

# faith in focus

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Reformed Churches  
of New Zealand

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"I have set my rainbow in the clouds,  
and it will be the sign of the covenant  
between me and the earth.  
Whenever I bring clouds over the earth  
and the rainbow appears in the clouds,  
I will remember my covenant  
between me and you and all living  
creatures of every kind."

*Genesis 9:13-15a*

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## Editorial

We focus this month on a religion that has been very much in the news of late: Islam. It is a religion, in the words of Dr Samuel M. Zwemer, the well-known 19th-century Reformed missionary to the Middle East, which is the closest to Christianity and yet the most opposed to Christianity. Certainly, as an ideological and political force it has replaced Communism as the prime opponent of western capitalism. But it also a religion which is coming closer to each one of us, as more and more Muslim refugees becomes residents and then citizens of New Zealand, and the other western countries. We need to be informed about what they, and the other migrants to our shore, believe. I would encourage you to do a study through such a booklet as "Asians in Britain: A Christian Understanding" (by Patrick Sookhdeo, Paternoster Press), or any of a number of other books which detail their beliefs, and how Christians can witness to them.



Sjirk Bajema

### Lest we forget

Faith in Focus is the magazine of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. It says so in the masthead of the magazine. But not only is it the magazine of the churches, it is also the magazine of the families in those churches. That's why I make a special plea to include Faith in Focus in your special family celebrations - births, engagements, marriages, anniversaries, and deaths. It's easy enough just to get someone in the family to drop an email to me. An attached photo file is most welcome, too. We have to celebrate the deeds of the Lord, and that begins in the home - the church home.

I have included with one such notice in this issue some words written about the one who passed away in the local church bulletin. I did that because they help put that man's life in the church perspective. But I also did that because he was my Oom Wim. No, not a blood relative - he was my Uncle in the church family I grew up in. I remember the part he and Tante Nel had in my life. And I remember some of those incidents in my life. This is one: We used to have a visitor to our church, who only came to the New Year's Eve service (the visitor was a former member). Oom Wim led the reading service for New Year's Eve on one occasion when he attended. The man came up to Oom Wim after the service, and said, "That was the same sermon as last year!" To that Oom Wim replied, "Well, you'll have to come more often then!"

This is the kind of thing we recall and share at family gatherings - for whichever reason they are held. It's an important part of being a family. And that's why we should share it as a church family, too. I am your son, or brother, or Uncle. We are all God's covenant children.

### ERRATUM

In last month's issue (February 2002), two proof-reading comments, which were in italics within brackets, were inadvertently left in Benjamin's Hoyt's article, 'Chick and golf.' We apologise for this oversight which occurred as a result of a change in our procedure. On page 3 one of sub-titles should read 'The church is **not** a building'.

*And in old age, when others fade,  
They fruit still forth shall bring;  
They shall be fat, and full of sap,  
And, aye, be flourishing.*

*Old Scottish Version of Psalm 92:14*

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.

# The golden rule

## *It's the King's right to rule!*

**Sjirk Bajema**

*"In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12.)"*

This twelfth verse of the seventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel is commonly known as "The Golden Rule". The phrase, "Do to others what you would have them do to you," would have to be one of the best known quotes of the Bible to those who don't believe the Bible—those who aren't Christians at all. Actually, some atheists have even gone so far as to claim "The Golden Rule" as a principle which doesn't belong only to the Bible, but to all people.

One example of this occurred during the recent debate over values in education—or should one say the lack of values in much of education—when one rationalist lecturer said that the Golden Rule, as the most common ethical precept, remains the best basis for a programme of values. He further said that "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," can be found in the teachings of Confucius, Buddha, Socrates and Jesus Christ. To which he then added, "It is ridiculous to suggest that the 867,000 New Zealanders who in the last census declared themselves as having no religion have no values."

The Bible does not say that, though. What he has done is to set up a straw man—a caricature of what Christians believe. What the Bible in fact says is that whether you believe, or don't believe, in the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour and Lord, you are still going to believe in something.

The Church has never denied that other religions have similar ethics to Christianity—it is something in all of us. We all know deep down that there is a higher force. Our world shows that—whether it be the Hollywood phenomena called X-Files, or the obscurest animist religion in deepest Brazil.

This is what John Calvin called the "sensus divinitatis" in every person. He explained that in our hearts we know we're not some kind of cosmic accident. There is a divine pattern and purpose which we all recognise is at work, even though many dull their consciences about that.

We need to note, however, the way in which all of those other religions describe this golden rule principle. Here are a few quotes:

- (i) from Confucius, "What you don't want done to yourself, don't do to others"
- (ii) from a Buddhist hymn, "Putting oneself in the place of others, don't kill, nor cause to kill"
- (iii) from the Greek Stoics, "What you don't want to be done to you, don't do to anyone else"
- (iv) and the religion in most headlines recently,

Islam, which says, "Woe to those who deal in fraud."

So—how do they sound? Are they positive? Actually, aren't they all framed in the negative? They're all saying, "Don't do to others what you would have them not do to you." None of them are saying, "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

While this may seem subtle, it is a distinct difference—the difference which makes all the difference!

### **It's not what you don't do**

Those quotes from other religions show a very common misunderstanding. At the heart, what they are saying is that they think they can do it. They say it's simply a matter of what they don't do. When they speak about the Golden Rule, they talk about something which they can do—and if everyone else only did it too, what a different world this would be! Take, for example, the 1960's, where people believed that if only we had no more wars, there would be peace. Get rid of racism and there's harmony. Do away with hate, and you're left with "love"!

These people, though, turn it into a rule. And I mean "rule". They place such a guilt trip on you that you have to do as they tell you to! And there you have the trap of the Pharisees.

It was against this trap that Jesus invoked the Golden Rule. He told us that the Golden Rule is really what sums up the Law and the Prophets. Right there and then, with the multitude of rules and regulations which detail down to the millimetre how far you can travel on the Sabbath and by which way you can travel that far, Jesus said that they'd forgotten the spirit of it all. And if there's no heart beating underneath, there's certainly no life through the rest of the body!

Jesus, by emphasising the spirit of the law, is not saying anything new in the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 5, He said a number of times, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago...But I tell you...". He said it because the Law had become a law unto itself. The whole point of God's people being in a living, personal and vibrant relationship with Him, had well and truly gone. No more was it by faith—this was fear!

But God's Law isn't a Road Code. It's not something which we follow without thinking, because, well, that's just the way it is. This is not an impersonal and detached thing—this is not a machine. The LORD God is alive and so are we—and that's what He loves to see!

That's why verse 12 comes when it comes. Here, we need to note what came before it—the verses 1 to 6 were about our relationships

with our fellow men and women, and verses 7 to 11 about our relationship with the LORD. Here, Jesus joins it together in the most telling way!

Before we look at that further in our second point, let's see what happens when people reach the stage where they believe any good on this earth can only come through everybody doing that good. In church history, this has been described as the social gospel. It is a gospel which isn't concerned with the preaching and teaching of what Jesus Christ has done, so much as being about what we have to do to show Jesus right now. After a while, those holding to this teaching don't need Jesus as much of a Saviour, because they are too busy saving themselves and each other with their own good works. Jesus becomes merely a good moral teacher, helping us to be good people ourselves, because He was such a good man.

We can also call this thinking "horizontal," because its focus is wholly on our fellow man. They would use this verse to support that. They would say, "Do to others what you would have them do to you."

And, at first, it does seem to sound all right. They use the right words and phrases; they are certainly busy in the Lord's Kingdom; and they are all such "nice" people!

Mind you, one reason why they are so "nice" is that their belief begins and ends with themselves. If they can't keep putting a positive image on things, everything falls away. As those movements have all eventually done, because sin won't let them win! They cannot hope to do it at all by themselves. History is covered with shattered utopian dreams. From the "liberty for all" of the French Revolution, to the Communist "wealth for all", to the 1960's "peace for all", and today's "equality for all," it all falls

People can't do to others what they would have them do to themselves. The past is littered with all those who haven't done it. They only ended up serving themselves.

At this point, we can join again where we left off before. The relationship we have with each other and the relationship we have with the Lord, which intersects in our text, does what those worldly philosophies and religions can never do.

### **It's what He does through you!**

Much as this world talks about its own enlightening, and what people can find and do, it's this truth alone which breaks through! This is the light that pierces the darkness—it's what He does through you!

If it were not for God, we wouldn't have the Golden Rule anyway. That's why it makes the most sense to go to God and understand it the

right way, so that it does become the right way. That's when we're turned upside down! The answer is not within; the answer is not through enough people doing the same thing at the same time; the answer isn't even in all the laws that governments make; the answer is that we don't have the answer! It's what He does through you.

The answer of the Gospel is that you must start with God. So when the Golden Rule says, "Do to others what you would have them do unto you," we can't go past the greatest commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Matt.22:37)." This comes first. If it doesn't, there's no second. It's the one that really counts! You don't start with your fellow humans—you start with God.

In fact, relationships will never be right, whether between individuals, or groups, or nations, until we all start with God. You cannot love your neighbour as yourself until you love God. You will never see yourself or anyone else in the right way until you've seen them in the sight of God.

The verses 7 to 11, just before the text, are about this looking to the Lord. Those verses are about prayer. Prayer—that relating to the Lord in such a way that we're truly humbled. There we meet the all-holy and almighty LORD of all. He deserves all praise—and He alone! Before Him, even the mightiest empires of this world are insignificant insects.

When we meet this One in prayer, as we ask and seek and knock, we aren't going through the motions of a ritual, we're asking

plus acting plus persevering. Our whole lives are being taken in with Him! We are growing to be more and more open to Him and to His leading. And His leading is the Law—it's His Word to us today and for us all everyday.

God's Word is therefore the framework of a standard, the standard which our Lord has strongly reinforced throughout this Sermon on the Mount—exactly by going to what it really meant, not what man has added to it, with so many layers on top of it!

Actually, the Pharisees had twisted the meaning of the Law around so much that the word "neighbour" was used only for a fellow Jew—and he had to be a faithful one at that! By using the word "men" here, instead of "neighbour", Jesus made all the difference in the world. It meant that the Law was also for foreigners and to people who were the most terrible "sinners".

Far from what many Christians believe, that here Jesus is doing away with the Law and replacing it with Grace, Jesus is proving how much more valuable the Law will be, now that His people know its own fulfilment. By faith, they've even meet that fulfilment—Jesus Christ Himself! And by that faith, now that He's found us, we want to keep in step right next to Him!

There was a period in European history, around the 16th and 17th centuries, when the kings and queens insisted on their "right to rule." This was the belief that they were divinely ordained to be kings, and so no one should ever be able to disrupt their legitimate and exclusive regimes. Naturally, this became an excuse for all kinds of excesses and abuses.

In England, it was even one of the reasons why Charles the First lost his throne altogether!

Those kings and queens were right about one thing, though—it is God who gives us our leaders! They may not always be the same leader, or the family line of a particular leader—but God certainly appoints them. That is why Psalm 2 says, "Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for His wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him (v.10ff.)."

This is the same theme that is found in Romans 13, as we live in the light of Christ. That's what clothing ourselves with Him is about. It's seeking refuge in Him Who is the Rock of all ages.

Then, you'll find your life is steadily claiming more and more things for Him—whether that's in your own personal walk with Him, or how you treat those around you, every day.

And let's be ready when those unbelievers around say that they will be okay in the next life, because they've been basically all right in this life. "I've never hurt anyone," they may say. "At least, not robbed a bank or killed anyone." "Look, I've followed the Golden Rule!"

So, ask them differently. And certainly, in your life, show them differently. Say to them, "But what good have you done?" And if they start to give you a long list, ask them, "And how do you know they're so good? How can you really, truly know? I mean—have you met the good?"

## Islam in the media

### *The Dhimming of the West*

**Bassam M. Madany**

(Note: This is primarily a review on a television documentary, *Islam: Empire of Faith*, which was aired on American Public Television. It does help us, however, to understand the deliberate misinformation occurring today in regards to the background and beliefs of Islam.)

#### **Where never there is heard a discouraging word**

In his Foreword to Bat Ye'or's book, *The Decline of Christianity under Islam: from Jihad to Dhimmitude*, Jacques Ellul was concerned about what he called the "Dhimmitude of the West." He was referring to those Western writers and intellectuals who would adopt self-censorship when dealing with Islam. Such behaviour is similar to that of the Jews and Christians who came under Islam in its early days.

The conquering Arab Muslims called them, "Dhimmi." This status conferred upon them the freedom to practice their religion on the condition that they refrain from any criticism of Islam. Furthermore, they were not allowed to propagate their faith. Once a Dhimmi embraced Islam, he no longer could go back to his former faith. *Apostasy was punishable by death.*

I could not help thinking of these words of Ellul, the late French Protestant scholar, when viewing a Public Television production, *Islam: Empire of Faith*. In Chicago, it was aired on May 8, 2001, from 8-10:30 p.m. The majority of the speakers and commentators are Western, and are associated with such institutions as the University of Saint Louis, Columbia University, Boston College, and Edinburgh University. At several intermissions during the two-and-a-half-hour show, we were informed that the documentary was being made available "through viewers like you." I doubt the veracity

of this statement. (Later I learned that the screening was co-sponsored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, CAIR, and other Islamic organisations.) How else could such a lengthy program, which took us to three continents, covered more than a millennium of world history, showing the viewers a multitude of people in movement, as well as great architectural monuments, have been realised merely through viewers' contributions?

#### **The appropriate credentials**

At this point, someone may question whether I am eligible to undertake a review of *Islam: Empire of Faith*. After all, I am an Eastern Christian. How could I be free from the prejudices that my people have harboured regarding Islam ever since the conquest of their homeland in the early seventh century? I admit that I am not entirely free from bias. But it is a bias that has a legitimate and reasonable foundation.

Furthermore, I do have the credentials to make an assessment of this documentary. I have lived a good deal of my life in the Middle East. I have experienced some of the great upheavals that took place in that area in the aftermath of World War II. Even after moving to North America, I have kept up my studies of the history of the Arabs and of Islam, both in Arabic and in English. My credentials are just as valid as those of the speakers who contributed their comments in *Islam: Empire of Faith*.

### Revisionist history

As the show proceeded, I felt I was watching a thoroughly revisionist history of the Middle East since the rise of Islam. I have read Arabic books written by Muslim scholars and intellectuals that were far more objective than what I was watching. Western scholars seldom show such an attitude toward Christianity. Just three weeks prior to the airing of this program, the same Public Television Station (Channel 11 in Chicago) aired on Easter Eve a program in which one journalist opined that, "We are not sure whether Jesus Christ was a historical person." Could there have been anything more shocking than casting doubts about the historicity of the person of Jesus Christ, just a few hours before Christians were to celebrate the resurrection of their Lord and Saviour?

The airing of *Islam: Empire of Faith* had hardly begun before we were told that one fourth of mankind follows Islam. This is a preposterous claim. The world population today is around six billion. The Muslim world has, at the most, one billion adherents. Therefore, one sixth of the world is Muslim, not one fourth. That inflated number alerted me right away that I was watching a propaganda piece of history.

When dealing with the experience of Muhammad in a cave near Mecca, the commentator made no qualification when saying the Prophet's "mission was given by Divine revelation."

While it is accurate to report that in 622 A.D. Muhammad and some of his followers moved to Medina on account of the hostility of the leaders of Mecca, it is not accurate to state, "Hostility always began from the Meccan side." Muslim historians extol the ability of the Prophet to organise attacks against the Meccan caravans that were on their way to Syria. Details in the life of the Prophet that may offend Western viewers were totally left out. Indeed, it was a truly sanitised biography! As to the early years of Islam, the age of the caliphate and the conquests, the impression was given that the spread of this theistic religion was primarily due to the power of the faith. But this is not the whole story. Certainly, the early Muslims were fired with a tremendous zeal as they burst out of Arabia and entered the territories of the Byzantine and Persian Empires. But the rapid success of their conquests was not exclusively due to the "power of the faith."



Charles Martel, leader of the Franks halts the Moslem invasion at Tours in 752. Picture from BK Kuiper "The Church in History".

### Historical circumstances

The two super powers of the time, Persia and the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium), had been in violent conflict for several decades. They had exhausted their resources and bankrupted their treasuries in that rivalry. So they were no longer able to subsidise the Arabised kingdoms on the borders of the Arabian Peninsula that had kept the Bedouin tribes in their homeland. Thus, when the flood of the Arab horseman came from the south, Persia crumbled like a house of cards, while Byzantium lost its hold on Egypt and Syria.

Muslims revere the early "golden" era of their history. That lasted a little over 25 years. It was the age of the "Rightly Guided Caliphs." The conquest of the Middle East had begun, and soon North Africa was to come within the Empire. At the same time, the Golden Age was not so bright and beautiful! Of the four caliphs that succeeded Muhammad after 632, three were assassinated. Ali, the fourth caliph, who was a cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was murdered by some of his disgruntled followers. After his death, the caliphate became dynastic. The capital of the growing empire was moved from Medina to Damascus, Syria. The caliphs of this era, now belonging to the Sunni division of Islam, bore a fierce hostility to the family of Au (Ali?). One of their caliphs ordered the massacre of Husein, Ali's son, and his

entire family. Eventually, in 750, this Damascus-based caliphate came to an abrupt end in a horrible blood bath.

Why not at least one paragraph about this tragic part of the history of the "Empire of Faith?"

The brutality of the Crusaders was described in great detail in the television program. No Christian scholar would defend nowadays that tragic part of the history of Western Christianity. But then, one may say that to the Western Christians at the time, the Crusades were a type of *Reconquista*. Eventually they failed. Centuries later, the Spanish did mount their own *Reconquista*, and in 1492, they did succeed in regaining their homeland. In the eyes of Muslims, their conquests were divinely-mandated. Thus, no criticism may be levelled against them. But according to *Islam: Empire of Faith*, non-Muslims may not and should not claim any right to re-conquer what once was their own homeland!

### Faith or force?

I don't have time to go over the other details that were thrust at the TV viewers by those scholarly men and women who kept on extolling the greatness of Islam. But the apex of my horror was reached when the Ottoman period of Islamic history was being recounted. The Ottoman Turks had come from Central Asia,



A Christian church has been converted into an Islamic centre.

and served the caliphs as mercenaries. Eventually, they adopted Islam. They became the defenders and spreaders of their new faith. They pushed the borders of the Islamic Empire into Eastern and Central Europe. They devised a military system known as the "Devshirme." This involved the forceful taking of young Christian boys from their families in conquered parts of Europe, and forcing them to Islamise. Then, they were formed into an elite army corps that would go on to expand the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. This army was known as the *Jannisary*.

How did one of the commentators describe this barbaric and inhuman method that deprived Christian families of some of their male offspring? The Ottomans "recruited" Christian children." Is "recruited" a proper word to use here?

What a blatant camouflage of an evil system that lasted far too long!

### More balanced views

I find it hard to believe that a majority of Western men and women treated us for two-and-one-half hours with the most embellished story of Islam. However, the picture is not that dark. There are several Western historians who have narrated the same story differently, objectively, and honestly. We are thankful for men and women like Bat Ye'or, Jacques Elul, Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Edward Mortimer, and other scholars who have told the truth. Their account of that specific history is essential to know, since we now live in a globalised world. Nations and cultures must learn to live peacefully in a world of shrinking resources and exploding populations. Above all, Muslims need to view their history with objectivity. They must acknowledge that not all of it was as glorious as the account dished out to Western viewers in the documentary: "Islam: Empire of Faith."

The following books are relevant to this topic and offer a more balanced view: *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*, Bat Ye'or. Associated University Presses, Cranbury NJ 08512, 1996.

Any of Prof. Bernard Lewis' books. He taught

at the University of London, and during the 1990s, he moved to the USA, and taught at Princeton University. His books are available at major book stores.

*The Arabs in History and The Middle East and the West*, Harper and Row, New York 1960s. *The Political Language of A/Am*, University of Chicago Press 1988, and *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, 1990.

*What You Need to Know About Islam and Muslims*, George W Braswell, Jr., Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2000.

*Faith & Power: The Politics Islam*, Edward Mortimer, Random House, New York 1982.

*In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power*, Daniel Pipes, Basic Books, Inc. New York 1983.

*Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* V.S. Naipaul, Vintage Books, Random House, New York 1981.

*Beyond Belief Islamic Excursions Among the Converted People*, V.S. Naipaul, Random House, New York 1998.

*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996.

(The Rev. Bassam Madany was for many years the Minister of Arabic Broadcasting for the Back to God Hour of the Christian Reformed Churches of North America. In retirement, he and his wife, Shirley, have established Middle East Resources, 106 B. 162nd Place, South Holland, Illinois, 60473, as a help for ministry to Muslims. Their website is [www.safeplace.net/members/mer](http://www.safeplace.net/members/mer))

## A faith of peace

### Which Muslim nation is an example of freedom?

Joel Belz

It's not just politically correct, but probably strategically essential as well, for the president of the United States and all his people to go on demonstrating to the American public what they call a big difference between the radical terrorists of September 11 fame and ordinary Muslims. It's part of the president's job to preserve the unity of the country and to defuse secondary differences.

That's clearly why Mr. Bush made a point of visiting a mosque [just a few weeks after the attacks]. It's why he stressed as he left that Islam is "a faith of peace."

### Spun by the spin?

Does that mean the rest of us should put on blinders about Islam? Does it mean we should take at face value the glib assertions that selfless love is at much at the root of Islam as it is at the core of biblical Christianity? Does it mean that we should simply nod in

polite acceptance when we're assured that the destruction of non-combatants in war is as repugnant to Muslims as it is to us? Does it require us to embrace the notion that Islam, properly understood, has as much to offer the world as the religion of Jesus?

Even before the awful attacks of September 11, WORLD's editorial team had begun laying plans for one of our special issues this fall (autumn) that will help you understand Islam better. We first started talking about that last spring, and the assignment has become more important now.

But some of the details I don't have to wait to study. Yes, I've probably got some presuppositions and biases that'll have to be set aside once I've examined the details. But there are also some things I'm already persuaded of that will be pretty hard to dislodge.

First and foremost among my doubts is this: Where is the Islamic society to which millions of people from the rest of the world are streaming to because it is so compelling and attrac-

tive? In what country, or region, of the world is this "beautiful religion" practised in a way that might prompt you to want to move there for the rest of your life?

When I visited Saudi Arabia 11 years ago, I was warned not to speak in public to a woman, and if in conversation with any Saudi man, not to mention Jesus. Either kind of misbehaviour, I was told, could result in my arrest. And that was in a "friendly" Islamic country!

Oddly, of course, both Christianity and Islam are exclusivist religions. Both teach that theirs is the only right way to God. There may be a little ambiguity when Muslims say that there is no God but Allah, but the ambiguity disappears when they add that Mohammed is his prophet. Faithful Christians, on the other hand, remember that Jesus said flatly, "No one comes to the father, but by Me." So both are exclusivist.

But after that, the differences get radical. The explicit teachings of Jesus, His example during His lifetime on earth, and the pattern of

most believers make it clear that the gospel and its implications are to find their access to people's hearts not by force of military or political power, but by the energy of God's Spirit. Jesus could calmly tell Peter to resheathe his sword: He had so much power to spare—even at that moment of extremity—that He could stop and restore the ear that Peter had so aggressively sliced off! The freedom of speech that Jesus thus extended to His enemies (rooted, of course, in His confidence in the power at His disposal) is a foundational distinctive of the Christian religion—and a foundational element that Christianity brought to Western civilisation. If we Christians have not always remembered that as part of our birthright, as the Crusaders certainly did not, the essence of Jesus' teaching is not diminished.

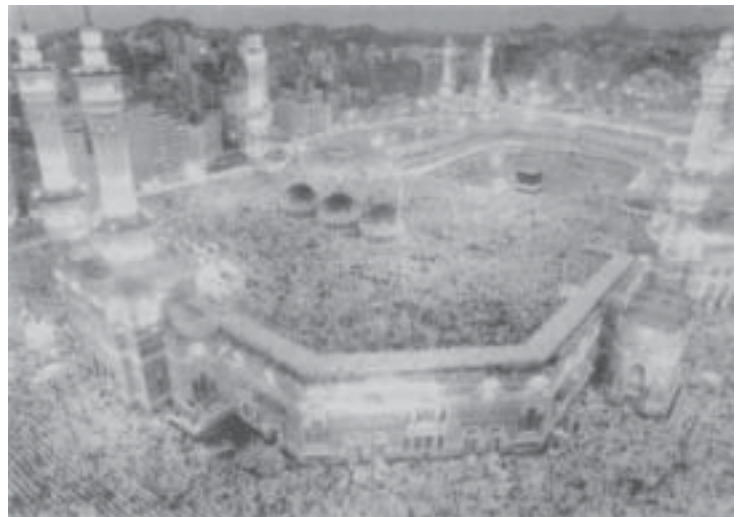
**Where does it show?**

Where is Islam's answer? A whole band of nations stretched out across the top of the African continent, through the Middle East, and then into south-west Asia, where personal liberty is but a vague abstraction? Let's concede the point that the more radical branch of Islam—the Shiites who stress the concept of jihad—accounts for only 10 per cent of the Muslim population worldwide. That means that the more moderate Sunnis have as their frontpiece countries like Syria, Indonesia, Egypt,

Pakistan, or Saudi Arabia. Which of those countries welcomes people of other faiths in the way our nation welcomes Muslims?

Three explanations don't work. It isn't for lack of time: Islam has had well over a millennium to get its act together. It isn't for lack of money: Islam has direct access to some of the world's greatest wealth. It isn't for lack of power: In 20 countries of the world, Islam has been dominantly in the political driver's seat.

On the face of it, harassment of Muslims in the United States (and other western countries) of the sort that has been in the news of late is both unbiblical and obnoxious. But we are not engaging in harassment when we ask questions like these. If a group of radical Christians had done to our nation what was done on September 11, those of us who call ourselves



*The Holiest of Holies – Hundreds of thousands of worshippers visit Mecca on pilgrimage each year.*

Christians wouldn't have been surprised if we were asked to answer some hard questions. It's one thing for the leaders of Islam to say that what we've just seen isn't the true fruit of what they teach. It's another thing for them to show us where the true fruit is.

*(World Magazine)*

**Between You and Me!**

**A caterpillar with a future**

Before I get to the story of the caterpillar, I'd like to tell you an interesting experience in one of Christchurch's Malls, where I go to have a mug of coffee and do some people-watching, trying to get into some conversation as I sit down with my cappuccino. The young lady was busy preparing a cup of cappuccino for a customer. She was an artist, lovingly topping the creamy milk carefully and with flair, totally unflustered, as the queue grew longer. Normally those in a queue get flustered, look at their watches, and some go elsewhere. But this time, we watched a piece of art taking shape. The 'artist' sprinkled some cinnamon, totally oblivious to us all, as we held our breath watching her.

As she handed the mug to the customer, one of those waiting clapped, and the others joined in. What a joy it was to see someone "work" who loves what he or she is doing! She took pride in the simplicity of making a cappuccino. As we stood there unhurriedly, we felt privileged to see the art and care of producing a simple cuppa without flurry.

\*\*\*\*\*

And now the tale of a caterpillar! It is not from my imagination, but an overseas magazine, which I need to translate for you:

"Just imagine: a brilliant professor has found a way to communicate with a caterpillar. He discovered that the knowing of the jaws is actually secret messages. In no time, this professor manages to translate it into English. Scientists and scholars are holding their breath! What secrets will be disclosed? The first question is, "Tell us, dear caterpillar, what hidden wisdom could you pass on to us?"



**Dick G. Vanderpyl**

*"Well, professor, point one is that I am the centre of the earth!"*

*"Do you really mean that? Aren't you aware (my translation – G) that you are just an insignificant, undernourished squirt?"*

*"Me? Just watch the ant and the flea. They are the scum of the earth!"*

*"Mr. Caterpillar, have you got any ambitions in your life?"*

*" Sure we have, we eat and eat and eat and keep on eating. And eventually get a new suit when the old one is cracked."*

*"Don't you know that you deprive others with your gluttony? Even the Bible states that you devour the wool (Isaiah 51:8) and ruin vineyards (Deut. 28:39)."*

*"Probably, Professor, I've got my own troubles. By the way, your Bible, can you eat it?"*

Let's change the subject Do you look forward to the day that you change into a butterfly? That you will have wings to fly anywhere you like to go? That you may endlessly revolve in sunlight? That you may suck in the nectar from scented flowers? To me, it would be an incredible heavenly experience for a caterpillar!"

"I've never seen a butterfly, so .....these are fairy-tales. These are just figments of dreamy caterpillars' imaginations. When my life as a

*continued next page*

caterpillar has come to an end, I'll turn myself into a warm cocoon of silky threads. I just close my eyes and that's the end of my life. Over and out!"

"Oh no, caterpillar, you're really making a big mistake here. The cocoon is only a temporary stage. One day you'll break out of this cocoon, and fly away towards freedom."

"Sir, already now I am so incredibly magnificent. All my paws and hair are already in the right place. No, I just don't want to know. There is

no life after this life. And by the way, could you please excuse me? I'm starving after this conversation. It's just too much to swallow!"

Somewhat disappointed, our professor prepares his research report. His conclusion?

Caterpillars are like humans. There is a beautiful future for them, but they don't realise what is at stake. Wouldn't it be glorious if they only dared to reach out and believe in an eternal future!

# Half a century

## *a reflection on fifty years as the R.C.N.Z.*

**Cor Feyter**

There is a lot of interesting information in the yearbook of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. It shows, for instance, who the present and past ministers in each congregation are, the size of each session, membership statistics and a good idea of the range of activities in each congregation. Then, in a separate section, it gives detailed information

about all past and present ministers, including their ages and service records. Interesting reading, indeed! For the purposes of this article, however, I would like to refer to what is shown in the top line of the second page for each congregation: the date of its institution. Six of our present churches were instituted in 1953, with a seventh a couple of years later. So next year, the denomination will have been in existence for half a century.

### **Our institution no cultural reaction**

I had intended to start this series of articles with a review of the reasons why the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) were established, but that has already very effectively and in great detail been done by Dick Vanderpyl in his book, *Trust and Obey*. So if you are interested in the process that led to the establishment of our denomination, I suggest that you beg, borrow or otherwise obtain





a copy of *Trust and Obey* and make yourself familiar with it, particularly Chapter 5.

I quote a few lines from the first paragraph on page 72: "The principal consideration which led us to establish our Reformed Churches has been the following: although we found in New Zealand some orthodox Lutheran Churches, to our distress we were unable to find a church which is faithfully retaining the Scriptural Confessions of the Calvinistic Reformation... We have failed to find a clear maintenance of the Evangelical Truth of the Reformed Confessions."

You see, the RCNZ were not started because the early Dutch immigrants had trouble fitting into the NZ churches. Of course, that was widely alleged—an allegation which the foundation members of our churches (myself included) vehemently reject. No, the RCNZ were started because the early immigrants could not find an existing denomination which accepted, preached and upheld the Biblical truths they believed in. I have always regretted that it was necessary to add another denomination to the already large number of existing ones, but I am grateful that we did. It was the only responsible way to go. So, now that the RCNZ are approaching half a century of existence, I'd like to consider how well (and in some aspects not so well) we have done.

### Positives

For nearly half a century, the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ has been preached from our pulpits. That fact alone is ample justification for our existence. Despite the dire predictions that the churches would fold once the economic realities of having to support ministries and acquiring properties started to bite, we are still here, still in existence, well established and prospering. Undoubtedly, that is in no small part due to the single-minded commitment, determination, perseverance and sacrifice of the early church members. *Trust and Obey* is rightfully dedicated to them. And we also owe a lot to the vision and guidance of our church leaders, the ministers. I intend to deal with the role of ministers

in our churches next month, so we will pass them by for now. Brace yourselves, you ministers!

Another area where we have done well is in the training of our young people. We have taken that very seriously, as we should, being a covenant church. Many hours and resources, much time and energy have been spent in teaching the Bible and the doctrines of the church to its young people, first in Sunday school and then in catechism classes. A parallel organisation, the Calvinist Cadets and Calvinettes, teaches them to use their spare time and energy and their personal abilities in God-honouring ways. The pleasing result of all this instruction is that many of the young people who grew up in our churches have become communicant members, and a number of them are now office-bearers, or fill other positions of responsibility.

### Negatives

There are also a few areas where, I believe, we have not done as well as we could have. To this day, we have been unable to shake off the label, 'the Dutch Reformed Church', although all congregations used English within a very short time after institution. That label remains a convenient excuse for the population at large to dismiss us, but it has not stopped a number of people from other backgrounds from joining us or attending our worship services. Then, for our own benefit, our liturgical forms could have been reviewed and made more up-to-date, and the same can be said for the structure of our church government. And wouldn't it be great if we had a present day concise statement of our doctrines? Sort of a 20th (or 21st) century confession, specifically addressing to-

day's general godlessness, materialism and individualism.

By far the darkest blot in our copybook, however, is the disunity in the denomination. It appears to have started because different congregations were at one time being served by ministers from different church and cultural backgrounds. But I'm not really interested in how it started: how to stop it is what I would like to know, because nothing will dilute or cancel the message from any organisation quicker than apparent division. As the saying goes: united we stand, divided we fall. Instead of trying to be more effective in our task of preaching the Gospel, we have wasted time, energy and resources arguing with and scoring points off each other. Let's put things into perspective. People who refuse to acknowledge their Creator should be our targets, not those who celebrate or don't celebrate Christian feast days. People who deny the deity of Christ and the authority of the Bible are our enemies, not those who sing only Psalms in worship services or those who sing hymns as well. Surely, the great things we, as churches, have in common are much more important than the ones we disagree on. So, let's show that we are united in important matters, and stop judging each other in the not so important ones! (Col 2:16).

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## IN TOUCH

**S**ubscriptions to the IN TOUCH magazine are available. This is an opportunity for those interested who do not have access to or have joined a Cadet and Calvinette Club (Cadets and Calvinettes will continue to be supplied through their clubs). The cost is \$12 per year for four issues.

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

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



If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your SNZ12 (or SAU10), with your details, to the National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe, Auckland. (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)

## A feminine focus

# Teach us to pray...



Sally Davey

Prayer is something that is supposed to come easily and naturally to a Christian. After all, we talk freely with husband, children, friends—why not with God, our Maker, our most faithful friend? But we all know it is not as easy as that. We are quickly distracted, our thoughts wander. We seem unable to converse with God for longer than a few short minutes. Our prayers become long shopping-lists of items we'd like for ourselves or those near to us. We want more patience, better-behaved children, a more rewarding job, a new kitchen...On it goes. We become frustrated with the spiritual failings that such prayer represents. How can we improve? Who can teach us how to pray?

Well, there *is* someone who understands all this, and who has proved himself very helpful in this matter of prayer. Let me introduce him. Richard Pratt is a very interesting and versatile writer. He's a professor of Old Testament at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida (he's now in his late 40s). But he's also a Christian who has shown himself passionately interested in the problems we all have in living our daily lives for Christ. Pratt has been a pastoral, people-directed person from a young age: at only 18, he was serving as a pastoral assistant in a church in Virginia. He was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry at the age of 21. As a young student he worked as a night nurse, and once spent six months caring for an elderly man in his home until he died of cancer. The pages of all his books show him to be a man who cares deeply about people—they are full of illustrations of ways he has tried to help Christians in their daily walk with God.

His first book, *Every Thought Captive*, adapts the complex apologetic system of Cornelius van Til for the ordinary reader, showing us to how to defend and explain the Christian faith to our unbelieving friends. Another, more recent title, *He Gave Us Stories*, introduces us to the purpose, meaning and message of the Old Testament narratives. These parts of the Bible are so often misinterpreted and misapplied; and Pratt writes with the steady purpose of helping

us use them for deeper understanding of God's ways, and better service to Christ. His latest book, *Designed for Dignity*, lays out the central message of the Bible, showing us what God meant us to be, how sin marred us as God's image-bearers, how Christ restored that image, and how we are meant to live as God's witnesses in a sin-scarred world. He writes in a warm and friendly manner, clearly understanding the ways we need to have truth explained in a relevant, useful way. Pratt is a minister in the Presbyterian Church of America, and he has also served some years in a Christian Reformed Church while a student at Harvard University. His particular passion is to train students for the preaching ministry, so that they will be faithful preach-

ers and pastors—but the message in all his books is directed clearly at the needs of everyday Christians. As one reviewer has said, theological students have practical, personal spiritual questions too. Have you ever thought of that?

*Pray with Your Eyes Open*, Dr Pratt's second book, is a guide to prayer—a guide written by a man with a deep theological understanding of prayer (his doctoral dissertation was on the way the writer of Chronicles used royal prayers to convey his ideas for restoration in the post-exilic period). But his book also shows us his pastoral concern:

he wants to teach us what we are really doing when we pray, and how to do it. Pratt encourages us to pray with knowledge of what we are doing, and why; of Who we are praying to; of how to pray different kinds of prayer in different situations. He shows us what kinds of things to say, and why we should say them to God (so helpful for those of us who feel inarticulate in public prayer!). Above all, he uses Scripture to show us what prayer is like, and he uses Scripture, not only as a model for prayer, but also as a rich source of the right words and expressions to use in our communication with God. Pratt is a real teacher. Each chapter ends with an exercise in constructing a prayer illustrating the principles covered in the chapter. These are a simple, very clear way to learn the principles Pratt has taught in the

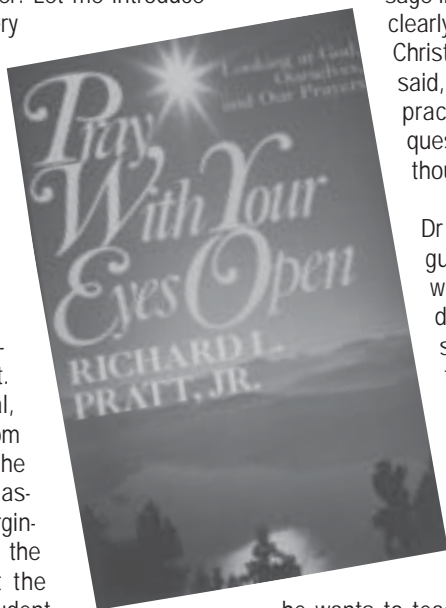
chapter. In doing them, you find yourself praying with much more clarity and purpose than you've done in a long time! Through the course of the book, Pratt introduces the reader to several different kinds of prayer—prayer which is both illustrated and taught in the pages of Scripture. The whole book abounds in lively personal illustrations of good prayer, bad prayer; and ways Dr Pratt has helped others learn to pray with purpose, vigour and reverence.

### The object of our prayer

The first thing Pratt asks us to do is to consider the *object* of our prayer. We need to ask ourselves *why* we pray, and what should be our attitude to God. As he puts it, we should look at God with the gaze of a "needy servant", one who realises how completely dependent he is upon Him. Failure to realise this results, he observes, in days too "busy" for time in prayer—living, in fact, as if we do not need God at all. Furthermore, he urges, our gaze should be an intense one, as described by the writer of Psalm 132: "*As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, a the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy.*" Pratt suggests one way to develop an intense gaze is to consider carefully the names we use to address God in prayer. The Bible provides countless possibilities. By choosing "Head of the Church", "Giver of life", "Father of the fatherless", "Our Mighty Fortress," instead of "Lord" (repeated ten times in the one prayer!), we focus our attention on Who God is, and what He does for us, His people. We should also be fascinated with God's character. We should work at ways to rekindle our love and amazement at Who and what our perfect God is. Prayer is an excellent way to do this. Simply telling God about the many ways He is wonderful, powerful, faithful and patient stirs our hearts to devotion. And this is precisely what the psalmists did. They piled metaphor upon metaphor to express their enthusiastic devotion to God in prayer. We should do the same. Consider Psalm 150, the last "praise" psalm: really, it is a list of the wonderful things God *is* and *has done!*

### The subject of our prayer

As well as being carefully-considered and well-constructed, Pratt teaches that our prayers



should also arise spontaneously from our daily situations. Our prayer should arise, fervently and directly, from our most soaring joys and deepest struggles in life. There are countless examples in Scripture of God's servants repairing to Him in prayer the instant they are afflicted, or shouting for joy to Heaven in thanks at their deliverance from some trouble. Again, we need to do the same. Even in between those times, when we wait in tiresome periods for God's help, we should pray, often, in expectation. Pratt encourages us to put our troubled thoughts, our discouragements and our disappointments into words in prayer. He shows us how to do this, with the words and model of Scripture. He notes that the psalmist (Ps22) puts the very details of the insults and mockery of the enemies of the Christ into his prayer. He does not simply say, "Lord, things are unbearable!" Of course, we should not sin in our prayer—anger and rebellious grumbling, covetousness and desire for personal revenge should be far from our prayer. But our God, who counts the very hairs on our heads, wants to hear us pouring out our troubles to Him.

We should also remember to tell God our joys. Pratt recalls a hospital chaplain telling him how the chapel at his hospital was often used as a haven by people coming to God in deep distress for their sick loved ones. How seldom, though, did this chaplain recall people coming to the chapel to thank God in joy for the recovery of the sick person! Remember how Jesus lamented that only *one* healed leper came back to thank Him? However, prayer can also *bring* us to a state of joy. Good prayer, in which believers remind themselves of the many, the countless truths concerning God's goodness, love and faithfulness, is a pattern in Scripture. There are many psalms that follow this pattern. Psalm 13, for instance, begins with the psalmist asking "*How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?*" But it ends with the joyful statement of "*trust in your unfailing love... I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.*" Pratt also uses Psalm 59 and 73 to demonstrate the point that reminding oneself, in believing prayer, of the ways God takes care of His people, are routes to the restoration of our faith, trust and joy.

### Prayer for others

How about intercessory prayer? This kind of prayer perhaps comes most easily to us, but we need useful instruction here as well. Many of us suffer from "shopping list" syndrome when it comes to prayer, and we need to guard against this tendency. But, of course, we should pray our petitions to God. We are to pray, specifically, for others and for ourselves.



Richard L. Pratt jnr

In dealing with the subject of petitions, one of the many helpful points Pratt makes is that of "building a case" before God. He is really developing the principle of the "importunate neighbour" in Jesus' parable in Luke 11, and of Abraham in Genesis 18, respecting the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. There is good reason, Pratt teaches, for building a series of persuasive arguments in prayer to God. We can beseech on the basis of His promises, or of His character. We can present a variety of humble and reverent arguments to our Father in prayer. However, we need to remember that this is not an occasion for arrogance—we are not telling God anything He does not know already! Likewise, once God has acted, we need to accept His holy and wise ordering of events humbly, just as David did when his son died as a

result of his sin. Pratt notes two benefits of this type of prayer. It helps us decide *what* to pray in times when we are unsure (eg. a hastily-gathered prayer meeting for a dangerously-ill church member). It also gives us the ability to spend longer periods of time in fruitful prayer. As he observes, "*Many Christians wish they could spend more time praying but find that their minds wander and their hearts grow weary after only a few minutes.*" He recalls a period

when he and the other leaders of a congregation gathered for extended prayer on a Friday evening and Saturday morning about once every three months. How were they able to pray for so long for a few specific items without resorting to long lists of concerns? By presenting extensive support for their petitions.

### The different ways

Pratt also considers the *ways* we communicate all of these things to God. In particular, he looks at the ways to establish a proper balance between form and freedom in prayer. He compares the relative merits of prepared, written prayers and free, spontaneous prayers. Both have their important uses, especially when it comes to leading in prayer in public occasions (whether a women's meeting, Sunday school class, Bible study or prayer group, etc.). I think this is a point really worth considering—I'm sure we have all suffered in embarrassment for someone who just cannot think of the words to use in public, when it would have helped them enormously to have (prayerfully) considered the words to use at home beforehand! We often tend to think of ourselves as churches belonging to a tradition of extempore prayer, as opposed to a church like the Anglicans, which recites prayers written in a prayer book. But did you know that Calvin often used written-down prayers in public worship? Pratt reminds us, however, to be careful not to let our love for either form or freedom get out of hand. Here is how he concludes:

One of the best ways to keep our prayers vibrant and meaningful is to vary between spontaneity and formality. We need to be able to use written prayers and to write our own prayers at times. Yet, we also need to know the freedom of spontaneous encounter with God, never forgetting that He hears us because of His grace at work in our hearts, not because of our eloquent words. As we develop the ability to approach prayer in both ways, we will find our communication with God growing in depth and wonder.

May your prayers be encouraged, made richer and more full of understanding by the help of this wise and godly man!

---

## That hour of darkness!

The clouds were gathering....  
Downpour of God's holy wrath  
On the beloved Son.

Accumulation of accumulations  
Fall out of evil peril  
Has begun.

Observe  
The sweating, agonizing Saviour  
The sleeping, slipping followers  
The sniper-traitor shooting out of  
hiding  
To plant a kiss of deadliest intent.

Ah, how the darkness deepens  
Its hues immensely stark!  
Walk through Gethsemane in spirit....  
Be still, my soul, and mark!

How shall I measure  
The immeasurable?  
How, and to what extent  
Fathom the way He went?

.....

And to His father, in obedience still,  
He said, "I've come to do Your will!"

**John Goris**

Wellington, Jan 2002

(Luke 22:39-53; 23:44)

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**Let's Understand our Times**  
**and know what we ought to do!**  
 (1 Chronicles 12 : 32)

## Books in focus

**God in Three Persons: Biblical Testimony to the Trinity**, by **Allen Vander Pol** (Reformed & Presbyterian, 2001, Price is around \$NZ13.50 from Geneva Books)

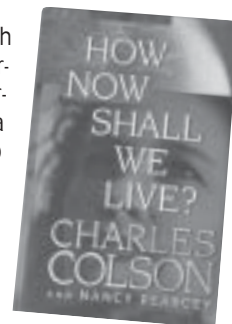
While the Rev. Allen Vander Pol was ministering among the Nelson congregation he mentioned that he would like to write a book some day. Well, it seems the encouragement he had then, and since, has resulted in this most helpful publication.



Not that it is a long work, mind you! But in its brevity it has its value. Starting with the Person of the Godhead revealed to us in person through Scripture - our Lord Jesus Christ - Allen covers the biblical material in support of the Trinity, and answers nine questions often asked about this in a concluding chapter. There are five chapters with discussion questions. They can be used profitably for new Christians in particular, and certainly for those from a cultic-sectarian background, but also as refresher for Adult Study groups.

**How Now Shall We Live?** by **Charles Colson** and **Nancy Pearcey** (Tyndale House Publishers, 1999. Price is around \$NZ34.95)

This is quite a larger book that Vander Pol's, with ten times as many pages. It is written quite differently, too, with many of Colson's 'stories' interspersed throughout. But it's actually based on a similar framework as Vander Pol's, for it is also trinitarian. With five parts - Worldview: Why It Matters; Creation: Where Did We Come From, And Who Are We?; The Fall: What Has Gone Wrong With The World; Redemption: What Can We Do To Fix It?; and Restoration: How Now Shall We Live? - we see a similar pattern to our Confessions of Faith, and their framework in the Trinity



The aim Colson sets forth in his 'introduction' is most laudable. He highlights that "The church's singular failure in recent decades has been the failure to see Christianity as a life system, or worldview, that governs every area of existence." He acknowledges that he has come to see this lack through theologians/philosophers such as Abraham Kuyper and Francis Schaeffer. Indeed, his co-author, Nancy Pearcey, was herself involved in L'Abri in the early 1970's and credits the Schaeffer's with being used by the Lord in a special way for her conversion and subsequent Christian life.

The aim of the authors means that this is no Catechism textbook. It uses the testimony of believers from through church history, and across the world, to show how we need to whole world-and-life view, and what a blessing that is, and would be if you didn't have it. Examples range from throughout human history and from across the world, and, though we might not be happy with some these (the leaning of Colson evident in the Evangelicals & Catholics Together memorandum shows though a number of times), it is a good and easy read. In an age when reading is becoming neglected, particularly amongst men, it is a useful tool. In fact, a number of mature Christian men have trawled through it already and most warmly recommend it. I would certainly recommend it for Men's and Women's Studies, Prayer Breakfasts, and the like. This sounds very much along the lines of the World-View Conference being organised for Auckland within the next month or so.

Apparently there is a Study Guide and possible video to go with it but no Christian bookshop was able to help me with that.

**Reviewed by the Editor**

# Samuel – is it possible to help him?

## *the second part to the story of Samuel*

**John Steenhof**

Part of my disbelief that Samuel could be helped, stemmed from a life-long inability to get my mind into a new situation. Even as a child this problem of doubt plagued me. I used to fish early in the cool Canadian early mornings in the dark, wondering whether indeed it would ever get light or brrrrrr... just warm. When after a long time of shivering, the sun broke in warmth over the horizon, it provided a great sense of genuine surprise as well as relief. Long before meeting the sceptic Scottish philosophers such as Hume, I myself was a sceptic about the universal repetitive and reliability of God's world. Just from this point of view, it was easy to see why I just could not get my mind out of the darkness that Samuel was in, and believe that the sun could ever rise on his situation.

But this skepticism had other factors. One was Samuel's age combined with nasty habits that build up over the years. Samuel was now in his early 60's, and as we all know, "*You can't teach an old dog new tricks.*" How would someone so solidified in his habits ever change? But then again, Samuel was not a dog.

And then I thought of biology. My mind reflected on inert and unchangeable genetic programmes, one bundle which was standing before us in the form of Samuel. What apart from a switch in genetic codes could change this man? Perhaps his "unchangeable" genes had programmed him from birth to be "low class". Maybe another proof of the incredible mechanistic determinism found in determinant cells of protoplasm. A Richard Dawkins delight!

But this incredulity of mine, mostly was cemented in a complete lack of focus on the grace of God at that moment. I should have been singing, "*Grace, grace, sweet grace, grace that is greater than all my sin.*" I should have reminded myself, "*C'mon John, this is the mercy of God is bigger than 'nature' and/or 'nurture'.*" Even habits that had been nurtured for so long.

Yet even though our hearts were not overflowing with expectation, we began to talk with Samuel.

As we sat in the dark living room of Samuel, he seemed to feel quite free to share with us. To our surprise, He was a Scot raised up in a Godly Presbyterian family. So much for the theory of bad genes. He had a praying mother, who was often on her knees for him. But for some reason unknown to us he had left the faith. I imagined his mother praying for all those years when he went astray, and never seeing

fruit of this labour on her knees.

He unfolded to us how he had a live-in partner for the last number of years, and raised a daughter with her, who was now grown up and independent. His partner and his daughter had left him and now he was living alone without a job. He had a hard job to pay the rent and pay for living expenses. While we did not know for sure, we began to wonder whether her exit was related to his drinking.

He repeated that he felt that he was not a great guy, and certainly not the kind of fellow who could go to church. We tried to explain that God's grace was for sinners, but this answer seemed to provide only a kind of temporary relief. Besides he seemed uncomfortable when he changed the subject. In any case he didn't appear fully ready to believe the answer. Or we were not very good expositors of God's grace.

a flat. Without too much prodding, he was more than willing for this to happen. Thank you Lord! (Yes, I am Reformed!)

Alice and I left the house very happy, and thankful to the Lord, indeed that Samuel was willing to connect with the church. He seemed open and willing beyond expectation to allow the church to help him. For that we were thankful. That may seem small to some, but knowing the independent Scottish temperament, a willingness to receive, was indeed God's gift. We rejoiced in the grace of God and the fact that Samuel's heart so far seemed open.

But we were determined that this time, evangelism was not to be "our work" alone. It would also have to be the work of the church. We believed that if Samuel was to be a part of our church, our church had to be a part in helping Samuel. And this scared us. How well would they respond? This kind of care for a person



We both, without consulting each other moved into the territory of trying "deeds before words". We asked him if he would allow us to arrange to have the power turned back on, with the help of an anonymous donor. When he hesitated, we were in one way thankful as it showed he was not a free-loader. But we were relieved when after some reassurance, he was willing to accept. At the same time we asked if a deacon could come in and discuss his finances with him, to get things straightened out, and perhaps assist him to move into

off the street was not something they were used to. The Lord in His grace was not to leave us alone in this work. There was a great response.

A donor paid for the cost of power, so soon after the power came back on in Samuel's house. Then along came the office bearers. With the help of our deacon, Eric Valk, Samuel was soon budgeting his money. After some discussion with those in the know on finances, a For Sale sign appeared in front of his house. Having a number of other people on

the lookout, we obtained a flat in Silverstream, and it wasn't too long before Samuel moved in.

The ladies fitted him out with all the various supplies needed for his house. While my wife took the lead, it was much more a combined effort than we anticipated. Soon his flat had that cosy lived in feeling.

Without the help of all those in Silverstream this would never have been possible..

Soon Samuel was a familiar "landmark" in Silverstream. We would see him at the stores, standing on the bridge by the school, in the school, and around the church. It seemed that Samuel was and always had been a part of the furniture. Since he had smoked all his life, his walks were punctuated by frequent stops to catch his breath. Since one of these stops was often at the bridge by the Christian School, the children would often talk to him there. He took an interest in the children and their lives, and they would quickly sense that. They loved nattering with him.

I remember one day, having just arranged the song, "Scotland the Brave" on the computer for Samuel. The bagpipes on our sound module resounded with Samuel's homeland anthem. I cannot forget the glint in his eye when he sauntered upstairs to hear this song, arranged just for him. It almost looked like Samuel was going to throw on a kilt and start dancing.

With all these deeds of love toward Samuel, a barrier to the gospel seemed to evaporate. All sorts of little natural opportunities to informally teach presented themselves. He was definitely much much more receptive to the gospel. Barry and Ann James were able to take him under their wing, and instruct him on many matters. But much of his "instruction" came via little moments with a variety of people.

Samuel could now walk to our church, just around the corner from his flat. Soon Samuel was faithfully attending church every Sunday. He took a strong interest in the things of the Lord and asked many questions. We had an old familiar seat for him, next to myself and my wife, which became his personal domain. Either he would hold the row for us, or we would hold the seat for him. There is no doubt that for the first while at church Samuel had a musty smell, which seemed to be a mixture of smoke and alcohol.. sometimes it took at least 15 minutes for your nose to accustom itself to the smell.

He also put an end to my private peppermint moments. I used to pride myself on the ability to sneak a peppermint in my mouth without even my good wife noticing. (Yes I still listened to the sermon.) Anyway, once Samuel started coming, this ruse ended. Since he now sat beside me, it behooved me to share with him. Every time I gave him a peppermint, he would loudly whisper, so anyone within five meters could hear. This attracted far too much

attention "Thank you". There went my little private peppermint moments.

Sometimes the changes in Samuel seemed slow and all too gradual. Often times with a story in mind like the prodigal son, there can be a dominating expectation of sudden change. We expect sudden conversion with more compelling instant change. This was not to be the

case with Samuel.

At times we would revert to our original "old dog-unchangeable genetic protoplasm" evaluation of Samuel. But gradually a very real, and permanent change became clearly perceptible. Next time we will relate how two key families were used by God to help facilitate the spiritual change in Samuel.

## World news

### Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag joins Dr. Joel Beeke

Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag was ordained Sept 14, 2001 as the second pastor of the 850-member Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan. A graduate of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and a former ruling elder of Jordan, Ontario, VanderZwaag served as the principal of a Christian school for many years.

Dr. Joel Beeke will continue to preach for the congregation five times per month. The bulk of Dr. Beeke's time, however, will now be devoted to work at the expanding Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) and outreach through foreign and domestic conferences, teaching at seminaries and on mission fields, and writing.

PRTS presently has 20 ministerial students, and offers both the M.A.R. and M.Div. degrees. The M.Div. degree is a rigorous four-year program that stresses knowledge of the original languages, careful exegesis,

thorough grounding in systematic theology, and especially, Reformed experiential preaching in the Puritan tradition.

+ Rev. Dr. Joel R Beeke, 2917 Leonard St. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505 (616) 977-0599 jrbeeke@aol.com

### Are we bluffing in Sudan?

Brad Phillips of the Persecution Project Foundation was involved in food and medical aid distribution in the oil field areas of southern Sudan the second week of December. He reports that fighting between the Sudan government forces and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army was intense, with hundreds of casualties, and relief flights were suspended.

The hostilities give the lie to the ceasefire negotiated by Sen. John Danforth in late November, according to John Garang, head of the SPLA. Dr. Garang also said that Khartoum has "called the bluff of American policymakers," by continuing its practice of terrorizing, killing and enslaving civilians in the south, despite America's words of condemnation.

+ Brad Phillips, PPF, Warrenton, Virginia, (540) 341-8578: [www.persecutionproject.org](http://www.persecutionproject.org)

### Betrayed by the U.N.

Over 500 southern Sudanese refugees in Syria were arrested in early December, Sudanese church officials say, and will doubtless be deported to Sudan. The arrests were ordered by the U.N. Chief of Mission when the Sudanese turned to the United Nations for protection against a forced return to Sudan.

Women and children were released after the first day, but 148 men remain incarcerated, sources say.

The Sudanese church officials say the arrests came as Syria and the U.N. cooperate with the government of Sudan to force the return of all Sudanese nationals living in Syria.

"The Sudanese had fled to Syria in hope of escaping the genocidal jihad being waged against Black African Sudanese by the National Islamic Front regime," Church Alliance for a New Sudan coordinator Faith McDonnell explained. "For five years they have been appealing to the U.N. for asylum, but as is so frequently the case with Christians seeking protection from religious persecution, they have been denied protection by the United Nations." + Faith McDonnell, CANS (Institute on Religion and Democracy): (202) 969-8430; [fmcdonnell@ird-renew.org](mailto:fmcdonnell@ird-renew.org)

### God at work in Indonesia

The dramatic deliverance Dec. 1 of some 60,000 Christian villagers and refugees in Sulawesi from immediate harm by the Muslim paramilitary group, Laskar Jihad, is said to be a clear answer to prayer.

The Laskar Jihad, arriving in central Sulawesi to settle an old score, had promised a bloody Christmas, and terrified Christians throughout the Poso region retreated inland to Tentena.

Some fled there because terrorists drove them out of their homes; whole villages were burned or leveled with bulldozers. Steve Snyder of International Christian Concern reported that Islamic villages were untouched while Christian villages were razed, and noted that the Christian peasants don't own bulldozers.

Several Indonesian cabinet ministers investigated and demanded government action. At the end of November, Prime Minister Mega-

wati Sukarnoputri sent 4,000 troops to Poso to prevent bloodshed, and there has been no massacre. Regional politicians have brought Christian and Muslim militia leaders together to talk peace, although that result may be unlikely.

It may be Megawati's conscience that wants to protect the Christians or it may be awareness of the proximity of U.S. Special Forces advisors in adjacent parts of the Philippines (where they are helping root out the Abu Sayyaf kidnapers).

However, the Jakarta Post reported Dec. 20 that "Vice President Hamzah Haz insisted that foreign intervention was not needed to solve the Poso conflict." Apparently he thought insistence was necessary.

Similarly, local governments in Java - the Indonesian island most visible to the watching world - are acting to prevent church bombings at Christmas. Churches are tightly guarded today in Jakarta, Bandung and other places. Bombing threats were credible because there were 500 church bombings in Java in 1998.

Also, the Indonesian military is very pragmatic. In Maluku (the Molucca Islands) where the Laskar Jihad holds overwhelming numerical superiority, the government military has collaborated with the Islamic paramilitary force in driving the Christians out. However, in the Aceh area in Sumatra, the military outnumbers the Islamic rebels and kills them there at will.

In Sulawesi, direct involvement of government members and international media attention led to effective military action. [GN]

## India's Dalits are asking for Bibles

Thousands of Dalits (Untouchables) are asking for Bibles as a result of the huge public rally in New Delhi Nov. 4.

Bibles for the World's John Pudaite reports, "Over a half a million New Testaments have been requested as well as hundreds of the thousands of copies of the Gospels of John. We're seeing the people are tremendously open. We're talking about this as the rally heard around the world."

+ Rochunga Pudaite, *Bibles for the World*, [bftw@crosswalkmail.com](mailto:bftw@crosswalkmail.com), [www.biblesfortheworld.org](http://www.biblesfortheworld.org); *Mission Network News*, *Christian Aid Mission*, Charlottesville, Virginia., [www.christianaid.org](http://www.christianaid.org)., via James Ferrier, HCJB Radio, [jferrier@hcjb.org](mailto:jferrier@hcjb.org).

## Special forces arrive in the Philippines

US Special Forces arrived in the Philippines Dec. 14 to help the local armed forces rescue American missionaries Martin and Gracia Burnham from the ransom-oriented insurgent group Abu Sayyaf.

The group has been linked to al Qaeda, and the Philippines is working with the United States to control terrorism. An unspecified

number of US soldiers arrived at Edwin Andrews air base, near Zamboanga city in the southern Philippines.

Lt. Gen. Roy Cimatu said Dec. 13 troops were closing in on the faction holding the Burnhams and he hoped to rescue them in a few days. "We hope and pray we will really attain this objective," he said. BBC news, 12-14-2001, [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk).

## Daring to link al Qaeda to Laskar Jihad

According to the Jakarta Post, Indonesia's intelligence chief would not name the international terrorist group that he said Dec. 12 was involved in recent clashes between Muslims and Christians on Sulawesi island.

"Poso has become a ground for an international terrorist (group) and a local radical group," A.M. Hendropriyono told reporters. He refused to name it. "If I mentioned it, I wouldn't be an intelligence officer," he said.

However, BBC reported, without elaboration, "Confirmation that al Qaeda members have been fighting on the island of Sulawesi came in a statement from the head of the National Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. A.M. Hendropriyono."

Mounting tensions in central Sulawesi prompted Jakarta to send 2,000 extra troops ten days ago to prevent a possible massacre of Christian villagers in the Tentena area. Two weeks ago, police in Poso detained but then released three reputed al Qaeda representatives. There is some concern that Laskar Jihad, an Indonesian Islamic paramilitary force, may provide a haven for al Qaeda units fleeing Afghanistan.

+ Jakarta Post, 12-12-2001, [www.thejakartapost.com](http://www.thejakartapost.com); BBC Online, 12-12-2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

## Salvation Army in Moscow

The Salvation Army in Moscow has lost its initial appeal of a court ruling in favor of the Moscow city government's legal effort to liquidate the organization. The SA has legal standing with the national government, so it is unclear how the court order may be effected.

+ Religion Today Summaries, 12-14-2001.

## A bang-up New Year's in Indonesia

At midnight New Year's Eve, bombs exploded in Palu, on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, damaging the Indonesian Christian Church (a Presbyterian congregation), an Adventist church, and the Ekklesia Pentecostal Church. Witnesses said men on motorcycles threw the bombs.

Hundreds were meeting in the churches at the time, but there were no fatalities. Church leaders credited God with protecting the con-

gregations. However, a fourth blast on the morning of Jan. 1 killed two policemen who were trying to defuse a bomb found at another Pentecostal church across town.

Palu, the capital of central Sulawesi province, has been gripped by renewed tensions since November when the Muslim Laskar Jihad militia attacked Christian villages, killing at least nine people and sending scores of thousands fleeing through the forest.

The explosions come less than two weeks after a peace pact was signed by Christian and Muslim leaders, and just days after warring sides had begun surrendering weapons ahead of an official police roundup of arms.

+ Agence France Press, via Times of India, 1-1-2002; <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>; Masariku Network, East Indonesia Update, 1-3-2002; Ian Freestone, [ian@rnc.org.au](mailto:ian@rnc.org.au); [malukuwashdc@aol.com](mailto:malukuwashdc@aol.com); Dr. Jeff Hammond, [jeffhammond@bigpond.com](mailto:jeffhammond@bigpond.com).

## Christians rotting in jail in Saudi Arabia

Arrested between July and September, 14 Christian men who are citizens of other countries are still in custody in Jeddah, Saudi Ara-



## WILLEM Borgdorff

1929-2001

*Gone to be with his Lord,  
29 December 2001*

*Devoted and much loved  
husband of the late Nel,  
who went to the Lord,  
21 February 2000*

*Though with hearts of sadness,  
we thank the Lord that he saw fit  
to take our beloved father and  
Opa from his illness and loss, to  
be with Him in glory.*

Jan (Egypt)  
Connie and John (Dunedin)  
- Shane, Rachel and Thomas  
Dick and Cate (Wellington)  
- Grace and Matthew  
Wilma and Rob (Nelson)

*"Your grace is  
sufficient for me."*

bia, without any formal charges filed.

They are believed to be held because of involvement in expatriate house churches.

On Christmas Eve, nine of the Jeddah 14 were moved to a deportation prison and told they would be released soon. However, International Christian Concern learned Dec. 31 that talk of release was misleading and that the prisoners might be held for months. Conditions are unhealthy and dangerous in the Saudi facilities.

+ Steve Snyder, ICC, [iccusa@home.net](mailto:iccusa@home.net); via ChristianNet World, [ChristianNet@christianet.org](mailto:ChristianNet@christianet.org).

## China to execute pastor

Human rights groups are urging US President George W. Bush to protest China's planned execution of pastor Gong Shengliang, founder of the South China Church.

Freedom House and the Committee for Investigation of Persecution of Religion in China made the appeal Jan. 3.

Mr. Gong's legal appeal of his death sentence was considered by the Supreme Court of Hubei province Jan. 5, and he was granted an extended period to appeal further. Sources in Beijing said that Gong's reprieve was due "in a significant measure" to the pressure exerted by US Government and Congressional sources, as well as swift publicity by agencies such as Compass Direct and Freedom House.

Mr. Gong, 46, was sentenced to death Dec. 30 after the Intermediate People's Court of Jingmen, a city in Hubei, found him guilty of using a cult to undermine the enforcement of law. He and 16 other church leaders were arrested last summer after government authorities classified the church as an evil cult.

Mr. Gong was also accused of injuring 14 people during church rituals involving exorcism. In addition to Mr. Gong, four other church leaders, including his niece, Li Ying, were sentenced to death, but their sentences were suspended.

Members who confessed to being raped have withdrawn what they now report was forced testimony made under torture, saying that they were stripped and beaten by local Hubei police in what appears to be a frame-up.

Mr. Gong established the South China Church as a splinter sect of the Total Scope Church, the Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy said. Such groups typically espouse a Bible-believing variety of Christianity and operate in defiance of laws requiring Protestants to worship only in state-controlled churches. The church grew over a decade and has 50,000 members spread across 10 provinces in eastern and central China.

+ James Ferrier, 1-5-2002, HCJB World Radio, [jferrier@hcjb.org](mailto:jferrier@hcjb.org); (719) 590-9800; [www.hcjb.org](http://www.hcjb.org); via ChristianNet World, [ChristianNet@christianet.org](mailto:ChristianNet@christianet.org); ICHRD, Beijing; Associated Press, 12-30-2001.

## Our churches in focus

***This column is dependent upon the contributions sent by those appointed within your congregation to submit regular reports to Faith in Focus. So if you haven't read anything about your church recently, it will be because we have not received any letters— whether email or postal—from that person.***

die is gain. Yet death is still the last enemy, and it always seems a sad thing to have to write about departed members.

Over the last few months, we have lost three members in this manner. Jo de Groot and Gerrit ("Pa") Lubbers passed away after extended periods of illness, and most recently, Theo Lubbers. Mrs de Groot left no relatives, but the



*The Klazinga family. Left to right: Jim, Irene, Julie, Caleb (on Julie's lap), Naomi (at the back), Josh, Ben and Micah.*

With the acceptance by the Rev. Jim Klazinga of the call to Christchurch, we are blessed with the presence of recent ministers from North America in each of our Presbyteries. So to the Rev. Leo de Vos in Wainuiomata, the Rev. Dale Piers in Pukekohe, and the Rev. Jim Klazinga in Christchurch, we extend our warmest antipodean greetings, and very much pray that the Lord will bless your respective ministries.

Now while we have four ministers from North America, most of our ministers are from—guess where? (No need to send in your answer, but it will illustrate for you that we need to keep encouraging suitable men from our congregations to enter the ministry!)

With the recent acceptances of calls, the number of vacancies has decreased—now Avondale, Foxton, and Masterton are presently without a minister.

## Christchurch news

I don't know who came up with this ironic quote, but I thought it fairly deep: "Everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to die." As Christians, we acknowledge that we attain our immortality through death. To live is Christ; to

Lubbers clan, which now mourns its losses, is quite sizeable.

God in His providence has also blessed us with new life: a second son, Jesse, born to Carl and Georgette Janssen. Jesse is our first baby in a year and a half.

And we were able to celebrate the gift of marriage, that of Erik de Boer and Jacky Willemsse. A number of other weddings have also taken place in our building over the last few months, but I leave these to be reported on by my counterparts in Bishopdale and Dovedale – to whom these glad tidings rightfully belong.

Late last year, we bade farewell to the Baynes. David Bayne had decided to pursue certain opportunities that had arisen for him in our denominational "nearest neighbour," the Evangelical Presbyterian Church here in Christchurch. Besides the "ordinary" contributions to our congregational life, their departure has also deprived us of our chairman of Session, Catechism teacher, Sunday School teacher, and (in my opinion) a bunch of interesting people. The silver lining is that Presbyterian has granted our request to allow David to continue to preach in our congregations from time to time.



Not only do we find ourselves two ministers down from this time last year, but by some magical collusion of events, two-thirds of our remaining office bearers have come to the end of their term just now. We were hard pressed to replace them all, so it was high time for the good news which came to us in the form of Rev Jim Klazinga's acceptance of our call for him to serve as our minister of the Word and Sacraments.

We anticipate the arrival of Jim, Julie, and their six children around the middle of March – about a year after we became “vacant”. They come to us from the United Reformed Church in the little town of Telkwa, somewhere in the icy hinterlands of British Columbia, where they have dwelt among moose and dreamt about sunbans. When we, and the Reformed Church of Masterton, expressed interest, Jim was gracious enough to come and visit us immediately subsequent to the birth of his youngest son. Although he has a Frisian name, (Sjirk – couldn't this be offensive to some?) the session and congregation considered he would fit in well, and consequently the call was extended. At the time of writing, the Klazingas are endeavouring to extract visas out of New Zealand's High Commissioner in Ottawa.

The last thing I shall mention in this newsletter is the impending synod. At present, all our sessions around the country will be sharing with us in the joy of considering synodical reports. What makes this synod special for our congregation is that this time, we are the hosts. Although to date the preparatory work that has been going on has been pretty much hidden from view, I expect in the next month or two the logistical implications will start to hit home as more and more people get pressed into service by our organising committee. In a secret recess of my mind, I think it may actually prove to be an enjoyable project... but we'll see!

- Ed. Havelaar

## Short Report of Wellington Presbytery (2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2001)

Wellington Presbytery met at the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> & Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2001. Rev. Paul Archbald chaired the meeting, which was represented by all the Presbytery Churches including representatives from the Wanganui Home Mission group, and the Foxton congregation, both of whom were members of the Palmerston North delegation. Also attending the Presbytery meeting were Reverends D van Garderen & M Flinn, as Synodical examiners, and visiting ministers Rev. Harry Hoving, Rev Jim Klazinga (of the URCNA) and Rev Jan Lion-Cachet (of the

RCSA).

The primary agenda item on Friday evening was the Colloquium Doctum of Rev. L de Vos, minister elect to the Wainuiomata Congregation. Questions on the subjects of Dogmatics, Christian Ethics, Symbolics and Church Order were put to Rev. de Vos by Revs. Archbald, Hoyt, Goris and Kavanagh respectively before the Synodical Delegates were also granted the opportunity to ask questions. After a brief review of the answers given by Rev. de Vos, Presbytery was pleased to be able announce to Rev. de Vos and the assembled guests that the Colloquium Doctum had been sustained, for which the Moderator led in a prayer of thanks.

Rev. Jim Klazinga, who had the previous weekend sustained a preliminary Colloquium Doctum from Christchurch Presbytery, was introduced to Presbytery, after which he gave some personal detail including how he was led into the Ministry in the United Church of North America. A period of general questions from the delegates followed, during which Rev. Klazinga gave a positive account of his calling and work in the ministry.

Article 47 questions were put to Wellington, who responded with a most positive report on the life within the congregation, and particularly of the progress being made to establish a preaching outreach on the Kapiti Coast. Palmerston North also responded positively concerning the congregational life of the congregation, and reported that they were supporting the entry of Br David Waldron into study for the ministry. On behalf of Presbytery, Brs. J Leenders & Rev. Hoyt led in prayer for the needs of, and gave thanks for, the Lord's blessings in the Wellington & Palmerston North Congregations respectively.

Church visitation reports were received from visits paid to Hastings and Wellington, with clarification sought on the level of remuneration to the Church Counsellor of a vacant church. It was noted (spelled out sounds a bit harsh to me) that the practice had been for the Counsellor to inform the vacant church session of his expenses, so these could be paid.

Wellington reported in more detail on developments of Church planting activity in the Waikanae area, and of the contact made with Rev. Jan Lion-Cachet from the RCSA of Port Elizabeth. Rev. Lion-Cachet addressed Presbytery, bringing greetings from the RCSA, before briefly explaining how he had received calls for help to serve a significant South African immigrant community on the Kapiti Coast. The greetings carried by Rev. Lion-Cachet were reciprocated by Presbytery.

Vacant Church Counsellor Reports were given for Wainuiomata by Rev. Archbald, and for Masterton by Rev. Hoyt. Both reports were received.

A report by Wellington on events, developments and progress toward reconciliation within the Reformed Church of Foxton, covering the

period July to November 2001, was considered in closed session. Presbytery received the report, and were also thankful to receive a positive statement from the Foxton elders, from which Presbytery issued the following statement.

**The Foxton Elders reiterated that there were never matters that should have rendered Rev. Ed Rademaker unsuitable for the Ministry, or presently detract from his good standing as a Minister in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.**

Rev. Hoyt expressed a work of joy and encouragement at the level of reconciliation that has been achieved within Presbytery over the past three months, and thanked God for his grace towards us. Rev. Archbald thanked all the delegates for their contribution to the meeting before leading in closing prayer.

**Leen Vandenberg**

*Stated Clerk*

## LETTER TO EDITOR

Re: USED STAMPS

It's time for an update.

I would like to say a sincere thank-you to all those who faithfully send used stamps to me as a fundraiser for our Overseas Missions Board.

I get about \$14 per kilo of stamps from the dealer so the more that come in the better. If you have not collected stamps for this cause before, perhaps you'd like to start now.

The dealer has requested that you do not soak the stamps off but that you send them with about 1cm of paper around the stamp to avoid damage. Some of you do a beautiful job of trimming stamps from envelopes but if you don't have time, I'm happy to take what comes just the same.

You can contact me at 06 3797551 and 15, Parker Rd., RD1, Carterton.

If it's easier for you to sell the stamps yourself please make a cheque out to 'Overseas Missions Board'.

*Thank-you again for your support,*

**Mrs Gill Goodin**

**Advertise your Happenings  
and Church events in**

**Faith in Focus**

## Missions in focus

### An Interview with Alex & Renona Munro

(conducted by John Goris)

**Question:** Alex, How long since you last visited New Zealand? What did you find the hardest adjustment to mission work in Eastern Europe?

Renona and I last visited New Zealand about 4 years ago. After working for 26 years in the Philippines as church planters in 1995, we took up a new challenge of culture, language and church-planting ministry in Ukraine. Learning to adjust to a new culture so different from the Asian one we were used to, and to the cold winter, was difficult, but once we were there we found the Ukrainian people warm-hearted. We learned that the Ukrainian people had suffered very much during the decades of Communist oppression, including the 1934 Stalin-induced famine that resulted in the unimaginable death of over six million men, women and children. We were able to begin a new congregation, and begin leadership training. Today, that congregation is firmly established as a member of the Ukrainian Presbyterian Church. We still go to the Transcarpathia area of Ukraine, and work with people from the Hungarian Reformed Church in training church planters.

**Question:** What would you consider the greatest need in Eastern Europe as far as the Gospel is concerned?

In 1996, we were loaned by Christian Reformed World Missions to the Bible League as director for Eastern Europe. We have focused on Scripture placement and church-planter training in Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Macedonia, and Hungary. Because these nations as a whole did not experience the Reformation, or even a widespread Protestant movement, there is a great need for the Church to model the Kingdom of God. The Church needs to build bridges to the lost and needy, and proclaim the Gospel in

Word, work and character. It is not possible to say what is the greatest need over all, as individual nations have different needs. Romania has hundreds of orphanages, and needy orphans. Bosnia needs Scripture translation that speaks to its own people, and like the Albanian Muslims of Kosovo, they equate Christianity with the Serb Orthodox population who have been their oppressors. Many of these nations have few churches. I would say that the production of Scriptures and training people in its use and knowledge, and training Church leaders to have a vision and a program to start new churches in the thousands if towns

and villages without a Christian witness, is of prime importance. How will these precious men, women and children, many of them ravaged by ignorance and sin, ever come to know the love of Christ unless a family (congregation) of the Lord Jesus Christ is begun among them?

**Question:** You have also been in the Middle East: how would you describe the response to the gospel there?

In the last few years, we have been co-ordinating the Bible League ministry in the Middle East. We work with nationals in four of these nations, and there is a great response to the Gospel, and a great response by the Christians to have an agency to give them vision and to train them for starting new congregations. In Egypt, our partners planted over 200 new congregations last year, and in Jordan, 20. In Libya, there is not yet even one congregation made up of Libyan people, and that in a land of about 6 million people! In Jordan recently, Iraqi Christians asked me to come to Baghdad and help train them to be church planters. There is a hunger for training and for universal fellowship in Christ, and a hunger by the lost for a knowledge of true peace and salvation wherever God's people are motivated to seek the lost. It is important that we in the West work together with the national Christians that are already established in a nation rather than going it alone, as they know the language and culture already, and will remain on to continue the work Christ has given to them.

**Question:** What could people in the RCNZ do for the people in those areas? Is there scope for Short Term Mission work?

A good way for a Christian in New Zealand to help people in these areas is first to have an awareness of the general and church situation of a nation, and then choose one or more of those nations as a area for interest and prayer. Without awareness, there can be no vision or information that can lead to transformation in the pray-er and in the people being prayed for. There is the need to subscribe to periodicals of Missions or agencies that can supply regular information and prayer items. With a prayerful concern, there is the need for finances. There are many projects or needs that mission agencies can supply to help a giver decide how he or she could assist in this important way. Churches need to hold regularly before their congregations the wider mission

of the Church, and place before young people the wonderful challenge and urgency of Missions. Today's missions include almost all varieties of occupations to promote the ministry of God's Kingdom, including preparing programs for satellite communications, and, like the good Samaritan, binding the wounds of the broken-hearted. Among others, the Bible League in New Zealand can help in giving information about needs and planned giving to missions. We do not have a specific programme for short term workers, but if someone with a missions heart would like to come with me to a training session in a country when I go, I would be happy to have them "come and see," and relate with the nationals we are working with.

**Question:** Are you planning to go back to Europe/Asia/Africa, the Lord willing, and do you have a similar programme in mind?

One of my ministries is as a trainer of trainers of church planters in a number of countries. I will continue this work. At present we are working in Romania, Ukraine and Middle East counties. This is a great work, and I know we are very privileged to be involved in it. Personally, we would prefer to be in a local setting working in the beginning of a new congregation, but we believe God has called us to this probably more strategic ministry of training others. We see ourselves not as presenters of material, but as "builders of lives"—in this case, building into the lives of church planters the knowledge, the skills, and the character that will help them develop into becoming, and continuing to be, good church planters, whose purpose it is to bring those prepared by the Holy Spirit into fellowship with Christ and His Church.

We close by saying how much Renona and I and our two adult children (Roderick and Janelle), have appreciated over many years the prayers and encouragement of so many caring members of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. Without that kind of support, we could not hope to have been blessed by God in our lives and in the lives of others. Together we can say with Paul, "We proclaim Christ, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end we labour..."



Janice Reid

# From the D.A.'s Office

## Archives Statement of Policy & Procedures

And now the fifth instalment of the Archives Statement of Policy and Procedures, "Procedures".

### PROCEDURES

#### A. Generation of archival materials

When a member leaves a position or office, the file shall be kept intact for reference during the following term (or four years). At the end of this time, the file shall be sent to the archives. The archivist shall solicit copies of all relevant material for the historical records:

Minutes of meetings - committees, publications, lectures etc.

To ensure the preservation of such materials, the archivist should visit the various churches, to assist members in selecting such materials for preservation. These materials shall be sent to the archives on a regular basis, preferably annually. The archivist shall produce an inventory of the material and acknowledge receipt of it.

#### B. Use of archival materials

##### 1. Research use

The following guidelines shall be observed by researchers, whether members or other individuals:

- (a) Permission to use the archives shall be obtained from the archivist; in case of doubt, the decision may be referred to the administrative secretary.
- (b) Each researcher shall fill out a form stating the purpose of the research and the records to be consulted.
- (c) The use of certain documents may be restricted by statute, office, origin or by request of the donor; the researcher may quote from these documents only with permission of the archivist and with due reference to the source, that is, the denominational archives of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.
- (d) No one except authorised persons may enter the stack area; ordinarily, the archivist will bring requested material to the research area.
- (e) As a general rule, no letter, memorandum, or document written by a person still living, may be quoted, paraphrased or used in any way without the consent of the author.
- (f) The researcher shall assume full responsibility for conforming to the laws of libel and literary property rights which may be involved in the use of manuscripts and other archival materials.

#### C. Handling of archival materials

- (a) Records shall be handled with care; they shall not be traced or marked upon. Therefore, no carbon, ink, or ballpoint pens are permitted in the research area - pencils will be made available.
- (b) If permission is given for reproduction of materials, the process shall be done by the archivist at an established cost per sheet or page; a reproduction is provided solely for the convenience of examining the manuscript and must be returned upon completion of the research. The reproduction may not be further reproduced, examined, or transferred elsewhere without prior permission. Permission to reproduce material does not constitute permission to publish.
- (c) If permission is given for the use of material for publication, two copies of the publication should be sent to the denominational archives. A thesis or dissertation is considered a publication.
- (d) No book, document, manuscript, or item may be removed from the archives.

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#### IN MEMORIAM – Willem Borgdorff

As a congregation we joined the Borgdorff family on Thursday, the 3rd of January 2002, to say farewell to, and to celebrate, the life of Br Wim Borgdorff.

All of us are the better for knowing him, and his love and witness for the Lord.

Since Nel died, but especially during the last difficult months, before he passed away, Wim was not the same as we once knew him, having suffered a lot. But we have known him as a tireless worker for the church, a long-serving elder, and many times Session Clerk, who spoon-fed many an immigrant in this church. With God's grace Wim was enabled to do a lot of work for the Lord's kingdom.

We pray that the Lord will comfort the family and us till we meet again in Jesus' Name.

*Taken from the Nelson Bulletin*

## From the D.A.'s Office *(continued)*

# Reformed Church of Silverstream



*Rev Arent de Graaf placing the foundation plaque at a special service dedicating the new Reformed Church of Silverstream building in 1963.*

Next month, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, the Reformed Church of Silverstream will be celebrating 35 years since it was instituted in 1967. The current Reformed Church of Silverstream church building was built in 1963, as another preaching post of the Reformed Church of Wellington. The foundation plaque was laid at a special ceremony led by Rev Arent de Graaf, the then minister of the Reformed Church of Wellington, on Easter Monday, 1963. Once completed, the dedication of the building took place on Saturday, 7 September 1963. Rev de Graaf was then on furlough in the Netherlands, and so it was the pleasure of the interim minister, Rev Alex Scarrow to lead this special service. Can anyone identify any of the other people in the photo?

