work.

Thanks again to Gill for the work done, and to everyone for the stamps collected. Please hang on to those stamps for now, till we can find someone who is ready to take over. Let me know if you would like to take over.

Chris Kavanagh (OMB member)

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Faith and the Arts

Creativity and the role of the artist in the light of the Scriptures

Don Capill

In looking at creativity and the role of the artist in the light of the Scriptures, it is not possible here to consider every relevant scripture and issue. We will look at a number of scriptures, however, that directly bear on these matters. No attempt will be made to link the thoughts sequentially. They may best be thought of as starting points for further thought and discussion.

* "God said, 'Let us make man in our image... and let them have dominion.'" ¹

When Adam and Eve first surveyed their unspoiled environment, they saw at a glance that it was good, beneficial and beautiful. They saw what God Himself was pleased to create — and bestow upon them in love. Appreciation, gratitude and delight were theirs. After the Fall, mankind was still endowed with a sense of the beautiful, as well as having a sensed need for truth and righteousness. There were tasks to perform — to subdue and cultivate the world (i.e. to tame it, to eliminate its unruliness, to order it, and to place their human imprint upon it). And they were held accountable to God for their actions. "Responsible action is the vocation of man, and shalom is his end." ² To the servants in the parable of the talents, their master's instruction was, 'Occupy till I come.'

Dostoevsky was convinced that there was a sublime unspoken connection between goodness, truth and beauty, and should these three be cut off from humanity as a felled tree, beauty would likely to be the first to shoot forth, foreshadowing the return of goodness and truth. With these three things — goodness, truth and beauty — men should occupy themselves.

* "In Christ, all things were created — things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible — all things were created through Him and for Him." ³

The Old Testament speaks of works of art as a part of life — as much a part of life as eating and working. There are countless references to music, poetry, narratives, craftsmanship, embroidery, architecture, engraving, decorating, and so on. Music, sacred and secular, figures in many a historical reference. The visual arts abounded in the Temple: different creations of the human mind. Some are

representational, some symbolic and some abstract. All were acceptable in the House of God, and artistic abilities were seen as gifted to man from a generous, life-loving God. Their gifts were given to enrich life and to redound to the glory of God. Biblical life was, and is meant to be, a pattern for work, leisure and worship. Human recreations are capable of echoing the satisfaction and pleasure that God Himself found in creation — found in a creation that was functional, beautiful and good.

It has been said that the sphere of the imagination is as much a part of God's creation as the sun, moon and stars. Invisible things include the whole realm of ideas and



"Self-Portrait" by Vincent van Gogh

imagination, emotions, instincts, memory, sensitivity, intuition and the ability to dream and fantasise. (13. Brand & Solway, *Art & Soul*) And this capacity to imagine, experiment and make things happen applies to all of life — to education, horticulture, science, home-making, etc. Artists do not have a monopoly on the application of imagination, though for them it is central.

* "Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise, think about these things." ⁴

This much-quoted verse has far-reaching implications for any artist. These values are to shape the Christian's thinking and artistic creations. He is called not only to present the noble and the lovely, but also the truth — truth in a fallen, ugly world where it has ugly consequences. In order to recognise

what is true and so on, "we need to be able to recognise what is false, ignoble, wrong, impure, unlovely and justly unadmired. But such categories are almost never applied to popular culture — which is why the Grammy Awards in 1989 added a category for heavy metal." (Kenneth A. Myers) Works that are true will plumb the depths of human nature and the human heart. "It will lead to poetry like the Psalms; stories with complex and confusing characters; and painting that depicts decay and chaos, as well as beauty and order." ⁵ "If you only have the major theme," as Francis Schaeffer has said, "no one will listen. They will know you are lying." The skill is in knowing how to present the balance. The temptation for the poorer artist is to wallow in depravity and sentimentality.

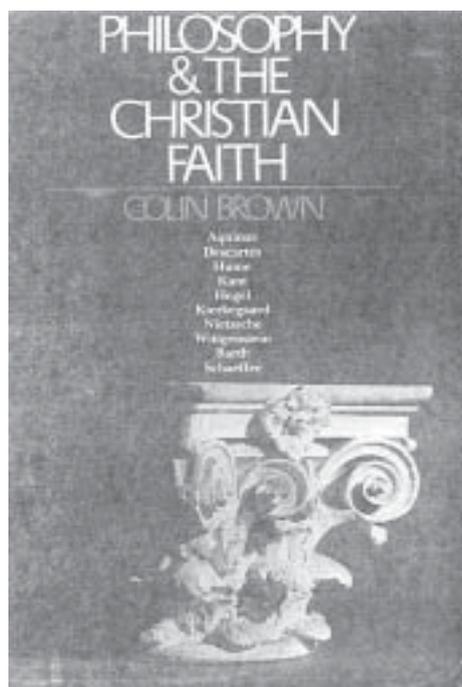
* "All things are lawful but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up." ⁶

On the basis of this reference alone, art needs no justification, as Rookmaaker has said; but the artist is called upon to show marked integrity. His integrity is to shine forth in all he creates and in what he refuses to create. His motivation lies beyond pleasing himself or a patron or a buyer: it lies in seeking to please God, doing all that he does to the glory of God, as did J.S. Bach, Dvorak and countless others. Before embarking on any composition, Bach inscribed at the top of each page, "To the glory of God." While we might not literally do the same before embarking upon a work of art, our attitude and desire should be identical.

* The Christian artist is not to be "acting in worldly fashion; for though we live in the world, we are not carrying on a worldly war... We take every thought captive to obey Christ." ⁷

While every Christian is charged to contend for Christ in the world, the artist is at the forefront of an encounter with worldly culture. Being different from that culture, he will not only be concerned about his message and motivation but he will be careful about the forms and styles he chooses to use. He will seek to speak to this world without being of it, at the same time as he is revealing another, and better, world.

Modern educationalists have done us a real disservice where they have sought to remove historical perspectives from many



branches of learning. An over-concentration on the 20th century has robbed us of our roots and the ability to stand on the shoulders of our forebears. How well Colin Brown summed this up in his *Christianity and Western Thought*:

"The history of science reveals a progress of knowledge in which later thought superseded earlier thought. But theology and philosophy — in common with other liberal arts — is not like science. It is not a case that the discoveries of the present make obsolete the views of the previous generation. The latest play on Broadway or the West End of London does not make the plays of Shakespeare obsolete. Modern verse does not supplant the poetry of Wordsworth or Milton. The music of Bach, Mozart and Brahms is not surpassed by twentieth-century compositions. The present should have its own integrity. But that integrity requires us to listen to what the past has to offer."

* *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."*⁸

All artists shape and slant truth according to their experiences. They bring works into being from their own inner worlds, and those inner worlds are not blank slates. They are treasure troves where are stored the deepest and most personal experiences, experiences that then shape what they create and bring to light. All artists are, in their way, prophets. Each artist must determine what he treasures in his heart because whatever is there, will be proclaimed. And it is up to each

consumer to discern whether the artist he admires and would emulate is true or false. All artists are in the business of seeking to influence, woo and move others. Is it toward truth, meaning, purpose, and delight, or is it not? Each of us must learn to decide, but deciding is not always easy. Here, again, we must remember Calvin's caution that in a fallen world, truth is not the exclusive property of Christians. Far from it — which is why Christians must not close themselves off completely from unbelievers. God, by common grace, has scattered truth abroad, and we must recognise it as such wherever we find it.

* *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us."*⁹

And so we all struggle in life — struggle with temptations of the mind and the flesh and the world. Those with more sensitive and imaginative dispositions know this most of all. The artist knows what it is to be pressed on every side: to have a burden to give through creating and yet feeling continually frustrated — frustrated by people who don't understand him, by interruptions and shortage of time, and quietness, and the need for money, supplies and so on. And central to all these matters is the knowledge that he is primarily called to be *salt* and *light*. What he is, is more important than what he accomplishes in a visible sense, and this he must always keep in mind. This gives all else perspective.

* The Christian artist, like all struggling believers, must learn to rest content knowing that *"in everything God works together for good with those who love him, who are called according to His purpose."*¹⁰

Here the artist must rest his concerns. *"In me you have peace,"* Christ teaches us. *"In the world you will have tribulation."* This is the kind of peace which John Milton, though blind, knew:

"Dost God exact day-labour, light denied?" I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need

Either man's work or his own gifts; who best Bears his mild yoke, **they** serve him best."

There is no substitute for the believer's close walk with God. In Him, there is peace. His grace is sufficient for all our needs.

Very different is the life of the unbeliever. He knows not that peace which passes understanding. All too often, the frustrations of life bring resentment, cynicism and bitterness.

Think of Wagner who said, *"I cannot live the life of a town organist like Master Bach. I must have beauty, splendour, light around me. I am not as others. I have nerves as sensitive as touch. The world owes me a consideration — yes, luxury."*

Note what most highly acclaimed, English painter, Francis Bacon has commented about life: *"Man now realizes that he is an accident, that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without reason... I think of life as meaningless; we create certain attitudes which give it a meaning while we exist, though they in themselves are meaningless, really... I work hoping that chance and accident will just run for me."*¹¹

Think, too, of the anarchist John Cage, who had a marked influence on music education, and who said, *"And what is the purpose of writing music? Not an attempt to bring order out of chaos, nor to suggest an improvement in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of the way and let it act of its own accord... I am less and less interested in music — I am interested in revolution."*

Or of D.H. Lawrence's comment, *"My great religion is the belief in the blood, the flesh as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true."*

And Stockhausen, German music professor and long-time experimenter in electronic composition: *"Reason is just an instrument: nothing more, nothing less. You have to learn when to switch it on and when to switch it off."*

The French painter Paul Gauguin wrote in a letter to a friend near the end of his life, after deserting European society and family responsibilities for life on Pacific islands: *"Since my childhood, misfortune has dogged me. Never a chance. Never any happiness. Everything always against me, and I cry out: 'Oh, God, if you exist, I accuse you of injustice, of malice... Only crime is logical and makes any sense."*

The secular writer often over-values the role of the artist, as we can see in these words spoken by Orlando, in the novel of the same name, where Virginia Woolf is really speaking for herself. *"The poet's office is the highest of all... His words reach where others fall short. A silly song of Shakespeare has done more for the poor and the wicked, than all the preachers and philanthropists in the world."*

These are statements from artists on the other side of the Christian divide. Many others lie between the specifically Christian and non-Christian points, so that it is important to remember Calvin's advice that one can learn from unbelievers in temporal matters.

More positive remarks — from a range of other artists and writers.

First, from the renowned art critic and prolific author, Herbert Read: *"The artist expresses what he perceives... We see what we learn to see, and vision becomes a habit, a convention, a partial selection of all there is to see... What we want to see is determined.. by the desire to discover or construct a credible world."*¹²

The novelist Joseph Conrad has written, *"My task is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see."*

Solzhenitsyn: *"One word of truth outweighs the whole world."* (This was the substance as well as the title of his address given on the occasion of his being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970.)

The French sculptor, Rodin: *"The artist's task is to reveal the hidden truth beneath appearances."*

Van Gogh: *"To try and understand the real*

significance of what the great artists, the serious masters, tell us in their masterpieces, that leads to God."

The inventor, Thomas Edison: *"Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."*

The writer of modern hymns and choruses, Graham Kendrick: *"Inspiration in my experience does not so much float out of a clear blue sky as gets washed up on the beach in a storm."*

The great hymn writer, Isaac Watts: *"It was hard to sink every line to the level of the whole congregation and yet keep it above contempt."*

Let us end this sweep of quotations with two brief ones that dove-tail: one from the writer, Nicholas Wolterstorff and one from the prophet Jeremiah:

*"Art is not to be man's revolt against his fate. Art is man's fulfilment of his calling."*¹³

*"Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not."*¹⁴

This is the second of three addresses first given at the Faith and the Arts Seminar organised by the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Australia, in August 2002.

Lord willing, the third will appear in our next issue.

¹ Genesis 1:26

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Ibid.*

³ Colossians 1:16

⁴ Philippians 4:8

⁵ Brand & Solway, *Art & Soul*

⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:23

⁷ 2 Corinthians 10: 3-6

⁸ Matthew.12:34-35

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:7

¹⁰ Romans 8:28

¹¹ 'Newsweek' interview, Jan.24, 1977

¹² Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting.*

¹³ "Art in Action"

¹⁴ Jeremiah 45:5

Who was St. Alban?

A look at the ancient British saints

Patricia van Laar

When growing up in the suburb of St Albans in Christchurch, it never occurred to me to wonder who was this saint, Alban. So easily do we take names for granted. It was with some interest, then, that as an adult I first heard his story. His was the first definite name given a place in British church history, hence his being given first place in this brief series. Yet so little is known of him, some have asked —

Was there such a Person?

In the Dictionary of Christian Biography, Alban

is almost dismissed out of any authenticity in an article which begins, *"Alban, if he ever existed..."* This seems an unreasonable approach to a figure who was so deeply entrenched at the very least in folklore, even if he is as unknown to many others as he was to me! Was he merely fiction, invented by some remote, pious Christian for some obscure reason? His memory may be one of those "encrusted in legend" as the modern historian Henry Chadwick puts it, but Chadwick also affirms that this does not mean that the legends did not have some basis in fact, nor should we suppose that his existence itself is to be doubted. Alban

from the earliest times was widely recognised as the first known British martyr, dying about the year 303 or 304, during the Diocletian persecution.

The first known reference to him comes from a writing in France dated about 480. Constantius of Lyons, writing the biography of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, mentions that Germanus, while in Britain during the late 4th or early 5th century to oppose the Pelagian heresy, visited the shrine of *"Albanus the blessed martyr."* Constantius spoke of Alban as a martyr of Britain whom nobody knew, but who was revered by the writer.



Alban preaching the gospel



Alban being beheaded



How could knowledge of him spread so far and so fast that Germanus would go to see his shrine, if he were merely a fictional invention?

Ancient references

Two ancient British historians tell of Alban (or Albanus, to give the Roman version of his name). Gildas the monk (560), who was, it is now thought, a presbyter (priest) rather than a monk, wrote his account from a circulated story of the martyr, most likely a verbal one. Bede (781) on the other hand, in his Ecclesiastical History of Britain, gave the story as a unit in itself, i. e. lifted the story as it stood from a written source, and incorporated it as it was, into his text. His source was a manuscript of "*Passio Albani*," which has signs of having been composed in Auxerre in France.

This man Albanus, the first British martyr ('*protomartyr Anglorum*') as he was later

designated, '*first martyr of the English*') was born at Verulamium (Verulam), now called St Albans, in the 3rd century. To apply the word 'Anglorum' to him, however, was anachronistic, for the term certainly did not belong to his background. 'Anglorum' comes from the word Angle, from which the name England is derived. The Angles were not settled in Great Britain until a century and a half later. In actual fact there is a possibility that he was not a Celtic Briton either, for some say that although born in Britain, he was a Roman soldier, converted to Christianity late in life. But this is by no means certain — no one really knows. So even his origin remains in obscurity.

Albanus the martyr

An outline of the story of Albanus is that he, a heathen, once gave shelter to a Christian presbyter who by example and instruction won Alban to Christ. When soldiers came to arrest the priest, Albanus swapped his cloak for the presbyter's and was taken instead. The judge commanded him to be sacrificed to the gods, condemned for his refusal to pay homage to them, for Albanus declared them devils, not gods.

The story, as told by Bede, now enters the realm of legend. Crowds form on the river bridge to see his execution. Alban goes into the river (the Thames, according to Bede's version), and the water dries up, banking like cliffs to allow him to cross. [In actual fact, the Thames does not flow through the region of St Albans, although a small stream does run unto a tributary of that river, one so small that it could hardly bank up so as to be described as 'cliffs'.] The executioner, seeing this miracle, throws down his sword and is himself converted. On the hilltop opposite, Alban prays and the river flows again. A spring rises up in the ground close by the martyr as

he stands waiting for death. Alban and his convert are both beheaded. Some time later, when peace has been restored, a church is built on the site where he was executed.

This account has little of historical value. Nevertheless, as Henry Chadwick comments in his *History of the Early Church*, although Alban's memory is encrusted with such legend, it would have a substratum of truth. We can accept that his martyrdom by the sword did occur, and that it took place about 304 AD. We can also accept that his death made a profound impression on the observers, both soldiers and people of the town, and that subsequently it made a tremendous impact on the British Church. This is the basis of truth. By the 5th century his shrine had already become a place of pilgrimage, as witnessed to by the visit of Germanus and his companion.

If the story is not based on fact, it is hard to believe his birthplace would have changed its name from Verulam to St Albans.

A blessing for us

What strikes me about this whole record is that as we read the Scriptures, how thankful we can be that God through the Holy Spirit has preserved for us the four Gospels and the book of Acts, so that we may read of His marvellous works and of the beginning of Church History without having to strip away legend. The New Testament reads as truth. Any miracles (and only few are recorded) were not performed for magical sensation, nor for the benefit of the person performing them, nor were they purposeless. When establishing the Canon of Scripture, the Church rejected some writings as spurious. Thank God for His guidance and wisdom. Would that the Church throughout its history had shown the same restraint!

The account of Alban leaves us wondering: why would the river bank up like cliffs, to allow him to cross, if he died in spite of this? Was it just to impress the executioner? What was the point of a spring suddenly coming up?

Alban was preserved in the memory of the people by the church built on the alleged site of his death, but we have only to look at superstitions that have arisen around such historical sites and historical characters, as well as around some Biblical characters and Biblical sites, and even around the Lord himself (such as are found in the so-called '*Gospel of Thomas*') to be thankful for the preservation of the New Testament, which gives us a reliable account of the things that took place. This is not to detract from the honour due to such saints as Alban, nor from the benefit of contemplating their example, but to thank God that we have in our hands a Bible that bears the hallmark of reliability. It tells us the story of the Biblical saints, 'warts and all', in sincerity and truth.

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Mission in focus

Janice Reid

Leadership Training at Ekoro

Rev. Peter Baas hails from the Netherlands, and has served in Papua (the Indonesian side of the island on which Papua New Guinea is situated) for many years on behalf of the mission organisation, De Verre Naaste. Rev. Baas has recently spent three months in Papua New Guinea, with support from our OMB and the Canadian Reformed Churches. He worked with Rev. Stephen 't Hart to strengthen the small congregations of the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea. Here is his report of leadership training conducted by Revs. Baas and 't Hart.

"My wife Trijnie Baas-Prins and I, Peter Baas, have got a volunteer visa for almost three months to assist missionary Stephen 't Hart and his wife Dorinda in PNG. One of the things Stephen asked me to do is to provide training for the leaders and future leaders of the Reformed Churches of PNG. The training was held in Ekoro from the 22nd till the 27th of March. The topics I should teach were: the work of elders, the work of deacons and how to develop a program for religious instruction at public schools. Stephen himself would teach about the parables of the Lord, while some of the students looked at specific parables during the morning devotionals.

We were together in Ekoro with 13 men:

3 from Port Moresby, 4 from Mekeo; 3 from Ekoro and 1 from Beregoro, with Stephen and I as lecturers.

1. The work of elders

We held five sessions on this topic.

The first session was about the elder as a shepherd. A shepherd is concerned about the lives of his sheep. He brings them to grass and water, the food they need. He protects them from such dangers as wild animals and steep valleys. In the same way, an elder must be concerned about the spiritual lives of the people that are entrusted to him. Do they get enough spiritual food and drink? Are they protected from the dangers of their spiritual lives? Satan and his companions are looking for opportunities to steal members of the flock of Jesus.

The second session was about the elder as a steward. A steward is concerned to oversee the estate of his master, to manage the growth and profits of the owner's property. Similarly, an elder must be concerned about the growth of the faith of the members of his ward. He has also to be keen on the advancement of the whole local church for the Kingdom of God.

The last three sessions were about home visitation. Home visitation is the core of the work of the elders. Through home visitation the elder examines the individual members as to whether their faith is alive or not, and whether or not there is growth in faith. Are the sheep well nourished? Are they healthy in spiritual knowledge and spiritual life? It is the elder's task to find out what his people need to be taught, whether they should be admonished, encouraged or comforted.

Some of the trainees do know the work of elders, because they are working as elders (Port Moresby) or as candidates for the office of elder (Ekoro). Others don't know this kind of work, because they are relatively new contacts of the Reformed Mission (Mekeo, Beregoro).

Pray for spiritually sound and healthy elders in the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea for the growth of living congregation with living members of the Body of Christ.

2. The work of deacons

Three sessions were about this topic. The work of deacons is in PNG almost totally unknown. In Port Moresby there is one deacon, but they lack vision about his work. Many people think that the work of deacons is to collect money for the poor and to divide what they've collected among the poor. This is only one aspect of their work, and not the most important one.

More important is their work to instruct all the members of the congregation to serve with all the gifts God has given them, helping other members of the congregation and the neighbours around them. It would be wrong to think that the diaconal task of the congregation is only to collect some money for the poor once in a while. No. The diaconal task of the congregation is to care for people in their physical needs. Deacons try to diminish or take away these needs, in order that the people who receive their help can serve the Lord better.

Christ has given us an example, when He washed the feet of the apostles. But today, people are usually better at washing each other's ears than washing each other's feet! So the deacons' job is to instruct members of the congregation to follow the example of the Lord.

The Lord is not only interested in the wellbeing of our spirits and souls, but also in the wellbeing of our bodies. He died on the cross not only for the liberation of our souls, but also for the liberation of our bodies. Therefore He will resurrect our bodies from the grave on the Last Day or change them in a twinkling of an eye, if we are still alive then.

Deacons should instruct the members of the church to meet the physical needs of other church members, or other neighbours. You can read that in Ephesians 4:12: "...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (NIV). Although the office of deacons is not mentioned there, we may apply these verses to their office as well as to the other offices. Of course we discussed other Bible verses about this office as well. Further, we have





tried to make these men aware of the work of deacons by letting them think, discuss and decide about some cases and situations within and outside the church. They have to discuss what they should do as deacons.

Pray for spiritually mature future deacons in the Reformed Churches of PNG who can instruct the members of their churches to serve each other in the range of physical needs.

3. How to set up religious instruction at public schools?

In Papua New Guinea, churches are often requested to give religious instruction at public schools. In one of the schools of Port Moresby, three brothers of the Reformed Church of Port Moresby are giving those instructions in three classes (out of 21) on Tuesday mornings from 8 till 9, when the school really starts. Most of the pupils are coming, listening and learning. Stephen told me that these brothers do this work wholeheartedly and with dedication, but also without plan or a set goal. So there was no measurable progress.

In one session I tried to make the trainees understand the importance of formulating goals and of making plans.

First, I asked them to formulate a goal for religious instruction at public schools. They formulated the following one: The schoolchildren have to learn to know God and his Word and have to be encouraged to serve the Lord during their whole lives.

Second, I asked them to make a plan for this instruction. They came up with the following solution (I admit I had to guide them in this area):

In preschool you can only tell basic and simple Bible stories.

In grade 1 and 2 teach the main stories of the Old and New Testament.

In grade 3 till 8 teach stories, but add names, verses and facts from the Bible that students can memorise (children love to memorise things like this).

In grade 7 and 8, introduce the teachings of the Old and New Testament. This includes main themes, and the relation between the Testaments.

In grade 9 and 10 (only on 30 provincial schools) introduce the teachings of the Church, for example, an introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism.

In grade 11 and 12 (only on 4 national schools) provide an advanced course on the teachings of the church.

With the instruction in the higher grades, you should encourage the students to serve the Lord with dedication and full of faith.

PNG is evangelised, but Christians in this country lack discipleship training. Much can be done, but where can you find people to do it effectively? Three members of the Church of Port Moresby gave in three classes religious instruction, but in 18 other classes they could not do it at the same time. Those pupils were playing outside. This is only one school in a large city. What can be done by the Reformed Churches of PNG? How can the missionaries assist them to meet this need of this country? Also here, the fields seem to be ready for harvest, but there are not enough workers.

Pray for the need in PNG for religious instruction at public schools and the strengthening of the weak forces of the Reformed Churches of PNG to meet that need.

4. Other teaching

Stephen guided the trainees in the making of biblical meditations on parables for devotionals. That was very instructive and attractive.

The last evening we had a devotional and a dinner with the whole congregation of Ekor. Stephen meditated on the parable of the one lost sheep out of a flock of a hundred. That was the conclusion of the whole week, where the two main subjects were on the work of the elder and on the use of parables in devotionals. The dinner was prepared and served by the congregation. It was very tasty. The devotional songs were exciting, accompanied by several guitar players from Mekeo with their magnificent voices.

We have enjoyed teaching in PNG. But to do it in English was quite difficult for me — it was my first time teaching in this language. Sometimes it felt like my mouth and tongue muscles were twisted at the end of the day. My wife said once: "Your tongue is overworked." Luckily you can sleep that off. And the Lord has provided me every day with enough strength to do this wonderful job in PNG for his coming Kingdom.

MIF prayer notes

Please pray for the team in Papua New Guinea. Wally & Jeanette Hagoort should be finished their Pacific Orientation Course by now, and settling in to their work at Mapang Missionary Home in June. Please continue to pray for Walter's health.

Dorinda't Hart is expecting a baby at the end of June. Stephen says that he hopes to take the family to Australia in time for the delivery. Please pray for safe travel, and safe delivery for the baby.

Wayne and Cheronne VanderHeide with their two young children hope to get to PNG as soon as possible to take up their work in teaching. However, their visa applications have taken longer than expected. Pray that they will settle in well and be a great asset to the team.

Pray also for the outreach in the new mission posts of Beregoro and Mekeo, which the Lord is blessing. Pray for more pastors to shepherd the Reformed congregations in PNG.

Janice Reid and Jean-Luc Lebrun have now completed three radio training workshops with their beginner's-level course. Pray for clear understanding of the direction that RTS should take from now on, as Janice and Jean-Luc develop the next level of training and work on the trainer's manual for the first course.

The team from the Reformed Churches of Australia serving in the Solomon Islands includes Kevin and Machi Rietveld, along with Jack and Trudy Visser and Jenny Van Wyk. Pray for the Lord's blessing on this work: for effective outreach and a godly witness to the community. Pray for health and strength for each member of the team.

A feminine focus

“Just as I am...” the life of CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT

Sally Davey

Have you ever felt laid aside from usefulness to God? Have your circumstances in life ever seemed an immense drawback, preventing you from actively serving in the usual ways? Perhaps you are ill, housebound — or frail and elderly. Perhaps you suffer sleeplessness, or chronic pain. You're unable to visit people, and perform practical kindly, womanly services in their homes. You can't share the gospel, teach — or maybe even read much. In short, you wonder how in the world you could ever be a useful Christian at all. This story is about just such a Christian woman — a woman who felt deeply the frustrations of sickness, and who often longed for really useful service. But God, who has His ways of using our very weaknesses for His own glory, used this woman's circumstances in a very special and lasting way.

An evangelical background

Charlotte Elliott was born on March 18, 1789. She was a four-month-old baby when the French Revolution began — but despite the turbulent times she lived in, Charlotte's life was quiet and uneventful. The granddaughter of Henry Venn, a clergyman and friend of leading evangelical politicians like William Wilberforce, she grew up in Clapham, the village near London where her uncle ministered as vicar and where these politicians also lived. She had many opportunities to hear the faith talked about; and to see it lived out in zealous and tireless ways.

Like most young women of her background, she grew up cultivating a number of interests and gifts — “accomplishments,” as Jane Austen's contemporary women characters called them. Charlotte's talents were portrait painting and the writing of humorous verse. She was good with words. She was also a happy, rather carefree girl. But this was to change in her twenties, for by the time she was thirty years old her health had failed seriously — to the point that she was a bed-ridden invalid for life. With this came a deep

despondency — a despair that today would be called “depression.”

She came as she was

But God has servants for just such times as these. In 1822 (when Charlotte was 32 and by this time living with a married brother in the fashionable seaside resort of Brighton) a noted Swiss evangelist, Dr Cesar Malan, visited the Elliott home. This visit proved the turning-point in Charlotte's life. Dr Malan talked with her about her discouragements, and the heart of her problems — which were spiritual. As a result, Charlotte came to a true saving faith in Christ, and for the rest of her long life, she celebrated May 9th — the day her friend had led her to faith — as her spiritual birthday. The central truth that Dr Malan impressed upon her was this: “You must come just as you are, a sinner, to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.” It does not matter that you are an invalid — come as you are. What matters is that you are a sinner, in need of salvation, and you must come to the Lamb of God who will take away your sin.

It was well that Charlotte came to love the Lord Jesus as she did, only two years into her confinement to home and bed. For

50 years more she endured periods of great physical suffering. It was her faith that gave her life purpose; and transformed what would otherwise have been “useless” years into a lifetime of valuable service to Him who gave Himself for us. But they were never easy times. Of her afflictions she once wrote: “He knows, and He alone, what it is, day after day, hour after hour, to fight against bodily feelings of almost overpowering weakness, languor and exhaustion, to resolve not to yield to slothfulness, depression and instability, such as the body causes me to long to indulge, but to rise every morning determined to take for my motto, ‘If a man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’” Another time she wrote, “God sees, God guides, God guards me. His grace surrounds me, and His voice continually bids me to be happy and holy in His service just as I am.”

A special service for her

The service that God enabled her to do at home, even on her sick bed, was one aptly suited to her talents. Charlotte had been in the habit of writing verse before she became ill; and it was this skill that she turned over to Christ's service once she knew Him as her Saviour. By 1836 she had written over 100 hymns, poetry for singing praise to God. But the hymn that has made Charlotte's name famous among women hymn-writers — the one in our own *Psalter Hymnal* (No. 424) — has as its theme the very words Dr Malan spoke to her in her illness and discouragement

The specific circumstances of this hymn, written in 1836, were these. All her family had gone off to a bazaar, a fund-raising project in aid of a school her brother, Henry (the clergyman) wanted to start for the children of poor clergymen. Charlotte had been left alone at home, unwell, and was a little sad at being, as usual, left out of active good work. For her own encouragement she began to dwell on the great certainties of her salvation — her Lord, His power, His promises. Then, Dr Malan's words in her mind, she realized a sudden sense of peace



Charlotte Elliott, 1789-1871

and contentment. Taking her pen, she wrote the following verses:

*"Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to
Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

*Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each
spot,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

*Just as I am, tho' tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind –
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find –
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

*Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

As the day wore on, her sister-in-law came in to see how she was, and to bring her news of the bazaar. Charlotte showed her what she had written; and Mrs Elliott asked for a copy, taking it back to the bazaar with her. As it turned out, the use of this hymn spread far and wide, and in the end the royalties it earned raised more money for her brother's school than the entire bazaar did. Such is the way God sometimes uses our talents, in our weakness.

Encouraging others and being encouraged herself

This hymn has become a very famous one, widely sung around the world wherever British hymnody has been taken. It has been translated into almost every European language, and many other languages as well. Countless people have been encouraged by its message, as they have sung it or read the words as poetry. After her death, over 1000 letters were found in one of Charlotte's boxes. She had kept these letters because they had encouraged her so much. They were from individuals all over the world, thanking her for what this hymn had done for them. Her minister brother wrote at this time, "In the course of a long ministry, I hope to have been permitted to see some fruit of my labours; but I feel more has been done by a single hymn of my sister's."

And what of the message of the hymn? Simply, it is to recognise our sinful, weak and needy state and come — to the only One who can forgive, heal and help us — the One

who also bids us come. It is important to keep in mind that this hymn is the product of an age in which most Christians really did believe in the reality of sin. Churches taught that people needed salvation because they sinned: and that Christians need continuing grace because they still sin. Every week, morning and evening, Charlotte and her family prayed this prayer of confession:

"Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws...And there is no health in us."

But for the grace of God

This was a time in the history of the Church when Christians understood that men and women are sinful and rotten to the core, and that sinners are completely dependent on the grace of God to bring them to salvation. Of themselves, they are unable to do anything that will bring them a jot closer to the kingdom. Unless God be working in the heart, there can be no acknowledgement of sin, and no power to take steps of faith.

When Charlotte wrote "*Just as I am*", she did not mean what I fear congregations singing these words in later times have sometimes understood. Charlotte's hymn has been very popular in the American revival tradition: that tradition which has seen the holding of special evangelistic meetings where stirring preachers have warned of hell, and urged, pleaded with, and pressured sinners to step forward from their seats to move to the front of the room and record their decision for Christ. Many a time, the singing of "*Just as I am*" has been sung over and over at the conclusion of such messages, adding to the pressure on people to come forward. "*Just as I am... O Lamb of God, I come!*" can, in this context, be re-interpreted to mean "*I, a sinner, am coming forward to make a decision for Christ.*" But this is not what Charlotte would have meant. She was not writing of any need to make a bold decision to come — rather, it was the response of faith in a heart knowing full well it was undeserving, but had been granted faith to come. It was a hymn of faithful, repentant obedience; not of decisionism.

A hymn wrongly used

But there is another misunderstanding of these words that I fear may be afoot today, in this age so affected by popular psychology. "*Just as I am*" appears to have taken on a new cast of meaning in the twentieth century. We have learned to parrot — and even to adopt the idea — of "accepting people just as they are" — signifying that no matter what they are like, no matter how unlovely, unlikeable or offensive — we are to love them unjudgementally, "warts and all." And this

(is how the thinking goes) God accepts us. So we may come to Him, "just as we are..." But this is true only in a very limited sense. God does indeed come to us when we are "*dead in our trespasses and sin*" — just as unlovely as we could possibly be. And then He gives us faith, and repentance, and clothes us in Christ, so that we are then as lovely as could possibly be — in His sight. But there is no way we could come before God "just as I am" if it were not in a spirit of complete repentance. The first response of any believer in the Scripture record who really does gain a glimpse of God's glorious presence is "*Woe is me, a sinner... I am undone.*" (See Isaiah Ch. 6, for instance). And this is what Charlotte's words mean. Notice the words of the first, second and fifth verses. God wants us to come to Him repentantly, to be cleansed and forgiven, not accepted just as we are.

The meaning for us today

So what of the message of these words to us, Christian women today? First of all, we can thank the writer of them for her own example of faith. She realised that she could be of use to God even on her sick bed. She had enough knowledge of the Scriptures to understand that prayer, and the written word, may be of use to the servants of Christ. And so she did what she was physically capable of. We too, today, sick or tired, housebound or in hospital, can do the same; in just the same spirit — and, who knows, with similar effectiveness.

Secondly, we can learn from the example of those who wrote to thank Charlotte for her hymns during her lifetime. So often we take for granted the fact that people know how grateful we are for what they have done. How seldom it is that people take the trouble to acknowledge those whose far-off deeds have made a useful impact on their lives, perhaps stirring them up to "love and good deeds" through a book. Have you ever thought of writing to an author via his or her publisher? It is easily done, and such letters can sometimes be a tremendous encouragement to the writer, who might never otherwise know how their words are being used of God. Think of those 1000 letters, kept in that box by Charlotte, and found, after her death...

Think on these things, next time you sing "*Just as I am*"...

Situations Vacant

Hurry-Up Shoe Repairs of Wellington has a vacancy for a young man to learn the trade of shoe repairing. Please phone Dennis Bartlett at (04) 472 8046

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Bishopdale

Congratulations to Richard and Cindy van Garderen on the birth of Sophie Marcella, 9lb 4oz, at 10 pm on the Tuesday. Cindy and Sophie are now at home.

The baptism of Sophie will take place on Sunday 4th April and the service will be led by Rev Dirk van Garderen from the Reformed Church of Bucklands Beach and also our first minister here at Bishopdale.

Congratulations to Cedric and Cathy Carranceja on the birth of Tara Margaret, 6lb 8oz, at 9:31 am on Wednesday. Cathy and Tara are now at home. The baptism of Tara will take place next Sunday morning.

Last Monday the Lord called home to himself our dear brother Richard Cannemeyer. Our sympathies go out to the family with the knowledge that our only comfort in life and in death is in our faithful saviour Jesus Christ. Our brother lived in this knowledge. We would also like to give thanks for playing the organ so faithfully over many years.

Congratulations to Rob and Robyn Bosma with the birth of their son and Emily and Jack's brother on Tuesday morning. Sam was born at 24 weeks 3 days gestation weighing 1lb 13oz (830gm). Praise be to God for answered prayer and the miracle of his life. Sam still needs our prayers for his continued health, growth and eventual homecoming.

Congratulations to Desiree and Stephen Huls with the birth on Wednesday of their daughter Natalie Desiree weighing 7lb 7oz. Everyone is well and happy.

Wedding Announcement: If there are no law full objections the wedding of Wouter van Schalkwyk and Ruiping Li will take place on Saturday 8th of May 2004 at the Reformed Church Bishopdale at 2 pm. The service will be conducted by the Rev John Goris of the Reformed Church of Wellington. There will be an opportunity for congratulations and refreshments in the hall after the wedding.

Bucklands Beach

Bucklands Beach Women's Fellowship Retreat. On October 9, 10 there will be a special overnight retreat day/night at Chosen Valley. This is for the sisters of our fellowship here at Bucklands Beach. If you would like to come or just find out what it's all about, see Gonny van Garderen for enrolment forms. Pastoral. It is difficult to know how or where to begin. This week has surely been an amazing one for the van Garderen family and for us all as a part of God's household. The accident of their son Jason highlighted that, waywardness or not, a son is and remains a son. For the first few days our expectations were that his survival was only a remote (1% said one doctor) possibility. The brain damage was 'diffuse' - i.e. many areas throughout his brain have been impacted. On Tuesday morning things began to change. There was a sense of jubilation as everyone became more confident of his survival, but at the same time daunted by what lies ahead. The future is unknown - totally in God's hands, but looks brighter. Jason has

recognised us and acknowledged us - a hand squeeze and a 'sort of' wink. The response of many hundreds of people from throughout New Zealand, Australia, the Netherlands and the USA has been overwhelming! Jason, even as a wayward son, has had people praying for him everywhere. Surely it was in God's plan and design that this man became a part of the covenant community and that, even as he left it, God has not left him. May his survival be used by God for his glory and his purpose. Meanwhile, our pastor hopes to go to Christchurch later on this week to join Gonny and to meet granddaughter Sophie - and her family! God willing, her baptism will take place next Sunday morning at Bishopdale.

Heart sister sheets will be handed out at this meeting as well. Anyone and everyone interested in taking part in the 'heart sister' programme during the month of May, please see Corrie Barton who has the details and forms.

The Reformed Church of Mangere

NEEDS YOU

We have property, position,
and potential ...
what we don't have is **people!**

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field opportunity for committed
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Sjirk Bajema – (09) 277 9360

The RTC Biblical Preaching Workshop for 2004

**Geelong, Thurs 30 September
& Fri 1 October**

“Preaching Christ from the Psalms”

The Reformed Theological College's Biblical Preaching Workshops are becoming widely known, and an appreciated professional development event for ministers and pastors. They provide an equally valuable instruction time for other Christian workers, lay preachers, elders and other Christian leaders. One of the most telling evaluations received was this one **“I learned a lot about everyday ministry, these workshops are for everyone!, not just for ministers**

The Workshops are aimed at supporting preachers who are already established in basic preaching skills and committed to biblical preaching.

They provide two days of teaching and interaction, which will challenge and assist participants spiritually, stimulate their thinking about preaching, help them in their preaching ministry, and encourage them to ongoing faithfulness in Biblical preaching.

The Workshops have proven to be times of expert preaching skills instruction by RTC faculty members and guest lecturers, and joyful fellowship around The Word.

Participants have come from all over Australia, and New Zealand, and from a range of church denominations; evangelical, conservative, pentecostal.

The 3rd annual Workshop, to be held at the RTC, 125 Pigdons Rd Waurin Ponds, Geelong, DV on Thursday 30 September and Friday 1 October 2004, will be on the subject of “Preaching Christ from the Psalms”.

It is currently under preparation. Intending participants should note the dates in their diaries already, and talk about it with their church council. That will help planning to attend having regard to other commitments, and making timely preparations for travelling etc. Some churches enrol a group of delegates, which has proven most helpful in their work.

Intending participants should keep an eye out for the Programme & Enrolment Form, due to be issued around June. Accommodation on the RTC Campus will be at a premium due to the increased number of residents living there, so it is advisable to enrol and book accommodation on Campus at an early date.

RTC Faculty members look forward to again welcoming many participants to the 2004 Preaching Workshop.

Dr Henk DeWaard
PRINCIPAL

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Christchurch

Our heartiest congratulations go out to Brother and Sister Prins, who celebrate their 50th anniversary this Saturday.

Milestones to give thanks to our Lord for - Mr. Adrian & Mrs. Feikje Posthuma who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this Saturday.

Hamilton

Golden Wedding Anniversary. Congratulations to Martin and Corrie Vink for their Golden Wedding on Thursday 15 April.

Pastoral: We take this opportunity to say a special welcome to the Rev Alastair McEwen who is our guest speaker at the Hamilton Easter Convention. Good to have you in our midst Alastair and have the opportunity to hear you speak so clearly and personally on the Sermon on the Mount. May the Lord give you a good trip home, tomorrow and bless you and your colleagues in your work at the Reformed Theological College.

Mangere

We rejoice with Br Johnny Ryan and Sr Esther Bartlett upon the announcement of their engagement! A special time. So we pray that as they set the date and prepare for it the Lord will guide them together.

Masterton

Regarding the calling process: Rev Fritz Harms and his wife Brenda and children Jackie and Derek are due to arrive in Masterton DV on Wednesday 21st of April. They will stay until Monday 3rd of May. Rev Harms will be examined by Presbytery at the meeting on 30th of April. Praise God for these developments in His providence! If anyone would like to listen to his sermons on tape please see the Elders or Deacons.

North Shore

And yes, we did notice you (on TV1), Tim, studying so diligently at Eden Park on Thursday. It is such a hard life, being a student.

Bert and Rebecca Borger were blessed this past week with the safe arrival of a healthy little girl: Miriam Alies. We praise God for His care for this family, and pray

that He will give Bert and Rebecca the strength and wisdom needed to raise their children in the fear and love of the LORD.

Palmerston North

Men's Forum. The idea of a Men's Forum of the PN Reformed Church was approved by Session at their last meeting, and the Forum met for the first time Friday morning 26 March at 6:30am! The Forum plans to be a weekly meeting where we can study the Scriptures in order to help each other become better husbands, fathers and leaders. We are looking initially at Ephesians 4:17 — 6:9 to seek both to better understand this passage and to apply what it says to our lives. All men are warmly invited to join us at our next meeting, Friday morning 2 April at 6:30am sharp, which will be held here at Harmony House.

It now and again comes to my notice as a pastor that someone has shown Christian love, or practiced hospitality for someone else in the congregation. No-one else would know about it, and I'm sure this is just the tip of the iceberg, and many more acts of service and practical love and support are given and received. All praise to the Lord for these things. Be encouraged in your work for the Lord. The same is true of the folk who put in a lot of time in service in the congregation, which is often unnoticed, and they don't draw attention to themselves either. Thankyou to all, from all. Chris

Pukekohe

WEDDINGS: It is with joy that we announce three weddings coming up in the next three weeks (unless there are lawful objections). Geraldine Loef and Frits de Vries will marry at 12:30pm this Friday, 2 April at St James Presbyterian Church, West Street, Pukekohe. Rev John Haverland will officiate at the wedding. You are all welcome to attend. Petra Smilde and Anthony Lagas will marry at 12:00pm on Saturday 10 April at St David's Church, Matangi Road, Matangi. Anneke Tepper and Ruven Duinkerke will marry at 1:30pm on Saturday 17 April at the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Buckland's Beach.

The Cadet & Calvinette Counsellor's Executive Meeting for 2004



On Friday 26 March , the 33rd Executive meeting of the Cadets and Calvinette Counsellors was held in Bridge Valley Christian Ranch in Nelson.

The first night was spent finding your beds, having fellowship over coffee, and then a devotion on ATTITUDE.

Saturday, another sunny day. The first executive for the new board was held, the mission project for 2005 was voted on and passed. It is to be the 'Help a Child Foundation' Dharward Home in South India. We do realise there are plenty of needy causes for us to support. The meeting was held in good spirits, with the odd bit of humour.

Saturday afternoon was Activities from the daring (high rope) to the relaxed (mini golf) , also we had the North vs South soccer game (3-0 to the North. At night we had a devotion by the Rev. Reinier Noppers on Serving with the Mind of Christ — a topic to make us all look at ourselves.

On Sunday it was Church in Nelson followed by lunch supplied by the Nelson people, then it was the goodbyes till next year.

A big thank you to the Nelson club for hosting us and giving us a joyful weekend

Danny den Harder



More picutes next page ►

The Cadet & Calvinette Counsellor's Executive Meeting for 2004

