

faith in **focus**

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of New Zealand

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"Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills."

Psalm 147:7-8

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Editorial

As Christians we are known to be among the more trusting citizens of our nation. We honestly want to believe the best of our fellow men and women. As those who believe in a supernatural God we want to be open to different ways in which He's working. And this is particularly so when we come across a situation that seems to justify, in quite a distinctive way, our position as Reformed believers. Because we think our particular emphasises are being affirmed in such a situation, however, we can let our guard down. The discernment and scepticism we might have otherwise becomes put to the side. While the Consumer magazine warns us, "If it sounds too good to be true it probably is!" we who otherwise can be so careful are easily taken in.

Recently, this was brought home to me through a local situation. I received a phone call from a man who said he was the pastor of a local ethnic church which had broken away from a mainline denomination because of their unbiblical decisions and practices. When looking through the 'phone book and seeking other churches/denominations of like-mind he had seen our name and, so, through, a neighbouring colleague had received my 'phone number. We arranged a place and time to meet.

I rang up my colleague who encouraged me to look positively at this meeting as he knew of a growing biblical revival amongst such groups. I had heard and read of the same. It would certainly be an area where our reformed churches could help in equipping and training.

We meet for a coffee at MacDonalds and he described how their congregation - a group of over 150 - was keen to be part of a wider denomination from whom they could learn and interact with. He spoke of his deep unhappiness with what had gone on when he was a minister in the mainline denomination and how he had been dismissed because of that. My earlier scepticism wasn't completely abated, though, as he mentioned that he needed an official endorsement to support his permanent residency. He was most positive, however, about our meeting and the way that we could work together as a true work of God. Seeing our name in the telephone book he saw as God's direct leading.

It was agreed that I would discuss this with our elders and that I would get back to him the following day in order to tell him of our thoughts and arrange a meeting with him and their elders. The only proviso was that he would provide some referees in the meantime - names of other ministers or church leaders who could affirm what their situation was.

Those references weren't forthcoming, however, so, the next day, I sought some references. I did some walking through the 'phone book and rang up those whom I thought might know of his background, or pass me on to those who would know. This produced a reliable witness who spoke of quite a different scenario than that painted to me the day before. He also strongly warned against becoming involved with this person.

That changed everything. When someone lies - no matter what they might call it - it takes away any basis for co-operation. I spoke to him about that. While not denying that that was why he was dismissed, he said that this was not true and that there had been a conspiracy against him. Regardless of whether or not the charge was true, though, he had lied to me. He had not told us of that accusation and so had misled us about the background.

It shows how much we all need to be on our guard. Whether it's the two nice young men with their white shirts and ties who knock on your door and say they're Christians, when that's the last thing they are; or the person begging for money at your door because they say they're not getting any money till next week and they've got to feed the kids and they've got nothing for the bus, while they've just blown it on the pokies or they've got a car just around the corner.

Pray for discernment. Pray that you will be able to do what really helps them, despite whatever they might be saying to you. Pray that they will be re-formed. Because that's what's happened to you!

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

The other Martin

Martin Bucer (1491 - 1551)

Sjirk Bajema

Perhaps, by way of general background, I could invite you to think about the time of the Reformation. What is it that stands out about that time, in your thoughts?

More than likely you would have thought of Martin Luther, especially nailing those 95 Theses to that huge wooden door.

Others could have thought in particular about John Calvin, the great systematiser and commentator of the Reformation. But quite apart from these Reformers, important and gifted though they be, there was at work what we know was a great movement of God. The Reformation is first and foremost a tremendous revival, a work of the LORD that reformed His Church, even though the instituted church as it was then, tried so terribly hard to repress and suppress it.

Just a little reading into this fascinating time of the Reformation shows us the many others there were, sharing and speaking the same precious scriptural truths. From our continental reformed links we meet the names of Guido de Bres, the writer of the Belgic Confession, and Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, who co-wrote the Heidelberg Catechism. On the English side there are the Westminster Divines, those men who met to formulate the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Shorter and Larger Catechisms.

That's why I have chosen as the title for this article, "*The Other Martin*". For we know well **the** Martin, Martin Luther, but how many others were there? In the light of Martin Luther they may seem to pall to insignificance. But by reflecting a while on them and their place, we will be drawn to an even greater thankfulness to our Lord and Saviour for His Spirit's reforming work. We can so easily be caught up with what seem to be the great things. Yet it's this Lord who works especially in the small things and small ways too to bring all things together unto Him, who is the Head, Christ Jesus, ever to be praised!

Biographical details

We begin with a few details regarding the life of Martin Bucer, or Butzer, as he is sometimes called. He was born on November the 11th, 1491, in Schlettstadt, Germany. This is near Strasbourg. He was named Martin after Saint Martin of Tours, the same saint Martin Luther was named after. His original surname was Kuhhorn (cowhorn) — but, as was the practice amongst many, he latinised his name. His background was

humble — his father was a poor cobbler. His education, though, was good in childhood. At the age of 15 he entered the Dominican order, where he continued his education, particularly in Scholastic Thought, which is the theology of Thomas Aquinas. From there he was transferred ten years later to a cloister at Heidelberg where he continued to study, learning under Johannes Brentz and reading the works of Erasmus.

Erasmus was one of two major influences in this stage of Bucer's life. Erasmus was a Dutchman who excelled in the thorough study of the original languages of Scripture, and who was known for his humanism.

Now, we must note here that Erasmus'



humanism was totally different than what we call humanism today. His humanism was actually a Christian humanism, in which he wished to see the church purged of superstition through the use of intelligence and for there to be a return to the ethical teachings of Christ. To quote K.S. Latourette, "*He desired no break with the existing Catholic Church. He initiated no innovations in doctrine or worship. Rather he pleaded for ethical living, and in a politically divided Europe, racked by chronic wars, he argued for peace. His approach was rational. He appeared to cherish the conviction that through the appeal to man's reason both Church and society could be vastly improved.*" (p661, Vol.1., 'A History of Christianity'.)

The second early influence that had a major impact on Bucer was meeting Martin Luther himself. This occurred in April 1518, when Luther came to preside at a disputation during a meeting of the Augustan order.

Bucer, though of the same religious order as Tetzel, was convicted by Luther. Here I quote his own personal impression of Luther:

"Although our chief men contradicted him with all their might, their wiles were not able to make him move one inch from his propositions. His sweetness in answering is remarkable, his patience in listening is incomparable, in his explanations you would recognise the acumen of a Paul not a Scotus; his answers, so brief, so wise, and drawn from the Holy Scriptures, easily made all his hearers his admirers. On the next day I had a familiar and friendly conference with the man alone and a supper rich with doctrine than with dainties. He agrees with Erasmus in all things, but with this difference in his favour, that what Erasmus only insinuates he teaches openly and freely..."

In 1521, Bucer — now a strong supporter of reform — left the Dominican order, despite strong attempts by his ecclesiastical superiors to dissuade him.

1. Martin Bucer - the Minister

Above all else, Martin Bucer was a preacher of God's Word. This was recognised immediately following his withdrawal from the Dominican Order, when he became the parish priest at Landstuhl in 1521. There he found himself soon displaced because of yet another change in political events, and he moved on to Weiszenberg, where he was during 1522, through until May 1523, when the political situation forced himself and the minister there, Heinrich Motherer, who had originally invited him, to go to Strasbourg.

As a result of their sudden departure Bucer wrote his first definite theological treatise, in which he explained to the congregation in Weiszenberg the circumstances surrounding his sudden and mysterious departure from the town.

This short explanation, while clearly showing the belief he shared with Luther about Justification by Faith Alone, also showed a difference from Luther, with a comment regarding the crucialness of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Though it was only a short period of time between leaving the Dominican Order and Bucer's arrival in Strasbourg, we can already note two key aspects of a reformer:

1 – Bucer has a God-given determination to preach God's Word in all its fullness. This shows in his proclamation of the 'Doctrines of Grace', but also in his developing the Scriptural doctrine regarding the work and person of the Holy Spirit. This study into the Holy Spirit was certainly no vague spirituality,



a subjectivism which dissolves objective standards in a pottage of undifferentiated experience. Just as much as he believed that God's Word should never be interpreted apart from the Holy Spirit, so also he believed that spiritual experience has no validity apart from the objective check of the inscripturated Word. For a doctrine to be believed it must agree with the teaching of the Bible;

2 – Bucer is persecuted and then excommunicated by the church. While in Weiszenberg he suffered persecution from the Franciscans and excommunication by the Archbishop of Speyers.

In 1523 we find Martin Bucer in the 'free city' of Strasbourg. It was here that his parents' citizenship gave him protection. In the turmoil that he was experiencing then, we could say that there is a reflection here of the apostle Paul's Roman citizenship, which enabled him to continue his ministry. By God's providence Martin Bucer was now about to develop into an important lynch-pin in the Reformation.

It was in Strasbourg that Martin Bucer's gift for the ministry was shown. As one historian notes: "*His personal charm, intellectual abilities and zeal brought him eventually to a position of leadership in Strasbourg and in southern Germany.*" All the New Testament qualities for the teaching eldership were found in this man.

Bucer once defined the Church of Christ this way: "...*the gathering and communion of those who in Christ our Lord, by His Spirit and Word, have been assembled and united, in order to be one body and members of one another, in which every one has his own office and task in the universal upbuilding of the whole body and of all its members...*". He certainly demonstrated this knowledge in his own life.

Bucer's preaching brought forth much fruit. Quite aside from the many commentaries on Bible books which he wrote, there were the living letters written on the hearts and lives of those coming to true faith, growing in that faith; and further, ministers going forth preaching that faith, spreading through other congregations the good news about God's glorious grace.

The biblical work, in which we know Calvin was blessed richly by the Lord, was already happening under Bucer, who is rightly called "*the spiritual father of Calvin*". Another historian even described him as "...*a Calvinist before Calvin.*"

Thus Martin Bucer followed a genuinely biblical theology, the theology of such as the apostle Paul, Augustine of Hippo (the Church Father), and several men who particularly emphasised the doctrines of grace we as a Reformed/Presbyterian audience share today. Like those men, Bucer didn't hold back from the full truths of the Word, much as that brought misunderstanding and eventually led to his removal from Strasbourg on principle.

In Strasbourg, Bucer was soon working through the Biblical view on church office, and on liturgy — which is public worship — and on discipline. Aside from his preaching

and teaching these were three key areas in his ministry...church office, liturgy and discipline; not so different to the kind of areas we need to reflect on today either!

Church Office

With church office Bucer at first reacted **against** the Roman Catholic hierarchical system by ignoring any type of order altogether. It seemed, early in his ministry, that he had a kind of charismatic view, with anyone leading and speaking as the Spirit allegedly prompted on occasion. Quite rightly he always emphasised the priesthood of all believers, though initially without a clear distinction between various callings.

It was actually the charismatics of that time, the Anabaptist sects, who brought him to examining scripture on this. Then he realised the double order of offices — the higher ones held by bishops and elders (those who do the preaching/teaching; administering the sacraments; exercising discipline); and the other office assisting these offices in their pastoral care and also actively caring for the needs of the poor. Although rejecting the apostolic succession, Bucer still held a place for a Bishop as a supervisor.

So he advocated a two-office view — that is, elders and deacons — with the elders being further divided into two; those ministering the Word, and those leading the people and exercising pastoral care. This is the model of 1st Timothy 5 verse 17. It was this study which was clearly elucidated in his 1534 Church Order.

Liturgy

In terms of liturgy we can best see Martin Bucer through John Calvin, who followed very closely the principles and practice of Strasbourg. In fact, the kind of worship the Reformed/Presbyterian churches have had for four hundred years comes from Strasbourg, as (and we need to especially say this) Bucer went back to the New Testament Scriptures.

Thus the Confession of Sin was early in the service. In this part of worship, the minister admonishes the people to make confession of their sins, with a prayer seeking the Lord's forgiveness. Then God's pardoning grace is declared to those who believe.

Following this the congregation sings several brief psalms or hymns of praise, after which the minister makes a brief prayer and reads to the congregation a passage from the writings of the apostles, expounding it as briefly as possible.

Then the congregation sings again — either the Ten Commandments or another hymn or psalm. The minister then proclaims the gospel and delivers the sermon itself. After this the congregation sings the Articles



of Faith. The minister then offers a prayer for the government of the land, in which he prays for an increase of faith and love and grace to keep the remembrance of Christ's death with profit.

The minister proceeds with the Lord's Supper, admonishing those who wish to participate in remembering Christ to die to their sins, bear their cross willingly, and love their neighbour truly. All this with being strengthened in faith, as the believer considers what unlimited grace and goodness Christ has shown to us, in that He offered His body and blood to the Father on our behalf.

After this the Bible passages about the Lord's Supper, as written in the gospels, together with 1st Corinthians 11, are read.

The minister then divides the bread and cup of the Lord among them, also joining in himself. The congregation follows with singing another hymn of praise, the minister closes the Supper with a short prayer, blesses the people, and bids them go in the peace of the Lord.

This was the order of Sunday worship in the morning. There were altogether six services on the Lord's Day, with four for each day of the other six days of the week. These four daily services were all at different times so that the opportunity was there for each member of the church to go to at least one of them. This may seem somewhat excessive to us today — we have so many members who don't even go twice on Sunday, let alone all those other days of the week! But Bucer believed it to be vitally important because of the lack of knowledge of the people. Calvin also continued this same practice.

Many of the old hymns were done away with as they were either unscriptural or unsuited for singing, having been written in the medieval sophisticated choir format. Bucer saw that God required His people to be singing **together**, and not to be silent bystanders in some elaborate ritual.

Dr G.J. van de Poll sums up Bucer's position in this regard: *"Whereas Luther accentuated the soul of the individual in the invisible church, Bucer stressed the priesthood of all believers, embodied in the congregation and its liturgy. Therefore Bucer's ecclesiology [ecclesiology is the Latin word for church government] showed an altogether different character from those of Wittenberg and Zurich (where the reformer Zwingli was). The features of the Early Church and the ideal of the Humanists stood out clearly in his memory."* (p.56.)

Thus far the liturgy — perhaps the area to which we owe Martin Bucer our greatest debt.

Discipline

It soon became evident that the general oversight of the elders needed a tighter

application than all the congregation being under the same office bearers. So, within a particular church, there were areas set up. We might also know these as sections or groups. In these smaller groups there was a more closely-knit working and encouraging together.

Although Strasbourg was known for its wider toleration of anabaptists and others, this was not at the expense of the churches there. Indeed, as a result of groups such as the anabaptists, Bucer continued to sharpen his understanding of Scripture on discipline throughout his ministry there.

In particular, we find that the period from 1530 to 1545 brought forth his richest development in this, as he drew deeper into Matthew 18, the verses 15 'til 17, and its application for the church. Van de Poll says of this: *"In contrast with Calvin... Bucer saw discipline as one of the features of the true church, and he wanted to show this to the non-believing world. The fruits of love were essential, in order that the church might present herself as the visible beginning of God's Kingdom."* Then he quotes Bucer directly: *"Thus our Lord and Master Jesus Christ wishes to reign over His members...that he completes the work of salvation through all the members and through a true communion."*

A Match Maker Too!

But church office, liturgy and discipline aside, there was another thing Bucer enjoyed. That, surprisingly enough, was match-making. He was a man who loved married life — marrying first a former nun, like Luther, and then after her death because of a plague, marrying the widow of a fellow reformer in Strasbourg. This love he wished others to enjoy too. So when the ultimate in academic bachelors came to town, John Calvin himself, Bucer was instrumental in his marriage to Idette de Bure. And though we know Calvin had a few preconceived ideas as to what his wife was to do for him, yet he too grew to love married life — in fact, when his wife died, he spoke highly of how the LORD had blessed him with her. He missed her greatly.

2. Martin Bucer – the Mediator

Bucer stood as a unique person in the whole ebb and flow of this reformational period. As we have heard, he knew Martin Luther. Bucer was even there at the Diet of Worms in 1521, when Luther was said to have spoken the immortal words: *"Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. So help me God!"* Bucer also knew well the Swiss Reformers, especially Ulrich Zwingli and those of his school.

Together with his deep knowledge of the

NEW ZEALAND CONFERENCE ON REFORMATION THEOLOGY

The second NZCRT will be held (dv):

Christchurch 17/18 October

at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale

Wellington 24/25 October

at the Reformed Church of Silverstream

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Speakers this year will be

Dr Joseph A. Pipa, who is the President of the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and Dr Morton H. Smith, also of Greenville, South Carolina. Both these men are accomplished teachers, authors and pastors whom the Lord has used extensively.

The conference theme will be *'The Church'*. Our speakers will explain from the Word of God what a church should look like, its characteristics, and task, and how we, as His people should live in the church to make the 'body of Christ' honouring to Him. The talks will be ably illustrated and applied. Examples of address titles will be *'The Beauty of the Church'*, *'The task of the Church'* and *'The Church and the Family'*.

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Roman Catholic church, he became an important link through two decades of attempted mediating conferences. He was a participant in nearly every conference on religion in Germany and Switzerland in the years from 1524 to 1548.

But, rather than detailing each one, let me place before you the two that reflect perhaps his highest and lowest points in this area.

The highest I think would have to be the meeting at Philip of Hesse's castle in Marburg in October 1529. Here the Lutherans met the Zwinglians, together with Bucer and several others. Of the 15 key points raised, there was agreement on 14. Yes — 14! Even on the fifteenth point they were close. As Latourette writes, "*Zwingli was willing to concede that Christ is spiritually present in the Lord's Supper and Luther granted that, no matter what the nature of Christ's presence, only faith can make it of benefit to the Christian.*" Intercommunion might have been obtained had not Melancthon objected on the ground that for Luther to yield might make reconciliation with the Roman Catholics impossible." Although Melancthon himself warmed towards the Reformed position, and later was a good friend of Calvin, yet this was the point at which they came so close and still were so far!

Bucer himself had taken the middle ground in the Lord's Supper issue — a position later followed by Calvin — which recognised the spiritual presence of Christ, though not His physical presence.

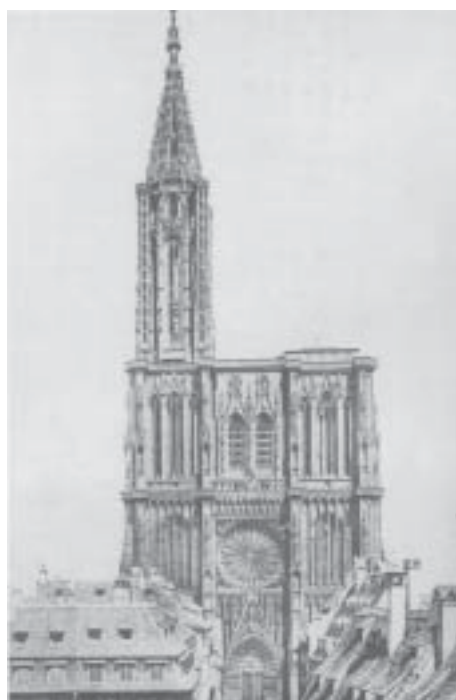
The Catholics invariably made much of this break-down, as was shown in the following year at the Diet of Augsburg, when the Lutherans presented their Augsburg Confession, Bucer and several others presented their Confession of the Four Cities, and Zwingli presented his Confession. Though there were some agreements reached with the Lutherans, such as the Wittenberg Concordia in 1536, this Marburg meeting of 1529 would have been the height.

And the pits? Well, it's always difficult to tell what Bucer himself would have felt, but the hindsight of history would seem to indicate the colloquy at Regensburg in 1546, when some secret negotiations he had been having with reformist Catholics were taken quite out of context, and sprung upon him. He denied their truth. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants rejected what was alleged.

Then the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, broke the Protestant powers by military force, and laid down his own compromise scheme, the Augsburg Interim of 1548. And although the Augsburg Interim didn't concede much more to Catholicism than some of Bucer's earlier compromise solutions had, he opposed vigorously its acceptance by Strasbourg. His view was that even a poor

compromise was justified if it made some progress toward reform, but that for Strasbourg to accept the Interim would mean going backward. This is very much in the line of the apostle Paul's word to the Philippians, "...only let us live up to what we have already attained..." (3:16). The city, though, wouldn't oppose the armies of Charles. Finally they discharged Bucer and several other ministers, all of whom were then invited by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to come to England.

Considering Bucer's ecumenical struggles made me wonder about the essentials and non-essentials of ecumenical contact today. The modern ecumenical movement has made much of Bucer, though he, for his part, wouldn't want to be much involved — if at



all — with their views today!

How could he with the dictum, "...let us live up to what we have already attained." How would he had ever thought of Christians not believing in most of the Apostles' Creed, let alone just the one difference over Lord's Supper! The denominator for Bucer was not the lowest common one — quite the contrary! For him any invitations were to be used as a way for fraternal conversation and self-examination with other denominations, so that we discover the sins that have kept us separate. He was truly biblical! And why else are we today Reformed Presbyterian?

Let me assure you, Bucer's 'Unionspolitik' is something quite different than marching down the streets of your local city with clergymen and so-called believers who deny the virgin birth of our Lord, and His bodily resurrection, and personal sin. Martin Bucer wanted to join with those closest to him. But

only after agreement had been reached. Otherwise he had nothing to do with them!

3. Martin Bucer – the Motivator

I have to say that I use the word "motivator" in the sense of a whole-of-life calling that had influence outside and beyond the area where Bucer was himself physically. For Martin Bucer was no flash-in-the-pan, instant man. He was, rather, deeply committed to where he was, and dedicated to an ongoing and thorough biblical exposition. He was a steady grafter, working hard at doing what he believed he was called to do, and not leaving unless principally or forcefully being ejected!

In our age of changing fads and fashions, of instant choices and lack of responsibility, we should appreciate such values. Consider the fruit this brings. Bucer and the other reformers had an immense depth of knowledge. No television, pentium computers and fax machines then. But they read and debated and spoke and read some more.

Though, let's not become disheartened. "Dig deeper", Bucer would have told you. "Search the Scriptures, study the history of the Lord's Church, discuss these things together." Isn't it what the Lord Himself commends, as Mary is contrasted over against Martha?

So, realising the nature of this motivation as being that which reflects the Divine Character, we consider Martin Bucer... **the Motivator!**

In the first place, we cannot go past Bucer the writer. Though many of his works were destroyed, the influence they had in his lifetime, and in the period directly following his life, are of vital importance. We reflect on a few now.

There was that first treatise which Bucer wrote to the congregation at Weiszenberg, encouraging them in the faith.

Then in 1524 he wrote the book which title in English was shortened to "*Ground & Being.*" (The original German title was somewhat longer! — "*Grund und Ursach de Neuerungen, von den Nachtmahl, de Herrn, dem Tauf, den Feiertagen, Bilder und Gemeindegessang*").

The reason for this work was the defence of the pastors of Strasbourg against the slander that monks and prelates had spread about their liturgical reformation. The contents in this book deal with how an evangelical church should conduct her services, with its eleven chapters considering the Lord's Supper (that itself took up seven chapters), and Baptism, Christian Festivals, images, hymns and prayers. The source of this liturgy is scripture, supported by the writing of the Church Fathers.

We have in our age many Christian churches claiming a return to the early

church. You may sometimes read the phrase in their promotional literature — something like, 'We practice New Testament Christianity', or 'Like the Early Church'. In particular, those of a pentecostal theology can be very vocal: they do things as they were done in the early church!

Martin Bucer, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Farel, and the other reformers, though, believe **they** did just that. And their confessions and liturgies are what the Reformed-Presbyterian churches hold to today.

Why the difference? Have we been wrong all along; have we missed out this tremendous blessing from the Lord in that continuing revelation from Him? How would these reformers argue against what can be quite compelling arguments today?

Well, you know, they did! In their age they had the forerunners of the charismatics and pentecostals of today. And they addressed them by pointing time and again — as they did with the Roman Catholics — to the total picture of Scripture.

Those others, you see, had very small Bibles. Perhaps you notice, as you talk with them, that there are certain texts they keep coming back to...Acts 2, 4, 8, 10 & 19; 1st Corinthians 12- 14. Certain texts which are lifted out of context, out of the flow of salvation history. How about later texts? There is little regard for how the very latest of God's revelation spoke, as it comes, for instance, through the apostle Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus.

It's actually the very basic Church Order contained in these letters — 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus — which Bucer came to after struggling himself with the local charismatics. In searching through the Scriptures he found what was needed. Let's pray and work that our churches are also discovering the same!

So as the motivator, Bucer certainly had an effect with his Church Order. Indeed, this was taken over also by the cities of Hesse and Cologne, as well as Strasbourg, and developed further in Geneva.

The mention of Geneva brings to the fore an individual, who, though we should be loath to name any one particular individual as an example of Bucer's motivation, is perhaps the way through which Bucer left his strongest mark. That person's name is John Calvin. Yes, you're thinking, I've mentioned him already. But now let's think about the terribly disappointed figure who makes his way to Strasbourg in 1538. It seems that, despite his strongest efforts at reform, it hasn't worked out in Geneva. The opposing party has gained political ascendancy, and Calvin is forced forlornly to Strasbourg.

Not that there won't be a warm welcome there. Calvin had originally been on his way to Strasbourg, to be under Bucer, when in August 1536 Farel, the minister of Geneva,

confronted him with a curse from God if he didn't help out in Geneva. Now he was in Strasbourg.

But what a difference now! There would not now be the quiet scholastic life he had intended originally. Rather, taking up the calling as the minister to the French-speaking refugee congregation there, Calvin was able to freely develop the Church Order, liturgy, and discipline he had desired for Geneva. Indeed, as we speak of Calvin's liturgy today, it's the Strasbourg model we turn to for his model of what is most scriptural.

Though financially it became grim for Calvin — he even had to sell some of his precious books, and then they were very valuable, for printing presses had just begun — yet he was able to persevere. Though he was offered a large sum of money if he desisted from preaching the distinctively Reformed doctrines, he yet stayed faithful; and was richly rewarded with what he later described as the most enjoyable period in his ministry. And that was with Martin Bucer, a man he had long admired, and now could work right next to and with. William Pauck said of this association, "*The Reformed type of church was Bucer's gift to the world, through the work of his strong and brilliant executive Calvin.*"

John Calvin's theology and practice was

nothing new. Bucer had believed and done the same before him. And, in turn, Bucer had largely taken over the belief and practice of the Early Church. Here was where Luther fell short. Though theologically so blessed, he yet failed to work through those implications which would have brought him back more fully to the New Testament Church, and to the reformed view of church.

One door closes - another opens

Still, after the tremendous work he had done, it seemed there was a definite closing of doors when in 1549 Bucer received his marching orders from the authorities in Strasbourg. It was poor thanks after all he had achieved. But political considerations being what they are — and knowing the vacillations of politicians, also ours today! — Bucer had to move on. That's something we need to remember too. At points in our lives we may well wonder why the Lord suddenly throws up a road block. I mean, didn't He know how well I had been driving? Still, He means us to walk for a while. There's something else He has in mind for us then. Do you believe that? Would you even trust that, based on how the Lord has blessed you to that particular point, that He'll bless you again?

In that sad situation of exile from

CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

singles convention

Attention all singles who want to share a time of Christian fellowship and enjoy a holiday in our nations Capital Canberra. That's right planning is well underway and we like to see as many of you there to share this time with us, so put in for your holidays and start saving now.

When: 3rd Jan - 10th Jan 2004

Where: Greenhills Murrumbidgee Conference Centre, 1437 Cotter Road, Cotter (Canberra) ACT, Australia.

Cost: \$300-\$350 dollars (to be determined)

Activities: Generally include- Topical bible studies, Sports, Sight seeing, formal dinner, leisure time etc.

Transport: Own, Air, Rail or Bus.

We will keep you posted as more information becomes available. If you want to know what Canberra has to offer you can visit www.visitcanberra.com.au

We asked that you remember the planing committee in your prayers, that we may honour God and serve you well in the preparations we make for this convention.

On behalf of the planning committee,
David Vander Reyden - contact number 02 45765469
(ndavidv@bigpond.com)

Strasbourg, Bucer was blessed through his previous motivation. A man no less than the Archbishop of the Church of England himself — Thomas Cranmer — personally invited Bucer and several other reformed exiles from Strasbourg and elsewhere, to assist in the reformation of England. Bucer was even appointed Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge.

At this point, though, some may be wondering what a Calvinist and an Anglican could have in common. I'm reminded here of a story R.B. Kuiper told to Philip Hughes, an Evangelical-Anglican. In this story R.B. tells about two men who were taking a stroll through the cemetery. As these two men looked at the inscriptions on the tombstones, one of them suddenly cried out, "Here's something different, really different!" "What is it?" his friend asked. "Here are two men in one grave," came the reply. "Two men in one grave? That's strange." "Well, this is what it says on the tombstone: Here lies an Anglican and a Calvinist!"

Or there is the story about the Anglican Priest who vigorously denied the doctrine of predestination in a conversation with a Reformed minister. He was emphatic that he could never support such a doctrine and was most glad to be in a denomination which was against it. That was until the Reformed minister picked up that Priest's own 'Book of Common Prayer', and, turning to the Articles of Religion, began to read out Article 17, precisely about Predestination & Election!

We can thank the Lord for Martin Bucer's work when we look at a diocese such as Sydney, where the reformed foundation and influence is strong. He was there when these things were being drawn up. His critique of the 1549 Prayerbook set the scene for much of the Calvinistic work which was to follow.

That work in England began with '*The Anglican Ordinal of 1550*,' a book on offices and ordination. Although he didn't want to be too radical — for instance, the office of bishop was maintained — he advised the use of one single ordination formula for all the offices, thus showing that there should be no hierarchical order. On the other hand he defended the Scriptural offices against the attacks of Anabaptism, which in his opinion "*undervalues or condemns the office.*"

Bucer's influence was further noticeable in the *Book of Common Prayer* of 1552. Here his critique on the 1549 Prayerbook was extensively used. Calvin, after being invited by John Knox and others to evaluate, gave a mild reply, thus recognising its value. Although later editions partly did away with Bucer's influence on the Prayerbook, there is still a distinctive strand that remains. A strand of such usefulness that I would recommend any fellow Reformed-Presbyterian colleague to have such a book as this Anglican Liturgy compared with the Bible. This has added a wider appreciation to my private and public prayers.

Though I would by no means want to take away from our precious "free" tradition, yet,

as a friend found, while travelling around Australia, at least in an Anglican worship service there is a confession of sin, because of the prayer book!

I quote G.R. Elton, a well-known secular historian, on this vital period in English history: "*...from its first archbishop the Anglican Church inherited not only a beautiful liturgy and a readiness to obey civil authority, but also a doctrine half-way between the extremes...*". And further on he summarises "*The Prayer Book of 1552, the Ordinal of 1550 which it took over, the act of uniformity which made the Prayer Book the only legal form of worship, and the Forty-Two Articles binding on all Englishmen, clerical and lay — these comprehended the Protestant Reformation in England.*"

In this light we find even more proof that Martin Bucer was a much-blessed Motivator.

On the 28th of February 1551 Martin Bucer passed through to be with the Lord he dearly loved and served. And although the Roman Catholic reaction under Queen Mary was to have his remains exhumed and post-mortem burnt at the stake, he died as he lived — bringing God the glory through the simple exposition of His Word. That Bucer's name was rehabilitated during Elizabeth's reign may ease our discomfort, but it did not make one iota of difference to how the LORD had been pleased to richly bless His people through the life of this servant. To God be the glory and honour, for great things He has done; and great things He will continue to do!

The way ahead?

Towards a resolution: The second part to our looking at mental illness

Dirk van Garderen

What is needed here is a return to some basic Biblical premises and, working towards a position where we can formulate and explore the Biblical parameters in providing a way ahead.

Allow me to begin on a very optimistic note. I believe that the key lies in understanding and coming to grips with a Biblical (yes, specifically Reformed!) understanding of ourselves as human-beings created by God in his image who, in Adam, have sinned and are, by nature, sinners.

How does the Bible describe us human beings?

Scripture teaches us that we human beings are designed and created by God - *in his*

image. (**Gen 1.26ff**) On the one hand we are a part of creation (being taken from the dust of the ground **Gen 2:7**; that dust we are to dust we shall return. **Gen 3.19b**). On the other hand we are separated from the rest of creation as well. Ours is a very special place of honour *over* creation which, in that sense, allows us to see ourselves as separate from it. (**Psalms 8:5** '*you made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.*') Furthermore, there is a spiritual dimension (soul/spirit) which sets us apart from the rest of creation.

The 'image' or 'likeness' that set humans apart from the rest of creation to rule and have dominion over it consisted in three essential qualities: holiness, righteousness and knowledge. (**Col 3.10, Eph 4.24**). Note

once more that each of these qualities is understood *in relation to God*.

Holy: set apart from the rest of creation to serve, glorify and honour God. To reflect and imitate him. To be his representatives.

Righteous: To reflect God's way of doing and dealing with things. Do as God does. Employ the same standards.

Knowing God: living in a close relationship intimate relationship where our purposes, aims and aspirations are directed towards God and arise from a deep and intimate understanding of him.

Functionally (what we do or are meant to do) and ontologically (what we are) this sets human beings apart from the rest of creation. It also means that we as human beings will only find true peace and contentment if and when we function as we were designed to -

that is, are holy, righteous and in a positive relation with our creator as his servants.

Then came the fall as described in **Genesis 3!** Everything changed. Our bodies become corruptible and corrupted. Human ability became paralysed. Human nature was transformed. Death, corruption, decay entered every fibre of our being - physically, spiritually and emotionally. Sin and pollution corrupted:

our **physical body** (witness our physical deterioration, malfunction and decay inevitably culminating in death);
our **spiritual life** (recall that we are, before God, dead in trespasses and sins);
our **mind** - if you like, our mental faculties - emotions, reasoning, thinking, became darkened, weakened and corrupt.

What does this mean?

Simply this: Illness, disease, malfunctions - all the result of sin (either directly or indirectly) - necessarily manifest themselves in the totality of our being - body, mind and spirit - and in an inextricably inter-connected manner. Yes, mind, and as an expression of it, *will* too! (c/f Romans 1:21 thinking became futile; 1.24 gave them over to sinful desires; 1.26 shameful lusts; 1.28 depraved mind).

Therefore, when dealing with depression - both in terms of possible causes and effects - I must take into account the *whole* person. To focus on one or perhaps only two of the dimensions of a person - or to suggest that one only dimension is the cause of a condition like depression is both presumptuous and a failure to take account of the *whole* person whose *whole* make up is permeated by sin!

My criticism of the medical and psychiatric community is about its failure to take into account the *spiritual* dimension of a human being. The presence, power and involvement of a personal God in human experience - both as one to whom we are accountable and who offers us freedom from the powers of condemnation, guilt, fear and death - is almost completely ignored (or dismissed as irrelevant.) We must object! The Bible tells us that we have a spiritual dimension and that we human beings can only be understood (both functionally and ontologically) in our relation to God. By ignoring this medical people and psychotherapists are only dealing with a part of the problem. (This might also account for much of the failure attributed to psychotherapies¹

However, there is another side to this as well. Christian pastoral counselling which ignores or minimises those factors (organic, historic, etc) is equally guilty of dealing with only part of the problem. To say that the (whole) problem is sin and that the solution to depression or whatever is simply

confronting that sin, confessing it and accepting God's promise and guarantee of forgiveness - whilst, in many respects true - is to grossly oversimplify things. It is just as reductionistic as the naturalistic, psychotherapeutic perceptions are.

In practice

What this means in actual practice is that we learn to approach conditions such as depression, from a full-orbed Biblical perspective which begins by acknowledging the crippling and life-destroying, strength-sapping impact and power of sin on the totality of our being. When Calvinists speak of the result of sin manifesting itself as '*total depravity*' they do not mean that we human beings are as bad as could be, but rather that the totality of our lives (physical, mental and spiritual) is corrupted and disabled to the point of powerlessness and inability by sin. We also believe that the environment (all of creation) is in bondage to decay and cries out like a woman in childbirth (Romans 8:18ff).

Therefore, when dealing with depression, causal effects and impact (damage if you like) as well as therapeutic measures must include all dimensions. For example:

Address organic causes and or effects and, inasmuch as these can be corrected, alleviated or controlled in a truly helpful manner by medicinal or, if necessary, more radical procedures, consider them. The warning to all parties involved is simple: Medication is and of itself is not the whole cure! It may be a necessary *part* or aspect of the treatment - but to leave it at that is not enough!

Whatever else, psycho-therapy has demonstrated that the mind - how we think, what we remember and what the impact of what we remember is - *does* play an important role that impacts deeply on us. Alongside of that, the things that have been

done to us - past traumas, etc., that are a part of our life stories - *do* continue to have a deep impact on us.

Speaking in Biblical categories, do not ever forget that we ourselves as sinners - that our minds ('hearts' to use one of the biblical terms²) are impacted and malfunction (twist, change and even invent past and present events). Furthermore, because we live in a sinful broken world among sinners (still using Biblical categories here) we are also the victims at least as much as we are the cause and perpetrators of sin!

What has struck me in regard to this is two things:

That much of the counselling done by Christians (all across the spectrum - including non-integrationists like Jay Adams and those who follow from that direction) is often very weak and limited in exploring and coming to grips with that area.³

In responding to the prevailing spirit of the age which is almost totally preoccupied with self (an age of 'selfism') there is a tremendous emphasis on being a victim. In this context someone like Rousas Rushdoony speaks of the 'cult of victimisation.' However, the tendency on the part of Christian critics is to go to the other extreme and emphasise personal responsibility and personal wilful choices almost to the exclusion of everything else.⁴

What this means is that someone being counselled is made to feel that he/she is ultimately personally responsible for his/her present condition **and** that the only solution is by now either becoming responsible enough to actually change the existing patterns or start believing (trusting, having faith) in Jesus. The trouble is that depression is precisely that overwhelming sense of powerlessness, helplessness and inability. '*I want to - but a can't! I ask, but Jesus doesn't seem to hear!*' This ignores the *biblical doctrine* which we know as 'total



depravity' - the fact that the whole of our being - including the human will is crippled, disabled, paralysed and permeated by sin.

A plea

My special plea is that the kind of factors and strategies that psychotherapists are often so good at addressing ought not to be ignored. They too are a part of the experience of a person. The mistake is in focussing on this area and ignoring or playing down the others! Ignoring the organic and spiritual is a failure to deal with the whole person.⁵

The spiritual dimension of a human being *must* be taken into account. The human heart will find no rest or peace until it finds it in God through Jesus Christ. Whatever else, one of the major components of depression is an overwhelming sense of guilt (a sense of standing before God as someone who is a sinner and who has sinned). This guilt (also manifesting itself in a deep sense of shame, embarrassment, a damning conscience, feelings of despair and wretchedness) has a very positive side to it. It makes us realise that we need help - real help and that we are helpless in terms of helping ourselves.

Psychotherapy, whilst aware of this dimension, tries to find the way out by either turning away or deflecting the blame to others (parents, etc) OR by offering strategies or techniques that will (more or less successfully) allow the person to deal with it. (For example: stop believing in the kind of God you do!)

Biblical counselling that takes into account what the Bible says *includes* the spiritual dimension (and insists on it) but does not ignore the impact and crippling

power of sin on the body and mind as well. To address depression the *whole* must be taken into account.

Finally, Biblical counselling knows about and proclaims (repeatedly, daily, until the Lord takes us home or comes back) the *grace* of God! Biblical counselling knows and recognises and fully takes into account that dimension. Here is the comfort, the hope and the knowledge of the promises of God.

¹ I am thinking here of Hans Eysenck and Walter Mishel and their critiques.

² Thus Scripture highlights that, because of the condition of the human heart - man inevitably chooses the wrong! Gen. 6.5, (c/f 8.21) states: The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and they every inclination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil all the time. Dare you say that succeeding generations have improved or bettered themselves? Scripture doesn't:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure (desperately corrupt) (Jeremiah 17.9)

Romans 1.18 - 3.9 ought to be compulsory reading. Let me just quote 1:29-31 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; (NASB)

³ See for example, Ed Welch (Op Cit p 231 where he addresses the subject of a Biblical response to codependent descriptions.

He writes:

Many persons who have been captured by the codependency system feel understood when reading the descriptions. They feel as though the descriptions are about them. On the other hand, when they go directly to the Scriptures or to a pastor they sometimes feel as though they are not uniquely understood.

Codependency has provided an important challenge to the church. It reminds us that past influences can be very powerful. Undoubtedly the church can do better at studying individuals and describing patterns and making relevant applications of biblical

categories. We must realise that our ministry task is two-fold: we must study people, together with the insights we glean from culture, science and so on; and we must study the Bible more deeply... (p231f)

⁴ See Bobgan, Martin and Deidre Psycho-heresy (p 158) who write:

'Human will and responsibility go hand in hand. If a person makes choices, then he is accountable for his behaviour. Individuals have different degrees of freedom and choice because of biological limitations, environmental backgrounds, habits established through past choices, and the other effects of the Fall. However, God holds each person responsible for the degree of choice he possesses. A person is not responsible for all that happens to him, but he is responsible for his reactions. The Bible makes it clear that persons do make choices and are held accountable for their behaviour.

According to Scripture, man chooses his thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Man chooses to love and to hate, to forgive and to accept forgiveness, to act responsibly or irresponsibly, and to think biblically or unbiblically. If a person is not capable of such choices, why has his Creator commanded and exhorted him regarding love and forgiveness, thoughts and actions? The concept of personal accountability is a critical biblical doctrine which is essential for change.' (p158)

⁵ Can you now begin to appreciate my problem with the Bobgans and many like them? They hold to a view of human nature (in this case human ability) which is not Biblical (or reformed). The result is that the approach they advocate is often used to place an even greater burden on someone who is depressed. Their diagnosis is that depression is caused by (or even if it isn't) continues because of irresponsible choices. Choose to love or to hate - to act biblically or unbiblically. Choose to believe and if you don't confess to Jesus and accept his promise that he has forgiven you when you ask, change what you believe. It is up to you. It depends on you! The depressed person, in a deep slimy pit without anything to hold on to, experiencing a mood of total mental and spiritual paralysis and feeling totally helpless... cries. What the Bobgan do, unwittingly I suspect, is burden a depressed person even more! How? By accusing them of I am refusing to help themselves or accept the divine help offered to them. Where is God's *grace* in all of this?

Mysterious ways

How God can use a mental illness

That Wednesday afternoon when I was admitted to the psychiatric unit of Geelong Hospital, the nurses asked me if I knew where I was. Of course I did. I declared that I was on God's earth. I was energetic and talkative, though I hadn't slept in three days. The psychiatrist asked me if I thought I had a mission from God. My eyes welled with tears and I felt like Jeremiah.

The last few weeks had been pretty crazy.

Usually a diligent student, I had abandoned my books. Generally considered a level personality, my mood had been very up or very down. The Bible study group I attended was finding it difficult to stay on topic. Previously uninterested in having a girlfriend, I had fallen helplessly in love.

Some pretty hefty drugs and two days of sleep saw my mood decline a little. I was soon informed of my diagnosis: Bipolar Affective Disorder, previously known as Manic Depression. The latter label can mislead one to think the condition is just depression, though severe. Bipolar actually encompasses both extremes (poles) of emotion - soaring ecstasy and plunging despair.

It's been about three years since my mental illness episode and as I look back I laugh a little and cringe a fair bit. I also marvel



at how God used such a tumultuous time for His own wise ends. At the moment I can identify four uses God can make of such a mental illness episode.

1. Deepen trust in Him

My situation was one of complete helplessness. I could not trust my common sense – not even to keep me safe walking across an intersection. I could not trust my mind to correctly inform me of my condition – I had never felt more alive and well at the time of my admission. I was incapable of reading my Bible – and it was a long time before I read anything at all. And yet, in the centre of the storm, I felt very safe. I had no doubt that God was in control of my life. To one weary of trusting himself, it was a wonderful and necessary helplessness.

2. Change a life's direction

Though I was confident I was called to be a Bible translator, and was studying theology in preparation for that, God evidently had other plans for me. Striding resolutely towards the goal of Bible translating, I felt a quiet sense of loss for some things that I longed for, but couldn't factor into my projected career path.

For one, I had grown up too fast without having enough fun. I had assumed a seriousness which overshadowed my personality and stole my youth. I also had a lurking envy for people who studied language or literature at university. This was an interest of mine which I never had time for, and I was sad that I never would.

I missed my family and at heart didn't like the prospect of living and working in a foreign country. I was also sad at the possibility of bachelorhood, even though I knew being single had its advantages for a missionary.

God knew me better than I did and has granted me the things I had denied myself. Free of my weighty prospects, I have recovered the lighter side of my personality. I am studying a language-oriented Arts degree at Melbourne University, and am enjoying it thoroughly. I have grown in love, appreciation and closeness to my family. And best of all, in July this year I married the girl I fell in love with that eventful September.

3. Develop character

My experiences with Bipolar have taught me a lot about myself, and I am less hard on myself than I used to be. I find this has enabled me to empathise better with others, to allow for human-ness, and to be less driven. Having ridden the peaks and troughs of emotion also helps me to identify with people in varying circumstances.

4. Strengthen His church

In my time of illness, both in the acute and

recovery phases, the Body of Christ was immensely supportive. I had visitors, encouraging notes, foodstuffs and all sorts of good things coming at me, from the local and wider church community. My mum flew over to be with me and was wonderful. I think in some ways the ordeal was harder for her than it was for me, but her love and help and removal of me home to W.A. sped my recovery greatly.

My family and friends were very understanding, and learned what they could about the nature of Bipolar Disorder so they could better understand what I was going through. My now-wife Ingrid has been an amazing friend through the whole thing, and I cannot overestimate the positive impact her love has made on my life. It is often adversity that knits the Body closer together, and I

feel very privileged to be a part of it.

These days maintaining my health means taking 3 tablets a day, getting enough sleep, and trying to live as low-stressed and balanced a lifestyle as possible. Not that these things absorb me like they used to, but they're still important.

God has worked in my life to help me become more of the me He wants me to be. Had someone suggested the method of His working to me beforehand, I couldn't have thought of anything worse. This side of it, I don't think He could have done it any better.

Tim Vanderstoep

(This article first appeared in Trowel & Sword, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement)

God knows best

On that memorable Wednesday morning in September 1999, a phone call from the Reformed Theological College informed us that Tim had become mentally unwell and that he needed to be hospitalised. Did we agree to that action? Stunned we said — yes, yes, of course if that's what's needed, then yes, do whatever needs to be done. So Tim was hospitalised.

We were upset, and cried out to the Lord to help us and Tim in this time of serious concern. We were thinking, 'Can this really be true, can this be happening to Tim, our levelheaded, conscientious son?'

Thankfully I was able to fly to Geelong within a short time and was allowed to visit. Tim was still on a high, while I was *not*.

After being treated with some heavy

"Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while..." Mark 6.31

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medication, Tim recovered reasonably quickly.

The psychiatrist was amazed at the insight Tim developed into his own condition. He reduced the medication and Tim was allowed to leave hospital. I remember that date very well — it was Tim's 20th birthday. That evening we had a low-key celebration with his friends. We were all very glad Tim was allowed to be home, even though 'fragile.'

Realising that it would be better for Tim to have a break from his studies and come home to W.A. to further his recovery, I floated the idea to Tim and was very glad that he agreed and that he was happy to come home. We packed up all his things and flew to Perth.

All during this time the College community, our church families in Willetton and Geelong as well as our Rehoboth Christian High School staff at Kenwick, Perth, proved to be of wonderful support. We thank God for them — just think what it would be like to go through hardship and sorrow and have no such loving and interested people to help!

After arriving in W.A. Tim's mood slowly but surely started to rise again. He needed hardly any sleep, became overexcited and very talkative, jumping from subject to subject, into 'art', very unlike his usual self.

Later we learnt that this was still part of

the same manic episode, which had not come to an end.

Earlier in the year Tim had experienced a time of profound depression. All the things which he used to love doing, he found no longer any pleasure in. As time went by, depression turned to elation.

Episodes of Bipolar Affective Disorder, if not treated, can last anything from a few days to a few months. Because Tim's medication had been reduced too much too soon, he became extremely elated, very irritable and irrational. Reality and fantasy blurred.

Even though we went to see the psychiatrist twice that week, they were hesitant to admit Tim again. However, we (Kees and I) were getting exhausted through lack of sleep, and were worried because Tim needed to be supervised now for his own safety.

We spoke to him and persuaded him to pack his small bag and come to hospital.

Without any arguing, he complied and was admitted. I went home and cried.

Next day we were allowed to visit. That was not good, however, so soon after Tim's having had a massive dose of medication. We could hardly communicate, which made us even sadder. Those first few days were shocking for us as a family. Tim's siblings also were experiencing a range of emotions, from grief and anger to disbelief and denial.

Quite soon Tim was out of acute care. A family meeting was organised the next week with medical staff, Tim and us. This proved to be of slight benefit.

Visiting each day, we were delighted to see Tim improve and after a fortnight he was allowed to come home.

Regular check-ups with the psychiatrist and on-going medication were now the requirement. Because of the sedative effects of the medication, Tim was not able to do much at all for quite some time. He certainly did not feel at all like reading or studying — he was just sitting around.

Although we loved having him home, we were praying for ongoing recovery so that he could take his place again in church and society.

Gradually as the months went by and the medication was once again reduced (with some trepidation on our part), Tim was able to help Kees at work for short periods.

He also was helpful at home. All through this time his wit and incisive insight provided many light-hearted and humorous moments. A part-time gardening job at Manoah, a Senior Citizens Village, followed.

Tim's work was appreciated and he felt well.

As time went on his moods stabilised, much to our delight.

Then in June, our daughter, Jo, and Ingrid, Tim's girlfriend, came over for a holiday from Geelong. We had a wonderful time, and Tim was making plans to return to Geelong.

Ingrid, of course, was the big draw-card in Geelong. Even though we had our concerns, we prayed and trusted God that He would make all things well for Tim and Ingrid.

A few months later Tim found steady employment and at the beginning of this year he commenced language studies at Melbourne University. In July Tim and Ingrid tied the knot, much to our delight.

Reflecting on how God used our experiences and hardship in coping with this particular disorder, we can see that we as a family as well as our church learnt a lot in the way of acceptance, patient endurance and an increase in love. Empathy blossomed for others who are suffering physically, mentally or emotionally.

We have come to realise even more the preciousness of our children and know that they are also precious in the sight of our Lord. We have learnt in no uncertain ways to trust God even more when the chips are down and you feel sad. God will work *for* you and *in* you. To feel a beloved part of our church family also is fantastic.

It was good to be in church, but at the same time very difficult. Hymn-singing was an impossibility for quite some time, not because we didn't want to sing but because the tears were too close to the surface. (Even

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while I write this article, nearly three years since these happenings, the tears freely flow.) Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ supported us, speaking and praying with us, thus encouraging us greatly.

We are also very thankful for the effective treatment now available for Manic Depressive Illness (Bipolar Mood Disorder). Each state of Australia has appropriate, well-trained medical staff, and there are support groups available for patients and their families. In Perth there is 'ARAFMI', the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill.

Hence the outlook for mental illness has brightened considerably in the last number of years. The stigma of mental illness is

thankfully lessening, but it is still there. I think it is the unknown, the uncertainty as to the outcome and the general feeling of the public, probably also due to certain movies which portray mental illness in an unfavourable light.

However if you, or someone close to you, is affected and needs help, then do not hesitate to take action. The longer 'an episode' goes unchecked and untreated, the longer (probably) the recovery time and the higher the risk of the person affected being harmed in the process. It is also traumatic for family and friends. They are affected greatly. Due to the nature of the depression, which is very deep, the suicide risk is proportionate. God kept Tim in the faith and

he did not consider suicide an option.

Praise be to our Sovereign Lord!

In closing, we like to give thanks to God for bringing good out of a (for us) very difficult and worrisome situation; for bringing us through and out of deep waters — with the Psalmist we can now also say, "*He lifted us out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire and set our feet upon a Rock*" — that Rock being Christ. He lifted up our head and proved to be our Shield and Protector.

Kees and Henriët Vanderstoep

(This article first appeared in Trowel & Sword, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement)

Home mission in focus

In this issue we have a review by Ralph Adams on a comprehensive and important book entitled "*Evangelism Through the Local Church*" by Michael Green. The Masterton and Hastings congregation also report on their evangelistic endeavours. It's encouraging to see these reports coming through from our churches, may the Lord continue to strengthen and bless us as we seek to be faithful to the Great Commission.

HV

Voice of the Church Radio Ministry

Our congregation in Masterton has had the privilege of being able to broadcast a Christian radio program on our local community radio station for the last two and a half years.

The program is called '*Voice of the Church*'. It takes up a 30-minute slot on Sunday at 12 midday and is repeated on Wednesdays at 4.30 p.m..

Arrow FM 96.5, our regional station, is part of the nationwide Access Radio network. It receives government funding, with individual broadcasters and sponsors contributing as well.

Our 30-minute '*Voice of the Church*' program is made up of a 12-minute main message and a 5-minute children's story, interspersed with music. The music ranges from children's songs, worship music, contemporary Christian, to traditional hymns.

Invitations to attend our worship services, or to contact us by phone or email, are always part of the program.

A host of topics has been covered in the

Continued next page ►

A Book Review

Evangelism Through the Local Church

by Michael Green

Published by Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1990. 559 pp. (available from the publisher @ 12.99 English pounds)

This is a mammoth work, comprising 15 chapters, plus 8 appendices, of which several are provided by contributors other than the author. It was published more than a decade ago. Nevertheless, Michael Green produced a definitive work that can still claim a relevant place among evangelism texts even today.

Part One contains a wealth of background material in its four chapters, including a first devoted to defining what 'evangelism' is. Others deal with such issues as conversion and inclusion in the faith; evangelism in the face of multi-faith opposition and some issues raised by Christianity's claim to uniqueness; and fourthly, what kind of church best facilitates the work of evangelism.

Part Two — again four chapters — deals with Christian apologetics and getting the message across. In chapter five, for example, Green describes "five faces of secular man: monism (i.e. the New Age ethos or 'everything is One'); humanism (the worship of man); narcissicism (individualism & worship of self); agnosticism (no God, no absolutes); and pragmatism (Does it work?). These 'isms' are prevalent in western societies and do a pretty good job of shutting God and Christ out of the individual's life. I don't know why Green doesn't include a sixth 'ism,' — materialism — in his secular 'faces,' nevertheless, this chapter and the others in Part Two provide some critical advice to help us get in touch with the modern mind. Having just been enlightened by Peter Jones in *Pagans in the Pews*, I can now see that the importance of this section cannot be overemphasized.

Part Three's content is easily gauged from the titles of the various chapters. These range from 'Preaching for a verdict,' which is excellent advice for the evangelism-conscious preacher, through "person to person" as the most effective form of evangelising, on to the essential 'Christian nurture,' which will help to establish new believers in the faith. 'More ways than one' is an interesting little diversion, while in 'Missions,' Green maps out some possibilities for a local church mission. This sort of leads into the final chapter of Part Three (the signature chapter of this book), 'Evangelism through the local church.'

Part Four is given over to the various appendices, including some helpful hands on stuff. The whole work is almost a must-have for any minister's or evangelism team's library.

Ralph Adams

main messages. Some examples: 'Parables', 'Sure and lasting hope', 'Rebellious children', 'Christians, saints or sinners?', 'Pentecost', 'Children are a blessing'.

The children's program is often based on the 'Jungle stories' by Paul White, — at other times, it may be based on a Bible story.

To date we have not had any responses from listeners, but of course we don't know how and when the Lord will use our broadcasts to reach the hearts of people in the community.

The effect of such a radio outreach also depends on how many people listen to 'local radio'. This will vary between different areas in NZ. In the meantime, we are called to be faithful, and God has promised that His Word will not be without effect.

The Voice of the Church ministry has helped the members of the congregation to cultivate more of a desire to reach the people of Masterton with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It can do the same for you!

Ed Rademaker

From Hastings

Mainly Music. This group has been going here for only one term, and has experienced tremendous growth! It is an outreach to parents/grandparents of pre-kindergarten age children, and involves a once-a-week meeting in which they have about 1/2hr of music, followed by morning tea together. Palmerston North was doing this before us, and the idea was passed on at the Ladies' Presbyterial last year. Radio Outreach. A member of the congregation presents a one hour program on Radio Kidnappers on a fortnightly basis. Scripts are derived from sermons and adapted for radio. The team is seeking to arrange for a broadcast on the in-between weeks, but this would be a different format — more music and scripture reading.

Missions Display Board. We have a board on a wall in the church hall. Displays are changed about 2 or 3 times a year, and seek to raise congregational awareness of people/groups that we support.

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

Some of the ladies in our congregation are involved in pregnancy counselling and Bible in Schools. As a church we held a survey of the congregation, in which we sought to learn more about the congregations' attitudes to evangelism and church planting, and to gain ideas for further work.

Nigel Cunningham

Halloween – another nail in death's coffin?

Berwyn Hoyt

It is October 31. There is a knock on the door and, when it is opened, the inevitable, "Trick or Treat!"

"Ah, I'm sorry but I don't have a treat for you...however, I can tell you a good Halloween story. In fact, this story is so good that quite a few people have died for it! Would you like to hear it?"

"Uh...all right." says the tricking treater.

"Well, as you know, Halloween is all about the gruesome: demons and death. This story is about the conqueror of both the demons and of death: the Elixir of immortal life. Immortal life...no wonder so many people have died for it.

"This Elixir of life was the Son of God who came to earth as a man. He lived a perfect life – the kind that only the Son of God can live.

"But despite his perfection – or, perhaps, *because* of it – his countrymen hated him and murdered him. He was buried some 2000 years ago in Palestine. This would normally have been considered the end of a good man.

"However, this was no ordinary man. God, his Father was so pleased with his Son's perfection that he raised him up from the dead just three days later. He was the first man in history to rise from the dead and live immortally for ever.

"But he was not the last. He calls himself the "Water of Life" and promises that anyone who believes in him will not die, but live for ever. To date billions of people have been given this Elixir of life, and his victory over death is celebrated weekly in churches all over the world.

"Now I've told you this story of the source of life, but any time you want to hear more about it, I don't just tell it on Halloween. And even though many real men have died for this story you don't need to. All you have to do is believe in the Son of God, and his life will be yours. The simple question is, 'Do you want it?'"

What better?

What better treat could I give on Halloween than the story of death's death? I figured that if they could choose their trick then I could choose my treat! This was my chance to speak – albeit in riddles – to an unbelieving generation. I had it all planned out. The day came, I rehearsed my gospel outline, night drew on...but no tricking treaters...no one knocked on our door to receive this life-giving treat. Not a single soul.

Perhaps the devil learned from last year that my house was not a good place to send an unprepared treater. Or, just perhaps, the Lord planned it that I would be so disappointed at the "lost" opportunity, that I would be motivated to write the idea up for all of you.

"No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light."

(Luke 11:33)

Reprints of articles in

Faith in Focus can be obtained by

contacting the Editor

World in focus

Explosion over Canadian homosexuality guide

To help the Presbyterian Church in Canada understand homosexuality in the church, a General Assembly committee generated a study-guide called "Listening: Understanding Human Sexuality." From research cited, members are supposed to discern where the church is headed.

Instead, one New Brunswick session identified bias in the guide, writing a response including references to Levitical laws against homosexuality. Martin Kreplin, minister at St. Andrews, denounced the Assembly product as "trivialising the Scriptures to suit our cultural and moral tastes." Consequently, Kreplin has been accused of advocating the death penalty for homosexuals. Kreplin claims he did not intend to provoke hatred and anger, but wanted to "indicate the seriousness with which God takes the matter of homosexuality."

+ Presbyterian Church in Canada, 50 Wynford Dr., North York, Ontario M3C1J7

Lawyers for gay lobby dispel "10 percent" myth

Statistics cited by Attorneys for John Lawrence and Tyron Garner in an Amici Curiae presented to the US Supreme Court on behalf of two homosexuals fighting Texas sodomy charges, dispel the myth that "10 percent" of the US population is homosexual.

Figures presented by the petitioners are from the National Health and Social Life Survey, described as "the most widely accepted study of sexual practices in the United States." Real numbers are "2.8 percent of the male and 1.4 percent of the female population identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual."

There has been no indication the United Church of Christ will make the necessary corrections in Synod 2003's resolutions or in UCC Opening and Affirming study materials.

+ Biblical Witness Fellowship, PO Box 102, Candia, NH 03034-0102 areformer@aol.com

R.C. Sproul honoured at CBA International

Dr. R.C. Sproul was honoured at CBA International 2003. Published reports indicate "P&R Publishing commemorated his work as author of 60 books with the celebration of a book edited by his son, R.C. Sproul, Jr. The book, titled 'After Darkness, Light,' includes chapters by contributors such as John MacArthur, Sinclair Ferguson, and R. Albert Mohler, Jr., and was unveiled

officially at the Ligonier 2003 Annual Conference in March."

+ Presbyterian Church in America, 1700 North Brown Road, Suite 105, Lawrenceville, GA 30043 (678) 825-1000

Sudan's "Lost Boys" now in South Africa

Some of Sudan's so-called "Lost Boys" have made it to safe haven in South Africa and are studying for the ministry and other vocations with the intention of taking the gospel back to Sudan. Three refugees are studying at Cedar College of Education, located at KwaSizabantu Mission.

Joseph, born in 1974, is the third of seven children. He was forcefully recruited by Muslims and made to fight against the "Christian rebels" in the south. During the process he was severely injured by Muslim police officers and fled Sudan in 1990.

Dominic, born in 1977, was arrested and interrogated in Islamic military barracks. One of the guards helped end his persecution and he managed to flee the country.

Leonard, born in 1981, is the last of nine children. Two brothers were killed while fighting in Sudan. Both parents died when

a bomb hit their village. Leonard fled in 2001.

+ In Touch Mission International, 2115 Cedar St., Suite 1, Tempe, AZ 85281 (480) 968-4100
itmi@intouchmission.org

PCA offers a hand as Uniting Church unravels

With Australia's Uniting Church riven by homosexuality the Presbyterian Church of Australia is welcoming refugees. Moderator of Victoria, John Wilson, says homosexuality is "unacceptable," and a physiological "absurdity," that Christians should not accept. Presbyterians supplied much of the base for the Uniting Church in the 1970s.

In a radio interview Wilson declared, "We stand for a Christian lifestyle that is according to God's pattern and we would insist that all our office bearers and preachers of the word live by those standards."

The PCA formed 24 July 1901 as the larger Australian denominations confederated. Each state maintains a regional Assembly.

+ Presbyterian Church of Victoria, 156 Collins St., Melbourne, Victoria, 3000 (03) 9655 1400
clerk@pcvic.org.au



St Andrew's Christian School

Senior Position in Primary School

Established in 1987 as a private Christian School, St Andrew's offers Christ-centred education to meet the academic and vocational needs of children from Year 1 through to Year 10.

A senior teaching position is available in our growing Primary School commencing the end of January 2004. We are looking for a vital committed Christian who is skilled in the nurture and teaching of children.

The successful applicant will have opportunity to provide professional leadership in our upper primary school. Salary negotiable and commensurate with position. Please state your teaching strengths and experience.

For all inquiries please contact: The Principal, Shane Kennedy at (09) 266-4444. Applications with CV may be sent to our school: PO Box 75-623 Manurewa or email standy@xtra.co.nz.

A job description package is available from our school.

Cleveland Presbyterian departs

As the nation mourns the death of Bob Hope, Cleveland Calvinists feel the loss personally; Hope was a Cleveland Presbyterian.

When asked in a widely distributed interview what drew him to Habitat for Humanity, Hope stated, "Maybe the fact that I had to nail my own house together! Or maybe it was because my father was a stonemason, who built things all his life." "That's why we came over (from England) in the first place: He built Euclid Avenue Presbyterian Church in Cleveland and invited the family over to see his work. We six kids and our mother were Episcopalians, until we saw what he'd built. We converted immediately to Presbyterians."

+ Lawrence Toppman, *Movie Critic for the Charlotte Observer* ltoppman@charlotteobserver.com

Record breaker - 67 attend Gumtree

Gumtree ARP Church in Tupelo, Mississippi, had a record attendance 27 July; there were 67 people present for worship at the young church, and reportedly it was necessary for the first time to bring in extra chairs to the meeting area.

+ Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod, One Cleveland Street, Greenville, SC 29601

Seed company appoints Roy Peterson

The Seed Company, a leading-edge Bible translation project appointed Roy Peterson to lead the group effective 15 July. Peterson brings to the task two decades with Wycliffe. As president at Wycliffe, Peterson directed a 5,000 member organisation operating in 70 countries.

According to Seed Company founder Bernie May, the organisation plans to work with 1,000 languages remaining without satisfactory translations of the Bible. Some 215 of those translations are in process.

+ *The Seed Company, 3000 W. MacArthur Blvd. Suite 440, Santa Ana, CA 92704 (714) 549-7333*

Books without borders

The Presbyterian Publishing Corporation (PPC) will add the Evangelical Theological Academy of Armenia to the current list of 20 international seminaries that it supports through its "Books without borders" program.

PPC provides more than 200 books and resources to seminaries in second- and third-world countries.

+ *Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202*

+ *Armenian Missionary Association of America, 31 West Century Road, Paramus, NJ 07652*

East African Theological College turns 100

St Paul's United Theological College, once a centre for freed slaves and now a leading educational institution with close Presbyterian ties in Limuru, near Nairobi, is celebrating 100 years of existence. On 28 July 1903, what is known as the "long walk of faith" of the college began at Frere Town, now a poor neighbourhood in the coastal city of Mombasa, a place where freed slaves had found a place of refuge in the 19th Century.

The Church Missionary Society, in 1875, settled freed slaves at Frere Town, where they began new lives in a secure environment. In 1888, Rev. E. A. Fitch began teaching the former slaves theology, preparing the ground for the Rev. Harry K. Binns to start a divinity school in 1903.

The divinity school moved to central Kenya in 1930 and is now situated 30 kilometres west of Nairobi.

The college takes students from Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches in East Africa and other Protestant denominations, and offers Bachelors and Masters degrees in divinity, and more recently also degrees in business administration.

+ *St. Paul's United Theological College, PO Private Bag, Limuru, Kenya*

Evangelism not welcome at UCC Synod

The check is in the mail. A refund, that is, for Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse - Operation Christmas Child whose Minneapolis regional office had planned to exhibit at the 2003 General Synod of the United Church of Christ. The group was accepted and then denied participation in the biennial denominational meeting because they combine evangelism with humanitarian aid.

Samaritan's Purse operates hospitals and schools in Sudan and Afghanistan and is preparing similar medical and health needs help in Iraq. Many UCC churches participate in the Shoe Box children's Christmas program that sends millions of gifts to poverty-stricken countries around the world.

+ *Biblical Witness Fellowship, PO Box 102, Candia, NH 03034-0102 areformer@aol.com*

Buddhist mobs attack five churches in Sri Lanka

Mobs attacked five churches in southern Sri Lanka 2 Aug. Initial information from the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (EASL) suggests the organised attack is part of the government's plan to introduce anti-conversion legislation.

Police thwarted an attempted attack on the Methodist church in Rathgama that a

50 YEARS NELSON

The Reformed Church of Nelson invites all previous members and friends to celebrate with us Gods faithfulness to our congregation on its 50th anniversary held on

Saturday 22 November

for Dinner and entertainment evening

Sunday 23 November

for Thanksgiving Service and Lunch

All inquiries to

Dick Vandenberg

36 Motueka St

Nelson

Ph 03 5488657

Email v-d-berg@clear.net.nz

crowd of Buddhist monks and youth mounted 27 July. However, the monks returned the following Saturday. They stoned the building, destroyed pews and benches, and beat two church workers so badly that they required hospital treatment. Other churches in the area were attacked 2 Aug.,

including the Assemblies of God in Thanamalwila and Lumugamvehera, and the Calvary church in Hikkaduwa.

According to the EASL, attackers are attempting to incite Buddhists against the Christian community in order to create an environment of religious disharmony which,

in turn, will allow the government to argue convincingly for the introduction of anti-conversion laws.

+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

The last car left at about four o'clock Wednesday afternoon. Two days of holiday club had ended. Two very successful days, under the capable and willing leadership of Reuben Ploeg, and his mother, Mrs Wilna Ploeg. We thank them both for their leadership, in preparation and during the two days. May God bless the sown seed. Corrie and I were encouraged by the widespread participation, enthusiasm, and willingness of so many people. God was indeed praised!

Bishopdale

Congratulations to Chris and Kirsten Scarlet with the birth of a daughter last weekend, named Ella Kaitlin, weighing 8 lb 2 ozs, and to Brian and Liz Dimbleby as grandparents.

How To Interpret the Bible: All Christians should be interested in this subject as the Bible is our primary source of knowledge about our triune God and the way of salvation. Rev John Haverland will present a series of seven lectures on the main principles of biblical interpretation. These will be given on Tuesday mornings and evenings beginning on Tuesday 29th July with the same lecture presented on both occasions. Here is a good opportunity to learn more about the Bible in this block course.

This afternoon we welcome Andrew Nugteren to the pulpit while he and his wife Lydia and their children are here visiting their family. Andrew has completed his studies at the RTC and is at present pursuing a Masters degree. I will lead the service and conduct the Lord's Supper and Andrew will preach.

Buckland's Beach

Anneke Tepper and Ruven Duinkerke announced their engagement to be married

last Saturday! Anneke's eyes sparkle at least as brightly as does that wee stone on her ring finger! Congratulations to both of you! May God's guidance and blessings be and remain very real as you now start to prepare for and lay the foundations for your future together.

Elders' meeting. The pastor reported on a meeting with the Rev Dr Stefan Joubert, one

of the pastors of the South African congregation which meets here in Howick. One positive outcome is that ways and means of creating meaningful contact with each other are being explored. At the same time our pastor has been in contact with the Rev Jan Lion-Cachet, who serves as a second pastor in the Reformed Church of Wellington. He ministers to a growing group of Afrikaans-speaking Christians in Porirua. Plans are under way to invite him to come and meet with us here in Auckland in the near future.

Christchurch

Our sympathies are extended to Sr. Nel Bangma and the rest of Charlie Bangma's family. Charlie passed away this past

We Are 50 Years Old

The Reformed Church of Hamilton will celebrate the fact that the Lord established a Church in Hamilton.

This celebration will take place on 22nd and 23rd November 2003, the Lord willing.

On Saturday there will a picnic lunch and a social evening with sketches and items and on Sunday afternoon a service of thanksgiving.

If you have any links, old or recent, with us then let us know whether you will be part of our celebrations.

Mail your expressions of interest before the 18th October, giving your Name and contact details.

To:

**The Reformed Church of Hamilton,
Attention Theo Grul**

P.O. Box 15-129, Hamilton.

Or alternatively email tcgrul@hnpl.net

Thursday morning. The memorial service, which Charlie had hoped would be one of celebration, will be taking place tomorrow in the church at 2:00 pm in the afternoon. There will be a brief service of internment earlier at the Methodist cemetery in Woodend on Main North Road at 11:00 am. May God continue to grant comfort and strength to all who look forward to the future resurrection, when there will be no more death, and all of God's people will celebrate His faithfulness forever.

Our sympathies are extended to Sr. Gerda Dirkze and the rest of Henk Dirkze's family. Br. Dirkze passed away this past Thursday afternoon. The memorial service will be taking place tomorrow in the church at 2:30 pm in the afternoon. There will be a private service of internment earlier in the day. May God continue to give His people peace and comfort as we look forward to the future resurrection, when there will be no more sickness and death, and all of God's people will worship Him forever.

Dovedale

Special Congregational Meeting: At the congregational meeting held last Wednesday, it was decided to proceed with

the purchase of 28 Shands Road in accordance with the terms laid out in the letter from the Session. Session will meet this coming Wednesday and, in consultation with the COM, will begin to follow through on this decision. We are thankful that the special meeting went well, and that there was a very clear indication from the congregation as to what we should do.

Session is exploring the possibility of holding a service in Afrikaans for South African people in the city close to Christmas time. Rev. Jan Lion-Cachet, our churches' home missionary in the Wellington area, has kindly agreed to help us out with this. The Home Missions Committee, together with the minister, will be looking to form a group of interested people to spearhead this outreach opportunity.

Dunedin

Hearty congratulations are extended to Frank and Els Gouman who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this week and to Jan and Henny Weegenaar who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary next week. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! May the Lord continue to bless you as married couples in the years to come.

Foxton

Today your new pastor is being installed. It's something that this congregation has prayed and hoped for, for some time. So what can we expect? The RCNZ church order states that the task of the minister is to expound the Holy Scriptures, to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors, to administer the sacraments, to continue in prayer, to watch over his brethren, the elders and deacons as well as the congregation, to catechize the youth, and with the other elders to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in order.

Mangere

Is it Worth Hearing Sermons? A Churchgoer wrote a letter to the editor of the newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday, "I've gone to church for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons, but for the life of me I can't remember a single one of them. So I think I'm wasting my time and ministers are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all." This started a real controversy in the "letters to the Editor" column. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher, "I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals, but for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu of a single one of those meals. But I do know this. They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me those meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today." No more comments were made on the sermon contents anymore.

Masterton

We give thanks specially today as we celebrate the official opening of the new church extension after this morning's service with a shared lunch. The Lord has been good to us in providing us with such a lovely and comfortable building in which to worship Him together. All guests are most welcome to stay behind after the service and join us for lunch.

We give thanks for the addition of another covenant child to our congregation, in bringing Anna Maria Jane Elliott safely into the world on Thursday morning. We rejoice with Jason and Sandra and the children in God's wonderful gift of new life. Both mother and child are well. God is gracious and kind to His children.

Nelson

Today we welcome Rev. Jim Klazinga into our pulpit in both services. Jim is here for the Church Visitation which took place last night, and he preaches here today as part of the

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.)



Presbytery pulpit exchange schedule.

50th Anniversary of our Church. Preparations are under way for this event. Celebrations are planned for weekend of 22nd and 23rd of November! If you have any photo's about any church event over the years please give(or lend) them to Elisabeth. Also start thinking if there is anything you can remember, serious or funny, that might be worth telling, write it down and/or tell Dick.

North Shore

We have to prepare to say goodbye – to two of our founding members. As most of you know by now, Gerard and Janny Minnee have decided to move to Palmerston North. Their last Sunday with us will be 17th August (Lord willing). To farewell them, we will have a pot luck lunch after the morning Service on Sunday 17th. Everybody bring a plate.

Palmerston North

Fare well & come back soon. Next Thursday Craig Smith will be travelling to the USA to spend some quality & fun time with both of his sons Zak & Alanson. They will be travelling across the US visiting many states & will no doubt meet up with & visit family and friends over there. Also on the way to the USA, Craig will make a stop in Tokyo to visit Take Ozawa, who has not only invited Craig to stay with him for a couple of days, but has organised for him to talk to a number of Japanese Christian home schoolers in Tokyo!! (Take will interpret and has asked that Craig speak plain English! - ? How could Craig do this ?)

CHURCH CAMP ADVANCE NOTICE. A (very!) advance notice that we are hoping to have a Church Camp next year. We are considering camping over Easter weekend (9-12th April 2004). If anyone cannot attend over Easter weekend and would really like to join us, please let us know asap as we may reconsider the date. Further details of study topics, venue, etc will be given closer to the time.

MARK TWAIN: "Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they don't understand, but for me I have always noticed that the passages that bother me are those I do understand."

Wainuiomata

Our sincere condolences go to Joop de Boer and his children and grand-children on the passing away of Willy on Wednesday. May the Lord, and the congregation of His people, be a strength and a comfort to you in this difficult time.

Christchurch Presbytery

Christchurch Presbytery met on Saturday 19th July 2003 at the Reformed Church

of Bishopdale.

Rev. John Haverland opened the meeting with a short devotion on Psalm 87, after which we sang from #166 in the Psalter.

Credentials were received and delegates stood to indicate agreement with the confessions.

The agenda was adopted, minutes of the previous meeting approved and matters arising from those minutes discussed. Bishopdale delegates then highlighted matters of interest from the various minutes of other Presbyteries and CRCA Classes.

Presbytery discussed the request from Nelson that Presbytery submit an application for assistance from the Needy Churches Fund as per Synodical guidelines (cf Office Bearers Handbook 6-5.5). A motion to this effect was passed.

The status of students temporarily relocated to an area other than that where their membership resides was again raised, with delegates agreeing to follow the decision made previously, which was to deal with the matter on a case-by-case basis.

Delegates from Nelson, Dovedale, and Bishopdale answered C.O. Article 47 questions, and prayer was offered in response to the reports from

each congregation in turn.

Rev. Hans Vaatstra reported on the colloquium doctum of Rev. John Zuidema in Wellington Presbytery, which was sustained. He also briefly reported on the situation in Foxton/Levin, and developments in Waikanae and Porirua.

Rev. John Haverland reported briefly on the colloquium doctum of Rev. John Terhorst in Auckland Presbytery, which was also sustained.

Dovedale delegates then requested that official synodical examiners for the Christchurch Presbytery be appointed, and after some discussion, Revs. John Haverland and Michael Flinn were appointed, with Rev. Hans Vaatstra as alternate.

A request concerning United Reformed Church of Myanmar was deferred pending further clarification.

Rev. Michael Flinn reported on behalf of the OMB, on possible future work of Janice Reid and that of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia in PNG.

The next meeting of presbytery was set for 8th November at Dovedale.

Reporter - Ralph Adams

A feminine focus

The spiritual discipline of journaling

Sally Davey

(This is the fourth in a series of articles reviewing and applying Donald S. Whitney's Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life. All references are to Chapter Eleven, "Journaling... for the Purpose of Godliness".)

Have you ever had thoughts about how nice it would be to keep a diary? If you're like me, then you have! When I was a teenager at boarding school I sometimes read novels about girls (the dreamy type) who recorded all their thoughts about life, their hopes and their fears, in secret journals. The daily entries would begin something like this:

"Dear diary, I couldn't wait to confide in you tonight. The most dreadful (or wonderful) thing happened!..." I thought it would be such an interesting and useful thing to note down my daily doings, and record all my impressions about life. It would be so interesting to read my diary many years later (perhaps as a grandmother) and be able to travel back in time to the 1970s. But if you're anything like me, you never had the self-discipline to actually do it. No, my teenaged diary-writing career never went past the nice thoughts, I'm afraid.

But in subsequent years, after I came to believe in Christ, I could see that there was another – and much better – way to use a diary. This was as a spiritual record of what I was learning – from my daily bible readings; from the way God brought blessings into my life through His shaping of circumstances; and from my struggles with sin. I did make some promising starts – for a week or two – but soon found that whenever (a few months later, for instance) I re-read what I'd written I was ashamed of myself. How could I write such self-absorbed nonsense? I asked. Page after page revealed flowery descriptions of how unsure I felt, or how sorry I felt, or how ecstatic I felt, depending on what had happened in my life at the time. So, I did

what you would probably do: I ripped those pages out, burned them, and began again. And again... And after I began to properly appreciate the biblical teaching about God and ourselves, I think I gave up on diary-writing completely. My conclusion was that the less I thought about myself and my feelings the better: let the objective truths of God's Word do their work as I focused more on God and *His* thoughts.

Examples for Christian Journals

However, more recently, I've come across a number of Christian writers who've become really good examples – and inspirations – in the matter of keeping a spiritual journal. It seems to me that as long as you understand some important theological truths, such as who you are (a miserable sinner) and who God is (a holy and gracious Father who forgives sinners) then what you will write in your journal about your daily lessons and experiences will be worthwhile (and will even bear re-reading). Women like Elisabeth Elliott and Susan Hunt, and of course one could go back to the godly Puritan ministers, all show how to write helpful and edifying things in their diaries. And in his chapter on journaling as a spiritual discipline, Donald Whitney explains, in detail, how to do it. I've been quite excited by this chapter. Let me share some of his ideas with you.

Whitney's definition of the exercise is worth repeating. It is an introduction to what he goes on to explain:

"A journal... is a book in which a person writes down various things. As a Christian, your journal is a place to record the works and ways of God in your life. Your journal also can include an account of daily events, a diary of personal relationships, a notebook of insights into Scripture, and a list of prayer requests. It is where spontaneous devotional thoughts or lengthy theological musings can be preserved. A journal is one of the best places for charting your progress in the other Spiritual Disciplines and for holding yourself accountable to your goals."

A better awareness of ourselves

One of the greatest uses of journaling, Whitney writes, is developing a better awareness of ourselves. This is for the purpose of healthy self-examination, not simply self-absorption! If we write down how we reacted to an event, a piece of news, a difficulty in a relationship with someone, then we are very often better able to gauge where sin lies in our attitudes and motives. This may prompt us to confess this sin to God, and ask for His forgiveness. (It may be helpful to write down our confession as well). We can also see, by looking back, whether we've made any progress against our sin. And, if we're still concerned about the possibility of too much focus on self, the way

we have written our thoughts will often reveal whether this is the case. Did these recorded thoughts lead in the direction of honouring God, or toward our own peace of mind, or comfort? Did they ask: have I loved others enough? - or rather, who did wrong to me and how did they do it?

A spiritual journal can be especially helpful when we're going through a particular crisis or difficulty in our lives. Susan Hunt's *True Woman* contains the story of one woman for whom keeping a journal was an important anchor. She was married to an alcoholic husband, and throughout her trials her church wisely advised her and gave her every kind of practical help. The elders worked valiantly with her husband, and were, in her words, "faithful and diligent elders who were not afraid to do the tough work of shepherding." They helped her financially



until she could get a job, explained things to her children; they prayed and prayed and prayed. And they continued to pray. They also tried to fill the void in her children's lives by giving them male attention and role models. And she was assigned an elder's wife who was given the responsibility of discipling her through the difficulties. Here is what this woman wrote:

"At our first meeting she [the elder's wife] gave me a journal and encouraged me to record my journey. She explained the urgency of spending time with the Lord each day. My Bible and my journal were my lifeline over the next few months, and they continue to be my daily companions in my pilgrimage. When the separation began, my stress level was so high that I was on an emotional roller-coaster. Many days I did not see or feel God's presence, but I knew He was there... journaling helped me stay focused on Him and his Word." Here are some of the things she wrote in her journal:

April 22: "I thought it would be hard to go to church alone today, but God met my need through loving brothers and sisters in Christ. An elder and his wife opened their home and

invited the children and me to lunch.

April 29: The Lord is dealing with me about judging others and about my temper. I asked Him to show me myself, and He opened my eyes to some ugly sin. I have been so focused on my husband's sin that I tend not to see myself as I really am. I pray that God will forgive me and help me turn from my sin.

May 4: 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5). It is so reassuring to me to know that even at a time of uncertainty God will not leave me."

Lessons such as these are priceless treasures.

Helps meditate on the Scriptures

Journaling also helps us meditate on the Scriptures. The reason for this is simple: note-taking always makes us concentrate better, and disciplines us to think in a more orderly way. It stops us zooming off into daydreams. As Whitney describes: "Sitting with pen and paper in hand also heightens my expectation of hearing from God as I think on Him and his words in the passage before me. I always listened better in school when I was taking notes. I'm the same way with hearing a sermon: I listen more attentively when I'm writing down the more significant thoughts of the message. The same principle transfers to journaling. When I record in a journal my meditations on a passage of Scripture, I can follow more closely the still, small voice of God as He speaks through the text."

Helps in our prayer

Then there is the matter of our communication with our Lord. Writing in a journal helps greatly in prayer. You know how difficult it is sometimes to convey what you mean, even to a close friend. You've found it's much more effective to write down what you wanted to say – writing gave you time to choose your words, and gave an outlet to the strong emotions or thoughts that were burning away in your heart. It's the same with our prayer to God. Journaling your prayers is a great idea – and I must say, I've found writing in a journal in the last few weeks has given my prayers a much better focus. It has even helped me work out what it was I wanted to ask God, and what I *should* ask Him. And Scripture shows us this too. As Whitney notes in another place, David's psalms are a model for the prayers we might write in a journal. In the psalms David gives full vent to his hopes, fears and longings to God. He confesses his sin and shouts his joy. *And* – something I love about the psalms – David frequently moves, as he writes, from sorrow or anxiety to a state of joy and trust. He does this by reminding himself, in prayer, of what great things God has done for him in the past, or of the promises God has made

and will never relent from. We too can do this in prayer, as many a faithful saint before us has done. And looking back on our prayer will help build our faith in thankfulness for God's subsequent answers.

Remembering thoughts better

Writing in a journal also helps clarify our thoughts so that they can be more useful – both at the time of writing and later on. You could say that journaling is a record of our quiet times – of the lessons from them in particular. Whitney tells that what he records from his quiet times is useful in later conversations, in counselling, encouraging and evangelism. Of course, writing them down means we remember the thoughts better, and they won't be useful to us later if we don't remember them. Now, he's a pastor, and you might be thinking – he *needs* to be more spiritual, keeping a record of his thoughts and all that – and as a pastor of course he's going to be having conversations about the gospel and counselling people. That doesn't apply to me (eg a woman at home) nearly as much (if at all). Don't you believe it! We are all responsible for our fellow-Christians' spiritual welfare, and that includes us women. There are many situations in which the words of a wise woman may be more helpful than anyone else's. Think of the lonely widow, the chronically-ill mother, the wayward teenage girl. If you've been carefully recording what the Lord has taught you over time, you'll have a real store of treasures to pass on.

Keeping focussed

Lastly, a journal is such a helpful way to record our progress in keeping spiritual goals – especially the major goal of putting off our sin. Christians throughout the centuries have used their journals for this purpose. Perhaps two of the best-known are Jonathan Edwards and his contemporary, George Whitefield (both 18th century ministers and evangelists). They recorded resolutions to achieve certain measures of obedience in their lives – and every day, wrote down whether they had been faithful in those areas or not. Edwards wrote: "Concluded to observe, at the end of every month, the number of breaches of resolutions, to see whether they increase or diminish, to begin from this day, and to compute from that the weekly account my monthly increase, and out of the whole, my yearly increase, beginning from new-year days." An example of this process was a January 5 entry: "A little redeemed from a long, dreadful dullness, about reading the Scriptures. This week, have been unhappily low in the weekly account: - and what are the reasons of it? – abundance of listlessness and sloth; and, if this should continue much longer, I perceive that other sins will begin to discover themselves."

George Whitefield gives a list of the kinds of goals he was aiming at in his journal. These included fervency in prayer; regularity of prayer; consideration of how any chosen action or word might glorify God; zeal; humility and cheerfulness in his daily life. Perhaps this sounds somewhat eighteenth-centuryish? But you could be doing the same thing – adapted to your twenty-first century situation. Is your besetting sin eating too much? Gossiping? Anger? Excessive anxiety? Are you slothful in prayer or bible reading? Consciously decide to make no more provision for the flesh. Work out where temptation lies in your daily path, and resolve in your mind that you'll avoid doing anything which makes it easier for you to succumb. Determine to take steps to put off these "deeds of darkness", and make some goals to put on the "armour of light" (Romans 13:12). Write your goals in a journal, and prayerfully keep at them. You will be able to look back over the weeks and months and check your progress.

How you can do it

So how should one go about keeping a journal? What methods are there? This is a question Whitney answers well, with some interesting practical suggestions. The most obvious way is to buy one of those journals with blank pages that are readily available in bookshops – I'm sure you've seen them. Some are handsomely bound; others have bible texts written on each page, or headings such as "Prayer Requests" or "Insights from Scripture". Many Christians prefer to use everyday notepaper, or lined refill. Whitney himself likes this, as he can keep all his writings in a small ring-binder, and keep loose pages in the places he might be reading or meditating, writing down insights whenever they come. This might be in his study, his car, or at home. He finds by keeping spare pages in his bible and briefcase he is never without opportunity to record thoughts, impressions, observations, items from conversations wherever he might be at the time.

One of the most interesting of Whitney's suggestions is to use the computer to write down his thoughts and insights. Technology has made it so easy to switch from one program on the screen to another; and simply to bring up your "journal" file while you are working away at your desk on something else, should you think of an idea, has lots of potential for people (many of us included) who spend much of their day at or near a computer screen. Of course, there *are* privacy issues to consider, and your journal is probably going to be something between you and the Lord. Keep that in mind if you have youthful "hackers" in your house! Whitney quite often writes his journal on the computer, then prints it out and files it with

his other pages in his ring binder: he finds it is neater, and it suits him because he types faster than he can write by hand.

Some of Whitney's closing thoughts are important in connection with the practice of this spiritual discipline. He reminds us that we don't need to be natural or expert writers to find it profitable. It is a useful exercise at any level we are able to involve ourselves with it. And whatever our spiritual state – full of joy or low and discouraged – it will be worthwhile to record what we are learning from the Lord. But it also requires persistence: the novelty of the idea will wear off. Sometimes we seem to be learning nothing special. While we don't have to be writing every day, we will have to push through this barrier in the end if we are not to give up altogether. Plan for persistence. And if you've never done it before, be assured that you must start journaling in order to experience its value. Whitney quotes the story of an Irish Presbyterian pastor who began a journal, which he called "A Diary of God's Dealings with a Most Unworthy Sinner" in the 1880s. This man, Thomas Houston, tells how actually making a start convinced him how valuable the practice was. I will end with his words:

"For a considerable period I have been resolved on keeping a register of the dealings and providences of my Heavenly Father towards me, but, what through want of what I considered a fit opportunity, and through what was, I fear, a greater cause, spiritual sloth, I have hitherto neglected it. When I first began to think of this subject, various objections appeared to me to lie against diary writing altogether. It would give room for spiritual pride; it led persons to measure themselves by themselves; and as it is not easy to determine between the motions of the Spirit and the natural outworkings of the unrenewed conscience or the artifices of the Deceiver, there is a danger of forming incorrect judgements. These and other reasons kept me a length of time from determining for the thing. Of late I have got over these objections entirely, and am now of the opinion that such a record may be of much service to an individual to furnish him with matter for prayer and self-examination, and to be a monument to God's faithfulness."

How about recording God's faithfulness in your life?

[*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, by Donald Whitney, is available from NavPress, P.O. Box 6280, Christchurch, Phone +64 3 343 1990, Fax +64 3 343 1330, navpressnz@maxnet.co.nz; and also, I understand, from Geneva Discount Books]

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Jared Berends, late of Buckland's Beach congregation, returned to New Zealand in July after spending a year in Mongolia, teaching English and working with Christians from the oh-so-young church in the town of Zuunmod. Here's an overview of his time in Mongolia and the needs of the church there....

The Church in Mongolia

Well, I'm finally back in New Zealand after spending a year in Mongolia. Time has flown by but reflecting on this year I feel it has been one of the most important of my life. Spiritually this year has been filled with highs and lows. But as the Word assures us, the Father has never let me go.

Joshua 1:9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

This year has been full of the unknown for me. The unknown of a new country, new culture, new language and a new role in the church. Again the Father has led me during the unknown. During my time in Mongolia I have learnt to trust more in the Father's perfect timing and power and less on myself. As Isaiah 42:16 says, "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them."

The local church

Over the last months in Mongolia many changes have taken place in the church I was attending in my town. It became apparent that the Pastor of our fellowship had fallen into sin over a period of 3 years and when approached about these sins he was unrepentant.

After many team and church meetings, we felt that we needed to leave the church. Over 50 members including all the leaders left our old church and started a new church

called "The Assembly of Truth Church"—part of a larger denomination of seven churches. Our church established itself with a dedication to biblical preaching and a consulting of the Scriptures when any decision is made. The new church has also dedicated itself to financial accountability, something which was lacking in our old fellowship group.

This new church has faced many small trials in the few months it has been operating, but the grace of our Father has enabled us to continue meeting with regular members and faithful leaders. In June, 17 members of this church were baptised and professed Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Personally I was really excited to see my flatmate and 5 girls from my study group commit their life to our Saviour. Currently the church has a regular Sunday meeting with between 35 and 60 people attending, as well as a children's church on Sunday afternoons and a mid-week youth service.

One change that has been made has been the emphasis on people attending a home-group. Now, everyone in our church has a home group they are encouraged to attend. The emphasis within the home groups has also changed: instead of one person leading the group every week, people now take turns. There is a discussion on the topic of the day, and a time of sharing about the joys and struggles of the Christian faith. As I leave this church I feel comforted by the faith of the leaders and the vision they have for bringing Christ to the rest of our town.

The national Church

When I think about the church as a whole in Mongolia, it reminds me of the early church in Acts. The church really is only 10 years old in Mongolia and is therefore still very excited about the good news of Jesus. But in some respects, it is also immature: young in its faith.

Many Mongolian pastors only attend Bible College for one year, before being sent out into the remote regions of Mongolia to be leaders in churches or to establish new churches. Often these leaders have only been Christians for one or two years before they attend Bible College.

Because of this, many leaders are susceptible to the temptations of money and power and also to misinterpreting the Scriptures. However, the Father still uses these young men and women to show His power and grace, as He equips them in a mighty way to do his will.

I feel the Mongolian Church needs to continue to disciple its young leaders even though they are often in remote areas and

needs to think more about the spiritual health of its pastors who are watching over God's flock in Mongolia.

The Mongolian church also needs to start looking outwards. Our focus as an organisation 2 years ago was to have teachers in the remotest towns as a light for the gospel. This focus has now changed to encouraging the church and its members to be the bearers of this light to the furthestmost regions of the country.

Often the members of the church are still unsure of their faith and a little frightened and maybe ashamed of what they believe in. We need the Mongolian believers to catch a vision for 'gossiping the gospel' to the smallest villages throughout the nation. Mongolian Christians need to know that the Father will strengthen and help them as they begin to share the good news.

There are a lot of people attending the church in Mongolia who still haven't grasped the concept of Grace. Being predominantly a Buddhist nation, many people who have a knowledge of the Gospel message have not come to terms with salvation as a free gift from God. They are still trying to do good deeds to earn their way into heaven—which is the same as spinning a prayer flag in a Buddhist temple.

This is where the importance of a group study comes in. In a group study the message of the Gospel can be explained slowly and thoroughly, and people are given the opportunity to ask questions about the key points of our faith.

Persecution

There is still persecution of believers in Mongolia. The Mongolian Government has made a commitment to freedom of religion. But churches must be registered, and this is a long and lengthy process. Foreigners wishing to work with the church are not readily granted a visa. Many new believers face persecution from their families if they admit to being a Christian. Each year, we hear of many young people who have been turned out of their family homes because they have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. And many Lams blame the Christian member of a family for any illness or death that occurs in a family.

One way that our church in Zuunmod has managed to get its message into the community is by making a stand on social issues. Our church runs an alcohol-free club called the "Time Club." It is based on, and feeds into, the church-run AA program. The Time Club encourages sober people to come in for social contact, and to enjoy games of pool or darts. Then, as they are introduced

to AA, many Mongolian men are sobering up and finding their way to church—and hence to a saving faith.

Over the last 4 months, the town drunk—a man called Sharow—found his way to the AA, and has professed Christ as his Saviour and been baptised. This man is now a changed man: sober, kind and faithful to the church. Many people have been asking Sharow how this has been possible, and he has pointed to Jesus as the answer. It is an amazing testimony.

Summing it all up

I believe in the value of Mission. The Bible clearly states that the teaching of the Gospel message is not an option, but a mandate. In Matthew 28: 19-20, Jesus says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very ends of the age." When this task can seem overwhelming, we can take comfort in the last part of this verse: Jesus is with us and He has sent the Holy Spirit to be our guide.

I have come away from a year in Mongolia believing that the mission focus and methods need to vary from country to country and culture to culture. The message of Jesus as our Saviour is a message to all the world, not to just to the western world.

When we think about sharing the message of Jesus to our Mongolian friends it is important to determine what is the heart of the message, and what part of the message is cultural. Many Mongolian churches worship God in ways we would maybe find strange, but this is part of their cultural heritage and does not make it wrong.

Jesus told us to go and make disciples of all nations. This can be done in a number of ways, by listening to the Father's will in our situations we can find which method He wants us to use—and then we will be successful.

My role during my year in Mongolia was to get alongside the youth leaders in the church: to encourage them and give them advice on ways they could reach the youth of our town. My other role was to run a weekly Bible study group, which I led alternately with a Mongolian, preparing her to take the group over completely when I left.

What's next

I am now back in New Zealand and have moved to a new city. I plan to stay here for a year and a half and—Lord willing—resume studying in 2005. My heart is still very much in Mongolia and I miss my friends and church over there a lot. I plan to return to Mongolia after I finish studying again, or sooner if the Lord permits.

The next time I do similar work I would like to go for a longer period of time. Although a lot can be accomplished in one year I can really see the value of making a longer term commitment.

Please pray for the believers and the Church in Mongolia, specifically:

For Zuunmod Assembly of Truth Church, especially the leaders, that they remain faithful to their calling and persevere through the trials that come their way.

For ELI Mongolia. The number of teachers

for next year has dropped from 30 to 21 and the province of Bulan-Olgii will be have no ELI teachers at all. Pray that more people take up the call of this ministry.

For the young Mongolian pastors and Missionaries that are sent out into the countryside every year. Pray that they can remain truthful to the word and resist temptation.

Pray for the many young Mongolian believers who face persecution from their families because they are Christians.

MIF prayer notes

1. Kevin and Machi Rietveld together with Frank and Janet de Hoog work for the CRCAustralia in the Solomon Islands. They ask for our prayer support as follows:

Frank will be very busy building two clinics in October and November. One in the village of Belaga, and one in the village of Fauambu. There are builders coming from Australia to help him.

Pray that things will settle down here (they are not anywhere near as bad as the reports might indicate.)

Rietvelds will be on long service leave from July until end October. Pray for rest, increased strength for ministry, and excellent times of catchup with family and church members.

2. Frank van Dalen asks prayer for the following:

Praise for an 8 day retreat for Missionary Kids coming from overseas to enter as first-year students at Columbia International University in Columbia, South Carolina. Emily, Frank's wife, was involved in organizing the retreat. It was held in August, and attended by 16 students. Students were introduced

Looking for a CHALLENGE???

The Fountain Christian School, a caring 18-pupil school with a special character situated in Foxton, has the vacancy for a Principal/Teacher with assistance teaching Y1-Y8 beginning in January 2004.

This position requires a committed Christian with a desire to apply Biblical principles to teaching and school management.

For a job description and application form please write to:

The Secretary HCSA
9 Liddell Street
Foxton, NZ

Please apply before September 12, 2003.

to American culture, helped to develop new friendships, and given a head-start in adjusting to the US after growing up on several mission fields around the world for most of their lives.

In September, Frank was one of two keynote speakers at a "Meeting for Better Understanding," held in Columbia, SC. At this meeting, Frank represented the views of Christianity, as he and a Muslim speaker both addressed the subject of "prophecy." Pray for lasting results in terms of greater understanding on the part of Muslim seekers who attended the meeting.

Frank is scheduled to go to Pakistan in November, 2003, for a week of preaching and teaching at the Sahiwal Convention. He's been away from the country for 6 years. Pray for language ability and for the preparation of messages which are clear and

relevant. The topic which has been assigned is: "The Church – the Pillar of Truth." Pray that the security situation would remain stable.

3. The Overseas Mission Board asks prayer for the following: Provision for an ordained missionary to work in Papua New Guinea; also for the growth and strength of the Reformed Churches in Port Moresby, Ekorovo and Lae.

The United Reformed Church of Myanmar, with whom the OMB has had contact through Rev Goris & Rev Hoyt. At the date of writing this, Revs Hoyt and Haverland are planning a trip to Myanmar in November. Please pray for their preparations, for safe travel, and a time of blessing during their ministry to the church there.

For God's blessing on the home-mission

posts at Waikanae and Wanganui.

Please pray for Hukanui session, for the OMB, and also for Wally and Jeanette Hagoort as they make decisions regarding the Hagoorts' possible missionary service in Papua New Guinea. The Hagoorts are preparing for this by studying at the WEC Missionary Training College just north of Hamilton.

Janice Reid has recently moved from Indonesia, after holding three workshops on behalf of the FEBC office there. She is beginning to settle into her new accommodation in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and to take up the reins of the work she'll be doing for the coming year. Pray for safety and health, for language acquisition and for good progress on the radio training materials she is working on, together with her colleague, Jean-Luc Lebrun.

Country profile: Belize

Belize is a small nation on the Caribbean bordering on Guatemala and Mexico. It has the world's second largest coral barrier reef. With a population of only approximately a quarter million, it is Central America's most sparsely-populated country. Forty percent of the country is set aside as national parks and reserves, and the country's main source of income is ecotourism. Some 90% of Belizeans regard themselves as Christians; of these, some 14% are Evangelicals; the majority of the remainder are Catholic.

Pray for Belize:

- 1) While most Belizeans profess to be Christians, their faith is often shallow and superstitious, mixed with underlying paganism that dates back to Mayan times.
- 2) Evangelism is being done, but there is little follow-up, and "conversions" are shallow and not enduring.
- 3) Pray especially for the less-reached minority groups:
 - a) The Mayan peoples — there are a few Nazarene and Mennonite believers.
 - b) The Garifuna have had their own New Testament since 1983. Their strong animistic culture has only been marginally penetrated with the Gospel message.
 - c) The Chinese have increased through immigration from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, but only a few are evangelical believers.
 - d) The East Indians are almost entirely Muslim or Hindu.

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