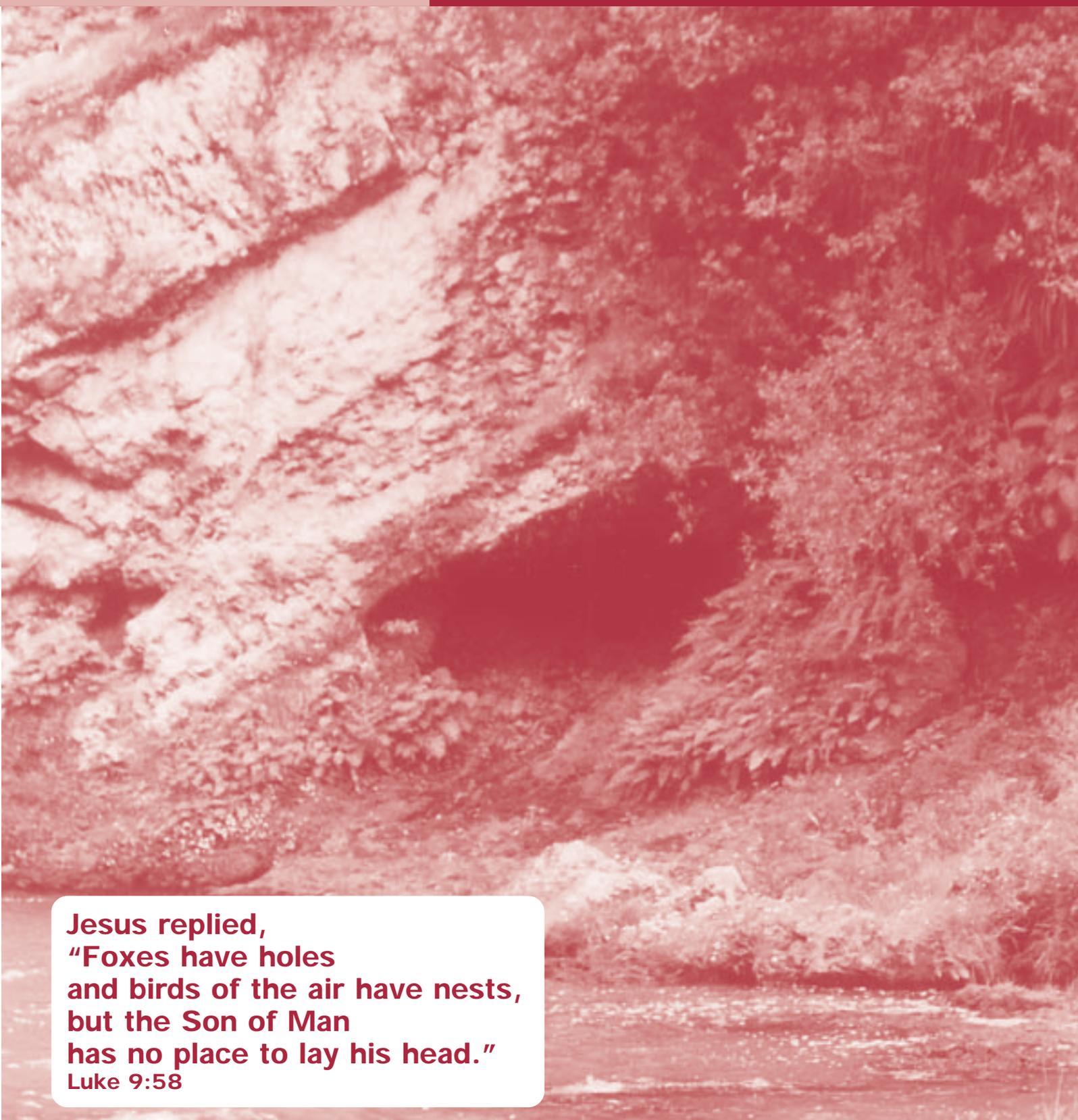


faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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**Jesus replied,
"Foxes have holes
and birds of the air have nests,
but the Son of Man
has no place to lay his head."
Luke 9:58**

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Editorial

We have passed through the summer break. There were the church camps, and three this year because of the triennial Cadet & Calvinette Camp. By all accounts the three Camps went well, and no doubt we will read some more about them in Faith in Focus, as we can already see in this issue with a report on the National Youth Camp held at Camp Adair, Hunua (near Auckland).

I was privileged to be the studies leader for the Youth Camp. My first National Youth Camp for 24 years! And what a surprise! For while no one was there from the last one I went to, apart from yours truly, there in front of me were the children of many who had been with me that last time! I was greatly encouraged by God's faithfulness through the generations. And encouraged just as much by the response to the studies and the general spiritual character of many of the youth.

Also over the summer break many of us caught up with family. I was interested to receive this report of one of these gatherings and thought it might be helpful for you:

"In honour and memory of our parents, John and Gerda Vandenberg, we have just enjoyed our second family reunion. We met for one week. 62 out of 67 family members attended - some only staying for a few days. For the second time we enjoyed the hospitality of Graham and Katherine Howard, who manage a Christian camp site in Riversdale. With the help of their volunteers, they cook, serve and clean for us, and we truly have a blessed holiday. The meals were "sumptuous" with the fresh fish they catch, truly mouth watering.

Most of us have cabins, but some bring their tents. We enjoy singing as a family, and this year we had a choir. The family worship held on Sunday was led by Andre Holtslag, and in the afternoon we gathered in four groups, with a time of meditation and questions from the sermon reflected on.

Each day the menfolk led us in meditation and prayer, with Leen Vandenberg reading out of the Children's Bible for the children. Leen also read aloud to us all the life of Martin Luther, giving us a few chapters each day.

We had a concert evening, and some of the family members entertained us with song, games, reminiscing about our dad's love of music and enjoying much laughter. We invited the camp staff to the concert.

Naturally we made oile bollen and really, there were not enough!! Next time we need to make more as everyone loves them!

Being near the beach, families took time out to take their children for a swim, or enjoy the sand. Some of the menfolk could play golf, or go fishing and we had the time to enjoy getting to know each other again, and grow closer as a family.

We have been blessed by the Lord in a marvellous way. He led our parents to this country, and it is for us to continue in His Ways as we live throughout New Zealand with our children and grandchildren. We were encouraged to make choices that are in accord with the Word of God, both young and old. We prayed for all of us in the new year: some plan to move, some are looking for work, some expect new babies, and some are straying from the truth. We are thankful to know that we are all in God's care and as a family can pray for one another.

We do plan to meet again in four years time.

It's good to have these times together as extended physical families, but it's especially good to meet together as God's family. This year we will remember God's goodness to our Reformed Churches of New Zealand with a number of Anniversary Celebrations. This is our jubilee - the fiftieth year. Let's make a point of participating in these as much as possible. And as do so let's very much thank the Lord for His grace in bringing our forefathers to this land.

++++++

"The church that prays together stays together"

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.

From the DA's Office ...

First Reformed Church of New Zealand

This month, the Reformed Church of Christchurch celebrates 50 years of existence. On 10th March 1953, the Reformed Church of Christchurch was instituted – the very first Reformed Church in New Zealand, hence this is also the 50th anniversary of the New Zealand churches.

In March 1953, Rev Deenick from Auckland made a trip to the South Island. Christchurch was planning to become an instituted church on March 22nd, but with the arrival of Rev. J. W. Deenick in Christchurch for the weekend of 8 March to lead them in worship, events accelerated, most likely due to the pressure of the availability of a minister and consideration of travel costs. Hence the first Reformed Church in New

Zealand came into being on 10 March 1953.

The 'Protocol' which was signed by those present at the Institution was written in Dutch. A translation of it is reproduced below.

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PROTOCOL

"We, the undersigned, who were before our emigration all communicant members of a Protestant Church in the Netherlands and of positive Reformed confession, are deeply afflicted concerning the fact that we cannot affiliate ourselves with one of the churches in New Zealand, partly because in some of them modernism can unfold itself unhindered and partly because in the more Evangelical Churches such deviations of the Reformed Confessions occurs, that we are unable to join them wholeheartedly, have therefore decided, to the honour of God's name and with a view to our own salvation and that of our children, do hereby proceed with the establishing of our own Church community, of which the name will be:

THE REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRISTCHURCH

As the basis of this Church, we accept with a believing heart the Holy Scriptures as God's infallible word and the confession to that word, as the Churches of the Reformation have laid down in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt.

We will maintain this basis through the exercise of Christian discipline over doctrine and life in accordance with Bible and Confession and according to the Church order of Dordt, which we accept as accord of our community.

After a prayer meeting in this church three elders and two deacons will be elected. It is our intention to call a minister as soon as the Lord wills it.

If possible we will also in other places in the South Island further the establishment of a church and are willing to have community with all those who love the Lord and are willing to place themselves on the basis of God's Word in accordance with the old confessions of the Reformation.

Through using the English language in the worship service, we will strive to become, as soon as possible, a real New Zealand Church.

We take this step of Church establishment with the earnest prayers to God, that He will bless us and make us a blessing. May He keep us and our children from wandering from the faith which was once delivered unto us by the saints. May he through His grace make us faithful to His Word and the Confessions according to that Word.

Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who has made the heavens and the earth.
 Christchurch, 10 March 1953.

And it was signed:

Handwritten signatures in Dutch, including: M. Kleinjan, G. Valk (Dordrecht), J. Alberts, J. Nuiwehuizen, P. W. Mulder, G. A. Mulder, and others.

M. Kleinjan, J. Taal, D. G. de Groot, J. de Groot-Pel, M. De Weerd, G. C. Bomhof, C. van Gelder-Bouwman, H. J. Moot, A. de Mooy, G. Westerink, A. Verkerk, J.

Handwritten signatures in Dutch, including: Verkerk-Couprrie, F. Dekker, G. L. vander Berg, R. vander Berg, C. den Brave, Albert Broerse, Theo Althuis, W. Gorter, D. Bouman, A. van Gelder, H. vander Bor, A. Boender, S. den Brave-Hofmeester, J. H. C. Bouman-Bergmeyer, E. Gorter-vander Meulen.

We, the undersigned individual baptised members and present at the above mentioned meeting, wholeheartedly agree with this statement and join the Church Community: (it was signed) — G. Valk, J. Alberts, J. Nuiwehuizen, P. W. Mulder, G. A. Mulder, The Rev. Deenick also signed the protocol."

Handwritten signatures in Dutch, including: G. A. Mulder and others.

A feminine focus

Christian womanhood – *in the Church*

By Sally Davey and Robyn Posthuma

We thought you might like to hear about some good ideas.

One of the sources of dissension in the church, and an area of considerable confusion - even in our own circles at times - has been the role of women in the church. As is usually the case with such topics, it has been a cause of confusion and dissension in churches everywhere. But in some of them, it has been discussed and dealt with helpfully. It is great to have the opportunity to learn from our fellow-Christians in other places, when they have been wise and faithful. Certainly, we believe this is the case with the ideas we heard presented last Spring (2002).

Susan Hunt

Susan Hunt, the speaker at the "True Christian Womanhood" conference, organised by the Ashburton Evangelical Presbyterian Church and held in Christchurch in October, is the Women in the Church consultant for her denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America. Her work as a writer, teacher and encourager of women is overseen by the Christian Education and Publications Committee of the PCA. She is also a minister's wife, a mother and a grandmother; and is very clear that whatever Christian women do in the church and in wider society, their primary responsibilities are as helpers to their husbands. She is an intelligent, educated and articulate lady, and we found her to be a clear and convincing speaker.

As Susan explains it, we are defined by our theology. All that we are and do, down to the smallest details of our life, is determined by what we believe. If our theology is poor and weak, we will be poor and weak. So what is wrong with us today? She sees the confusion about womanhood in our society as having its origins in the theological shift away from objective truth toward subjective, emotion-driven theology in the middle of the nineteenth century. This meant a shift away from the "true woman" of earlier times, a woman who looked to Scripture to find out what she should believe and how she should behave. The true woman was quite prepared to deny self to do what was right. However, this shift in theology produced the "new woman" who consults her own feelings to discover what she wants to do. And

the character of the true woman, much as everyone has always admired her, cannot be had without her theology. So what we have is women, even in the church, whose main concern in life is their own needs and happiness. The problems created by the selfish demands of the new woman have haunted both our culture and our churches throughout the twentieth century.

Susan's home church

Susan's church, the Presbyterian Church in America, is a relatively new denomination. It came together in 1973 as a merger of a number of older, generally faithful denominations,



particularly from the South of the United States. It is now a fast-growing, very evangelistic reformed church, with congregations all over the country. Many of its older congregations - some of them well over 100 years old - had in place some well-established traditions of ministry activities. And these included women's activities. Women generally were very active in organising church meals, hospitality programmes, teaching Sunday school, caring for small children, and running creative women's social get-togethers. But at around the time of the beginning of the PCA, two things were happening. Firstly, women were receiving the benefits of far more higher education than ever before - and with this - experience in responsible professional occupations.

Secondly, the feminist movement came crashing into the scene, causing women everywhere to become confused about their calling in the home, the church and the world. Younger women with a great variety of skills and gifts honed in the workplace found they were "out of place" in the traditional spheres of women in the church (fellowship dinners and organising the crèche). But many of these women knew the Scriptures very well, and had no attraction to feminism. Their problem was that they just did not know how to use their particular gifts helpfully in the church. And neither did their elders. There began to be a lot of discussion about the way a reformed, thinking Christian woman should fit into church life. It was at this point that Susan Hunt, and a number of other co-workers, began to do some careful study of the Scriptures in consultation with the church as a whole.

Sketching out the picture

The result is the books she has written; a series collectively entitled "Biblical Foundations for Womanhood." In these books Susan has sketched out a picture of womanhood derived from the "big truths" of Scripture, one that is clear, intelligent, satisfying and immensely attractive. It applies to all of us women - whatever our calling in life - whether we are young and single, mothers at home, senior rocket scientists or elderly widows! It begins with the deep truths about our relationship with Christ, and works its way out into a multitude of satisfying applications for our service as part of Christ's body, his Church. It was a picture of faithful, biblical maturity that Susan presented to us at the conference. Let us relay some of it to you.

From the beginning

Susan began by examining the creation account to show us why it was God had created us the way we are. We are designed to be helpers - first, (if we are married) for our husbands; and then, in a multitude of creative supportive, nurturing activities as his servants in the church; and finally, (as part of this body) in the culture in which we live. Of course we all, as daughters of Eve, have sinned. We inherit this nature as children of our first parents. But in Christ, we may be redeemed; and it is as redeemed women that we should pursue the

calling that He has given us as part of His people. Susan stresses very strongly the covenant theme of Scripture. God is a faithful, covenant God Who saves His people according to the promises He made from the beginning of Scripture to the end. That is how women from Eve, to Sarah, to Rahab, to Ruth, to Mary, Dorcas, Lydia and Priscilla have been saved. But it is also the way that such women have found their callings in life and fulfilled them faithfully – *in the context of God's family of believers*. It is this reformed, covenant emphasis that most distinguishes Susan's writings from other helpful writings on Christian womanhood. All that women do should be done under the overseeing wings of His church, and for the upbuilding of it. Women's activities should never be divorced from the other ministries of the church. Women do not go and "do their own thing", or act as individuals in Christ. Susan illustrated this by means of the scene in the wilderness – all the people of Israel in family groups were encamped around the tabernacle, facing it at the centre of their circle. "What would have happened," she asked, "if one woman had said, 'I don't like the influence of those children in the tent next door,' or 'I don't like group travel.'"? Imagine what it would have done to the corporate community if such women and their families had gone off into the desert alone – or what it would have done to these women and their families? No, we are created for each other, to serve and nurture each other – as she puts it, to foster both "community" and "compassion" in all that we do in the church.

Gladly submitting

Right throughout Susan's addresses there was a clear deference to God's provision of male leadership in the church. Quite rightly, she believes this is our blessing and protection; and that we should gladly submit to the leadership of our elders in the church. Our first and most important relationship is with our husbands if we are married; and our marriage should be a picture of the gospel. But in our lives as women in the church, when we think about working together as women, we should gladly submit our plans to the elders for approval, and for suggestions as to how we might better serve the church. This will ensure that all our activities will serve the greater goals and purposes of the church; and that they do not clash with other ministries the elders have put in place. What we do as women in the church will complement, not compete with the other activities of the church!

Handing it down

Another important theme was that of our task to pass on the important truths about Christian womanhood to the younger women of the next generation. This she calls the "Titus 2 mandate". By that she means teaching them, and modelling for them, the ways to live humbly,

faithfully, and creatively as daughters of the gospel in family, church and world. This has been hinted at by Elisabeth Elliott and others, but developed most fully and clearly by Susan in her book, *Spiritual Mothering*. It is a most motivating and attractive picture; and if carried out well, does much to bind the generations of women together in a church. It is achieved through friendships between younger and older women – but not necessarily chronologically older and younger. The important thing is that the more mature spiritually help those newer to or less advanced in the faith to grow in grace and wisdom in their lives. It means practical help in the everyday skills of bible reading and prayer; in wifehood and motherhood; in ways to show active mercy to those in need; in learning to deal with all manner of hardships in the school of suffering. It means help to live each stage of our lives as Christians – help from those who have gone before us in these things. And we don't need to be a mother physically to do this! Single older women can be wonderful spiritual mothers; as can childless older women – and the twenty-somethings with the teenagers! The possibilities are many.

Bringing it home

So, how do we transfer these ideas to our own New Zealand, Reformed Churches setting? First, obviously, we need to take into account any differences in context between Susan's church world and ours. Theologically, there is very little difference – and we can recognise and appreciate the biblical wisdom of what she says. However, she and the others who wrote the books live in churches which are very large (some have 2000-6000 members) and so, when it comes to practical details, some things need adapting. If you have a huge church, you are often blessed with a ministry - and a committee – for everything! (You may even need an office full of secretaries to coordinate everybody). But that is not our blessing – or our problem. Our activities are fewer, but likewise, we do not need a multitude of "get to know each other" programmes, bulletin boards and newsletters just to get information flowing. Some of you may ask – and rightly so – do we need an official "organised" women's fellowship/ministry/activity in our congregations at all? Of course not. The Bible nowhere outlines an office of "women's committee member" or "meals-on-wheels organiser" in any shape or form! But such things can be practical and useful. Properly, maturely, humbly and submissively done, such organization can be a very helpful way of enabling the women in church to make friendships and serve each other, and their church family, in appropriate and creative ways.

Susan and her fellow staff members at the Christian Education and Publications office of the PCA have developed materials to help encourage good women's activities in congregations. The main items among these

are a series of leaders' guides that go with the "Foundations" books, so that groups of women can use them as studies to build their understanding of biblical womanhood, both at home and in the church. (We list these books below).

Guiding principles

If we are thinking of setting up some form of organised women's fellowship, she suggests that we first (in consultation with the elders) make sure it is founded on these sorts of principles or values:*

Biblical purpose: It will challenge women to glorify God in all areas of life and to recognise God's Word as the authority for faith and life.

Biblical perspective: It will view the church as God's covenant family. [*Note: we thought Susan's emphasis on this was very helpful. We are often strong on seeing the covenant as a "family" thing, going through the generations, but could do well to remind ourselves that the church is a family of all sorts of people not physically related to us, who could so benefit from being considered family – eg the single person, the student, the widowed, the elderly, and so on.*]

Submissive: It will be under the authority of the elders.

Integrated: it will be consistent with and supportive of the doctrine and ministry of the church.

Corporate helpers: It will support and enhance other ministries in the church rather than duplicate or compete with them.

Spiritual mothering: It will encourage women to pass on (by word and example) the truths of Christian womanhood.

Community: It will provide opportunities for women to cultivate upbuilding friendships with one another.

Equipping: It will equip women to serve as helpers and life-givers in the home, church and community.

Compassion: It will provide opportunities for women to extend practical compassion, both in the church and to the needy outside the church.

Welcoming: It will be outward-focused, always seeking to extend the boundaries of the covenant to include more women, both within and without the church.

Secondly, she suggests we ask ourselves a number of questions about what we do already, to evaluate the usefulness of our various activities. She stresses the point, over and over, that we need to be *intentional* in what we do. It is no use running an activity simply because we've always done it, or even because we enjoy it. We need to ask questions like – *Why are we doing this?* (the most important one, to begin with!) Also – How will this glorify God by reflecting His character (eg of mercy, love, truth)? What is this teaching the women about the biblical view of womanhood?

Do our activities or tasks flow from Scripture?
How will this build community among the women?

How will it build community with other members, age groups and ministries of the church?

How does this extend the boundaries of the community to include those outside the church?

How does this demonstrate the compassion of Jesus?

Will what we do and how we do it give life to or suck life from our church?

Passing it on

Most importantly, Susan reminded us that we need not only to be able to answer these questions effectively ourselves, but we also need to be able to communicate those answers to those who participate in the ministry. Nobody will want to continue in something, especially when it's not easy or "fun" to do, if there isn't a clearly-understood biblical purpose for it! (Very important). (And of course not every activity will do all of these things; but each should do some of them).

In relation to our own congregations, we could ask practical questions like these: Are our social activities sufficiently purposeful? What components do they include that encourage people to think biblically about what they are doing? Often we say, rather loosely, "it's for fellowship..." but do we know what "fellowship" as portrayed in the Bible, really is?.. If we are planning or evaluating (after the event) a children's holiday club, do we know why we are going to do it/have done it? Are we going to present the gospel clearly, in a way the particular children in our neighbourhood will understand it, and be able to apply it to their lives? In addition, are our younger helpers learning, through this activity, to share the gospel more effectively themselves?... If we are going to have a women's fellowship evening, do we plan to get beyond the cooking demonstration or the health talk to discuss the issues of *why* we should cook interestingly and well (for God's glory and our families' health); or *why* we should look after our bodies medically *and at the same time* not live in fear of cancer of heart disease striking us?.. If we are going to put on a welcome dinner for three new immigrant families, could we articulate three (or more!) important biblical reasons *why* churches should welcome strangers into their midst? We should never assume the reasons for these activities are obvious, simply because we've always done them.....

A warm recommendation

We found that these principles, and their practical outworkings, painted a most attractive picture of church life. It was a picture both personally inspiring, and corporately motivating! We hope that you will find the same, by looking further at the books. They are the solid product

of years of teaching and encouraging women in the church - and of reflection on the trends that can so easily lead women far from the biblical ideal. There is much worthy of use in our own situation.

If you would like to know more, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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The "Foundations" books most applicable to our situation (in the order we think best read):

The True Woman, by Susan Hunt (Crossway)

By Design, by Susan Hunt (Crossway)

Spiritual Mothering, by Susan Hunt (Crossway)

Treasures of Encouragement, by Sharon Betters (Presbyterian & Reformed)

Leaders' Study guides for each of these are available from the PCA bookstore in Atlanta, GA, order online from bookstore@pcanet.org. Website is: www.cepbookstore.com

Also, if you would like to hear what Susan said in four sessions in Christchurch, you can order the tapes from Mrs Glenys Bayne, idbayne@xtra.co.nz

* Note: we have taken these principles, and the list of questions that follow (with slight adaptations of our own) from some of the training material prepared by the Christian Education and Publications Office of the PCA, and used by Susan in training workshops for women in the churches.

Between You and Me!

Ode to the Mike!

D.G. Vanderpyl

We now live in the age of microphones! We need a sound system to be heard well! Or are we getting sound deaf with all the noise from radio, TV and other sources? We use it for communications!

Do you realise that sound travels 1130 ft (about 410 meters) per second. There is, according to the experts, dry sound versus wet sound and sometimes it's combined! Those who sit in the front rows usually hear dry sound only, while wet sound is reverberant, i.e. echoing. Fortunately, both wet and dry combine nicely to form a **total/uniform/complete** sound heard by an audience towards the back. That's why, unaware of it, those at the back feel far more comfortable! Hence, dry sound takes a bit more time to reach our ears, depending on where you sit, of course.

When the mike is not operable everybody in the pews are patiently waiting and the minister or whoever needs the thing, looks towards the back with a questioning look to turn it on. He himself may have forgotten to switch it on. He still doesn't believe it, so hopefully he'll give it a few taps and a smile from the operator at the back encourages him or her to get on with it.

You may wonder what's it all about?

Jesus preached to multitudes of 5,000 people and more in the open field (Matt 14:13-21; 15:32-39) without any sound system.

Around the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, field-preachers like George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Dwight Moody, Charles Finney and others addressed

multitudes of men and women - between six and eight thousand and more at other times - who came to listen to the Word of God! Preachers would either sit on a horse or stand on a hastily collected pile of stones.

It sure is the age of the microphone! No matter whether it is used in a large hall with a great number of people or in a small hall with a few dozen. The microphone **must** be used as a matter of principle.

As you well know, the microphone is a device for turning the acoustic energy of sound into electrical energy.

Now we come to the position of the mike! The sound received by the microphone is affected by its position close to the chest, the lack of high frequencies under the chin, the room acoustics and the filtering effect of any thick clothing that is used to conceal that ??????- you didn't know that and neither did I!

A deep voice is over-emphasised by the mike being held close. A sibilant voice is made worse by a mike with an erratic high frequency response, sounding like a hiss.

The Lord Jesus preached without any aid - neither did the field preachers; unless maybe they used a cow's horn?

When I see someone getting up front for a few announcements, they grope for the mike! You see? It's class!

One very old grandmother, celebrating her 104th birthday was interviewed with a large number of family and friends around her. The TV guy held the mike close to this Opoetje and asked her: "How was it in your younger days?" And with a husky voice she repeatedly kept saying: "The potatoes in my time were much bigger!"

Buddhism Basics

A look at a religion settling in our country

Douglas Kuiper

A Buddhist, trying to give other Buddhists an overview of Christianity, faces a daunting task. The history of Christianity is extensive; its doctrines cover a broad range; and each branch of Christianity has its own peculiar history and doctrines to be considered.

A Reformed Christian faces the same difficulty in giving Reformed Christians an overview of Buddhism. The various branches of Buddhists each have their own peculiarities of thought and life. Two Buddhists will not always agree on what is fundamental to their religion.

The attempt, though difficult, will be beneficial. Because Buddhism is a growing force in western countries, Buddhists might very well be the neighbours who cross our paths and whom we are called to love. We show this love by showing them the deceit and hopelessness of Buddhism, speaking to them of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and calling them to repentance and faith in Christ, who alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

History

Buddhism originated with Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, the "Enlightened One."

He was born about 563 BC in what is now Nepal. His father, a prince, raised him in luxury and sheltered him from seeing any form of suffering. In his adulthood, having travelled from the palace, he discovered four forms of suffering - a man suffering from old age; a sick man; a dead man; and a poor monk, begging for bread. Gautama concluded that happiness was an illusion. To search for the cause of suffering and the way to eliminate it, he left his wife and child when he was 29. For six years he lived ascetically, depriving himself of food, sleeping on hard beds, and not sitting down. When he almost died from his self-deprivation, he realised that this was not the way to eliminate suffering. Other teachers did not help him find the answer either. One day he sat down, vowing not to rise again until he found the cause of suffering. Meditating deeply, he found his answer, which he called the "Middle Way," because it avoided both extremes of self-indulgence and self-deprivation. This moment is called his enlightenment. Until his death around 483 BC, he taught others what he had discovered. The heart of Buddhism is the understanding and practising of this Middle Way, and sharing this way with others.

After the Buddha's death, monks continued teaching his ideas throughout India. King Ashoka embraced Buddhism in the 200's BC and sent missionaries to other lands to teach

it. As Buddhism spread, two main branches developed - Theravada Buddhism (spreading to southeast Asia) and Mahayana Buddhism (northeast Asia).

Theravada Buddhism holds that Gautama was the only Buddha; that his writings alone constitute their Scriptures; that enlightenment is limited to monks and other elite; and that one ought be concerned only with his own enlightenment.

Mahayana Buddhism teaches that other Buddhas have existed; that the Buddhist Scriptures include many writings from other good Buddhists, and are even still being written today; that everyone can be enlightened; and

that one ought to try to help others reach enlightenment. Even within these two main groups there are smaller divisions.

In the 1800s, Chinese and Japanese immigrants brought Mahayana Buddhism (especially Zen and Tibetan Buddhism) to America's western shores. The religion became very popular in the mid 1900s. The main Buddhist organisation in North America is the Buddhist Church of America, but many Buddhists are not affiliated with any organisation.

Buddhism is a growing force in America. Scholars estimate that between a half million and six million Buddhists live in America. That





it has affected our culture is evident from the fact that Hollywood has popularised the religion in a number of movies (Red Corner and Seven Years in Tibet, for example).

Fundamental teachings

The Four Noble Truths set forth the basic principles underlying Buddhism. First, life consists of suffering. Second, the cause of suffering is our desire for things which are not permanent (material things which can be lost, food which will not prevent hunger from returning, etc.). Third, this suffering will end when one eliminates his desires and attains enlightenment. Fourth, the way to enlightenment is set forth in the Middle Path.

The Middle Path consists of eight steps. The first two deal with wisdom. They are Right Understanding (knowing the four noble truths, and rejecting wrong ideas about suffering's cause and elimination) and Right Thought (freeing our mind of all evil desires, and focusing on the Middle Path). The next three deal with ethical conduct. Right Speech means speaking well of others, and refraining from slander and gossip. Right Action requires one to refrain from killing men or animals, from

stealing, from lying, from drinking intoxicants, and from unchastity (sex outside marriage is forbidden; in marriage it is permitted, but one must not let one's sexual desires prevent one from following the Middle Path). Right Livelihood means that a Buddhist's occupation must be one which is productive and helpful to others, and which does not violate religious principles (for example, he must not be a butcher or brewer). The last three steps of the Middle Path deal with mental discipline. The Buddhist must put forth Right Effort, trying to overcome evil, and developing one's powers of thinking. Right Awareness requires him to understand things as they really are, and to be aware of minute details in his life, such as his breathing and the moment he falls asleep. Right Meditation, finally, requires him to meditate on a particular object until he falls into a trance, is free from distractions and sensations of suffering, and becomes enlightened.

This survey of Buddhism's main teachings shows us three things. First, the religion is based very much on legalism and works. One must live a certain kind of life to be "saved." Second, consistent Buddhists must teach that theirs is the only way of "salvation." Following

the Middle Path is the only way Buddha found enlightenment, and is the only way others can find it. Third, this "only way" is far different from the only way of Jesus Christ, His saving work, and faith in Him.

Contrasts with Christianity

I suppose one could find similarities between Buddhism and Christianity. Both encourage their followers to know certain truths and to live ethical lives. Both realise the existence of suffering and speak of salvation in terms of the end of suffering. But these similarities are only superficial. In substance, the two religions are very different.

In their view of God, the two differ greatly. The Buddha himself taught that gods exist, but they are merely spirits who also must know the Four Noble Truths and follow the Middle Path to attain enlightenment. One must not worship these gods, or any other being. Some branches of Buddhism consider the Buddha to be a god; others do not. Among those who do, some worship him, others do not.

How different from the Christian faith! Scripture begins, "In the beginning God . . ." (Genesis 1:1). Scripture reveals God as being eternal, sovereign and independent, unchanging, wise, all-knowing, gracious, loving, merciful, just, Triune – and much more. This God is not an impersonal, nameless God – He is Jehovah God! Eternal life is to know Him (John 17:3). We depend on Him for all things related to our earthly and spiritual existence. Him alone we serve, for He commanded us to have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3). Faith in God is not merely part of our faith; it is the whole of our faith.

Rejecting faith in the true God, Buddhism also rejects faith in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, who are also divine. Of course Buddhists do not deny that Jesus lived on earth; some would even consider Him to be one who attained enlightenment. But they consider Him just a man. Any "salvation" that He provided consisted only of teaching others who were alive when He was how to become enlightened. Having left earth, He plays no further saving role.

How different from Scripture's revelation of Jesus Christ as being God come in our flesh (John 1:1,14)! And that our salvation is based on His atoning work on the cross alone (Romans 3:24-25; II Corinthians 5:19; Galatians 3:6)! And that He arose again, ascended into heaven, sits at God's right hand governing all things, and sent His Holy Spirit into the church and hearts of believers, to apply to us all the blessings of salvation which He earned for us on the cross! How different from Christ's own claim to be the promised Messiah, the only saviour of the world (Luke 4:21; John 4:26; John 14:6).

Buddhism's lack of faith in any god, let alone Jehovah God and Jesus Christ, is due to its thinking that man can save himself. Of course,



if man can save himself by his own right thinking and works, who needs God? And who needs Jesus Christ? In fact, Buddhism makes man God – thereby committing the great sin of unbelief and pride. Buddhism is idolatry.

As part of “right understanding,” Buddhism teaches regarding man that he has no soul. That man has a soul is a lie which Christians invented in their quest to escape suffering. Rather, man consists of five things: body, feeling, perception, disposition, and consciousness. These five things are united in one human being as long as that human is alive. At death, these five parts separate from each other, and reassemble with parts of other dead humans, to make another human – just as one might use different parts of five cars to make one car. This is the Buddhist view of reincarnation – quite different from the doctrine of reincarnation as taught by other religions. Because of this reincarnation, Buddhists teach that suffering is endless, unless it is stopped.

Enlightenment, Buddhism’s conception of

birth. Both body and soul were totally corrupted by sin, so that apart from God’s saving grace we experience only His wrath (even good material and earthly things are given in preparation for Him justly to destroy us, Psalm 73:3-20), and are able only to sin more, bringing upon us even more greatly the experience of His wrath (Romans 3:10-18). Our life consists of suffering, but that suffering is due to sin.

Salvation consists not only in the removing of sin’s guilt (so that we no longer need fear God’s wrath) and corruption (so that we can begin to obey God’s law again), but even more in the positive enjoyment of fellowship with God, as members of His covenant. That salvation is based on the work of Christ, bearing the wrath of God in our stead. It is given us through faith in Christ. This faith is worked by two means: the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the (two) sacraments. And this salvation, which we begin to enjoy in this life, is enjoyed perfectly after death, when in

other issues, one who desires to witness effectively to a Buddhist should not assume to know what he believes, but should ask him to state his faith himself.

The fundamental difficulty in witnessing to Buddhists is that by nature they, like all of us, are blind to the truth. Before witnessing, one should pray to God to use our words to accomplish His purpose, and if it is His will, to use them to bring the Buddhist to sorrow for sin and faith in Christ. Not always is this His purpose. However, we must remember that His word never returns to Him void (Isaiah 55:11).

Witnessing to Buddhists is also difficult because the Buddhist views negatively certain concepts which are fundamental to the Christian faith. We speak of salvation as being life with God, ultimately enjoyed in heaven, a place of permanent existence; they consider “salvation” to be a matter of not existing. We speak of regeneration as being an aspect of salvation. They see it as the Christian counterpart to reincarnation, which they desire



salvation, is the only thing that will make this suffering cease. This enlightenment is the end to suffering in this life. It does not change the objective facts of life, which include hunger, pain, sorrow, etc. But the enlightened one does not experience suffering on account of them. At death, the five parts of the enlightened person are not reincarnated, but cease to exist. Salvation consists of nothing more. It does not consist of covenantal communion with God. It is not enjoyed everlastingly. It is only the end of suffering and of existence.

While all branches of Buddhism seem to agree that the means to such enlightenment and “salvation” involves following the Middle Path, some branches teach that more is necessary. Theravada Buddhism requires one to renounce the world and become a monk. Zen Buddhism requires one to practice meditation regularly. Tibetan Buddhism requires, in addition to regular meditation, the use of mantras (chants by which one communicates with divine spirits), certain body gestures, the prayer wheel, and other techniques. In one branch of Buddhism, Amida Buddhism, this salvation is obtained through reliance on the Amida Buddha.

By contrast, Christianity, on the basis of Scripture, teaches that man consists of body and soul (Genesis 2:7), both of which are derived from one’s parents at conception and

our soul we are brought into the presence of God in heaven, and even more perfectly after Christ’s return and the resurrection of the body, when we and the whole church of the elect are glorified as the body of Christ, made perfectly sinless, and serve God with praise and thanksgiving to all eternity.

Indeed, Buddhism and Christianity have no essential similarities. Buddhism denies the truth of Scripture, and teaches instead the lies and inventions of a man. It is really Pelagianism (an old heresy which our church fathers battled in the early centuries of the Christian church), in that it denies that man’s suffering is due to his inherent sinfulness, and claims that man is able to deliver himself from his suffering by his own works, entirely apart from Christ. Buddhism begins with a different starting point than does true faith in Christ, leads one along an entirely different path, and brings one to an entirely different destination. I say with sorrow, but not with any hesitancy, that a Buddhist who holds yet to his ideas on his deathbed awakes in hell. Salvation cannot be for him, for he has not known nor confessed salvation from sin to be found in the crucified and resurrected Christ alone (Romans 10:9).

Witnessing suggestions

Because Buddhists disagree among themselves on the way to enlightenment and

to escape. We speak of the need to search the Scriptures, and to think through the doctrines of the Christian faith. Their goal in meditation is to be released from and rise above the thought processes. So a Christian witness to a Buddhist will require patience on the part of the Christian, a willingness on the part of the Buddhist to allow his own faith to be challenged, and perhaps repeated attempts at witnessing for the Buddhist to begin to understand.

Clearly, to witness to Buddhists the Christian must know and be firmly convinced of the truth of Christianity. One must know and experience the suffering of sin, the sure relief of that suffering through faith in Christ, and the certain hope of blessed existence with God after death, in order to witness with earnestness. Then we must express our Christian faith clearly, appealing to Scripture, and consciously showing how our faith is contrasted with Buddhism.

Responding to the Buddhist’s view that all things are everlasting but impermanent, the Christian would do well to teach that God is permanent, and His love for His people is a permanent, faithful love. Picking up on the idea that suffering will end when desires are eliminated, the Christian should show that God requires us, not to eliminate our desires, but to put away our evil desires and to desire Him

(Psalm 73:25). Recognising that the Buddhist has no real conception of sin, and views lapses in moral conduct as only a weakness, the Christian ought to emphasise the reality of sin, sin's consequences, and Christ as the only way of deliverance from sin.

The Christian must always witness by living his faith. However, the Buddhist does the same. We could explain why we live ethically, and how we are able to do so – in these areas, we differ. But perhaps the most effective practical witness to the Buddhist would be to live our faith consistently when we suffer. Scripture often commands us to contentment and joy in suffering (Philippians 4:11; James

1:2; I Peter 2:19ff, 4:12ff). Should the Buddhist notice that, rather than complaining or trying to eliminating our suffering, we have found joy in it, he might question us as to the reason for our faith and hope.

Should that happen, let us have an answer!

(This article has been taken from Reformed Perspective, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement)

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World news

Business sued over worker forced to take Sunday shift

According to the 9 December Grand Rapids Press, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is accusing Allegan County business, Meijer Inc., of violating the civil rights of a cake decorator who was fired after refusing to work Sundays. Debra Kerkstra, a member of the Christian Reformed Church, was terminated in May 2001 after a year at the Plainwell store.

Meijer "failed to provide a reasonable accommodation to the known religious practices of Ms. Kerkstra," according to the EEOC. The retail operation argued a day off for Kerkstra would have caused "an undue hardship" on "one of the busiest days of the week."

+ *The Grand Rapids Press, 155 Michigan St. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503*

Filipino pastor imprisoned in United Arab Emirates

On 12 November 2002, Fernando Alconga, a Filipino pastor in Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates, was arrested by the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) of Dubai for distributing Christian materials.

Alconga was asleep in his car at Al Bustan Center in Al Qusais, Dubai when he was approached by two men requesting Christian materials in Arabic.

After being informed that he had no materials in Arabic, the men requested that Alconga show them his supply of materials in other languages, which he did. At that point the men identified themselves as CID agents and arrested him for distributing Christian literature.

+ *International Christian Concern, 2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW #941, Washington, DC 20006-1846 (301) 989-1708*

Wee Frees turn up short of Gaelic-speaking Ministers

A sex scandal and the indifference of the young to their native tongue have created a chronic shortage of Gaelic-speaking Wee Free ministers in the island heartland of the faith and language. Six Free Church of Scotland congregations in Lewis and Harris, where up to 5,000 of Scotland's 12,000 Wee Frees live, are without a pastor and practically every local clergyman is "doubling up" to maintain Sabbath worship.

Stornoway, regarded as the world centre of the Church, is affected, along with Barvas, Lochs, Scalpay, Park, and Carloway, and church sources fear it may never fully recover.

Barvas and Lochs have been without a minister for two years since the Free Church split over its handling of allegations of sexual misconduct against the Rev. Donald MacLeod, one of the church's leading modernisers and theologians.

MacLeod was cleared by a court of assaulting several women and the sheriff ruled he had been the victim of a "vicious and orchestrated" conspiracy. Before the court case, in 1996, a church investigation had cleared MacLeod of a charge of adultery brought against him by other ministers.

However, some leaders wanted to pursue the matter, and when they were prevented from doing so left to form the Free Church (Continuing). The smaller body attracted 32 ministers and is now in a court battle with the majority over ownership of assets.

Seven dissidents were Gaelic preachers. Their loss, allied to fewer vocations and the apparent indifference of young islanders to Gaelic, has left the Free Church with a "seriously worrying problem." A higher skill in Gaelic is required to preach, and the church college has started classes to assist trainees to bridge the gap, but it will take time. "It's time we may not have; it's a desperately serious situation," said one church source.

+ *Jim McBeth, The Scotsman, Barclay House, 108 Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, Scotland EH8 8AS jmcbeth@scotsman.com*

Nigerian Reformed bodies reach peace accord

The Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) and the Reformed Church of Christ of Nigeria (RCCN) met 10 Sept. in Takum where both denominations had their secretariat before Nigeria's 1998 war. On each of nine disputed points the denominations reached agreement and declared "the CRCN and RCCN have forgiven each other."

In 1998, members of the two churches were on opposite sides. Through a peace process they initiated, supported by the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the community reached a preliminary peace agreement for Takum last year and the September accords grew from this.

The Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN) formally organised in 1951, with ratification of that decision in 1954. The first congregation, however, organised by the Sudan United Mission, was founded in 1922. Johanna Veenstra, one of the first foreign missionaries of the Christian Reformed Church (North America), was a major influence in early formation of the CRCN. Some 200 ministers and 250 evangelists

supply 97 congregations and over 1,610 preaching stations serving 345,000 members and adherents. The churches meet twice a year in General Church Council. The Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession serve as doctrinal standards for the CRCN.

The Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria formed 15 November 15, 1973, when a believers from the Kuteb tribe left the Ekklesiya Kristi a Sudan Laredin Benue. In 1993 the church changed her name from EKAN Takum to the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria. The 49 pastors serve

277,000 members and 200,000 regular adherents from the Ichen, Tiv, Jukuns, Mumuye, Jenjo, and Tigum tribes. The denomination numbers 60 congregations in 11 districts and meets twice a year in General Synod. The Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession, and Nicene and Athanasian Creeds serve as doctrinal standards.

+ Rev. Yakubu Ishaya Tsojon, CRCN Secretariat, Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria (CRCN), PO Box 38, Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria
+ Rev. Musa A. Manasseh, RCCN Secretariat, Reformed Church of Christ of Nigeria (RCCN), PO Box 42, Takum, Taraba State, Nigeria
+ Dr. Richard L. van Houten, Reformed Ecumenical Council Secretariat, 2050 Breton Rd, SE, Suite 102, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Agnus Radio begins broadcasting in Transylvania

The Hungarian Reformed Church began broadcasting over the radio in Kolozsvár, Romania, on Christmas Eve. Agnus Radio reflects the tireless vision of Pastor Laszlo Adorjani who has labored to bring the radio to life since the region's liberation from Communism. The synodical radio station will serve the entire Hungarian-speaking community. According to reports originating in Budapest, one third of each eight hours of broadcast time will present religious programming. The remainder will carry secular public service material: Interviews, news, and music. Some 15 reporters, technicians, and editors will staff the enterprise under the immediate direction of editor-in-chief Attila Sebesi Karen.

+ Hungarian Reformed Church of Transylvania, Strada 23 August NR 51 3400 Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), Romania

Christianity can be expensive in Palestine

When Saeed and Nasser Salame, Arab brothers and residents of Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, converted from Islam to Christianity, they didn't know it would cost them their homes, their friends - possibly even their lives. Saeed Salam was an active member of Fatah, Arafat's party, when he converted. For this "crime" of conscience, he was imprisoned and tortured, according to a French group and the Religious Freedom Council.

The brothers decided their only hope was escape to Israel - and then, perhaps, or some Western nation where they could practice their faith freely. With one of them facing a death sentence, they escaped from a Palestinian Authority jail and made it to Israel.

Israel has only been willing to issue them 30-day permits. They are now facing deportation back to the Palestinian Authority. Fatah has accused both brothers of being Israeli collaborators. That charge often results in public lynching. The brothers now fear a sister may have been murdered since they arrived in Israel. She has vanished without a trace, they say.

Rep. Jo Ann Davis, [R-VA] and the Religious Freedom Coalition are calling upon Israel to extend asylum - at least long enough so arrangements for emigration to Europe can be made.

+ Rep. Jo Ann Davis, 1123 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515 (202) 225-4261

Church of Scotland advances toward unified National Denomination

In 1968 five denominations accepted the Church of Scotland's invitation to begin working toward fusion: The Churches of Christ (a constituent of the United Reformed Church), the Congregational Union of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the United Free Church. The Baptist Union of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland were observers. From this project the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church formed the Scottish Church Initiative for Union in 1996.

At the heart of the latest proposal is the Maxi-Parish in which local communities would work together under one body and be grouped together in Regions under a Bishop and a Council. In cities, the Maxi-Parish might cover one part of the city and in a small town, the maxi-parish might cover everyone.

Fundamental to each local jurisdiction would be a Church Meeting of members and a Congregational Council. A National Council, meeting annually, would speak for the entire organisation on social, economic, and

environmental issues as well as approve organisational budgets.

Elders would continue to participate at all organisational levels while professional Deacons would direct political action regionally. Bishops would be pastors to pastors and their ministry teams.

+ Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh, Scotland EH2 4YN

You do and we're out of here: Baptists aren't happy with Nashville

A proposed Nashville ordinance validating the homosexual lifestyle troubles the Southern Baptist officials responsible for recommending convention sites for the SBC annual meeting. Jack Wilkerson, vice president for business and finance of the SBC Executive Committee, stated his concerns to the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau in writing 8 Jan.

"I have personally worked to convey my belief that Nashville is a family friendly community and one which would provide a welcoming environment for our messengers and families attending the SBC annual meeting scheduled for Nashville in 2005," Wilkerson told Baptist Press.

"The Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau provided excellent support in that effort, and the mayor's office also was extremely supportive, with Mayor Purcell having personally attended the news conference announcing the Executive Committee recommendation of Nashville to the convention. I would hate to see the council adopt this pro-homosexual amendment undercutting our team effort and diminishing Nashville's national reputation as pro-family."

"We have, in past years, convened the Southern Baptist Convention in cities where every lifestyle is embraced as 'normal,'" Wilkerson wrote, "but our constituents are telling us today that they do not want to meet in cities where our meeting has to constantly deal with these issues."

Southern Baptists have a record. "It has and will continue to be our policy to express displeasure with activities that violate Biblical principles or which have a negative impact on the fabric of family life," Wilkerson told Baptist Press.

In 2002, the SBC cancelled a contract with a Howard Johnson hotel in St. Louis when the hotel hosted an inappropriate conference. In 2001, a hotel contract in New Orleans was cancelled because of non-friendly family activities, Wilkerson noted.

+ Southern Baptist Convention, 901 Commerce Street, Nashville, TN 37203 (615) 244-2355

Presbyterian girls killed at Christmas service in Pakistan

Four people, including a Muslim cleric who allegedly urged his followers to murder Christians, were detained in Pakistan after a Christmas Day grenade attack at a church killed three girls and injured a dozen other people, police said 26 Dec. Witnesses reported that two of the assailants in burqas, the traditional women's garb, tossed a grenade at the Presbyterian church in the village of Chianwala, in Daska township, about 100 miles south of Pakistan's capital Islamabad. "Two masked men threw a hand grenade on the church during the service," the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) quoted an unidentified police official as saying.

+ ASSIST, PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842

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

Our churches in focus

Bulletin Gleanings

by Andrew Reinders

Avondale

A number of things have happened within our congregation and getting a new Minister has now become one of them! After the Rev Esselbrugge declined the call extended to him the call we then extended to Rev ter Horst was accepted (he is scheduled to arrive in early April).

On hold for this month are Cadets & Calvinettes, Women's Fellowship meetings, Sunday School, Men's Fellowship meetings, Session meetings, etc.

Meanwhile, the life of the congregation ebbs and flows. It is January and everyone is currently enjoying holidays. Family Camp and Youth Camp are over for another year and both were a great success – one enjoying better weather than the other. What a blessing these camps are, and what wonderful opportunities they create for old and young alike.

Again our number has increased due to the arrival of some babies in our midst –

Bradley to Joshua & Heidi Meinsma; Jack to Edward & Melanie Gjaltema; Brianna and Jamie to Neil & Nikki Hunt; Liam to Rodney & Dianne Gjaltema; Cody to Glen & Yvonne Thompson.

The latest request in the bulletin was for more cots to help keep up with demand!

We farewelled Richard and Andrea Moot and their children who returned to Christchurch after 4 _ years in Avondale. Christchurch's gain is our loss.

We had only one wedding during this time - Emily Breckon to Wayne Standen, BUT two 50th Wedding Anniversaries (Len & Ann van Trig and Rinze & Ties Gjaltema) with more to come. In June we witnessed the Profession of Faith of Wynand Breytenbach Jnr. Sister Jenny Eden passed away in September after a long illness.

A highlight for some last year was getting together with Mangere Reformed Church for a friendly game of soccer and netball followed by a BBQ. More gatherings between local churches would be wonderful - definitely food for thought.

So what does this year hold for us? The Cadets & Calvinettes, along with the Youth Club will be delivering telephone directories again in March; the Men's Leadership training seminars will continue to upbuild and

encourage men for service within the church; the Women's Fellowship committee will no doubt come up with interesting ways to spend our Wednesday mornings and Friday evenings; calls will go out for vacant positions in Session and in Sunday School; Home Groups will work out their schedules for the coming year; work will continue at the Christian Kindergarten and at the Christian School; plans will start to develop for the Holiday Club programme; and discussions will continue to take place on the possibility of building a new church hall.

Helen Wassenaar

Bishopdale

Teacher Training: Early in February next year there will be two evenings of teacher training for all teachers and leaders of children and youth in our Christchurch congregations (ie. Sunday school, catechism, youth clubs, Friday Frenzy). The two sessions will be presented by Mr Michael Vannoort and Mr Don Capill, both experienced teachers. These will be held from 7.30 pm - 9 pm on Tuesday the 4th and Tuesday 11th of February at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. These evening are open to all those interested in the Bishopdale, Christchurch and Dovedale.

New Year's Eve Service: There will be a combined New Year's Eve service at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 31st December. This year it is hosted by Cornwall Street and Rev. Jim. Klazinga will be leading the service. This is a very fitting way to see in the New Year as we thank the Lord for the year almost passed and pray for His blessing for the year to come.

Budget Advisor Training: Beginning 30th January for 9 Thursday evenings at the Kingdom Resources Offices – 168 Colombo St. Have you got an hour or two a week to spare? We desperately need people to train as budget advisors. Are you: Committed to your local church? Someone who wants to help people? Reasonably good with figures? Want to know more? Contact Paul at Kingdom Resources 332-1700.

Dovedale

From the Pastor: Time flies. One year rolls into the next. It's been five years since our family came to Christchurch, and it seems like just yesterday. Then again, a lot has happened in that five years. We have been instituted as a congregation; we have a number of ministries in place and we are planning for the future. It is traditionally the time for taking stock and thinking about the new year – a time of setting goals and direction. As we do this, we need to remember to submit all our plans to the Lord (Prov. 16:9). In our thoughts and prayers, there

must be a "DV" after all that we desire to achieve. Our days are numbered and we are very much in the Lord's hands. That is also a comfort and security for us as we face change and uncertainty in our lives, as we go through periods of readjustment. Today I want to focus of a Person who does not change and what this means for us. As we enter a new year, let's look to the God who is the same, yesterday, today and forever – MF.

Br Jack de Graaf passed away at the end of January. We commend to the Lord Martha, the family, and their dear friends.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Rev. John Rogers is presently representing our churches at the forthcoming synod of our sister church, the Reformed Church of South Africa.

Rev. Jim Klazinga has been appointed to the Interchurch Relations Committee as a replacement for Rev. Dale Piers, who has returned to the USA.

Dunedin

I am writing to thank you and the congregation for your very generous gift of \$354.95, that you sent in September to add to God's work through the ministry of FEBC. I pray that the money will be blessed by God and multiply in effect, to reach souls for the Kingdom. The money you so kindly sent was used to make possible my recent workshop in Myanmar (formerly Burma), where I taught twelve tribal radio announcers how to use the chronological Bible teaching material known as Firm Foundations. In Myanmar, many people who call themselves Christians have only the most rudimentary understanding about the character of God and the real nature of salvation. Hundreds still practice bizarre rituals that are closely connected with worship of traditional tribal spirits. Please pray that the people who attended the workshop—most of them pastors—would understand and be enthusiastic about the potential benefits of chronological Bible teaching for their listeners—both Christian and unbeliever.

Janice Reid

Foxton

Happy New Year: As we go into 2003 keep in mind what Paul wrote to the Philipians, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility

consider others better than yourselves. Each of us should look not only to our own interest, but also to the interest of others. Our attitude should be the same as that of our Lord Christ Jesus.

Session Notes: Reverend Zuidema will be arriving on Wednesday 22 January 2003 D.V. Session would like to invite everyone to a congregational meeting to meet him and his wife Trudie on Friday 24 January at 8pm in the Church Lounge. He will be preaching in Foxton on Sunday 26 January and then leaving for Hamilton on Monday morning. There will be coffee after the morning service on Sunday to give people another opportunity to speak with the Zuidema's. A Further congregational meeting is called for Thursday 30 January at 8.00pm in the church Lounge.

Hamilton

Pastoral: But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven. Matt 6:20 As we face a new year, Anno Domini 2003, the Lord Jesus encourages us to be forward looking. We need to think of the future, we need to think ahead. It is true that our Lord tells us not to worry about tomorrow. Live one day at the time, each day has enough trouble of its own. But that does not mean that we should not make provision for later. One of the main reasons for poverty in a country like New Zealand is a lack of budgeting, a lack of forward planning. Store up treasures for yourselves. We are allowed, in fact we are encouraged, to think of our own advantage. Jesus encourages us to ask what is the best for us, what is to our advantage. Think ahead. Do some long-range planning. Not just for your twilight years, your retirement on this earth. But beyond this life, for your eternal mansion. Store up treasures in heaven. How can we do that? By using time and money to do good to others now. In the parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16) our Lord warns against trying to serve two masters. You cannot serve God and Mammon. You cannot live your life seeking to enrich yourself in God and at the same time being all out to get as rich as you can financially. One must come first. And the way to make sure that God comes first is to "use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

MONEY

Money can buy medicine, but not health.

Money can buy a house, but not a home.

Money can buy companionship, but not friends.

Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness.

Money can buy food, but not an appetite.

Money can buy a bed, but not sleep.

Money can buy a crucifix, but not a Saviour.

As Seneca, the Roman statesman, once said:

"Money has never yet made anyone rich"

Thank You. Betty and I were overwhelmed last Sunday by the unexpected congratulations and well wishes on our fortieth wedding anniversary. And what a beautiful present! We love the painting you gave us. We are very grateful for the warm and generous support we receive from the members of this congregation. We hope to enjoy the privilege of serving the Lord among you for a few years yet. Bill and Betty Wiersma

Hastings

A word of thanks: Thanks to Lex and Nellie and others who were involved in organising the New Year's Eve celebrations at Raukawa. I'm sure all who attended had a thoroughly enjoyable evening. Brothers and sisters, don't forget to give your donation toward the costs to Lex.

Mangere

The congregation was blessed with the birth of a bouncy (true - 11 pounds!) baby boy to Chris & Laura Giddy, and the public profession of her faith by Anna van Tuinen. We also experienced the passing into glory of Sr Adrie Kooperberg, Br Henk Kant, and Br Kees de Jong. We commend their loved ones to the Lord's comfort.

Palmerston North

Mt Taranaki Climb: Roy Nugteren will be leading a group of Reformed Church people up Mt Taranaki on Saturday 1 March 2003. If interested, pick up an information sheet and booking form from the foyer.

Pukekohe

The special collection in connection with the Lord's Supper will be for Voice of the Martyrs.

Wainuiomata

Annual Combined Churches Swimming Evening. Just an early notice to keep Saturday, 1 February 2003, 6-9pm, free in your diaries for our yearly swimming event. More details will follow closer to the date. Any questions, phone Wilma on 566-6001.

Wellington

Bibles for Laos. It is with many thanks that I can tell you that we have so far donated 160 Bibles, that is 10 more than we targeted for and there are some more coming I heard. As HOMECE we are thankful that the congregation supported this project, as it is not always known before hand if a project has the support. Imagine how great the demand is for Bibles in a country like Laos and than imagine how many people will share one Bible, so how many people will be sharing 160 Bibles with the greatest news of all times, that is the salvation of mankind. As I said before I hope to inform you with news about the Bibles later in the New Year.

Christmas Singing. This is an invitation to everyone to come and join with the Wainui

congregation for an evening of singing tonight, Sunday 22nd December from 6.30pm onwards in the Wainui church. We will be singing with the piano, organ and flute all the well-loved Christmas songs, interspersed with some musical interludes, followed by coffee and oliebollen! Come and join us with your family - we had a wonderful time last year and would love to again unite together to give all praise, honour and glory to God, our Lord and King.

Waikanae Fellowship

Pastor: Rev Jan Lion-Cachet
Kapiti Uniting Church,
56 Kakariki Grove, Waikanae.
Ngapaki Street,
Phone: (04) 905 6239.
Waikanae Beach.

Afrikaans Service (10.00am):

led by Jan Lion-Cachet
At Porirua Seventh Day Adventist Church
(Youth Hall) c/o Kenepuru Drive and Lower
Main Drive

Hymns (Afrikaans Liedboek): 188:1,2;
235:1,2; 119:1,4 and 476:1,4

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 13:1-32

Text: 1 Kings 13:26

Waikanae Service (7.00pm):

led by Jan Lion-Cachet
At Kapiti Uniting Church, Ngapaki Street

Hymns (Blue Hymnal):

373:1,3,4; 94:1,2; 355:1,2 and 384:1,2,5.

Scripture Reading: Revelation 2:1-7, 12-29

Text: Revelation 2:4, 5

Sermon: "Our love in action!"

1. *Do not forsake your first love*

2. *Understand love properly*

3. *Structure your action according your love*

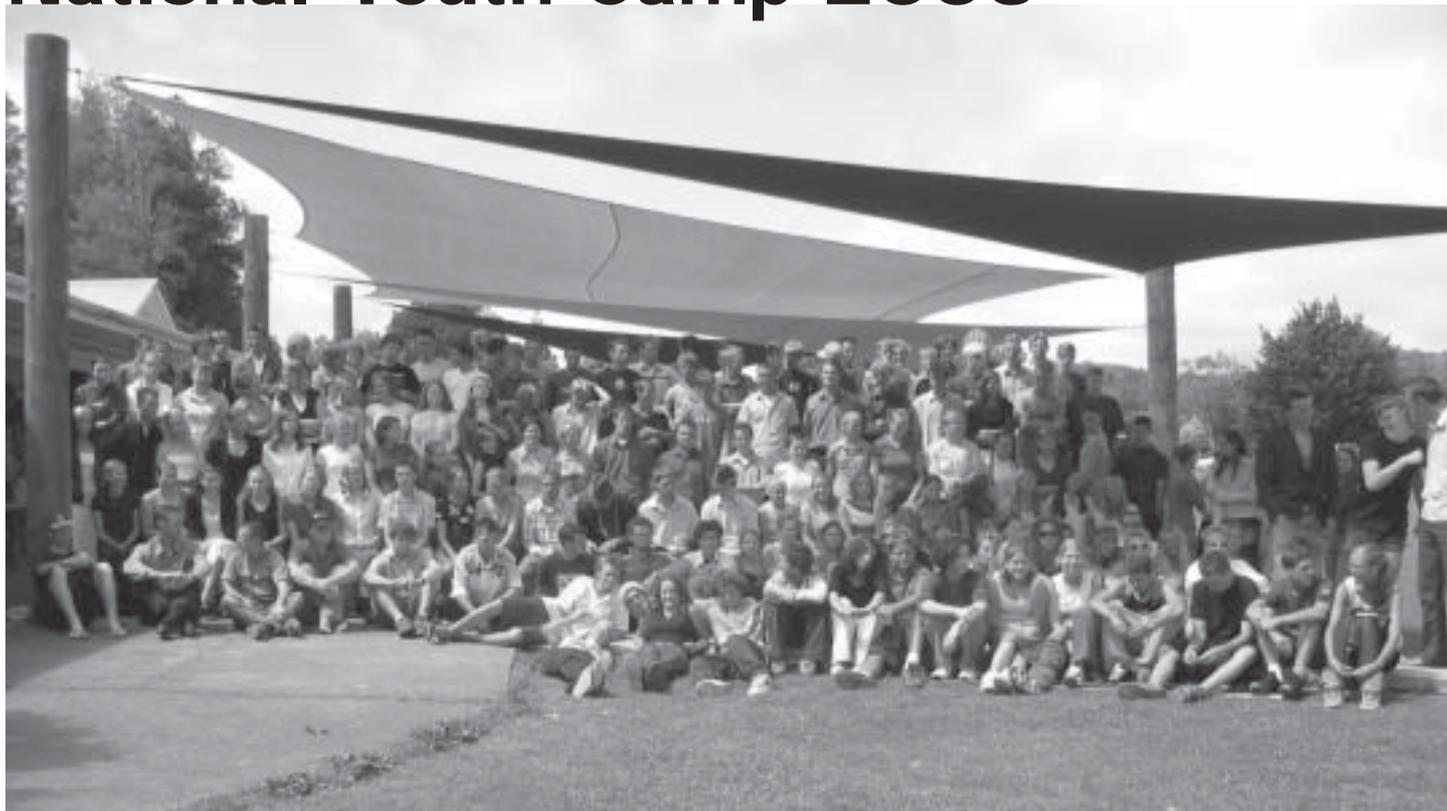
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National Youth Camp 2003



At any camp I guarantee there will be plenty of sunshine and rain and at the last national youth camp we had them both in abundance. The first few days we had moderate amounts of sun, some of us even got burnt. The last few days we had buckets of rain which transformed the field into a swimming hole.

Surrounded by the tall trees of Camp Adair and the songs of many birds, we were also shown God's love to us through a very dedicated committee, a wonderful camp mum

and dad, a very 'youthy' type of minister, and some very talented camp cooks plus a few special volunteers.

I needn't bore you with the daily program because I assume you all went to youth camps in your day. Basically, we had Bible studies, we ate, we played sport, we met new people and rekindled old friendships. There were a few other extra activities like the 'Supportas Nite', Storm the Heights, Top Group activities, excursion to Miranda pools, Swing Dance,

Asterix Banquet and the Megabash, just to name a few.

To be honest with you, the bathing and excrement areas weren't the best. Everything was to low, the showers, the toilets and the basins. Everything was also always wet. The walls were not soundproof, which actually proved to be quite comical as one could often here the occupants of the men's toilets talking about waxing their legs and the girls the liked - just the usual stuff.

The food was good but the spiritual food was even better. The studies were focused on the theme 'Go Vertical' which was all about prayer - when to pray, how to pray, what to pray and why to pray. We tackled the tough issues about prayer, investigated sources and material that can help us in prayer (like hymns, prayer books, the psalms, etc.), and we rewrote sections of psalm 119 in a 'youthy' way. The studies kind of donked me on the head and told me to get my act together and spend time everyday with God in prayer and Bible reading. I pray that this was the outcome for other people too. On three different nights, some people spoke to us about prayer in their lives. The camp parents and camp cooks told us about their prayer life as well as some of us young-uns, which was really encouraging.

One thing that really made a huge impact on me at camp was the 'Special Presentation'. Sergeant Smith came and talked to us about being a police officer, a Christian, about crime and offensive weapons (like toy guns and screwdrivers). He told us that attitude is a big



Camp Adair Hunua, site of the National Youth Camp 3-10 January 2003

thing as far as crime is concerned. So is 'hattitude'. He pointed to several guys in the audience saying "hattitude" and they quickly removed their hats and there I was in the front row with my hat on backwards. I was SO SCARED!!(apparently ladies are allowed to keep their hats on, phew!). So yeah, he talked to us about attitude and how a bad attitude is what gets most of us in trouble. I looked around me and I saw a few bad attitudes. I know some people thought the camp wasn't too good but I also know it's all about your attitude. Hey, I had fun, despite the almost non-existent waterhole. I had enough time to hang out with my friends (8 am till 1am the next day usually). I was well fed, washed and entertained, I had a bed to sleep in and a roof over my head. Yeah, it is all about your attitude - "people with a good attitude tend to fly at a good altitude".

God blessed me heaps at this camp, it's good to be able to met fellow young people who can help you out on your walk with God. I'm really thankful for that. Great camp, see you next year!!

Lauretta den Hartigh



50th Anniversary Celebration

The Reformed Churches of Auckland celebrate the 50th Anniversary of their institution as the original Reformed Church of Auckland on the 4th April 2003. The Reformed Church of Auckland became the Reformed Churches of Avondale and Mangere on the 1st of January 1964. The Reformed Church of the North Shore, a daughter of the Mangere congregation, was instituted on the 27th of April 1980, with the Reformed Church of Pukekohe, a daughter of the North Shore congregation, being instituted on the 5th of February 1989.

To thank the Lord for His goodness by remembering His great help in the past, there will be an open morning, D.V., on Tuesday the 1st April 2003 in the Reformed Church of Mangere, especially for our Senior members, with an open day on Saturday the 5th of April, in the Reformed Church of Avondale. The Rev. J. W. (Bill) Deenick, our founding minister, has been invited to attend and speak at these events and to preach at a number of worship services.

For further information please contact the Rev. Sjirk Bajema on (09) 277 9360 or email him on thirty@paradise.net.nz .

Further details will be forthcoming once they have been settled.

Books in focus

Reviewed by the
Rev. C. Kavanagh

English Standard Version of the Bible

In 2001 a new version of the Bible appeared on the shelves of the Christian bookshops, the English Standard Version (ESV). In fact, it is not an entirely new version, but an old one that has been amended and re-published. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) was a favourite and a staple for a couple of generations, but recently went out of print. Crossway Bibles acquired the copyright, and re-published the RSV with some significant changes as the ESV.

Bible translations fall into several categories. There are those in the King James, or Authorised, Version family, which have always had a foundation of the work of Tyndale and his collaborators, received from an earlier generation into the KJV. They can be traced through the line of the KJV, the Revised Version, the American Standard Version (ASV), the RSV then the New Revised Standard version (NRSV), and now the ESV, and also the New KJV. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) claims the American Standard Version as its base.

Others are completely new translations, like the New English Bible (NEB), and the New International Version (NIV), and Today's English Version, or Good News Bible (TEV) or GNB). There are a few paraphrases, which take a translation as their basis, and offer a paraphrase, that is explains the text as it goes along, such as the Living Bible and the New Living Bible.

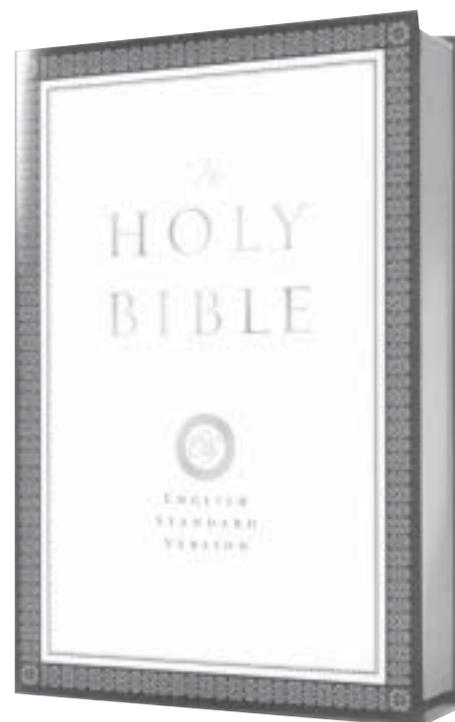
On the whole the KJV family are translations that reflect the actual wording of the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic originals of the Scriptures. Sometimes, as in the ASV, the translation is very literal, and the English can become difficult to follow in places. The NASB is also very literal, and sometimes uses the word order of the originals in a way that can make it difficult to read in English, especially out loud. The other versions count readability high on the agenda, and somewhat smooth out the translation. The NIV does this without losing accuracy, as does the TEV, which also uses a limited vocabulary, with some paraphrasing.

The newer translations go in for a thing called "dynamic equivalence", to a greater or lesser degree. This is when a word or phrase in the original language is replaced by one in English that carries the same sense, but is not a strict translation. All versions do this to some extent (for example, the NASB translates a word meaning literally "same-minded" as

"kindred spirit", in Philippians 2.20), though the NIV has it as a policy of translation. A good example is in Psalm 63.5 (NIV): *My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods*, is literally: *My soul will be satisfied with fat and fatness*. This does not detract from the usefulness of the NIV as a version for general use.

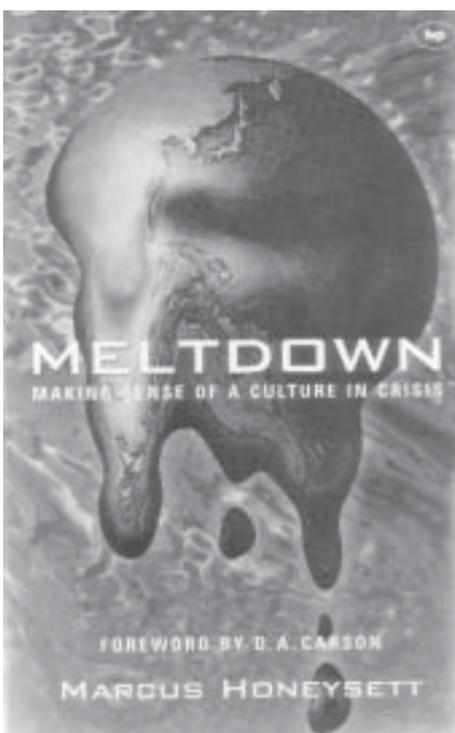
Some versions have a deliberate policy of amending the text, such as the NEB, whose translators produced a readable, if now dated translation at the expense of inaccuracy in translation. Other versions go in for political correctness by being gender neutral. The NRSV is probably the worst offender here, to an almost comical degree – "son of man" in Ezekiel is rendered "mortal" for example. These versions are rendered unsuitable for all except highly specialised use.

The English Standard Version has the readability of the Revised Standard Version, but the editors have restored some of the literal meanings in some places where the RSV tended to show some bias. For example, the word translated as "expiation" in the RSV in places like Romans 3.25 has been replaced by the traditional "propitiation". It can be noted that the atonement is an expiation of sin (cleaning away), but the particular Greek word so translated is more accurately translated as "propitiation" (removal of God's anger by sacrifice). Again, in Isaiah 7.14, the controversial "young woman" has been



replaced in the text by the more conservative "virgin".

All in all, for a version that is readable, accurate and up to date, without descending into political correctness, the English Standard Version will take a lot of beating. Hopefully it might find its place along side of the NASB and NIV in our churches for general use.



Meltdown – making sense of a culture in crisis

By Marcus Honeysett,
published by Intervarsity
Press, England, 2002

Our culture is the air we breathe. So opens the introduction to *Meltdown*. And just as we take in the air we breathe, without conscious effort or deliberate thought or action, so we experience the culture all around us, of the world in which we live. It becomes invisible to us, and we accept it as normal and given, without thought. It's a good thing to take a step back now again to have a look at that culture, and this book will help us to do that. *Meltdown* is a beginner's guide to Postmodernism, the modern philosophy that underlies so much of the present day culture, and is defined in the book as having broadly three big ideas – relativism (no absolute truth), pluralism (all

ideas and opinions and persons must be treated equally), and cynicism (no big picture in life).

Honeysett is a Christian writer who has worked for student organisations in the UK, and brings a conservative Christian perspective to bear on his subject. The book is especially geared for the Christian student community, with examples drawn from student life, but gives a good insight into the foundations of Postmodernism for anyone who is interested to make sense of the world around him.

Five influential theories

The first half of the book is taken up with five specific theories and writers who have influenced modern culture and philosophy. There is an illustration, taken usually from student life, of what the idea looks like on the ground, in real life, and a brief Christian critique of each of the author's philosophy. The individuals cited are:

Foucault – on authority and intention, and the impossibility of being able to get at the meaning of any author or any piece of writing. **Derrida** – the inventor of deconstruction, really saying that any piece of any communication ultimately means what the receiver intends it to mean.

Benjamin – on the impossibility of judging the true value of anything.

Butler – on gender, from a radical feminist perspective. **Baudrillard** – on knowledge and reality, and the impossibility of truly knowing anything. References are given to original works if anyone had the inclination to try to get to grips with the writers themselves. The authors' name are phonetically spelled for us too.

Part two looks at some of the effects this way of looking at the world has. We are all familiar with them, even though we couldn't put a label to them, or recognise where they came from. Effects are noted especially in reference to Christianity in the areas of the University, the Bible and Bible reading, the Church, morality, and T.V..

The glorification of self

We are interested to know what these philosophies look like in the street when we meet them. There is a widespread rejection of believing that any system has the answers, be it Marxism, Capitalism, religion and so there is a rejection of Christianity. It becomes one among the many "metanarratives" (big stories) that people think they cannot trust or believe in these days. And so the individual becomes the most important thing. Cynicism is rife; it is just not possible to get people to ask of anything "Is it true", but people will ask "Is it for me?". Self is glorified, and along with this comes selfishness, rejection of service, pursuit of leisure, so that many Christians even see the church as a leisure time activity. Pluralism leads to political correctness, and we are all familiar with that, from government downwards, in every area of life. Postmodernity must lead to apathy and self absorption, to a society of Lotus Eaters. *And deep-asleep he seemed, yet all awake, And music in his ears his beating heart did make.*

Everything is reduced nondescript sameness, and nothing really matters. The most important duty is duty to self. The biggest thing in the landscape is self. Is this what we are seeing all around us?

The question that arises in my mind is "Are these just fancy new names for old sins"? I think they are. But now the old sins have a theoretical backing from these, and other, philosophers. Just as in the previous century, the theory of evolution gave academic leave for people to shut God out of the world, so Postmodernism is doing the same to enthrone self.

Are these things that Christians should take an interest in? yes, but we should see the philosophy as man-made, and not "natural". It is not something discovered, but invented, and is not part of the natural order of things. Here is a good book to explain the jargon of an underlying philosophy, to get you thinking, and even to look at the original sources if you are interested enough. Seeing the culture is the first step to redeeming the culture, but always bearing in mind, it is sin that makes us cynical, pluralistic and relative, and the cure for that is the cross of Christ, and His Gospel.

Reformed Theological College

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The CD-ROM based subject offered in 1st semester 2003 is:

*(TH210) The Doctrine of God and the Person and Work of Christ
(An introduction to Theology, taught by Dr Bill Berends)*

TH210 is an A.C.T. accredited core subject for both the Diploma of Theology and Diploma of Ministry.

Subject format and requirements:

- Students need to have a computer with CD-ROM drive and internet connection.
- The subject consists of 12 lectures on CD-ROM, with hyperlinks to the biblical text and a Bible and theological dictionary.
- Students should complete one lesson and assignment per week .
- Progress will be monitored by the assignments, and bulletin board interaction. A final exam will be held in or near the student's hometown.
- Library books, if not available at local libraries, may be borrowed from the RTC library, at the cost of return postage.
- Students will be linked to a mentor in their area
- Tuition Fees for CD-ROM based subjects are \$A400 (inclusive of Deposit, A.C.T. Registration Fee , Library Fee, and CD-ROM study materials) . The prescribed textbook will be additional (about \$A20).
- A Deposit of \$A100 is required with the completed Enrolment and Registration Forms. The balance of \$A300 is payable upon receiving the study materials

Enrolments for TH210 for 1st Semester close on 15 March

**Enquiries: ph 0352442955, fx 0352436055,
eml hquake@rtc.vic.edu.au**

**Reformed Theological College 125
Pigdons Rd Waurn Ponds Geelong
Vic 3216 310103 247WDS**

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

“On the road to Mandalay”

Last November, Rev. John Goris visited Myanmar (formerly Burma). He was invited by the **United Reformed Churches in Myanmar** to officiate as guest-speaker at the formal opening of the Evangelical Reformed Seminary (ERS) and Ministerial Training Institute (MTI) in Yangon. In addition to that, John spent four days lecturing at the seminary, teaching students about the covenant and various eschatological issues. Here are excerpts from his report to the Overseas Mission Board:

The church in Myanmar

“In Myanmar, Christianity began by Baptist mission work in 1812 under the initial efforts of Adoniram Judson. There is openness to the gospel today although the [socialist] authorities are most careful to enforce restrictions. Nonetheless the church is growing.

“The general church situation deteriorated in the 20th Century with increasing liberalism and to offset that a particular brand of evangelicalism entered which had a considerable following, viz, Dispensationalism.

“Reformed doctrine was virtually unknown until a young man teaching at the Baptist Seminary got hold of some *Back To God Hour* sermons. That was in the mid-eighties. He went to the States to learn more about Reformed teachings at Calvin Seminary. Meanwhile the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar had been started in the late eighties/early nineties. Today there are more than 10 Reformed denominations in Myanmar.

United Reformed Churches in Myanmar

“One such is the United Reformed Church of Myanmar (URCM), which was started in 1993 by Rev Moses Thang. The URCM has shown a particular interest in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) and wishes to join. As much as I could observe they are a faithful Reformed Church, faithful in their teaching and faithful in reaching out and growing in their witness. They are most eager to learn and take a stand against the teachings of dispensationalism. They have adopted the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession of Faith, and adapted the Church Order of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to the Myanmar situation.

“The URCM presently has 23 congregations and 3 mission fields and a total of 17 pastors, and 7 pastors to be, as well as 5 missionaries. They have 3 classes.

“Firstly, *The Falam Classis* – North Chin State has 9 churches, primitive methods and tools. They are most keen to improve their Biblical and Reformed instruction and were grateful for this visit to their country. Many Christians are still influenced by dispensationalism. The high cost traveling prevents them from coming to Yangon too often (for further training), but they do come.

“Secondly, there is *the Kale Classis* (since 1994) - the plains just outside the Chin State. The Lord guided them in church matters but the written formulation of a Church Order is greatly appreciated. They love the Reformed faith but are seen by some other Christian groups as a cult. However, their numbers continue to grow. This classis has 8 churches, 7 of which are in the villages and have buildings of bamboo-matted material. The eighth one is in a township where land is expensive, hence, no place of worship except for the pastor’s house which is too small. There are also other denominations in the villages, SDA, RC, JW and dispensational groups.

“Thirdly, there is *the Yangon Classis* – Initially there were 3 churches in Yangon, now 5 churches. They have 2 mission field churches, one in Mandalay (2nd biggest city of Burma). In total the classis has 7 churches with 11 pastors including 4 missionaries. It is a difficult field of labour as any open outreach/worship could come under suspicion.

“The Yangon Classis has responsibility for the ERS & MTI. It is quite a burden to them as there are no proper facilities and expansion is important. The study programmes began in 1997 with the training and “upgrading” of pastors, there are 12 pastors who come in periodically. At present the Rev Moses Thang is the Principal, assisted by pastor Siang Hope.

“There was a plea for more teaching help from abroad and I was urged to consider coming again. They have also asked assistance in the training of their 32 elders and 51 deacons. Over against Dispensationalist teaching which jumps from text to text, the brothers of URCM desire more instruction in expository teaching. However, they lack commentaries and other vital Reformed literature. Any contributions towards the library would be welcome. They are eager to translate helpful literature and Scriptures into the Falam language. (Pray for efficient translators)

The Mission work of the URCM

“Since the founding of the denomination, the

URCM has been most conscious of its mission task. They focused on three areas from the start. Their concern was to reach Buddhists, animists and other unbelievers. They began to dig 2 wells in some inland area and the people opened up to the gospel. Even the authorities allowed them to stay and encouraged them, giving them land. (How good the Lord is!) Soon other villages approached the mission workers and invited them to come in to preach the gospel. It is important to have some facilities for those regions to have a central ‘post,’ or a mission centre.

“As a whole the URCM was most grateful for this visit and the teaching lounge was packed in those 6 days. They appreciate the contact with Reformed brethren elsewhere. The church is poor and in many places is not even allowed to have worship facilities, unless they are linked with a pastor’s house or a member’s place of work etc!

Conclusion

“On the whole, the visit was very worthwhile. It proved to be a meaningful and challenging fact-finding tour in a needy land where the Lord has been pleased to let the great Reformation truths take root. I believe we ought to be open to the churches there, patient with those aspects of teaching where some still need to be weaned from the greater or smaller remnants of dispensationalism, or other “isms”.

“The URCM is definitely a church to get to know better and is worthy of support prayerfully and practically, especially in their endeavors to teach a faithful Reformed message at their seminary. It is humbling to see a church rich in zeal and love for the Lord, though poor in the resources of this world. Their presence is a vivid reminder of our gracious Lord who for our sakes became poor, that through His poverty we might become rich! (2 Cor 8:9)”

Famine relief in southern Africa

Moving from Asia to Africa—we’ve heard a lot on television recently about the famine in southern Africa. Here’s a report that was sent to the National Diaconate Committee about the work of **Christian Reformed World Relief (CRWRC¹)**, to provide relief for those most in need:

“My name is Bruce Campbell-Janz and I am the International Relief Project Manager with CRWRC in North America. I work with Jacob Kramer. Jacob asked me to provide you with an update on the programming in southern

Africa in follow-up to the contribution by your churches [last October]. It is my pleasure to be able to do so.

"Nearly 15 million people will be in need of food assistance between now and the next major corn harvest. To address this situation, our large initiatives in southern Africa are well underway. CRWRC is programming both food and seed in Malawi and Zambia and seed in Mozambique (which has not been so severely affected by the food crisis as some of its neighbouring countries).

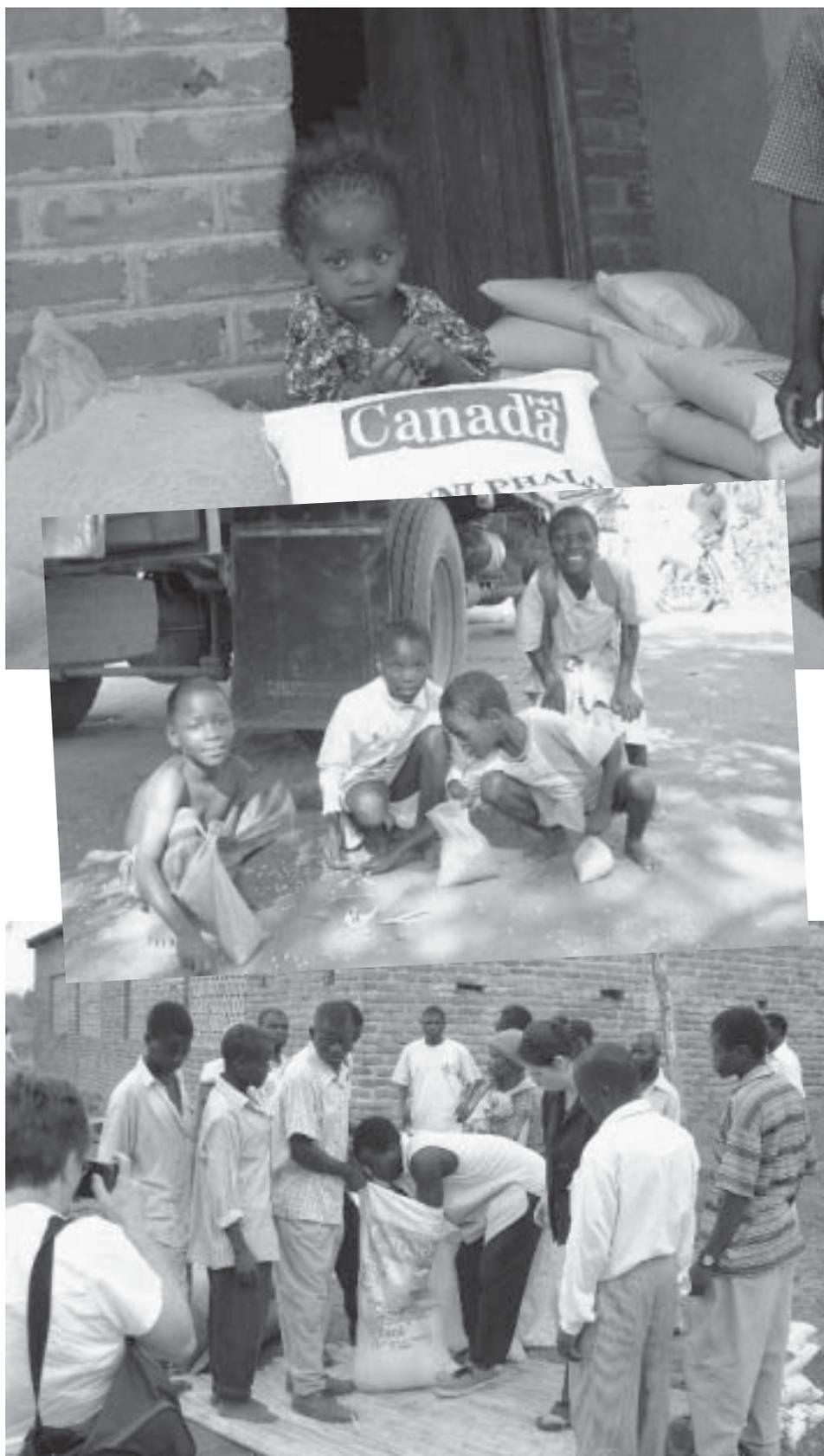
"Seed programming projects are in full swing in all three countries. Planting season is in November/December and the next major corn harvest takes place in April/May. All-in-all, more than 10,000 farming families are receiving seed, purchased locally, in the three countries through our currently planned program. Programming seed is very important for us at CRWRC because we operate from a basis of food security. Yes, providing food for people in need today but also making an effort to help people become more food secure themselves so that they can provide for their families in the future. Due to the food crisis, families were forced to consume the grain that they typically set aside for seed.

"As far as the food programming goes, Malawi is much further along than Zambia. As you may know, the Zambian government has now formally rejected all food assistance that may contain Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

"Corn grown in Canada is not segregated between non-GMO and GMO in the storage process. So, there is essentially no way to guarantee that a given quantity of corn from Canada is GMO-free. This is a major challenge for our programming in Zambia but we are working at alternative ways of providing food to those in need in Zambia. These alternatives include: buying GMO-free white corn in Canada and shipping that although quantities are quite limited (as it is kept separate from the stream of yellow corn, which is both GMO and non-GMO), pursuing local purchase possibilities, etc. Our commitment is to walking with the poor. Therefore, we will do all that we can to provide food assistance in Zambia to the greatest degree possible.

"In Malawi, the food shipped from Canada is starting to arrive in-country. The first containers of corn and peas arrived at warehouses in Malawi last week Monday (21 October). Containers continue to arrive on a daily basis. Due to bottlenecks in the infrastructure in southern Africa, these commodities took almost 4 weeks longer than originally scheduled to arrive at destination. Six once-a-month distributions are currently scheduled between early November and early April. So, things are well underway in Malawi.

"We are greatly concerned by the situation in both Malawi and Zambia. In each of the countries, at the height of the crisis (from



December/January on to the harvest in April/May), more than 3 million people will be in need of food assistance which means that almost 1 person in 3 in the total population of the country will need assistance. We must do all we can.

"The programs that are mentioned above have been covered off by donations from churches, collaboration with the Canadian

Foodgrains Bank (CFGB), and matching (through CFGB) from the Canadian government. However, we are also planning on doing more in these three countries in need through what we are calling "complementary programming." Due to certain limitations in our programming with CFGB and the Canadian government (based on their policies), we are projecting

using CRWRC church-raised funds to be able to have more flexibility in our programming and reach more people. Current planned programming here includes: extending the seed distribution in Zambia to reach more people, providing supplies for a Food-For-Work (FFW) project in Malawi focussing on rural infrastructure rehabilitation to reach agricultural markets, etc. . So, there is certainly a great need for additional support. This is particularly the case given the challenges in Zambia as we are very limited through CFGB as to the local food purchases that we can undertake.

"I should mention that we have contract relief staff working in both Malawi and Zambia in order to support this CRWRC relief

programming and work in conjunction with CRWRC relief partners in these countries. There's a Canadian couple in Zambia and a Canadian couple and single woman in Malawi (workers in Malawi cover off Mozambique as well). They've been very helpful in this relief programming process. CRWRC has a longer-term presence and community development staff in both Malawi and Zambia as well.

"We greatly appreciate the commitment and dedication of the Reformed churches in New Zealand to supporting our sisters and brothers who are in need in southern Africa. Your contribution has been a special encouragement to the work to date."

MIF Prayer Notes

1. The **Presbyterian Church in Eastern Australia** (PCEA) asks prayer for their work in **Peru**: "Give thanks for the two new works commencing in the villages of Jepelacio and Cachiyacu. The latter is an hour by Peruvian road and then five hours on foot from Moyobamba. Pray that the preached and spoken word may take root." Also noted: "Give thanks that the distribution of 1,000 New Testaments in Moyobamba was very successful; there were very few knock backs, some who missed the distribution are asking

Country profile: CAMBODIA



25 years of war, genocide and the greed of subsequent governments have impoverished most of Cambodia's population. The major economic activities are receiving international aid (the largest per capita receiver nation in the world) and sin (pornography, prostitution, drugs and illegal logging).

Cambodia's history is a sad one: the country has suffered for 500 years as a pawn in regional and global conflicts with Thai, Vietnamese, French, Japanese and US invasions or occupations. A tragic victim of the Vietnam War (1970-75) which opened the way for the extreme Marxist Khmer Rouge take-over in 1975, Cambodia's people suffered and died through one of the most savage slaughters of the 20th Century. Almost all former military personnel, civil servants, educated or wealthy people and their families were killed, and the nation turned into a vast labour camp. The Vietnamese army ousted the Khmer Rouge in 1978, but civil war between four contending armies raged with superpower support until 1991. International efforts to bring democracy with elections in 1993 and 1998 were hugely expensive and manipulated by the leader Hun Sen to entrench his personal power base, and crush opposition. Nevertheless, since 1998 there has

been no further warfare. A member of ASEAN since 1998, the restored monarchy may not survive into a second decade.

Buddhism has been the national religion since the 15th Century. The Khmer Rouge sought to eradicate all religion; 90% of Buddhist monks and most Christians perished. Since 1978 there have been periods of more tolerance, but only since 1990 have Christians been allowed to worship openly. There is increasing freedom of religion for Cambodians. 1.19% of the population is Christian.

Pray for Cambodia:

Deep emotional and physical scars which remain in people's lives following the genocide of 1975-79 in which nearly 2 million were killed. There are over 30,000 who have lost limbs to landmines, and almost the entire population needs deep healing from the trauma of their losses and suffering.

Pray that many Cambodians would be free from the spiritual darkness that oppresses the country. Ever-present spirit shrines, moral collapse, and the strong influence of Buddhism are signs of this darkness. The sex industry thrives, but a third of all prostitutes (an estimated 50,000) are children. Cambodia has the highest rate of child abandonment in SE Asia.

Pray for the Cambodian Church. The first CMA missionaries arrived in Cambodia in 1923, and laboured for 47 years before they saw much fruit. There were only 700 believers in evangelical churches in 1970, but by 1975 this had grown to over 9,000. Only 2,000 survived the slaughter.

Christian ministry to physical needs is a major concern. The social needs are enormous. The murder of most of those with skills or an education makes expatriate input essential. Rehabilitation, orphanages, reconstruction, health care, projects for agriculture, fisheries, water management and education are all ministries where Christians have significant input.

Those least evangelised:

The Buddhist majority.

The Cham are almost entirely Muslim. Probably 60% are deeply involved in spirit worship. They have increased rapidly in numbers. Few are Christians and there are no churches among them.

The tribal peoples. Only among the Mnong have significant numbers come to Christ.

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

for a copy and a number of families are attending church as a result."

2. This time last year, MIF reported on a ministry of the **Orthodox Presbyterian Church** that reaches out to French-speaking Canadians. Rev. Ben Westerveld represents the OPC in **Québec**, and he has recently reported: "While certain pastoral cases weigh heavy upon my heart and the heart of Elder Marc Drouin, we are also greatly encouraged as the Lord continues to provide opportunities to teach the gospel. A few weeks ago, a young man called me and asked that I might meet with him and his girlfriend. He is a member of one of the ERQ (l'Eglise réformée du Québec) churches, but since moving to the Québec City area has rarely attended church. The young woman was raised Roman Catholic but no longer practices. I feared that they were going to ask me to marry them, something which happens frequently enough in Québec among those who profess some kind of religion. How surprised and pleased I was when the young man told me that his girlfriend wanted to know more about the Christian faith. "Would you have time to do a Bible study with us?" Sure! Pray for this couple as we study the Scriptures together, and as the two of them read and discuss the Gospel of Mark together during the week. Pray that the Lord would return the man to His flock and that the young woman would also respond to the call of the Good Shepherd."

3. Please pray for OPC workers in **China**, who are affiliated with a University but also spend time in ministry to believers. One missionary writes about his church involvement: "The intensive class on the Westminster Confession of Faith which I taught at a local church went very well. We had class six hours a day for three days. For most of the students, it was the first time for them to consider the practical implications of the theology of the Bible. On the last day, it was a pleasure for me to hear the reports the students had prepared about what they had learned. May these not just be words, but may they translate into action as these young leaders go back home to minister in their villages."

4. Here's news from **Jared Berends** of Bucklands Beach congregation, who is teaching English in **Mongolia**. In his newsletter Jared writes, "I am teaching an Adult Community English class for two hours, four nights a week, and am running the EXCEL programme for my province. I really enjoy my Adult Community class. I have 14 students, most of whom are professionals studying at our college for four hours a day plus working full-time. The EXCEL programme aims to increase the teaching skills and English knowledge of Mongolian English teachers by holding week-long seminars, marking intensive homework assignments and observing and teaching them.

"Life in Mongolia is never dull. So far I have been electrocuted in the street twice, been assaulted at the black market, learned to ride

a Mongolian horse, helped in the winter muster, and been stranded in a snow-storm, just to mention a few things."

Jared asks prayer for: his health, more English teachers to go to Mongolia, and effective contacts with people that he meets. And as you pray, remember that it's winter in Mongolia: my friends who lived there didn't have a refrigerator, but they didn't need one. They just hung the yak out the window (first floor apartment) and hacked bits off as they needed it!

5. **Rev. Barry and Anne James** report that they are keeping well in Mbale, **Uganda**. Barry continues to teach his courses to about 20 students who are training for the ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Uganda. The OPC missionaries (Tony and Kathleen Curto) there have expressed their immense gratitude that the RCNZ has seen fit to agree to their request for the Jameses to 'fill in' at such short notice to alleviate the teaching shortage they were faced with.

6. Thank the Lord that **John Goris** could chair the ICRC missions conference in Pattaya last month, and that **Anton Meister** was able to present a paper at the conference. Thank the Lord for safe travel and a time of blessing and cooperation as delegates shared about the mission-work done in the Asian region by various Reformed denominations.

7. **Hans and Lisa Vaatstra** will return from PNG this month, arriving in Dunedin on 18th. Pray for safe travel and an enjoyable reunion with family. Pray that both Hans and Lisa will be able to form a clear picture of the work in PNG, and to see where and whether they can contribute to it. Pray for them as they settle back into life in Dunedin and make decisions about the future.

8. Pray for **Janice Reid** as she continues to revise and develop the Hands On Training materials that can help radio announcers to develop their skills and provide a better service for their listeners in the name of the Lord. Pray for preparations that are under way for Janice to teach Firm Foundations Radio to a large group of radio workers in South Africa in May.

9. March is the time when many thousands of overseas students start their courses at NZ

tertiary institutions. Pray that they will hear the Gospel while they are in NZ. Pray that they will meet with sympathetic and caring NZ Christians, who will befriend them and introduce them to Christ. Please pray that churches in New Zealand, including our Reformed churches, would catch on to the idea that the Lord is sending multitudes of overseas students here, and giving us a unique and not-to-be-missed opportunity to share Christ with these folk, who may never, in their whole lives, meet somebody who can tell them about Him.

10. Pray for **Frank Van Dalen** as he prepares for his trip to NZ during April. Pray for his ministry in the churches, and at the Ministers and wives conference (1st week in May), at which he is speaking. Pray also for meetings arranged by SPROUT/OMB at which he will speak.

11. As church activities begin again for the year, please pray for increasing interest in missions by our churches. Pray for the Lord's blessing on mission committees, and on office-bearers as they discharge their duties. Pray for those who have expressed an interest in serving in mission, that their sessions would have wisdom to guide them through the processes involved.

1 CRWRC is a ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

IN TOUCH

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

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

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



If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ15 (or \$AU15), with your details, to the National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe, Auckland. (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)

Focus on home

This month we review two popular programs designed to present the gospel to those who would benefit from an introduction to the Christian faith. Samuel Alexander whose story was featured in Faith and Focus last year was one of many whom I know was helped by a presentation of Christianity Explained. Both courses are 'in print' with the publishers details listed below.

Christianity Explained

This popular evangelistic tool has been around since the early eighties and was produced in Australia by pastor Michael Bennett for a culture which has little knowledge or understanding of the Christian gospel. That may seem surprising given that Australia and New Zealand have a strong Christian tradition. However, since 1955 weekly church attendance here has dropped from around thirty three percent to less than ten percent. It is no longer reasonable to assume that most people have a reasonable understanding of Christianity and the Bible. The author therefore figured that the "one-off" evangelistic presentation or a crusade style evangelism, popular in the 50s, 60s is not as effective today in leading people to Christ. A slower step by step approach is deemed to be more helpful. Christianity Explained begins with the assumption that the hearer has little or no prior knowledge of the Gospel and that a single presentation would hardly be sufficient to explain important concepts

such as the character of God, sin, who Jesus is, what His death means, His resurrection, salvation by grace and the place of faith and repentance in the order of salvation. These important concepts take time to explain thoroughly and are necessary for hearers to have a basic understanding of the Christian faith.

In its current format the course is presented in a manual of 85 pages containing three main sections: The Principles Behind Christianity Explained; How To Use Christianity Explained; The Six Studies based on the Gospel of Mark. These six studies include; 1. Jesus the Son of God; 2. Jesus His crucifixion; 3. Jesus His resurrection; 4. Grace not works; 5. What is a Christian? Repentance; 6. What is a Christian? Faith. Each of the six studies are presented with detailed instructions for teachers and copying masters for handout sheets for the student. The intention is that one study per week is taught and that between studies students are asked to read relevant sections in the gospel of Mark which are then discussed the following week before the next study.

This course is recommended as a user friendly and effective tool for teaching the basics of the Christian faith to new-comers or those whose neglected faith needs 'revitalizing'. The manual is available from

Union, Wellington, PO Box 760, New Zealand, Ph. 04 385 0485 at a cost of \$39.95. Two videos presenting the principles behind the course and the six studies are also available for hire as teacher training aids.

HV

Two Ways to Live

This personal evangelism course has been produced by Moore Theological College lecturer and missiologist, Philip Jensen with the intention of equipping Christians with the skills and knowledge necessary for faithful, Biblical evangelism. The training course consists of nine sessions designed to assist trainees in their presentation of the gospel. Topics listed include; relating to unbelievers, dealing with common questions, our role in evangelism, and a six step illustrated gospel presentation. The sequence of the presentation is as follows: 1. God is the loving ruler of the world. 2. We reject the ruler God by trying to run our own lives without him. 3. God won't let us rebel for ever. God's punishment for rebellion is death and judgment. 4. Because of his love God sent his son to rule the world: the man Jesus Christ. By dying in our place he took our punishment and brought forgiveness. 5. God raised Jesus to life again as ruler of the world. 6. The two ways to live: Our way, Reject the ruler live our own way and face condemnation by God or, live

God's way by relying on Jesus' death and resurrection, submitting to Jesus as ruler and being forgiven by God and receive eternal life.

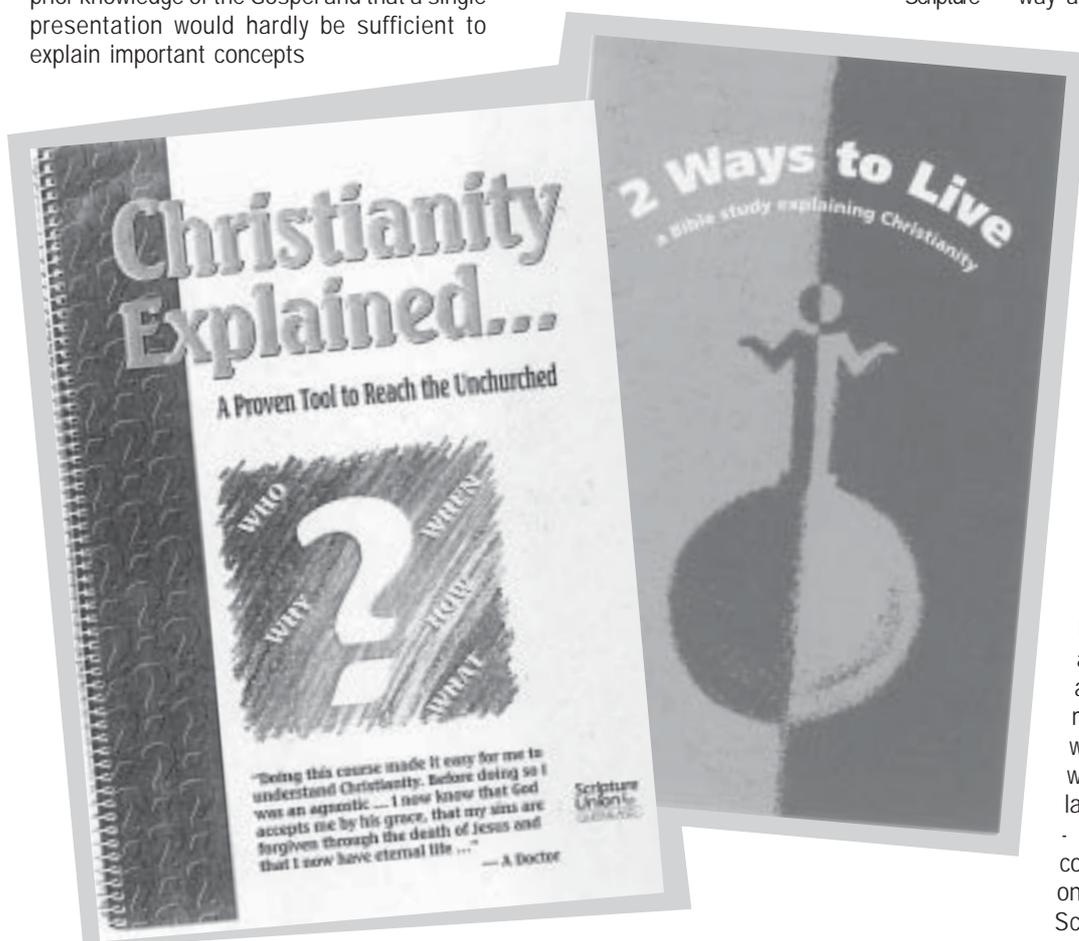
The course is available through Matthias Press. Currently the trainee work books are available for AUD \$7-50, Leaders manuals are \$11.00 and booklets containing gospel outlines are 70c. Matthias Press can be contacted via the Internet or by ordinary mail to PO Box 225 Kingsford NSW 2032 Australia.

HV

From Hastings

Mainly Music. This group has been going here for only one term, and has experienced tremendous growth! It is an outreach to parents/grandparents of pre-kindergarten age children, and involves a once-a-week meeting in which they have about 1/2hr of music, followed by morning tea together. Palmerston North was doing this before us, and the idea was passed on at the Ladies' Presbyterial last year.

- Radio Outreach. A member of the congregation presents a one hour program on Radio Kidnappers on a fortnightly basis. Scripts are derived from sermons and



adapted for radio. The team is seeking to arrange for a broadcast on the in-between weeks, but this would be a different format; more music and scripture reading.

- Missions Display Board. We have a board on a wall in the church hall. Displays are changed about 2 or 3 times a year, and seek to raise

congregational awareness of people/groups that we support.

- Craft Group. The ladies have a craft group which meets regularly. Some ladies from the community attend occasionally.

Some of the ladies in our congregation are involved in pregnancy counselling and Bible in

Schools. As a church we are currently finalising a survey of the congregation, in which we are seeking to learn more about the congregations' attitudes to evangelism and church planting, and to gain ideas for further work.

Nigel Cunningham

A church is born

November 24, 2002 saw the institution of a new church in Hamilton—the first such event to occur in Auckland Presbytery in some fourteen years.

The service was a joyous one. Members of the congregation and visitors from other churches joined to worship the Lord and give thanks for His grace in growing the church. Hukanui Reformed church had small beginnings, but it is now a fully-fledged member of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Read the story of how the Lord brought all this to pass...

A brief history

In late 1997 a group of members in the Hamilton Reformed Church congregation had a desire to reach out with the preaching of God's Word to the rapidly developing area in the north-eastern suburbs of Hamilton. Growing out of this, a proposal was presented to the Session of Hamilton Reformed Church, to form a second preaching place in Hamilton, with a view to also creating a focus for outreach to the people of this area.

As a result, the first worship service was held at the Hukanui Primary School on 10 May 1998. With a strong core of faithful supporters, the work continued. And identity in the surrounding community was being forged.

Two Sunday School classes were established, one for older children before the service (this targeted children from the community) and the other for younger children during the service. Coffee and fellowship became a feature after each service, and on the first Sunday of each month a shared lunch encouraged people to get to know one another.

Since the first service, the folks at Hukanui have welcomed many visitors and new members, and continued to search out avenues that will establish contacts and relationships with people in the local community.

One of the highlights of the year 2000, was the purchase of the land and building on Rototuna Road, previously owned by the North City Apostolic Church. Even though buildings and property were the last things on the mind of members involved with the outreach, the Lord placed this opportunity squarely before them. Through the generosity of His people in the Reformed Church of Hamilton, the property was purchased as a permanent place of worship and a site for the future development of the ministry in Hukanui area.

The "Hukanui Reformed Fellowship of the Hamilton Reformed Church" commenced worship services in its new premises early in

April 2000. At the first service, members heard the welcome news that Rev Noppers had accepted the call to come and serve the Lord in Hamilton, and specifically to help with the work at Hukanui. The Noppers family arrived in July 2000.

Since that time, membership has continued to grow rapidly, with many new families coming to worship at Hukanui. As the congregation has grown, additional space has been created in the auditorium, so that more seating can be provided.

The ministries of the Fellowship were varied, and continue to grow now that the congregation is established as a full sister-church within the denomination. There are several Sunday School classes, home fellowship groups, and a weekly ladies' Bible study during term-time. Christmas 2000 saw Hukanui Fellowship combine with several other churches in the area to host a "Carols in the Park" evening, which attracted many in the local community. Children's holiday programs, special meetings hosted by the home missions committee, and monthly "Prayer, Praise and Fellowship" meetings add to the range of activities.

The members of Hukanui Reformed Church



Rev Bill Wiersma brings greetings from Hamilton congregation.



Members of the congregation at the Institution service

give thanks to our gracious Lord for His faithful provision, and continued blessing over the years in which this congregation was established. Special thanks, too, to the Session of Hamilton Reformed Church for their help, provision and guidance during the process of "growing" this new congregation.

Following the light

The service of institution was a fitting reminder of the history and development of this new congregation, and a testimony to God's grace and favour in bringing them to this point. The institution sermon, preached by Rev Noppers and based on Psalm 119:105, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path," reflected the desire of each member to be guided by the Word of the Lord in the days and years to come.

As stated in the Declaration of Institution, "It is our prayer that the Lord may cause us to prosper in His service so that His church may continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; through the faithful



Session members sign the Form of Subscription for the new congregation

preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments and the patient exercise of discipline. May His church also continue to increase in this place and

throughout the world through the conversion of sinners by the proclamation of the Gospel. To God be the glory." And to that we can all heartily say, "Amen!"