

# faith in focus

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*"For these commands are a lamp,  
this teaching is a light,  
and the corrections of discipline  
are the way to life..."*

*Proverbs 6:23*

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**Editorial**

The 24th Synod of The Reformed Churches of New Zealand will most likely be completed by the time you receive this issue of Faith in Focus. Naturally, a report may take a month or two to appear. The Reports, Overtures and other correspondence for this Synod are all known about, however. They have been received and considered by local sessions some weeks and even months before. We do things in good order. There are established procedures so that in every aspect of church life we recognise the wisdom that we have together by God's Word and Spirit.

By having a Synod we affirm on a wider level - after the local Session and Presbytery - the Biblical way of dealing with those matters which affect us altogether. Following the rules and regulations shows that we are seeking as much as we can to work together in the service of the Lord.

It's interesting that when people use the phrase, "an exception to the rules", they often use it in a way to justify a whole new rule altogether. But an exception to the rules actually proves how good the rules are - it is an exception, after all. We see how true that is when those who use the exception to make a new rule are tripped up by what the old rule was there to guard them against in the first place! There are many examples of where churches have moved away from the 'traditional rules' for worship to accommodate the 'youth' only to have those youth leave their churches at an even faster rate of knots. Those rules were there because there is a godly heritage based on scripture. They took it away - so what was there to make those youth stay?

The next time someone mentions that what they're about to do is "something different" or "bending the rules a little" ask them what it's different from, and which rule(s) are being bent. Then think about whether there does need to be that change.

\* \* \* \* \*

You may notice something different about this issue. It should be already apparent on this page! There are no longer any photographs of our regular contributors. To allay any concerns this is not because the photos we have been using are actually misrepresentations - some are more than ten years old! - but it is an economical measure which means we can keep putting the other pictures in. In the printing process bromide is an added expense, and by wise use of our bromide we can keep having appropriate pictures for each article at a reasonably low price for a magazine.

Thank you for the 'News' items. Please, keep it up!

*Before Christ sent the church into the world,  
he sent the Spirit into the church.  
The same order must be observed today."*

*John Stott*

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

# The first preaching of the new covenant in Christ's blood

## The message of Acts 2:38-39

Dean Anderson

Acts 2:38-39 is a very important text. It is situated at the beginning of the Gospel preaching of the New Testament, and is often used in defence of infant baptism. It certainly instructs us as to the core of what New Testament preaching ought to be. And yet, we ought not to forget that this text stands in a certain context. It is equally important that we do not rip it out of that context.

### The command of this covenant

Anyone who was not brought up in the Reformed churches may already have questions. Covenant? Where do you find the word covenant in this text? Nowhere, that is true. Peter doesn't use the word covenant, and yet the concept of covenant is very much present in what he says. But that ought not to surprise us. Not so long ago, the apostles had been reclining at table with the Lord Jesus to celebrate the last Passover. Jesus had said to them, "This is the blood of my covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28).

As you well know, in the Bible a covenant always comes with a promise and a command. Think of Abraham. God said to him, "Walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1)—the command. But He also said, "I will be God to you and to your descendants" (Gen. 17:7)—the promise. When Christ at the Last Supper indicated that His death would inaugurate a new covenant in His blood, He also made clear where the core of God's promise in that covenant was to be found. "This is the blood of my covenant... for forgiveness of sins". That is the core of God's promise to us. Salvation in Christ's blood means forgiveness of sins—and if our sins are forgiven, then we are reconciled to God—then He has become *our* God—just as He promised to Abraham.

Now, what do we find in our text? Peter comes to his audience both with a command, and with a promise: "Repent!" - the command. And the promise? He mentions this in verse 39: "For the promise is for you and your children," What precisely this promise holds we shall see a little later. Let us first pay some attention to the command.

"Repent!" says Peter. To whom is he speaking? To native Jews and

proselytes. They were the people who had gathered here from all the ends of the earth to celebrate the feast of Pentecost with each other. Look once again at Acts 2:5, "Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven." These nations are summarised in verses 10 and 11. But why did Jews have to repent? The charge Peter made against them was crystal clear. In verse 36 he speaks of "this Jesus whom you crucified". The Jews had rejected Jesus, and yet at this feast of Pentecost there was evidence that He was still alive! Tongues as of fire had descended upon the apostles, and everyone had heard the wonder of the speaking in tongues (true languages) of the apostles. This was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy.

The Jews who were present, at least 3,000 of them, were deeply smitten in their hearts. They had only just realised that they had participated in the crucifixion of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—someone who was now ruling from His seat in heaven. This must have been a very frightening moment for them! What could they now expect? The psalms are full of statements showing how the Messiah will

avenge Himself upon his enemies. And Peter was not afraid to refer to such psalms in his sermon. In verses 34-35 he quotes Psalm 110..."For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET."'

These Jews realised now that *they* had become the enemies of God. What now? "What must we do to be saved?" they ask Peter. It's not just any sin that they have committed.

Then come Peter's amazing words, words of comfort, full of the grace of the almighty, holy God whom they had so insulted. "Repent, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins". Yes, in the name of the person whom they had helped to kill...in His name God would grant forgiveness of sins. There is a way back to God. Reconciliation with God was possible, despite the extent of their sin. That is the grace of our God. Even those who had participated in Jesus' death may be washed of their sins in Christ's blood. God does not cherish a human kind of revenge. And that is a great comfort to us. No sin is so great that it cannot be covered by God's grace, and by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is a condition. Forgiveness is not doled out randomly. God is righteous, and He expects repentance. But also that was a gift of grace in the ears of the Jews. God *wishes* to accept our repentance! Praised be His name!

But what is this repentance here in our text? The first thing we need to note is that it is something that man himself must do. Peter gives a command, "Repent!" Literally, this word speaks of a transformation of our thinking. Our thinking, our whole outlook, must be turned around. To put it succinctly, it means that one is not only deeply sorrowful for his sin, but also that he has a new outlook and motivation to change the course of his life. No longer does he wish to walk in the path of this sin, but to turn around and go back so as to show God that he really means to live for Him, and not continue in his sin. It counts in the same way for God as for us. It's not very believable if someone keeps on doing the same sin and time and again asks, "Forgive me, please". You might be sorrowful, but that is not the same as repentance. True repentance (conversion) means warfare—the



fight against sin, a fight that under the blessing of the Lord must slowly but surely win ground. Note that I do not say that one in this life will become completely free of sin. No. But the Lord requires us to honestly engage ourselves in this battle against sin. If we do so, He promises to show us in the symbol of baptism how our sins are washed away in Christ's blood.

In verse 37, not everything is said. Peter does not say *how* baptism symbolises the forgiveness of sins, nor *what* precisely the blood of Jesus has to do with this forgiveness. We know the answers to these questions from the rest of the New Testament. And we must suppose that Peter also explained this to the Jews. It is not for nothing that we are told in verse 40 that Peter *"with many other words solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them"*.

We are, however, told that Peter spoke to them of God's promise (v39: *"For you is the promise and for your children"*).

### The Promise of this Covenant

At this point, we need to focus closely on what the text says. There are many who say, "Look, this promise must be the promise of the Holy Spirit." And it may seem, at first sight, that this is so. What does Peter say? *"And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children."* And yet this is *clearly* not the meaning of the apostle.

In order to make this clear, I must first say something about the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then I will come back to the question of just what this promise is in verse 39.

What was this gift of the Holy Spirit which Peter promised? The first thing we need to say is that it is *not* the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in one's heart. Of course not! For that would be completely the wrong order of things. Repent, be baptised...and only then receive the Holy Spirit in your heart? That cannot be correct. We learn very clearly in the New Testament that true faith, true conversion, is something that the Holy Spirit Himself works in our hearts. If I know for myself that I truly believe, then I may conclude that the Holy Spirit is in my heart. If I repent of my sin, then that is evidence that I already have the Holy Spirit! But Peter does not speak here about receiving the Holy Spirit, but about receiving the *gift* of the Holy Spirit. Within the context of Pentecost he cannot mean anything else than the special gifts of the Spirit, especially, the ability to speak in tongues. That is what is promised to

these Jews if they repent and allow themselves to be baptised.

They had already seen this special gift on that first day of Pentecost, but none of them had received this gift themselves. No, they had *heard* the apostles using this gift. It was the group of apostles who received the gift of tongues from heaven at Pentecost. No one else. All those Jews, from all over the world, *heard* the apostles speaking in tongues. Look at verses 6–8:

And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and marvelled, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"

*"But now"*, says Peter, *"if you repent and allow yourselves to be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins, you will also receive the special gift of the Holy Spirit."* Yes, even they could speak in tongues as proof of the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. But how did this come about? We learn this further in the book of Acts. Take, for example, chapter 8:14–19, which shows us how the apostles went around granting the gift of the Holy Spirit to others by laying their hands on the heads of the recipients. See also chapter 19, where the apostle Paul came across several people who had never been baptised in the name of Jesus. Let's see how that went...

And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, and he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptised?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." And when they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.

And that's how it happened. *"Repent, be baptised, and then you will receive the special gift of the Holy Spirit (by the laying on of the hands of the apostles)"*.

But what then is the great promise of which Peter speaks in verse 39? That Peter cannot be referring to the reception of the special gift of the Spirit is clear from the fact that this promise is for everyone—even descendants who are far off. The special gift of the Spirit could only be distributed by the apostles. When they died, the special gift of the Spirit died out with them. But Peter makes it clear by his own words that this is not what he means. For, although it is not very clear in translation, he

refers back to the words of the prophet Joel. The great promise is the promise of the prophet Joel, the promise of salvation, Acts 2:21...

And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

In the prophecy of Joel 2:32, we can read the rest of that verse. There it reads:

And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

It is clear that for Joel the promise concerns salvation/ deliverance. Now, those last words of Joel—"whom the Lord calls"—are precisely the words which Peter refers to *"The promise is for you and your children ... as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself."* In the original Greek, we see Peter adapting the words of Joel to his own sentence. It is unfortunate that this is not indicated in most translations. Peter uses the standard Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. And it is this promise of salvation from Joel that he is thinking of here. This also agrees with what he has just said, *"Repent, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins"*. Forgiveness of sins is the essence of our salvation! *This* is the great theme of Peter's admonition as verse 40 confirms:

And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"

Peter was concerned with their salvation. And God gives this promise not only to the Jews who were present here, but also to their children, and for all who are far off. There is forgiveness of sins for all.

But now, we come up against an important problem. Peter says, *"Repent, and let each of you be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins."* But most of us were already baptised as children! Is that not in contradiction to the order presented to us in this text?

Our text says, first the command (repent) and then the symbol of the promise (baptism). That is clear. But the order in our text ought not to appear strange to us, for God had given the same order to Abraham. Abraham had to first believe. Only then did he receive the symbol of the promise—in his case, circumcision. In Genesis 17, the Lord comes to Abraham with his covenant, and the sign of circumcision. But years earlier, in chapter 15, God had recognised Abraham's *faith*. In chapter 15, God states that Abraham's faith was reckoned for righteousness (15:6). In Romans 4, the apostle Paul discusses the significance of this fact.

What is my point? The order, *first repent, and then let yourself be baptised*, is the normal order for people who are admitted into God's covenant, both in the Old Testament and in the New. But if you have been admitted into God's covenant and have received the covenant sign yourself, then God gives that

### LOST

LOST at Family Camp, a Kodak KB28 Camera in black vinyl camera bag. Please contact Ross Baird, phone 06 3773449, 21 Cambridge Terrace Masterton. Thank you.

same promise not only to you, but also to your children. It is *extremely* significant that Peter also speaks of God's promise of salvation in this way—and then to a group of Jews. The promise is for them and for their children. God had said the same to Abraham. Abraham knew that, because of that, the sign or symbol was not only given to him as an adult believer, but also to his children. The Jews who heard Peter all knew the history of God's dealings with Abraham. The connection between salvation

for the believer and the promise for both the believer and his children could not possibly have been missed.

It is true that this connection is only implied in the context here? Peter does not explain everything in our text, at least not for us. For the Jews, he gave much extra explanation. We read about that in verse 40. But we have the rest of the New Testament to fill in the details for us. Think of Col. 2:11-12, where Paul instructs us that baptism has come in the

place of circumcision. Think also of the rest of the book of Acts, where time and again we are told that entire *households* were baptised. God's grace is not only for adult believers, but also for their children. Praise Him for that great grace!

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## What about prophecy and tongues today?

**Richard B. Gaffin Jr.**

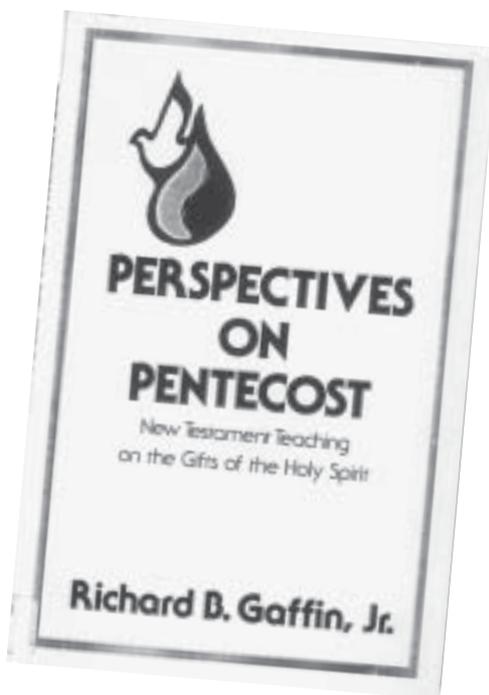
The Westminster Confession of Faith, insisting that Scripture is sufficient in our day, holds that "those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people" have "now ceased" (I.1.). We who adhere to that doctrine thus are often called "cessationists." That label carries a lot of baggage. By itself it's negative. In current debates about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, it suggests what one is *against*. At the outset, then, we need to correct certain misconceptions about "cessationism."

We do not assert that *God's Spirit* is no longer actively working in dynamic and dramatic ways. We earnestly believe that he is. What, for instance, can be more powerful and impressive—even miraculous!—than the 180-degree reversal in walk that occurs when the Spirit transforms those dead in their sins into those alive for good works? This involves nothing less than a work of *resurrection*, of (re-) *creation* (Eph. 2:1-10). This is awesome indeed!

Nor do we believe that *all spiritual gifts* have ceased and are no longer present in the church. At issue is the cessation of a limited number of such gifts. The continuation of the large remainder is not in dispute.

People sometimes tell me, "You're putting the Holy Spirit in a box." At least two responses come to mind. First, I do take this charge to heart. It is by no means an imaginary danger that we can unduly limit our expectations of the Spirit's work by our theologizing. We must ever remember the incalculability factor Jesus notes in John 3:8 (the Spirit is like an unpredictable wind). A mark of any sound doctrine of the Spirit's work is that it will be content with an unaccounted for remainder, an area of mystery. Secondly, however, as I will try to show, the Holy Spirit himself, "speaking in the Scripture" (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:10) puts His activity "in a box" if you will, a box of his own sovereign making. The Bible knows nothing of a pure

whimsy of the Spirit. The Spirit is indeed the Spirit of *ardor* but He is also, and no less, the Spirit of *order* (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). It's striking that Scripture particularly stresses *order* in a discussion of spiritual gifts! A perennial challenge to the church is that we seek this ordered ardor or, if you prefer, this ardor-infused order of the Spirit.



### First the foundation, then the superstructure

According to the Nicene Creed, the "one holy catholic" Church is also "apostolic." What does that mean? What constitutes the apostolicity of the Church? Getting a biblical answer to that question is the important first step toward seeing that God's Word teaches that certain gifts of the Spirit have in fact fulfilled their

purpose, and ceased.

Ephesians 2:11–22 provide as comprehensive an outlook on the New Testament church as anywhere in Paul's writings or, for that matter, the rest of Scripture. Using a favorite biblical metaphor for the church (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4–8), the one church—composed now of Gentiles as well as Jews—is the great house-building project that God, the master architect-builder, is at work on in the period between Christ's exaltation and return. The church is "God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (vv. 19–20).

Two closely related considerations are noteworthy in this description. First, notice that the foundation in view is finished. It is a historically completed entity. When a builder knows what he's doing (as we may assume God does!), he lays the foundation once at the beginning of the project. The foundation doesn't need to be repeatedly re-laid. After he lays the foundation, he builds the superstructure on that foundation. From our vantage point today, we are in the period of superstructure-building. Christ has laid the foundation of His church. Now He is building on it.

Secondly, this conclusion is reinforced when we consider exactly *how* the apostles and prophets, along with Christ, are the church's foundation. For Christ, that plainly consists in His saving work, in His crucifixion and resurrection—"no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11; cf. 15:3-4). But the apostles also belong to the foundation. That is not because the saving work of Christ is somehow incomplete. It is rather because of their *witness*, a witness—authorized by the exalted Christ himself—which is fully revelatory (e.g., Acts 1:22; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:13).

This unique role of the apostles in the God's historical unfolding of His saving plan comes to light in Ephesians 2:20. We find a correlation all through the history of salvation to

its consummation in Christ (Heb. 1:1-2a)—God's *Word* focuses on God's *deeds*. And so the situation is this: to the foundational once-for-all, finished work of Christ, God joined the foundational once-for-all, finished apostolic witness. God's *Word* focuses on God's deeds. This was the matrix for the eventual emergence of the books of the New Testament. Ephesians 2:20, then, indicates that the apostles had a temporary, noncontinuing role in the life of the church. Their place was in the important foundation-laying phase of the church's history. Their function was to provide revelatory, infallibly authoritative, canonical witness to the consummation of salvation history in Christ's finished work. That function was fulfilled. It does not belong to the superstructure-building period to follow. It instead provides the completed solid foundation on which Christ continues to build the superstructure of the church.

Several other lines of New Testament teaching confirm that the office of apostle was temporary. In order for someone to be an apostle, one job prerequisite was to have been an eye and ear witness of Christ before His ascension (Acts 1:21-26). Paul—in 1 Corinthians 15:7-9 (cf. 9:1)—saw himself as meeting this requirement by way of an exception. Along with that, he seems clearly to say here that he is the last of the apostles. The Pastoral Epistles were largely concerned with making apostolic preparation for the future of the church after the time of the apostles. Two of these letters are addressed to Timothy, whom Paul viewed, more than anyone else in the New Testament, as his personal successor. Yet Paul *never* called him an apostle. In light of the redemptive-historical rationale already noted, "apostolic succession" in a personal sense is a contradiction in terms. The apostolicity of the church is not secured by an unbroken, outward succession of officeholders that can be traced back to the apostles. It rather consists in steadfast fidelity to the apostles' teaching or tradition (2 Thess. 2:15) as it is inscripturated in the New Testament.

Many in the charismatic movement agree that apostles—in the sense of those who are "first" among the gifts given to the church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11), like the Twelve and Paul—are *not* present in the church today. In that respect at least—whether or not they regard themselves as such—the large majority of today's charismatics are in fact "cessationists." Anyone who recognizes the temporary nature of the apostolate, then, needs to think through—in the light of other New Testament teaching—what further implications this basic cessationist position may carry.

### What about prophecy?

Ephesians 2:20 itself states one such implication—an important one. Along with the apostles, it affirms that the *prophets* have a foundational role. Who are these prophets? Clearly not the Old Testament prophets. First of

all, notice the word order: "apostles and prophets," not "prophets and apostles." More importantly, just a few verses later and in almost identical words, the prophets in view are said to belong to the "now" of the new covenant, in contrast to the "other generations" of past covenant history (Eph. 3:5). Some have recently argued that these prophets are identical to the apostles ("the apostles who are also prophets"). This view is hardly plausible in view of Paul's next reference to apostles and prophets beyond this context (Eph. 4:11: "some to be apostles, some to be prophets"). Ephesians 2:20 clearly implies that prophecy was a temporary gift, given for the foundation-laying period of the church. Therefore, along with the apostles, the New Testament prophets are no longer a present part of the church's life.

### What about tongues?

1 Corinthians 14 deals with prophecy and tongues in far more detail than any other New Testament passage. A quick perusal will show that, like a backbone, a contrast between prophecy and tongues structures the entire chapter (beginning in verses 2-3, continuing throughout, and culminating in verse 39). The broad concern of the apostle's argument is to show the relative superiority or preferability of prophecy to tongues. Prophecy is "greater" because (as speech intelligible to others) it edifies the church, while tongues (unintelligible to others) do not. The immediate proviso, however, is that when tongues are interpreted, they are on a par with prophecy for edifying others (vv. 4-5). Tongues, when uninterpreted, are eclipsed by prophecy. But interpreted tongues are functionally equivalent to prophecy. And so God's *Word* draws a close tie between prophecy and tongues. We may even say fairly that tongues, as interpretable and to be interpreted (vv. 13, 27), are *a mode of prophecy*.

What these two gifts have in common, and the reason they can be contrasted in this way, is that both are *word* gifts. Specifically, both are *revelation*. Both bring to the church God's *Word* in the primary, original, nonderivative sense.

That prophecy is revelation is explicit in verse 30. It is also clear, among other considerations, from the only instances of prophecy existing in the New Testament, those of Agabus (see Acts 11:27-28 and 21:10-11) and the book of Revelation (see 1:1-3).

That tongues are revelation is plain from verses 14-19. They are inspired speech of the most immediate—indeed virtually unmediated—kind. In its exercise the gift of tongues completely bypasses the "mind," in the sense that the intellect of the speaker does not produce what is said. The Holy Spirit so takes over speech capacity and organs that the words spoken are not the speaker's own words in any sense. Also, "*mysteries*" (v. 2), as an indication of their content, confirms this fully revelatory understanding of tongues (as well

as their link with prophecy, see 13:2). Elsewhere in the New Testament, at least without any clear exceptions, this word always refers to revelation, more specifically, to the redemptive-historical content of revelation (e.g., Matt. 13:11; Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Tim. 3:16).

From those passages that are most pertinent and decisive, then, a basic explanation for the cessation of prophecy and tongues emerges. By God's wise and gracious design, apostles and prophets played a temporary role in the Church's history. They did not continue beyond its foundation-laying era. The redemptive-historical "specs" of God's church-house are such that apostles and prophets are not permanent fixtures (Eph. 2:20). Neither are tongues, since they are tied, as we have seen, to prophecy (1 Cor. 14). They, too, passed out of the life of the church along with the passing of the apostles and prophets (and other means of bringing God's *Word*).

### What about 1 Corinthians 13:8-13?

Many, however, judge that 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 clearly teaches that prophecy and tongues will not cease until the Second Coming of Christ. To them, this is a "gotcha" text that by itself settles the issue. But does this Scripture really imply their conclusion?

Look carefully at 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. Notice that its primary thrust is to compare the believer's present and future knowledge. Present knowledge is partial and obscure (vv. 8-9) in contrast to the full, "face-to-face" knowledge that will be ours (v. 12) with the arrival of "the perfect" knowledge (v. 10). "The perfect" almost certainly refers to the time when Christ returns in power and glory. Does that mean that these gifts will not cease until the Second Coming? That conclusion goes beyond the aim of this text. The accent of this text is on the *character* of our present knowledge, in particular, on its *partial* quality. The particular *media* of that knowledge are not the point. Paul clearly had a pastoral concern with the proper exercise of prophecy and tongues in the church at Corinth (chapters 12-14). Therefore, it's understandable that he mentioned them in this context. He was not, however, addressing the issue of *when* they would cease. Rather, he was stressing the partial, opaque character of all our knowledge until Christ returns. This is true no matter by which revelatory means that knowledge comes (including, by implication, even inscripturation). This is also true no matter when those means may cease.

Ephesians 4:11-13 reinforces this interpretation. The exalted Christ "*gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets ... until we all reach unity in the faith ... and become mature [or, perfect] attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*" Almost certainly the "unity" and "fullness" of verse 13 is the same state of affairs as "the perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10. Ephesians 4:13 perhaps echoes 1 Corinthians 13:10 as well,

by its use of the word “perfect” or “mature.” This is the situation Christ brings by His return. Since that is so, if we read Ephesians 4 as noncessationists insist we should read 1 Corinthians 13, we are left with the unavoidable conclusion that there will be *apostles*, as well as prophecy and tongues, until the Second Coming of Christ. Even many noncessationists, however, rightly reject this conclusion.

But how can they consistently do so? In terms of gifts in relation to the ultimate goal in view, how is this passage any different than 1 Corinthians 13:8ff? Noncessationists who correctly recognize that there are no apostles in the sense of Ephesians 2:20 and 4:11 today can't have it both ways. If these passages teach that prophecy/prophets and tongues continue until the Second Coming, then they also teach that the apostles do as well. But a more sound understanding is simply to recognize that these passages do not even address the question of whether or not prophecy or tongues (or any other gift) will cease before

the Second Coming. They leave it an open question, to be settled from other passages.

A dilemma confronts noncessationists. If prophecy and tongues (as they function in the New Testament) continue today, then the noncessationist is faced with the quite practical and troublesome implication that Scripture alone is *not* a sufficient verbal revelation from God. At best, the canon is *relatively* closed. Alternatively, if—as most noncessationists insist—“prophecy” and “tongues” today are not revelatory or are less than fully revelatory, then these contemporary phenomena are misnamed. They are something *other* than the gifts of prophecy and tongues that we find in the New Testament. Noncessationists are caught in a redemptive-historical anachronism. They are seeking within the *superstructure-building* phase of the church's history that which belonged to its *foundation-laying* phase. They are involved in the contradictory effort of trying to maintain that the New Testament canon is completed and closed, and yet at the

same time that the revelatory gifts for the open canon period—gifts for when the New Testament documents were still being written—continue.

But God's Word lifts us out of this dilemma. It shows us that by God's wise and gracious design, prophecy and tongues have completed their task and have ceased. What remains, supremely and solely sufficient and authoritative until Jesus comes, is “the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1:10).

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## Home visits

### Cor Feyter

Once, when the session I was serving in was being visited by representatives of a neighbouring session, the visiting minister, who came from a background where regular home visits were not practised, presented his impression of home visits more or less as follows :

There was an unpleasant atmosphere in the family that evening. Mum and Dad were tense and preoccupied. The evening meal was rushed, and cleaning up done as quickly as possible. The children were then told that the elders were coming that evening, so they were given precise instructions about how to behave: sit still, speak only when spoken to, when asked a question answer politely and positively, but as briefly as possible.

The elders arrived exactly at the arranged time and after some preliminary talk asked some questions of the children, which were answered as directed. The children were then dismissed and it was the turn of the parents: yes, they were happy in the church; yes, they liked the minister and thought he preached well; yes, they did pray and read the Bible every day.

When the elders judged that sufficient time had been spent, one of them read a Bible passage and prayed for the family, after which they departed. The couple heaved a sigh of relief that no major problems had surfaced and that it was now behind them again for another year.

### A caricature

The elder who was asked to respond to this stated flatly that what had been presented was nothing but a caricature of a home visit, and it was. Home visits are generally much more meaningful than that. Yet, home visitation has been an accepted practice in our churches for so long that some members may have only a vague idea of what it should involve, and even less of what its purpose is. If we start by considering the latter, some indication of how to go about it may well follow. So, if I ask you, the reader, why you think home visits are done, which of the following options would you choose?



- To show the members that the session is interested in them
- To find out what members think about the preaching
- To hear if the members have any complaints about the way the church is organised
- To encourage members' involvement in church activities
- To encourage financial support of the church
- The church order requires it

- It's a reformed tradition
- All of the above

**The spiritual pulse**

Some of the listed subjects may well, and probably will, be raised at home visits, but I would not consider any of them to be their purpose. Article 23 of the church order requires that elders visit the members of the congregation at least annually in order that they may comfort, instruct and encourage each one according to need. So, before visiting elders can do any counseling they must first of all try to assess the spiritual life and health of the members they are visiting. That may range from a constant awareness of the love and grace of the Lord and a genuine desire to live in thankfulness to Him, to the other extreme of where people's convictions are evident only in a more or less mechanical adherence to a Christian lifestyle. When home visits are reported back to the council of elders of a church, they help to form a composite picture of the spiritual life and

health of the congregation as a whole. Thus, home visits can be roughly compared to representatives of a commercial enterprise, who go out to meet their contacts and then report back to the management.

**Keep to the point**

Elders on home visits, intent on having a meaningful discussion about the spiritual life of the members, may be faced with a series of obstacles. The most common one is that many people, although church members in good standing, have difficulty expressing what they believe, so they try to steer away from a discussion of it. One of the early ministers of the denomination used to say that as soon as you start to discuss spiritual matters, the lady is sure to ask, "Would the minister like another cup of coffee?" Another obstacle is often, ironically, the church itself. Many members are involved in the organisation of the church in some capacity or other and like to discuss that involvement, much as other people like to talk about their membership of a sports or hobby organisation. Many an elder has returned from a home visit satisfied with the animated discussion about the church organisation that has taken place, whereas the spiritual life of the members has barely, if at all, been touched.

**Coming prepared**

Conducting a home visit is a daunting task, but it will become easier if the visiting elder is well prepared. As stated in an earlier article, an elder should make it his business to know all there is to know about the members in his care. Then, based on that knowledge, he should take time to prayerfully and carefully consider the visit he is to conduct, select an appropriate bible passage on which to base the discussion and form a basic plan for leading it. Conducting a home visit discussion aimed at getting people to talk about what they believe and what their beliefs mean to them requires tact, sensitivity and good listening skills.

The more relaxed the atmosphere, the better the discussion will be, so it may well be easier if the visit is done by one elder rather than by two, as is the practice in some churches. If practical examples are needed, try to think of biblical ones and quote them. An elder should avoid talking about his personal experiences. Chances are that they will not be as significant or relevant in the ears of his listeners as in his own memory. He should, however, not hesitate to state his own convictions and, of course, if he cannot talk freely and easily about what he believes, than he cannot expect the people he is visiting to do so either.

*With thankful hearts to the Lord  
we celebrate with our beloved parents*

**Roelf and Maria  
HAGOORT**



*on the occasion of their*

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**8 May 2002.**

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*Ps 90:1. Lord, you have been  
our dwelling place throughout  
all generations.*

**Between You and Me!**

**Dick G. Vanderpyl**

On looking through my collection of items to be used at some future date I came across this article, author unknown now, and thought it could do with an airing in this day of so much unbelief and proud self-righteousness:

**What did the Fool say?**

Scripture mentions a fair number of fools, and what they say and do! Psalm 14 is one of them, and is often referred as the "Fool's Psalm," Why? Because this fool with many others says in his heart:

"There is no God!"

Now, how does our fool—with so many others—arrive at such a conclusion? Can he prove that the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God of the Bible doesn't exist?

Does this fool really think that he has infinite knowledge and thinks that he can prove that a God—who knows all things—does not exist?

If this fool—and millions more—did have infinite knowledge, then he would be God and not man, and he would surely not want to prove to us that he himself does not exist!

Has he been around from all eternity so that he can know that there is no eternal God?

If he had been, then he would himself be eternal and uncreated, and he would be God, not man. And we would surely not hear him denying his own existence.

But we know better, of course: our fool is a finite and sinful human being! This fool, and so many others like him, can't prove that there is no being infinitely superior to himself. Furthermore, he'd better realise that unless the infinite and sovereign God of the Bible does exist, there is no basis for knowledge, for assurance, for certainty about anything.

Unless there is a God who knows all things and who rules all things, and who has revealed the truth about Himself to men, no man can be sure of knowing anything aright.

Apart from the infinite God, no finite being can make any valid assertion or denial of anything. Our fool wouldn't even exist to deny God if God did not exist. And his denial of God's existence would be utterly meaningless if God did not exist to give meaning to all things, including denials.

So, here you are, you fool, when you say in your heart that there is no God, please take a look at your own credentials!

## A feminine focus

# Consider it all Joy

Who has not had trials? Who has not, when viewing their fruit in our lives with the eyes of faith, been able to agree with the apostle James that we should be able to “consider it all joy” (James 1:2)? Difficult, yes; painful, perhaps; but true, nevertheless. I’d like to introduce you to one woman writer who illustrates this truth with grace, insight and warmth.

Elizabeth Prentiss was born in 1818 and died in 1878. She grew up in a fine Christian home, the daughter of Dr Edward Payson, a much-loved American Presbyterian minister whose preaching was instrumental in the conversion of a great many people. She married another Presbyterian minister, George Prentiss, and they lived and served in New York City during the middle years of the nineteenth century, including the terrible years of the American Civil War (1861-65). She was a child of the culture that Susan Hunt has called the age of the “True Woman.” That is, she grew up in a world that respected scriptural truth, leading to strength of character in those that lived it out. It was a world where women faced their trials by thinking theologically, not therapeutically. And, in doing so, their lives bear witness to us today.

Elizabeth wrote the hymn “*More Love to Thee, O Christ*”—one that we still sing today (No. 437 in the *Psalter Hymnal*). Its words are a reflection of her desire to love this world less, and her Saviour more. Those who knew her certainly testify that her devotion to Christ was the outstanding characteristic of her life. She was a sweet, candid and scrupulous friend to those privileged to walk the Christian life with her.

It is through her novels that Elizabeth Prentiss is best-known today, though. They are stories that have stood the test of time, because she was so clear about what she wanted to do. Her purpose is clear from the way she wrote. These are not stories full of racy adventure, or that dwell on touching scenes of romance. This is not to say that her books are devoid of adventure or romance. No, they picture life in all its reality—hopes, sorrows and delight—including romance! What sets them apart from most of their modern counterparts is that they picture life as it is *really* to be understood, from a true biblical perspective. Her characters’ struggles are more like our struggles because they mirror our own efforts to live by the same truth. This is a writer who aims to teach us, by painting a picture of the path that leads towards it, what mature Christian womanhood can be like.

Of all her novels, the best known and loved is *Stepping Heavenward*. This is the story of a

young girl, Katherine, growing up into adulthood. It is her sixteenth birthday when the story begins; and on it she resolves to begin a journal. The story takes the form of her journal, in which she records her life’s journey, and her responses to the joys and sorrows that come her way. Only sixteen when she begins—“How dreadfully old I am getting!” she writes—she is willful, rather selfish, but endearingly able to depict the youthful weaknesses of her character. Katherine’s mother is a fine Christian lady whose patient wisdom bears much fruit in



her daughter’s life. We see her correcting Katy, always (as Katy quotes their conversations) with gentle admonition, rather than irritable criticism. Katy does not always listen at the time, but later, we see her reflecting on her mother’s words. Often, she learns to appreciate them, and at times, much later, as she grows up, we see her living them out herself. It is a fine story.

Katy’s father, who is inclined to spoil her, dies suddenly from an accident in her sixteenth year, and this is the first of the sorrows that we see shaping her character. This tragedy means the family has a much lower income, has to move to a smaller house, and Katy must enroll in a less desirable school. It is her first experience of suffering, and her mother’s calmness in bearing it contrasts with her own rather wild anguish. In fact, her mother’s ability to listen with patience to the clumsy, even tactless condolences of friends and neighbours infuriates Katy. “It is always a trying task to

visit the afflicted,” her mother replies, “and you make it doubly hard to your friends by putting on a gloomy, forbidding air, and by refusing to talk of your dear father, as if you were resolved to keep your sorrow all to yourself.” Katy is unable to deny the truth of these words!

Later on, as she leaves school, and continues to live with her mother, she is helped on in her Christian walk by the friendly wisdom of her minister, Dr Cabot, and his wife. Both appear to have an excellent sense of humour, and their conversations with Katy provide a thoroughly believable picture of how wise adults can provoke spiritual thinking in their young friends. But Katy is still easily flattered, and because of this, nearly marries a charming but shallow man. He reveals his character by marrying one of Katy’s more worldly-minded friends as soon as she breaks off their engagement. Her reflections on this show how much she has learned, but (realistically!) how much room for Christian growth there still is in her heart:

“I have shut myself up in my room today to think over things. The end of it is that I full of mortification and confusion of face. If I had only had confidence in mother’s judgement I would never have gotten entangled in this silly engagement. I see now that Charley never could have made me happy, and I know there is a good deal in my heart he never drew out. I wish, however, I had not written him when I was in such a passion. No wonder he is thankful that he has gotten free from such a vixen. But, oh! The provocation was terrible!

I have made up my mind never to tell a human soul about this affair. It will be so high-minded and honorable to shield him from the contempt he deserves. With all my faults, I am glad that there is nothing mean or petty about me!”

Some time later, Katy meets a man not conventionally attractive, a hard-working doctor, a man not given to the usual excitements of romance (though not without them, either). He admires her ability to teach children, and her enthusiastic, though still-maturing faith. Her mother deeply respects this man, and slowly, and at first rather unwillingly, Katy grows to love him. There are moments of dismay—he sometimes spends more time in the evenings reading and writing than he does with her: there are times when the needs of the suffering, and his instinctive compassion, must come before her comforts. But finally (you guessed it!) they marry, and a new phase of Katy’s life begins.

Marriage deepens Katy’s understanding of

her heart. The closeness of the marriage friendship, and the practicalities of living so closely with another person, soon show her how much she must give up self in order to love her husband, and to serve Christ. And there are trials. Soon after they return from their honeymoon, Ernest brings home his aging, newly-widowed and cantankerous father to live with them in their none-too-large house. What a husband, you protest! But Ernest is so accustomed to giving up self himself that he lacks consideration for the feelings of his young wife. Stormy scenes are on the horizon, but through her willingness to learn from Christ, Katy gradually comes to accept her circumstances, and even love her difficult father-in-law. In fact, Katy's natural gifts of fun and laughter help dispel the gloominess of this morose old man. By the time of his death, he has discovered, through her, the joy of knowing Christ.

But there is more to come in Katy's life. On her walk with Christ she encounters further sorrows—trials which, as she matures, touch her heart more and more deeply. But because of her growing maturity, she is able, more easily, to count them joy. A number of bereavements, of the kind that we can all face even today, show her more and more able to

accept gracefully the "severe mercies" of our loving Father. Katy does suffer. She loses her oldest child to sudden sickness; and as many mothers say, the death of a little one is one of the hardest and most "unnatural" of all deaths to suffer. Here is how Elizabeth Prentiss writes of Katy's deepening faith on this occasion:

"Yes, I have tasted the bitter cup of bereavement, and drunk it down to the dregs. I gave my darling to God, I gave him, I gave him! But, oh, with what anguish I saw those round, dimpled limbs wither and waste away, the glad smile fade forever from that beautiful face! What a fearful thing it is to be a mother!... But let me not forget my mercies. Let me not forget that I have a precious husband and two darling children, and my kind, sympathetic mother still left to me. Let me not forget how many kind friends gathered about us in our sorrow. Above all let me remember God's lovingkindness and tender mercy. He has not left us to the bitterness of a grief that refuses and spurns to be comforted. We believe in Him, we love Him, we worship Him as we never did before."

Katy has come a long way along faith since her story began on her sixteenth birthday. Her road "heavenward" has made her a stronger and finer Christian by far. I want to recommend

Katy's story to you, because Elizabeth Prentiss has fulfilled her aim in this book. She really does show us, unstintingly and believably, that Christian character, shaped and refined in the trials of life, is a beautiful and desirable thing. She does not suggest the road heavenward is easy, or gloss over the stubbornness of remaining sin as a young woman grows in grace. What she does is picture for us a path in life that all of us, if we choose it, can follow with similar results.

This is a story that will do you good; and it has done many good, over 130 years, and all around the world. (It was translated into French and German as well as English.) Why not give it as a gift to your mother, or daughter or granddaughter? They will treasure it, as my mother and sisters all have. Pass it on as a gift from the heart to someone making their first tentative steps in the faith. And together with Elisabeth Elliot, who has written an introduction to the edition I have in my hand, I "do not hesitate to recommend it to men, who need to try to understand the wives they live with, and to any woman who wants to walk with God." Believe me, Elizabeth Prentiss, one who has stepped heavenward before us, will not disappoint you.

## A move south - was it wise?

### *Never follow your children!*

This familiar adage seems wise. In a country like New Zealand, many of the population are continually on the move. Are our children likely to be amongst them? No guaranteeing where they'll be next year! And anyway, would they want you 'chasing them around the country'?

These are commonly heard comments. Certainly in some cases, it is sensible advice. But some of it is just worldly wisdom. Thoughtful



consideration should stop us in our tracks. What about this from a Christian viewpoint? What about the responsibility of the generations to each other?

Father Jacob would say, "Never say never." In his case, Jacob followed his son to Egypt for his last years. With Abraham and Terah, it is a question of, "Who followed whom?" Stephen (Acts 7:24) puts the initiative into Abraham's hands. Genesis 11:31 says that it was Terah who took his son from Ur in the Chaldees. Surely an interesting explanation must lie behind this apparent discrepancy!

The point is that here is a family which kept together, even though it might have been hard for Terah and for Jacob in their old age. No, it is not for everyone, but nor should it be dismissed out of hand. Maybe, in **your circumstances**, you should follow children or a child.

#### **Coby & Henk**

Part of the reason that Coby and Henk decided to move away from Auckland was that their only daughter, Cathie, had also moved away. True, there were a couple of sons still in that city, but they lived miles away, and with the sons at work, it necessitated evening visits with great distances to drive, or weekend visits, not always convenient. With Cathie, the only girl, gone, Coby missed the comfortable mother/daughter relationship, and as grandchildren arrived in her daughter's home, she was often travelling the many hundred of miles to the township where their daughter now resided, in order to spend some days with her family. She, especially, wanted to be nearer.

However, this was by no means the only reason for deciding on a change. Coby found that Auckland could be quite lonely for her. Henk's work had meant that she was used to his long absences in other parts of New Zealand and overseas, which were not so bad while her children

were still at home. She had many friends who often popped in for a 'cuppa', and she had also immersed herself in voluntary work in a Christian kindergarten, but now her own children were married, and Henk had retired, she looked forward to seeing much more of him.

Henk had retired, yes, but he was still a really active person. Even after retirement he seemed to be at the beck and call of others, sometimes for business purposes and advice, sometimes for social needs in their locality. While she did not grudge a certain amount of time for this, Coby found herself still sitting in the evenings by herself too often, for Henk, the big-hearted, had not learnt how to say no. Since moving south there is not so much of this, for while he *still* does not know how to say no, the calls are less frequent and less demanding.

So far, it sounds as if the decision rested with Coby, but not so. Henk could see all the points as they discussed them thoroughly. He did not really mind where they lived, but it had to be a joint decision—both happy, or no change. Further matters had to be considered. Both of them warn that you should be very, very careful.

"We know a New Zealander who moved to a new town to be close to a daughter, and regrets doing it. Her daughter works during the day. Our friend knew no one in the new city. Even though she joined the local church, it is so difficult at her age to become close friends with anyone. She misses her old friends, and there is no one to fill the gap."

This is not such a problem in small denominations like ours, with considerable inter-church contact. Still, it must be borne in mind. Friends are of paramount importance. This couple had many in Auckland, and a few years ago would not have considered going away. But they had in recent years lost some of their closest friends, and found their circle becoming smaller. They really missed the absent faces. Henk keenly missed one in particular. Only, there were still many others left. Was it wise to leave these? Would they themselves be missed?

One thing clinched matters: near the place where Cathie lived, they *already had* many friends. They had not lived in Auckland all their lives, and both still had plenty of old friends in three or four of the southern churches, from their first days in New Zealand. They would be foolish to go where they did not have any, and on this they were most emphatic. They would not have moved otherwise. So another point was emphasised: no friends, no go.

"Church is not just for the Sunday services," said Coby. "It is also the big part as Christians, of your social life. Social activities, fellowship and friendship."

### Moving costs money

For Henk and Coby, the financial aspect was not a consideration. For some it certainly would be, and it must be mentioned. These two have found their move an advantage financially, as anyone living in Auckland will appreciate. Selling a house in Auckland and purchasing elsewhere has put some extra money in their pockets. This means the opportunity of more freedom in many respects. They have made improvements to the house they bought in their new city, and can afford to travel back to Auckland whenever they like to see their sons and their friends! They have found living costs decrease, including petrol, which is cheaper in the region where they now live. But beware! They say, "If we wanted to go back permanently now, we could not afford to do so."

Coby and Henk thought about it and talked the matter over for at least a year before making any decision. No hasty actions—pray it over, and look into all aspects (church life, social, family, finances, etc.) before burning your bridges. They are satisfied that they have not made a mistake, but if you do make one, it is very hard, if not impossible, to undo. So, as they would say, do not make up your mind and ask God to bless your decision. Instead, ask Him to make clear His decision for you!

Sometimes, His guidance is just a gut feeling that an action is right. As Isaiah 30:21 puts it, You will hear a word behind you saying, "This is the way, walk in it," if you turn to the right hand or to the left.' The word is not audible, but is a conviction that comes from prayerful consideration. As you walk with Him all the days of your life, He knows and can show His place for you in the last years of your life.

## Books in focus

### **HIDDEN SORROW, LASTING JOY**

The forgotten women of the persecuted church

By Anneke Companjen

Reviewed by Jolanda Nugteren

**A**s the wife of the President of Open Doors International, Anneke has travelled the world and seen first hand the tragic toll of persecution.

Around the world today, there are hundreds of men who have been imprisoned for their faith. While stories are told and retold about these men, it is the women who are left behind who have become the forgotten victims of the persecuted church. At a time when women's rights have become a popular cause, these women's needs are virtually unknown or forgotten.

Who are these women? What are they going through? What do they face while their husbands are in prison? Who cares for them and prays for them?

Following the suicide of a woman (the wife of an imprisoned Vietnamese Pastor) she had befriended, Anneke wanted the world to hear the stories of these women of incredible faith and courage.

*Hidden Sorrow, Lasting Joy* is a tribute to the forgotten women of the persecuted church. It is the story of 20 women of courage and endurance, and their message to us. Some of the stories have happy endings and some do not, yet they are all true. In this book you will meet women from around the world who all live in similar circumstances. Some of them wrestle with rejection, poverty, shame and constant harassment not only by the authorities but also by their families. Some are hungry, some are lonely, and some are threatened with arrest or imprisonment themselves. You will catch a glimpse of their personalities, their courage and the faith that sustains them daily. They are mothers, daughters, sisters and aunts. Some are young and some are old, while still others are aging too quickly for their years. Some are rich in hope while others contend with relentless depression. They all wonder whether they will ever see their husbands alive again.

This book will open your eyes to the need of these women, which above all else is prayer. Prayer is the most important effort we can make. So, when we pray for the persecuted church and the men in prison let us also remember to pray for the women.

May God indeed transform their sorrow into lasting joy and peace.

**NOTE:** This book is available through Open Doors (N.Z.), Koorong in Australia, and may also be available here in the Christian Bookshop. The book is published by Hodder & Stoughton, and the ISBN is 0-340-75675-6

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# Everything you always wanted to know about a singles convention –

## *but were too afraid to ask*

**Judith van Trigt**

Take a group of single men and women in the prime of their lives. Transport them to a setting of unique natural beauty. Relieve them of the pressures of work and other commitments, the moderating influence of family and friends. Encourage them to unwind. Want to know what happens but too afraid to ask? Or maybe too polite? Bet you're curious, though.

First up—admit it—is that nagging suspicion. A singles convention? Strictly something for the tragic, the desperate and the terminally incompatible—right? Wrong. The reasons why people get to an age at which pimples are no longer a primary concern and find themselves single are many and varied. God has a unique plan for all of us.

Secondly—I'll say it so you don't have to—it's a marriage market. Right? Let me tell you, I had a moment when I saw the pens in our snazzy convention packs were emblazoned with the logo "Moots Meat Market"! I soon realised that the hard-working and hugely-talented organising committee were not only smart enough to enlist corporate support, they did a nice line in irony. Yes, conventions are

about meeting up with old friends and making some new ones. Doesn't that happen anywhere?

### **Now the Truth!**

With those old chestnuts out of the way, let's get on to what the singles convention was REALLY about.

Convention 2002 was held at the luxurious YMCA Wainui Park, on the beautiful Banks Peninsula, ninety minutes drive from Christchurch, New Zealand. Fifty-one people attended from Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Fifty-one people, richly diverse in background, life experience, occupation and family circumstance. Most importantly, fifty-one Christians, coming together for a week of fellowship and fun.

The devotions were lead by Rev. John Haverland. The theme was [www.christian.God](http://www.christian.God)—our witness, our work, our worship and our walk with God. Each session began with prayer, singing, and bible reading. This was followed by a message from Rev. Haverland, then we broke into smaller groups for discussion. The topics were thought-provoking, and the questions invited us to share our experiences as single Christians (or should that be—Christians who are single?). With church life so often focussed—and quite rightly so—on marriage and family, it's easy, as a single person, to become preoccupied with what makes you feel different. First and foremost, however, we are Christians and, as such, our relationship with God takes priority, irrespective of our marital status. That said, there are some things about being single that makes for difference. Practising

hospitality, for instance. If you invite a family over coffee or a meal, who keeps the conversation going while you're busy in the kitchen? How will you make the children feel welcome?

Alan and Monica Bosch ran an entertaining workshop on the differences between men and women. It's hard to capture in words the experience of Team Bosch in action. The gist of their presentation seemed to be that Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus. Interplanetary travel with Mr Mars at the wheel will involve passing the same service station countless times and eventually getting lost. Not a problem—Miss Venus has a map in her bag. Unfortunately, she probably won't be able to read it, and will disappear into the nearest shopping mall at the first opportunity!

### **Activities**

On to the activities. The committee did an outstanding job in arranging activities to keep us stimulated and amused. There were sea kayaking, fishing, a rope course, scenic walks and a wine-tasting session at a local vineyard. One afternoon was spent exploring the township of Akaroa, followed by a harbour cruise with barbecue on board. A particular highlight was the group of dolphins that accompanied and entertained us throughout the voyage. There was a day sight-seeing in Christchurch, with a Maori concert and 'hangi' dinner (cooked in the ground) in the evening. The concert included that feature most feared by spectators the world over—audience participation. Our "Chief" Eric Janssen did a fearsome job in leading a 'haka' (war dance) and his wife "Chief Lady" Yvonne was the epitome of grace swinging her 'poi' to an action song. Thanks, Eric, Yvonne and all those who willingly sacrificed their dignity so the rest of us didn't have to.

No gathering is complete without the odd



rumour and the one doing the rounds at Wainui was that it was, in fact, summer. New Zealand is famed for its hospitality and, lest anyone cast aspersions, let me make it clear that the absence of sunshine was just our way of making our northern hemisphere visitors feel at home. The chilly temperatures, however, brought out the best of Christian virtues. Swimming in these circumstances required a great deal of courage, character and longsuffering.

Between activities, devotions and the sumptuous meals, there was plenty of opportunity to relax, read, play games and chat. These times are what makes convention so special. Where else are you going to find a

group of people who share your faith and values, who have all come together with the express purpose of glorifying God and enjoying each other's company? Can you think of a better way to spend a holiday?

Okay, so now you're kicking yourself because you didn't come or—for those not in the demographic—you didn't encourage that family member or friend to attend. Fear not—another convention is being planned at this very moment. It will be held in Victoria, Australia, early in 2003. Look out for details in this magazine later this year. To those who did attend, tell everyone how fantastic it was and bring them along next time. All are welcome.



## World news

### Professor calls on Liberated Reformed to confess guilt over schism

Netherlands—The retired professor J. Douma has called on his church, the (Liberated) Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, to confess their guilt over a 1967 schism. That break led to the creation of another church, the Netherlands Reformed Churches.

In 1966, a group of 20 pastors from the Liberated Reformed wrote an open letter calling into question the belief that the liberated churches were a "special work of God." The synod of that year suspended those 20 pastors, and placed their congregations "outside the union" (buiten verband).

Douma has sent a letter to his synod, claiming that the synod of 1967 acted too hastily, without proper procedures. He suggested that the two churches should recognise their mutual inadequacy in the bitter events of 1967. Douma also apologised in the letter for his role in those years, when he was part of a later synod that rejected all appeals of the 1967 decision.

Douma noted that the sense of being a "special work" led his church to create many closed Reformed organisations, an "exclusivism that caused a lot of damage," he wrote. (Centraal Weekblad)

### Day of decision for Zimbabwe

President Robert Mugabe, 78, one of the last remaining post-colonial revolutionaries in Africa, has become a despot determined to retain power at all costs.

One of the costs now emerging is loss of life due to starvation. Zimbabwe was once the breadbasket of southern Africa, but in the three years since farmland redistribution began in earnest, it has become a recipient of United Nations food aid. Twenty percent of the population faces extreme hardship and four percent already risks starvation.

Mugabe doesn't want hungry, angry people

voting. To avoid a thorough shellacking in the national elections March 9-10, he has established 146 bases for his party's own militia, organised thugs to suppress political dissent, arrested and threatened opposition leaders, expelled foreign observers and repeatedly tinkered with election laws.

High court decisions have gone against some initiatives, but after each, leading judges have had to resign. New appointees have given Mugabe a compliant majority on the Supreme Court.

James Bovard, writing in *Investor's Business Daily*, Jan. 22, reports that the World Bank, until late 2000, heavily financed Mugabe. After the cut-off, Congress instructed US representatives to the bank to not vote for new funding till the campaigns of murder and expropriation ended. However, the United States does not have veto power in the World Bank, despite its large role in funding the bank, and the bank could vote to resume funding after a few cosmetic reforms.

Dr. Derek Carlsen, the Zimbabwean pastor who wrote an Open Letter to the President calling on Mugabe to repent, anticipates being arrested under new security legalisation. Eleven Christians, including four pastors, were arrested for organising an interdenominational prayer meeting in Bulawayo in mid-February.

Dr. Carlsen writes: "It is now a week since the letter was first launched, and I haven't yet been arrested. This delayed reaction on their part is amazing, not only to myself, but to many others as well. I had a call last night from a fellow pastor who had been out of town and thus had only just learnt of my letter, and he was very supportive, and also amazed that I was not yet in detention.

"My view on this is that it highlights the reality of the spiritual battle we are in. Mugabe is steeped in witchcraft and consults the spirits to guide and assist him. What God, in His grace, has done is to stir up and seize the hearts of Christians around the world to pray earnestly for Zimbabwe, and against the wickedness and darkness in this nation.

"As a result of this, the authorities either

don't know what to do, or due to God's ordering, have decided that to act against me would be an unwise strategy at this time. This doesn't mean they will not still react, but their slowness certainly shows the power of prayer and the confusion or indecision in their camp.

"In the meantime, many people within our nation are being encouraged to stand for righteousness. It is only God who can move people to pray in the way He has done, and I am extremely humbled by the response to my letter, and am filled with worship and awe for the Lord whom I serve. .

"Please do keep praying with us—for the millions of people in our nation that are being subjected to intense suffering. I was in a meeting with a number of ministers yesterday who pastor in the rural areas of our country, and their stories of persecution and terror were horrible to listen to. These heinous acts, being perpetrated every day, are sanctioned from the highest levels of authority in our nation. Pray that God would not only free us from the tyranny of our wicked rulers but also from the tyranny of our own sin, and that He would, through all that has transpired in our nation, bring many to true repentance and into zealous service for His Kingdom.

+ Dr. Derek Carlsen, Reason of Hope Ministries, PO Box 3348, Paulington, Mutare, Zimbabwe  
rhm@syscom.co.zw.

### Comfortable with this?

More and more Christians are basing their morality on how they feel rather than on what the Bible teaches, according to a recent survey by pollster George Barna. Of all adults surveyed, only 22 percent believed in moral absolutes; 64 percent felt truth was relative to the person and his circumstances; only 32 percent of "born-again" Christians believed in moral absolutes.

This mentality, notes Mr. Barna, is culminating in a one-word view that it summed by "whatever." Relativism, tolerance, and diversity without critical reflection are becoming the hallmarks of secular and Christian thinking.  
+ *Charisma News*, [www.charismanews.com](http://www.charismanews.com), via TVCNews, 2-15-2002

## Pakistani court acquits three of blasphemy

A Pakistani high court acquitted three Christians of blasphemy, calling for an investigation as to whether their Muslim accuser had fabricated a false case against them two years ago. In a ruling issued on January 25 by the Lahore High Court, Hussain Masih, his son Isaac Masih, and Iqbal Sahar Ghouri were cleared of the charges, which carried a potential death penalty under Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws.

During the hearing, the chief prosecutor declared that "no direct or circumstantial evidence" could be produced to corroborate the complainant's claims. According to a report issued later by the Lahore office of the Justice and Peace Commission, the court ordered that complainant Ijaz Ahmed be investigated for "registration of a false and fabricated case against the accused."

A Muslim living next door to the Masih family, Ahmad had lodged a formal accusation of blasphemy against the three Christians on November 25, 1998. Ahmed said he had found partially-burned pages of the Koran and two letters containing derogatory remarks against the prophet of Islam in his yard, near a wall separating his house from that of Hussein Masih. In his statement to local police, the Muslim declared that he "suspected his Christian neighbours" of the offence.

The Muslim had reportedly ordered Isaac Masih to stop playing hymns over the loudspeaker near the wall between their houses, complaining that his children were learning the words to Christian songs and prayers. Isaac's close friend, Ghouri, 23, was very active with him in prayer meetings and other religious activities held in the Masih home.

The head constable of Alipur Chatta, Mohammed Afzal, told investigators Ahmed had gathered a procession of hundreds of "maulvis" (Muslim religious leaders) and threatened to set the police station on fire unless officials agreed to register a blasphemy case against the Christians. "We registered the case to avoid a tense situation in the city," Afzal said, admitting he did not have a large enough police force to confront the mob.

More than 50 Pakistani Christians have been victimised since 1987 for allegations of insulting Islam, the Koran, or Mohammed. At least seven Christians are currently imprisoned without bail on such charges.

Over the past year, radical Islamist sects have begun to use the laws as a trump card to file cases against rival groups, resulting in the jailing and sentencing of a number of Muslim leaders.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799 (949) 862-0314*  
*compassdirect@earthlink.net*

## Presbyterian landscape changes permanently

### Carl McIntire 1906-2002

"The last of the 20th Century's Fighting Fundamentalists has been called to glory. Only eternity will tell of the countless souls rescued from cults and the modernist churches due to the influence of this man," commented Dr. Morris McDonald, of the Presbyterian Missionary Union, when word began to spread today that Dr. Carl McIntire had passed away late on March 19, at Virtua Health Center in Voorhees, New Jersey. Born May 17, 1906, McIntire was just short of 96 at the time of his death.

An exhaustive preacher, writer, and publisher, McIntire was best known for his motto, "A man who will not use his freedom to defend his freedom does not deserve his freedom." In support of his causes, Dr. McIntire published the Christian Beacon newspaper, preached on the 20th Century Reformation Hour, and at various times directed the American Council of Christian Churches and the International Council of Christian Churches.

Dr. McIntire started his ministerial career in Collingswood, and served the congregation there from 1933 for more than 60 years. Under his leadership, the church left the Presbyterian Church (USA) as the flagship congregation of what would become the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Bible Presbyterian Church, and a large portion of the Presbyterian Church in America. Though originally partners in supporting the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, Dr. Gresham Machen and Dr. Carl McIntire moved in different directions after the break with the Northern Presbyterian Church. Machen became identified with Westminster Seminary, while McIntire developed Faith Seminary.

According to Bible Presbyterian sources, Dr. K.C. Quek, the General Secretary of the ICCA, will fly from Singapore to participate in the funeral, which is scheduled for March 26 at 1 p.m. at the Bible Presbyterian Church of Collingswood, New Jersey.

+ *Mrs. Carl McIntire, 426 Collingswood, New Jersey 08108*

## Study Reformed doctrine the Observer Way

The widely popular series on the Shorter Catechism by the Christian Observer's Senior Editor, Dr. Gordon Reed, is now available in book form. *Plain Talk About Christian Doctrine: A Pastors Looks at the Shorter*

*Catechism* is presented in a convenient paperback edition. In simple, practical language, Dr. Reed opens the pastor's heart for his people relentless, gently, and faithfully. No series published by the Christian Observer in the last century could match the original articles for popularity.

Priced at US\$12 retail, Christian Observer subscribers may obtain *Plain Talk* for only US\$9 per copy. Further discounts are available for Sabbath school classes and Bible study groups.

+ *Word Ministries Inc., 1446 Garland Road, Sardinia, SC 29143 (803) 473-3329*

## Forman Christian College comes home

Some 30 years after it was nationalised by Pakistan's Islamic government, the historic Forman Christian College in Lahore is being returned to the Presbyterian Church.

The Church of Pakistan and the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan have been working for eight years on the campaign which returned Forman. Some dozen other schools, including those of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, have been part of the same campaign, but have not yet been returned.

Supporters of the school estimate the restoration process will require an immediate investment of US\$4 million.

Prospects are bright that all 12 Christian schools and colleges will be returned eventually. Next on the list is Gordon College, in Rawalindi.  
 + *Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, PO Box 13, 2 Empress Road, Lahore 54000, Pakistan*

## IN TOUCH

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

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

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

If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ12 (or \$AU12), 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.)



# Whom God did predestinate...

## *The continuing story of Samuel*

**John Steenhof**

A huge comfort we have as Christians is that we are in the unbreakable chain of God's mercy. If God takes our lives in **His Hand**, then **He** will finish the gracious work He has started. We don't have to constantly worry about holding onto God all the time, because His everlasting arms hold us firmly. However, we wanted to be reassured that Samuel Alexander, by now "our dear Samuel", was in that unbreakable chain. Indeed, we were grasping for every new evidence.

We found no final assurances in his later family history. True, in his early years it must have appeared to all around him that he was on the right path. As we have seen, he was brought up in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. His tough father, whom he spoke little of, and his compassionate mother, whom he often mentioned, brought him up in the things of the Lord. But somewhere along the path, he left the faith.

Perhaps "one straw which broke the camel's back" was the fact that his young wife contacted pneumonia. Her end was sudden and shocking. At one moment she was in bed seemingly recuperating from a flu of some type, and the next moment she had passed away. This set Samuel off.

He later emigrated to New Zealand, where later he found a partner to stay with. God seemingly was left out of the picture if Samuel had anything to do with it. He had a daughter, who was not confronted with the means of grace by her now-wayward father. He had no interest in sharing a faith which He had largely rejected himself. As we found out, Samuel himself, as a covenant breaker, had become more and more difficult to live with. Both his partner and daughter found him increasingly belligerent, and later decided to leave. Hence, he was living by himself when we met him.

### **A godly mother**

His sensitive praying mother years earlier realised that she had seemingly lost her son not only to the faith, but to all the habits she had faithfully inculcated, and to all possibilities of family contact. She was not to enjoy the benefit of seeing and enjoying her child Samuel, nor her children's children—or in this case, her child's child. Perhaps that Samuel's life fell apart **at a distance** was an aspect of grace. She wouldn't have to witness the decline. It would have perhaps too much for her compassionate mother's heart.

But no matter whether he was close or at a distance, her praying "callouses" all seemed to be in vain to all those who looked on. Rather a hopeless picture, one that she was

destined to necessarily leave to God's hand, when she went to be with Him. She was never to know while on earth that her son might ever turn to God again. To all appearances, Samuel had fallen completely out of that chain of God's grace.

But here we were, decades later, hoping for evidences that God was restoring him. With a Scotsman, what went on inside might not show too clearly on the outside, so we watched with the rapt attention of a careful scientist



working on an important experiment. We looked especially for a personal testimony that Christ had died for his sins. He always seemed hesitant when we talked about the gospel. There seemed to be no definite breakthrough in this area, but neither was there a hard-hearted resistance.

Samuel was freshly in the church. Some families, while extending fellowship to him, had cautioned their children (rightly so I believe) not to spend time alone around this "new man in the church" till he was a better understood person. That fact alone showed how unsure we were of God's work in Him. Many people complained that his language was crude, rude and dirty and he looked scruffy. He actually looked like a sinner. And here we were associating with sinners!!! This smacked of following Christ literally! But seriously, it delighted us that our dear brothers and sisters rose to the occasion in spite of these cautions to their approach.

### **The Lord's time**

Thankfully, it was 1996—I say thankfully, because the Vaatstras were in Silverstream with Hans taking his vicariate that year. Hans and Samuel immediately had very good rapport. Samuel was very interested in taking a Bible Study with Hans. While it was supposed to last an hour each week, it almost always lasted the whole afternoon. Praise the Lord! And since the Vaatstras were right beside the Silverstream Christian School, we were delighted to see him on the premises often. His well-defined Scottish face was a pleasure to see.

An openness to God's word was a more outstanding evidence of God's grace. Samuel loved searching the scriptures to see if these things were so. A definite good sign. He was modeling a noble mind and a Berean spirit. We all know that apart from God's grace, we can't even see the kingdom of God, never mind accept the instructions of the king. Who but the Holy Spirit could make Samuel see and accept?

Samuel was also finding a newfound interest in people outside himself. We talked of his ability to converse with children. The Vaatstra children loved talking with him, as he always was interested in their lives. As a matter of fact, Samuel became a new example to us all in terms of his caring about others. In that communication with children, he played a very important role in the congregation. Alex especially loved to listen to the stories which Samuel told about his youth. That special relationship was appropriate since Samuel's last name was Alexander. The Landkroon children always loved the lollies which Samuel shared with them. He would apologise when he had forgotten to bring his delectable delights. And this bigheartedness was an evidence of God's grace working in him. There was a neat generosity! That kind of Spirit was very much like our Lord, who welcomed the little children. Surely that was a work of God's Spirit as well.

### **Changes**

There were changes in his appearance and behaviour which also were yet another signpost of God's work. Samuel's smell was reduced greatly in decibels (yes you could almost hear his smell) and he took greater care of his appearance. His flat began to look much neater. Some carpet, some paint and some elbow grease did wonders.

But none of this, as hopeful as it appeared, was fully satisfying to us all. We wanted to hear more about a testimony of the blood of Christ and what it had done for him. We were hoping for a greater evidence of self-conscious repent-

ance. It seemed that our hopes were about to be dashed, as his interest in the things of the Lord almost seemed to fade at one point. His gray eyes began to look a little sadder, and that nagging hesitance in things of the Lord became more pronounced.

However, one day Lisa Vaatstra met Samuel walking along the path by the creek with a radiant look on his face. His beautiful Scottish features had a new glowing illumination. There was a measurable look of relief on his countenance. She asked why. He first related the story of what was grating on him before. He had wondered over the last weeks, ***“Why God would want to bother with a guy who had squandered his inheritance? For one who had blasphemed His name in such a way?”*** ***Could God’s grace come in the same way, as to those who had never wandered from the faith?*** “That was the perplexing question which had bothered him all these weeks.

Samuel then related how Hans had shared with him the parable of the two men who worked in the field for their master. The one started working early in the day, and the other near the end. At paytime, both of them received the same wage. This parable had completely opened Samuel’s eyes to the grace of God. He could not help but see the parallel between the blessed fellow who started work so late and received full wages, and his own late entrance into the kingdom. Nor did the pointer to God’s free and undeserving grace escape him. No wonder he looked triumphant. Amazing grace!

No doubt this was a major visible turning point in the continuing storyline of God’s grace in Samuel’s life. His face was radiant, as if the light suddenly was turned on. This light was His and Samuel wasn’t going to let that go after he had received it. He had turned because God had turned Him. No, more importantly, God’s unbreakable chain of grace had not let Samuel go. Samuel’s hands in a clasp of the grace of God on the outside, came from a heart where God had already worked on the inside!

Some days later, he engaged in a major intensive flat renewal. When one of the Vaatstras admired his work, they could only say, “This is fantastic!” His answer was immediate, “When you have new life in Christ, you want to clean up your act! Just out of thankfulness.” That’s the language of a fellow out of chains of men, and in God’s chain of grace. The Lord’s new white heart in Samuel resulted in a multicoloured paint job and refurbishing in his own house. His life was a summary of the Heidelberg catechism—Sin, Salvation, and Gratitude.

The other area which changed over time was Samuel’s drinking habit. He cut down on drinking in sporadic spurts, till in the end he drank no longer. Those who helped clean his flat, in the end could not find a drop. (Of course the cleaners would not nose around!) His smoking was one habit he never conquered, but he had two excuses on that one. In the first place, for

some it is a mark of being Reformed, and perhaps there are too many bad examples around in our churches. So I for one don’t blame him fully.

Yes to all appearances, Samuel was a part of this magnificent chain of God’s grace. There were changes in his life that evidenced God’s work.

### Hunger for the Word

After this time, Samuel’s hunger for the word dramatically increased. Jos Landkroon, who had worked with him as deacon, and who lived just around the corner, had for some time taught him Bible Study. Soon, Samuel was a part of the furniture at the Landkroon house. His language, habits, and appearance all changed over time dramatically. But like all of us, it was not without effort. While at first Judy had dreaded his visits due to his somewhat filthy language, and rough manner, over time his visits became a highlight of the Landkroon household. His new self in Christ became a self that people enjoyed having around.

With the Landkroons, Samuel travelled through the Heidelberg Catechism with joy. He loved it so much that it was a pleasure for him to then cover the Westminster Confession. He just couldn’t get enough. He would write out every question, every answer and even all the Bible texts. Sometimes, it appeared he wrote out the Bible texts so he wouldn’t have to suffer

the embarrassment of looking up the texts in front of us. Anyone who thinks the catechisms have a bunch of dry doctrine would think twice when discussing with Samuel. They were summaries of Biblical truth, that for Samuel, were exactly what the doctor ordered! He took to these catechisms like a fish to water. He was at the same time reading creation magazines, *Faith and Focus*, and a variety of Christian magazines.

We were witnessing the growth in grace of a man who had fallen away. And what a sight to behold! How we wished we could have given this good news to his praying mother, and his father. It seemed such a tragedy that here Samuel was turning back to the Lord, and yet they parted this earth without ever getting to know about it. But we could not turn back the wheel of history. God had decided differently. We just gave thanks to God that Samuel was a part of God’s chain of grace. *“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren. And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified, and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”* (Romans 8:29,30)

*(Next time we would like to end this series by witnessing God’s finishing work in Samuel and the lessons we learned in our church.)*

## Our churches in focus

### PUKEKOHE

Hello from Pukekohe! We have had a busy start to the year, but a very joyful one.

On January 24 we were up early and at the airport to welcome the Piers family to New Zealand. God answered our prayers and on Sunday 3 March Rev. Dale Piers was installed as our minister. We are all thankful to have Dale and Tami, and their children Josh and Janelle, as part of our congregation.

We have had plenty of opportunity for fellowship - enjoying a welcome barbeque at the beach for the Piers family, and quite a few church lunches.

In February we witnessed the Profession of Faith of Roelof Voschezang, and in March the



Installation of Rev Dale Piers

baptism of Emma Kingham, daughter of Wayne and Sarah.

A number of our young people have left Pukekohe to study elsewhere in New Zealand. However, it hasn't all been one way traffic; in March we were glad to welcome Marco Bosgra into membership.

Founding members of Pukekohe, Ross and Glenys Jackson, celebrated their 30th Wedding Anniversary recently. We also congratulate the Voschezang family on the marriage of Lisa to Jon Stephens.

We are enjoying the encouragement of mid-week Bible studies and Ladies Bible study again. The children are busy with Sunday School and Cadets and Calvinettes. The Youth Group are making the most of the summer weather, and appear to have a full calendar of activities.

We are enjoying a blessed start to 2002, and pray for God's continued blessings over Pukekohe.

Until next time,

**Moana Leenders**

**SILVERSTREAM**

Greetings from the folk in the Reformed Church of Silverstream.

We can reflect on the Lord's blessing in the past year and continue to look to Him for the year ahead. We need His guidance as we live before Him in our marriages, as parents and grand-parents, even great-grand-parents, in the work place and in our congregation.

Many members are involved in the life of our congregation, serving as Session members, on different committees, Cadet and Calvinette leaders, the Youth. We all have different talents to use in God's Kingdom. As a congregation, we are waiting to see plans for our new church building. After 40 years, it is exciting to look to the future to rebuild and have a building that reflects the needs of the people and be used to the honour of our Lord and Saviour, the King of His Church!

We were again blessed with the birth of Samuel to Mark & Dorothea VanderZwaag, David to Wilo & Lisa de Jonge, Jamie to Stuart & Rebecca Williams, and Shannon to John & Sue Huizinga.

Br. Samuel Alexander and Br. Kees Posthuma went to be with their Lord and Saviour. (You can read about Br. Samuel in this issue of *Faith in Focus*.)

Sr. Sjoerdje Heeringa underwent heart surgery, and has had a wonderful recovery.

Last Sunday we witnessed the Profession of Faith of three young men: Jason Donk, Simon Eldershaw and Hugo VanderWerff.

Simon Eldershaw and Melanie Archbald announced their engagement.

Br. Henk Holtslag had to enter a Rest Home for twenty-four-hour care. We see the need in the future to establish Christian Homes for our brothers and sisters, in the meantime taking time to visit and encourage the elderly among us.

John and Hettie Leenders celebrated forty years of marriage, with the congregation joining in a fun evening.

In all these things we give thanks to our faithful God, who hears us and answers our prayers.

With Synod in April, our office bearers are meeting weekly considering the overtures and reports. We commend the Synod, once again, to our Lord, that His Word and Holy Spirit will lead the discussions and decisions for the future of our church in this nation.

**Maria Holtslag**

**SHORT MINUTES OF AUCKLAND PRESBYTERY**

The main purpose of this meeting was the Colloquium Doctum of the Rev. Dale Piers, in order for him to be installed as the minister of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe. (Rev. Piers was a minister of the United Reformed Churches of North America, a group of churches who have

broken away from the Christian Reformed Churches over the interpretation of scripture.) He and his family, the Pukekohe members, and the Synodical examiners, the Revs Flinn and Goris, were welcomed.

Following questioning upon the areas of *Confessions & Subscription*, *Word & Spirit*, *Women in the Offices*, *Issues facing the Christian Church/Community*, and *Liturgy & Worship*, each conducted by one of the ministers of Presbytery and further questioning, it was announced, after a brief closed session, that the Colloquium Doctum was sustained, and thus his installation into the office of minister in the Pukekohe church was authorised.

Following this, the usual Presbytery matters were dealt with. Under closed session, one of the churches sought and obtained concurrence to proceed with the second step of discipline of a delinquent member.

The Church Order Article 47 questions were asked of the North Shore and Pukekohe sessions. The North Shore brethren were especially pleased on the near completion of their church building, with Pukekohe particularly encouraged by the arrival of the Piers family, and thankful for the help of the Hamilton ministers.

Various appointments were made for the new year, including agreement on the nature of pulpit supply to the Avondale congregation.

**S.B.**

**SHORT REPORT OF THE CHRISTCHURCH PRESBYTERY**

The Christchurch Presbytery met on Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2002 at the Reformed Church of Christchurch. Rev Ralph Adams opened the meeting, in his position as moderator, with a devotion on Romans 12:12, "Be joyful always." He welcomed the visitors who were present for the colloquium doctum of Rev Jim Klazinga and gave a special word of welcome to Rev Jim and Mrs Julie Klazinga, who had arrived in the country a few days earlier, and to the synodical examiners, Revs. John Rogers and Paul Archbald.

Rev. Jim Klazinga was questioned in the following areas:

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| <i>Systematictheology</i>                  | by Rev. Michael Flinn. |
| <i>Worship issues</i>                      | by Rev. Hans Vaatstra. |
| <i>Church Polity</i>                       | by Rev. John Haverland |
| <i>Motives for the ministry and ethics</i> | by Rev. Ralph Adams.   |
| <i>The confessions</i>                     | by Rev. Paul Archbald. |

After some further general questions from the delegates and the synodical examiners, the presbytery went into closed session. Following a brief discussion it was decided to sustain the examination, with the concurrence of the synodical examiners, and this was announced to Rev. J. Klazinga and to the visitors. As the counselor, Rev. Michael Flinn will conduct the installation service, which was scheduled for Sunday morning the 7<sup>th</sup> of April.

After morning tea, delegates from the Reformed Church of Christchurch responded to the questions of Article 47 of the Church Order. They expressed thanks to God for the good heart in the congregation during their time without a minister, gratitude to the Bishopdale and Dovedale sessions for their help in the past year, and joyfully anticipated the installation and ministry of their new pastor.

The Article 47 questions were also put to the delegates from the Reformed Churches of Dunedin and Oamaru. They informed the presbytery of the harmony and peace in their churches, and expressed thanks for the blessing of a stable and fruitful ministry. Five people have expressed the desire to profess their faith. The readers in the Dunedin congregation are feeling the pressure of having to share quite a number of services amongst a few men.

The presbytery went into closed session as the Dovedale delegates sought advice on a pastoral matter. After lunch, the Nelson delegates reported on items of interest from the minutes of other presbyteries in

New Zealand and from the classes in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. The clerk, moderator and vice-moderator were assigned the task of organising the church visitation schedule.

The meeting was closed at 1.45 p.m. with prayer. The next meeting was scheduled for Saturday the 20<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Reporter: Rev John Haverland**

## SHORT REPORT OF WELLINGTON PRESBYTERY

Wellington Presbytery met at the Reformed Church of Hastings, on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> and Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2002. Rev. Bruce Hoyt chaired the meeting.

Church Order Article 47 questions were asked of Hastings and Masterton. Hastings responded that they were happy with their vicar, Br. Nigel Cunningham. They were also pleased to be under the ministry of their pastor. Masterton, similarly, was being blessed by the ministry of Rev. Rademaker. His preaching and pastoring was well-appreciated, and it was felt that he worked well with the Session there.

Reports were also heard from the Presbytery Youth committee (Rev. Rademaker); the Vacant Church Counsellor (Rev. Hoyt for Masterton); church visitation in Wainuiomata and Masterton; and the scrutiny of minutes of other presbyteries/classes (Wellington). It is now the custom of Wellington Presbytery to pause for prayer for the churches dealt with in the visitation reports.

Considerable time was spent discussing a request from Wellington to have in-principle support for their work in Waikanae. This support includes recognition of the work as a home mission; and assistance with preaching and finances. The financial assistance will be needed in the event that a home missionary is found to work in Waikanae. Wellington has a man in mind—Rev. Lion-Cachet, from our sister-church in South Africa, the GKSA. Rev. Lion-Cachet has already visited and met with the previous Presbytery; however, a formal *colloquium doctum* will now be organized. Presbytery unanimously agreed to these requests.

Presbytery also spent quite some time discussing the oversight of the Foxton congregation. Synod had indicated that oversight should return to Foxton after at least a year from the special synod. Wellington formally requested that the Caretaker Session

cease oversight. Presbytery decided to hold a special meeting—a continuation of the 1-2 March meeting—to decide the question, on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> April. Before that time, there is to be at least one meeting between the Foxton elders and the “Levin group” (those former members of Foxton who meet for worship in Levin). Presbytery will evaluate the report from this meeting, in order to decide about the oversight question.

Presbytery decided, on majority, not to allow Palmerston North an extra delegate from the home mission work in Wanganui. Delegates did point out, however, that Palmerston could include the Wanganui minister or ruling elders as one of the 2 delegates they normally send.

Other matters were dealt with fairly quickly: the churches were encouraged to send copies of their bulletins to the other sessions, Br. Leen Vandenberg was elected as stated clerk of Presbytery for another term of 2 years, and a new church visitation roster was accepted.

During the Presbytery, time was spent in prayer, both for the reconciliation of Foxton members and ex-members, and for the work in Waikanae. Rev. Hoyt, in closing with prayer, was also able to give thanks to the Lord for the spirit of co-operation between the churches.

## Missions in focus

**Janice Reid**

In January this year, Brs Anton Meister (Palmerston North) and Derek Cressy (Masterton) visited Papua New Guinea on behalf of the Overseas Mission Board. This is an edited version of their report to Synod about what they learned....

“We stayed most of the time in Port Moresby; the ‘t Hart family stayed there as well. We spent many hours talking to Stephen and Dorinda about their work. We also visited the settlement where the church of Port Moresby is, visited with some people, and met with the session of the church. The planned trip to Ekorovo (Sogeri region) where Stephen is working had to be delayed as the four-wheel drive vehicle broke down on our way there. Hence, instead of going on Thursday (with a planned evening meeting with the congregation) we could only go on Saturday. Since there is no phone connection between Port Moresby and Ekorovo, the people waited for us in vain. On Saturday night after we finally arrived, we had an impromptu meeting with the congregation. Next day we attended the worship service. We departed again in the afternoon for Port Moresby to return to NZ.”

### Reformed roots in Port Moresby

The history of the Reformed churches in

Papua New Guinea is not long, but giving all the details could fill this space and not leave any time for us to look to the future! Here, though, is the briefest of outlines....

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia have been working among the indigenous people of PNG for some time, as well as with refugees from Irian Jaya who have a Reformed background. The work consists of preaching, sacraments, baptisms and provision of funds. Their main focus now, after some restructuring, is the congregation in Lae, on the northeastern side of the island.

In the late 80s, a missionary was called from Holland to work in Port Moresby. He stayed for 2.5 years. His time there didn't work out well, in part because of an ‘oversupply of money.’ This created money dependence problems as people joined the church simply to get housing loans, and then left after the loans were granted.

More recently, the Canadian Reformed Churches of Classis Ontario (headed by the church of Toronto) agreed to assist the church in Port Moresby with work in the Sogeri Valley region (2 hours drive inland). Stephen was called to be a missionary to Ekorovo (Sogeri). He arrived there in 1998.

Toronto saw its task as building up the church through teaching not through the giving

of financial support. The Mission Board therefore was less involved in the day to day running of the church. Port Moresby receives no on-going financial assistance from the CanRC Mission Board, although money is given for one-off projects

### The Reformed presence in PNG today

Currently in PNG there is only one instituted Reformed Church (Port Moresby), although there are other preaching posts and groups of believers. The church in Port Moresby has its own indigenous pastor and its own session. The church is self-supporting and self-governing. The majority of members are refugees from Irian Jaya, hence they do not speak the local language well and find it correspondingly difficult to get work. As a result the congregation is very poor: there is only *one* man in the church with full-time, paid employment.

Rev Stephen ‘t Hart’s work is that of church planting in the Sogeri valley, although he also acts as advisor/counselor to the Port Moresby church.

### What’s the local situation?

1. It is clear that the Lord has blessed the proclamation of the Reformed Faith in PNG. The growth in the churches, and the attitude of the elders and deacons as well as the

people in the congregation are clear signs of that.

2. There is a great desire by the people to reach out to those around them. However, they don't have the resources or time.
3. The Reformed congregations are not made up of indigenous people (the majority are refugees).
4. Tribalism creates difficulties for outreach: if most members of a church are from one tribe, it is hard to encourage people from other tribes to join.
5. The people who came from Irian Jaya have language problems and hence they often find it difficult to get work.
6. There is a desperate need for training of indigenous pastors, as well as training of elders and deacons.
7. Published Christian training and teaching material in the two main local languages (Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu) is very scarce.

#### How can we help?

Brs Meister and Cressy, in their report to Synod, made some suggestions regarding possible areas of service for missionaries from our churches. They include:

1. **Full-time missionary.** This work would be similar to that of Rev Stephen 't Hart. "Such a person would have to learn the language. There should also be cultural training. Not all of this would have to be done beforehand. Although some knowledge prior to coming would clearly be advantageous, a person without it could still be effective, working in the English language, while learning the local language/culture."
2. **Short term pastor.** "An ordained pastor who in the first instance would help to build up and strengthen the work of the church in Port Moresby, especially in terms of training elders and deacons. Knowledge of the local language would still be preferable but...language learning could occur simultaneously while working in the church. This person could help to develop English preaching and teaching."
3. **Short term worker (spiritual).** A non-ordained person, who would work with the church to develop English programmes to attract outsiders and help develop activities. Some possibilities: youthclubs in English; teaching of English as a second language (ESL); remedial teaching for children.
4. **Short term workers (physical).** People who would come over and help to build on the land owned by the Moresby congregation. "The big question here is finance. Where is it going to come from? It is essential that the local people are involved in raising funds within the country. However, outside help will be needed to complete it (or even as seed money to get it started)."
5. **Short term workers to help with the development of non-church activities for outreach.** Possibilities: kindergarten, pre-



Scaling the height's on FEBC Cambodia's new antenna...playing with airplanes?!

school, radio programmes.

6. **Literature development.** Possibilities: establishment of a Reformed bookshop in Moresby; production and publication of simple Reformed material in Tok Pisin and English (*everything* is needed, from sermon outlines to church leadership material to women's literature to Sunday School resources to music!).

#### Jumping to conclusions

Actually, I have to jump because I'm out of space! Brs Meister and Cressy conclude: "there are opportunities in PNG for RCNZ to be involved. Also the people there are all keen to see us involved, for several reasons:

1. They are isolated and contact with other Reformed churches would be of great support to them;
2. They are poor and busy people, busy surviving and have little spare time, or capital to do outreach themselves;
3. There is a real desire to reach out to the lost, especially those other refugees and people from the same tribes; and
4. There is a real hunger for preaching and training, something they themselves are not able to do."

It seems clear that Papua New Guinea is a harvest-field just waiting for those who are willing to give of themselves for the sake of the Kingdom. If you want to know more, please contact the Overseas Mission Board. If you're wondering whether *you're* called to work in one of the areas mentioned, make a start on finding out: speak with your elder. And in the meantime, here's a command from the Master Himself: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. **Ask the Lord of the harvest,**

**therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."** Matt 9:37,38 (NIV)

## MIF Prayer Notes

**Home mission** Wanganui fellowship is hoping to start an evangelistic Sunday school. Please pray for those involved, and for good contacts with children and families in the community.

**International mission** Rev John Goris asks prayer for the members of the Missions Committee of the ICRC as they plan and organise regional conferences. Please pray that members would be constantly aware of and alert to the needs of the mission churches, so that conferences would be practical in helping those churches to meet their specific needs. Lord willing, there will be at least three regional conferences on missions in the months ahead: later this year: Latin America; early next year in Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo), and a third in Asia (Thailand).

**Janice Reid** asks prayer for her colleagues in FEBC Cambodia. After more than two years of discussions with government departments, including petitions at the highest level of government, FEBC has not been able to get their AM transmitter released from Customs (this in spite of an AM broadcasting licence issued some long time ago). However, they praise the Lord that they are finally on air, this time on FM; the first live programs started on March 6. Please pray for the announcers, who are used to producing programs for shortwave: FM format is quite different, and there's a lot of adjustment to be made! Pray for an effective outreach, and that the name of the Lord would be honoured by FEBC staff and in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

## From the D.A.'s Office

# Synod 1961



*Delegates to Synod 1961, on the steps of the Congregational Church, Cambridge Tce, Wellington.*

Our Churches xx Synod has just completed in Christchurch, having met together for a full week. Delegates will have come from all 18 of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, plus some delegates from sister churches and other observers. In total there will have been around 45 'official' attendees. What better time to look back to the early years, 1961 in fact, when the 7<sup>th</sup> Synod was held in the Congregational Church, Cambridge Terrace, Wellington (where the Reformed Church of Wellington then held worship services), from 7 to 9 February. At that stage in our churches history there were 10 Reformed Churches in New Zealand, and the photo shown here shows the delegates to that Synod.

Those on the photograph are (left to right):

**Back Row:** Piet Braam, Rev Alex Scarrow, Henk van de Waardt, Arie Nugteren, Nico Traas, Peter Donk.

**Middle Row:** Leen du Mez, Rev Bill Deenick, Rev Richard Venema, Rev Peter Pellicaan, Prof Dr Klaas Runia, Fred Channing, Rev Sid Cooper, J van Voorthuizen, Dick Vanderpyl.

**Front Row:** Ivan Ferguson, P van Dam, Wim Borgdorff, Bill van Rij, Rev Arent de Graaf.

## Archives Statement of Policy & Procedures

And now the penultimate instalment of the Archives Statement of Policy and Procedures, "Specific Regulations Regarding Publishing".

### Specific Regulations Regarding Publishing

If a researcher intends to publish a book, thesis, or any other paper for a university or similar institution, the following undertakings must be given:

1. Not to copy any holding of the archives in any form without special permission in writing.
2. Not to publish any information obtained from the archives without permission in writing.
3. Before publication, to submit all work based on the holdings in the archives for the approval of the archivist.
4. To give due acknowledgment to the source of all original material used.
5. To provide the archives gratis with a copy of any work which is the result of research in the archives.
6. If required by the archivist, to sign a document releasing the archives of any legal responsibility if any action for slander or any other legal action follows from publication of material contained in the holdings of the archives.

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