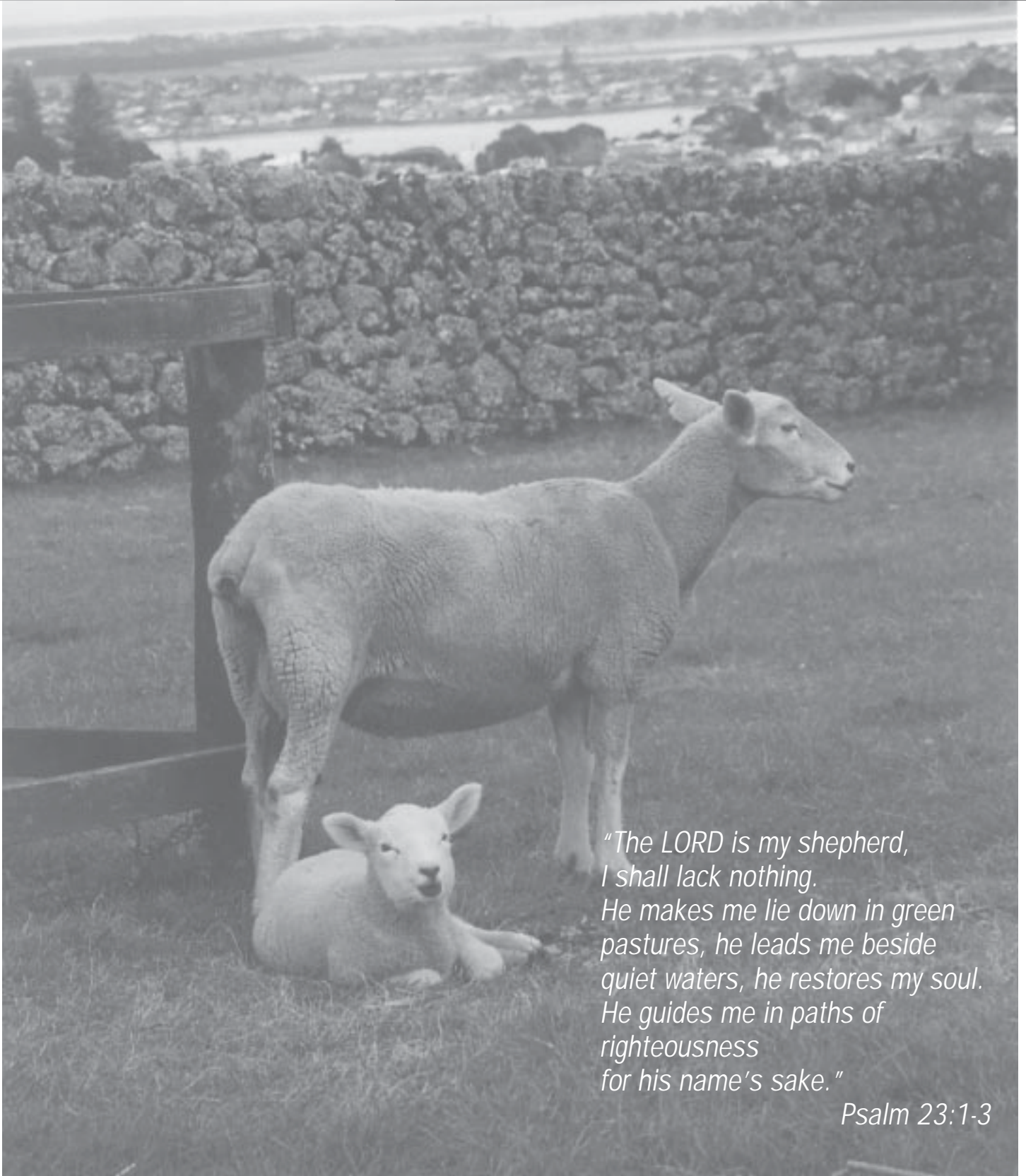


faith in focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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*"The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green
pastures, he leads me beside
quiet waters, he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of
righteousness
for his name's sake."*

Psalm 23:1-3

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Editorial

Recently I asked several Christians from other denominations how they handled Jehovah's Witnesses coming to the door. I asked this because I had had Jehovah's Witnesses tell me, after having kindly shared the gospel with them at the door, that I was one of the first "Christians" — if not the first — to speak with them that way. I thought perhaps they were being polite, so when I had the opportunity I asked how other Christians handled this mission field which came to their door. Well it seems they don't. They respond to them much the same as non-Christians would, except perhaps saying, "I've got my own faith."

When I asked further why this was so, it came down to a lack of confidence in their Bible knowledge. And when asking further about how much they were learning in their churches, the answer was very disappointing. It appears there is little serious study happening. The pastor's sermons are not expository. They tend to be personal stories with much emotional appeal and motivational phrases. Any other fellowship tends to be upon a secular framework, with no definite program of Bible or doctrinal study.

But this has been noticed from elsewhere, though. The Chinese Christian leader Samuel Lam, a believer who has been imprisoned for his faith for twenty years, said, "our churches in China are undergoing persecution, your churches in the West are undergoing delusion." It almost seems as if we are back in the pre-Reformation age where the laity were kept in ignorance by a largely untrained clergy and a focus on the visual — the smells and the bells. Today many churches which are not Roman Catholic have a similar orientation. You can go into churches with an evangelical history and not open your Bible once — or perhaps have a phrase flashed up on the OHP. Michael Horton noted that "the average lay-person without a college degree who was properly catechised in our churches — while our churches still taught from a catechism — knew the Bible better than most pastors today in the United States."

I am greatly encouraged by the growth in contributions from our members and churches to the pages of 'Faith in Focus'. This helps not only to inform the wider church what is happening but also to encourage and challenge them to further work in the Lord's Kingdom. Thank you for that.

This month the contributions received tied in nicely with a real family-focus. It is an area we need much encouragement and strengthening in of late. May those articles and, indeed, all of 'Faith in Focus' this month, help you in your walk with the Lord.

Did you pick up the mistake in the September issue? One astute reader picked up an error in the position of the columns on page 11. The third column along should have been the second column along, and vice versa.

I'm not sure how that one happened but it's certainly a reminder for me to double-check my proof copy!

*"Wife and children are a kind of discipline
of humanity."*

Francis Bacon

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

Fatherhood revived

Men do matter

John A. Haverland

Late last August the government Minister on Youth Affairs, John Tamihere, delivered a provocative speech at St Peter's College in Epsom. Government MPs are often giving speeches. This one made the headlines because it went against the political correctness of feminism. John Tamihere urged men to be men and to be proud of their gender. His outspoken remarks arose out of his great concern for the boys and young men of New Zealand.

Boys account for 90% of behavioral problems at school. Men are responsible for 90% of convicted acts of violence and they make up 90% of the prison population. Young men are five times more likely than younger women to cause a fatal car crash. Of the top ten ranked schools in New Zealand seven are girls' schools. Out of a study of 32 countries ours has the third highest male suicide rate, ahead of Russia and Lithuania. One in three boys live apart from their natural fathers. In 1993 10% of non-Maori and 40% of Maori children under twelve months lived in sole-parent homes. More than 34,000 children in New Zealand have no father listed on their birth certificate. On current trends all these statistics are only going to get worse in the years to come.

As people reflected on these statistics, many realise that a primary cause of these problems is the breakdown of marriage and the family and the absence of good male role models for the boys and young men of our society. John Tamihere also came to that conclusion. At the end of his speech he addressed men and stated that we "must progress to one of the greatest accomplishments we can do for our families, our community and our country — and that is to be good fathers." (Herald, 30/7/04).

Nothing new

Of course this is not a revelation for Christians. From the Scriptures we know that God has structured the family so that children will be raised by both a father and a mother. Sometimes, in His providence, the Lord does not grant a husband and wife any children. Sometimes a couple do have children but their family is disrupted by the death of one parent or by separation or divorce. Yet this does not take away from the biblical ideal of both a father and mother raising their children. At the beginning of the book of Proverbs Solomon urged his son, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov.

1:8). Solomon assumed that truth is learned in the home from both a father and a mother.

We can be thankful for this renewed interest in parenting and in the role of a father in the lives of his children. Sadly there are too many sole-parent homes in New Zealand where the father is absent. But a father may be physically present in the home but still absent from the lives of his children. That could be because of job ambition: a man may be so pre-occupied with his work that he neglects his calling to be a father. Or he could be at home but remote: the "behind the newspaper" syndrome. There is a widely quoted statistic from United States research



that says that fathers spend on average six minutes a day with their children. It may be a good exercise to evaluate how much time we spend as fathers in meaningful interaction, conversation and instruction with our children.

The man's vital involvement

This lack of time can be part of a larger problem in families. An article in the Christchurch Press a few years ago noted that "While a quarter (of children) are growing up in households dependent on benefits, an equal minority are growing up in double-income households awash with material goods but arguably running dangerous deficits in the time and energy parents have to give to their children." (The Press, 21 April 2001, Weekend p.2) We have heard about the DINKS: "Double-income-no-kids"

couples. We could add to them the DINTS: "Double-income-no-time" families. This secular diagnosis of a serious problem should prompt us to reflect on our situation as families in the church. Often responsibilities and tasks in the church can add time pressures to already crowded lives. In the busyness of our lives and our jobs and even our church, let's be sure that we keep our focus on our families and on instructing and leading our children.

I am not suggesting that men minimise their involvement in the church. According to the Bible leadership in the home and in the church rests with men. In many families and in many denominations men have defaulted on their responsibilities and the leadership of both home and church has fallen to wives and women. We need to be sure this does not happen in our homes and churches. A man's involvement in the church as a living member of the body of Christ is a good example to his children and shows them that the church is high in his list of priorities. Once I spoke to a father about his lack of participation in church life. He defended himself by explaining that his father had been so busy serving as an elder that he had never been at home; he declared that he was not going to repeat that same mistake. However, he fell to the opposite problem of doing nothing in the church except coming to worship. While seeking to avoid one error with his children he fell into another and failed to model the well-balanced life of the Christian man in his home, work and church.

The time to begin that involvement

Training our children should begin when they are young. Again the Proverbs reflect this early start to instruction. Solomon said that he was taught "when I was a boy in my father's house, still tender and an only child of my mother" (Prov 4:3). These early years are formative in the life of a child. When a tree is young and slender and flexible you can train it and direct it to grow straight and tall. When it is old and inflexible and solid it is almost impossible to straighten it out. This is why the Jesuits said, "Give me a child until he is seven." They were aware that these are the formative years of a child's life. Someone else said, "The best way to tackle a minor problem is before he grows up!" And one of the Puritans wrote, "It is common sense to put the seal to the wax while it is soft." These early years are the time to lay a good foundation. What you sow now as a father you will reap in the future. Put in the

time and effort now and by God's grace you will reap the benefit of that later on. The Proverbs say, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov 22:6).

The nature of that involvement

As we train our children we must give them a clear direction. Not everyone agrees with this. Some advocate that you should give your children all the information they need and then as they get older they can make up their own minds. They suggest you give them all the options so that later on they can make an informed decision. The wise men quoted in the book of Proverbs did not advocate that approach! They knew that "folly is bound up

in the heart of a child." Left to himself a child will choose the wrong path and get in with the wrong crowd. Christian fathers must understand the sinful nature of their children and their natural bent towards evil and actively direct them into the narrow path that leads to life. We cannot follow a "take it or leave it" attitude with our children or be casual about their direction in life. Rather we must press on our children the teaching of the Bible, show them that this is all-important and urge them to follow the Lord. Their eternal future depends on their response to the covenant promises of the Lord.

John Tamihere's remarks reflect a growing awareness in our society of the important

role fathers play in the lives of their children. As Christians we can be thankful for this and pray that it may awaken more men to a greater sense of responsibility for their children. However, the tide in marriages and families will not turn until men and women realise the futility of their own ideas and schemes for solving the massive problems they face, repent of their human pride and selfishness, and turn in faith to God through Christ. May the Holy Spirit help us to model a Christian family life that gives us many opportunities to minister to the needs of others and to speak to them about our Father in heaven.

Where have all the children gone?

John Rogers

Leland Ryken, in his book, *The Puritans: Worldly Saints*, says, "The Puritan doctrine of sex was a watershed in the cultural history of the West. The Puritans devalued celibacy, glorified companionate marriage, affirmed married sex as both necessary and pure, established the ideal of wedded romantic love, and exalted the role of the wife."

As with most other things good in the world today, I want to ask the question whether we have put a twist on this that, in effect, perverts it, and in a typically 20th – 21st century way. The Westminster Confession says, "Marriage was ordained for

the mutual help of the husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with legitimate issue and of the church with an holy seed and for the preventing of uncleanness." I have to confess that it does seem to me, in a principal statement, that the mention of preventing uncleanness is a little odd. It is true, of course, that Paul tells us that we should all have our own husband and wife, if God gives us such, and so enjoy sex in the biblical way. But God created marriage before sin so that at that point there was no question of uncleanness. That leaves us then with the mutual help, the increase of mankind and the increase of the Church as the purposes for which God gave us marriage.

The mutual help

There is something very important in this business of mutual help. The marriage form in the back of our present Psalter-Hymnal has the words, "enrichment of the lives" of the couple. And some would say today, Christians too I mean, that that is the most important purpose of marriage (it is listed third in the Psalter-Hymnal). Some even marry with the express intention of not having children but just for that companionship, that relationship and the fulfilment of that relationship in sexual oneness. And I have heard that from Christians too.

But is that right? The marriage form speaks about "the enrichment of the lives" of the couple. The Confession speaks about "mutual help." They are not necessarily synonymous and it would be good for us to examine them for a moment. There was Adam, naming the animals and, we read, "No helper suitable for him was found." You see, Eve was not just a companion, she was a helper. And a helper in what? In his task as a man, his kingdom work. "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them. And God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (Genesis 1:27-28).

Nothing in life is for its own sake

Certainly, one purpose of marriage is companionship. But that, like everything else in life, is to be taken up and offered to the service of God. For the Christian, nothing in life is for its own sake. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you." Since this serving God is



kingdom work in terms of Genesis 1:27-28, and since it involves having children, filling the earth, and subduing it and ruling over it, this raises the question of children and how many. And that raises the question of contraception – because Paul says we are not allowed to deny ourselves to each other.

This has become a sensitive subject and therefore it is not often talked about openly. There may be all sorts of reasons for that and, in the end, it is for each couple to make decisions about before the Lord. But the Bible talks about having children and it talks about it as a specific purpose of marriage. Therefore the Church must say what the Bible says about it and apply it in the context of our day.

First of all, the Bible teaches us that children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 128). Furthermore, as Jacob had to remind Rachel, *"It is God who opens the womb and it is God who closes it."*

There are Christians who believe any form of contraception to be wrong. I am not able to say that. The texts I have heard used to support it are, I believe, being misused. On the other hand, we Protestants have simply accepted contraception without thinking much about it. I have checked all my ethics textbooks, including material of some men I know personally and who usually have scriptural backing for everything they say, men I have a high regard for. But none of them asked the question the Roman Catholic Church has asked: is contraception right? They all simply assume its rightness and discuss its use.

I doubt there is a direct answer to the question. The proper way to get guidance here is to work from these larger principles I have been discussing. And the first of these is the cultural mandate; multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and rule it.

To which, many people say, But the earth is full and God said, Fill it; not overfill it! It certainly seems full in some parts. But is that because it is empty in others? And that because of great sin – of all sorts? I would like to put two questions to this objection.

i) Is the idea that the earth is overpopulated simply another example of our intellectual arrogance? And intellectual arrogance is a big problem for us.

For example, it was only 30 to 35 years ago that we were told in all seriousness to prepare for another ice-age. Today it is a melt-down!

For example, 35-40 years ago, we were told the earth was overpopulated and there would soon be a great famine. But then there was the Green Revolution! It kicked back on us, of course, as GM food may very likely do also. But still, the world-wide famine still hasn't come. And where

there is famine, it is demonstrably the result of sin and the rest of the world is still easily able to feed the refugees by the million! That has not always been so in history, even with far smaller populations.

This intellectual arrogance shows itself in many ways, but with our modern technology, much of which is right, the result of fulfilling the cultural mandate in other respects, are we simply climbing the tower of Babel all over again and playing God? We are not humble under the Word of God anymore. We are not content to live under the providence of God anymore. Is this playing its part in our thinking about family life and children as well?

For more than 30 years now, many western European nations have been very worried about the decline in their growth rates and doing the best they can to increase it. Italy is down to about 1.2 children per woman. The one-time presidential hopeful, Pat Buchanan, has stated that by 2050, less than 50% of the population of the USA will be of European stock. London will, reportedly, be less than 50% Anglo-Saxon by 2010. This is not racism; it will bring enormous cultural and religious changes.

But the interesting thing is, this does not only apply to the West. I quote from an article in the Herald of 14th March, 2002.

In a major shift that has stunned demographers, fertility rates in much of Asia, Africa and Latin America have begun dropping, easing fears of a future global population explosion.... Demographers now "see fertility coming down to lower levels than we have ever anticipated," said John Caldwell, a professor at the Australian National University in Canberra. "For the first time, we think it possible that within a hundred years or so, we will have a world population declining from, say, 10 billion people. We may some day pass our present level on the way down again," Caldwell said.... Caldwell identified 13 countries in the category he said now appeared likely to slip soon below the replacement level. They were Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, in Latin America; Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and South Africa, on the African continent; and Indonesia, Iran, the Philippines, Turkey and Vietnam, in Asia. He said that two other huge countries in the group, India and Bangladesh, might also slip below replacement fertility levels.

I am not saying this is what is going to happen. These are human projections as much as the alarm bells in the past were! But that is exactly my point! We think, with our human knowledge, that we can manage this world and plan for the future and save

the planet and all the rest of it. It is sheer arrogance.

But as Christians we believe God has a plan for history. We are simply under orders to fill the earth. Can we really tell when it is full? And what if it were? Perhaps God will then bring history to its close? That fits much better with the idea of the purposeful, planning God we find in the Scriptures.

ii) The other question I want to ask is this.

With greater education, which is right for both men and women (I have encouraged all my daughters to get a tertiary education), **and the possibilities that education opens, it has become more difficult for women to be content to be mothers** – and see that as a rewarding career. (On the other hand, please do not think I believe all young people should get a tertiary education; we can make that an idol too. It depends entirely on gift and calling.) We ought not forget that the most famous of women is famous precisely for motherhood! And the most blessed of women is so because of a simple, humble servant attitude. She accepted the will of God for her life; *"I am thy handmaid; be it to me according to thy word."*

Or, if being content themselves is not the problem, women are greatly pressured by the world to be out at work, pursuing a career. (Ha! Many men don't have a career! Just a job.) Yet, even so, very few women don't want to have one or two children. Only now, many demand the right to have them while others pay for them, with paid parental leave and so forth. But what absolutely must not be sacrificed is **their** outside-home career. There is little or no sense of having received a gift from God that is well worth the sacrifice of perhaps a lower standard of living to enjoy them and bring them up to serve God. Or they want to have them, but very quickly get back to their **real** career, so they put them in



day-care at the very most important time in their lives when they need their mother; at barely a few months old. No wonder the world is full of emotionally insecure young people who don't know who they are.

Transformed or conformed?

The question we Christians need to ask ourselves is: are we, instead of being transformed in our minds to the will of God (Romans 12:1), being conformed to the thinking and values of the world? I understand the temptations – they're only one brand of the temptation we all face: to want more of so many of the world's good things. But we need to ask: are motives of selfishness, and worldly ideas of self-fulfilment, which we all admit form the spirit of our age, also shaping our motives as well?

Maybe we need to ask just how we view our children. They are a gift. Many couples are not blessed with them – or not many of them; and if you want to know just how much a blessing they are, get to know a childless couple well. The world is inclined to view them as a burden, a bother, rather a

hindrance to getting on with real life, a bit of a nuisance side-show to the main plot. The biblical view is that for a woman, they are the main plot – if the Lord blesses her with the circumstances and the ability.

No room for judgment

Whatever we believe about this matter of family size and contraception, we need to watch our thoughts very carefully. There is no place for large families to look down on small families. We will all know families the Lord has not given many children. Who is to know that the same may not be true of other small families? Maybe there are some not so small, even large families, to whom the Lord may have given more? – although it is far from me to say they should have had more. All I am saying is: this is a matter in which it would be easy to look at others and judge. We may not do that, unless we can prove that Scripture says something very clearly about limiting the size of our families. At present all I can say is that the command to increase still stands. So Scripture does speak against severe limitation and since

replacement is 2.3 children per woman, we are not adding until we have a third, unless God, in his providence prevents us.

The gift of marriage is that the woman help the man in his cultural work in the world. Within that command is the command to multiply and increase, and it is for that that woman is particularly equipped – and not just to fill the earth; but to increase the Church – to bear children of the covenant that they in turn, by God's grace, work to bring God's kingdom.

We should receive marriage for both these purposes: companionship and pleasure; and the natural fruit of that companionship and pleasure, children. And receive them as an equal pleasure; and seek, before our **own** pleasure and convenience, to serve God in them both.

Footnote:

And it was these same Puritans who (largely) wrote the Westminster Confession and who stated in it as the first reasons for marriage the service of God before its blessing to us.

The lost son — or daughter

Are you mourning someone still alive?

Lorraine Dittrich

The story of the Lost Son in Luke 15:11-32 is well known to us. All churchgoers have listened to a sermon on this subject at one time or another. The contents never cease to touch one's heart. The love of a father which presents the love of our Heavenly Father who welcomes his lost son with open arms and prepares a feast to celebrate his return.

There is not much in the Bible about the agony of the father in the parable awaiting the return of his son. Nothing about him watching the road, squinting his eyes to see if there is the slightest speck of dust as indication of his son's return. Or the long nights in which he lay awake, concerned about his son's well being. Maybe his strong belief in his son's return, prevented him from counting the days and months. It can be that Jesus, when telling this parable, did not want to emphasise the impact of the son's absence on the household, but focussed on the most important fact of the son's return, his repentance and the response of the father.

Sadly, so many Christian parents have experienced the devastating effects of a son or daughter who turned away from the faith

when they became young adults. There are many reasons they give to justify their decision. Whatever the reasons or even lack of explanations, the initial shock of their loved ones is indescribable. Parents and siblings are severely affected and each one has to cope with the situation in his or her own special way.

There are inevitably questions asked: "Where have we gone wrong? How much of this is our fault? Why haven't we noticed the signs earlier? What can I do to make this all go away?"

Accompanied with these questions are overwhelming feelings of guilt. This is the child we promised during baptism to raise as a covenant child. Somehow we failed the Lord and this child.

Thoughts as the above are just contributing to the deep sadness, emotional devastation and the seemingly hopelessness of the situation. Even praying and seeking the wisdom from the Word seems fruitless. Maybe we are asking the wrong questions.

We have to remember that each child is lent to us from above. This child comes from God: "*Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.*" (Mark 9:37)

As covenant parents we welcomed this child in His name, we raised him/her in God's ways and although in hindsight all parents do realise that mistakes were made, they were unintentional. They prayerfully sought wisdom from the Lord with the child's best interest always at mind.

One of our greatest joys as parents is to see our children grow in their faith and seek the Lord in all their ways. When a child disappoints us by going astray our pride gets a severe knock, because it becomes quite obvious that we did not succeed, as we wanted to believe. As we read in Proverbs 11:2, "*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.*" In these moments of despair over our child, our pride changes very quickly to humility and a sincere seeking of wisdom from the Lord. Inevitably this is an experience that brings us closer in our walk with Him in a time like this. So the Lord is also using this situation to bring him glory through a new wisdom gained in a way we would not have chosen for ourselves.

Many parents will admit that there were long hours of discussions, even arguments and harsh words and as a last resort earnest pleas with this child, trying to convince him or her not to go their own way, knowing

all the temptations waiting out there.

But here is a lesson to learn from the father of the lost son. There is no account of any effort on his side of trying to convince his son of his own foolishness. It seems as if the father knew that it was necessary to let the son go, and letting him free was the only way the son would come to his senses. He needed to experience the feel of being in control of his own destiny, the disillusion that followed and then being utterly abandoned by his friends and his own once-so-solid convictions.

In trusting the Lord with our child, we have to accept that we have to let go and let God deal with him in His own sovereign way. The promise in Rom.8:28 is just as valid for our child: *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,*

neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Our lost son or daughter has to be assured of our love, and that nothing can ever change our love for them. We do love them to the full, and cannot love them less or more. Also that they are not accountable to us as young adults, but to God. We will rejoice with them when they return "home" to where they know they belong. Our hurt and pain will be erased by the same forgiveness that we have received in the Lord Jesus Christ and which we will pass on to them. As the father in the parable the church community will embrace them and welcome them back with joy. What a wonderful moment to look forward to, knowing that at the

same time there will be great rejoicing in heaven as well.

Until that time we can hold onto the promise in Philippians 1:6 *"being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* The Lord has started a good work in our child the day he/she was born to us as covenant parents, and will carry it on to completion.

God-fearing parents have the wonderful assurance that they can leave their child in the Lord's hands to carry the work on to completion. Accepting the fact that God's ways are not our ways. But most importantly we must never cease in praying, and be always ready to welcome the lost son or daughter back with a feast of love and forgiveness.

World in focus

Pentecostals challenge Alpha

On 12th May 2004, Moriel Ministries wrote a letter to Mr Nicky Gumbel of Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) regarding many serious concerns about the Alpha Course, of which Nicky Gumbel is a high-profile leader and ambassador. The letter invited Mr Gumbel to participate, together with Sandy Millar, his pastor, in a public debate with Jacob Prasch of Moriel Ministries to be facilitated by an independent and neutral moderator. The letter was personally handed to Mr Gumbel.

The event was to be open to the Christian public, with specially invited guests including scholars in Hebrew and Greek. The event was to have been video-recorded, with a copy of the whole proceedings being handed to each party before leaving the venue.

This debate would have provided answers to many Christian around the world who are deeply troubled by the teaching and the claims made by Alpha, and the resulting 'changes' in the lives of those who 'come through Alpha'. This concerns the fact that so many people 'come through Alpha' but appear to have absolutely no idea about salvation, redemption, repentance and forgiveness of sins — this enforcing the view that 'Alpha-ettes' are not really born again but inoculated with just enough gospel to prevent them catching the real thing.

In a world where chances to defend criticisms are often denied or avoided, we feel that this kind offer to debate would have been seized upon by those at HTB who have been aware for a number of years that there is mounting concern about Alpha's association with Roman Catholicism, the collusion with the Marian Cardinals of Rome, Mr Gumbel's recent

meeting with the Pope in Rome (May 2004) — and many other issues.

'Contending Earnestly for the Faith' magazine, September 2004 - www.christian-witness.org

Dutch Reformed readmitted to Council

South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church, once ostracised for its theological justification of apartheid and white-majority rule, has rejoined the South African Council of Churches. (SACC).

The move, announced during the ecumenical organization's triennial meeting in Johannesburg on 13 July, ended more than forty years of antagonism between the denomination and South Africa's most prominent ecumenical agency and was hailed by South African media and church leaders as something of a milestone in the country's ongoing process of reconciliation.

+ South African Council of Churches, P O Box 62098, Marshalltown 2107 South Africa

Christians threatened in Cameroon

Religious tension is rising in northern Cameroon (which borders troubled northern Nigeria) as foreign Islamists infiltrate to stir up the local Muslims against the local Christians. The Cameroonian authorities report that the region has been inundated with Islamist tracts inciting hatred of Christians. The Islamists are urging local Muslims to marry and convert young Christian girls, as well as to drive Christians out by raising rents and refusing to let property to them. Bishop Yves Steven of Extreme North Province reports some Christians have already been forcibly evicted from their homes. Unless this threat

is tackled decisively, the situation could deteriorate with northern Cameroon descending into religious conflict.

+ World Evangelical Alliance Secretariat, PO Box 1839, Edmonds, WA 98020

Judge drops partial-birth abortion ban

A federal judge ruled today the federal partial-birth abortion ban is unconstitutional.

The ruling of US District Judge Richard Casey of Manhattan mirrors one in June in a separate case in San Francisco. One more challenge to the ban, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bush, is still pending, in Nebraska.

In his ruling, Casey called partial-birth abortion a "gruesome procedure" but claimed the ban conflicts with a 5-4 Supreme Court ruling in 2000 upholding the practice. That decision in the Steinberg v. Carhart case said a "health of the mother" exception must be a part of any abortion ban.

Casey admitted in his ruling: "The Court finds that the testimony at trial and before Congress establishes that D and X [partial-birth abortion] is a gruesome, brutal, barbaric, and uncivilized medical procedure."

+ Office of Public Affairs, Administrative Office of the US Courts, Washington, DC 20544

EPC Commission to attend ordination

The Kazakhstan Commission of the Evangelical Presbyterian General Assembly will travel to Kazakhstan in September to be present for the ordination of the second national pastor to have been trained by World

Outreach personnel and the first to have

come to faith in Christ through the work of the World Outreach team.

The Kazakhstan Commission was appointed by the 21st General Assembly to work with the developing Association of Reformed Churches of Kazakhstan (ARCK) in drafting Reformed and Presbyterian standards of government and to develop recommendations to the General Assembly on how the EPC might maximize its structures to assist similar future works. By God's grace and largely through the labors of EPC's World Outreach team in Kazakhstan, a self-governing Reformed church now exists in this former Soviet republic which is a rising cultural and commercial force in Central Asia.

+ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Office of the General Assembly, 17197 N. Laurel Park Dr., Suite 567, Livonia, MI 48152 (734) 742-2020

Proposed religious vilification laws

On the 5th of August the Western Australian State Premier G. Gallop announced the State Labour Government's intention to enact new laws against racial and religious vilification.

In a discussion paper issued by the Office of Multicultural Interests (available on the internet at HYPERLINK "http://www.omi.wa.gov.au" www.omi.wa.gov.au) a number of proposals for changing the law are put forward for comment.

Amongst the proposals are:

1 - Amend the existing provisions relating to incitement to racial hatred in the Criminal Code by inserting an offence of serious racial and religious vilification, which could include engaging in any conduct that incites hatred, contempt or ridicule, not just the possession or publication of threatening or harmful materials as currently exists. Such an offence would also remove the current element of intent;

2 - Create a new stand-alone Act, as in Victoria, that sets up a range of administrative civil, and criminal remedies for racial and religious vilification, as for those set out in the above option.

The reference to Victoria, the most recent state to enact Racial and Religious vilification laws, will cause great concern amongst Christians. A recent leaflet warns that vilification laws such as these "tend to be used vexatiously by people who are intolerant of any unfavourable assessment of their religion. They tend to encourage intolerant people to answer argument with accusation and to abandon persuasion for litigation. Christians in particular are placed at risk by religious vilification laws, as an ongoing case in Victoria illustrates."

Andrew Bolt, a Melbourne journalist, wrote in the Melbourne Sun on 14 Nov, 2003 that,

allegedly with the support of the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission, the Islamic Council headquarters alerted several Muslim converts to a seminar on jihad to be run by a Melbourne Pentecostal church, 'Catch the Fire Ministries'. According to Bolt "Catch the Fire" had, unknown to its leader, Pastor Danny Nalliah and its speaker, Pastor Daniel Scot, Muslims among the 250 Christians at its seminar who were seemingly ready to feel vilified."

The result is that the three Muslim converts who attended the seminar lodged a complaint, claiming that it "incited hatred" against Muslims in Australia. After more than two years of hearings and submissions and a legal cost to the pastors of over \$150,000, the matter is still not resolved.

The case has attracted considerable attention locally and overseas. Piers Akerman of the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* makes the following pertinent comment: "The greatest crime is that the politically correct Victorian Government ever enacted the shameful legislation which permitted the case to begin at all."

Submissions on the Racial and Religious Vilification Consultation paper which was released only early last month closed on 3rd September. If the proposal goes ahead, there should be more opportunity to express our opinion to the legislators.

+L. van Burgel in 'Una Sancta', September 5, 2004

Recommendation to adopt the Belhar Confession rejected

A convent of people from churches in the Dutch Reformed family recommended that a future united church include the 1986 Belhar Confession as one of four basic standards of faith. However, in August a regional synod turned down the proposal.

The Synodical Commission of the East Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) said they still held to their earlier opinion. The DRC recognized how crucial the Belhar Confession is to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), but said it was less crucial in the self-identity of the DRC. They hope for unification with the URCSA, but thought the churches should work together on a new identity for the future.

+ United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H9RT United Kingdom

Dr. Stephen Olford passes away

Dr. Stephen Olford, Founder and Chairman of the Board of Olford Ministries International, passed away on 29 August 2004. Dr. Olford was born on in Zambia on 29 March, 1918, the son of missionaries.

He was recognised nationally and internationally for his powerful exposition of Scripture, and his Christ-centred ministry.

As an ordained Baptist minister and a

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conservative evangelical by conviction, Dr. Olford ministered across denominational, cultural, and racial lines. As well as his extensive preaching ministry, Dr. Olford produced numerous books, booklets, and preaching resources.

Dr. Olford's influence upon thousands of pastors and preachers cannot be measured. Often called "The Preacher's Preacher," Olford has had a significant role in the lives of many including his long-time friend, Billy Graham.
+ Michael Ireland, Chief Correspondent, ASSIST News Service, PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842-2126

Constitutional Courts in Germany say "No" to retail on Sundays

A large megastore wanted to open on Sundays in defiance of state law, saying that "it fit the will of the people." Protests followed from churches, trade unions, and consumer organizations who demanded that Sunday should remain a day of rest. To force their will the Metro and its daughter company, Kaufhof (Germany's major chain of shopping stores), took the matter to the Supreme Federal Republic Court of Constitutional Rights. However, the judges ruled that Sunday should remain a day of rest "for the spiritual and physical benefit of the German people." They further declared that retail trading on Sundays and other public holidays was contrary to the nation's constitution.

+ Kaufhof, Moonckebergstrasse 3, 20095 Hamburg

International protection asked for by Colombian Presbyterians

A letter addressed to international Christian organizations and its sister Church in the US, the Northern Coastal Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia has requested solidarity and accompaniment. The letter voices the concern of this Presbytery regarding its work to accompany the displaced and to promote and defend human rights.

Since the end of last year, in the wake of several attacks that took place in Barranquilla, people detained by authorities have been interrogated regarding leaders from the Presbytery and the organisation that forms part of the Human Rights Coordinator.

The letter, which was signed by the moderator of the presbytery, Jairo Barriga, concluded by asking that the Presbyterian Church in the US and other international Christian bodies write to the pertinent Colombian authorities to ensure that the work of Human Rights organizations carried out by the Human Rights Coordinator and the Ecumenical Network be respected and guaranteed.

+ Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia, [Presbyterian Church of Colombia] Rev M. M. Camargo, Carrera 46 No. 48-50, A.A. 562, Barranquilla, Colombia

Presbyterian Church of Nigeria accuses Federal Government

The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria has accused the Federal Government of not doing enough to enhance freedom of religious worship in the country as enshrined in the constitution and warned that unless the incessant harassment of Christians in some parts of the country was checked, it would continue to threaten the unity and stability of the country.

The Moderator and Principal Clerk of the General Assembly called on the various levels of government to ban institutions whose practices were repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience. It also called on churches and religious bodies to join in the crusade to sanctify the land.

+ Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, PO Box 32, Unwana, Ubeji L.G.A. Ebonyi State

Ten Evangelical pastors and elders released

Ten evangelical pastors and elders of Iran's Assemblies of God Church have been released. Along with 70 other Assemblies of God representatives, the 10 leaders had gathered at a church centre for the church's annual general conference on 9 September when the arrests happened. It was reported that they were not given any reason for their arrest but were asked "many questions about themselves and each other." Since its declaration as an Islamic state in 1979, Iran has clamped down on its Protestant citizens.
+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799

The dispute between the Free Church and the Free Church Continuing

Both sides in the unhappy dispute between the Free Church of Scotland and those who walked out in January 2000 met together in a Mediation process for four days in August under the leadership of John Sturrock and Hugh Donald of Core Mediation. The representatives of both churches recorded their gratitude for the courtesy and respect shown to each other as brothers in Christ throughout the meetings. This created an atmosphere in which much constructive discussion took place, and it was agreed that certain proposals be submitted to the respective Commissions of Assembly.

The proposals included that the two Churches recognise each other as separate Christian Churches. Consequently, the Free Church would recognise FCC ministers as ministers in good standing in a Christian Church, and as a result their ministers would no longer be regarded as suspended ministers. The possibility of immediate reunion of the two Churches was ruled out because of the FCC's insistence on 'the right of continued protest' which the FCS understands

to mean the right of a dissenting minority to decide which issues are unconstitutional and to go on refusing to submit to decisions of Church courts and to go on campaigning until the majority agrees with them. But it was agreed that the two Churches could consult further on this issue. It was also agreed that, although the FCS could not give up title to its property, local arrangements would be encouraged whereby ministers of neither Church would be rendered homeless and whereby congregations of both Churches would have the use of suitable buildings. The FCS Commission accepted these proposals 8/9/2004, subject to the FCC accepting them. However, the FCC Commission 10/9/2004 unanimously rejected the proposals and countered that a minimum basis would be that a framework and timetable for reconciliation and reunion be established, and meantime an equitable distribution of property, that the suspensions in 2000 be declared void from the beginning, and that the Civil Magistrate determine the constitution as to the right of continued protest.

While the FCC representatives in the Mediation process did not have a mandate to agree on a basis and argue for it in their Commission, it is extremely disappointing that the mediation proposals which they indicated might form a suitable basis for settlement have been unanimously rejected. It thus appears that the legal action of the FCC against the FCS will go ahead on 12th October. At the initial hearing, the judge may strike out the action as without merit or it may proceed to trial. If the latter occurs it will be very expensive in money and in spiritual repute.

As regards the legal merits, those who withdrew lack the numbers to bring the model trust deed into operation, while their argument of a breach of constitution such as to enable a successful claim on the ground of an overriding denominational trust is a long stretch indeed, considering no constitutional change has occurred in the FCS. If the argument is to rest on a failure to allow the right of Protest, the FCS allowed those who disagreed with its findings to Protest, but commenced a process of discipline because of subsequent behaviour: a discipline cut short by the FCC men declining the jurisdiction of the Assembly.

The statistics of the Free Church include a good number of small congregations, and the problems common to us all, but there are positive indications with younger ministers, and a good body (25) of students in the College. The total active community of the Free Church of Scotland is a little over 12,000. The group which split off has a following of about 1,200 but they tend to be very committed, and funds have not been lacking. Several new buildings have been opened by them in recent times.

Rowland S. Ward

Born-again Christians just as likely to divorce

The Ventura, California-based, Barna Group has released a distressing report showing that marriages between born-again Christians are just as likely to end in divorce as those who do not profess to be born-again.

The Barna study revealed that among married born-again Christians, 35 percent have experienced a divorce, the same percentage as those identifying themselves

in the study as not being born again.

Additionally, the study found that multiple divorces are also unexpectedly common among born-again Christians, with Barna figures showing that nearly one-quarter of the married "born-again" (23 percent) get divorced two or more times.

Jerry Falwell, a nationally recognized Christian minister and TV show host, believes the most significant finding in this study is the fact that a majority of those born-again

participants — defined in the survey as people who said they have made "a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today" — (52 percent) said they did not believe that divorce without adultery is sin.

+ The Barna Group, Ltd., 1957 Eastman Ave. Ste B, Ventura, CA 93003
+ Rev. Jerry Falwell, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA 24501

Billions of Bibles – beginning with one!

The story of Mary Jones

Patricia van Laar

Llu sern yw dyn air i'm traed, a llewyrch i'm llwbr. (Psalm 119:105)

Mary Jones longed for a Bible of her own, in her own language. But ten-year-old Mary could not read. Then how had she learnt about the Bible? Mary was the daughter of weavers in the village of Llanfihangel in North Wales. Her illiterate parents taught her what they knew of God's Word, and she heard more at the Calvinistic Methodist Church they attended every Sunday. Cottage weaving kept both parents busy and the wolf from the door, but left little over for such a book, even if one had been available! Welsh Bibles were

so scarce that even rich people could not always get one. And anyway, what was the use of a Bible if no one in the home could read it? Still, Mary had learnt to love the Bible stories, its teaching and the Lord. If only...

The offer of help

One day Mrs. Evans, a farmer's wife, visited the weavers' cottage. When she heard of Mary's interest, she made a promise that if she learnt to read, she might come whenever she liked to the farm two miles away and read the big Bible at the farmhouse. But how could Mary learn? What chance did she have? Then came a day of great excitement in the village. News! Rev. Thomas Charles

of Bala had been opening schools for the poor. His next was to be opened at Abergynolwyn, about two miles away from Llanfihangel. Could Mary accept the offer to attend? Her parents relied on her help in daily chores around the cottage. "If I get up two hours earlier to help each morning," she thought, "and do the rest of my work for Mother straight after school, I'm sure I could manage."

Three weeks later, excited Mary set off to walk to school for the first time in her life. In an incredibly short time she began to master reading and writing. At last, she knew enough to ask Mrs. Evans to keep her promise. So it was that every Saturday afternoon Mary would walk the two miles to the farm, and study in the big Bible her lessons for the next day's Sunday School class, memorising as much as she could. But how she longed for a Bible of her own! Could she possibly save up for one? When the holidays came, after finishing her chores, Mary went to the neighbours, job-hunting. She found work, here minding a baby, there mending and patching clothes. She went to the wood and collected sticks and brushwood for fuel. A farthing here, a halfpenny there, all went into a box made for her by her father. One day Mrs. Evans gave her a rooster and two hens, a further source of savings.

For six years Mary worked and saved, and continued to pray for her Bible, until at last the great day came; she had enough in her wooden box. But where could she buy her Bible? None were for sale in the villages nearby. The nearest place was at Rev. Mr. Charles's home in Bala, twenty-five miles (40 kms) away. The thought of such a journey was exciting but daunting. The thought of asking a famous, but to her unknown, minister frightened her a little. She wondered if Mr. Charles would have any left from the supply he had received from London long ago. Her parents were at first unwilling for their sixteen-year-old daughter to go so far alone, but then her father said, "The Lord will keep her safely over the mountains. We must not go against His will."



A famous walk

So on a fresh spring morning in May 1800, Mary, with her only shoes in a bag, set out after breakfast and family prayers, a day she never forgot until her dying day. Bare-footed Mary, the happiest girl in all the country around! Morning, noon and afternoon she plodded on, eating her mother's provisions, washing in a little stream, resting blistered and cut feet, and on and on until she arrived at Bala. She managed to get her unspoilt shoes on and stumbled to the house where she had been instructed to go, the house of an elderly, respected minister. Surprised at his unexpected guest, he told her it was too late to see Mr. Charles that night, but insisted she stay at his home, sleeping in his little attic. He would take her there in the morning.

The next day, Mary met the famous Thomas Charles face to face, and told her story. This disconcerted man replied that he had no Bible to spare: the few left in his possession were already earmarked for others, and the printers in London had indicated they would be publishing no more. Mary burst into tears. The kind clergyman looked at her. Six years of saving, six years of reading a borrowed Bible, twenty-five miles of walking through the rough, tough mountain tracks, should this all go for nothing? Quickly making up his mind, he went to the bookcase and took down one of the few remaining Bibles.

"You shall have your Bible," he said, pressing it into her hand. Mary's tears turned now to tears of joy. She gladly accepted the Book, paid him, and with a light heart turned to go the long journey home, arriving after dark to her anxiously-waiting father and mother.

A vow

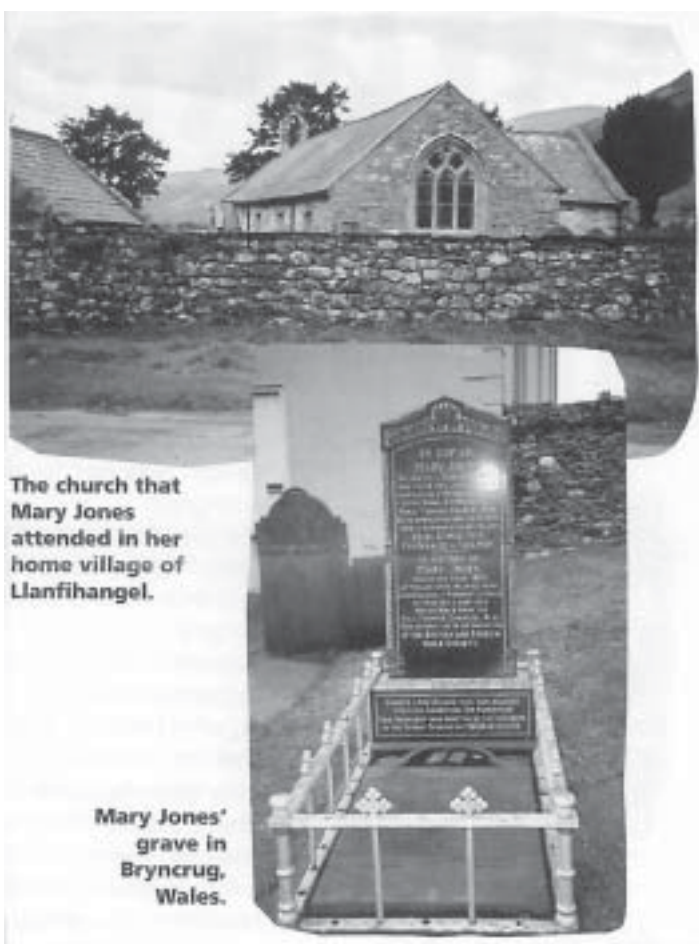
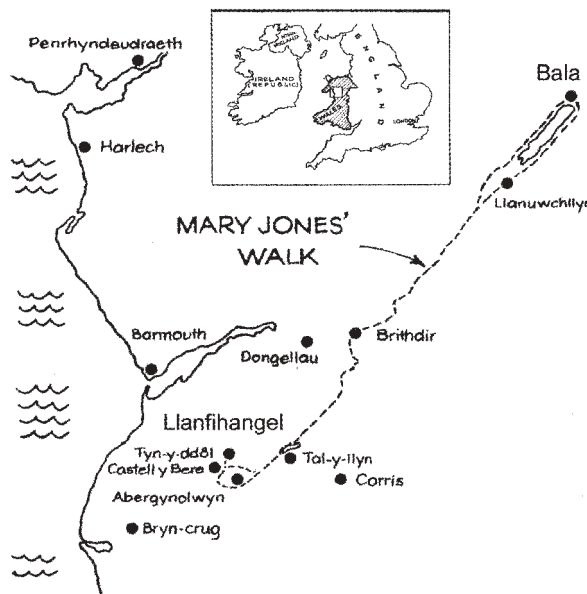
Thomas Charles vowed there and then that he would never rest until he found a way to supply his country of Wales with the Word of God. Thomas Charles kept his vow. Turning the problem over in his mind, he suddenly hit upon the idea of forming a society specifically for the purpose of producing Bibles for Wales. In late 1802, he went to London, approached the committee of the Religious Tract Society, told the story of Mary Jones, and made a plea for the forming of such a society. A wave of sympathy swept over the listeners. Then one of the committee members, Rev. Joseph Hughes, who judging by his name was also Welsh, said, "Mr. Charles, a society might be formed for this purpose, but if for Wales, why not for the whole world?" The suggestion was enthusiastically seized. Plans were made over the next eighteen months, and in March 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society was born! The first consignment of Welsh Bibles reached Bala in 1806.

Two hundred years later, the society has developed into an organisation known as the United Bible Societies. The bicentenary of its founding was celebrated in London by a service of thanksgiving in the presence of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II and other dignitaries, as well as some supporters, in St Paul's Cathedral, on March 8th, 2004. The year 2004 has seen commemorative celebrations and exhibitions in many countries all over the world. The societies have produced full Bibles in several hundred tongues, and New

Testaments and portions in over two thousand, totalling billions of Bibles all in all. The work goes on. Do you wonder that the Societies honour the name of a young Welsh girl, as they celebrate two hundred years of service to the Lord and to the people of the world?

"Beibl i bawd o bobl y byd;" "A Bible to all the people of earth."

This information was gleaned from 'Mary Jones and Her Bible' by Mary Ropes



The church that Mary Jones attended in her home village of Llanfihangel.

Mary Jones' grave in Bryn-crug, Wales.

Coincidences?

W. Peter Gadsby

Q: What is the shortest chapter in the Bible?

A: Psalm 117

Q: What is the longest chapter in the Bible?

A: Psalm 119

Q: Which chapter is in the centre of the Bible?

A: Psalms 118

Fact: There are 594 chapters before Psalm 118

Fact: There are 594 chapters after Psalm 118

Add these numbers up and you get 1188.

Q: What is the centre verse in the Bible?

A: Psalm 118:8

Q. Does this verse say something significant about God's will for our lives?

**A. Psalms 118:8 (NKJV)
"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man."**

The chapter and verse divisions of the Bible that we know today were not in the original manuscripts of either Hebrew/Aramaic Old Testament or the Greek New Testament. In ancient times, divisions were marked in the copies, but they weren't the same as our modern chapters. These were probably invented in 1205 by Stephen Langton for a Vulgate (Latin) edition of the Bible, and were adopted both by Jews and Christians over the next two hundred years.

The present Old Testament (OT) verse divisions date from about A.D.500. In the sixteenth century, Robert Stephanus, a Paris book printer, took over the OT versification, and introduced a similar scheme for the New Testament (NT).

Unlike the original text, the chapters and verses in our modern Bible are not inspired by God: they are just a handy way of referring to the text. In fact, in many cases they don't do justice to the flow of thought. (Stephanus' son reported that his father made up the NT verse divisions on horseback, during a ride from Paris to Lyons. Many readers of the NT would find this quite believable!)

What then shall we make of the remarkable 'coincidences' contained in the above paragraphs? Are they significant? Do they make Psalm 118:8 a 'special' verse in the Bible, more important than others?


Today, in my regular Bible reading, also by 'coincidence' I was reading the account in 2 Kings 8:1-6. It recounts that Elisha had told the woman whose child he had raised from the dead, to go away during the seven year drought that was about to come on Israel. At the end of this time, she returned with her child to beg the king to restore her land to her. Now, it "just so happened" that at that very moment, Elisha's servant Gehazi was there, telling the king about how Elisha had restored life to the dead! And this woman walked in. A truly remarkable coincidence? Well, yes it was...

God's Word tells us that God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph.1.11). Nothing falls outside his plan, including the many unusual 'coincidences' that spice up our lives. We should not think of coincidences as 'chance' events, as if 'Lady Luck' rules supreme. God orders all things in accordance with his perfect plan and purpose. That includes the remarkable coincidences concerning Psalm 118.

When such unusual things happen in Gods providence, they should indeed make us pay attention, but they cannot serve to guide us as the Word of God does. They are part of the "spice of life," but you don't depend on spice

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Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden". Christians can only be salt and light to the world as they demonstrate a consistent world and life view. Because secular humanism and other worldviews are rampant in our culture as the west has turned away from God, Christians have imbibed secular thinking through the education system, the media, music and films, and they are not even aware of it.

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for sustenance. Coincidences have no intrinsic authority to require our obedience — they're just part of the grand fabric of experience that should lead us to glorify God in everything.

Christians should never speak as if

they believe in 'luck' or 'chance,' as if what happens is random. We know that God is in control, and that's why we can rest in the wonderful promise of his Word, that "in all things God works for the good of those who love

him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom.8.28).

This article originally appeared in 'The Presbyterian Banner', with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement.

A feminine focus

The feminine virtue of piety

Sally Davey

Piety is a rather old-fashioned word. In fact, it has bad connotations for many modern people. Related as it is, to "pious", it sounds a bit like spiritual self-righteousness. Well, to eighteenth and nineteenth century (and earlier) minds, this was not so. Piety was nearer to our own expression, "godliness". So that is what I have in mind as I try to explain and apply this feminine virtue to our own age.

How it was understood

Piety was understood in a number of ways by the nineteenth century writers on feminine virtue. Usually it depended on their theological starting point. There were some writers who, because of their high church leanings, stressed frequent attendance at church services (especially at communion), and the importance of beauty in both liturgy and church decoration. They often emphasised the corporate rather than the personal aspects of the Christian life. Such writers, though less biblically driven, spoke much of the spiritual impact of women's example in family, church and society. However, it is the evangelicals of the nineteenth century that give us the better model for godliness of character in women. Their focus was a woman's inner walk with God and the outworking of her faith in works of love and mercy. So they discussed such things as Bible reading, meditation, prayer, sharing the gospel and trusting God through trials and temptation. Both groups of writers, however, saw piety as the basic virtue from which all the other virtues were derived. They also surveyed the state of their society, identifying points at which womanhood in their day fell short of what was necessary, and attempting to show how godliness should look in their own day, age and culture. We shall do the same.

Piety in Scripture

But let us start where evangelical writers did:

with biblical passages that deal with piety, or godliness, in women. Perhaps we should begin with Proverbs 31, where we find the most extensive discussion of womanhood in Scripture. Coming at the end of King Lemuel's long description of the worthy woman's qualities and activities is a summary statement of all he has said: "*Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.*" (v.30). Here are contrasted two things. First, that which women throughout the centuries and in every culture have yearned for and been admired for—personal charm and physical beauty. But in comparison with the second attribute, devotion to God, these externals are simply empty—and as we all know, they do not last! The secret of this more excellent woman is that she loves and honours God. When we read Proverbs 31 we are generally preoccupied by the impressive list of everything that keeps this worthy woman busy. But it is her personal godliness that leads her to do it all; and gives her such love-inspired, useful priorities.

Piety is a defining feature

Several passages in Paul's pastoral epistles also show how piety in women is a defining feature of their actions. To Titus he wrote that older women, in teaching younger women by their example, should "*be reverent in their behaviour*" (most versions) or, as the King James Version helpfully puts it, "*that they be in behaviour as becometh godliness.*" In other words, women should live in a way that accords with the faith they profess. Unruly, coarse behaviour, for instance, simply doesn't go together with a claim to be a Christian. It isn't becoming. I like the application Matthew Henry makes from this command. He writes that older women are to live becomingly, "as beseems and is proper for holy persons, such as they profess to be and should be, keeping a pious decency and decorum in clothing and gesture, in looks and in speech, and all their

deportment, and this from inward principle and habit of holiness, influencing and ordering the outward conduct at all times." Do you know what a spiritual "decency and decorum" in dress, demeanour and speech should look like today? We will consider this together in subsequent articles on the other virtues.

Paul says the same thing to Timothy when he contrasts the improper adornment of women (expensive jewelry and elaborate hairdos) with the proper, which is "*good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.*" (1 Tim. 2:10) Godliness in our inner parts will shine forth in a life characterised by acts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. Such acts match the faith that we say we hold to, perfectly. If we live like this everybody will see it, and glorify God for it. That is our purpose in this life.

A deep and sincere consciousness of sin

Well, how do we develop godliness as an attitude of heart; as a feminine virtue? What will it be like? There are several ways people have helpfully described piety. One could turn first to Jonathan Edwards, a minister living in New England in the mid-eighteenth century. In a series of sermons that became his most famous book, *Religious Affections*, Edwards outlined a number of distinguishing marks of a true Christian. You could say that they are signs of godliness in a person; they help describe what a Christian should look like. These include, firstly, a deep and sincere consciousness of sin — which should be found in anyone who has been truly convicted by what the Scriptures teach of God's holiness. Such a person is truly ashamed of how little they know of such holiness, how deeply selfish, proud, angry, covetous and greedy she is in her inner motivations; and how much she is in need of a Saviour. Are you conscious of the depths of your sin?

Christlikeness

A second mark of godliness is what Edwards calls Christlikeness; a quality that resembles Christ's personal traits of love, meekness and quietness. Are our hearts turned in love to God and others – or to ourselves? Are we humble and gentle; and do we think lowly of ourselves and highly of other people? Or are we rather full of ourselves, arrogant, assertive and bossy?

Symmetry and proportion

A third mark Edwards identifies is "symmetry and proportion." By that he means that a wide range of Christian graces is found in a person. For instance, we don't just exhibit those qualities that are natural to our personality type. We need to be self-controlled as well as warm and friendly; we should show patience as well as zeal; we should have courage no less than gentleness, and so on.

Striving for maturity

Another telling mark of a true Christian, one wanting to become really godly, is that she strives for maturity – yet the more mature she becomes, the more she longs for a deeper walk with God. As Edwards puts it (and I feminise his pronouns), "The more a true saint loves God with a gracious love, the more she desires to love him, and the more uneasy she is at her want [lack] of love to him: the more she hates sin, the more she desires to hate it, and laments that she has so much remaining love to it... the more she thirsts and longs after God and holiness, the more she longs to long, and breathe out her very soul in longings after God..." Is that a description of you? It grieves me to read it when I survey my own heart – but it also makes me long to be more like that. It is a true description of piety.

Other descriptions

Other more recent writers have given us specifically feminine descriptions of godliness. May I commend two of them to you? They have been mentioned before in the pages of this magazine; but they deserve it! Elizabeth George, in *A Woman After God's Own Heart*, gives a very compelling and motivating picture of godliness as it may be lived out by women these days. I love this book. On the frequent occasions when I need straightening out, or re-motivation for disciplined, ordered living, I re-read it. Elizabeth shows how we can order our days to pray, study our Bibles, and create a home life that serves those God has placed nearest to us in our lives. You could say she gives a

practical, do-able picture of how to carry out the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life for women, in their homes, in the twenty-first century. The other writer, Carolyn Custis James, urges women to pursue godliness in the way Mary of Bethany did when she sat at Jesus' feet. Her book, *When Life and Beliefs Collide*, is a plea for women to study the character of God, to build their knowledge of Him and His ways – not only so that we become more like Him in our hearts, but also *so that we serve Him more faithfully in practical, everyday ways*. It is a great book. Godliness, as I mentioned before, is both a



state of the heart *and* a quality that works itself out in tangible, loving, others-centred actions.

Godly womanhood down under

Well, my intention in these studies of feminine virtues is to try to make these ideas real to us here, in New Zealand, today. How godly are New Zealand women, when seen by the standards of King Lemuel, or Paul? And how might godly womanhood look if it were practised well by us?

It is clear we are a godless society. There is no denying that. Evidence abounds, and is mounting by the day, of the kinds of evil behaviour Paul tells Timothy will come in the "difficult times" of the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-9). There is arrogance, revelry, disobedience to parents, malicious gossip and love of pleasure in abundance, wherever

we turn. Paul could have been specifically describing the women of our world – and, in a very real sense, he was. But we must not respond to this in any of several wrong ways. One is to throw up our hands in horror at this "wicked world" and despair of New Zealand society, or its women, ever turning aside from its suicidal course. Another is to assume government action or legislation will do the trick. Ending legal abortion won't do it; neither will abolishing the DPB or giving tax breaks to families with stay-at-home mothers. No, the problem is that we live in a Romans 1 kind of world – the only kind of world there has ever been since the Fall. The reason we are surrounded by every species of female godlessness is because women's hearts, and minds, are blinded by sin. New Zealand women, like all women descended from Eve, suppress the truth in unrighteousness; and unless someone brings them the good news of the gospel, and God gives them grace to believe it, they will continue to rage against Him in ever-increasing depths of sinful thinking and behaviour. It is impossible to become godly without the grace of God; and we, who have been shown such mercy and goodness by God, simply cannot turn our backs on the women around us. We must show them the gospel, and bring Christ to them.

An unchanging Christian?

But what about the evangelical church in New Zealand? Is it characterised by the feminine virtue of piety? Sadly, not as it should be. Why do I think this? Because we see so many women who profess Christian faith but who seem to lack the life-changing passion that glorifying God and enjoying Him forever must surely imply. Women who seek to love the Lord their God with all their hearts and minds and strength will long to know this God better. But do Christian women in our country choose to study God seriously? What kinds of topics fill the programmes of most women's conferences or retreats? What do women find attractive as Bible studies, as subjects for women's fellowship evenings? Usually not the subject of God Himself, because this subject is too taxing, too dry – and generally too boring. What seems to excite Christian women is themselves; and hence we find the subject of the day will usually be how to cope with this or that practical situation, how to manage your relationships with husbands and children, and how to feel more comfortable with life and with yourself. The trouble is, such a trend

finds secular psychology more inspirational than Scripture. So we begin to deal with life therapeutically rather than theologically, excusing ourselves and blaming others for our difficulties and shortcomings. We underestimate our sin and overvalue our worth. We lose sight of God as He has revealed Himself to us, and end up with a god of our own making.

Wise in their own eyes

As a result (and such trends do have consequences) I find women everywhere in Christian circles in New Zealand have become wise in their own eyes. About fourteen years ago I had a vividly-memorable conversation with a fellow Christian school teacher over the photocopier. She was telling me of her plans to leave teaching to study for the ministry the following year. I asked her what she thought of the passages in the New Testament instructing that women should not teach men or lead in the church. She was incredulous; and assured me that a proper reading of the epistles (she had been absorbing the "evangelical feminists") showed that women today are not bound by what Paul wrote in and for his own context. Now, this friend was part of an evangelical church, and I'm assuming she's now a pastor of such a church. Many, many women are – just look at the church notices in your local newspaper some time. Sadly, disbelief in and disobedience to God's Word in one area often leads to disbelief and disobedience in others. We are fast heading towards a new era of liberalism. Will we lose our knowledge of the essentials of the gospel even? It has happened over and over before in church history.

The lack of discipline

This is not all. Most basically, I believe, we lack the discipline that will help develop true godliness. I know this to be dreadfully true of myself; and am aware that in more faithful times of the history of the church, it has been the steady practice of the spiritual disciplines that produced godly character in both men and women. It is not for nothing that for centuries Christians have taught that we should meet with God in private, on our own, to study His Word and to pray. Sometimes this is called a "quiet time" – in other times and places it has been referred to as meeting with God "in your closet." But do many of us really do this regularly, let alone every day? I have more opportunity to do this more easily than many, and yet it is the easiest thing in the world to let days go by without either praying or reading. And soon the sloppy, slothful decline into sinful, God-dishonouring thoughts and habits begins. I worry, I resent, I envy, I become discontented. I am honestly convinced that unless we become more serious about these disciplines, we will never

have much effect as Christians in our families, our churches or our society.

Some glimpses

But it is possible, of course possible by the grace of God, to be a godly woman in New Zealand these days. I know some well. May I close by describing aspects of these friends' lives, to give some hope-inspiring glimpses of feminine piety? (I will not name them, and probably you will not know them). The first was a single lady, now gone to her heavenly rest. She truly did practise the spiritual disciplines: her face would often glow with the effects of her times with God. She studied both God's Word and books that taught about Him. In fact, she had studied theology overseas for several years to improve her knowledge of Him. She was also a great lover of people – children and elderly people alike. She often taught women and children at Bible conferences – she loved nothing better than passing on her knowledge of the Scriptures, and making application for them. Her women's Bible studies were the result of her own quiet exposition at home in the evenings. But she also, frequently, did more humble tasks at church camps – cooking was her forte, and she used the opportunity to disciple those helping her. I am truly amazed at the huge web of influence for good this lady has had over a wide range of Christian people in New Zealand; and yet for most of her life she lived in small, rural communities. Glory be to God.

Hospitality personified

My second friend is a faithful wife and mother, who, to me, is hospitality personified. I first got to know her when I was newly-arrived back in New Zealand after some years away for study. I didn't know many Christians, was unsure of where my future was headed, and somewhat lonely. It was the year I was finishing my thesis, and almost every afternoon I went for a walk to clear my head of the fog of writing. My friend lived near the university then, and was at home with two very small children. But she never minded my dropping in and was always, unflinching, ready to chat about anything. She and her husband were true friends, and set me a good example of useful, purposeful, discipling friendship. They have always been this way, and I don't know how many hundreds have been welcomed into their home for meals, talks, Bible study and solid advice. My friend is not an academic, but is a most faithful follower of Christ, and uses the gift of a discerning mind to pass on the fruits of her own bible study and wide reading. I love her!

They rise up and call her blessed

My third friend is a lady of exquisite feminine taste: she uses words like pearls, and I have

few greater pleasures than a good talk with her. But life has not been easy for her. She has moved frequently, in difficult circumstances; and for much of her life as a Christian did not have a believing husband. But she has moved house dutifully and cheerfully, setting up her household time after time, in the most attractive way imaginable. It is a delight to visit her in her home, to drink tea, and to talk about our walk with Christ. She does all kinds of things: she teaches Bible in schools, leads women's Bible studies, and works part time as a nurse. She has brought up her three children to love the Lord with vigour, zest and infectious spontaneity. Her faithful example, through thick and thin, has inspired them; and in truth, "they rise up, and call her blessed." (Proverbs 31:28)

Remember, it is the woman who *fears the Lord* who is able to do — and to be — all these things.

Code Blue

Christian
Worldview
Conference

Living a Christian
Worldview in a
Postmodern World

January 18th to 21st
2005

Willow Park Convention Centre
Bucklands Beach, Auckland

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

We congratulate Carl & Dawn, Harry and Sarah Storm on the safe arrival of a baby son and brother, Jack Carl (7lbs), who was born on Thursday night. Praise God for His goodness!

Congregational Soup Night: Tickets are now on sale. Please see one of the Women's Fellowship committee to purchase tickets. Date: Saturday 4 September, 6pm. Venue: Church Hall. Cost: Adult \$4, Child (5-15yr) \$2, Child (under 5) free, Family \$12. Please bring a slice for dessert. We are also looking for soup makers to bring a soup for the night. Please see Ann or Nikki Hunt or Sharon Jefferies if you can help.

Bishopdale

Calling Committee: The visit of the Rev. John and Sallee de Hoog from the Christian Reformed Church in Canberra, Australia has been confirmed for Wednesday 15th September to Monday 20th September. Rev. de Hoog will take both services on the 19th. There will be a congregational meeting on Thursday 16th to give you an opportunity to meet them. If you have any questions that you would like to ask please give them in writing to Jos Bosma or Fred Braam.

The vicariate that we applied for has been successful. Robert & Laurel van Wichen and their seven children will be arriving early next year. As a session we are excited about this opportunity that we have been given. Please pray that this will be a blessing for all concerned.

Congratulations to Andrew and Lydia Nugteren on the birth of their third child, Kenric Paul. For those who do not know, Andrew is training for the ministry at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. The Nugterens are members of our congregation.

Buckland's Beach

Evening worship service times. Session again discussed the time for the evening service.

As notified previously, a proposal that the evening services commence one hour earlier—namely 6.00p.m.—has been considered. Reactions, such as they have been, were positive. Reasons for moving the service to 6.00p.m. have focussed on the children and young people. Family participation becomes easier at this earlier time. More important, session is very much concerned to encourage growth and fellowship among the young people of the church. One way to do this is to encourage regular times for meeting and fellowship—and one of the better times is Sunday evening! The North Shore model (a 6.00p.m. service followed by a young people's fellowship time) has been working well there and is a blessing! Session has therefore agreed to change the evening worship service time to 6.00p.m. - commencing on Sunday, 3rd October. It is very much our hope and prayer that this change will be helpful in maintaining and strengthening the life of our congregation.

Christchurch

Cadets And Calvinettes. On Saturday 25 September we will be having the Cornwall Street Derby — a cart race using carts the children have been making on Monday evenings. We will also be having a sausage sizzle to raise funds for our mission project — the New Life Orphanage in M'bale.

South Island Ladies Presbyterial 10-12 September 2004 — Reformed Church of Christchurch — Cornwall Street. An invitation is extended to all ladies — from young ladies in Year 9 (Form 3) to age 99, including all those in between, to attend this year's Presbyterial. To allow us to spend a little more time getting to know one another, we have planned a programme beginning on Friday evening at 7.30pm called Prayer. Praise and Punch. You will be able to collect your registration pack and enjoy a great time of fellowship together. Our Saturday programme begins at 9.00a.m. and will finish at around 3.30p.m. Please encourage one another to attend this once-a-year event. Our theme this year is *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*. The life of women today isn't really that different from that of Mary and Martha in the New Testament. Like Mary you long to sit at Jesus feet...but the daily demands of a busy world just won't leave you alone. Like Martha, you love Jesus and really want to serve Him...yet you struggle with life's demands often leaving you tired, resentful and feeling inadequate. Then comes Jesus, right into the midst of your busy Mary/Martha life — and He extends

the same invitation he issued long ago to the two sisters in Bethany. He invites you to choose 'the better part' — a joyful life of 'fellowship' with Him that flows naturally into 'service' for Him. Come and hear how you too can choose 'the better part' and how this will affect how you live your life for Him. Come and share in the fellowship of other Christian women and learn from each others experiences of how to spend more time at Jesus feet. For more information please contact Sarah Van Leeuwen, 338-1648.

Dovedale

Tertiary Students' Meeting: Thank you all who have come to the earlier meetings. The next meeting will be the last for this year. God willing, it will be held on Thursday, 9 September 2004, from 7:30 - 10:00 p.m. at 27 Reading Street, Upper Riccarton. Mr. Don Capill will be speaking on a vital topic often considered very controversial today: "*Gender Differences and Roles*". All tertiary students of the Reformed Churches are warmly invited to attend. Please mark it on your calendar. For further information please contact Mr. Don Capill or Neville Watson.

Ladies' Reading Group: Following Andy Vosslamber's presentation on the "Women and Theology" reading group in the Hastings church, a number of you have said that you are keen to join in reading and discussion for our mutual encouragement and accountability. Any other ladies who couldn't make it on the evening of the 13th are welcome to join us. We will begin by reading Carolyn Custis James's book, *When Life and Beliefs Collide*. Each person will need their own copy of the book, and I can order copies for anyone who doesn't have one. (They should be about \$20-22). Please let me know if you would like one. I will be ordering from Koorong early this week (that is, in the next couple of days). Please see me if you'd like more information on what we plan to do. We'll get together approximately two-monthly, and we'll have help on to how to read and glean the main points of books. We'll have plenty of discussion on the meaning, use and applications of the ideas in the books! — **Sally Davey**.

Dunedin

Last months brain teasers. 1. Reinier Noppers, 2. John Goris, 3. Hans Vaatstra, 4. Bill Wiersma, 5. Bruce Hoyt, 6. Paul Archbald, 7. Jan Lion-Cachet, 8. John Rogers, 9. Sjikr Bajema, 10. Gary Milne, 11. John Zuidema, 12. Jim Klazinga, 13. Dirk vanGarderen, 14. John ter Horst, 15. John Haverland, 16. Michael Flinn, 17. Chris

Kavanagh, 18. Ralph Adams, 19. Leo de Vos.

Letter from a Former Pastor. Dear friends, brothers and sisters in Christ. Over the years it was always a joy to receive ROC and read about the various things that were going on in your midst. I have also noted that there are more and more names on your roll which are unfamiliar to me. But then it is 46 years since I came to New Zealand and Dunedin. It is a joy to see the Lord's blessings on your church and that you with your pastor are seeking to be a faithful flock of the Lord Jesus Christ. I read with interest the passing of Sieger Wieringa and recognise the loss to your churches of the home coming of Tony de Reus. I recall my visit to that home with Rev. Boelens, and especially the opportunity I had to be at that home to introduce them to the Rev. Pellicaan. In my short acquaintance with that brother I sensed he was a child of God. May the words of Revelation 14:13 be of comfort to his loved ones and to you all. With love and best wishes. **Richard Venema**

Lunch and Learn. There will be a lunch and learn meeting on Monday 20 September at 12 midday in the church hall. The video screening will be the sixth in a series of seven on prayer—speaker Don Carson. Bring Bible and lunch—tea and coffee will be provided. **Ladies' Fellowship.**

Foxton

Cadet & Calvinette Trivia Evening. The congregation is invited to attend a Trivia Pursuit evening as a fund-raiser for the Cadet Mission badge on the 14th September in the church lounge. Please mark your calendars and join us for a fun night. It starts at 7:00 pm.

Hamilton

We rejoice with John and Itty Regnier who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this coming Wednesday, the 15th .

Ben MacDonald and Maria van der Wel have signified their desire to be united in marriage in the Reformed Church of Hamilton. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on Saturday 2nd October 2004.

Hukanui

Wedding Banns: Logan Hagoort and Josie Bodle have indicated their desire to be united in marriage before the Lord and His people. Lord willing, the celebration of this event will take place on Saturday 11th September at 1:00pm here at the Hukanui church.

A Men's Study Day for the Auckland Presbytery will be held from 9a.m. - 3p.m. on Saturday 30th October 2004 at the Pukekohe Reformed Church. Mr. Andrew

Young will give three addresses on the topic: "*Revitalising The Church*". These will be stimulating talks and there will be plenty of time for discussion and fellowship. All the men of the RCNZ churches of the Auckland presbytery are warmly invited — young and old. We hope to see a good number attend. Please mark this in your diaries and plan to come.

Hastings

Combined Bible Studies. This Tuesday we begin another series of 4 combined Bible studies. The first two will be on the topic "*Israel: Past, Present and Future.*" Why all the interest in a little nation in the mid-east? What is the history behind it? Does the present nation of Israel have a Biblical claim to the land on which they now live? Are the citizens of the present nation of Israel the true seed of Abraham? Can we identify the "Jews" of Scripture with the "Jews" of today? Should Christians support Israel? Bring your questions and your Bibles and I will seek to give some answers.

Quiz Night – Saturday 4th September. In your pigeon holes there is a notice about the Quiz Night organised by the Social Committee.

This night will be a night of fun and enjoyment so make sure you don't miss out. Please place your forms in the social Committee's pigeon hole.

Congregation Meeting. At the congregational meeting last Tuesday it was decided to give approval to the session to negotiate for the purchase of the 907 Florence St. property. The vote, including proxy votes, was without dissent (i.e. no negative votes). It was also agreed that a careful evaluation of the house would be made by Arie van Seventer before purchase. We will keep the congregation informed as to the outcome of the negotiations as soon as possible.

Masterton

Update on the Tuinstra's visit. Rev. and Mrs. Tuinstra along with two of their children will be coming to visit us in a few weeks. Lord willing, they will arrive on Thursday 2 September and will stay for about two weeks, with Rev Tuinstra preaching on two Sundays. We thank the Lord for enabling them to be able and willing to come so soon. During this time he will also have a colloquium doctum by a presbytery committee to ascertain his doctrinal soundness.

Student news from Geelong

Hello. My name is Judith van Trigt and I am studying at the RTC in Geelong. My home congregation is Avondale. I came to the RTC at the beginning of 2002. I am now in the second year of a Bachelor of Theology and have roughly two more years to go.

My motivation to study at the RTC was fairly simple. As a new Christian, I thought I would be more useful to God if I knew Him better. I wanted to put a decent chunk of time into learning what the Bible says. God has blessed me with the opportunity to do that at the RTC.

Prior to coming to Geelong I worked in television, writing stories and scripts for soaps and serial drama. I have a degree in Women's Studies. I am a registered nurse and, these days, work part-time at a large retirement village here in Geelong. I have a passion for the arts, movies, and popular culture in general. I have no specific plans as to what I will do when I finish my studies, but I know that God will put what I am learning to good use.

While remaining a member of the Avondale congregation, I worship at South Barwon Christian Reformed Church. It is a small congregation (boosted by a significant number of NZers!) which meets at the RTC.

Things I miss about New Zealand: my parents, the hills, green things, and the absence of critters that bite to kill. But there are many wonderful things in Australia too...

Please pray for the RTC — for the staff, students and prospective students!
God's peace to you all,



Judith van Trigt

Judith

North Shore

Auckland Presbytery seniors' morning. On Tuesday, the 5th of October, 2004, at 10 a.m., we hope to have a seniors' coffee morning in our church at Mangere. All of the senior members of our churches in the Auckland Presbytery are warmly invited to join us. To help with catering could you let Rev. Bajema know if you are coming — phone (09) 277 9360.

Andrew Flinn and Sarah Ludgate will be married this coming Saturday in Rotorua at 3 p.m. by Andrew's uncle, Rev. Michael Flinn. We wish Andrew and Sarah the Lord's richest blessings on their future together.

Palmerston North

Social evening. A fun evening of food and games is in the planning for Friday September 17. Please keep this date free: it'll be a great evening of getting to know each other a little better. More details will follow in future bulletins. Heleen, Bep and Rachel.

Congratulations to Bart and Alison van der Wee on the birth of their son, Joshua Bart (7lb 5oz -3300g) on 23 August. We pray that

our Lord and Saviour will grant you wisdom as you raise your two boys for Him.

Social evening (Wanganui). The Social Evening is this Friday, 17th September, at 6.30p.m. at the Pavilion in Castlecliff. We'll be having a bring-and-share dinner so could each family please bring a main and something for supper. Get your brains into gear because we'll be having a Trivia night! Hope to see you all there at 6.30pm sharp.

Pukekohe

The ministers of the churches in Pukekohe by turn lead the prayer at the beginning of the meetings of the Franklin Council on Thursdays. This week I will be taking my turn for this responsibility and privilege.

Men's Study Group: A Men's Study Group will meet for the first time at the church from 7:30 – 9:00pm this Thursday 2 September. John Haverland will present a study on "A Man and His Family". All the men in the church are invited to attend — young and old. All of us are either fathers or sons and some of us are both, so this will be a subject of interest to all of us — and ties in well with Father's Day a few days later. The session

wants to see regular meetings such as these to help equip men to be leaders in our marriages, homes, church and in society.

Wainuiomata

We give thanks to God for the safe arrival last week Saturday (4th) of Harry McGhee Rogers, a son for Andy and Tash. He weighed 6lb 11oz and is now taking over life at home (as all babies do!). Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Family Entertainment Evening. Just another reminder that this will now be held a fortnight later, which is the 16th of October, due to busyness with phone book deliveries. Please amend your calendars accordingly and we'll keep you posted. Any queries — see Wynne or Wilma.

Cadet & Calvinette Bike Ride. Everyone (old and young) is invited to join the Cadets & Calvinettes on a bike ride next Saturday (4th September) at the Rimutaka Incline Track. This is a scenic track and not too strenuous, so dust off your bikes and let Caroline de Vries know if you will be coming so she can arrange for transport of the bikes to the beginning of the track. Please meet at the church at 10.00 a.m. with your bike and a packed lunch.

Wellington

Welcome to the most junior member of the household of this church! Her name is Lucy, daughter to David and Angela Holtslag. She was born last Sunday night. All is very well: Thanks be to God! Congratulations to her parents, and welcome Lucy!

Congratulations to Craig and Shelley on the arrival of their son, Jonty Alexander! (And can you imagine Emily fussing over her little brother?). Everything went so well, and we praise the Lord for a good delivery on Wednesday, 1st September!

IN TOUCH

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

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

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

If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ15 (or \$AU15), with your details, to the **National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven, Upper Hutt.** (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)



CHRISTCHURCH PRESBYTERY

The Christchurch Presbytery met at the Reformed Church on Cornwall Street on 17 July 2004. Rev. Ralph Adams opened the meeting with a reading and devotion from 2 Corinthians 2:12-16, and also chaired the meeting.

Delegates were present from the Bishopdale, Christchurch, Dovedale, Dunedin and Nelson congregations.

Rev. Hans Vaatstra will take over from Rev. John Haverland on the National Publications Committee (NPC) and gave an update on their activities. The Forms and

Confessions Books are in short supply, and another print run of these books will be considered. It was noted that the document is available from Rev. Bruce Hoyt on compact disc.

The representatives from Bishopdale, Dovedale and Nelson responded to questions from Article 47, which deals with the functioning of session, Church discipline, Christian education and mission work. Matters of praise, thanksgiving and needs were also brought before the meeting.

Bishopdale reported that the period of ministry of Rev. Bob Brenton was greatly appreciated by the congregation while the session seeks a new minister. Eight people had recently professed their faith and two people were currently involved with mission work overseas.

Nelson reported that the congregation was generally in good heart, united and faithful in good attendance at the worship services. The recent family camp was also a success. There was some difficulty in finding suitable office bearers, and funding the church building budget continues to be a concern. The Church Extension Committee is assisting.

Dovedale reported that two young people have been on an overseas mission trip and another was leaving to assist with teaching in a school in Sudan. Dovedale was committing financial support for the work in Papua New Guinea. The Dovedale congregation had also recently purchased the church building in Shands Road, where they currently worshipping, from the Brethren.

Minutes of the Australian Classis were

received and the main items were highlighted.

A number of vicars are coming available. Robert van Wichen is seeking a place next year, in 2005.

The OMB meet in was held on 7 May. It was reported that the Hagoort's van Goorts mission work is going well. The OMB is also setting aside funds for short term mission work

The Christchurch delegates sought the advice of Presbytery on a matter, and a brief discussion was held.

After a time of prayer of thanks and petition, the delegates enjoyed a delicious lunch prepared by ladies from Christchurch.

Reporter: Gary Haverland.

Wellington holds "Work as Worship" seminar

More than 60 people attended Wellington's Mentoring and Discipling Team's 'Work as Worship' seminar on July 31. The Lord safely guided people from as far away as Auckland to Wellington Reformed Church for the Saturday afternoon.

The seminar focused on life goals and objectives and the importance of keeping them in tune with God's will. The issue of being a Christian in the workplace was emphasised, as well as the need for mentoring and discipling within the church.

Steve Sterne flew up from Christchurch to run the proceedings, and hopes the discussions will have served as a catalyst

for the development of a wide spread mentoring and discipling system. He said, "I hope it will help provide a platform and expectation in people that will allow the work to proceed."

Positive feedback continues to flow in to the Mentoring and Discipling Team from both those who attended.

'A vote of thanks for the M&D conference. We had 6 younguns fair buzzin' saying it was the best seminar they had been to because it was so interactive and applicable to their lives,' wrote a parent from Wainuiomata Reformed Church.

The Mentoring and Discipling Team would like to thank all those who attended the seminar and hope that others will also take the initiative in developing the Reformed Church into one healthy body of believers. More seminars of this nature are expected in the future. For any inquiries regarding the Mentoring and Discipling Team please contact Tim Sterne – tim.sterne@gmail.com.



Mission in focus

Janice Reid

Cambodia's Christians: a reflection

A mature Cambodian Christian looked across the room to where a younger Christian couple were sitting. The mature Christian leaned over and whispered in his friend's ear, "If I wasn't a Christian, I would have them done away with." He was deadly serious, but in the end he didn't have the young couple killed: he had them fired, after making false claims that they were stealing money from the mission organisation he and they both worked for.

You might wonder how somebody like this could possibly be called a Christian, or could possibly get (and keep!) a job with a mission organisation. Problem is, Cambodians are good at creating impressions; good at making westerners think they are genuine, mature believers. At least, the older ones are.

Under the Khmer Rouge (KR), the strict communist regime that ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, a Cambodian had to lie, cheat and steal to stay alive. Pol Pot's henchmen emptied the entire capital city without warning—forcing the population to take to the roads and find a place to stay in the country. Thousands died on the roadside

from starvation and disease; more died in relocation camps or as a result of the unimaginable tortures inflicted on them at Khmer Rouge prisons. You may remember the stories we all heard back in the 1970s, about Cambodian boat people? They were the lucky ones: the ones that escaped torture in the notorious S21, Pol Pot's main prison in Phnom Penh. It used to be a high-school, but by the end of the KR regime, 17,000 people had been tortured to death. Only 7 survived.

During the KR era, a Cambodian would be labelled as an intellectual even for something as simple as wearing eye-glasses...and having that label was enough to get him killed. If he had worked for the Lon Nol government (which was notoriously corrupt and fell to Pol Pot's army in 1975) he would be hunted and eventually found—even if he was living in a remote village, doing menial labour, posing as an uneducated man. The usual consequence of discovery was to have one's head beaten in with a hammer—it saved bullets.

Maybe you're thinking: but that evil regime was defeated 25 years ago; what does it have to do with the state of Christianity in Cambodia today? The answer is that the KR, plus the subsequent decade of communist rule (under the Vietnamese) has had a lasting effect on the whole nation. It is estimated that 60% of Cambodians over the age of 30 need psychological counselling to help them recover from the traumatic memories of the KR years. But how few counsellors are here!

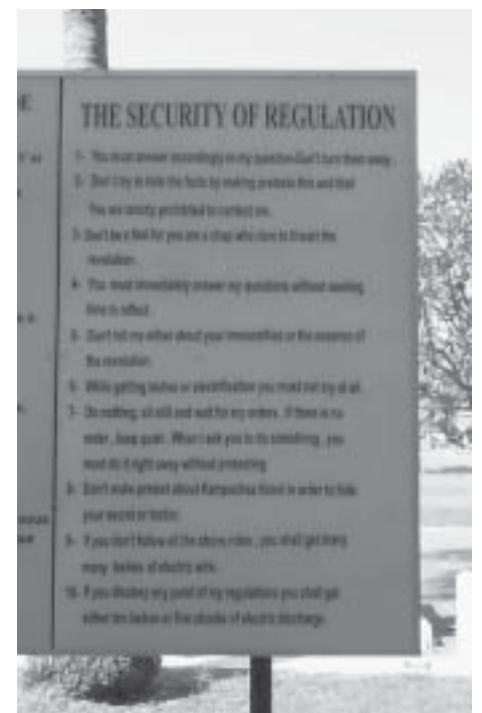
And how little is being done along these lines, to promote healing and restoration in the lives that have been so damaged by this nation's greatest shame.

This is not a claim that it's okay for Christians to go around plotting murders! It is, however, an observation that Christianity in Cambodia faces huge challenges, as missionaries and relief workers seek to bring help and healing to those most damaged by the country's past.

For example,

I've heard many stories, in the year gone by, about the problem of "rice Christians." This term describes people who will come along to a Christian organisation and get handouts of rice, clothing, medical assistance—and in return, will appear (on the face of it) to be very open to the message of the Gospel. In actual fact, they are far from belonging to the Lord; their answers are a simple formula to convince the organisation that they should keep giving rice, keep giving aid.

In a comfortable, well-to-do country like New Zealand, it's easy to think these "rice Christians" are nasty and shallow, tickling the ears of aid workers so they can obtain material benefit. And at base, that's true. But Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the world. During the years of its grim past, people have had no choice but to lie, in order to survive. Self-protectionism is so built into them after all this time, that it comes naturally. And communist or not, starvation is still a grim reality to all too many people





in Cambodia: 50% of children are malnourished.

In this brief article I can offer no solutions. But I will make a request: please pray for Cambodia. Pray for its people who are so steeped in ignorance and painful memories. Pray for missionaries and aid workers to have wisdom from God, so that they would understand how to help in practical ways and yet clearly explain the difference between sham conformity, and a true and living faith which is the only way of salvation for Cambodians—and for us. And pray that more workers would be raised up to serve in this ever-so-ripe harvest field. Cambodia needs your prayers...and your presence.

MIF prayer notes

Walter and Jeannette Hagoort will be busy both at Mapang and with the Reformed churches as the Christmas season approaches. Pray for health and strength, and for a productive time in the lead-up to their return to New Zealand for deputation and a short break (mid-December).

Janice Reid is back in Cambodia for a second year, and will be teaching another group of radio announcers this month—this time in Khmer (with the help of an interpreter). Pray for an effective workshop, and that announcers would be helped in their ministries in a practical way through this training. Please also pray for opportunities for Janice to help out with local Christian radio so that she can see, over the long term, how announcers use the things they learn in the RTS workshops.

Jared Berends and **Heidi Posthuma** continue to teach English in their respective countries; please pray for safety, good health, and rapid settling into their towns and communities. Pray for effective communication and good friendships that lead to conversations about the Lord.

Hayden Bosgra is now living in his assigned town in Ecuador. Pray that he would be able to develop good relationships with other Christians, and that his confidence in Spanish would quickly grow, so that he can share the Good News with local people and be of help to the church.

Kevin and Machi Rietveld give thanks for the Lord's continued work in the Solomon Islands. By His grace, Kevin has recently run a pastors' workshop, while Machi held a sewing skills class for ladies from a local church. Two young women from the Reformed Churches of Australia are in the Solomons, doing a ten-week occupational therapy placement with a local hospital; pray for positive outcomes from their visit.





Family Camp

The 2004-2005 Family camp will run from 27 December to 1 January. This is a short camp running from Monday to Saturday).

Registration forms coming to churches soon. Any questions or early cabin bookings (for special needs only at this stage) to dirk@familynet.nz

Home mission in focus

Church centred instead of God centred?

Some concerns about modern church growth literature

There is a lot of literature around today that promotes the idea of church growth. You may have read some of it as I have. While we should be thankful for those who genuinely seek to promote the Great Commission, my concern is that the methods put forward in much modern Church Growth literature may lead people into churches for the wrong reasons. For example, people may end up in a church because they like it better than the one they left or because they get more of a 'buzz' out

of being in a large church with a professional entertainers out front. In other words, a lot of current church growth literature is going to produce churches filled with people who are there because their personal preferences are entertained rather than out of commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. What follows is an identification of problems in modern church growth literature which has contributed to a man or church centered rather than a God-centered approach to church growth.

Reason over revelation

Much of what is written in the church growth movement arises out of personal experience in adopting certain methods which have produced numerical growth. For example Rick Warren of the Saddleback Valley Community Church, California says that Saddleback was the 'laboratory' for everything written in the book. From the outset, Warren endeavored to provide a service where people could bring unsaved friends without embarrassment and where everything done in the service was

culturally sensitive. To achieve some of these aims Warren would ask prospective members what their likes and dislikes regarding music in the worship service were and whether or not these folk preferred a formal and traditional or informal and contemporary style of worship. He regards as myth the idea that if as a church leader you are dedicated enough, pray often, stay doctrinally pure and faithfully preach the word your church will grow. Skill is needed to bring about church growth. Such skill is gained through knowing the culture in which your church exists and then accommodating that culture as much as possible. This is, of course a pragmatic rather than principled approach in organizing one's church in order to maximize attendance at worship services. The foremost question asked is what do people want when they come to church rather than what does the Almighty require? If they want rock music give it to them, if they want drama and lots of hi-tech visuals, it must be provided. Sermons must meet felt needs and 'tickle' the ears of those who listen, rather than proclaim the whole counsel of God calling sinners to repentance and true faith in Christ.

This pragmatic emphasis is also promoted by Ralph Neighbour, a well-known proponent of cell-based churches. Neighbour wrote "the most effective Bible study groups are the pseudo-Bible study cells. These do not really focus on the Bible; they use their group to get together and share deeply. In a world of people who are perishing, I do not give two hoots about cold doctrine. Our calling is to first heal hurts and build dreams." (1990, page 66) Such an approach degrades the teaching task of the church while elevating the subjective and experiential. To be sure working to heal the hurts of people who suffer with fear, loneliness and pain cannot be overlooked. However, it is the truth which sets people free. (John 8:32) In a society where few people have a solid Christian heritage to draw on it is paramount that the Church concern herself with objective truth albeit in a compassionate and caring way.

Reason and experience are fallible while Revelation as God's word in Scripture is infallible. The so-called Enlightenment years have shown us the grave spiritual dangers of over-riding the Infallible with the fallible.

Manufactured Kingdom blessings

John Calvin taught in his comments on Hebrews 2:5 "that the world to come is not only that which we hope for after the resurrection but that which begins from the rise of the kingdom of Christ". Modern church growth experts often distort the meaning of Calvin's realized eschatology by endeavoring to manufacture present blessings of the kingdom much like some of the more

extreme postmillennialists posit a golden era on earth through the application of God's law. As the error goes, those who apply modern church growth methods should see their churches grow into large, successful churches thereby maximizing the present realization of the Kingdom of God in their experience. Such goals are usually accompanied with a view of past church history and tradition as seriously lacking with the adoption of modern church growth methods needed to effect the necessary turnaround or even a 'third reformation' as some are now naming the modern church growth movement. (Cf. C.A. Schwarz, 1999, pp. 83 & 88)

The truth is that very few church's manage to scale the heights of the successful 'mega-churches' whose leaders are often the authors of church growth literature. The vast majority of church's will only ever be small churches of 100 members or less, not because they are failing in their task and are therefore not blessed, but because God is sovereign and the church on earth is the church militant as well as the church victorious. With respect to the present realization of the Kingdom of God on earth the ongoing existence of sin means that church growth will often be hindered. As A.A. Hoekema explains, "The church has experienced the victory of the kingdom of God; and yet the church is like other men, at the mercy of the powers of this world... for the church is the focal point between the conflict of good and evil, God and Satan, until the end of the age. The church can never be at rest or take ease but must always be the church in struggle and conflict, often persecuted, but sure of the ultimate victory." (1989, page 52) All faithful churches, large or small, may be assured through Jesus Christ that the church is perfect and beautiful in God's eyes, even though she is imperfect in her own eyes or in the eyes of the world. (Cf. Revelation 2:9 & 3:8) However, to assert that a structural or organizational solution will automatically bring about kingdom blessings or a 'golden age' for any church is neither Biblically nor historically justifiable.

Church centered rather than Christ centred

At a recent Church Growth conference someone put forward the following recipe for church revitalization. 'Get the right leaders with the right vision, disciple everyone, have a strong evangelism program and your church will be revitalized.' Thus, a high percentage of members must be involved in ministry of one kind or another and those who 'merely'

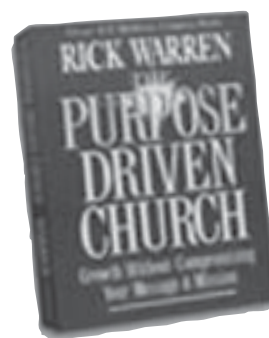
come along to church to worship God and listen to His word are derogatively called 'sitters and soakers'. 'Dynamic' church leaders become persistent taskmasters and guilt manipulators of their membership who constantly feel pressured into all kinds of tasks in order to help 'grow' their church. Meanwhile the primary purpose of coming together as a church i.e. to worship God and hear the word as a means of grace is overlooked. Instead, everything is designed to make the church 'get bigger'. Christianity, preaching, ministry and leadership all become church centered rather than Christ centered. Family life is disrupted and even harmed for the sake of the institutional church. A Herod's Temple or a St Peter's Cathedral rather than a haven for forgiven sinners must be built.

In Scripture, the basis for true spirituality is found in obedience to God. Jesus said, "who are my mother and my brothers? ... who ever does God's will." (Mark 3:33-35) The God-fearing mother who stays at home to be a home maker and care for her children is doing God's will even though on Sunday's she may just be a 'pew sitter'. The Christian university student may also be a mere 'sitter and soaker' on Sunday's. However, if he is diligent in study and personal

devotion to Christ and keeps himself free from sin, he is doing God's will and faithfully serving God in his own calling. The elder who faithfully visits the members in his section is doing God's will. So is the retiree who is diligent in prayer and encouragement. They may not appear to be very visible or dynamic in the life of the church or even have a job to do in the church. They may simply appear as pew sitters, but they are full of the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ and obedience to His word; not necessarily by doing 'church work'. After all, the church is a foretaste of our eternal rest. We are given the Lord's Day to sit under God's word and rest from our labours so that we may be equipped for service in the week ahead. Let's not 'revitalize' it into a market place.

This is not to criticise all modern Church growth literature. Rick Warren's book the Purpose Driven Church has a good section on the five fold task of the church, while the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers is thoroughly expounded in many of the volumes about cell based churches and evangelism. However, those who read without discernment may be disappointed and disillusioned if the desired result of a bigger church is not forth coming.

Hans Vaatstra



Friendship Ministries – Avondale

Celebrating 20 Years – 1984-2004

Friendship Ministries had small beginnings. In summer 1984, I was approached by one of my fellow sisters in Avondale.

She is the mother of a mentally-impaired daughter, who was then 14 years old. Because of her disability this lovely girl found it difficult to keep up with the normal Sunday School classes and this concerned her parents, as it should concern the church family as a whole.

Mum had attended a seminar to promote Sunday School material, held by Mrs Joanne van Wageningen from Australia. For the first time a programme was introduced specially written for young people and adults with mental impairments. It was called "Friendship."

Together we looked at the material, and I was asked to give it a try in Avondale. We started with a class of 5 students on Sunday mornings before the church service. It soon grew, mainly by word of mouth, to a much bigger group. We have seen the Holy Spirit do mighty work in the lives of our students and their families and caregivers over the years. This simple but effective way of teaching the Gospel to people with a mental impairment has led to four persons doing their profession of faith! Every year we have a special church service in which our students take part in taking the collection, having Bible readings and doing a short presentation.

This ministry has now grown to a group of 22 students and 20 teachers, since the programme is based on one-to-one teaching. Many of our young people are participating, which gives them the opportunity to explain their Bible knowledge in a simple way. Friendship materials are inter-denominational, easy to use, and sensitive to different ages and learning levels.

Through the Friendship programme, people with mental impairments will be able to:

1. experience the joy of knowing they are of value to God and to God's people.
2. grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ, claiming him as their Saviour and Lord.
3. grow in their relationship with Christ's church, making a public profession of their faith and participating in the church's life and work.
4. be fully accepted and loved by the Christian community.

If you would like to know more about the programme and/or want to set one up in your church, please feel free to contact me. I have sample packs and also workshop material available. We even have our own website: www.friendshipnz.netfirms.com You can contact me on: issjah@actrix.co.nz or phone me on (09) 818-7554

