

faith in
focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 38/10 NOVEMBER 2011



RCNZ Synod, 2011
Bucklands Beach

Contents

27th RCNZ Synod, 2011 Much accomplished at shifted Synod	3
Feminine focus Hymns from the Vicar's pen: or, the Victorian clergyman as hymn-writer	9
Letters to the editor	11
Focus on home Gleanings	14
Books in focus	16
27th Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (Group photo)	20

All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.
Church and family notices are free, subject to
sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and
payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$35.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography
Printed by: Flying Colours

Editorial

If anyone had asked me a month out from the 27th Synod what my opinion was as to how things would go – I would probably have said something like “the agenda is the biggest ever, and it may not all be smooth sailing”.

Sounds a little pessimistic doesn't it? Yet, I think it is safe to say that every session member around the country probably felt some trepidation leading up to synod week as they studied the 22 reports, 22 overtures two appeals and two communications. Was there an air of tension or anxiety? Possibly. However, I think honour for the Lord's Name and concern for the well-being of the RCNZ is what prompted the delegated office-bearers of each church to “participate with patience and calm speaking” (Mr Bruce Hoyt). Synods are usually serious affairs and this synod was no exception. There was also a degree of levity enjoyed on the floor of the Synod, including the presentation of a birthday cake and “keeping score” between the Synod and the Reformed Church of Dovdale in regard to how many of their eight overtures were passed (see pic on p12), which helped to alleviate tension and difficulty and enabled the brethren to enjoy fellowship with one another.

By all accounts, the Synod ran smoothly under the “wise, steady and good-natured guidance” (Mr D J van Garderen) of the Moderator, who thanked the other moderamen and the Bucklands Beach congregation for the great work they did in making this 27th Synod a successful event. Above all, we must thank the Lord for His grace in sustaining the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to His glory and praise.

Mr John van Dyk provides a synopsis of the Synod, covering all the major matters.

Mrs Sally Davey gives consideration to some lesser-known ministers in the Victorian era who wrote hymns. They were well educated literary men who wrote hymns for the glory of God and for the instruction of their congregations.

Book reviews for this issue are: *Psalm 119 for Life: Living Today in the Light of the Word*, by Hywel R. Jones and reviewed by Mr Stephen J. Tracey; *Timothy: An Unlikely Missionary*, by P. Frank van Dalen and reviewed by Mr D J van Garderen; *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger and reviewed by Wayne Sparkman, Director of the PCA Historical Center; *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* by Michael S. Horton and reviewed by OP pastor James T. Lim.

Cover image: Mr Jamie Fietje

Synod photos: Mr Gerald Strayton

“He values not Christ at all who does not value
Christ above all.”

Augustine

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.

27th RCNZ Synod, 2011

Much accomplished at shifted Synod

John van Dyk

Among the casualties of the devastating Christchurch earthquakes was the possibility of our churches holding the scheduled synod in the Garden City. The good people at Bucklands Beach very graciously stepped in and, at just five months' notice, organised a very well-run event.

It becomes apparent that a synod is different things to different people. For the delegates and those at a distance a

synod is a church meeting at which decisions must be made. For those living locally and who sat in on some of the sessions it is a bit like visiting Parliament, an interesting spectacle to watch and learn from. However for the organisers, headed by Mr Gerald Strayton, and those who provided meals, it is a time of sacrificial service; service for which we delegates are immensely grateful.

The moderator at this synod was Rev Bruce Hoyt (Dunedin/Oamaru); he had served six times previously as one of the

clerks but this was his first stint at the helm. Rev Peter Kloosterman (Masterton) deputised and also discreetly provided the moderator with advice and prompting when needed. The appointment of Mr Pieter van der Wel (Hamilton) as first clerk continues the practice of recent years where the churches' stated clerk serves the Synod in taking the minutes. Assisting him in the second clerk's chair was Rev Michael Willemse (Hamilton) who was kept busy ensuring the question under discussion at any given time



The Moderamen. (from left) Mr Peter Kloosterman (Vice Moderator); Mr Bruce Hoyt (Moderator); Mr Pieter van der Wel (First Clerk); Mr Michael Willemse (Second Clerk).

was displayed on screen.

In addition to taking charge of proceedings there was a not-so-visible aspect to the work of these four men, collectively called the moderamen. The amount of material on the agenda was problematic. It was clear from the thick bundle of paper that comprised the committee reports, as well as a swag of overtures, that there was more business to transact at this synod than there had ever been before. And then there were the appeals.

Appeals

I want to digress briefly and talk about the appeals. It would be convenient, and in some ways proper, not to mention them because they did relate to pastoral

issues and matters of discipline. There are quite a number who are closer to the action and who know many of the details. Those who are further removed probably know only a little, if anything at all. It's really best left that way. There had been concerns that hearing these appeals, which had been brought by two churches against decisions of Presbytery Wellington, would consume an enormous amount of time; some had even gone on record to say that a continuation of the Synod or an extra synod would be necessary.

Advisory committees

The moderamen, then, had to endeavour to find a way to deal with all of these matters, if at all possible, in the one-week

timeframe. Merely arranging the schedule to group related items was unlikely to cut it. What they did was to appoint a bunch of advisory committees and give them some of the Synod's valuable time to get started on their work. The committees were charged with considering feedback from the sessions and delegates, considering how report recommendations and overtures might be consolidated, and with making appropriate recommendations to help the Synod achieve a smooth passage of business. Four different groups found backrooms and secluded corners and respectively applied their expertise to: forms and confessions, hymnody, Bible versions, and the appeals.

The committees' work was instrumental in identifying detail which does not lend itself to being finalised by a large group and finding other ways to deal with it. For example, rather than spending time in discussion on individual psalms and hymns and their tunes, the Synod was able to focus on principles, hymn-books, and a way to bring the psalm and hymn selection process to a conclusion. This was a significant gain.

Forms and confessions

A little less of a gain was possible with the forms and confessions. There was a desire from the delegates to interact with the study committee responsible, and with each other, over the proposed liturgical forms in particular. Substantial time was spent on the forms for Lord's Supper, profession of faith and baptism. It is easy to have a lengthy and meaningful debate over, for example, whether a new communicant should promise to recognise the authority of the office bearers of "this church" or "the church," and not come to a resolution. There was a fair degree of progress made, but with time running out it was agreed that the forms should be finalised by the study committee working in consultation with the sessions, with final ratification of the baptism forms to be sought from each of the presbyteries.

Bible versions

The four overtures relating to Bible versions were neatly consolidated by the designated advisory committee. In relatively short order, the Synod declined approval for the 2011 New International Version as a pulpit Bible, as had been requested by two churches, and referred the English Standard Version to a study committee for evaluation and potential adoption at the next synod. Rev



Mr Daniel Wilson, the minister delegate from Nelson.



Mr Paul van Echten, the elder delegate from Foxton.



Deep in concentration. Mr Bruce Hoyt and Mr Pieter van der Wel.

John Rogers stepped up to the podium and, with an impromptu overture full of good sense and good humour, contrived to gain approval for the New King James Version to be similarly referred for evaluation.

A way forward

The appeals advisory committee heard from the parties involved who were present and recommended a way for the Synod to proceed. In recognition of the weightiness of the matter, delegates had the opportunity for overnight reflection and prayer both before voting on the proposed process and, two days later, before deciding the outcome. A time of corporate prayer was also held during the lunch break before the appeal hearing. In a bold move by the moderamen, one of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church fraternal delegates, Rev Jack Sawyer, well known to many in the RCNZ, was appointed to the appeals advisory committee. His experience and wise, independent counsel gave confidence to the committee and greatly helped them in their work.

The Synod eventually upheld the appeal and appointed a pastoral committee (Revs Tim Rott, Andre Holtslag, Peter Moelker and Mr Fred Braam) to visit affected parties to assist them by providing mediation and, we trust by the grace of God, effecting reconciliation. Prayer is sought for these men in their work and for those they visit.

Inter-church relations

The Synod is a time of attending to relationships with sister churches and other churches with whom we have contact. The sister-church relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia has, for some years, been officially under strain. The Interchurch Relations Committee in their report had recommended an ending of this relationship and Rev Henk de Waard, in speaking on behalf of the CRCA, effectively concurred. The Synod decided to take steps to establish a new, second-tier relationship with the CRCA to be called "ecclesiastical fellowship."

For the first time, representatives were in attendance from the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia. This church has eleven congregations in Australia, three in Vanuatu and one in Fiji. There may be a new sister church in the offing as it was agreed to hold appropriate discussions with this end in view with the PRCA.

The importance of our relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA) was underscored by their sending of two delegates: Rev Jack Sawyer and Mr Mark Bube, general secretary of the OPC Committee on Foreign Missions. To celebrate the OPC's 75th anniversary the OPC has published a handsome volume of essays entitled *Confident of Better Things*, to which Rev Sawyer has contributed a chapter, "The Glorious New Zealand Experiment." On reading this article it becomes clear how our close relationship was forged and how it is of enduring value to both parties.

Also present and warmly extending their greetings were representatives of the United Reformed Churches of

North America, the Reformed Churches of South Africa and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, as well as the Reformed Theological College.

Missions

With regard to missions, increased quotas reflecting the reality of costs in Papua New Guinea were approved. From next year the total collected by way of quota is set to exceed \$210,000, which includes provision of about \$40,000 for a new medium-term work at Mbale, Uganda. With regard to theological training, our churches were not considered sufficiently large as yet to justify establishing an institute to offer the first two years of study for ministerial candidates.



Our missionary to PNG, Mr Alan Douma (left) in conversation with Mr Andy van Ameyde of Dovedale.



A contemplative Mr Pieter van Huyssteen (right) in discussion with one of the delegates.

Sing to the Lord

We can look forward to a new hymn book, to be entitled *Sing to the Lord*, containing all the newly approved psalms and hymns, together with all four of our confessions. This book will be printed in China and is expected to sell for around \$10 per copy. It will be subject to revision at the 2020 Synod. Liturgical forms, because they are expected to take

longer to finalise, and also to allow for further revision, will be published separately in a soft-cover booklet.

Worthy of note

Invariably when there is a gathering of scholarly and well-read men, new or little-known words will be heard. A straw poll, held after the Synod had ended, settled on the following words as most

worthy of note.

Apostolicity: the quality of being apostolic, in particular the fourth attribute of the church mentioned in the Nicene Creed (along with one, holy and catholic). This was the focus of Rev Dirk van Garderen's sermon at the opening prayer service. The test for congregations to determine their apostolicity is not just in what they are, but also in what they do. Seeking and finding the lost is not just about protecting doctrine, it is to go out into the world and fight the good fight for the gospel. We need to recognise the nature of the battle, put on the full armour of God, be serious about counting the cost, and be serious about walking in the footsteps of the apostles. The word came up several times in debate during the week of the Synod.

Lacunae: omissions, missing parts. Used by the moderator in proposing how to deal with a report. When asked to spell it, a certain wag (from Christchurch, who has married into the moderator's family) intoned, with not a little irony, "g-a-p-s."

Propitiation: appeasing God's wrath for sin (as Christ did on the cross) thus incurring his favour and avoiding



Mr Dirk van Garderen is presented with a cake to celebrate his birthday during one of the Synod meetings, which afforded some laughter.

divine retribution. It was noted that this word, the best translation from the Greek original, is to be found in the ESV, though not found in the NIV. The word was also restored to the proposed translations of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort.

The emergence of these words of interest provides, quite unintentionally, a faint yet fitting echo of our Reformed theology. *Lacunae*, propitiation, apostolicity. Sin, salvation, service.

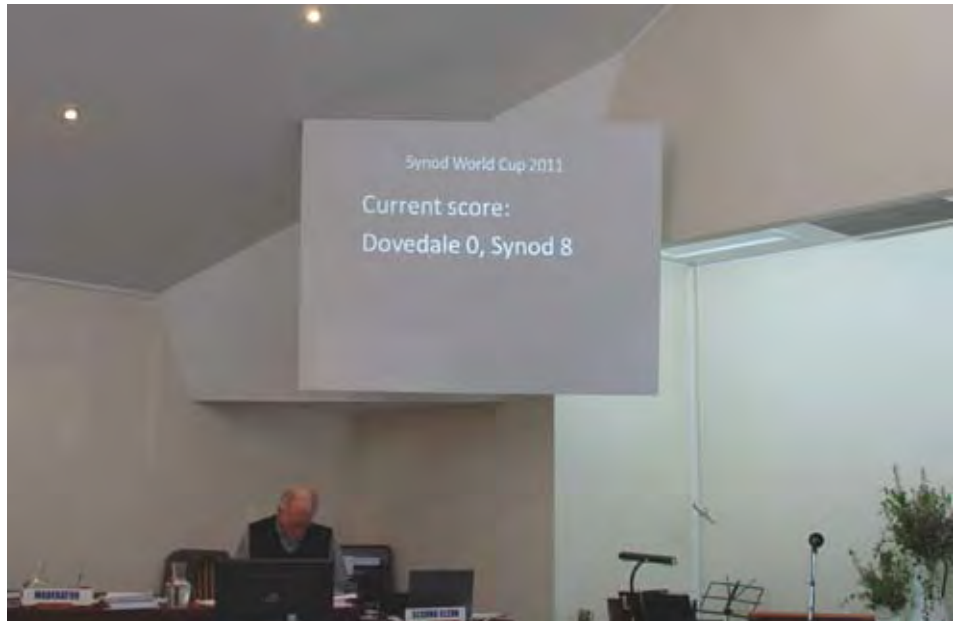
Keeping score?

It became apparent, towards the end of the week, that a score was being kept of a certain church's success rate with their overtures. The geographic distribution of the places from which they all originated makes for an interesting, if lopsided, analysis. Fourteen of the twenty-two overtures submitted to the Synod came from within the newly renamed South Island Presbytery, with twelve (yes, twelve) from the three Christchurch churches. Five came from within the Wellington Presbytery and just three from the Auckland Presbytery. It was evident that churches which put forward just one or two overtures seemed to fare better than those who, perhaps, sought to exert greater influence.

Bringing to a conclusion

In many ways this was a synod to bring to a conclusion work which, after long gestation, was coming to fruition. Forms and confessions as well as psalms and hymns, which had been worked on since 2002, received approval for publication. The report setting out who may preach was received.

Bishoptdale delegates renewed their invitation for the churches to enjoy their hospitality at the 2014 Synod. That synod will, Lord willing, consider revised guidelines for dealing with sexual abuse, responses from the Church Order Committee and evaluations from the Bible Translations Study Committee. No doubt there will be significant developments to



The Reformed Church of Dovedale presented eight overtures to the Synod. The score: Dovedale 0, Synod 8.



The ladies of Bucklands Beach provided some colour, displaying Rugby World Cup colours. All Black supporters seem to be in the minority here.



Mr John Rogers and Mr Michael Willemse.



Mr Timothy Rott, minister delegate for Reformed Christchurch of Christchurch.



Mr Mark Bube of the OPC (sporting an amazing bow tie) with Mr Erik Stolte (Vicar in Pukekohe).

report from the Interchurch Relations and National Diaconate Committees and the Overseas Missions Board.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to those who toil in many and varied ways on behalf of the churches. Our heavenly Father has blessed their work in the last three years and we pray that that blessing may be richly bestowed in the next three.

Mr John van Dyk is a member of the Reformed Church of Dunedin and was appointed by the Synod to be the reporter for Faith in Focus.



Mr John de Vries (elder delegate for Palmerston North) with Mr Hans Vaastra (Minister of the Wanganui Church).



Mr Carl Larsen (retired minister) speaking to Mr Erik Stolte (Vicar) and Mr David Waldron (Minister in Hastings).

Sally Davey

Hymns from the Vicar's pen: or, the Victorian clergyman as hymn-writer

In the first few decades after 1820, when hymns were first admitted to Church of England worship, there was a need for suitable hymns. Those available had been written by dissenters like Congregationalist Isaac Watts or Methodist Charles Wesley; and it was natural that Anglicans should want hymns that were their own.

As Ian Bradley has shown, hymn-writing flourished during Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). On average, one new Anglican hymnal was published each year between 1830 and 1880 – and that could not have happened had not a vast number of new hymns been written. They were written by Englishmen and women from many walks of life; but most especially by parish clergymen.

There are a number of obvious reasons for this. The first is that clergymen had the most intimate involvement with worship. Every Sunday, they led their congregation in Morning and Evening Prayer. Hymns were sung in both services, and the vicar chose them. Possibly he discussed the choice with the parish organist; but usually hymns would have some connection either with the sermon he was preaching or with the Bible readings for the day. The people knew their vicar was responsible for their worship (plenty got into trouble with formidable parishioners who did not like aspects of it). So, it would be fair to say clergymen wanted hymns that would raise the tone of worship, enable their congregation to sing well, and so on. It hardly needs adding that clergymen, having studied theology, were in a good position to write hymns teaching biblical truth.

The second reason is that many clergymen – if not most – had a better literary education than the majority of the

population. A Bachelor of Arts degree from Oxford or Cambridge University was the normal route to ordination; and certainly, it is true that the more prominent and prolific hymn-writers among the clergy were almost uniformly graduates of one of the Oxbridge colleges. And this education was literary in character. Students spent a lot of time in the poetry and prose writings of Greek and Roman authors (known as the Classics). They also studied history, rhetoric and philosophical subjects like logic – all of which train one in the use of language. Some of the best-known clerical hymn-writers, like Henry Francis Lyte, had won prizes in poetry. Others, like John Keble, were professors of poetry or skilled public speakers (as was Oxford University preacher, John Henry Newman). So they tended to be very familiar with the use of words – especially in poetry. It was a small step from writing poetry for reading to writing poetry for singing.

A third factor that may have motivated many clergy to write hymns is that, during the reign of Victoria, the Church of England was engaged in a serious, and at times heated discussion about restoring dignity to worship. It is true that during the previous century sloppiness and disorder had entered in, mostly due to the slackness and ignorance of many local clergy. But the push to improve worship, to make it more orderly, formal and beautiful, was led not for the most part led by evangelicals (as you might expect), but by what was known as the High Church party. And the majority of the hymn-writing clergy were moderately High Church in their beliefs. Their hymn-writing efforts stemmed from a desire to give their people poetically beautiful, edifying songs to sing. And what has surprised me is that – given their Anglo-Catholic leanings – their words are (for

the most part) remarkably sound in doctrine. Perhaps they reacted against some of the Methodist hymns, so often associated with rabble-rousers, large crowds and an excess of emotion.

Fourthly, good parish clergymen were very concerned to teach their flock well – and especially the children. This desire was the motive for much hymn-writing. We know this both from the type of hymns written (especially for children), and also from what these individual clergymen themselves wrote about their motives for writing hymns. It was different from today, when musical “professionals” write songs in order to make money through copyright. Many of the Victorian clergy received no income at all for the hymns they freely offered to the compilers of hymnals. This is not to say that young rural clergy on modest incomes weren't sometimes glad of a little extra income from the sale of a hymn text; but by and large, the edification of Christians and not personal reward was their driving motive.

I thought it would be helpful, now, to take a brief look at the lives of three fairly typical Victorian hymn-writers; both because they wrote some of the hymns we still know and sing today; and because they are not the most famous and best-known. This helps us remember that ordinary people can write good hymns.

The first is **John Ellerton**, who lived from 1826-1893. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, was ordained and then became curate at Eastbourne, on the South Coast of England. While there he was also lecturer in St Peter's church, Brighton. He was made Vicar of Crewe Green, about 30 miles south-east of Liverpool, in 1860; and was at the same time chaplain to Lord Crewe, the local landowner. During his time there

he became chairman of the Education Committee of the Mechanics' Institute for the Railway Company. (In Victorian times there were numerous such voluntary efforts, aimed at the education of poor, working-class people who had little opportunity to gain an education otherwise). Ellison made this Institute one of the most successful in England; and himself taught classes at it in English and Bible history. Interested in song and singing, he also organised one of the first choral associations in the Midlands.

Ellerton wrote quite a number of his 86 hymns during his nightly walks to and fro from the Mechanics' Institute. Perhaps it was the night-time atmosphere which inspired his thoughts; but many have noticed that he was a particularly fine writer of solemn hymns: the kind that help us reflect, think seriously about the transitory nature of this life, and even to grieve in a sanctified way. His best-known hymns are regarded as evening hymns, and some of these are sung frequently at funerals. "Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour dear" and "The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended" are two of Ellerton's most famous. Alfred H. Miles, Ellerton's biographer, has written that "the solemn side of life seems to have impressed him the most; and though he could be bright and joyful at times, the hush of the evening hour seems to have inspired him more frequently than the gush of morning song... he loves the fading light and the peace of eve, and lingers in the shadows..." Among Ellerton's hymns are some especially written

for the funerals of children.

He had an upwardly-mobile ministry, becoming Rector of Hinstock in 1872, and Rector of the parish of Barnes (a suburb of London), in 1876. However, the large population of this charge broke his health, and he went abroad to Italy for a year. Returning to England, he later became Rector of the parish of White Roding in 1886, where he remained until his death. As well as writing hymns Ellerton compiled a hymnal, *Hymns for Schools and Bible Classes* (published in 1859); and a book entitled *Notes and Illustrations of Church Hymns*, which was published by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in 1881.

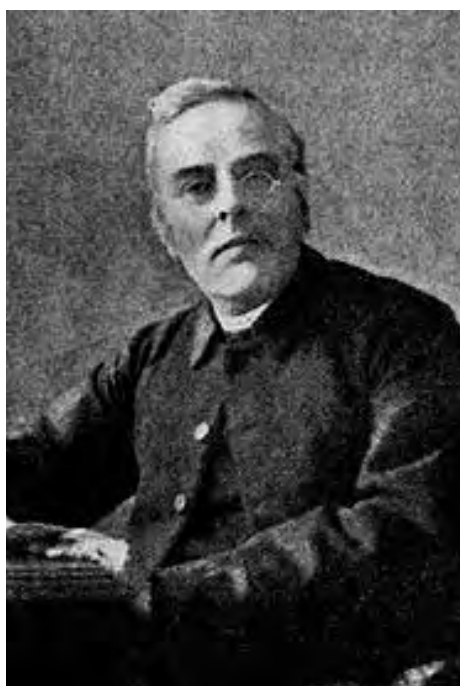
Godfrey Thring (1823-1903), was a local parish clergyman in Somerset for his entire ministry. His father was the Rector and Squire of Alford, in Somerset; and as a young man Godfrey decided to follow his father's calling. This took him to Balliol College, Oxford; and after ordination, to several curate's positions in various parishes. In 1858 (aged 35) he succeeded his father as Rector of Alford-cum-Hornblotton. Eventually he became Prebendary of East Harptree in Wells Cathedral. Thring apparently turned to hymn-writing when his mother was unable to find a hymn to sing to a tune she had known and loved all her life. So Godfrey wrote one for her.

He was a prolific hymn-writer, among his best-known being "Fierce raged the tempest o'er the deep" (a hymn to calm the soul in the storms of life); "Saviour, Blessed Saviour"; "O God of mercy, God

of might" and "Lord, dismiss us with Thy blessing" (this latter is a favourite for Anglican schools to sing at the end of term, and is different from No. 325 in our *Psalter Hymnal*). He also added verses to the much-loved "Crown Him with many crowns", as some of the words by the original author, Matthew Bridges, were considered a shade too Roman Catholic in their leaning.

Thring also produced a goodly number of hymnals. In 1866 he published *Hymns Congregational and Others*; in 1874 *Hymns and Sacred Lyrics*; in 1880 *A Church of England Hymn-Book Adapted to the Daily Services of the Church Throughout the Year*; and in 1882 a revised *Church of England Hymn Book*. Thring is a good example of parish clergy who were zealous in their efforts to provide the church with hearty, congregational hymns to sing in worship.

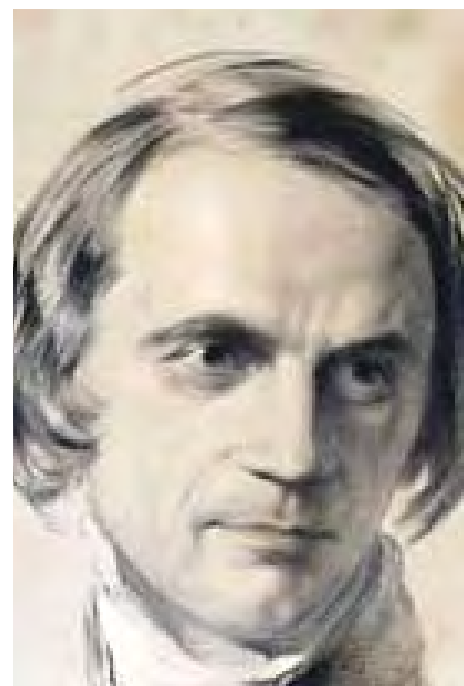
Christopher Wordsworth, our third hymn-writer, lived from 1807-1885. He came from an academic family (his father, also Christopher, was Master of Trinity College, Cambridge). However, the most famous member of the family was Uncle William Wordsworth, the Romantic poet, who later in life was Poet Laureate. Christopher the younger was educated in his father's college, Trinity, and distinguished himself both academically and in sports. During the 1830s he tutored at Trinity, was ordained to the ministry, took a tour of Greece out of interest in ancient culture and archaeology, and became headmaster of Harrow school for 8 years. After this he served



John Ellerton



Godfrey Thring



Christopher Wordsworth

as a canon of Westminster, as Vicar of Stanford in the Vale (a parish in Berkshire) from 1850-1869, and as Archdeacon of Westminster from 1864-9. His final calling was as Bishop of Lincoln, where he served from 1869 until his death in 1885. His seven children were also distinguished: one became a bishop and founded a school; one (Elizabeth) founded Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford in 1878 – helping pave the way for women’s higher education; and one became a notable liturgical scholar.

Wordsworth wrote a number of hymns, almost all of them while he was Vicar of his rural Berkshire parish. We still sing three of them from our *Psalter Hymnal*. Perhaps the best-known is “Al-

leluia! Alleluia! Hearts to heaven and voices raise”, an Easter hymn. This hymn rejoices in Christ’s resurrection, links his second coming with the theme of harvest, and ends with a triumphant doxology to the three Persons of the Trinity. “See, the Conqueror mounts in triumph”, a hymn in honour of Christ’s ascension to heaven, is full of rich imagery signifying his royalty. “O day of rest and gladness”, a hymn honouring the Lord’s Day, is similarly packed full with poetic pictures, drawn from the whole expanse of Scripture, outlining the delights of Sabbath rest for the Christian. A close study of these three hymns certainly reveals a writer who knows both the detail of the Bible and its great themes

extremely well. Furthermore, his poetic gifts, doubtless inherited from his famous uncle and honed by his studies at Cambridge, demonstrate a masterful grasp of language, particularly of powerful and evocative imagery.

What may we learn from hymn-writers like these three clergymen? First, that ordinary parish clergy (that is, ministers of local congregations) can write good hymns. Secondly, these men wanted their people to be well-instructed as they sang hymns. And thirdly, that literary gifts cultivated by a good education are very important when it comes to writing good hymns. Such men were pastors, teachers – and poets.

Letters to the editor

Dear Sir,

Our magazine, called *Faith in Focus*, does just that, puts the Christian faith in focus; reflecting on the Reformers, Calvin, Bucer, Luther, and even Zwingli (!?), and encouraging us to read sermons of our English Puritan forbears. However, I am asking whether from time to time also attention could be paid not to time-wasting romantic novels, but to books – for instance – about the dangers facing our society and culture from atheistic, political (p.c.) and scientific directions.

I am thinking of :

- *The Case For A Creator* – by Lee Strobel – published by Zondervan, Gr.Rap. Mich. – U.S.A. – A journalist investigates scientific evidence that points toward God – This book is also available in a student edition. From the same author appeared *The Case for Christ*, *The Case for Easter* and *The Case for Faith* – very worthwhile reading (and study !).
- *Badlands – NZ: A Land Fit For Criminals* – by David Fraser – published by Howling At The Moon Publ. Ltd., Auckland, N.Z. – (Criminals are not corrupted by prison, but by the unchallenged success of their criminality.) – every page a journey of discovery.
- *Justice – Speaking Up For Crime’s Silent Victims* – by Garth McVicar (co-founder of the Sensible Sentencing Trust) – published by the Penguin Group, Auckland. McVicar’s straightforward no-nonsense style cuts through the heart of issues affecting

all New Zealanders, highlighting the disastrous decisions of our judicial system in dealing with N.Z.’s most infamous criminal cases (Michael Choy, Sophie Elliot, Sue Couch, the RSA murders, Karla Cardno etc.) and the silent, still living victims of these crimes, their loved ones.

A. Snoek

Dear Sir,

Sincerest compliments for the September *Psalter Hymnal* Issue of *Faith in Focus*; not only are we greatly impressed with the depth of knowledge and insight of the three ministers as shown in “Singing hymns for God’s praise”, – dealing both with textual and musical matters and their copious foot-notes (24) – , but also their warning challenge and their insistence on excellence in the quality of what we sing in our RCNZ.

There is no doubt, unfortunately, that the blue *Psalter Hymnal*, – which we inherited free of charge, lock stock and barrel with forms, creeds, confessions and some pastors as well, from our brethren, the CRCNA, had set itself a rather low standard for its selections (refer also Sept. *Faith in Focus*., page 8, item 3.2. on complexity), mostly having borrowed these from the United Presbyterian Church in the States.

As is well known to those acquainted with the blue *Psalter Hymnal*, there is a lot of second-rate poetry (doggerel) and music (ditties and choruses) in it, which

could not but detrimentally influence our churchly musical taste.

It is because of this that we are all looking forward with great eagerness to our own, totally new, widely and wisely sourced *Sing to the Lord Hymnal* and to the revision of our *Sing to the Lord Psalter*.

We consider it prudent, very good, i.e. even worthwhile, to direct the attention of all our readers – pew-dwellers, elders, deacons, pastors, musicians and PsH.Cttee. members, to some excellent books on psams and hymnody, just to mention a few:

- *Singing and Making Music – Issues in Church Music Today* – by Paul S. Jones – P&R. Publ. Co., New Jersey – U.S.A.
- *Face the Music – Contemporary Church Music on Trial* – by L. J. Seidel – Grace Unlimited Publications., Virginia, U.S.A.
- *Discipling Music Ministry – Twenty-First Century Directions* – by C. M. Johansson – Hendrickson Publishing Inc., Mass., U.S.A.
- *Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns – How Pop Culture rewrote the Hymnal* – by T. D. Gordon – P&R. Publ. Co., New Jersey, USA.

Having said all this, thanks again to the contributors on our “Psalms and Hymns” and on “Singing These” in our *Faith in Focus* and to our editor for compiling all this material and making it available to us.

A. Snoek

RCNZ Missionaries to PNG on deputation in NZ



Rev Alan and Mrs Odette Douma (above) gave a presentation about their work as RCNZ missionaries in Papua New Guinea, at the Reformed Church of Silverstream on Thursday 15 September. Members of the Wellington, Wainuiomata and Silverstream congregations were presented with an overview of the work done with the Reformed Churches of PNG, the theological college and its education and were treated to some humorous accounts of personal experiences.



10 years in Wainuiomata

The Rev Leo and Mrs Carol de Vos arrived in our congregation on 19 September, 2001, just after 9/11, a time of world-wide anxiety. For the last 10 years we have been blessed by his ministry, particularly his preaching, which is always consistent and nurtures and feeds our congregation faithfully, and builds us up in God's word. His whole family are very much part of our congregation and his wife Carol plays a very active role in this church as a Sunday school teacher, motivator, supporter, encourager and in many more unofficial roles she willingly takes on.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE "QUOTES"

"Christian service is not meant to be a formality burdening the mind, but a fire burning in the heart." *John Blanchard*

"It is but right that our hearts should be on God, when the heart of God is so much on us." *Richard Baxter*

Evangelisation is a process of bringing the gospel to people where they are, not where you would like them to be...When the gospel reaches a people where they are, their response to the gospel is the church in a new place. *Vincent Donovan*

We shall have all eternity in which to celebrate our victories, but we have only one swift hour before sunset in which to win them. *Robert Moffatt*

THE KNOTS PRAYER:

Dear God:

Please untie the knots that are in my mind, my heart and my life. Remove the have nots, the cannots and the do nots. Erase the will nots, may nots and might nots that may find a home in my heart. Release me from the could nots, would nots and should nots that obstruct my life. and most of all, dear God, I ask that you remove from my mind, my heart and my life all of the "am nots" that I have allowed to hold me back, especially the thought that I am not good enough. Amen *Author Known to God!*

BIRTHS

Bosgra, Tristan Charles – a son born to Hayden and Jess – 29 August (Hamilton)

Heersping, Miriam – a daughter born to Hank and Vida – 7 September (Silverstream)

Swain, George Willem – a son born to Chris and Saskia (Hastings)

Walraven, Olivia – a daughter born to Nathan and Lydia – 3 September (Pukekohe)

WEDDINGS

10 September – Charmagne Smith and Joshua Downes married in Palmerston North

22 October – Daniel Flinn and Candace Stout married in the United States

28 October – Arie van der Houwen and Vivienne Fraser married in Pukekohe

DEATHS

Koole, Izaak – On September 6 the Lord took Izaak Koole from this world. The room that Jesus has been preparing for him in his Father's house is now occupied. We pray that Jannie Koole and the family might know God's comfort at this time. (Bishopdale)

FROM THE PASTOR

Nelson: Daniel Wilson

I would like you to prayerfully consider your reaction when we see someone new at church – do you grab your children and run over to greet them? Are you quick to both love others and train your children to do the same? Granted it is a difficult thing to do, but Christ taught that when we welcome strangers in His name, we are welcoming Him! And you may say, that just isn't my personality, or that isn't the way I was raised. And that very well may be! That makes it all the more important for you to work hard to overcome those obstacles, and if you have children, to train them to show the love of Christ to those who visit our church. Even if your children are older, when you see a visitor in church, grab your adult, teenager or 10-year old and take them with you to introduce yourself. In that way, we will begin to develop a culture of welcoming strangers in the name of Christ regardless of age. Let's not be known for being a welcoming congregation only to those we know (and to those from other reformed churches). Let's overtly, purposefully welcome strangers to our congregation as well!

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Christchurch: Today marks the first anniversary of the September 2010 earthquake. Ask the Lord for His peace and contentment in the midst of all that has happened since that day. May we see His hand at work in all that has hap-

pened. Pray that our building repairs or replacement will move forward quickly and that there would be unity on how best to accomplish it. Pray for our city as the leaders plan the rebuilding of Christchurch.

CHURCH PLANTING

Bishopdale: Rangiora Preaching Post – The plan is to hold evening services in this location every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month. We would encourage those who desire to be involved in this work to prayerfully consider committing to it. May God's kingdom be extended through this work as we desire to have another lamp-stand in our land; may this be all of our prayer.

DENOMINATIONAL

Synodical Report:

Rev Bruce Hoyt expressed his thanks to delegates who participated with patience and calm speaking. There had been a concern since Saturday afternoon that this wouldn't be the case but he needn't have worried. The Lord has been with us and has sustained us. Appreciation was expressed to the other moderamen and to the Bucklands Beach congregation. Above all, thanks to our gracious God. He has been with us, sustained us, given us strength and guided us; we have felt wisdom that only he can give. After a hard week many of us are weary. Yet we are urged not to give in to weariness (cf. Isaiah 62:6–9). Even when we are tired and weary in mind, body and sometimes in soul, we are urged to take no rest. The battle still rages. The enemy still seeks to undermine and overthrow the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to crucify the desires of the flesh. This is impossible for us to do in our own strength. This is why we call on God to give us no rest. We call on him to give us strength from above in the battle because there is always the temptation to sit back and say I've done enough. The time of fulfilment has not yet come. God confirms his promise of strength to us as he swears by himself. Christ will accomplish what his father has given him to do. He will do it in that day (Isaiah 62). In that day we will rejoice with no hindrance from ourselves, no temptation of heart, no weakness of body. Rev Hoyt closed in prayer.

On behalf of the delegates Rev Dirk van Garderen thanked Rev Bruce Hoyt for his wise, steady and good-natured guidance after which delegates sang Psalm 100. Synod ended at 4:10pm. Thanks be to God.

MISSIONS

Our missionaries in Papua New Guinea, **Rev Alan and Mrs Odette Douma** have been touring the country and making presentations on their work describing the Lord's work through them. It's been good to get positive feedback about the college and hear of future plans to establish gardens at the college so that they can become more self sufficient. At the moment funds are being raised for the purchase of the land.

Please uphold **Barry and Anne James** in your prayers as they serve in Mbale. They have found that there are sufficient supplies (at least by African standards) for them to be relatively comfortable.

Janice Reid – Janice is looking forward to being in NZ from mid-October on home assignment. Part of her time will be taken up with deputation work around the Reformed Churches in NZ but we pray that she will also be able to have a good break and catch up with family and friends.

PRISON MINISTRY

Dunedin: Angel Tree Special Collection – The general collections in today's services are in support of Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree project which aims to show Christian love to inmates' families at Christmas time through provision of gifts to their children.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

North Shore: KID'S CLUB – Please pray that God will prepare the hearts of those who came and that lives will be changed.

CLASSES and COURSES

Wellington: No marriage is without its difficulties, problems, challenges or tensions. This seminar we are hosting is an opportunity to look again at your marriage and see where further growth can take place. The seminar will consist of lectures, role plays and discussion times with your spouse (fiancé), and a question and answer time with the presenters. Peter and Margaret Reynolds are delighted to have this opportunity to meet with you and discuss together how marriage

can give glory to God as it mirrors to a watching world the relationship Christ enjoys with his church.

PRAYER

Bishopdale: This week there is an open invitation to men and women of the congregation to join us for a time of prayer and encouragement, especially in light of the present difficult times and challenges many people are facing. We will especially be upholding the sick and suffering.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Avondale: Soup Night – A whole range of different soups will be available for consumption. Tickets will be available from the Cadets and Calvinettes. The proceeds are going towards the Mission Badge (Jair and Lauretta Duinkerke in the Solomon Islands) and also to our upcoming National camp in Wellington. The

Youth Group will be in attendance and making their services available to diners. Services will be sold at auction to raise money for the summer youth Camp. So if you want your lawns mowed, house vacuumed or cars washed, please bring a few extra dollars to the soup night to bid for a service and support our youth in their desire to serve and to attend God-honouring camps.

Hamilton: Youth Group Ball: The 2011 biannual Reformed Youth Ball is fast approaching, this year we are raising money for Rahab ministries.

Hastings: Ant Lagas and Matt Saathof are heading over to see Jair, Lauretta and Theresa Duinkerke. They are going to go give a brother a hand and hang out. There a few projects that they will be helping out with; a crashed Toyota Hilux that needs a chassis replaced and that frontal panels replaced, a SWIM truck that need a rusty deck replaced



*With joy we give thanks to
God as we celebrate the*

50th Wedding Anniversary

of

John & Hetty LEENDERS

**Married in Denham,
the Netherlands on
17 November 1961**

With all our love,

Ed & Tessa
Stanley, Melanie, John, April, Dillon

Frances & Gerry
Esther & Seth, Seth & Emma,
Raymond, Abigail, Holly, Christian

David & Jantina
Michelle, Carl

Martin & Moana
Abel, Jack, Imogen, Sally, Joshua

Kenton

*"This is the day that the
Lord has made, we will
rejoice and be glad in it"*

Psalm 118:24

and a building that needs a rotten deck replaced with a larger one with a new roof over it. So it will be a busy time, with the hope of lending a hand with the everyday tasks that they are involved in and also just hanging out together.

Hukanui: Our Cadets and Calvinettes (and Counsellors!) will engage in a night of intense physical and mental challenges in order to raise funds for our Papua New Guinean Missionaries in conjunction with our missions' badge. This evening is open to the whole congregation and we'd love it if you could come along and watch us, or even join in yourselves! Entry is by gold coin donation, with all funds going towards sponsoring the books and course work for two diploma students (Nawai and Aisi – a sponsorship of \$2,000NZ per student is recommended), sponsoring the medical and emergency fund, and buying mosquito nets to give to those most at risk of malaria (mosquito nets are \$8 each). Challenges will include reconstructing the kokoda trail, coconut cracking, water/fruit or vegetable carrying, house constructing, flax weaving, creating a tribal identity, and a PNG trivia quiz. This will be topped off with indigenous music and indigenous food for supper! The Cadets and Calvinettes all have sponsorship forms for the evening. Please prayerfully consider sponsoring the Cadets and Calvinettes

as they seek to administer aid to our fellow Christian brothers and sisters in PNG. In addition to sponsoring, please pray for our Reformed missionaries – Wally and Jeanette Hagoort, and Alan and Odette Douma – as well as the three diploma students – Nawai, Aisi, Ben, and their families.

North Shore: Our Cadet Club is having its annual garage sale. Please support us by setting aside saleable items during the next month. Things that sell well include: clothing, furniture, kitchen items, toys, books, tools, plants ... in fact you'd be surprised at what we can sell! We are fundraising for several things: our mission project: Su'u School in the Solomon Islands, National Camp and our Big Day Out.

Palmerston North: New Building Fundraising – Anyone who is in to arts and crafts; has green fingers; can cook and bake; has a bit of elbow grease and wants to burn some energy; has a musical talent; you are in demand to help fundraising! NOW is the time to start growing flower and vege plants, grow cuttings and seedlings from your garden – make, bake, cook and grow items for market stalls – collect items for car boot sales – get buckets, rags and brushes ready for car washes – prepare the BBQ for the sausage sizzles – start practicing for concerts, etc., etc.

ACTIVITIES

Foxton: Music Club – Calling all musicians interested in joining a Christian music group! Meet at the front of the church after the morning service today. Beginner or pro, anyone is welcome. Come forward and show your talent!

Foxton: It is that time of year again when we start putting together gift-boxes for the Operation Christmas Child Shoe Box Appeal. If you are planning to donate items then please try and buy something from each category – something to love, something to play with, something to draw/write on or with, something for personal hygiene and something to wear.

Foxton: All ladies in the congregation (including our regular visitors) aged from 13-99+ are invited to take part in an exciting 'event' called Heart-sisters. This is a ministry of caring and sharing with sisters in Christ. This is a wonderful form of encouragement so please do join in.

Hastings: Harry, Peggy and Johann Landkroon travelled to North Korea last week for the Taekwon-Do World Championships where Johann has been invited to represent both special needs and New Zealand. Please pray that the Lord would grant opportunities in North Korea for this covenant family to proclaim Christ.

Books in focus

Psalm 119 for Life: Living Today in the Light of the Word

by Hywel R. Jones.

Carlisle, Pa.: EP Books, 2009.

Reviewed by Stephen J. Tracey

Psalm 119 is known as the Great Psalm. Perhaps preachers more often think of it as the Monster Psalm. It is like a great leviathan writhing on the pulpit and the fisher-of-men is not quite sure what to do with it.

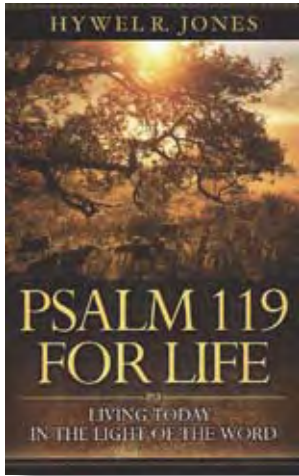
This little book is the fruit of Professor Jones's preaching through the Great Psalm in chapel addresses in Westminster Theological Seminary, California. Anyone who has tried that particular exercise – preaching consecutively through Psalm 119 – will understand there are few resources to help the preacher. Outside the

standard commentaries on Psalms, the staple diet is Calvin, Manton, Spurgeon, and Bridges. Jones gives us a little commentary that serves as a modest contribution to our understanding of the Great Psalm. When I say "modest," I mean that as a virtue.

The purpose of the book is to pay attention "to the content and purpose of Psalm 119 in relation to Christians and the church" (p10). Unlike older works which approach the psalm in a verse-by-verse mode, Jones works through the twenty-two sections with brief expository notes on each section. This is surely the right approach. The key to understanding, and thereby spiritually digesting, Psalm 119 is to realize that it is made up of sections. It is most profitably digested one section at a time. One verse

at a time is too little, rather like a pinch of salt on the main dish. To concentrate all our thought on one verse leads to the feeling that the song is repetitive – harping on the same theme, the law, the law, the law. The whole psalm is too much, likely to lead to mental overload. Each section is just right, designed for our spiritual well-being. How each section relates to the others, however, remains an elusive point.

In the conclusion of his introduction, Jones states that this psalm "anticipates true Christianity in every way and every Christian should give it his, or her serious and regular attention" (p21). He argues that the central theme of the psalm is "that the Word of God provides all things [necessary] to life and godliness" (p21). With all of its words for law, it is under-



standable that this psalm is understood as referring to the Word of God. Jones's subtitle is "Living Today, in the Light of the Word." This is the emphasis given by others too. For example, David Noel Freedman speaks of the "Exaltation of Torah," Christopher Ash speaks of "Bible Delight," and Christopher Wright speaks of "Life through God's Word."

There is nothing wrong with this application. We should love the Bible more than we do. However, the reflections of C. S. Lewis on this psalm point us further. He says, "The Order of the Divine mind, embodied in the Divine Law, is beautiful." The psalm, in Lewis's view, expresses the reactions of a man "ravished by moral beauty."¹ The psalm is more than a contemplation and exaltation of God's Word. It is a contemplation and exaltation of God. It is good to be ravished by the moral beauty of God's Word, but it is better to be ravished by the moral beauty of God. Jones, along with the other commentators mentioned above, pushes us to see more of the glory of God. He puts it well when he says, "God's word should never become a substitute for him" (p73).

The other great struggle preachers have with Psalm 119 is not simply how to preach it, but how to preach Christ from it. That, in turn, is part of the larger struggle to preach Christ from the Old Testament. Jones approaches this in several ways. Most obviously he looks for Messianic types. He speaks of the psalmist as "a type of the Messiah and an example to all who follow in his steps, whether apostles or not" (p84). A little further on Jones says the psalmist "is determined not to fall like Adam, and in that he is a conscious type of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's King over the church and the world" (p85). I have some questions on the statement, "determined not to fall like Adam." It seems

to be an overstated application, but it illustrates Jones's endeavour to preach Christ. At other times Jones traces the flow of redemption. Most of the time, however, the application is by way of analogy. Speaking of "enemies, teachers, and the aged" in verses 98-100, Jones says, "The Lord Jesus was surrounded by such people too" (p103). Well, yes, he was.

I found this commentary helpful. I also found it frustrating. Please don't misunderstand me. This commentary is a warm and refreshing devotional work. The frustration is not the fault of Dr. Jones. He makes a valiant effort to do what few preachers would do – preach through Psalm 119 and seek to preach Christ from Psalm 119. This work is an appetiser, but only that, because there is clearly so much more to this psalm. Jones whets the appetite.

Here and there we are given tantalising glimpses that underneath our English translation there is a poem of great beauty and power in the original language. The "content and purpose" of the psalm are clearly wrapped up in the form and shape of the poem in the original language. While Jones competently addresses some of the original language, there is little attention given to the technical structure of the psalm. One work that does give such attention is that by David Noel Freedman. He points out that "there is a direct correspondence between the structure and content of Psalm 119."² Jones makes reference to Freedman's work in his notes (p151:4).

Admittedly, on first reading, Freedman seems over the top, as though this were too mechanical an analysis. On rereading Freedman, one feels that a seam has just been found that may help with mining the "content and purpose" of Psalm 119. Freedman's structural analysis suggests that there are rhythms of structure (including matters such as the acrostic form, arranged in eight verses, with eight words for law; the masculine, feminine, singular, and plural use of the nouns, etc.) that are both deliberately arranged and, more importantly, deliberately broken. It is the points at which they are deliberately broken that are fascinating. What we need is a work that takes Freedman's research and incorporates it into a commentary.

The stark contrast between the perfect and the imperfect is what lies at the heart of this psalm. Perhaps that is nowhere more obvious than in the final verse. It seems such an anti-climax. "I have gone

astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments" (Ps. 119:176). It is like ending the great poem with a self-imposed "F" for "fail." It is like saying, "I wanted to love you and love your law, but I failed." From within that failure a cry rises, "seek your servant." Jones comments,

He is convinced that the Lord has a shepherd's heart towards his people and that he will not leave them in distress, seeing that he has given them the promise of a Messiah, a shepherd-kin ... And that is the best possible way to end an Old Testament poem – with an expectation of the coming of the Messiah." (p150)

Preach the Great Psalm. Preach Christ, the Word incarnate.

Notes

- 1 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 59-60.
- 2 David Noel Freedman, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 93.

Reprinted from Ordained Servant, December 2010.

Stephen J. Tracey
Lakeview OPC,
Rockport, ME

Timothy: An Unlikely Missionary

by P. Frank van Dalen
Christian Education Ministries,
ARP Synod, 2011

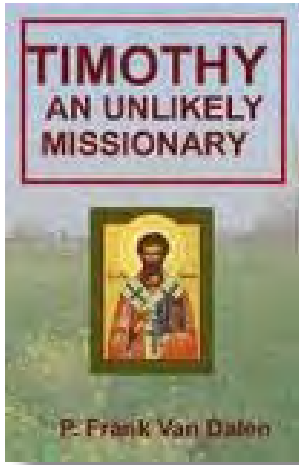
Cost: not stated

Sourcing this book:

www.arpem.com

www.arpbookstore.com

For many *Faith in Focus* readers, the Rev Frank van Dalen is – well known. He was born and raised in Mangere, completed a law degree at Victoria University and then went on to study at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia to prepare for ministry. There he met and married Emily Wilder, a third-generation daughter of missionaries working in Pakistan. The challenge to both Emily and Frank to serve in Pakistan was truly a call prepared and made possible by God. They served there (mainly in Karachi) for 12 years (1983-1995). Frank and Emily, along with their three children, eventually returned and settled in South Carolina. The Rev van



Dalen is currently serving as the Executive Director of World Witness, the Foreign Missions Board of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in the USA.

I was recently made aware that the Rev van Dalen had published a little book (92 pages) about Timothy, whom he labels as an unlikely missionary. Its intent is to stir up and encourage young men and women today to consider becoming missionaries. Most of us, when challenged immediately respond, 'What? Me?' and then give a long list of reasons why that couldn't be!

By examining the life and ministry of Timothy, and especially the advice, guidance, directions and encouragement given to him by his spiritual mentor Paul; as well as reflecting on his own experiences in Pakistan, the Rev van Dalen presents a very readable and compelling challenge to young men and women to think again.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading what this small book has to say; and believe it would be helpful to place it in church libraries and use it as a good tool for elders and pastors who see young people as Paul saw Timothy. Upon reading it, I myself was greatly encouraged and also kept on thinking. 'I must challenge ... to read it!'

The closing paragraphs are worth quoting:

Do you have what it takes to be a missionary? Don't ask yourself whether you are dynamic, clever, or have a vibrant personality. There is nothing wrong with these things. But the most important thing is to be a person who pursues godliness. If you have that, you have the first requirement for being a missionary. And then, if you ever have the privilege of becoming a missionary, let me assure you that it is the most rewarding life that you could ever want. There are difficulties and pain. But there is also a much

greater appreciation of God's grace, of His Word, and of His people.

Pray for your missionaries. But don't feel sorry for them. For being a missionary like Timothy is one of the greatest privileges that a man or woman of God can have. I pray that the Lord may one day give you the privilege of being a missionary.'

Dirk J van Garderen

(Buckland Beach)

Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Edited by John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger.

Published by the Committee for the Historian of the OPC.

Reviewed by Wayne Sparkman, director of the PCA Historical Center.

There is no way to do justice to this book, authored by twenty-six people, especially since the content is consistently good. So please bear with me as I skip a stone across the literary waters and touch on a few points.

This is one of two handsome volumes issued in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The other is D. G. Hart's *Between the Times*, which examines the middle years of the denomination. *Confident of Better Things* groups twenty-six articles under five headings: history, theology, Christian education, mission of the church, and ecumenicity (plus a conclusion). Both are Smyth-sewn hardbacks. I am certain they will provide many decades of good service in your library.

I was pleased to discover that there

are just a few articles with any age on them, and those are well chosen and suited to their purpose. Most are recently authored, with fresh and timely content.

The book has a good mix of articles, in terms of both intended audience and length, with something for everyone. Some articles are shorter, while others are longer or more technical. Few articles employ Greek, and even there the serious reader can still get the author's points.

John Muether takes the opening article, recounting the life and ministry of Paul Woolley at Westminster Seminary. I found this an enjoyable read. Danny Olinger's article follows, and it is a veritable primer on contemporary Roman Catholicism and intelligent Reformed response.

Roger Schmurr's personal recollections of OPC history, Alan Strange on the legacy of Charles Hodge, and Richard Muller on unity and diversity in our confessional heritage complete the historical portion of the book. Oh, the injustice of a glancing mention!

Under the heading of theology, Bill Dennison provides a Van Tillian analysis of classical Christian education, which for me was one of the most thought-provoking chapters. Ecclesiastes, cessationism, tongues, and redemptive-historical hermeneutics are covered in the next four chapters. Lastly, Robert Strimple's "Was Adam Historical?" proves to be one of the most timely articles, even though it was written some years ago.

Part Three takes up Christian education, and Stephen Tracey presents a rousing encouragement for pastors to continue making progress with the original languages of Scripture. Tom Tyson's chapter on catechetical instruction is challenging. Then Tom Patete's chapter on Great Commission Publications doubles as a chapter on ecumenical relations with the PCA, while Greg Reynolds presents what amounts to an all-important capstone for his book on preaching in the electronic era.

Part Four covers the mission of the church, and here Mark Bube's chapter seems to be the focal point of the book, aptly titled "Power in Weakness." The importance and place of ruling elders is well treated by John Shaw.

The book concludes on an eschatological note, with Part Five on ecumenicity.

After Jack Sawyer's recounting of OPC work in New Zealand and Bob Needham's succinct history of the Pres-



byterian and Reformed chaplaincy, this section closes with Robert Godfrey's telling of relations between the OPC and the URCNA, though all the while I was constantly reminded of Godfrey's grand dream of Reformed unity.

J. V. Fesko closes by looking forward to the next anniversary, yet warning that "one of the greatest dangers for the OPC, indeed any church, is elevating matters of adiaphora, things indifferent ... to the level of articles of faith, practice, or confession subscription" (p503).

Earlier, Reynolds had said, "One of the important benefits of celebrating historical milestones is that as we look back at where we have come from we gain a sense of community and the importance of various influences upon our lives and ministries" (p328). This volume stands in evidence of that truth. May our Lord and Saviour be praised for what he has accomplished.

New Horizons, October 2011

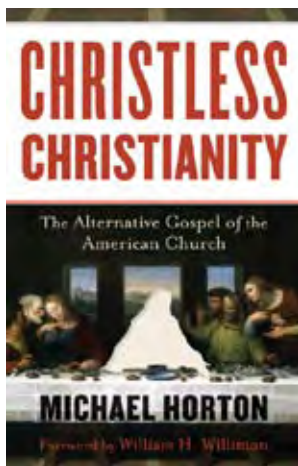
I anticipate publishing the article by Mr Jack Sawyer entitled The Glorious New Zealand Experiment, in the new year Ed.

Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church

Michael S. Horton.

Baker Books, 2008. Reviewed by OP pastor James T. Lim.

Is there such a thing as "Christless Christianity"? Sadly, according to Michael Horton, this is the trajectory of American evangelicalism, and "we are well



on our way" there. Horton argues "not that evangelicalism is becoming theologically liberal but that it is becoming theologically vacuous" (p24). Christless Christianity masterfully tells how American evangelicalism, through "a series of subtle distortions and not-so-subtle distractions" (p20), is displacing Christ (his person and work) from his central place in the church. Utilising the narrative insights of biblical theology, the classic Reformation law-gospel distinction, Luther's theology of glory versus the cross, and the centrality of Christ and all his benefits, Horton gives us a superb example of Christian apologetics.

Horton shows that American Christianity is in "captivity" (ch1). He goes on to describe it as "moralistic, therapeutic deism," following religious sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton (ch2), and "smooth talking and flattery" that seeks relevance over redemption (ch3), which turns "good news into good advice" as a form of "easy listening legalism" (ch4). Horton goes on to fix his critical gaze on evangelicalism's propensity toward a "deeds, not creeds"

mentality characterised by a modern-day Gnosticism, otherwise known as "American pietistic revivalism" (ch5), which seeks to rend asunder the vital connection between the Christian message and its divinely ordained medium of "proclamation" of the Word and "provision" of baptism and Lord's Supper (ch6). He concludes with a call to resist the "trivial and therapeutic" and to return to "listening to God's voice in Scripture again" by recovering the historic "Christian faith and practice within the church itself" (ch7).

This reviewer heartily recommends this book, not only because it is an excellent example of Cornelius Van Til's motto for apologetics, *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* ("gentle in manner, strong in substance"), but also for his comprehensive treatment that leaves no person or group shielded from critique. Especially convicting and helpful to this reviewer is Horton's critique of both the emergent and the conservative Reformed churches. He warns, "Our temptation as Reformed Christians, however, is to pride ourselves on bearing the marks of a true church regardless of whether people are actually being added to the church" (p. 197). He goes on to say, "A church that is not outward looking, eager to bring the Good News to the ends of the earth, is not really bringing it to those already gathered into Christ's flock Without the marks, the mission is blind; without the mission, the marks are dead" (p. 205). In essence, Horton is calling the American church back to the sufficiency of the gospel, in the ministry of Word and sacrament, not only for the edification of the people of God, but also for the evangelization of the world with a genuinely "Christ-filled Christianity."

Want to give a unique gift? Give a **SUBSCRIPTION** of **faith in focus**

See page 2 for details



27th Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand
Buckland's Beach, 3-9 September 2011