

faith in **focus**

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**“The trees of the LORD
are well watered,
the cedars of Lebanon
that he planted.
There the birds make
their nests;
the stork has its
home in the pine
trees.”**

Psalm 104:16-17



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Editorial

The news has been filled with the death of Pope John Paul II. It's interesting to note from that immediately following his death many Catholics went into prayer for his soul. They believe that their work in prayer can help the Pope's quick passage through purgatory into heaven. Perhaps he may be able to bypass that state altogether. How sad! It is so far from the biblical gospel of a salvation by grace alone through faith alone and in Christ alone. Because for all the 'good' it is said the Pope did he did not preach the gospel. Indeed, he is on record as having said there are different ways to be saved. He dialogued with Moslems and Jews and other religions, and openly promoted the worship of Mary. The Rev. G. Milne has a helpful piece on this in our issue.

And while on the news, much has been made of the marriage between Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles. Titles like "True Love After Thirty Years" and others of similar vein headline the newspaper articles. The argument is made that they have a right to happiness. It's a philosophy many believe in today. That's why no-fault divorce has become law, because everyone has a right to personal choice - no matter if it goes against their previous vows and family commitments.

Sixty years ago marriage was held in such a serious light Edward VIII had to abdicate the throne upon marrying a divorced woman. Now it doesn't matter anymore. Somehow we are meant to believe we have "progressed" from there. Well, it's certainly no improvement in human goodness - it is only legitimising human selfishness. And it pays its price. We have seen that on the public stage with the breakdown of Charles' previous marriage, and we see it every day around us with shattered relationships, broken families, and the plethora of social problems that come with it.

Christians are not exempt from this, either. The divorce rates amongst Christians are on par with non-Christian marriages. And it all comes down to the same cause: There's been a shift away from the Biblical standards on marriage. Many churches have failed to teach and uphold the sanctity of marriage. The philosophy of this world, where love becomes lust, has made terrible inroads in the Church.

We see this clearly now. Let's also believe and live this seriously now. Let's so depend on the Lord's Word and Spirit that our marriages shine out His grace in this world and in His Church. Then marriage will be truly royal, because then it will find the favour of the King of kings!

*Be very careful, then, how you live –
not as unwise but as wise,
making the most of every opportunity,
because the days are evil.*

*Therefore do not be foolish, but understand
what the Lord's will is.*

*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.
Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*

*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns,
and spiritual songs.*

*Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,
always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Ephesians 5:15-20

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.

Victory over stress

And you thought you had it bad?

Hans Voschezang

It was 4.30 in the morning, John made his way to the garage, opened the door, started the car and quietly drove off to work. It had become routine that he worked so many hours per day. He thought back on how he started out as a production engineer of a large Corporation some twenty odd years ago. Through work he met Clair, an Accountant, they started dating, became serious and married. They just could scrape enough money together for a deposit to buy a modest house and pay their mortgage.

They attended their church faithfully and both were happy. Over the years they were blessed with three children, the two boys now in High School and the youngest still at Primary.

Under the old management, where personal achievement was appreciated, he got rewarded with a promotion. Along with the new status they decided a larger house and a new car was in order.

That were the days where the General CEO took a personal interest in each individual person and their families. John felt part of the company, where incentives encouraged people to do their utmost to produce quality products. But those days were gone. The old managers retired and a younger generation of managers and accountants took over the reins. A feasibility study was carried out, in an attempt to cut cost and maximize profits. "Downsizing" became the catchphrase. This involved re-tooling the entire production line. New production processes were introduced along with a complete new computer system. The same amount of work could now be done with fewer people. So, John's workload increased as well. He took his laptop home to catch up on some work he needed to concentrate on. He worked some 60 – 80 hours per week on a fairly regular basis.

Clair's workload increased as well along with more responsibility, because office staff numbers were also reduced by the introduction of this new computer system.

Management employed a Psychologist to counsel employees, how to deal with the new work methods.

Once more they shifted to a larger house with an office, so they could work from home as needed.

John got his time managed by "Calendarized" schedules. He attended Management meetings by not even actually being there. His life was "mastered" by the computer. John

didn't meet his family any more; late at night when he came home from work, Claire had already gone to bed and early every morning he left while everybody was still at sleep. During lunch break John met Claire on most days in a fast food restaurant to catch up on family and the daily goings on.

By then they had employed a married couple to attend to their children and the running of the house.

While John and Claire were in their restaurant one day, they heard about the Columbine High School shootings. Their boys were unharmed, but at a counseling session with the Psychiatrist they bitterly complained that their Mom and Dad were never there for them, they had to cope on their own and tackle life as it was presented to them.

It's needless to say that John and Claire's church life had all fallen by the way side. Both were on medication to have a decent night's sleep.

Stress as a health hazard

Many Health experts say that coping with stress has become the No. 1 Health priority today. An estimated 112 million people in the USA take medication for stress related symptoms.

We delude ourselves when it comes to stress. Somehow we have convinced ourselves that stress is a temporary phase that will pass like the flu. We cling to a false hope that the rat race will slow down one day as soon as we get another job, or as soon as we are retired, or as soon as... There always will be another "as soon as". We forget that stress and pressure has become a fact of life, which we can no longer escape or control. So, what is stress, and how can we overcome it? Stress is feeling you are overloaded, you feel trapped as in a treadmill you can't escape. You find it difficult to make decisions and you can't concentrate, you want to get away from it all. You start worrying and have difficulties controlling your emotions, you become forgetful and feel inadequate at certain tasks.

Let's look now at some key aspects about stress as we generally know it:

1. Feeling stressed, originates from within, internally

No one can put you under pressure. You are the one who can do that, it's an inside job. External

stress doesn't cause internal stress.

The Lord Jesus, when He was on trial for His life, had perfect peace. While the others were out of control He was in complete control.

Peter was imprisoned and probably going to be executed, but he was sound at sleep. So vast asleep in fact, that the Angel who came to rescue him, had to strike him to wake him up.

Husbands and Wives should stop blaming each other when they feel under pressure. Parents should stop blaming their children. Employees should stop blaming the boss. You want to blame some body when you feel stressed? Look in the mirror, it's the person looking at you, it's a personal choice when you feel stressed. It's an inappropriate response to external circumstances.

2. Someone may say that he/she is stressed because they have too much to do

This is a misconception, however. Feeling stressed doesn't come from too much to do, but from our response toward our obligations. Being free from stress comes from knowing our capabilities and our limits. Feeling stressed is a result of being overloaded. Each one of us needs to know our capacity, how much we can handle and adjust the workload accordingly. We stress ourselves out when we take on too much and our performance will suffer as a consequence.

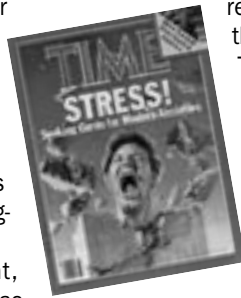
3. Economic changes can cause stress

It would be nice if we could work 40 hours a week; often we need to work more hours, particular those in management positions. Corporate downsizing to increase profits has resulted in asking a smaller workforce to do more. In New Zealand downsizing is done in a more subtly way. Usually the management waits till there is a "flat" spot in the economy and some people are made redundant. When the economy picks up again they carry on with fewer staff.

4. Complexity and multiple choices can cause stress

Going shopping can be stressful, a simple question, "What shall we eat tonight?" can cause stress. There are so many multiple choices, our minds have difficulties handling all these choices.

Look around you everyone has a cellphone, you can even make photos and send it by e-mail to the office. We have laptops, e-mail, voice mail, microwaves etc. It is rare for a person to go home and really be home. We take our



cellphones and laptops with us when we go on holidays. We have invented a new term – multitasking. We can do two things at the same time, we talk on the phone and type on the computer. And we don't even talk about what some people do in the car while driving on the motorway early in the morning.

5. Our sinful nature often contributes to our stress levels, such as pride

Too many believers have re-translated Phil 4 vs 13 from "I can do everything through Christ...." to "I can do everything....". It takes humility to admit that you can't do everything and ask for help. That's what the church family is about. There are Womens' fellowships, Youth clubs or someone willing to help. Yet, while most of us love to help others, we would rather have our arm chopped off than admit that we need help. It's pride. Think about it. Our self worth gets intertwined with our own work, or we believe we are indispensable. Pride causes us to feel stressed when we don't get the attention or service that we feel we deserve.

6. Discontentment can produce stress

Hebrews 13 vs 5 commands us to keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God said: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you". We live in a continual state of stress because no one or nothing does measure up to our expectations. Somehow we expect our children always to do better, seldom praising them for what they have achieved. Our marriages turn into a battleground, weaknesses are magnified and strengths forgotten. We expect more and more of our husbands or wives. There is always a larger and better house, a better job, a different church perhaps. And so, we are caught up in the whirlpool of wanting more.... and more.... and more....

What motivates us to make overtime? Is it out of necessity to make ends meet or is it a byproduct of greed and materialism. We have convinced ourselves that we won't be happy unless we live at a certain level. We are under stress, only to find out that *things* never satisfy, it never brings joy, and greed cost us our intimate relationship with God and our families. Paul warns us in Tim 6 vs 9 "People who want to get rich fall in to temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men in to ruin and destruction". Plato said: "Poverty consists not in the decrease of one's possessions but in the increase of one's greed". There is always another "thing" we want to have. At some stage we were looking forward to owing a car, but then we needed two. We were over the moon when we were able to buy an apartment of our own; "Independence" was the catchphrase. But soon the thrill of it all wore off and we hankered for a little house of our own. Eventually the little house was too little; it would take a larger house to do the trick. Yesterday's luxury had become

today's necessity. Greed produces stress.

Stress is often the heat the Lord is using to purify and refine our lives. We need to be pruned back in order to be fruitful. If we were always comfortable, we would settle down to spiritual mediocrity. Our Heavenly Father often uses stress for our own good and to His glory. When God is in total control, stress will not be stressful at all. Nothing comes in to our lives without God allowing it. Perspective makes a tremendous difference when it comes to stress, but we must see it from God's point of view.

God's point of view?

It's depending on His grace to overcome the difficulties we encounter in this world and grant us His peace, which transcends all understanding.

Acts 27 has a wonderful account of Paul having peace in a stressful storm at sea. Paul was on his way to Rome when a savage North-Eastern wind threatened to sink the ship. During this storm they lost control of their circumstances, and yet survived. In this story we find four skills we need to overcome and survive the storms of stress:

1. Get rid of needless baggage

Luke explains the first survival skill in Acts 27 this way: "We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard with our own hands". If someone had suggested to the captain of the ship upon departure, that the cargo, the ship's tackle and maybe his favorite chair, would be thrown over board, he probably would have told them where to go. But, when the storm hit, they decided they could do without all that stuff, whilst before they were so sure it was all needed. If we are to overcome our personal storms, we need to get rid of some "cargo". But we need to learn to let go, that extra cargo may be a bad thing like barnacles attached to the hull of our "ship"; too deep in debt, love of money, sinful habits, critical attitudes and so the list goes on. All those things we hang on to, but in our storm of stress our ship will sink. We need to evaluate what needs to be discarded, if we are going to survive.

2. Focus on important things that matter

Luke tells us that this storm lasted for two weeks. Then an Angel appeared to Paul in the night. The message of the Angel introduced a second survival skill. Paul relates this message to the crew: "Not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an Angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said: "God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you". Paul was reminded by the Angel, "The ship doesn't matter. Only the people do". To survive our "storm" we need to concentrate on the things that really matter, and that are usually people around us! In our pursuit of achieving our goals

or what we try to accomplish, the people we love can slowly get pushed aside, out of our lives. This neglect is not intentional. Weeds grow in the garden not because we planted them, but because we forget them. If we put our career as the number one obsessive goal in our lives, we leave our husbands or wives and our children behind, missing out on very precious moments. Colleagues or employees become functions instead of people with needs. Usually it takes a "storm", to land us back on earth, to restore our values.

In the pursuit of peace, the "ship"- the goals, the project, the deadlines, the organization, or whatever - may be lost on the rocks. That's costly, but that's all right. It's our people we can't afford to lose.

3. Get serious with God

Our faith tends to be cool, calm and collected until a serious crisis hit us. Then we go on our knees, and God becomes more than only "our Help". He becomes our only hope. Luke speaks for him self and Paul too, when he said: "We finally gave up all hope of being saved". That's probably why the Angel said to Paul: "Do not be afraid, Paul". We may think of Paul as some super saint but he seems to be as terrified and as desperate as all the others on board. The sailors sensed that they were heading for the rocks. So: "In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down in to the sea.... Then Paul said: "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved".

So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the life boat and let it fall away.

In our panic we often reach out for a "life boat" instead of the Lord. But we don't realize that our "life boats" make a bigger mess. We spend unwisely, we push people we love too hard. "Storms" make us panic or make us pray. It is when our points of reference disappear, like the sailor's stars, that we learn what prayer really means. If self-rescue becomes totally impossible, we throw our selves on the Lord's mercy, because He is our only hope. A Saint of old once said: "You never know Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you've got".

4. Get back in to a healthy routine

When the ship is heading for the rocks, in the middle of the storm, in this panic situation lunch can wait.... But when the ship is about to go aground. Paul urges the people to eat. "For the last fourteen days" he said "You have been in constant suspense and have gone without food.... Now I urge you to take some food. You need to survive". Paul tells them to get back in to a healthy routine when a raging storm batters the ship. Our daily routines are the first things we throw overboard. In fact, the heavier the pressure the more important it is to watch our sources of strength. We are losing it big time, when we miss out on sleep, skip meals in an effort to cut corners.

We need to fight for that quality time with

the Lord, our family, our husband or wives and our children.

Those healthy routines are what keeps us strong in good times and in bad.

This horrible storm ends with Luke's record that the tempest finally blew them aground on the island of Malta. Look it up on the map and you will find it that Malta sits right off the southern coast of Italy. Paul was on his way to Rome, remember? This was the ship's destination all along! All this time they thought they were out of control, but they were right on course! The Old Testament prophet Nahum

said it in a little sentence: "His way is in the whirlwind and in the storm".

Our plans maybe interrupted, but God's plan never fails. In fact, our "life storms" are part of His plan for us. If we don't abandon ship, the winds of Gods will keep us right on course, no matter how bad we feel off course. We live in a world filled with pressure and stress. We need to survive stress or coping with stress. Paul writes to us from Rome as well: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves me". If we can be "more than conquerors" in the stresses of life, why would

we settle for coping? The difference between coping and conquering is in those two words "through Him". It's depending on His grace to meet our needs so that we can have His peace within our souls.

Let the Lord be your Boss, your CEO in your life and belief that He has a better plan for you and me.

Based on two studies on stress by Clancy Nixon, Ashburn, Virginia, USA

John Calvin and Anxiety

Stress in the past

John M. Brentnall

A careful study of the history of the west reveals certain recurring types of anxiety. After centuries of suppression of the true Gospel, the early 1500s found Europe full of anxiety over guilt and condemnation. Following the collapse of both Rationalism and Romanticism, the present age is riddled with anxiety over the loss of identity and meaning. People simply do not know who they are and why they are here. What John Calvin has to say about anxiety is therefore very relevant to our present crisis. If anxiety is the agitated state of mind caused by uncertainty, we may safely say that Calvin himself was very prone to it. He gave it much thought and sought to administer comfort and guidance to those of his day who suffered from it. Through studying it, he reached the conclusion that anxiety is universal. From youth to old age, he concludes, "we cannot be otherwise than continuously anxious and disturbed." Not only do we know "by daily experience" the unresolved concerns that "distract our minds", but "those who are extremely anxious wear themselves out and become in a sense their own executioners."

Calvin's symptoms

The anxiety symptoms Calvin observed in himself were a tendency "to lose control and eat too greedily." One of his dilemmas was whether to trust God implicitly or take precautions for his own safety. Some contemporary Dutch Christians suffer the same dilemma over house insurance and inoculations. Indeed, he was so sensitive that he checked himself for asserting God's mercy "with so much anxiety as if it were doubtful or obscure." Calvin was also keenly aware of the grip anxiety held on others. The lives of kings may appear attractive, he notes, but "we do not see what torments harass them within." Indeed, it is

anxious dread that makes tyrants fill the earth with blood. All classes are subject to it, he notes: the greedy are anxious because they want more; workers worry about job security; scholars and students grow more anxious as the knowledge they crave recedes further and further from them. People's craze for astrology, fortune-telling, magic and 'new revelations' reveals their anxiety over the future. In this

connection, let us not forget Britain's current thirst for 'witchcraft and wizardry.' The ultimate anxiety, however, is the dread of death. It invades even the slightest illnesses, because we are terrified of what they might lead to.

Calvin's answer

When we ask Calvin about the cause of anxiety, he is in no doubt about the answer.



John Calvin

Its secondary cause is the disorder that now pervades the world, but its ultimate cause is sin. All the chaos and confusion we suffer, he asserts, is the fruit of our disobedience to God. This is why we should not promise ourselves "another day, hour or even moment." At this point, Calvin's psychology is superb. Little wonder that we are all anxious, he exclaims, for we are all sinners, we all deserve to die and we shall all be judged. A guilty conscience and anxiety are inseparable. And the sharper our stings of conscience, the more terrified of God we will be. At root, then, anxiety is a spiritual problem, based on our relationship to God. How can this anxiety be relieved? Not by trying to appease God's wrath by our own works. Such a vain hope will bring nothing but "wretched anxiety all our life." Neither can church prescriptions, such as the confessional, help us. Dividing our sins into "trunks, branches, twigs and leaves", then weighing them in their "qualities, quantities and circumstances" in the ears of a priest will never relieve us of guilt. Instead, it has the cruel effect of launching us on a sea of sin without either anchor or shore. This is why the poor devotees of Rome are held captive in perpetual anxiety. They lie in a dark abyss of horror and despair from which no church prescription can ever deliver them. Or, to put it another way, they wander blindly in a labyrinth which has no exit. Lost, full of uncertainty about the eternal destiny of their souls and without hope, they are bound to be anxious. This is man's plight without God. His whole inner life is spent in a spiritual void and he is so constricted by sin without and within that, unless God delivers him, he will never escape. Whatever masks men wear to make them seem happy are nothing but futile bluffs hiding their true condition.

Calvin's God

"How then," he asks, "can they who are so burdened escape?" Only by the sheer grace, mercy and love of God, he replies. Because God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, those who believe in Him shall not perish but shall have everlasting life (John 3.16). Here, says Calvin, "Christ opens up the source of our salvation, and He does so that no doubt may remain; for our minds cannot find calm repose until we arrive at the

unmerited love of God." Our whole deliverance rests in Christ's one offering for sin. It "ought to touch us to the heart when we perceive that God comes to seek us. He does not wait till we come to Him, but He shows us that He is ready to receive us although we were his deadly enemies." Therefore we are to "come straight to Jesus Christ." In Him we have a king who "preferred our salvation to His own life." Indeed, "He put our salvation above every other consideration." Because this is God's remedy for sin, the root cause of all our distress, it is also His remedy for anxiety. Trusting Him for all things in all situations, we find confusion replaced by order. A well-ordered life, regulated by God's Word alone, through Christ alone, by faith alone, for God's glory alone, is the only answer to our anxiety. Ultimately it is our lack of trust in our heavenly Father, the Sovereign God of providence, that produces anxiety.

Calvin's boundaries

This well-ordered life is worked out, says Calvin, by observing God's boundaries. We need to keep within the limits He has set for us, not daring to stray outside them if we wish to be kept free from sinful anxiety. Do we observe the differences, he asks, between things revealed and things concealed, between Law and Gospel, shadow and substance, Church and State, faith and unbelief, obedience and rebellion, sincerity and hypocrisy, liberty and license, love and lust, self-control and lack of restraint, reverence for God and unhallowed familiarity with God, moderation and excess, modesty and vanity, use and abuse, just and unjust war, man and woman? We must apply this principle of boundaries with precision to every department of life. The separations enforced by such boundaries, Calvin insists, are necessary in this dark world of sin, not only to establish us in the faith, but also to make human society stable, cohesive and even tolerable. Wherever these boundaries are trampled on, sin, chaos and their attendant anxieties inevitably follow. Hence Calvin's concern for well-ordered, righteous personal relationships. Inordinate friendship with the ungodly, the least association with idolatry, male effeminacy and female masculinity, will only lead us into a rapid descent into "such confusion that everything is allowed." By contrast, when we live within God's boundaries it will bring both peace and spiritual prosperity. Such a community was Calvin's ideal for Geneva, and with Geneva, Europe. In it, men would pursue righteousness and shun sin; crime would be punished and goodness rewarded; disorder would be abolished and order established everywhere. Though such an ideal is unattainable here on earth, nevertheless his thoroughly-worked-out blueprint for such a commonwealth, coupled with his own superhuman efforts to achieve it, reveal a man of God driven by anxiety for godliness unrivalled in

the history of the Church. How we need such a solution today! Not a Rome-dominated or a Secular Humanist European Federal State, but God-honouring, God-fearing independent nations, such as Switzerland and Britain have been in the past.

Calvin's warning

One other aspect of Calvin's teaching must not be forgotten. Anxiety, he claimed, is not an unmixed evil. It alerts us to natural dangers. In the spiritual realm, it should drive us to flee to Christ from the wrath to come and warns us against sloth, self-righteousness and pride. Besides, when "worn down with cares", "troubled by grief" and "stricken by terror" we will look to God all the more. Anxiety will also stimulate our diligence in watching and prayer. Watch anxiously and pray fervently, he counsels. Lastly, anxiety over the future will make us patient to wait for God to fulfill His promises and bring us at last into His desired haven. The conclusion of the whole matter is that anxiety can be overcome by implicit trust. The worst kind of anxiety in the believer, Calvin rightly says, is over his relationship with God. Do I find Him "friendly or hostile"? Does He accept or reject me and my service? In other words: Am I His or am I not? Those who constantly waver between hope and fear, he counsels, should immediately receive God in His Word, Christ in His Gospel, the Holy Spirit in His grace. Then we shall be freed from all sinful anxiety, for while 'fear hath torment,' 'perfect love casteth out fear.' Calvin's last word on the subject therefore reverts to God's original remedy for sin. "We are continually tormented until God delivers us from misery and anguish by the remedy of His own love towards us." By knowing this love shed abroad in our hearts "we obtain the benefit of a peaceful calmness beyond the reach of fear."

Taken from 'Our Inheritance', Winter 2004, by permission <http://www.bible-christian-heritage.co.uk>

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World in focus

Former Presbyterian minister heads Habitat for Humanity

Since the firing of Millard and Linda Fuller, co-founders of Habitat for Humanity, Paul Leonard of Davidson, North Carolina, who was a former Presbyterian minister, has agreed to remain as interim chief executive.

Leonard, 65, graduated from Davidson College, the University of Chicago with a master of divinity degree, and Emory University with an MBA. Leonard joined Trinity Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, on a pastoral internship from the University of Chicago in 1964. Ordained by Mecklenburg Presbytery, he served Trinity as its minister of Christian education. In 1968, he joined the Catawba Presbytery to lead a non-traditional church focusing on community action and service.

Leonard is no longer listed by the denomination as a Presbyterian minister.

+ *Habitat for Humanity International, 121 Habitat St., Americus, GA 31709-3498 (229) 924-6935, ext. 2551 or 2552*

One killed, three injured, in German church

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has reported that a man wielding a sword has killed one person and injured at least three more at a Protestant church in Germany.

Police spokesman Hermann Karpf said that the attack came as about 40 people, members of the local Tamil community were gathered inside the church. "Severed limbs were lying all around the church," a police spokeswoman said, adding that one man was arrested.

+ *British Broadcasting Corporation America, PO Box 6266, Florence, KY 41022-6266 (859) 342-4070*

Creationists heralding discovery

In an article published 25 Mar. in the journal "Science," a research team revealed that a dinosaur bone discovered in 2003 in Montana, yielded soft tissues, including blood vessels and possibly cells that "retain some of their original flexibility, elasticity and resilience," The New York Times reported. Scientists found the tissue when the thigh bone they were excavating was too long to fit in a helicopter and had to be broken in two pieces. It was then they realized fossilization was not complete and could possibly lead to understanding more about the mysterious creatures.

A creationist group based in northern Kentucky, Answers in Genesis, declared that it offers "immensely powerful support to the idea that dinosaur fossils are not millions of years old at all, but were mostly fossilized under catastrophic conditions a few

thousand years ago at most." Evolutionists believe dinosaurs were made extinct 65 to 70 million years ago.

+ *Answers in Genesis, PO Box 510, Hebron, KY 41048 (859) 727-2222*

Sri Lanka poised to outlaw religious conversions

The government of Sri Lanka is about to introduce a bill that would outlaw religious conversion. The bill would subject faith-based aid providers up to seven years in prison if accused of "attempted conversion" for aiding the needy while retaining their religious identities.

The Becket Fund which is a nonpartisan, interfaith, legal and educational institute dedicated to protecting the free expression of all religious traditions warns that the law would jeopardize all religiously-affiliated tsunami relief aid now pouring in to the country.

Buddhism is assured a "foremost place" in the Sri Lankan constitution and those practicing minority religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, have been violently targeted in the past.

+ *The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, 1350 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 605, Washington, DC 20036 (202) 955-0095*

Williams attended Pope's Funeral

Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, has accepted an invitation to attend the funeral of Pope John Paul II. Williams will be the first serving Archbishop of Canterbury – at least since the Protestant Reformation – to attend the funeral of a Pope. Williams will wear the ring that Pope Paul IV presented to his predecessor Archbishop Michael Ramsey.

+ *Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr., 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445*

Second President of Navigators, Dr Lorne Sanny, dies

Second president of The Navigators, Dr. Lorne Sanny, died on 28 Mar. at the age of 84.

Dr. Sanny served as president and general director of The Navigators for 30 years. During Dr. Sanny's tenure The Navigators grew from a staff of 171 in fewer than a dozen countries to 2,580 in 71 countries.

After stepping down as president and general director of The Navigators in 1986, Sanny continued as chairman of the US Board of Directors until 1993. Dr. Sanny developed and served the Navigator Business and Professional Ministries, which is The Navigators' marketplace outreach.

+ *The Navigators, PO Box 6000, Colorado Springs, CO 80934 (719) 598-1212*

Apurina New Testament

Judy King, a Reformed Episcopal Missionary serving in Brazil with Wyliffe Bible Translators, and her translation partner Cathie Aberdour, announce the completion of the translation of the New Testament into Apurina. The dedication will occur on 4-5 Jun., at Itaboca, Purus River, Amazonas, Brazil.

+ *Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr., 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445*

Pakistani Christians fearful and demoralised by killings

Unknown killers kidnapped and killed Protestant pastor Babar Samsoun and his driver and fellow evangelist, Daniel Emmanuel, on 7 Apr. One of Samsoun's colleagues reported that the slain pastor was "accused of trying to convert Muslims to Christianity." The two men had been receiving telephoned threats demanding that they stop their Christian activities.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, (949) 862-0314*

Kansas bans same-sex marriage

Kansas has become the eighteenth state to adopt a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. Seventy percent of voters favored the amendment. Since 1867, a state law banning same-sex marriage has been on the books but because of recent court rulings where such laws have been challenged, legislators and their supporters pushed for a constitutional amendment to protect traditional marriage against activist judges.

+ *Kansas Secretary of State, Election and Legislative Matters Division, 120 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, KS 66612-1594 (785) 296-4561*

Witch denied admission to Union Theological Seminary

Cindi Simpson, a self-described witch, says she was denied admission to Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia because of a story published in "The Layman." Simpson was admitted as a non-degree student, but she had applied to be enrolled as a degree student in the seminary and her application was denied. Simpson said she now plans to

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

enroll as a master of divinity student at Lancaster Theological Seminary, a United Church of Christ school in Pennsylvania, and become a Unitarian Universalist minister.

Simpson practices what she calls "magick" - the focus of your will to achieve something. Prayer is magick. It's engaging with the energy that it out there. The witch's rede (creed) is do as you will and you harm none. What that means for me is that I'm not let off the hook. I'm responsible for what I do."
+ *The Presbyterian Lay Committee, PO Box 2210, Lenoir, NC 28645 (828) + 758-8716*

Student group sues Southern Illinois University

The Christian Legal Society chapter at Southern Illinois University (SIU) School of Law sued school officials for revoking the chapter's registered status because the chapter requires its members and officers to affirm the group's religious beliefs.

The university revoked the chapter's registered status after reviewing the chapter's membership and leadership policies. The university claimed the chapter's policies violated the "Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (SIUC) Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Policy" and a Policy of the Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees requiring that all recognized student organization "adher[e] to all appropriate federal or state laws concerning nondiscrimination and equal opportunity."

Before moving forward with the litigation, the chapter is giving the university ten days to reinstate its recognized status and to agree to allow the chapter to select members and leaders based on their religious beliefs.

+ *The Christian Legal Society, 4208 Evergreen Lane, Suite 222, + Annandale, VA 22003 (703) 642-1070*

ELCA Lutherans could allow gay clergy

Under a proposal by a council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Lutheran bishops could allow gay and lesbian clergy in committed relationships to become pastors of congregations.

Currently church policy bans gay and lesbian clergy who are involved with partners but allows those who are celibate.

Heterosexual, single Lutheran clergy are expected to remain celibate until they marry, and the gay or lesbian minister would have to provide evidence of "intent to live in a lifelong, committed and faithful

same-sex relationship," according to the proposal. The minister would then head a congregation that had "indicated its openness" to a pastor in such a relationship, according to the proposal.

With almost 5 million members, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is one of the nation's largest Protestant bodies.
+ *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, + IL 60631 (800) 638-3522*

Pre-game prayer called "Un-American and Immoral" by ACLU

The American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana executive director Joe Cook says it was "un-American and immoral" to allow an adult to pray over the public address system of Loranger High School in Louisiana. Cook says members of the school board should be fined or jailed for failing to stop it.

Judge Ginger Berrigan ruled in February that school boards, unlike most government bodies, cannot hold public prayers. That ruling was denounced by Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and is being appealed.
+ *ACLU of Louisiana, PO Box 56157, New Orleans, LA 70156-6157 (504) + 522-0617*

Presbyterian Church of India challenges statement

The Chair of the National Commission on Minorities in India alleged that Christian growth in northeast India could be due to illegal migrants from Bangladesh, falsely reporting themselves as Christians. The

Presbyterian Church of India, the largest Protestant Church in the area took "strong exception" to that statement. They challenged the national commission to produce facts and figures where the commission chair believed this to be happening.

In its press release of 23 Feb., the PCI stated "categorically . . . that [it] does not believe in conversion by force, fraud and inducement but received adherents by their own free will. Therefore, it is not necessary to raise undue alarm and find scapegoats for introducing tension where there is none."
+ *Rev. Wailie C. Kongwir, Presbyterian Assembly House, Central Ward, + Shillong Meghalaya 793-001 India pcishillong@yahoo.co.in*

Connecticut passes same-sex civil unions bill

The Connecticut Senate passed a same-sex civil unions bill 6 Apr., but opponents are hoping that the bill still could be defeated in the House.

The bill would make Connecticut the second state in the country to legalize same-sex civil unions and the first to do so voluntarily. The legislature of Vermont legalised civil unions following a court order.

Civil unions grant homosexual couples many of the same legal benefits of marriage without using the word "marriage."

The bill passed the Connecticut Senate, 27-9, receiving support from 21 Democrats and six Republicans. Six Republicans and three Democrats voted against it.
+ *Connecticut Senate Democrats Legislative Office Building, Rm 3300, + Hartford, CT 06106-1595 (860) 240-8600*

Assyrians mark 90th Anniversary

Assyrians marked the 90th anniversary of the Turkish genocide of Assyrians, Armeni-

ans and Greeks by holding a demonstration at the European Parliament in Brussels on 23 Apr.

The Ottoman Turks began a three year long systematic genocide of Christians in Turkey on 24 Apr., 1915, which resulted in the killing of 750,000 Assyrians, 400,000 Greeks and 1.5 million Armenians. Turkey officially denies the genocide <http://www.aina.org/martyr.htm>

Islamic Law rules in favour of Christian widow

An Amman court of Islamic law (Jordan) ruled in favour of Christian widow Siham Qandah on 12 Apr., revoking the legal guardianship of her children's Muslim uncle, Abdullah al-Muhtadi, and ordering him to repay misspent funds. The seven-year custody battle may continue, as the former guardian has the right to appeal the judgement within 30 days.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, (949) 862-0314*

New Journal available soon

The Confessional Presbyterian, A Journal for Discussion of Presbyterian Doctrine & Practice will be available soon. It is anticipated that issues will be mailed out in mid to late May.

Contributing editors include from the PCA, J. Ligon Duncan, Ph.D., David W. Hall, Ph.D., and Mr. Wayne Sparkman, director of the PCA Historical Center, also John R. Muether (OPOC), Alan Strange (OPC), Thomas G. Reid (RPCNA), Ray B. Lanning (ARP), Sherman Isbell (FCC), and John T. Dyck

(BPC). Subscription rates are: Individual (USA) only US\$18.00 and Library/Foreign US\$25.00.

+ *The Confessional Presbyterian, PO Box 141084, Dallas TX 75214*

REC grows in Cuba

In the past 16 months the Rt. Rev. Charles Dorington, Bishop of the Reformed Episcopal Diocese of Western Canada and Alaska has traveled to Cuba three times to work with Christians in the city of Moa. The group has now grown to five house churches with 60 adults and 20 children.

+ *Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr., 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445*

Westminster Seminary has a new President

Westminster Theological Seminary of Philadelphia has announced the selection of its new president: Dr. Peter Lillback, pastor of Proclamation Presbyterian Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

Dr. Lillback is also an adjunct professor of Historical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary and Professor of Church History at Reformed Episcopal Seminary both located in Philadelphia. As the senior pastor at Proclamation church, Lillback has had a significant

role in the successful development of the church's Amachi program, the White House administration's national grass-roots mentoring program. Lillback also serves as the executive director of The Providence Forum, the non-profit organization that is committed to preserving and promoting America's spiritual roots of religious and civil liberties.

+ Westminster Theological Seminary, PO Box 27009, Philadelphia, PA 19118 (215) 887-5511

Lutheran Bishop deported from Russia

Bishop Siegfried Springer, who heads the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in European Russia, had his multi-entry visa cancelled and Russian authorities deported him from the country on 11 Apr.

Bishop Springer stated that "This is not about me, this is about our Church." Springer has no idea why border guards annulled his visa or what lies behind it. The Bishop said that he has never criticized the Russian government. "I have always regarded the Russian policy as good and recognize the improvements since Vladimir Putin became president. As a good Lutheran, I do not criticize the government where I live."

+ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631 (800) 638-3522

Four Justices in Massachusetts may be ousted

The Massachusetts' legislature Joint Judiciary Committee is considering ousting the four justices who voted for same-sex marriage.

The Massachusetts-based group Article 8 Alliance is promoting a "bill of address," a Massachusetts provision allowing lawmakers to remove judges who fail to fulfill their duties.

The measure, filed by Democratic state Rep. Emile Goguen in Apr.2004, contends the justices violated multiple articles in the state constitution prohibiting courts from nullifying existing laws and requiring that laws remain in effect until the legislature repeals them, regardless of the actions and opinions of the judiciary branch. The bill names Chief Justice Margaret Marshall and justices John M. Greaney, Roderick L. Ireland, and Judith A Cowin.

+ Article 8 Alliance, PO Box 1612, Waltham, MA 02454 (781) 899-4905

Hindu & Muslim villagers burn down prayer hall

Hindu and Muslim villagers burned down a prayer hall and attacked three church members in a village in Kerala, India, on 1 Apr. The attack came after 26 people were baptized in a discreet early morning ceremony. The prayer hall was completely demolished, but Christians in the village said they would continue to meet for prayer and Bible study in their homes.

Nineteen percent of the total population of Kerala is Christian. Muslims account for 23 percent and Hindus for 57 percent.

+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250 (949) 862-0314

Robinson speaks at pro-abortion prayer breakfast

V. Gene Robinson, the openly homosexual Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire, was the keynote speaker at an "interfaith prayer breakfast," sponsored by Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider, last Friday. Robinson told the organization's staff and supporters to take pride in what they do, "Long before the 'religious right' was objecting to abortions, Planned Parenthood was objecting to the violence against women when the butchers were performing abortions here in America." Robinson also said that America treats everyone wrong except for straight white men, " I'm so thankful for the experience of being gay, it has taught me so much It's my little window into what it must be like to be a woman, to be a person in a wheelchair, to be a person of color."

Prior to the breakfast, Dr. Ignacio Castuera, Planned Parenthood Chaplain, de-

scribed Robinson as an "inspiring religious leader and a compelling moral and ethical force in the struggle for reproductive rights, human rights, and sexual equality," adding that Robinson's work in the area of "healthy sexuality" has "shaped generations of believers who share his progressive spiritual values." Dr. Castuera also serves as Pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church in the Watts area of Los Angeles. Last year Planned Parenthood performed over 224,000 abortions nationwide.


+ Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr., 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445

Cranmer House Theological e-books

Cranmer Theological House, the school for ministry of the Diocese of Mid-America of the Reformed Episcopal Church, has released a number of out of print books in electronic format. The titles include works on the Church, the Book of Common Prayer, and works by the Rev. Henry Barclay Sweete. For more information visit Cranmer House's website at: <http://www.cranmerhouse.org>

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**Cr Rob Wierenga, 35 Humber Street
 Island Bay, Wellington**

The saints in ancient British history

St Oswald & St Aidan

Patricia van Laar

God continued to weave His tapestry in England, a criss-crossing of threads creating a magnificent picture for all who belonged to the future to view. When Aella King of Deira, the 'Allelujah King', died without having heard the gospel, Aethelfrith, King of Bernicia united the two kingdoms into Northumbria ('North of the Humber'). So he unwittingly set the wheels in motion that eventually would strengthen the church of the north from a tenuous hold on the people, to a decisive confirmation of the Gospel. By exiling Aella's son Edwin to East Anglia in order to prevent his accession to the throne, Aethelfrith exposed Edwin to his first contact with the same faith that Augustine had introduced in the south.

A Twist of Providence

Despite Aethelfrith's attempt, in 617 Edwin was made King, and on succeeding to the throne, he in his turn exiled Aethelfrith's son Oswald, then about twelve years old, to the

Scots at Iona. So Oswald came under the influence of the Celtic Church before King Edwin himself had any further contact with Christianity! It proved to be a momentous occurrence, for during this time of refuge Oswald, in the providence of God, was soundly converted from heathendom to Christ, and was baptised as a Christian.

After Edwin's death in battle in 633, Oswald, now twenty-eight, returned to ascend the throne of Northumbria, and attacked the vastly superior forces of Cadwallen, reversing the defeat by killing Cadwallon at Heavenfield. So King Oswald became the first English king to be deeply Christian in conviction and conduct for his entire reign. It was not long before he sent, not to Canterbury, but naturally enough to Iona, a request for a teacher missionary to restore and strengthen the faith introduced by his predecessor Edwin, and accomplished through the work of Paulinus.

The Over-ruling God

Iona first sent in reply an austere monk who

made no impact on the Northumbrians. This man went back to Iona, reporting to a meeting that the Northumbrians were uncivilised men, of hard and barbarous disposition. Present at this meeting was a monk named Aidan. His attitude and character can be judged by Bede's record of his address to the priest who had failed.

"It seems to me, Brother, that you were too harsh with your ignorant hearers, and forgot the Apostle's instruction to give them first the milk of simpler doctrine, till little by little, nourished by God's Word, they should be able to receive that which is more excellent, and to fulfill God's loftier commandments."

Discussing these ideas, Bede tells us, it dawned on the assembled monks that here was the man they should send to teach the ignorant and unbelieving, since above all else, he was full of grace and discretion. So, in 635 Aidan was sent as a missionary to these 'uncivilised, hard and barbarous men.' Bede records further, "As at the outset he showed wise discretion, so afterwards he proved himself equipped with many a virtue more."

A Man of God's Choice

Aidan brought with him, not only the evangelistic zeal and love of the Celtic Church for the souls of these pagans, but considerable skills of organization that would give a structure to serve the Church well. He had learnt at Iona the emphasis of its founder, St Columba, who, born in Ireland, followed St Patrick in living with the Bible. The preaching of Columba and his monks was direct and simple, was Biblical, and was based on its appeal to receive Christ as Saviour and to live a life of devotion to Him. Aidan had absorbed St Columba's passion for missions. Columba would have been delighted to see that Iona remained for centuries an active centre for spreading the gospel to outposts of the Irish Church.

Five important features of Aidan's church structure and organization

Base: Lindisfarne, an island like Iona but on the opposite East Coast, became Aidan's centre of planning and outreach. The island is 5 kilometres long, and joins the mainland at low tide, making it a wonderfully suitable place for both solitude and for accessibility. Three kilometres south was Farne Island, Aidan's favourite retreat, where he could face the sea for 'aloneness' and on the other side could face the rock fortress of King Oswald, as he prayed for the inhabitants of the adjacent town of Bramburgh. [One time when he was praying he saw flames. The heathen Penda had set fire to this place, and as Aidan prayed he recognised



St Oswald



St Aidan

the Hand of God in a sudden wind change which turned the fire on to the attackers and saved the homes of the defenders.]

Method: Aidan began evangelistic preaching immediately, supported by the King who at first acted as interpreter, for Oswald had become fluent in Aidan's Celtic language while at Iona. Aidan travelled on foot rather than horseback so that he could turn aside to talk to people individually or in groups. People flocked to listen and were newly baptised, or confirmed in the faith they had already gained from Paulinus.

Training: Aidan from the start opened a training school, commencing with twelve English boys, several of whom later became leaders of distinction, including Chad who became the first missionary-bishop of Mercia, and three of his brothers. This school provided the church with experienced native clergy.

Example: Aidan, Bede tells us, gave his clergy a pattern of healthy living, so that he and they commended the gospel to all men, by living just as they taught. Bede disliked the

Celtic church customs, but spoke highly of Aidan's peace, self-control, and humility, his lack of anger and of greed. Zealous for God and the teaching of the gospels, Bede attested, Aidan was faithful to the Scriptures.

The Gospel Preached: Bede's dislike of Celtic things was not a difference in doctrine, the teaching, but in certain practices, which differed from those that Augustine had brought with him from Rome. The Celtic Church had developed without reference to Rome, but the Southern Church influenced Bede (whom we shall consider in a later article). He may not have liked their customs, but he did appreciate the products of the Celtic Church, if we are allowed to speak of its fine leaders as 'products'. He acknowledged Aidan's preaching with its recurring emphasis on the Bible. Bede wrote, "In his heart he held and revered and preached nothing different from ourselves, which is the redemption of mankind by the passion, resurrection and ascension into heaven, of the Mediator between God and man, Himself Man, Jesus Christ."

God's Golden Chain

So the golden links in God's chain were formed, links which are fascinating to trace. Unknown witnesses from the South European Continent to the British northern belts in the earliest days, (travellers, Roman administrators and soldiers,) and from their converts to Ninian, Patrick, Columba and Aidan. Through France the links were joined by the Queens who influenced their husbands and have scarcely been mentioned. These 'English' queens were descended from a Frankish Christian Queen, Clotilda, and from her descendants came Edwin's Queen, the link between Augustine and Edwin.

Oswald joined the chains, Celtic and southern, together.

The chain of faith still reached through the centuries, across to Holland and Germany. (Wait and see!) God is never without His witnesses. We are the present generation of "links."

Let us see that under God, we do not break the chain.

News in focus

Here we present two recent articles concerning a serious recent challenge to the Christian faith.

These are two different perspectives which we suggest you could either personally evaluate or use as a discussion in a Bible Study or Fellowship Group, through the questions in between. In a group setting it might be handy to have one person read it out or that you share the reading around the group.

Morality - let him who is without sin cast the first stone

I was aghast at the news of Graham Capill's sexual crimes. What was particularly staggering was that here was a person who had headed the Christian Heritage Party for a number of years, fulminating against sexual evil, and yet been involved in it himself. I had never been able to bring myself to vote for Capill and Christian Heritage. It all seemed too narrow and hard in its approach. Yet I have to acknowledge that Capill is a fellow evangelical Christian, even if his version has a fundamentalist shade which mine has not. What adds to my distress is that Capill is not the only conservative Christian sex offender. Quite a number of prominent Christian leaders have been caught up in sex scandals of various sorts in the past few decades: Catholic priests, Baptist youth pastors, Pentecostal

ministers and so on. No part of the Christian Church seems exempt, and that includes the evangelical Christianity that has continued to emphasise the importance of sexual purity. It is particularly galling that among the fallen are those who have been most publicly prominent in urging traditional sexual values. When I researched the homosexual law reform debate of 1985-86, I was distressed to find that two key Christian leaders who had provided major leadership in the struggle against decriminalising acts of male homosexuality had subsequently been caught with their own pants down in breaches of traditional sexual morality. The extent of these lapses indicates that conservative Christians have lost the high ground on issues of sexual morality, if they ever held such ground. Perhaps they have been at even greater risk than people of no faith by pretending that their sexual drive, which so powerfully affects us all - Christian and non-Christian alike - is fully under control. My wife's response to the Capill news was, "I just don't understand how you men can do things like this". I don't understand, either. But I do recognise the power of sex as a driver for men. If conservative Christians are to maintain and advocate their sexual ethic, they will need to do it much more humbly and much less stridently than they have in the past. In my research on the homosexual law reform debate, I came across numerous Christian letters addressed to Fran Wilde, the parliamentary leader of the movement for reform. While some were fair and reasoned, far too many were not.

Some were downright evil in their tone: calling her "the whore of Parliament", expressing the wish that she might "rot in hell" and hoping that all her children would "become lesbians". It would be better if conservative Christians got out of the political arena altogether in terms of trying to impose legislation concerning consenting, non-exploitative, adult, sexual behaviour (Christian Heritage and Destiny take note). What conservative Christians need to seek is not legislation but winning the hearts and minds of New Zealanders. Quoting Bible verses, mounting political marches and adopting aggressive attitudes will not do this and may, in fact, be counterproductive. Humility, compassion and reasonableness might at least be a start. The Christian message of supportive and faithful marital relationships, of life-enhancing and loyal sex and of stable and secure family relationships might then get a better hearing. Above all, those of us who are conservative Christians need to recognise that in the area of sexuality there is no "us" and "them". We all have the marvellous gift of sexuality. And we all face temptation to misuse it for purely selfish ends. It is a case of "there but for the grace of God go I". Those who are Christians are fellow-strugglers with others in the stresses of life. Holier-than-thou claims should never be made or implied. The great Christian, C.S. Lewis, observed that in no way could he claim to be better than another person who was not a Christian. All he could claim was that he was better than he

would have been if he had not been a Christian. A poignant story from the early years of Christianity tells that when a brother who had sinned was turned out of the church by a priest, the fourth-century monk, Abba Bessarion, got up and went out with him, saying, "I, too, am a sinner". It is in solidarity with society, recognising our own moral frailty, that we Christians should speak.

Laurie Guy lectures in church history at Auckland University's school of theology, and also at Carey Baptist College. Reproduced from the New Zealand Herald, 6/4/05

Aspects for discussion:

1. What is the key theme of each of these articles?
2. Which Scripture do the writers draw upon to support the key theme?
3. Which supporting quotes do the writers draw upon to support their points? How do they support their points?
4. Which of the two writers do you believe is more correct and why?

"Christians fall, but the truth goes on"

The Press should be commended for printing in this past Monday's Perspective page Rev. Wally Behan's address to the St. John's Anglican Church regarding Graham Capill. I too, along with Rev. Behan and

Christians throughout New Zealand, found the story of Mr. Capill's committing child abuse "sad, disappointing - and...devastating." But by dealing with it directly in this pastoral message to the St. John's congregation, and by allowing this message to be published for the broader community to see, Rev. Behan and The Press have performed a valuable service.

I appreciated the wisdom and compassion demonstrated in Rev. Behan's words, and especially the humility. Indeed, as a fellow church leader, I can only reiterate the sentiment expressed when he says, "There but for the grace of God go I."

Of course, there have been many other articles, columns, and letters written about this sad affair, from many different perspectives.

Most of what has been written seems to focus on Mr. Capill's hypocrisy. This is understandable. After all, it is the high profile nature of his hypocrisy that has made his being charged and convicted so newsworthy.

By having set himself up as a prominent moral guardian, it could be said that Mr. Capill deserves to have his hypocrisy highlighted. He has even demonstrated that he realises this by owning up to what he did and declining to reapply for name suppression.

For sure, the hypocrisy he demonstrated is a very serious matter. But at the same time, it has to be pointed out that Mr. Capill's failure to practice everything he preached does not necessarily mean that what he preached was wrong.

Again, it can't be emphasised strongly enough that Christians are indeed required to practice what they preach. And those of us who are leaders in the Christian community are especially responsible to do so. The Bible itself says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1). And as the Bible also says, "the overseer must be above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2).

No one can belittle the seriousness of Christian leaders failing to live up to the high standards required of them. They deserve to be judged more strictly by the principles they teach. But still, it needs to be remembered that the truth of the principles they teach is not first of all dependant on their ability or inability to live according to those principles.

If the moral positions previously advocated by Mr. Capill were based on his own personal authority, then indeed his message would be nullified by the failure and hypocrisy of the messenger. But moral truth is not determined by any of us in ourselves.

If any person or group of people were to set themselves up as the arbiter of what is right and wrong, their foundation for morality would be very shaky. We need to look outside of ourselves to find a basis for

understanding good and evil. We need to look to the revealed wisdom of Scripture.

In fact, it is the revealed wisdom of the Bible that clearly shows Mr. Capill's actions to be wrong. The behaviour for which he was charged and convicted was grossly immoral,

not because the majority in society happen to believe it is wrong, but because it goes completely against the standard for living as revealed by God in the Bible. Any such behaviour would continue to be immoral, even if the majority in society were to eventually decide that sexually abusing children is not a problem, just as many have already decided that other behaviours contrary to God's law are not a problem.

But this is not the time for me to continue the casting of stones. This should be a time of reflection and humility for Christians throughout our land. The name of Jesus Christ has been dishonoured in a very public manner, and his followers cannot help but feel the shame.

At the same time, though, we must not let the failure of Christians, as serious as they sometimes are, be seen as an indictment on the truth of the Christian faith.

As a Christian leader myself, I have the awesome task of proclaiming the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth of this gospel is deep and rich. It goes way beyond what can be conveyed in simplistic sound-bites about morality. And I am personally very thankful that my own sinfulness and failures do not ultimately determine whether or not this wonderful gospel, with all of its implications for life, is true.

Rev. Jim Klazinga is a Canadian who moved to New Zealand with his family three years ago in order to serve as pastor of a church in St. Albans, Christchurch. This appeared in The Press.

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

"Youth Service": The first of two annual services to which we as a congregation have invited the youth of our Presbytery to join us, is this evening. The pattern will be the same as last year. We will begin serving some food & drink at about 6pm, and then the service will begin at 7pm. After that we invite everyone to join us for a cuppa and fellowship in the hall. Would our members please bring a plate. Congregation, let us help foster this interaction amongst our youth, and take

the opportunity to encourage them, and be encouraged by them.

Bishopdale

Update from Rob and Robyn: Sam is one year old this Wednesday!! It is really amazing to know that a whole year has passed already and all that has happened in it!! God has blessed us constantly with Sam's growth and development, and we are so thankful for His love to us. Sam is such a delightful little boy and he is reaching all the normal milestones when he should be. We have found he has a moderate hearing loss in both ears and will need hearing aids. This is a permanent condition and he will start to wear them this week. We are just so thankful that he is such a healthy boy and we are looking forward to him being able to hear everything and begin to copy all the new sounds - might get quite noisy at the Bosma house! (hopefully not in church). We thank you again for your continued love and prayers for our family. Rob, Robyn, Emily, Jack and Sam Bosma

Readers Needed: Are you an elder or a former elder? Interested in a weekend in Nelson sometime in May? Ralph and Jetje Adams will be away on vacation during the month of May, and the session of the Reformed Church in Nelson would appreciate some assistance in filling the pulpit during that time. The available Sundays are the 8th, 15th, 22nd, & the 29th of May. If interested, contact Ralph Adams at (3) 547 5735, or email: ralphadams@extra.co.nz"

Buckland's Beach

Hospitality Rosters. Trust that you all received those forms last week. Remember? The ones asking if you would be prepared to open your home to visitors who attend our services. This form needs to be filled in and handed to Gonny van Garderen as soon as possible. Warmest congratulations to Bernie and Jeanette Kant and their family. This past Tuesday they celebrated their Silver Wedding Anniversary! God has been good and gracious to and also through you and your family. May his nearness and strength remain as strong and stronger in the time to come!

Weekend Retreat. Ladies, please start returning filled in enrolments for the WEEKEND RETREAT in October! We need you to book now. Some of you may have missed out on receiving an enrolment form. If so, please see Gonny van Garderen as soon as possible.

Can't help but comment on an interesting and, as it turned out, very rewarding variation of home group meetings. This past Wednesday the Strayton homegroup decided on starting an hour earlier than usual - and finishing an hour earlier too. The reason? To share a pot-luck meal (and let me tell you, the food was five star plus!) and to invite the whole family to be a part of the singing, prayer and Bible studies. Everyone turned up and we had a memorable time. The formula is well worth considering. The Strayton group plans this kind of meeting on alternative meetings (ie once a month).

Christchurch

Next Sunday, the Lord willing, l'I (Jim Klazinga) be preaching for the Oamaru congregation, in accordance with our practice of having the Christchurch ministers preaching once a year in each of the other South Island Reformed churches.

Congregational Photo. Building up the archives for our 60th Celebrations!! Not really but it will help. We plan to take a photo of the whole congregation outside on Sunday 1 May after the morning service weather permitting. The purpose of this photo is so that we can send this to the Children we sponsor through TEAR Fund, it will also be used in a Congratulatory note for the retirement of Rev P Stadt (previous minister 1980-84). We would encourage you all

to be able to stay after the morning service on 1 May till this is complete. Thanking you in advance for your help to make this a success. Raymond Posthuma.

Dovedale

Dovedale Church Camp. Our mystery speaker is no longer a mystery: Robert van Wichen will lead some of the studies. Please register your enrolment for the camp with Arjen or Jantina Buter sooner than later (ph 366-4617). If you missed the handout of the information form: they are still available on the table in the foyer.

Wedding Anniversary! To celebrate 50 years marriage, Jo and Tina Koning will D.V. have an open house at their place on Saturday 23 April between 10.00 am and 4.00pm. There will also be an opportunity to share in the celebration with a special morning tea after the morning service of Sunday 24 April. Together with family and friends we would like to acknowledge and thank God for this joyous occasion in celebrating Mum and Dad's 50th wedding anniversary. It truly is a blessing God has given us, to be able to share in this time with them. Also that we as a family are thankful that they were and still are an example of how God wants us to live... with Him as the head of the house and our lives, trusting him is what ever comes our way. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Dunedin

South Island Queen's Birthday Camp. Bishoptdale Senior Youth Group warmly invites all South Island youth to Queen's Birthday Camp, 3-6 June. The camp is beautifully located next to Mt Hutt, surrounded by native bush, with a panoramic view over the Canterbury plains. An idyllic facility to relax by the log burner, enjoy the view from the deck, engage in some challenging outdoor activity and enrich your walk with God through Christian fellowship, Bible study and singing. Camp theme is "the fruit of the spirit" which is relevant to us all. Age guide is for youth turning 16 years in 2005. We would love to see you all there, so start saving now. Camp enrolment forms to follow soon. Any queries please ring Michelle Braam on 03 341 8842 or Andre Posthuma on 03 359 6566.

Foxton

Volunteers are needed to help pack boxes of clothing to be sent to Papua New Guinea. This will be done at the Fountain Christian School at 10am on Monday 4th April. For more info please see Gina Holtslag.

Session decided to have a Harvest Festival on Sunday 1st May. We would appreciate for

everybody to bring non-perishable food items only. The deacon will arrange that these be distributed via the Salvation Army.

Hamilton

URGENT CALL. Linda Vermeij (nee Van der Staay) needs another operation, but after having been through more than 25 operations in the past few years the doctors cannot do much for her anymore. She is still young, and has not much hope left. What would Jesus do? You can show her your love and support by putting both Linda and her husband on your prayer list. She needs a miracle. Please also send her a note (a story or a poem) or a card for encouragement (or maybe even a visit), to show her that as fellow Christians we do care for each other. Her address: Linda Vermeij, Ward 12 Room 2, Waikato Hospital.

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER! While the doctors didn't know what to do anymore, God did. Linda Vermeij has experienced unexpected relief and her condition has improved! Thank you Lord!! Thank you, people of our congregation, for all for your prayer support. Please keep both Linda and her husband on your prayer list.

Singles Club. Saturday 23rd April, the singles club goes on a day trip. Be at Aberdeen Church at 8.40am. We leave at 9.00 sharp, going to Ngatea Water Gardens and time permitting to Gemstones in the same area. Please bring your own lunch, cup, money and Good Mood and Big Smile. Any queries contact Ria Rengelink on 829 8973.

Hastings

New Member Class. It is a joy to have a number of regular visitors from various backgrounds attending our worship and joining in the congregational life. Several have asked to become members and so I (the Pastor) will be holding a new members class to explain the expectations and requirements for members. The class will consist of five or six 1½ hour weekly sessions. I will try to arrange a time when all participants can attend. A creche will be provided for parents with children who need to be cared for. Please speak to me indicating your desire to participate in this class and the evenings that would be best for you. Attending this class does not obligate you to become a member, so even if you are not yet sure about membership, please come and inform yourself about what membership entails.

Hukanui

New children: Since the beginning of this year, we've seen a few new faces in the Sunday School classes. Welcome and we hope you will enjoy coming again and again! Each time we try to provide new families with a letter about

the structure of the Sunday School, classes, teachers and the materials we use. If some of you have not received that information yet, do not hesitate to talk to us. It is also a custom that new children receive a folder in which they can put their Sunday School material each week. Can we also ask parents to check your children's folder and if needed to replace it, as this will prevent some unwanted hassles for children and teachers with loose material lying around.

Mangere

This coming Friday I understand that up to nine children will be initiated into our Cadet & Calvinette Club (six girls and three boys). May it be a blessed night for them and may they grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus through the faithful work of our Counsellors.

Congregation, Jonathan Edmond Ryan and Esther Marie Bartlett have indicated their desire to be united in Christian marriage. They want to begin their life together in the name of the Lord and in the presence of His people, and continue it to His glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at the St Mark's Anglican Church, 95 Remuera Road, Remuera, on April the 9th 2005 at 12.30pm, Lord willing.

As was announced last Sunday afternoon, the Hamilton congregation have called yours truly to serve as their minister. So that means I now have two calls to consider – the one to Hamilton and the one to continue serving the Lord here. Please pray for us the Lord's guidance as we weigh this up.

Masterton

The Lord is good and His mercies and care we experience this past week again as the Lord added a covenant child to the congregation in Georgia Terissa Stolte, a daughter to Jan-Erik and Georgina. May her life be one of service in Christ her Lord. We thank the Lord for giving and sustaining life.

Calling Process Rev. Kloosterman: Session has decided to invite Rev Peter Kloosterman and his wife Michelle to come over and meet with us. They are planning to bring their 4 month old baby. The times we are looking at are 12 - 26th of April, depending on availability of flights. Rev Kloosterman will lead four services and the preliminary CD is planned for 22 April.

Session will present Rev Kloosterman as a single nomination to the congregation on the first Sunday he is here (16th), with voting to take place on the Sunday after he has left (30th). All these plans are 'as the Lord wills'. Let us continue to pray that the God will direct us and Rev Kloosterman and that His will may

be done for the glory of His name and for our good as His people.

North Shore

Congratulations to Than and Chris Flinn on the birth of their precious daughter, Ella Grace. We rejoice with you in the Lord's wonderful blessing of new life, and pray that He will give you much joy and wisdom as you raise Ella in His ways. A special, warm welcome (and congratulations!) to Chris' mother, Wietske Loef, who is visiting from Australia.

Palmerston North

Congratulations to Darrel and Jo on the birth of a daughter, Audrey Rose, at 10lb 8oz, very early on the morning of Friday 25th. Mother and baby are well, and are home again. We pray the Lord's unending blessings for Audrey, and for the Lord's strength and wisdom for Darrel and Jo. We rejoice with those who rejoice.

Golden Anniversary Celebration. Henk and Maria invite everyone to stay for coffee after Church on Sunday 17 April, to celebrate their Golden Anniversary. Drinks and morning tea will be provided.

An Appreciation. As I have just come to the end of a series of Bible studies, I thought it a suitable time for a word of appreciation to our minister Chris. Several times (more than I can count) I have asked his help in a precise translation or the meaning of a Hebrew word, of which language I know nothing, or of Greek, of which I know just a little more. Every time, Chris not only answers my question, but he goes two extra miles in explanation. The same with history. A few weeks ago, in a sermon, he mentioned a Christian tomb in the Catacombs of Rome. When I asked him for more details, he not only told me what I asked, he also sent a copy of a few relevant pages from his source. Last year I asked what he had on the history of British saints to help my research for the series in Faith in Focus. He turned up with a pile of books about half a metre high, and for one topic on which there is little available information, sent me notes from the internet plus photos of archaeological finds, and notes on important contemporary characters. Some of the books had maps which were necessary to the articles. Chris always provides more than I ask for and he never makes me feel I am being a nuisance. So if you've any questions, or needs for clarification or information, don't hesitate to approach him. He excels, and I'm sure would be delighted to help. P.S. He does it promptly too - no waiting for days. Thank you, Chris. Patricia.

Cadets and Calvinettes – Anzac Day. Advance notice for Anzac Day; we plan to have a sleep over at church on Sunday, 24th April, and join

the Anzac parade and attend the dawn service as a club. Cadets and Calvinettes need to bring their uniform, sleeping mat and sleeping bag, something for a bring-and-share dinner, and a snack for breakfast.

After a week in hospital, Corry Vos passed away into the Lord's nearer presence in the early hours of the 14th April. She had been in pain for the last four or five weeks, and had been admitted to hospital from Summerset Village with breathing difficulties, which turned out to be due to pneumonia. She was so much a part of the congregation that it is difficult to see ourselves without her. We truly can say that her passing was a great release for her, and we are glad that she is with the Lord. The funeral was on Saturday. Many thanks to everyone who helped, at the funeral and helped to look after Corry in the hospital during her final week. CK

Silverstream

80th Birthday. We congratulate Cor van der Leek on his 80th birthday and thank the Lord that He has been with Cor these four-score years and pray that the Lord will continue to be with him in the coming years.

Report of the Women's Fellowship Presbyterial Meeting held Saturday 12 March, 2005, hosted by the women of the Reformed Church of Wellington.

71 ladies gathered at the Presbyterian Church in Island Bay. We enjoyed morning tea and the opportunity to fellowship together.

Geneva Books (Wibo & Lisa de Jonge) held their stall until midday and this is a good opportunity to look at their books and cards for sale.

At 10.30 a.m. Petra de Ruiters welcomed us and read from Colossians 3:1-17, followed by prayer. We sang No. 327. Petra introduced Mrs Carol Frost. Mrs Frost is a wife, mother, grandmother. She teaches Bible in Schools, spends two days in Prison Ministry work and for 20 years has been a Marriage Counsellor. She travelled from Christchurch.

Her topic was called "What are you telling me Lord?" Many Scripture verses were shared during her topic. Mrs Frost gave an example of sand paper. Sand paper is abrasive. Pressure is needed to use it properly. At times God uses events in our life to teach us. Twice we were given five minutes to share in groups of 4-6 around these thoughts.

In Christ I am....

Deeply loved

Completely Forgiven

Totally Accepted

Fully Pleasing

and

Complete in Him.

Her second thought....

As Christians we believe that ALL circumstances come to us through the often unfathomable will of an all wise, all powerful and all loving heavenly Father.

We were all blessed and have much to think about and apply in our daily living for our Saviour.

There was time for questions. Mrs Frost was presented with a gift of bulbs and a pot to grow them in.

The Collection for Help a Child Foundation raised \$397.15.

We sang together No.453, followed by prayer for our lunch. We could spend this time in fellowship over food and enjoy the sunshine.

At 1.30 p.m. we gathered again to sing the Presbyterian Anthem, hear the reports from each Club, and have the Roll Call.

We then moved into the hall where we were shown how to make very decorative cards. We could all take home the products of our efforts!

At 3 p.m. it was time to end the day with

prayer and the singing of No.325. Mrs Rose Thomson from Foxton gave thanks for the organising of this event. Thanks also was given to those who were busy in the kitchen. Next year, the Lord Willing we will meet in Hastings.

On a personal note, may I encourage our women to do their best to attend and be part of this special day, for our mutual encouragement and as a way of teaching our younger women.

Maria Holtslag, Silverstream

One of our students in Geelong

Andrew Nugteren



Andrew Nugteren and family

Andrew Nugteren is now in the final stages of study for the ministry. After graduating from Canterbury University (B. Com) in 1998, Andrew exchanged the snow-swept Southern Alps near Christchurch for the dry, flat and dusty Australian landscape (a poor trade!) and commenced studying at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. He is married to Lydia and they have three children: Arwen (3), Corrin (2) and Kenric (6 months), all of whom were born in Australia.

After graduating from the R.T.C. with a B. Divinity and B. Theology (Hon.) in 2002, Andrew commenced a program of post-graduate correspondence study with Bahnsen Theological Seminary, a Christian study centre based in Southern California. Andrew writes about his studies:

"I'm now in my third year of post-graduate studies, working towards a Master of Arts degree in Apologetics, and very glad to be on the home straight! Apologetics is about defending the faith, answering the objections that people raise to belief and demonstrating the truth of Christianity.

Apologetics, then, is something that's very important for us to be familiar with as Christians, since the Apostle Peter commands us to 'always be ready to give an answer to everyone

who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you' (1 Peter 3:15). I'm very thankful for the opportunity I've had to gain greater knowledge in this area.

The study focus

Most of my study has been by course-work and has focussed especially on exploring the thinking of a Reformed apologist called Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987). One of Van Til's key observations was that when we reason with an unbeliever, neither of us come to the "evidence" in a neutral manner, willing to let it take us wherever it leads. Instead, we come with conflicting worldviews – that set of beliefs which, among other things, determine what we'll allow to count as evidence and how to interpret it.

Since the unbeliever begins with one set of starting beliefs and we begin with a very different set of starting beliefs, it's inevitable that, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, we're going to end up in a standoff. So what should we do? Just agree to disagree?

Van Til believed we could do much, much more than this. His Transcendental Argument takes the unbeliever's set of starting beliefs and shows that, if they are held consistently, the unbeliever cannot account for ordinary,

every-day things that you and I take for granted; such as the belief that it's wrong to steal (morality) and that toothpaste will come out of the toothpaste tube when I squeeze it later tonight to brush my teeth (induction).

Assume, for example, that the unbeliever's set of starting beliefs includes a view of the world that everything is just 'matter in motion' and came about through the evolutionary hypothesis. If that's so, why would stealing ever be wrong? If the fittest survive and the evolutionary goal is to maximise survival, surely stealing is required if helps us get a competitive advantage over others.

Or back to our friendly toothpaste tube. How can the unbeliever know that when he squeezes the tube tonight, toothpaste will come out? After all, our world has (apparently) evolved out of chaos and chance. Why should we then turn around and expect things to be regular all of a sudden? And to say that every time we squeezed the toothpaste tube in the past toothpaste came out doesn't help either. We're not interested in what happened in the past, but what will happen in the future.

As strange as it may sound to you, this inability to know that the future will be like the past has stumped philosophers since the time of the British philosopher David Hume (1711-1776). There just isn't an answer that makes sense if you begin with a non-Christian set of starting beliefs. When we use the unbelievers own beliefs to show how he can't make sense of the world, we're "answering the fool according to his folly, so that he won't be wise in his own eyes" (Proverbs 26:5).

On the other hand, we can also take our own set of Christian starting beliefs to show that unlike the unbeliever, we can make sense of the world. In fact, only the Christian can truly make sense of the world without running into contradiction or confusion along the way. In doing this, we're "refusing to answer the fool according to his folly, so that we don't become like him ourselves" (Proverbs 26:4).

As Christians, we can be sure about the everyday things of life the unbeliever can't justify on his set of starting beliefs. We know that it's wrong to steal because God has revealed it to us. We know that toothpaste will

come out when we squeeze the toothpaste tube, because God created the world and governs it in a regular and reliable way – it's not just a chaotic product of random chance and variation.

Nearly finished

By the time you read this in print, I will be very close to having completed the coursework

requirements of my degree and will be working on a short thesis that will conclude my degree. In my thesis I plan to explore the relationship between Van Til's apologetical method and the ideas of Alvin Plantinga, a highly recognised Christian philosopher from Calvin College. Plantinga is one of the co-founders of a recent movement known as Reformed Epistemology and has done significant work in defending the

rationality of belief in God and in presenting a new way of looking at the "knowing" process – the way in which we gain and justify our set of starting beliefs.

We plan, Lord willing, to leave Australia in mid-December before commencing a vicariate early in 2006."

Mission in focus

Janice Reid

Update from the Rietvelds: Solomon Islands

Kevin and Machi Rietveld are serving in the Solomon Islands on behalf of the Reformed Churches of Australia. MIF has featured their work in the past. Here is an update from Kevin...

Greetings from Solomon Islands. After another dry spell - for us here, that means about 2 or 3 weeks - the Lord is sending us rain as I write. All our tanks bar one were empty. It is also a good opportunity to clean them out, which has happened.

On Tuesday, Pastor Japhlet, a man very much involved in Prison chaplaincy work, accompanied Kevin to the Prison to introduce a Bible Study Correspondence program to inmates at central Prison in Honiara. We visited every wing, and 117 inmates took an enrolment form. On Thursday, Pr Japhlet returned to pick up the responses, and 121 were received back. Some who were not present at the time heard it from others, and also wanted enrolments which they filled out on the spot. How exciting that

these men (and 2 women) want to study God's word seriously. Many of them are Christians, but will have only a superficial knowledge of the Bible. Others are only nominal Christians - and our prayer is that through this course they will come to real faith. Please pray for the inmates as they commence their courses soon, and for Pr Japhlet, who will coordinate much of the program.

Uganda news from OPC

From Nakaale, South Karamoja, Uganda, Al Tricarico writes:

Imagine proclaiming the Word of Life, pleading to needy souls, and watching the entire congregation get up and leave right in the middle of the message! This is exactly what happened while I was preaching in Kopetatum one Sunday morning. I felt very strange as I wondered why seventy people would conspire to exit in unison. Was it something I said? Was I going too long? No. In fact, as it turned out, there was no significant interruption in the message. The crowd simply rotated ninety degrees and resettled under better shade. The

sun had gotten to them. So I turned the pulpit and continued to offer Christ to them....

We have been in Uganda for about seven weeks, and we are still enjoying the place. Our house is put together now, and we are slowly learning how to get around. We have had several cases of malaria, but as I write this, all are well. I am still training under the competent direction of Dave Okken. We spend time together talking, praying, and ministering the Word of God. I have preached twice in the Sunday morning services and have begun to preach regularly on Sunday afternoons. I am also teaching the Westminster Shorter Catechism at the Clinic. ... Our mission agrees that a high priority for the next year is to find and train Karamojong leaders for the congregation in Nakaale. Right now, the membership is under the care of the Mission and all the teaching and preaching is done by Americans. We very much want to cast the gospel seed on neighbouring settlements, but cannot really get started until sound leadership is in place in Nakaale.

When you are close to God in prayer, do remember us. Please pray:

For the Word of God to go forth with power each Lord's Day.

For our acquisition of the Karamojong language.

For the spiritual growth of the whole Mission, especially in our devotion to prayer.



Pictured in this recent photo of the East Africa Mission in Uganda are: the Wright family, the Proctor family, the Okken family, Barry and Anne Janes, Amy DeWit, and new missionary Al Tricarico (third from left at the back).

MIF prayer notes

Hayden Bosgra is back in New Zealand. Please pray for him as he travels around our churches to share about his experience in Ecuador. Ask the Lord for safe travel and for a good response to what Hayden shares about the spiritual needs of people in Ecuador. Pray also for Hayden as he settles back into life in New Zealand.

Jared Berends is teaching English and ministering to local believers in a restricted-access nation. At this time of year, many of the townspeople head out to their see their families in the countryside, and stay away from the larger centres for a few months. Jared asks us to pray for Christians that spend time in small

towns where there are no churches, with family members who know nothing about the God of grace. Pray that the Lord would enable them to be a powerful witness in His name.

returns to New Zealand

around this time, after a year of teaching English in a restricted-access country. Please pray for her, that 'reverse culture shock' would not be a problem, and that the Lord would guide her in considering options for the future.

Pray for the work of Wally and Jeannette Ha-

goort in Papua New Guinea, particularly for the continued growth of the work at East Boroko, and as they consider how and when to start Sunday worship services in the settlement. Also pray for the work in Vanagi, that the Lord would add to their number, so that when the split (multiplication, not division!) comes, the work there would not be negatively affected.

Lord willing, Janice Reid will teach at least one course in Indonesia this month (the announcers' course—but by the time you read

this, the managers' course may also be on the schedule). Please pray for the Lord's guidance as Janice finalises preparations for the managers' course, coordinates the translation of handouts, and reviews learning activities. Please pray that Janice would have time and concentration as she works on the RTS announcers' textbook in between these workshops

National Deacons' Conference

Dirk van Garderen

A very capable team of Wellingtonians, under the leadership of deacon Daniel Reurich, convened, organised and conducted a somewhat overdue National Deacon's Conference on Friday evening and Saturday, April 8,9, 2005.

The Conference proved to be a real *eye-opener* for 35+ deacons who attended. Most of the congregations were represented and those who couldn't sent their apologies. *Enjoyable* and *stimulating* are other descriptive terms that come to mind. The conversations during well-prepared meals as well as tea breaks, were constant and filled with animation. Reflecting their relative youthfulness, many of the deacons were seeing each other for the first time since youth-club camps. They had a lot of catching up to do. But above all there was conversation and exchanges on what we were hearing; what deacons are doing (and not doing) in their local churches; what *could* be done in the name of the Lord, *if only...*

What I would like to do in this brief report is give you an indication of what we heard (in a very summarised form!) and some of the implications and applications that flowed out of this.¹

1. The deacon and his task from a biblical and historical perspective.

The two Wellington ministers, Rev Jan Lion-Cachet and Rev John Goris, presented back-to-back papers.

Br Jan, presenting a study of the deacon from a biblical perspective, pointed out that the descriptions of their task (Acts 6.1-6 in particular – but see also Acts 2,4,5) as well as their qualifications (1 Tim 3. 8-13) are a continuation and outworking of the qualifications and task found in the Mosaic description of the Old Testament priesthood. Given the New Testament's emphasis on the priesthood of *all* believers, it follows that the qualifications and task of '*diaconia*' (serving/ministering to the needs of other) is the responsibility of each and every believer. The *deacons* are called to lead – initiate, organise, guide and

encourage the congregation – in this work of *diakonia* (service).

Br John, speaking on the historical development of the deacon's office, showed that, because the NT is somewhat vague on exactly what their task is, deacons have often been involved in work that seems far removed from what is described in Acts 6. One of the rich heritages of the *Reformation* was the renewed study of and implementing of this task. Given Br Goris' special interest in Martin Bucer (1491 –1550), and the influence he has on the development of the diaconal task, special emphasis was given on what he wrote about the office of deacon in his book *De Regno Christi* (The kingdom of Christ). Bucer's summary of guidelines for deacons are well worth reflecting on:

- Ascertain which people are genuinely in need.
- Keep proper accounts of income and expenditure
- Care for the property of the church as well as for those under its diaconal care. Exercise discipline over those fed by the church.
- One quarter of the revenue of the church is to be set apart for the poor, etc.
- Forbid anyone to beg: they should work. If unable to do so, ask for the church's help.
- *There is a need for a common fund, rather than providing by personal generosity. Let the church investigate the reality of the need and subsequently assist, rather than an individual.*
- *Let the deacons not only provide food, clothing and shelter, but also give to marriageable girls who have no dowry. Likewise, provide boys without patrons the wherewithal to be educated.*
- *Provide the believing unemployed with help.*
- *Take into account the circumstances in which one has lived in the distribution of funds. Not everyone is used to the same lifestyle.*

Food for thought!

Br Goris also highlighted that the second half of the 20th century has witnessed a growing awareness of a worldwide need. He asked us, '*Is the Church today the institution **par excellence** with a heart for a suffering world?*'

Opportunities and challenges outside our congregations.

'... *As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of faith.*' (Galatians 6.10)

Diaconal tasks within and to each other as the 'family of faith' are a priority. The church's light shines in a most glorious manner when even the world exclaims of Christians, '*See how they love one another!*'

But we are also to let our light shine in the *world* – in the communities where we live and work. Two of the guest speakers highlighted ways and means of doing this.

The (Anglican) City Mission in Wellington, 101 years *young*, works largely in that city's *under-class*. Meals, shelter and guidance is offered for the homeless. A special educational programme and school is provided for the 'square pegs' who, for a variety of reasons, do not fit into or benefit from our educational system. There is also the provision of food parcels, budgeting advice and mediation with the multitude of social services (and forms!). What a challenge for deacons to explore these openings and guide some of our people into this kind of work!

Mr Mal Green, a worker with Youth For Christ NZ Inc, based in Auckland, highlighted a completely different aspect of diaconal ministry. Mal, starting off from our Church Order's description of the deacon's task (especially: '*...to visit and comfort the distressed, to encourage the congregation to show Christian mercy to those at home and abroad... Art 24*'), began by highlighting the plight and need of Kiwi young people. Only 6% have a Christian commitment. 30 % have, through their families, some ties to churches, but are not at all involved. The rest have no ties whatsoever. Living in a post-modern age, today's youth *believes* and *thinks* in a

manner totally alien to past generations. What of a diaconally-driven ministry to that generation? I couldn't help but think of the potential of a real, self-sacrificing challenging both *to* and, potentially *through* our young people.

That our young people are ready and looking for real challenges is clear. I think of young people like Jared Berends, Heidi Posthuma, Hayden Bosgra, Amanda Jongepier, who are currently serving overseas! (Apologies to those I have missed.) The field is right on our doorsteps young people. Mal Green pointed out how he is developing a real ministry among Korean young people – that generation of Kiwi-raised young people who belong neither to their parents' culture or that of their *pakeha* peers. It *can* be done and, in obedience to Christ, *must* be. Contacting, visiting, opening hearts and, above all, homes presents enormous potential.

Global Opportunities

A special guest speaker at the conference was the Rev Bert Kuipers, chairman of the CRCA's *World Relief Committee*. Br Bert, has become deeply involved in international diaconal aid programmes with a special focus on India. He has visited that sub-continent seven times and has built up an invaluable chain of contacts throughout the Reformed world. He addressed questions like 'How do you get started?' 'Where do you go and what do you do?' Speaking from experience, he spoke in a really engaging and encouraging manner.

For me his talk highlight two unforgettable images.

- Bert and his team visited a brick-making and stone-quarrying operation in India. We saw pictures of the 'what' and 'how' of these operations. The real highlight was on the *who*. 5 & 6 year olds were working alongside parents. Young girls 10-13 were full-time employees. No education. Bonded (in fact enslaved) to the boss through ongoing loan-repayments that never end. Bert asked us: How would/should we help? Are our 'western' solutions and values appropriate in a completely different culture? If we set them 'free' from their debts, is 'freedom' in fact worse than the security of a job and the care of a boss/owner?
- In connection with the CARE² programme, Bert showed us a number of pictures of children with grandparents. Looked cute – until he pointed out that these children had lost both parents to AIDS and were themselves HIV positive. Grandparents who, in a country without pensions, had hoped their children would care for them in their old age are in fact forced to care for their children's children – without any personal savings or resources. The challenge is felt in the pit of your stomach as you reflect on such images.

Three members of the National Diaconate

Committee (NDC) were also present. We were given much time to explain the various openings and challenges that are known to us. Valuable input was given and received in terms of stimulating giving, administration of funds and, above all, on who we direct funds to and why. Other reports in *Faith in Focus* have provided details.

I highlight the following.

- Attention was drawn to the *mandate* of the NDC³ which highlights that diaconal aid should, as a matter of priority, be linked closely to a Word ministry; channelled through local Reformed churches (deacons) or, at least and evangelical one. The mandate calls for projects that are ongoing. The CARE programme in India (supported jointly with the CRCA and the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) and the financial support of deaf students at the Henry Murray School for the Deaf (Morgenster, Zimbabwe – under the auspices of the Reformed Church of Zimbabwe) are current examples of this.
- Response to emergencies – the Boxing Day Tsunami and subsequent earthquakes centred near the (Christian) island of Neas – have tended to spontaneous and generous. Two things were noted: While such appeals are powerful and effective (often because of media impact), they are often extremely difficult to link in with local (reformed) churches. Simply putting our contribution into bigger funds (whether Red Cross, World Vision or Tear) is not considered a desired option. Furthermore, while there is a ready response to emergencies, contributions to such causes inevitably bit deeply into regular ongoing contributions. The result is that, currently, the NDC is finding it extremely difficult to maintain ongoing financial support for the CARE programme in India.
- Another exciting opening, initiated by a group of people who are members of the CRCA in Western Australia (Wileton) has been the providing of housing for members of a leper community situated just outside Dharmapuri in South India. The response has been absolutely overwhelming. Funds for no less than 47 houses (at approximately \$(A)2,700 each) have been received to date. The deacons heard and saw a power-point presentation on this work and challenged to consider sponsoring one home as a local diaconal initiative.

Issues and Challenges

I for one came away from that conference with a strong sense of purpose in this important area of Christian ministry and service. Diaconal work and the deacons who are called to stimulate and help organise it, belongs to the very essence of our Christian life. It is in this manner that we 'walk the talk'.

I noted the following:

1. Because deacons only serve for a limited terms, *and* because many of our deacons are in the office for the first time, the work lacks continuity and cohesion. It's a huge learning curve. Very often resources and channels created by one deacon are simply lost to his successor(s). Something needs to be done about that.
2. Deacons are often the 'Cinderella' members of session. They are (with good reason) excluded from the task of pastoral care/oversight and therefore find themselves spending most of their time simply doing what needs to be done – the offerings mainly. The spiritual dimension of their task tends to suffer.
3. A great initiative among the Auckland deacons is that of calling regional (presbytery wide) meetings once or twice per annum to discuss their work local, presbytery wide and internationally. Often one body of deacons has channels, expertise and resources not known or available to those in another. Sharing stimulates the work and enables it to be done!
4. The need for senior, experienced deacons. There is nothing as valuable as a deacon who has served in this particular office over an extended period of time. He knows the history, the work, the highs and the lows. I once wrote that in order to qualify as a deacon, a man ought first to have served in the office of elder for a few terms. I still believe that. While younger men tend to begin their work in leadership as deacons, they cannot gain experience unless they are trained up and guided by older more experienced ones.
5. Communication! Several comments were made about *showing* the our people some of the international diaconal needs and challenges using DVD and data projection. A five-minute clip in which the director of the CARE programme in India, the head of the Henry Murray School for the Deaf, or the kinds of houses being built for lepers in India is a must! Use them after the service or while the congregation is drinking its cuppa afterwards. Deacons need these facilities and bodies like NDC (as well as OMB!) need to make this kind of material available.

All in all, a thoroughly stimulating conference. Thanks to those who worked so hard to make it possible. May there be more of this. It is useful, practical and addresses the churches 'where we're at'.

(Footnotes)

¹ The order in which the material was presented has been rearranged somewhat.

² Centre for Aids Rehabilitation and Education

³ See *Office-Bearers' Handbook* (2002) p 4.21

What was the Reformation about?

Roman Catholicism and the praise accorded the dead

Garnet Milne

The various media news features have been dominated by the recent illness then death of the pope and the mourning which followed – mourning which took place both in the Vatican and around the world. One of the remarkable features of these recent events has been the willingness of the media and other Protestant Christians to laud the dead pope. Famous evangelical Baptist Billy Graham and his heir apparent Franklin Graham are just two examples. We could add President Bush (a Methodist) who seem so moved by the funeral that he came away saying that he now had a greater assurance of life after death.

Hal Lindsey, the dispensationalist author of the Late Great Planet Earth and other books on premillennialism attributes legitimacy to an extra-biblical prophecy of the twelfth-century Irish Roman Catholic bishop St. Malachy. This “prophecy” allegedly involves the recently deceased pope. And in our own nation there has been a clamour for space on newsprint and television screen by a wide range of folk, from atheists like our PM to conservative Baptists, in order to applaud the life of this Polish pope. Challenge Weekly has also come out cheering for this famous resident of the Vatican, suggesting at the very least that he was a great Christian.

What seems completely lacking in almost all of these eulogies is any awareness that there is a vast difference between the pope’s “gospel” and the Gospel of Scripture. It seems that most Protestants (and they probably would not want to be labelled as Protestants) these days believe that eternal salvation is possible through the system of doctrine and practice known as Roman Catholicism. The pope, the head of this

system who calls himself blasphemously the “Vicar of Christ”, is plainly the supporter and chief standard-bearer of Roman Catholicism. All the cardinals and the rest of the priestly class make their masses (the term by which they call the Lord’s Supper) the focal point of their religious system, as they claim to be able to turn the bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ, and to re-sacrifice this carbohydrate Christ on their altars. Older Protestants called the mass idolatrous for obvious reasons (see the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 80 for example). For the Roman



Catholic too, salvation itself is mediated through the hands of the priest, something totally alien to the teaching of the New Testament. Infants are said to be regenerated at baptism and have all their actual sin removed so that they are intrinsically righteous at that point. Furthermore, man is said to be *made* intrinsically righteous (and not *declared* righteous) through faith plus works. And an elaborate series of teachings using human mediators, labelled saints, also promote idolatrous worship towards

Mary and other dead people. Even now Roman Catholics are praying to this recently deceased pope.

The pope has been lauded by leaders of many different religions for he has held syncretistic worship at Assisi with other pagan religions and validated their paths to salvation. He also infamously entered a Mosque and kissed the Koran which is a demon-inspired book which blasphemes the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Christian Gospel or way of salvation. So we have to assume if Challenge Weekly and others can praise this pope as a great Christian who is now in heaven, that they validate the false gospel of Roman Catholicism. There can be no other conclusion. After all, the pope was the upholder of the official tradition and doctrine of Roman Catholicism, and believed that he was right with God because of his adherence to these views, once uniformly considered heretical by all Protestants.

If the Pope is a true Christian as these Protestants avow in their eulogies, we have to conclude that there has been an abandonment of the “solus” of the Reformation. Luther’s heroic stand on Scripture alone; on Justification by faith alone; and Christ alone must be written off as an unnecessary blemish on the church and the subsequent Reformation and evangelisation of the world pronounced a profound mistake.

Sadly, those who would claim that the pope and his legions of priests mediate real salvation to eternal life should rather enquire whether they have indeed understood the one Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.