

faith in  
**focus**

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Mastering the media for spiritual good

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## Editorial

Over the last 15-20 years our “progressive” western society has been changing in the way that it communicates and conducts business, much of which is due to the advancement of computers and the World Wide Web (commonly known as the Web). With the ability to send files by email or download/upload from web pages, we have seen that business has been sped up considerably from what it was forty years ago. Information is easier and quicker to access, we can even watch film clips of the Volvo Ocean Race via the WWW and track who is in the lead. We can access all the latest news and information from all over the world at the “click of a mouse” or “touch of a screen”. In terms of information, the world is our oyster.

With the advancement of this technology, there is need for great care. The social media, as they call it, has introduced a unique way of “communicating” with the use of computers, hand-held devices like mobile phones, iPads, iPods and what-have-you. You can upload your favourite snaps on Facebook, Twitter or Flickr, for the WWW community to see or for your “friends” only and leave messages about someone’s comments/status or photos. When we use these applications, any privacy that we might have had is potentially lost. I think

With this technology some very unscrupulous individuals have used it for the advancement of the “dark side” rather than for the glory of God. The social media have been harnessed for the promotion of pornography, identity fraud, scandal, etc. Then there is the potential for the young and not-so-young to use them for foolish purposes which may eventually lead to their embarrassment.

Our contributors write about the social media and how they can be mastered for spiritual good.

Mr Bruce Hoyt gives a very good introduction to the WWW and what to look out for.

Mrs Helena O’Neill is a journalist and writes about the “advantages” the social media give to the news media.

Mr Joshua Flinn looks at the internet from a historical and cultural perspective.

Mrs Sally Davey takes a cue from an article with the arresting title “Listen, darling, you just can’t legislate for compassion.”.

Mr Jack Sawyer gives us the final instalment of “The Glorious New Zealand Experiment” (from the book *Confident of Better Things*, by the OPC) and writes about our common ecumenical path.

Dr James Visscher asks the question: is baptism of children a Divine demand or just a human invention?

Mrs Harriet Haverland continues to keep us up to date with news from our churches in the Gleanings column.

Pastor Daniel F. Patterson reviews *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning*, by Nancy Pearcey.

Mr John Rogers writes about the Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil (Presbyterian Church of Brasil).

Images: p6 [www.stuff.co.nz](http://www.stuff.co.nz); p11 [www.crestock.com](http://www.crestock.com)

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# Mastering the media for spiritual good (1)

## Can anything good come from WWW-Land?

**Bruce Hoyt**

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness ..." (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*)

"The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" (Sergio Leone)

"Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?" (James 3:11)

These quotations describe what confronts us whenever we browse the internet. There is a lot of ugly, a lot of bad and a lot of good content available in WWW-land. It is a spring – no, perhaps we had better call it a flood – which pours out fresh and salt water from the same opening, inundating us with multiple billions of pages of information: textual, audio, and visual. This flood of information has returned us in one sense to the time Dickens describes. We may say it is the best of times and the worst of times, the age of wisdom and the age of foolishness, the epoch of belief and the epoch of incredulity.

Once you are hooked up to a broadband connection and have the requisite computer hardware and software, it's all there just waiting to overwhelm you. Just click on your browser and whoosh ... It's enough to make some of us wish we were Amish or even hermits. But burying one's head in the sand (only humans do such a stupid thing, ostriches certainly don't) won't make it go away.

As Christians we are to glorify God in all things: *"whether you eat or drink or whatever you do (e.g. surf the internet), do all to the glory of God"* (1 Cor 10:31). So how can we glorify God surfing the internet? I want to consider two unscriptural approaches taken by Christians and then consider a scriptural one.

### Isolation

There is a long history of Christians responding to the culture around them, and especially to cultural change, by standing apart from it or even isolating themselves. For Christians who truly want to please the Lord, it is understandable that many will completely reject any use of the internet because so much of it is bad and ugly. After all doesn't Scripture say, *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (KJV, 1 Thes 5:22)? It is almost impossible to avoid being confronted by sin and ungodliness on the internet. Foul, immoral and blasphemous language is everywhere. Typing a wrong search key

can bring up all kinds of pornography and sexual perversions. Even the news pages have thumbnail shots of prurient and salacious gossip with links to click for the "full scoop." It's not possible to avoid "all appearance of evil" and use the internet. So some sincere Christians urge abstinence. Don't go near that cesspool and you won't be polluted.

But there is a serious error in such thinking. Although it is true that dumping sewage and industrial waste into our lakes and streams will pollute them, the external pollution of our society is not what pollutes us. Jesus makes that very clear in Matt 15:11: *"It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man ... the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man."* Jesus is teaching that the source of our defilement is not external things but our heart. Man is polluted right in the very core of his being. Therefore pollution pours out of



Image: Salvatore Vuono / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

him in all he thinks and says and does – unless by God’s grace that polluted heart is replaced by a renewed one.

But someone may argue, Jesus was talking about eating food with unwashed hands. He was not talking about the sinful acts, blasphemous words and false teachings which are so freely available on the internet. We should have nothing to do with such sinful things and therefore we should completely avoid any use of the internet.

Yes, Jesus was responding to the criticism of the Pharisees and scribes who accused Jesus’ disciples of eating with unwashed hands and so defiling their food and becoming defiled themselves – according to their tradition. But surely Jesus is giving us a more general principle: it is what comes from our hearts that pollutes us, not what comes from outside us. That is what God intended to teach His people through the various ceremonial cleanliness rituals – they needed a

Disconnecting your modem from the phone line (or cable) through which it sucks all the rubbish from the World Wide Web (WWW) will not produce a circumcised heart. God said to Cain, “*Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it*” (Gen 4:7). At that point in the history of the world it was very clear that God was not saying that Cain must keep away from all the sinful and wicked things in the outside world so that he wouldn’t sin. There was no internet then, or TV or movies or pornography. There hadn’t been any murders or sexual perversions or robberies or violence or terrorism or war. But there was sin in Cain’s heart just itching for an occasion to take control of him.

It is the same today when we have these evils all around us; sin is in our hearts just itching for an occasion to take control of us. The problem is not what’s “out there” but what’s “in here”.

excellence had been totally set aside as irrelevant. I was quite sure that none of these men could preach a sermon on Phil 4:8 the following Sunday:

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”*

But I was also quite sure they needed to hear one.

What was the problem? Was it that these men were watching a programme that presented sinful acts, that was pervaded with foul language, and which had, as far as I could tell in a few minutes, no redeeming features? No, that was not the real problem – though the very fact that these men were watching such a programme was certainly a symptom of the real problem.

The real problem is not the sinful things coming from the outside. We live in a sinful world and to a greater or lesser degree will always be confronted by sin just as Jesus was. The real problem for these men was their uncritical acceptance of what was being presented in the programme, their enjoyment and participation in what was contrary to the holiness of God. That uncritical acceptance came from the inside, from unholy hearts.

We live in a very sinful world. There is wickedness and filth, ambition and pride on every hand. The only difference between the internet you surf in your home and the world outside is that you don’t have to walk outside to take it in, it’s all there at the click of the mouse. Just as we learn not to accept uncritically everything in the world around us so we must do regarding WWW-land.

When you go for a walk outside, you don’t try to find all the muddy places and walk through them (unless you are a five-year-old boy). No, you walk where you won’t get your shoes all muddy. And when you go out for an evening’s entertainment, you don’t go to the red light district or to the XXX rated cinema or the homosexual bars. Why not? Because you belong to the Lord and you seek to please Him in all aspects of your life, including the entertainment you enjoy. And for the same reason you don’t join an exclusive club of ambitious entrepreneurs who are seeking to get ahead financially with no regard for the glory of God, or a women’s fashion society

“Just as we learn not to accept uncritically everything in the world around us so we must do regarding WWW-land.”

cleansing of their hearts. God said already through Moses that He desired circumcised hearts: “*So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer*” (Deut 10:16). Because they did not, Jeremiah made clear that they were no different from the uncircumcised of other nations: “*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised ... for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart*” (Jer 9:25-26).

The Lord commanded His people to be separate from the other nations so that they would be a witness of God’s holiness to the surrounding nations. But that separation would not of itself produce holiness. They must draw near to God who promised that He would circumcise their hearts: “*Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live*” (Deut 30:6).

And isolation won’t fix that. Only God can fix that. And He will as we draw near to Him.

### **Uncritical acceptance**

Other Christians accept and participate in our culture almost without thinking. I remember how shocked I was in 1976 when I stopped by one of the seminary student flats while I was studying for the ministry. Three young seminarians were watching a stand-up comedy show in which the comedian was cracking one foul, immoral joke after another. What shocked me was not the foul, immoral crudity of the comedian – though we never had a TV, I was fully aware that this kind of manure was the order of the day – what shocked me was that these young men, who were studying Reformed theology in preparation for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, were laughing at and enjoying the immoral and foul vomit coming from the comedian’s mouth. God’s call to holiness and purity, integrity and moral

where one-upmanship is the way to promote yourself.

It is no different walking on the streets of WWW-land. You belong to the Lord 24/7 both in your home and outside it. Because you live for Him you set your mind against all that might displease Him. That means that you do not merely take in and enjoy whatever the next link may display. No! You see a mud hole and you recognise it for what it is and step around it. You see a news article and you consider its anti-Christian bias. You see the flashing advertisement for the newest BMW and ignore it since your 1994 Corolla is quite capable of getting you to work and to church. You see a blog by Carl Trueman, whose book *Reformation: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* you recently read, so you subscribe to and read the blog because you realise he is a sound, Reformed author whose words will be spiritually profitable and challenging.

In other words you deal with the internet as you deal with everything else in daily life. You do not uncritically accept whatever comes along, but you remember that first of all you belong to the Lord and then you seek to use the electronic tool He has placed in your hands for your edification and His glory.

### Careful discernment

To do that takes careful discernment – not only in separating the filth and rubbish from what is good and honourable and pure – but also in distinguishing truth from error.

I am amazed at how often I receive emails from friends and acquaintances about some shocking event in China or an amazing stand for righteousness taken by a Christian in the USA. However, a little investigation often reveals that the shocking event was a myth and the amazing stand for righteousness was a fabrication – like the urban myth that still circulates among some Christian groups that Charles Darwin had a death-bed conversion to Christianity.

Because anybody can write anything and distribute it widely on the internet, Anybody does! You must remember that there is no one between you and Anybody to check the information he sent you. Is it true? Is it a joke? Does it make sense? Is it a fabrication? Is it a way of promoting some hidden agenda? You need careful discernment!

Such discernment is also needed when assessing the mass of Christian information on the internet. Just because

“Using this God-given tool requires much self-discipline because of the individualistic nature of the endeavour.”

a site is designated “Christian” does not mean it is a good place to learn the faith or grow in the grace and knowledge of God. There is a huge amount of “Christian” information on the internet, including every heresy and subtle error known to church history. In fact, if you are not a theologically well-read Christian, it will be difficult for you to assess the mass of “Christian” information you can access at the click of your mouse.

But assessing Christian truth on the internet is no different from assessing it when it comes from other sources. When you attend a church of another denomination while on holiday, you may hear many “Christian” words and through them be fed a meal of heresy. You may attend a “Christian” Bible college and be taught that God is “developing” together with mankind or that He is a God who loves and saves those who first love Him.

On the other hand there is a huge amount of Reformed, solidly biblical material to be found on the internet. With a small financial outlay you can gain a solid and thoroughly biblical education, equivalent to a degree in theology, by a wise and discerning use of this valuable tool which God has placed in our hands.

All this leads me to a final observation. Using this God-given tool requires much self-discipline because of the individualistic nature of the endeavour. When you use the internet, you are not interacting in any personal way with other Christians. Your learning takes place without the benefit of critique or discussion with others. So you listen in isolation. Some people listen to sermons by great Reformed preachers but never become active participants in the life of any local church.

For we must use careful discernment not only in sifting truth from error but also in assessing whether our gaining much knowledge is at the cost of “forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some” (Heb 10:25). What we gain from the internet comes without any accountability, which we all need and which God provides through our brothers and sisters in Christ’s church. The individualistic nature of the internet may also come at the cost of serving God in His church and kingdom. In that case we would become puffed up with knowledge but lack the love of Christ for His own.

To answer the question of the title,



Image: Gregory Szarkiewicz / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

“Can Anything Good Come from WWW-Land?” I would say, “yes”. But as in all aspects of life we who love the Lord must exercise careful discern-

ment and self-discipline so that our walks in WWW-land may promote the honour and glory of God and build up His church.

*Mr Bruce Hoyt is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Oamaru.*

## Mastering the media for spiritual good (2)

# The advantage of the social media

**Helena O’Neill**

Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and other forms of social media are quickly becoming a regular feature in most aspects of our lives; and are now becoming a tool harnessed by journalists and activists as well as those just wanting to share their thoughts with the world. Natural disasters, riots, and other events overseas have led to the emergence of social media as an important part of the newsgathering process. Conversely, the social media has also emerged as a platform for those organising riots or civil unrest. Love it or loathe it, it appears social media are here to stay. The question is how should social media be used?

In this “digital age” tech-savvy journalists are embracing social media to such an extent that the phrase “according to a social networking site” is frequently appearing in news articles. For those of you that use the social networking site

Twitter and follow a news agency or a journalist, it is commonplace to come across a plea from reporters seeking comment from a particular sort of person, or someone who has had a particular experience in relation to a news story they are working on. This plea is usually “retweeted” by those subscribed to that journalist’s account, or by their employer’s official Twitter account, and can soon appear on thousands of Twitter-users’ newsfeeds. Both Twitter trends and Facebook groups are used to gauge public reaction on issues and events, and are quoted and referred to in so many of the news stories in our media – both nationally and internationally. Likewise television, radio, and print media all use Facebook through journalists’ personal accounts and their media organisation’s Facebook pages to contact potential sources and commentators.

Perhaps a less well-known use of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media

sites is the way images uploaded to these websites can be used by the mainstream media. Once a user posts an image online, it is picked up by a variety of search engines and is often shared with other users of that particular site. Sooner or later, that image is likely to reach a journalist, or someone working in the media industry. You may have heard about celebrities getting into difficulties when they accidentally send a photo to thousands, even millions, of their followers and fans on social networking sites. While the entertainment media thrives on these kinds of incidents, the news media also picks up on these faux pas, particularly when it happens to people in high positions. Images uploaded to websites, particularly blogs and social networking sites, are also used online, on television, and in our newspapers to illustrate a story or as a “mug shot”. Next time you are browsing through [www.stuff.co.nz](http://www.stuff.co.nz) or another online news



“Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites can be used by the mainstream media.”

website, keep an eye out for Facebook or Twitter listed directly under the image as a photo credit. You may be surprised by how often images are used from these types of websites.

Privacy is a factor that can not and should not be overlooked as many users of social networking sites and blogs often do not realise how much personal information they are communicating to an unknown audience. Bloggers use the internet to post their online journal to friends and family, but often leave their blog sites open to visitors, allowing all and sundry to view their thoughts and opinions. A recent survey conducted by communications researcher Cision and the George Washington University revealed that an overwhelming majority of reporters and editors use social media sources for researching their stories. A whopping 89% of journalists surveyed said they used blogs while doing research for their stories online. More than half said social media were important for reporting and producing the stories they wrote. If New Zealand journalists use social media as much as their American counterparts, then expect to see more references to blogs and bloggers in news stories. However, it is comforting to learn that 84% use information delivered via social media rather cautiously as they think it is less reliable than information delivered via traditional media. All journalists said they used search engine giant Google for their online research, and of these 61% are also turning to Wikipedia – an online encyclopaedia updated by anyone on the internet. Only two-thirds are using social networking sites like Facebook or LinkedIn, while only about half of them make use of the micro-blogging site Twitter.

Social media can also be used to capture events in areas where access is limited to journalists or to people in general due to conflicts, natural disasters, or isolation. Consider web journalist Robert Hernandez who was searching the popular video upload site YouTube for footage of the Bahrain protests. He used specific filters to find videos from Bahrain and then sorted them to find the most recent uploads. The top result had just been uploaded and had yet to be viewed by anyone. He watched it. The shaky video was taken by someone in a crowd holding a cell phone and showed a protester getting shot and killed during the protest. It took three simple steps to send a video of that event around the world: Record. Upload. View. Without

a news crew or photographer standing nearby, this death may have gone unnoticed and unrecorded, but through the power of a cellphone, the internet and YouTube, it was captured forever. The mainstream media also uses YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to show footage or images from other protests and conflicts around the world, before sending their own news crews to follow up on the initial reports – if they are able to.

But journalists are not the only ones harnessing the power of the social media. In 2011, the “London Riots” spread across England, a movement which was initially thought to be spread through social networking sites before it became apparent that the BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) network was being used by rioters. In the UK and the Middle East BlackBerries are cheaper than many smart-

phones, making them more accessible. The BBM service provides a free, private internet/3G communications network accessible by swapping PINs (or barcodes) and joining distribution lists. Unlike Twitter, where tweets are public broadcasts, or Facebook, where most messages are shared fairly indiscriminately, BBM is private. Most BBM messages are point-to-point, seen only by the sender and the receiver. It is also possible to send group messages which are only visible to those sending or receiving them. This messaging service is hard to police, and explains why rioting broke out without warning. However, social media was also used by police to track down lawbreakers after they posted photos of themselves with property stolen during the riots. Social media was also used to co-ordinate a riot clean-up campaign, prompting large groups of English residents to take to the streets armed with rubber gloves and brooms to clear the debris created by rioters.

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Likewise, perpetrators of the riots in Vancouver were also tracked down

through the social media. The Vancouver riots began when the home town national hockey league team, the Vancouver Canucks, lost to the Boston Bruins in game seven of the Stanley Cup Finals. Shortly after the riots began in Vancouver, Twitter was flooded with updates about the violence. People began sharing photos and videos of the rioters and soon concerned citizens, encouraged by the Vancouver Police, created an account on blogging site Tumblr where they could contribute to the hunt for criminal rioters. Witnesses could submit photos of people they saw looting or vandalizing property, and others could view them and identify who they were. Similar efforts took off on YouTube and photo/video-sharing website Flickr, causing many of the rioters to be identified and brought to justice.

But the best use of social media is

“We have to consider our use of social media, bearing in mind how our messages, images, videos or blogs reflect on ourselves as Christians.”

a simple one – keeping in touch with people. Disasters, whether natural or man-made, prove to be good reminders of this. Take the earthquakes in Canterbury and Japan. When contact with loved ones was limited people took to the social media for updates and for news on whether their loved ones were okay. I myself used Facebook and Twitter to track down friends and family during the February 22 earthquake, and it was through these social networking sites that I learned a good friend was missing, and later learned he had been killed in the collapse of the CTV building. Twitter users quickly began adding #eqnz to their messages, creating a category of messages relating to the Canterbury earthquakes and used by people asking for any sighting of missing friends and family members. These messages were often “retweeted” or reposted to thousands of others, in the hope someone had information on these people. Users of these social networking sites also posted photos and videos of their experiences, quickly showing New

Zealand and the world the extent of the damage and chaos. The social media was also used to mobilise support for the crippled region, sending a flood of volunteers and much-needed supplies to quake-stricken areas. The earthquake and tsunami in Japan also prompted social network users to take to posting images and messages to let their loved ones know how they were. These social networking sites, blogs, and photo/video sharing websites quickly spread information globally, making news instantly available to millions of people.

The social media are a complex and

ever-developing mode of communication. This article has merely touched on some of the good and bad uses of social media. As Christians we have to consider our use of social media, bearing in mind how our messages to friends and the images and videos we post on networking sites or blogs reflect on ourselves as Christians. While the social media can provide unverified information, or can spread atheistic or anti-God messages, they can also be used to keep in touch with loved ones, mobilise people to support their fellow citizens – whether with supplies or volunteer-

ing time and skills – and can also be used to spread the gospel. Social media bridge geographical and cultural barriers and are fast becoming an active part of our society: embrace them, but embrace them carefully. “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” – 3 Colossians 17.

*Mrs Helena O’Neill is a member of the Reformed Church of Dunedin.*

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## Mastering the media for spiritual good (3)

### From the Big ‘Dip’ to the computer chip

#### Joshua Flinn

It would be nice to believe that the conquering of the final frontier was based on a love of the Milky Way or the motivation to break free from gravity and explore the rest of God’s creation. The competitive background to the Space Race, however, appeared to be much less noble. Following the defeat of Germany in World War II, both Russia and America realised that true control lay with whoever held the biggest gun.

Russia was particularly concerned as America had missiles in Turkey left over from the war. John F. Kennedy had also been able to stop Khrushchev from installing missiles in Cuba. This meant that should nuclear battle eventuate, America had the upper hand due to the proximity of their weapons to Russian cities. When Russia launched Sputnik I into orbit in 1957 America feared that their advantage had now become obsolete as Russia would be able to use their nuclear capabilities (or more destructive weaponry) from anywhere in space without warning.

President Eisenhower realised the need to regain supremacy. To coincide with America’s own attempts to conquer space, Eisenhower worked towards de-

veloping a communications network to stimulate technological progress. Both J.C.R. Licklider and Leonard Kleinrock were instrumental in this plan. Their ideas culminated in April 1967 when Lawrence Roberts designed ARPANET, the precursor to the internet. Amongst many other social awards he was given the Secretary of Defence Meritorious Service Medal.

It took an extra 24 years before Tim Berners-Lee was able to move the world-wide-web out of the private sphere into the public domain.

#### Babel revisited

It is something of an irony that what originally was conceptualised to be a way to denote the superiority of one nation over another has now become unifying. The nations of the world have never been closer together than they are now. We now live in an age where all nations can speak freely with one another given the inclination; an age where travel is no longer necessary; an age where Skype enables you to *almost* reach out and touch people on the other side of the world in an instant; an age where language is the only barrier to international communication. Fortunately (or not), Google has a translator. The

International Space Station stands as a testament to this development. People who used to fight one another are now working together on a project for



*Sir Timothy John “Tim” Berners-Lee, OM, KBE, FRS, FREng, FRSA (born 8 June 1955[1]), also known as “TimBL”, is an English computer scientist, MIT professor and the inventor of the World Wide Web. en.wikipedia.org*

the 'good of all humankind'. We have solved the problem caused by the tower of Babel. Surely now we can create a nation which surpasses the heavens as all men work together to make dreams a reality; to "seek out new life-forms and new civilisations. To boldly go where no one has gone before." If the 2011 Rugby World Cup anthem is anything to go by we are 'the world in union, the world as one'. But hold on: If God has torn something asunder shouldn't we avoid putting it back together again?

### Extended families

Perhaps it may appear so on the surface – yet Paul spoke of a church family; adopted as heirs of the kingdom – fellow heirs with Christ. Consider Paul's letters to the churches. He did not simply serve in one local area but valued the relationships he had all over the Roman Empire. Even if letters had to be delivered by hand it is still apparent that the world was a larger place for Paul than the size of his prison cell. Even 5000+ years ago people understood that the world was larger than the distance a voice could carry from a pulpit. We have millions of brothers and sisters in Christ. With the internet we can communicate with them easily and encourage them; exhort them; enthuse them. We can weep with those that weep and rejoice with those that rejoice. In this sense, the internet makes instant what took Paul and the apostles (or the postal service of their day) years of travel to accomplish. We live in a time where *all* men are able to hear the gospel and are called to repent and believe, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

This also raises yet another interesting element of the information age. If an ancient traveller was talking to their grandson about the wonder of God's creation and mentioned the Hanging Gardens or the Grand Canyon, the young boy would have no point of reference. He would be unable to enjoy that element of the wonder of God outside of his own imagination or the storyteller's ability to express himself in an engaging way. In this age of information, however, we can see the heights of the Himalayas without tramping boots or marvel at the colour of the pink dolphin of the Amazon without having to be bitten by mosquitoes. Almost all elements of God's wonder can be seen from within our computer screens. We can see the rocks and trees cry out about the brilliance of God and to Him be the glory.

“If God can make use of the printing press for such things, how much more so the internet?”

### The printing press

The internet is not the first time the Lord has opened the floodgates of information for His people. In His infinite wisdom, God orchestrated the Reformation through creating an environment where learning was sought after; where questions about society and why things worked the way they did were common and expected.

Many people throughout Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century were illiterate. Only the rich could afford an education. State schooling as we know it today did not exist. If you wanted to 'learn letters' you had to hire a personal tutor or an accomplished governess. Valuable information was either spread through town gossips, cried forth by a town crier or told to you by a priest in Latin.

Enter the printing press. It has been heralded as the most important discovery of the second millennium. Invented by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440 AD, it enabled the mass production of text in a readable and accessible type. No longer was it necessary to ask a monk to painstakingly copy out a section of text so your neighbour could have it. Spreading the news throughout the realm was now easily achieved. People could hold in their hands relatively up-to-date information about what was going on in the world. The accessibility of this information encouraged all and sundry to learn how to read.

This invention stimulated more than simply a desire to become educated, however. People began to interact over the issues of the day and develop their own personal opinions. Two thousand years prior to this, the commoners of Rome realised the value of written laws. It forced the rulers to conform to the truth. Now, with the development of the printing press, the commoners were able to question the validity and questionable justice of the authorities over them.

### Tension in the Church

Directly on the back of this development came tension within the Roman Catholic Church. People questioned why they

could not access the Lord's Word themselves. Why did they have to hear the Bible read in Latin and not their own vernacular? Was it sin? Surely not! The Bible began to be printed in c.1451 AD with a modest 180 or so copies produced and available for purchase by 1455 AD. By 1500 AD over 2500 printing presses were at work in European cities churning out material.

In this context Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517 AD. Had this event happened 100 years earlier it would have largely passed unnoticed by the rest of society. Many would have put it down to obscure ecclesiastical squabbles and hoped that there wouldn't be yet another crusade. Yet Martin Luther's tracts, combined with many other famous reformers' writings, were avidly digested by much of society as a major source of reading material. Add to this the fact that the printing press had also helped stimulate the Renaissance and you begin to realise that people ques-



A Gutenberg press replica at the Featherbed Alley Printshop Museum, in Bermuda.  
[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

tioning the 'tried and true' methodology of their elders and betters had become a common hobby. The topic of choice, orchestrated by the Lord, was religion.

### **Why might God reunify humanity?**

If God can make use of the printing press for such things, how much more so the internet? You can send hundreds of people mail without having to buy a stamp. You can study the intricacies of creation without a microscope and explore space with the touch of

a button. You can download and read 20 books on your Kindle in the time it would have taken Gutenberg to print and post a single hardcover to your mailbox.

Yes, the internet allows sinful human beings to pursue their sinful human desires even more easily than they may have been able to before. They can hide away in their studies and delete the browser history. It doesn't even need to be planned: the best of intentions are frequently interrupted by the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes.

Yet this is the nature of the curse. Although we are sinful and fallen and corrupt, God has chosen to use us as His instruments, for His glory to be shown. The printing press could be used for good or for ill yet God used it to stimulate a Reformation. How much more, then, can the internet be used by Him to show forth His glory?

*Mr Joshua Flinn is a member of the Reformed Church of North Shore.*

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## **Feminine focus**

Sally Davey

### Cues from the World (No.2)

# A heart of compassion

The digital age has opened all sorts of new reading opportunities for me. I'm a slow learner technically, but I have my own little corners of the web that I have gotten to know well. One of my daily pleasures is a scan of the news online. If you spend enough time browsing you soon isolate a few must-read newspapers; and it didn't take me long to settle on *The Daily Telegraph* as my personal favourite. The *Telegraph* is a politically right-of-centre English paper. Its web site features a number of very good columnists and bloggers, many of whom have something very worthwhile to contribute to debates on current issues, social trends, even religious questions. These are good writers, who give you an indication of what clear-thinking, somewhat conservatively-minded people in the world may be thinking on given subjects.

### **You just can't legislate for compassion**

One such writer, Allison Pearson, recently contributed an article with the arresting title "Listen, darling, you just can't legislate for compassion."<sup>1</sup> Allison was writing about the report of a Commission on Improving Dignity in Care for Older People in Britain. This report apparently suggested that patronising the elderly in hospitals or care homes should be

treated as severely as racist or sexist abuse. Allison is more than bemused, she's somewhat appalled – given that it has always been the norm for kindly nurses and caregivers to use terms of endearment like "love", "sweetheart", "dear" – or even the quaint British "me duck" to convey affection to confused, frightened or embarrassed elderly patients. (I sympathise – for some reason shop assistants frequently call me "love" or dear"; and I find that more affectionate than demeaning).

Allison goes on to observe that hospitals used to know what kind of staff they needed to care for patients – they used to recruit, as a matter of course, "girls with big hearts" who *instinctively* did what it took: giving someone "a nice wash", "stroking an ancient hand" or making a joke of bedpan mishaps. Nowadays fully-qualified nurses, top-achievers at pharmacology or gerontology tell recruiters "This is where I see my career in five years' time." She found it "surreal" to hear a nurse at University College Hospital, London, telling Radio 4 that, when it came to recruiting, "We've learned a lot from John Lewis and Starbucks." And what was the secret? Apparently it was to figure out which applicants "don't fundamentally like working with people." "No kidding",

retorts Allison. "If the NHS [Britain's National Health Service] thinks it's breaking new territory by recruiting kind nurses who enjoy working with people, then we'd better book that one-way ticket to New Zealand."

But sorry, Allison, the situation is not much different here. In fact, much of the western world has gone the same way. Professionalising the ordinary human task of caring, in a culture that is fast losing its normal caring instincts, we are fast moving into a situation where those in charge think they have to write rule upon rule to define the parameters of caring. But the problem is – as Allison puts it – you just can't legislate for compassion, darling.

### **Take the topic and develop it**

This whole issue is an interesting one – and you will often find people talking about it. I've had some good conversations with people who are not Christians; and many of them share Allison's – and my – reactions to the scenario she describes. Because unbelieving friends can see the problem – though maybe they can't correctly diagnose it or solve it – you can often take them with you as you explain how the gospel of Christ does both. Some people will see that political-correct attempts to legislate for good

speech or good behaviour are merely attempts to alter externals: they do not affect the heart. Others will recognise that you can't *make* people care about others. But it is only Christ, who offers us new hearts, who can really change any uncaring human being. That's what they need to hear. Without that, they will simply fall back on interesting observations about "good examples" or deterministic assumptions that either people "have it" when it comes to compassion or they don't.

Let's consider some of the ways we could develop a conversation with someone interested in the whole subject of compassion and where it comes from. Let's say, for instance, that you're chatting with Allison (or someone like her). In the article she has written that she spent a summer in her twenties working on a senile dementia ward – and learned that simple acts of kindness were all you could really do to ease the discomforts of very old age. Complicated medicine didn't help very much – compassion did. She is appalled at the stories she's heard these days of highly-trained nurses treating dementia patients rudely and impatiently. You agree – then ask her – where does she think compassion comes from? How do we instill it in others?

### **Determinism and externalism**

Allison's answer is partly that some people have it and some don't. Some people are wired like that, and seem to have more of it. Those are the people who should be caring for the elderly. Let them call their patients "me duck"! She also makes a second point – you can't make people compassionate by placing limits on their speech, or setting rules about how often they should check the bedridden to see if their bedpans need emptying.

Let's analyse these two points. The first is to some extent true: God does make people differently; and some have greater gifts of compassion than others. (This much seems to be true from what Paul teaches on the body and gifts in Romans 12.) However, this view is somewhat deterministic. It suggests that there's not a lot you can do about it if you seem to be a bit deficient in compassion. (You might seem to be something of a horrible person – but never mind, maybe you're good at the technical aspects of nursing ...) Now, here's where we come in with the gospel. We need to explain to Allison that compassion is something God requires of all people – it is a general command. When we hold this

command up against our thoughts and behaviour, we see that we fall short. We are sinners, and need forgiveness – salvation. Furthermore, though we might be selfish and horrible by nature, there is hope. God can change us – we are not trapped in a deterministic world. In fact, God promises to give us a new heart, and by the presence of his Spirit working in us, the love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts" (Romans 5:5; KJV). Those who were once enemies of God, unkind, selfish and lacking in compassion, now have the power to become kind, generous and compassionate.

what Christ died for – to bring a new heart to those who realise their selfishness, and put their trust in him for forgiveness.

At this point Allison might ask – but why did so many more people act with compassion a generation or two ago? Why has pretty much the whole of society become – in general – less compassionate? You could explain that, say, fifty years ago there was a remnant of respect for what the Bible teaches – and that people were prepared to modify their behaviour accordingly. You could add that parents acted compassionately

“God can change us – we are not trapped in a deterministic world.”

Allison's second point, that the imposition of politically-correct rules on speech and behaviour is useless, is more subtle – and actually quite correct, biblically speaking. Many sensible people today can see that! What she is saying here is really the same kind of thing that Jesus was saying in the Sermon on the Mount, and frequently to the Pharisees. It amounts to this: evil comes from the heart, and no amount of external control on behaviour will fill a person with compassion. What counts is the heart, not your outward behaviour – which stems from what is in the heart anyway. To become compassionate, a person needs to have a change of heart. And that is

toward their neighbours, their children saw them doing it, and grew up following their good example. You might also suggest that it was socially much more acceptable for people to be seen to be compassionate – to be doing recognised acts of compassion (such as visiting their elderly neighbours, and so on). But you need to explain that even these motives for compassionate acts were only external behaviour modifiers. They did not of themselves indicate a genuine heart of compassion. We can be so subtle in our motivations – many of us are moved to do things from fear of man, or from a desire to please or impress others. They do not necessarily mean that we actu-



ally love the person for whom we do them. All of us need that new heart, so that we are acting compassionately out of love, as God loves.

And in the end that is the root of compassion – and every other virtue. We should be compassionate because God is a God of compassion; and he has shown us compassion, in Jesus Christ. Thus when he is at work in our hearts – *really and truly* at work in our hearts – we will show the fruit of this in our lives. Kindness, the

fifth fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), is very much akin to compassion.

Unbelievers with insight may be very ready to talk about gospel matters, since they already see partway through the folly and sin of our age. It is vital that we give them credit for this, doing them the honour of thinking about what they say, and helping them further along the way toward Christ. They may not respond – they may be unwilling to listen to you, or show themselves actively hostile to

spiritual truth. But if this is the case, don't walk away discouraged. God may keep your words in their heart, ready to return to their mind at a later time. A word in season is a precious thing; and God's Word has a habit of doing its own work, in good time.

#### Notes

1 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/allison-pearson/9113541/Listen-darling-you-just-cant-legislate-for-compassion.html>

## The glorious New Zealand experiment

### Part 4

# A Common Ecumenical Path

**This is the final excerpt from an essay by Mr Jack Sawyer which appeared in the book *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*.**

#### Jack Sawyer

Not only have the OPC and the RCNZ both had a similar beginning, shared ministers, and shared missionary activity, they have also followed a common ecumenical track. Their smallness and isolation caused them to reach out to each other.<sup>1</sup> But they also had a shared vision of establishing and maintaining relations with other churches and ecumenical bodies right around the world.<sup>2</sup> This can be seen in their participation in the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES/later REC), the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), and finally their same

course of action in dealing with some of their dearest mutual sister churches, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, and the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

The first synod of the RCNZ, fully realizing its ecumenical calling, sought membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. It also sought contacts outside the Reformed sphere by also joining the International Council of Christian Churches. Thinking they had found an association which would deliver them from isolation from mainstream Christianity, where modernism, liberalism, and Arminianism held sway, they were eager to be a part of the ICCC and its member churches and join their strong opposition to modernism and communism.<sup>3</sup> What they found instead was an ecumenical thorn in the flesh as the leadership of Carl McIntire, and his political, and at times unilateral, pronouncements, created "the first stumbling block" furor in the RCNZ, which would cause it eventually to withdraw their membership.<sup>4</sup> While the RCNZ was

a member of the ICCC until 1969, when they were "freed from the bondage," OPC involvement never reached this level.<sup>5</sup> The OPC was represented by observers, but when unable to steer the body in a more Reformed direction after four years, withdrew its participation.<sup>6</sup>

As noted previously, the RCNZ joined the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), but almost immediately were struck with the unacceptable inconsistency of member churches maintaining dual membership in the liberal World Council of Churches (WCC) and at the same time the RES. In fact, the 1955 Synod declared that this ambiguous attitude was "incomprehensible and confusing." The Synod promptly complained to all member churches of the RES that while the RCNZ were happy to be invited to the RES of 1957; nevertheless, "our churches are dis-

the Queen. On another note, G.I. Williamson was the RCNZ delegate to the ICCC meeting at Cape May, New Jersey in 1968, where he "was approached by delegates from the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, seeking introduction to Cornelius Van Til." Williamson, interestingly, believes that "the OPC should have listened to Prof. Stonehouse and itself joined the ICCC, that its constitution was a good document even though wider than merely Reformed, and with a rotating presidency, might have been a tool for good."

1 "D. G. Vanderpyl wrote of the first synod's, "we recognized our ecumenical calling in this world, small, tiny, and insignificant as we were.....we felt lonely in our ecclesiastical isolation down under." Vanderpyl, 586

2 To quote Jack Peterson, "separatists but not isolationists." See D.G. Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight; A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1985), 145.

3 Vanderpyl, 586.

4 Thomas E. Tyson and G.I. Williamson, *Interviews with the author*, 2010. Tom Tyson vividly remembers "the fierce debate about McIntire's overtures to Queen Elizabeth II, "petitioning her in the name of the churches (without RCNZ approval) to release the Rev. Iain Paisley from prison." The RCNZ, did not take kindly to this sort of impolite address to their queen, for Elizabeth was, and still is, queen of New Zealand. Every synod has a committee to address greetings and a declaration of loyalty to

5 Vanderpyl, 586-587. "The Reformed Church of Christchurch accused the ICCC of sectarianism and its leader, Dr. Carl McIntire, of serving the devil." Rev. Deenick, labeling this as slander, persuaded Christchurch to withdraw its overture.

6 Hart and Muether, 143.

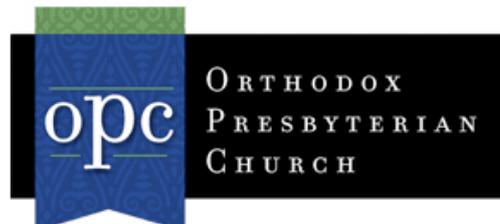
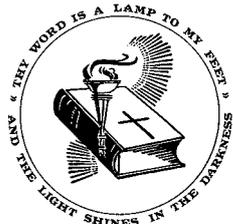
appointed and perturbed” because every related resolution of the synod ( RES of Evanston 1953) **“aimed at a unanimity which avoided offending anybody’s feeling and rejected nobody’s heresy.”**<sup>7</sup> Rather courageously, before even attending an RES meeting they resolved “to make protest at the attitude of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, in its stand toward the WCC ... because the RCNZ have clearly seen that in their defense of the Reformed faith, they can have no fellowship and dealings with those churches which in creed, or practice, or implication, deny the doctrines of the Word of God.” The Twenty-Second General Assembly of the OPC replied to this resolution, asserting that:

*The Orthodox Presbyterian Church is deeply touched by the warm greetings from their hard-pressed brethren in the faith who constitute the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. It is our judgment that the cautions expressed by that body to the member churches of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod with reference to membership in the World Council of Churches are fitting. We would urge upon the churches who are fellow-members in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod the great difficulties and dangers which are entailed by membership in a body such as the World Council of Churches where indifference to, and denial of, the truths set forth in Holy Scripture are so widespread. We hope that earnest heed will be given to the warnings on this matter already expressed by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.*<sup>8</sup>

Common decisions such as these began to forge a special relationship between the OPC and the RCNZ, one that was deliberately cultivated by their delegates to the RES. Together they would begin to attempt to hold this body to its constitutional and confessional basis, as they consulted one another, particularly in the 1980s as the influence of the GKN kept growing in a deformational direction which risked infecting the entire

ecumenical organization.<sup>9</sup> In the words of John Galbraith, “doors were opened to theological heresy of the most basic kind, relating even to Scripture and the atonement.”<sup>10</sup> The RCNZ, for their part, expressed the same deep concern to the GKN, and later dismay, over the open teaching of Professor H. M. Kuitert, of the Free University of Amsterdam, and the Rev. H. Wiersinga, a graduate of the Free University, and subsequently downgraded their relationship to churches in correspondence.

Kuitert denied the historicity of Adam



and the fall into sin, and Wiersinga denied that the death of Christ was an atonement for sin. When the GKN failed to respond to the RCNZ’s concerns by exercising discipline over her ministers, the RCNZ, firmly but reluctantly, terminated their relationship altogether in 1986.

These events were interrelated. The GKN was set on her course, and the RES was tepid in its response. The RCNZ and the OPC were alarmed that this leavening influence should go unchecked, particularly among third world churches. At RES meetings in 1980 in Nimes, France; in 1984 in Chicago, Illinois; and in 1988 in Harare, Zimbabwe, the delegates of the two churches closely consulted one another, found a common resolve and policy and spoke

forcefully to the Synod.<sup>11</sup>

The GKN compounded matters by sending female delegates to RES meetings and then by determining to push the envelope on the issue of homosexuality.<sup>12</sup> These actions represented ideological challenges which were exacerbated by growing pressure from the Christian Reformed Church, the GKN, and other influential members of the Synod to change the nature of the organization from a synod to a council. Objecting to women in the offices of the church and the practice of homosexuality and

fearing that a change of Synod to Council would lessen doctrinal and moral accountability and the possibility of discipline, the RCNZ and OPC, along with other member churches, steadfastly resisted these trends. Regrettably, because the majority of RES member denominations failed to listen, both churches sadly felt compelled to withdraw.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Vanderpyl, in attendance at the 1988 RES in Harare, related to the present writer his profound respect for John Galbraith, the chairman of the Synod, who relinquished his chair in order to testify against the apostasy of the GKN, and the policy of appeasement which seemed to enervate large segments of the delegations. Speeches such as this would earn the scorn of the GKN, who condescendingly pronounced that “the OPC was the little church with the big mouth.” Evidently the RCNZ was viewed in the same light, as it appears that not even their mail was taken seriously. D.G. Vanderpyl, interview by the author, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> The RES appointed a study committee to look at the nature and practice of homosexuality which came back with a rather ambiguous report: Homosexual practice is sin, but homosexuality per se may not be. This has led some to suggest that over the RES, and many other formerly faithful churches and institutions, might well read *died of study committee*. The Stated Clerk of the RCNZ, Carl J. Reitsma, spoke of this spirit when he wrote to the 35th General Assembly of the OPC: “damned be the humility that keeps silence when God has spoken. But thanks be to God we Christians do have the truth. We proclaim an authoritative message, a clear Gospel, a certain sound, for if the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle....this is the language of faith.”

<sup>13</sup> The OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations (CEIR) shortly thereafter sent G.I. Williamson (now back in the USA) and Jack Peterson on a worldwide tour of all the

<sup>7</sup> RCNZ Acts of Synod, 1954, Report of Deputies for Contact with Churches Abroad. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>8</sup> On motion, the 21st General Assembly determined to add, at the conclusion of the statement, “Moreover, it is the conviction of this Assembly that membership in the World Council of Churches is inconsistent with membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.”

<sup>9</sup> Both the OPC and the RCNZ maintained the closest ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKN, fully approving of one another’s membership, officers, and discipline.

<sup>10</sup> Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble, *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 415-416. Galbraith further added, “our church’s trust in the GKN was gradually eroded and ultimately destroyed, even though we sought to admonish and persuade the GKN, they simply would not listen.” The RCNZ had a similar experience, complaining at one synod that “as the Acts of Synod of the GKN over the past ten years or so give absolutely no evidence whatsoever that any correspondence or concern has transpired between our churches, we must conclude therefore that all our ‘intensive’ correspondence did not get past the GKN-Synodical Committee for External Ecumenical Relations.” RCNZ Acts, 1980, Report 24.

Consequently, both the RCNZ and the OPC were back to their starting point in search for international ecumenical organizations with whom they could seek a wider fellowship beyond their own unilateral contacts. In addition, because of troubling ideas now fully brewing in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and the CRC's evident hesitancy in dealing with the GKN in the RES, the two sisters would find themselves once again fighting the same struggles as they had in the past.

On the international front, a new organization called the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) had begun in 1985 in Edinburgh, inaugurated by the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated), and the Free Church of Scotland. By 1993, the OPC was a member and the RCNZ had sent observers to the ICRC meeting Zwolle, the Netherlands. These observers were very happy to report that "the tensions, deep differences, and political wrangling that has characterized the Reformed Ecumenical Council during our years as a member were completely absent." In fact, they said, "it certainly was a joy to be a part of such a united body representing a wide diversity of culture and languages."<sup>14</sup> The RCNZ observers noted a wonderful diversity of churches, but plenty of honest input

*from both the Continental and the English streams. And no doubt our experience in merging these two streams will enable us to make significant contributions to such a body. Because of our isolation and consequent need for more ecumenical contact at a correspondence level, because of the soundly Reformed nature of the ICRC, because of the potential for foreign mission work for our churches, and because of the benefit we can receive from those who are more experienced than we are, we recommend that*

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former RES/REC members. This tour, of nearly two months, had the pastoral purpose of visiting to thank the churches who had been true in the struggle, but who perhaps were still in the REC. Not only thanking them in behalf of the OPC, but assuring them of loving concern for their spiritual welfare and that they had a friend in the OPC. The diary of this extended, worldwide pastoral visit is one that should be preserved.

14 RCNZ Acts of Synod 1995, Report 8, Appendix 2.

*our churches apply for membership in the ICRC.*<sup>15</sup>

Now happily engaged in a genuine fellowship of International Calvinism, the OPC and the RCNZ both grew increasingly alarmed at liberalizing tendencies which had by this time become well developed in the Christian Reformed Church of North America. Both had historic and deep relations with the CRCNA which stretched back to the beginning of their existences. To the OPC, Van Til, Kuiper, and Stonehouse were seminal, household names. The OPC and CRC had even explored organic union, and many OPC young people had trained at Calvin College or its sister institutions. The RCNZ had borrowed CRC ministers and had used the CRC *Psalter Hymnal* and Sunday school materials for decades. But now both churches began the painful and necessary exercise of confronting the CRC as Scripture requires.

In March, 1995, the OPC CEIR traveled to Grand Rapids, MI, "in obedience to the mandate of our General Assembly of 1994," where, "according to the prescription of our Savior in Matthew 18," they were charged "to confront our sister with perceived corporate sins in the areas of women in office, homosexuality, and discipline." The CRC, however, proceeded to open all offices in the church to women, "demonstrating that our warnings had fallen on deaf ears."<sup>16</sup> Tom Tyson, the OPC fraternal delegate to the 1995 Synod of the RCNZ added, "when you are able to enjoy a breather from other matters, you will need to direct your attention northeasterly, and also address the question of your own relationship to the CRCNA."

Of the 1994 OPC General Assembly at Harvey Cedars, NJ, the RCNZ fraternal delegate would report:

*Of particular note to us in New Zealand, is the OPC's ongoing remonstrations with the CRCNA over precisely the same areas of concern felt by the RCNZ. The debate impressed me. Indeed, it was the most vigorous, stimulating, and careful of the entire assembly. Not desiring to go off half -cocked, neverthe-*

15 Ibid, Appendix 1.

16 RCNZ Acts of Synod, 1995, Appendix 7, Fraternal address of the Rev. Tom Tyson, OPC. The OPC would suspend its relationship with the CRC, terminate it, and then sadly, even be constrained to be party to the CRCNA's expulsion from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).

*less, the OPC issued a firm, loving admonition to the CRC regarding its deviation from Scripture and confession in the area of women in office . . . We should be aware the OPC have also taken strong exception to the CRCNA's position on homosexuality . . . I predict a rupture of the relationship due to the intransigence of the CRC and the determination of a liberal majority to press ahead . . . This will be painful given the long history of cross fertilization and joint labor between the two bodies. Yet it is the course of faithfulness that I for one trust the brethren in the RCNZ will not hesitate to follow.*<sup>17</sup>

The RCNZ, in fact, did not hesitate to follow the example of the OPC. In 1998, the Synod, while gratefully acknowledging its debt to the CRC, recognizing the difficulty and pain created when sister churches depart from sound doctrine and practice, and noting its own fruitless dialogue with the CRC (specifically citing "the extensive study and dialogue . . . undertaken between the OPC and the CRC"), concluded that the outcome remains the same as that determined by the previous Synod in 1995, which had suspended relations with the CRC. The suspension was made permanent because, "the CRC is simply not willing to reverse the decisions that are cause for so much concern among a number of sister churches."<sup>18</sup> Thus tragically ended a relationship inaugurated in 1953, but sacrificed on the altar of liberal CRC determination to chart a new path and walk with her sisters no more.

## Conclusion

On two occasions OPC fraternal delegates to have been so bold as to declare the RCNZ to be "the OPC's closest ecumenical partner" and "her nearest and dearest sister." Another described it as "the most exciting denomination in the entire Reformed world."<sup>19</sup> Why did they

17 RCNZ Acts of Synod,, 1995, Report 8, Appendix 4, Report of the RCNZ fraternal delegate to the 1994 General Assembly.

18 RCNZ Acts of Synod, 1998, Report 15. The Synod acted to terminate sister church relations and begin contact with the fledgling United Reformed Churches in North America. The 2008 Synod of the RCNZ welcomed its old sister, the OPC, and her new sister, the URCNA, both of whom by then had also found each other in North America in the bonds of ecclesiastical fellowship and NAPARC. RCNZ Acts of Synod 2008, Interchurch Relations Committee Report.

19 Speeches to the RCNZ Synod by Tom Tyson

express these strong sentiments? Perhaps because despite their remote location on the far side of the world in the heart of the antipodean south seas, in the providence of God, this little federation of churches has remained true to its original vision and character: to be a bulwark against modernism; a bastion of the Reformed faith; and a vehicle for ecumenical partnerships and missionary endeavors; and especially because in the kind providence of God the OPC has been privileged to be called to be a partner in this labor. Happily this project continues, as the RCNZ has educated her students under OPC tutelage at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA; Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, PA; Mid America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN, and Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Greenville, SC. Additionally, the RCNZ congregations still periodically look to call OPC ministers to fill their vacant pulpits.<sup>20</sup>

But this relationship has been far from one sided. The RCNZ's influence has flowed back to the OPC. There is

no doubt that Tom Tyson's vision of catechesis was enriched by his service in New Zealand, after which he would go on to serve as the General Secretary of the General Assembly's Committee on Christian Education, and later teach catechesis at the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC. Jack Sawyer once described himself as "more Reformed than Presbyterian" due to the influence of the RCNZ in the formative years of his ministry. He has preached through the Heidelberg Catechism many times from OPC pulpits, and was recently appointed to the position of Administrator for the General Assembly's Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch relations.<sup>21</sup> G.I. Williamson returned from New Zealand in 1983 and served for decades on both the CEIR and the Committee on Christian Education (CCE). He would become the first editor of the CCE publication, *Ordained Servant*.<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt how much his years in the RCNZ helped shape his ministry in the OPC, particularly his appreciation for the office of ruling elder.<sup>23</sup>

The story of the bond between the OPC and the RCNZ is an unlikely story: two small, culturally diverse, and geographically distant churches, one born in the crucible of the Great Depression, and the other in the impoverished aftermath of World War II, who would find each other in the bonds of Christ and proceed to share ministers, mission fields, and ecumenical endeavors. Here is a story worth telling and a model worthy of consideration – a "living test case," which has created "a deliberate blending of the streams of the Presbyterian and Reformed alike."

Our Lord prayed for this sort of unity. While in this case due to distance, it can never be a fully organic union, nevertheless it is one that has proven over time to be a vital, trusting, spiritual bond. It has proven to be a lasting ecumenical relationship that the OPC, as a contributing partner, can look upon with great satisfaction. In the still relevant words of Ray Zorn from 1963, "we rejoice in these mutual ties which so closely bind our two communions together." But above all else, the OPC must express her gratitude to our New Zealand brothers and sisters, and our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, for allowing us to participate in this "Glorious New Zealand Experiment."

(1995), Jack Sawyer (2008), G.I. Williamson (1977).

20 Just this year, the associate pastor at Tyler OPC, in Tyler, TX, Rev. Mark R. Wheat, regretfully declined a call to the Reformed Church of Dunedin. Rev. Peter J.A. Moelker, formerly associate pastor in Beamsville, Ontario was installed as the Pastor of the Reformed Church of Avondale, Auckland on July 23, 2010. We might also add that OPC and RCNZ young people also continue to marry, despite the distance!

21 RCNZ Acts of Synod, 1995, Report 8, Appendix 4.

22 History will hopefully show how much RCNZ influence will have contributed to the life of the OPC, though the work of these three men (among significant others), called to key positions of service for the OPC General Assembly.

23 G.I. Williamson, Interview with the author, 2010. Perhaps as much as anything Williamson "was impressed with the skill and dedication of the ruling elders with whom he served, none more gifted than Dirk "Dick" Govert Vanderpyl,

long time stated clerk of the RCNZ. Williamson's vision of the vital importance and character of the work of the ruling elder, adopted from down under, is a prominent theme in the early editions of *Ordained Servant*.

## Book in focus

### ***Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning***

by Nancy Pearcey.

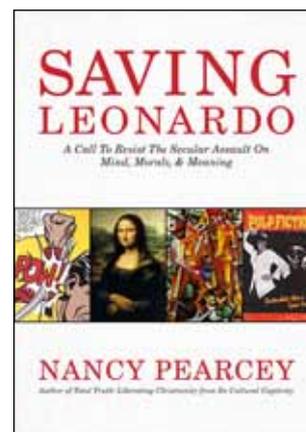
Reviewed by OP pastor Daniel F. Patterson.

"Every time we read a book or watch a movie, we enter into an imaginative expression of the artist's worldview" (p. 8). This is the wake-up call that Nancy Pearcey issues in her newest book. In *Saving Leonardo*, she walks the reader through the various "isms" of the modern age (relativism, scientific determinism, new age spiritualism, etc.), showing the devastating impact they have had on the minds and morals of people.

*Saving Leonardo* is detailed in its analysis of the secular worldviews that impact Christians today. Pearcey not only identifies these worldviews, but also gives the reader insight into their "family tree." Beginning with the Greeks, the reader is treated to an insightful analysis of how various worldviews are related to one another, either as competing worldviews or as developments of earlier worldviews. One frustration with the book here needs to be registered, but it is not with the content. *Saving Leonardo* has no subject index. With all the isms being addressed, sometimes in complex relationship with one another, a subject index is desperately needed. Unless one is using an e-reader, like a Kindle, one

will have to page through the book to find what one is looking for.

*Saving Leonardo* is devastating in its



critique of secular worldviews. Pearcey exposes the self-defeating nature of secular worldviews and shows how they are dehumanising because they absolutise (and therefore idolise) one aspect of God's creation. Christianity, she then affirms, is the worldview that accounts for the truths that secular worldviews cannot. Christianity is rational, Pearcey argues, and it alone among all the worldviews is a life-valuing system. Her answer to the dehumanising effect of secular worldviews is to remoralise culture with artists, musicians, and authors who can "create humane and

healthy alternatives that speak deeply to the human condition." She then goes on to use the language of "redeeming" the culture – which, unfortunately, makes many ill at ease and even uncertain as to exactly what she means. Perhaps a second edition of this book could flesh such language out, so as to clear up any confusion that this sort of terminology creates. With this said, Pearcey does an admirable job of exposing the folly of unbelieving worldviews and pointing her readers to the Christian faith as providing a rational answer to the ultimate ques-

tions with which so many struggle.

*Saving Leonardo* is delightful in its layout. Because secular worldviews sprout legs and walk into art studios, science books, works of literature, and movie theaters, Pearcey provides her readers with over one hundred images that illustrate how they have been influenced.

If you are interested in a penetrating analysis of the folly of secular worldviews and the danger they present, pick up *Saving Leonardo*. You won't be disappointed.

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## Infant baptism – Divine demand or human invention?

By James Visscher

### A controversial issue

"We have looked well through the Bible and cannot find it, and do not believe it is there; nor do we believe that others can find infant baptism in the Scriptures, unless they themselves first put it there." So wrote that famous nineteenth-century preacher, Charles Spurgeon in his official autobiography. In many respects Spurgeon was a thoroughly Reformed man, but when it came to the matter of infant baptism, a parting of the ways became painfully evident. I say "painfully" because it is a fact that throughout the ages the question of who are the proper recipients of baptism has been hotly debated. And it continues to be so today.

On the one side, you have those churches which have their roots in the Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Presbyterian traditions insisting on the legitima-

cy of infant baptism, albeit for varying reasons. On the other side, you have those churches that have emerged out of the more radical wing of the Reformation which stress the validity of adult baptism alone. Both parties have their champions, their treatises, their pamphlets, their converts. Both are busy firing volley after volley at each other. And then it has to be admitted that in the process a lot of blanks are being fired as well. Not all of the arguments are sound; not all of the reasoning is rational.

Who is winning? That is hard to say at times. Although, at the moment it would appear that the advocates of infant baptism are mostly on the defensive. I say this because the number of people switching from a paedobaptist position to an adult one is larger than vice versa. Many people who were once Reformed or Presbyterian have become Pentecostal, Free Evangelical, Alliance, or have gone over to some other Anabaptist grouping. Usually the reasons for the altering of

their allegiances are diverse, but if you talk to them then, more often than not infant baptism and their rejection of it figures prominently in the picture.

### Why become Baptist?

What kind of justifications for becoming Anabaptist are most frequently given? The first is that there is no text anywhere in the Bible which says that infants should be baptised. In this respect these people follow in the footsteps of Spurgeon, who encountered the same difficulty. However, there is another rationale as well, and it is even more basic. It can be captured in the following syllogism: faith is a condition for baptism, infants do not possess faith, therefore infants may not be baptised. In addition, they point to the so-called abuse of baptism in established churches where many people receive the sacrament, think that it works magic, and never bother to live up to it. Infant baptisers, they allege, have added far too much water to the biblical wine.

What has been the rejoinder to this from those who believe that baptism is also for infants? On a popular level it has often been one of consternation and weakness. The Anabaptists have always been good at spouting Bible verses at their opponents. The Reformed and others of an infant baptism affiliation have often reacted to this by citing vague and general biblical principles. They have chimed in that, of course, faith is a ne-

“Throughout the ages the question of who are the proper recipients of baptism has been hotly debated”

cessity, but they have run stuck when it comes to relating it to baptism. Yes, and as for the matter of abuse, there the paedobaptists have to confess that there are many churches that have and still do use infant baptism in a loose and superstitious manner.

### **The Reformed view: inferior?**

So where does that leave us as Reformed believers, except with an overdose of inferiority? People leave our fellowships claiming that they have found a better place to worship, a place where there is more warmth, more integrity, and more biblical faithfulness. But is that a proper reaction and is that a proper assessment of the historic Reformed position? Is tradition the only thing that Reformed confessors have going for them? Are all the pertinent biblical arguments on the side of the Anabaptists?

Hardly! On the matter of the baptism of our infants there is no need for Reformed believers to take even one step back. We dare to say that the teaching of the entire Scriptures is on our side, the great confessional documents of the church are on our side, the most able defenders of the faith are on our side. If we have left the field largely to the Anabaptists that is not because of defeat but due to default. We have failed to bring all of the truths of God's revelation to bear on the question in a clear, concise, and convincing manner.

What are those truths? By way of elaboration, first, a general remark, and it concerns the matter of there being no text in the Bible that commands infant baptism. Is this such a major lack? Not really! There are any number of practices current in the church which are not grounded in one or other text. Take the matter of worship on the first day of the week. Where is there a passage which says that Christians must worship on Sunday and not on Saturday? Is that not a matter of inference based on sound biblical principle? Or take the matter of women attending the Lord's Supper. Christ instituted this sacrament in the presence of men only. There is no command which enjoins us to accede the right of participation also to women. And yet who would dare to deny them? Not even the Anabaptists! So there are more practices and procedures which we follow which cannot be hung on one or other isolated Bible verse. They are the result of working out proper biblical principles, and that applies to the matter of infant baptism too.

To indicate that, let me proceed to develop my argument using five sets of contestants or antagonists. In each set the one position is that of the proponents of infant baptism, or better, the baptism of children of believers, and the other is that of the proponents of adult baptism.

### **a) Unity versus disunity**

The first set of contestants are dealt with under the heading of "unity and disunity." What is meant by that? It has to do with the fact that many Anabaptists approach the Bible in a divisive way. They drive a wedge dividing God's people and allege that there are really two peoples of God, two different seeds of Abraham. There is the church of Jesus Christ and there are the Jews. There is natural Israel and spiritual Israel.

This essentially dispensational scenario

Now it is important to realise in discussions with Anabaptists that there is this disconcerting tendency among them to fracture both the people and the Word of God. It is equally important that you counteract this position. As long as it prevails there is little or no room for discussion. And then we may say that it is not too difficult to dismantle this disuniting approach either.

Take the matter of the unity of the Bible. Careful study shows that there is a unity of purpose stretching across both testaments. Both stress the need for God's Name to be praised in all things. Both stress the fallenness of man. Both stress the need for redemption through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In addition, there is also a unity of ethical demand. The moral law of the Ten Commandments retains its validity in both testaments (Exodus 20; Psalm 119; Matthew



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holds that there are the Jews who are the real and natural Israel, with special privileges, special promises, special covenants, and a special future. Included in that future is an earthly land of Canaan, an earthly city of Jerusalem, an earthly temple on Mount Zion, an earthly throne of David. Here is the real and true Israel forever. As for the believers of the new dispensation, they are only the figurative seed of Israel. Two sets of people, two sets of blessings – that is the disuniting view of some Anabaptists.

Only it does not end there, for this element of disunity crops up not only when it comes to the people of God, but also when it comes to the book of God, the Bible. There are Anabaptists who place the Old Testament against the New Testament, the law against the gospel, OT Israel against the NT church. What applies in the one dispensation is not just in certain cases fulfilled or abolished in the other. No, it can even be contradicted.

5:17-19; 1 John 3:22). Also, there is a unity of future. What the prophet Isaiah predicts about the future of God's people dovetails perfectly with what the Apostle John is led to disclose in the book of Revelation. Indeed, this unity of the Bible is everywhere. Who can read and grasp the meaning of the book of Hebrews without an Old Testament constantly at his elbow? And so the arguments for unity go on and on.

And the same applies to the unity of God's people. They all have one father in Abraham; as Romans 4 reminds us, "He is the father of us all," (v. 16). They have all been called to faith and holiness. They have all been ingrafted into that one olive tree mentioned in Romans 11. There is not one tree for the Jews and another tree for the Christians. There is only one building of which Christ is the cornerstone (Eph 2:11-20).

In short, there is only one people of God, not two distinct peoples. There is only one Word of God, not two distinct

books or testaments or dispensations that somehow contradict each other. There is unity that moves forward to either abolition or fulfillment, but never contradiction.

### **b) Generations versus individuals**

The second set of contestants has to do with that of “generations versus individuals.” If one analyses the Anabaptist position carefully, then one must come to the conclusion that here the emphasis is emphatically individualistic. Faith is pictured in subjective, isolated, individual terms. At the same time there is little or no awareness that while the Bible speaks to persons, it also addresses itself to the generations, to one’s posterity, to one’s

not surprise one at all to find that the book of Acts speaks about the baptism of “households.” We will shortly touch on the matter of whether there were children in those households. For now it is sufficient to recognise that in Acts there is no tendency to separate believing adults from their children, or children from their parents. There is a stress on family solidarity, and that solidarity, it should be recognised, works both ways. In the second commandment mention is made of the benefits of this solidarity in terms of the future generations as well as the curses that may accrue to these generations.

The type of religious individualism which is so rampant today certainly

they have no rights and no standing before the Lord?” The Anabaptist does not like to have the matter approached from this angle and queried so forcefully, but these questions must be asked. Also, if he is consequent, then he will have to admit that prior to faith a person has no standing before the Lord.

Only that in turn raises other questions. For look at the OT. There you will see that God does not exclude the infants among his people. They receive a certain standing in his eyes. Genesis 17 reveals that God makes his covenant not just with Abraham, but also with all those in his house, with his infants, and even with his servants. In Deuteronomy 29 Moses summons Israel to stand before the Lord, and he does so with the words, “All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God – your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, together with your children and your wives ... in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath” (Deut 29:10-12). You will notice here that the Lord makes no distinction between adults and infants. They all enter into the covenant with him.

A little later, in Joshua 8:35, we are confronted with a ceremony of covenant renewal and we read, “There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the foreigners who lived among them.” Again infants are included.

In addition, they are also included at occasions of worship, fasting, and feasting. Think of 2 Chronicles 20:13, “All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.” Think of Joel 2:15, 16, “Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast.” Surely these words are sufficient to testify to the fact that children belonged to the people of God in the OT. God claims them, cares for them, protects them, promises himself to them. His fatherly heart embraces them. One of the gravest, most anguished indictments that he ever made against his people Israel is the one to be found in Ezekiel 16:20, 21, “And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols ... You slaughtered my children.” Need more be said about the Lord and

“On the matter of the baptism of our infants there is no need for Reformed believers to take even one step back.”

seed. God is so often described in the Bible as being the God of a people.

Any number of references can be made here. Take Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers.” Or Genesis 9:9, where God establishes his covenant with Noah and says, “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you.” You find it again in Genesis 17:7, “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”

Why, if you look carefully in the OT you see that the Lord does not deal simply with individuals. No, from Adam to Seth, from Seth to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Israel, from Israel to Christ, from Christ to his people, it is abundantly evident that the Lord works through the line of the generations. And this does not stop in the NT either. No, on Pentecost day Peter again stresses this same truth when he says, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

In light of such an emphasis, it should

cannot be said to take its cue from biblical revelation. That revelation takes an organic approach. It recognises that God works through the generations. It recognises that believers and their seed have special standing in the eyes of the Lord, a standing for either covenant weal or woe. It recognises that the communal aspect of Christian living does not contradict or deny the personal aspect of confession and commitment. The Christian faith is personal, but not individualistic.

### **c) Infants versus adults**

We come now to a third set of antagonists, which falls under the heading “infants versus adults.” In doing so, we are coming closer to the heart of the matter that separates the Reformed confessor from the Anabaptist one. The latter recognises only a baptism for adults or for mature children and dismisses as un-biblical a baptism also for infants. Because faith is the vital precondition for baptism and because of the absence of this pre-condition in infants, they are automatically disqualified.

However, that in turn raises the vexing question, “If infants of believers cannot be baptised, what is their standing before the Lord? Does he exclude them? Does he ignore them? Are they in limbo? Do

his relationship to infants?

Still, the remark can be heard, “But that’s the OT. In the NT it is a whole new state of affairs.” But is it? Remember what has been said about the unity of God’s Word and people. The teaching of the OT and NT do not contradict each other when it comes to the place of infants of believing, covenant-keeping parents. In the OT they belong; they belong no less in the NT. To assert anything less is to assert that as time goes on God’s revelation to his people becomes poorer, less loving, more restrictive. Can you imagine a situation in which children belong in one testament but are bypassed in another? Does that speak of an enrichment of revelation or an impoverishment? In every other way God’s revelation becomes fuller. His promises increase. The earthly Jerusalem will make way for the heavenly one. This earth will make way for a new earth. The promise of the Saviour becomes the reality of the Saviour. The shedding of the blood of bulls and goats makes way for the shedding of that one blood, at one time, by one person. God’s revelation becomes fuller, richer, and deeper. To sever the tie artificially between the Lord and his covenant infants in that newer and fuller testament goes contrary to the whole flow of biblical revelation.

That is not all. For we do not need to take our refuge in logical deduction alone. Recall that episode in the NT where the Lord Jesus welcomes and blesses the children. The Son follows in the footsteps of the Father (Matt 19:13-14; Mark 9:36-37; Luke 18:15-17). Now, the Anabaptists take this passage and say that it refers to a childlike faith. We, adults, should believe in the simple and absolute way that children do. But such an interpretation misses the mark. The children that are brought to the Lord Jesus are not children who are old enough to believe and to serve as models of belief. No, they are infants. They are babes in their mothers’ arms. That is what the original word means here. It is also noteworthy that the Saviour was angry with his disciples for trying to exclude these infants and their mothers as being beyond his concern, compassion, and interest. Also, the Matthew account does not even mention “childlike faith” at all. Finally, we are told that the Lord Jesus laid his hands upon them and blessed them. Does that sound like someone who leaves children in limbo until they come to faith? The Father’s compassion is evident in the Son.

In addition, the Father’s promises

remain valid too. In Acts 2:39, which we touched on already, the Apostle Peter, harking back to the words of the Lord to Abraham, says to those who have come to faith in the risen, exalted Christ, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” There you meet it again. The promises of God belong to the believers and their children. Their status has not changed in the NT; if it had, Peter would never have spoken these words. He would have either left them out, contradicted them, or reinterpreted them. He chooses none of these options. He simply underlines and reemphasises that OT commitment of the Lord to Abraham and his children.

“The type of religious individualism which is so rampant today certainly cannot be said to take its cue from biblical revelation.”

We can even take this a step further. For in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul says that certain children are holy. Which children? Even the children that arise from a mixed marriage. Such a marriage does not give rise to polluted children who should be ostracised and scorned by the believing community. No, the fact that even one parent is a believer is sufficient to render the offspring “holy,” special, unique in God’s eyes.

It is in this light too that we should return for a moment to what we touched upon already, namely, the “household baptisms” in Acts. Did those households of Lydia, Stephanas, the jailer, include children? We cannot say with absolute certainty; however, we would say that the law of probability favours the affirmative. One childless household is possible, but three would be stretching both the limits of logic and the law of averages.

#### **d) Circumcision versus baptism**

And so it is that we come to the fourth set of contestants, which has to do with “circumcision versus baptism.” The standard Anabaptist ploy when it comes to the relationship of circumcision and baptism is either to say that there is no

connection whatsoever between them or else to qualify that relationship severely.

To those who insist that there is no connection between circumcision and baptism we say most emphatically that there is a connection, even a threefold one. In the first place, circumcision was a sign of union and communion with the Lord. Turn to Genesis 17:7 and 11. “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you ... You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.” Notice that the Lord expressly says, “I will be God to

you and to your descendants.” At the very heart of God’s covenant there lies this concept of union and communion, a concept that comes back time and again in the Old and New Testament.

In the NT this communion is so often expressed in relation to baptism. “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom 6:4). Baptism is depicted here as that sacrament that unites us to Christ, that allows us to share in the fullness of him and of his redemptive work. Union and communion apply to both circumcision and baptism.

Yes, and so does the matter of cleansing. In Deuteronomy 30:6 the Israelites are commanded to circumcise their hearts. Elsewhere they are told to remove the foreskins of their hearts (Jer 4:4). Clearly, the outward cutting off of the foreskin was symbolic of the need to remove drastically all defilement from the heart. And baptism urges us to do the same. In Acts 22:16 believers are told to “Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away.” The water of baptism is symbolic of the need for cleansing as

“God has called us and our children to his covenant. For that reason our children have a place in his covenant. God’s call precedes all faith, all conversion, all regeneration in adults and infants.”

well as the ritual of cleansing.

Finally, circumcision was also the seal of the righteousness of faith. The Apostle Paul makes this plain in Romans 4:11, “He [Abraham] received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.” Circumcision was vitally related to faith. And so is baptism. As Peter says in Acts 2:38, “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

In summary, then, circumcision and baptism are closely related. There are any number of Baptist scholars who affirm this. Robert Kingdon in his book *Children of Abraham: A Reformed Baptist View of Baptism, the Covenant, and Children* says, “It is my considered opinion that Baptists must recognise the analogy between circumcision and baptism. It seems to me pointless to deny the existence of this analogy, yet it is often done” (p. 28). Or, “It can hardly be denied that baptism in the New Testament has much the same meaning and import” (p. 28). In the same vein, Paul K. Jewett in his book *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* says, “We have agreed that circumcision means essentially what baptism means in the New Testament” (p. 96).

### Inconsistencies?

In light of these admissions, as well as in light of Scripture, it would seem to be a futile exercise to drive a wedge between circumcision and baptism. But that does raise a further question with regard to those Baptists who, like Kingdon and Jewett, admit that these two ceremonies are similar. If you are a Baptist and yet agree that there is no difference between

circumcision and baptism, have you not conceded your argument? You would think so. You would assume that if children received the sign of circumcision in the OT and if circumcision and baptism are the same, then children should be baptised. But both Kingdon and Jewett refuse to come to this conclusion. What they do is something very surprising and inconsistent.

Kingdon says that the covenant has dispensational and transdispensational, temporal and eternal, earthly and heavenly aspects to it. The fact that the children were circumcised in the OT belonged to the dispensational, temporal, and earthly elements in the Abrahamic covenant. Jewett travels essentially the same route when he says that circumcision belonged to the temporal, earthly aspects of the OT covenant. The covenant covered a single ethnic group who lived in a specific area. In this way they both try to picture circumcision as a purely national and racial sign of external, non-spiritual blessings and privileges of God’s OT dealings with his people. Baptism has a spiritual dimension to it, circumcision does not.

What shall we say about this line of argument? It is contrived and artificial, to say the least. When God makes his covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17, then that covenant is not temporary but everlasting. It is still in effect today. Also, as we have seen when dealing with the similarities between circumcision and baptism, they mean the same thing. They picture for us not in the first place an ethnic reality, but a spiritual one. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant in its deepest spiritual meaning, and the same thing applies to baptism. Indeed, to say that the Abrahamic covenant was mainly concerned with earthly blessings

and promises is to fall into the same pitfalls as the Israelites. They assumed that outward obedience was sufficient, but God judges it deficient. He wants their hearts to be circumcised as well. Circumcision is not just national or racial, it is firstly spiritual.

Thus, the conclusion can only be that because circumcision was administered as a spiritual rite to infants, and seeing that circumcision and baptism picture the same covenantal realities and promises, infants should be baptised.

### e) Normativism versus subjectivism

Yet all of this does in turn raise one more set of antagonists, namely, that of “normativism versus subjectivism.” When the Anabaptist says that infants should not be baptised, on what basis does he make that assertion? It is on the basis that there is something missing in that child, namely faith. Only when faith is present can baptism take place. Now let us look closely at that assertion. What does it imply? It implies that the focus of the rite of baptism turns on the recipient and what is within him or her. Indeed, it grounds the rite in the person.

What it does is something which Reformed theology has always warned against. According to it, the focus of baptism must not be in the recipient but in the originator, in the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. To ground the validity of an administration of baptism in something within the recipient is a departure from and a violation of the *solī Deo gloria* of Reformed theology. The infants of the believing parents in the OT received the sign and the seal of the covenant not upon the basis of something that the children had done or that had been supernaturally implanted within them, but solely on the basis of God’s uninhibited command. Infants of believers are to receive baptism today for the very same reason.

To put in the words of Dr. J. Douma, “God has called us and our children to his covenant. For that reason our children have a place in his covenant. God’s call precedes all faith, all conversion, all regeneration in adults and infants ... Therefore we baptise our children; not because something is present in them, but because something was expressed about them: the promise of the remission of sins and eternal life.”

In baptism it is the Lord who comes and claims and promises. In his words of commitment we find comfort and strength as we seek to raise our chil-

dren in an ungodly world. It is God who stands in the centre of this whole sacrament — not the child, nor the parents. Yet how little Anabaptists seem to understand of this. On the one hand, they deny the validity of infant baptism, but on the other hand, there are many of them who practice a kind of substitute baptism called “dedication.” What happens then is that parents take their infant to a worship service and there they pledge to do their all to raise this child in a Christian manner. They express the hope that some day the child will come to faith and then receive baptism. Yet here we stand amazed. Where is the biblical warrant for such a practice? What is this but a man-made invention, a creation of people who cannot live with the consequences of their own theology? How tragic that a child has to go through a procedure of dedication, a procedure in which the parents promise everything, but God is said to promise nothing. What a desperate and empty ritual!

What a richness we have then when we see that we are to baptise our children because of God’s normative command. We do so not because we presume anything about them. We do

not presume regeneration. We do not presume election. We do not speculate about our children. What we know is that these children have God’s promises. They also are to be fully educated in God’s requirements of faith and conversion. They are children of God and they must also come to live through his Word and Spirit, as his children.

In this regard, we deny emphatically that infant baptism leads necessarily to an undermining of the need for repentance and faith. Baptism conveys the promises of God, but it also conveys the demands of God. It calls on all those who have been baptised, when they reach their years of discretion, to cleave to the Lord in faith, hope, love, and obedience. Failure to do so does not nullify the covenant; it does something worse, it unleashes the curses of the covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 29).

In conclusion, we say about the Anabaptist position:

- By excluding the children of believers from baptism it goes contrary to the whole character of God’s progressive revelation;
- It caters to individualism and refuses to recognise the biblical teaching of covenantal solidarity;

- It undermines the unity of the Word of God and the people of God by either driving a wedge between circumcision and baptism or else by distorting the meaning of circumcision;
- By implication it makes God a God of the strong, the mature, the able, the adult but places in question whether he is also the God of the very young, the mentally disabled, and all those who can for one reason or other not meet the pre-condition of faith;
- It emphasises the subjective by making something in man the sole pre-condition for baptism.

More can be said, much more, but suffice it to say that the weight of biblical teaching is on the side of those believers who believe that the Lord has established a covenant of grace with his children, a covenant that includes all believers and their seed.

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## Focus on home

# Gleanings from our bulletins...

### QUOTABLE “QUOTES”

No church can spread the gospel with any degree of integrity, let alone credibility, unless it has visibly been changed by the gospel it preaches.” *John R. W. Stott*

“Perhaps the most difficult task for us to perform is to rely on God’s grace and God’s grace alone for our salvation. It is difficult for our pride to rest on grace. Grace is for other people – for beggars. We don’t want to live by a heavenly welfare system. We want to earn our own way and atone for our own sins. We like to think that we will go to heaven because we deserve to be there.” *R.C. Sproul*

“True grace always produces vigilance rather than complacency; it always produces perseverance rather than indolence.” *Jerry Bridges*

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT – ABORTION

In New Zealand, the Abortion Supervisory Committee has released the abortion figures for 2010.

Things to note

- There were 16,630 abortions, down from 2009
- 65 were done over 20 weeks gestations
- 43 were for reasons of danger to life
- 16,295 (or 98%) were done for mental health reasons.
- 141 involved the ‘handicapped’ child reason
- The 20-24 year old age group had 31% of abortions
- 15-19 and 25-29 age group had just over 20% each

### BIRTHS

**Van Ameyde, Summer** – a daughter born to Jeremy and Sara-Jayne – 2 March (Bishopdale)

**Bylsma, Holly Nicole** – a daughter born to Luke and Natalie – 11 March (Pukekohe)

**Roberts, Lily Jane** – a daughter born to David and Lara – 14 March (Pukekohe)

### PROFESSION OF FAITH

**Wellington:** Sam Goris

### WEDDINGS

17 March – Daniel Roberts and Gwen Cook married at Glenbrook Beach (Pukekohe)

17 March – Simon Rose and Natalie Aiken married in Auckland

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

**Heersping Gary & Tineke** – 50<sup>th</sup> on the 17 March (Silverstream)

van Leeuwen, Gerard & Femmy – 40<sup>th</sup> on 25 February (Bishopdale)

Vlaanderen, Henk and Effie – 40<sup>th</sup> on 26 February (Bishopdale)

### DEATHS

**Boere, Bill** – On February 28<sup>th</sup>, the Lord took our brother Bill Boere into glory. We extend our condolences to the extended Boere family. (Wellington)

**Nugteren, Jim** – It was with grief and thankfulness that we laid Jim Nugteren's body to rest. Grief because he will be missed. Thankfulness because, by God's grace his earthly race is finished and he is in glory. Jim lived well and died well. At his funeral, the words of Ecclesiastes 7:1-2 came to mind: "A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning

than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart." Please continue to uphold Helen and the family in your prayers and with your kindness. (March 4<sup>th</sup> – Bishopdale)

### FROM THE PASTOR

#### Christchurch: Tim Rott

Remember the mothers in our congregation on Mother's Day. Also pray for our families; husband/fathers, wives/mothers and covenant children, and young adults who have made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the family of God and God's Word gives clear instruction on family relationships in the home, as well as our church family. Our church family is only as strong as each individual church family and member seeks to honour the Lord as the Body of Christ.

### MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Support of **Albert and Hanneke Couperus**: The Silverstream session agreed (in principle) to offer financial support to Albert Couperus in his desire to study for the ministry at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in the U.S. It is anticipated that the money would come from the "theological studies" fund, set up for just such a purpose. He hopes to begin studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in August of this year, and joins **Br. Josh Flinn** who hopes to begin there in August of 2013 and **Br. Luke Scheepers** who is currently studying at the RTC as RCNZ candidates for the ministry. We may also add to this list **Br. Graeme Zuidema** who has begun an internship at Bishopdale with a view to ministry studies. May God be praised for the desire of these brothers to prepare for the ministry and may He bless them in their work. May He also bless their sessions in their oversight and support of them.

### CHURCH BUILDINGS

**Bishopdale**: Building Project Volunteer Labour – We will be looking for volunteers to help with the building project. It is our plan to send out an email regularly (probably mid week) with the activities that need attending to at the coming weekend. If you are interested in helping please send us an email so you can be added to the list.

**Dovedale**: Session hopes to spend a Saturday morning discussing the use of our building, which is near capacity each week, as well as church planting and possible word and deed opportunities within our community. We have no specific plans but would like to talk and pray about these things in a general way outside of the time confines of a session meeting. Your prayers for these subjects would be much appreciated.

**Pukekohe**: Mrs Janine Grul will give an update on the church building plans after worship this Sunday morning. As the church building is very full on a regular basis on Sunday mornings Mr Martin Leenders and Mr Jerome Kloeg were asked to investigate alternative venues for the morning worship service and the cost of these venues.

### MISSIONS

**Christchurch**: Ten members of our congregation are committed to spend-

FOR THE LORD IS GOOD AND HIS LOVE ENDURES FOREVER;  
HIS FAITHFULNESS CONTINUES THROUGH ALL GENERATIONS.  
PSALM 100:5



WITH JOY WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD AS WE CELEBRATE THE  
**60<sup>TH</sup> WEDDING ANNIVERSARY**  
OF OUR PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS AND GREAT-GRANDPARENTS  
**ROEL & MARIA HAGOORT**  
*MARRIED IN TE AWAMUTU ON 8<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1952*

WITH ALL OUR LOVE

Bob & Chrissie  
Erin,  
Melissa and Brent  
Carl and Karen  
Nolan and Sonja,  
Ben and Bex  
Angela and Rene

John & Gay  
Shane and Toni,  
Amanda and Callum  
Glen and Maria,  
Brenda and James

Wally & Sjannette  
Damian,  
Justin and Eloise  
Logan and Josella,

Joanna & Pieter  
Neil and Josephine,  
Simon and Lydia  
Maria and Ben,  
Phil and Talia  
Peter

Rosalie & John  
Hayley and Luke  
Leslie and Nic

Linda & Charles  
Tracy,  
Louise and Jeremy  
Nikki and David,  
Julia

AND 37 GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN

ing 12 days in sunny Tonga helping repair and renovate St Andrew's High School in Nuku'alofa in July. Our plans are to reroof the piggery, (fortunately it has no pigs in it but the school plans to start raising pigs to sell to generate an income); teach agricultural skills to some of the students; renovate classrooms; paint; sew curtains and to do numerous other jobs.

## PRISON MINISTRY

**Pukekohe:** Mr Martin Leenders reported on a recent meeting of the five men involved in the church's Prison Ministry. They decided to continue with one to one visits at Springhill. Mr Andrew Dickson, a member of Hamilton Reformed Church, was also present at the meeting and described his work in reintegrating released prisoners into society with Prison Care Ministries in Hamilton.

## ACTS OF SERVICE

**Hamilton & Hukanui:** The West Hamilton community are looking for mentors for their youth. There are many more young people needing healthy role models than there are people to help them. You don't need to be 'special' or 'amazing' to make a difference – normal is special enough! They also need help in other areas including cooking the odd meal in the centre kitchen, joining a coffee group and assisting with team sports.

## CHRISTIAN READING

**Pukekohe:** A word to all the men of the church: did you read the first two articles in the February issue? The first was by Rev Peter Moelker on the office of Deacon and the second was by Mr Paul Davey and Mr Andy van Ameyde on the work of the Elders. Both are excellent articles and worthwhile reading for all the men.

## CLASSES & COURSES

**Wainuiomata** – New Testament Greek Course – Rev Paul Archbald will be running a NT Greek course, pitched at a level suited to members of our congregations. They will be meeting on Wednesday nights, fortnightly, from 7.30-9.30 pm on alternate weeks to our Bible Study at the Silverstream church. All members are invited to come along.

## FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

**Hamilton:** As part of a youth fundraising exercise we are going to have a free

movie night. The youth want to help Nikki Galuszka to raise funds for her short term mission trip to Bangkok to do work with Rahab Ministries. So we will be having a movie night followed by God glorifying worship and entertainment. We will make a stock pot of pop corn (bring your own bowl) and juice, any other treats feel free to bring. Everything will be free. Please pass on your offering for the mission trip to Johan. This will be a great night of worship-fellowship and just sharing what God is doing in each other's lives.

**Palmerston North:** Trade Me Fund-raising – Just wanted to let you know that I have set up a church trade-me account to fundraise for the building fund. Items have been selling well, so thank you to those who have donated items. If you want to see what we currently have available, we are trading under the name "harmonyhouse".

## ACTIVITIES

**Avondale:** Host Family Outreach – The Fellowship Committee is initiating a new ministry opportunity for the purpose of reaching out to those who visit with us for worship each Lord's Day. It is primarily an outreach that seeks to ensure that any visitors are made to feel welcome, whether they are from other congregations or from off the street. The 'Host Family' would look for opportunities to be a blessing to our visitors and invite them home for a coffee and a time of fellowship. As other members of the congregation will also be looking for opportunities to welcome visitors, the Host Family would not be expected to host every visitor (!) but would be especially on the lookout for those who might otherwise 'fall through the gaps.' "Love the Lord your GOD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'. The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12: 30-31

**Bishopdale:** Keep Saturday free for a fun filled variety evening of entertainment! Start preparing your crazy costumes, songs and dances, anything you like! Bring along friends and family too for a great night

**Bucklands Beach:** The Pastoral Care Team had its first official meeting for 2012. We continue to be grateful for all the 'one-anothering' care that continues to be part of the life of so many

members of our congregation. The providing of meals, helping to clean, move, and the visits that go on continually. Please note that last year we purchased a freezer (located in the church office). The idea is to collect and provide meals. We are asking you to donate meals or baking items, place it in a disposable container and pop it in the freezer. It will need to be labelled with your name, date of preparation, type of meal and quantity. The Pastoral Care Team and deacons will distribute what is in the freezer as the need arises. This project needs everyone's support in making sure the freezer remains filled. This is a great way for leftovers to be used.

**Christchurch:** BBQ for blokes at the pastor's house. The men of the church and their adult sons (12 years+) are invited to the pastor's house for a BBQ. For those interested, after the BBQ we will watch the movie *Courageous*, which was recently at theatres around the world.

**Christchurch Combined Churches Picnic** – We will have a combined churches picnic at Spencer Park. Feel free to bring friends along. We will have a BBQ dinner together. Please bring your own food, drinks, plates and utensils. If you are in a position to do so, please also bring a BBQ. For the brave (or foolhardy), a swimming beach is nearby. There is also a tennis court.

**Hamilton:** The youth will be watching the DVD "Indescribable" by Louie Giglio, who has assembled some great "slides" of the cosmos and other scientific facts that support the truths of the Bible. To conclude we will have a group discussion on the DVD.

**Palmerston North:** Photo Rally Pew Jumping Event – We will go to Milverton Park which will be our home base from where we will engage in a fun, creative, brain-stimulating, team-building and wonderfully epic series of activities. Please bring \$5 for fish'n'chips.

**Silverstream:** Day Trip 65+ – A day trip to the Wairarapa and Masterton, Foxton has been organised for the members of the Wellington, Wainuiomata and Silverstream congregations who are 65+.

**Wellington:** There will be an evening of soup, songs and games (bring your favourite board games!) for after the service.

# Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil

## (Presbyterian Church of Brazil)

When I was at the Synod of the Reformed Churches of South Africa in January, two representatives of the *Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil* were also present. I had never heard of this church before but to hear these men and speak with them was for me the highlight of the Synod.

The Reformed presence in Brazil goes back to about 1550 when John Calvin and the Reformed Church of Geneva sent missionaries (so much for Calvin's alleged disinterest in evangelism). They became the first martyrs in South America having first written the first confession of faith for the Americas. 152 years ago (in 1860) the first American missionaries arrived and were received by the Brazilian monarchy. The first missionary built a church and a school. "Hence we have this tradition and now have about 320 Presbyterian schools, being the largest private education system in South America," said these brothers in their address. They have their own university, the Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, in Sao Paulo. This was established in 1870 and presently has several campuses and 60,000 students; it is the fastest growing university in Brazil – because of its academic reputation. It is growing too fast to staff it completely with reformed teaching staff, but from a certain level the teaching staff must be confessional and it is confessionally based. I asked about the relationship of the university with the church and he said the church owned it. (You can imagine how green I was!)

Wikipedia's first paragraph on this institution is as follows:

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**Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie (Portuguese for Mackenzie Presbyterian University) is a private university in São Paulo, Brazil. Founded in 1870 as the American School, Mackenzie is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in Brazil. The University is regarded, both nationally and internationally, as a center of excellence having graduated numerous important names of Brazilian history. Apart from its main campus in São Paulo, Mackenzie University has campuses in the city of Barueri; as well as in Brasília, Campinas, Recife, Rio de Janeiro for postgraduate and continuing education. The nickname "Mackenzista" is often used to refer to Mackenzie present or former students.**

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The IPB (Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil) was founded by the Reformed Church of the United States of America from which they broke in the 1960s because of its liberalism. (The mother church also split about that time and there is now a continuing Reformed Church of the United States, RCUS, which is a true reformed church.) The IPB had been members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches but left that some time ago for the same reason and are now members of World Reformed Fellowship. There was a Prof. D Gomes and Rev. L Morais present (at the RCSA Synod). They spoke of the Reformed Faith growing and having exciting possibilities in Brazil. According to the last national census they have 800,000 members, but their own figures

are that they are now past the million. They are growing at about 7% pa (!!). About 300 new churches are planted each year. The reasoning he gave was interesting and instructive. "This has not happened because we have tried to be relevant. This has happened because we realised that the mark of the church is preaching the gospel and preaching true doctrine. It is through the pulpit that we grow. We decided also as a General Assembly to put our money where our mouth is – over 50% of all the income must go to missionary work." They also committed themselves to spend 19-21% of their annual income on theological education. "Then a third thing happened – we decided we had come to a time when God wanted us to be partners and become a giving church; we had been a receiving church too long." Their General Assembly (Synod) has about 1400 commissioners (delegates). They have eight seminaries but are still 2000 pastors short. They have about 6000 local churches, 4,200 pastors and 170 missionaries in other countries.

There are a couple of things in the final paragraph that I didn't quite understand so I spoke to these two brothers personally and asked how the 50% for evangelism worked. They said the decision was taken at a General Assembly level but that at a local level it also included support for the ministry of the Word. In that respect he said that all the work of the church should have three faces – an upward, an outward and an inward (serving and building up the members of the church).

I asked also where the growth was coming from. They told me that 62% of the present membership has come from outside the church; of that 62%, 40% is ex-Roman Catholic and the rest are from a spiritist/pagan background or a Pentecostal/Charismatic background. Large numbers of Pentecostals and Charismatics are becoming reformed. He could not be quite clear about qualifications for membership (or at least I may not have understood him clearly), but at least prospective members must study the confessions (Westminster Confession and Catechisms) and be confessional on major points. It sounded a little less than full confessional membership (such as we have) but more than agreeing with only the Sum of Christian Knowledge (a briefer document some Presbyterian churches make the standard for membership).

In further discussion, I asked whether the subject of women in ecclesiastical office was on their agenda (a relevant question since it has been on the RCSA's agenda for 27 years – and counting). They told me they recently had proposal to accept women in office. A study was presented and 99% of presbyteries rejected it, so the General Assembly decided not even to discuss it.

This was such an encouraging report in the light of so much defection we see in too many western churches. What was also encouraging about it was their straightforward faith in the preaching of the Gospel – something we need to remember; as Paul said, "the Gospel (meaning, the preached Gospel) is the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16).

**John Rogers**