

faith in **focus**

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of New Zealand

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**“When
you send
your Spirit,
they are
created,
and you
renew the
face of the
earth.”**

Psalm 104:30



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Editorial

If I may, I would like to raise a few 'house-keeping' matters:

1 I recently received an anonymous letter addressed to the Editor of *Faith in Focus*. It was clearly meant for publication. When I call it an anonymous letter I mean that it is a letter where no name or address is given with the letter, nor on the envelope. There was only a non-de-plume at the end of it. We cannot, though, publish anonymous letters. I am unhappy also at the idea of publishing a letter where the editor knows the identity of the person writing but a non-de-plume is used. I don't believe we should have anything to hide from each other. We are brothers and sisters together in God's Family – the Church of Jesus Christ. We have to speak to each other face-to-face.

The letter, though, was a fair one. He or she was following the guidelines for letters to *Faith in Focus*. I could see no reason why the person needed to hide behind a non-de-plume.

2) I also would like to make a plea to ministers or whoever is writing the 'Pastoral' column in their local church bulletin. This is my request: Could you please put in people's full names? While your local congregation may know everyone in your church (although that's often doubtful too), it helps the wider denomination if there are full names used.

3) Please note that all family, church, and Reformed Church ministry notices are now free. This is to both encourage sharing the significant times of our Christian community together and a recognition that we all support *Faith in Focus*. So please zap them through – and remember photos don't cost us any more now.

*We are all strings
in the concert of his joy.*

Jacob Boehme

Cover photo credit: A & L van Seventer – taken near Lake Tarawera

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 real point of worship

Giving the right answer

Larry Wilson

People who inquire about a church often ask, 'Is your worship contemporary or traditional?' Whenever I hear that, I feel like the guy who's just been asked, 'Are you still beating your wife?' How can you answer a question like that? It starts with wrong assumptions. It's the wrong question! It misses the real point of worship.

Is it really that important?

It's common in our day, however, for believers to avoid facing the real point of worship. Disagreements are smoothed over as mere preferences regarding 'style.' Even so, few things can occasion greater discord in the church than such 'preferences.' In such a climate, any effort to revise the OPC's Directory for the Public Worship of God (DPW) — which will be on the agenda of the General Assembly this year — seems to fall somewhere between quixotic and malicious. Is it really worth it?

It should give us pause to learn that John Calvin said that there were two main reasons why the Reformation was needed. The church needed 'a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshiped; and secondly, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained' (see 'The Necessity of Reforming the Church' in *Calvin's Selected Works*, vol. 1 [Baker, 1983], p. 126). He listed worship first!

But why should that surprise us? God himself insists that He is 'jealous' for faithful worship (Ex. 20:4–6). Someone once told me that asking the OPC to adopt a revised Directory for the Public Worship of God is like asking her to adopt an official sex manual. He was jesting, but maybe he got closer than he imagined to the point of worship. 'I will be your God, and you shall be My people' is the refrain that sums up the covenant of grace throughout the Bible (Ex. 6:7; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; Ezek. 36:28; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10). The Bible depicts this covenant relationship as a *marriage*. The Lord was the husband; Israel was His wife. Christ is the groom; the Church is His bride. Therefore, when the Lord established His covenant with Israel as a nation, He first identified Himself and the covenant relationship: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out

of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.' (Ex. 20:2). Then He insisted on the faithful, exclusive love of His wife: 'You shall have no other gods before Me.' (vs. 3). He continued to concentrate on worship in the second, third, and fourth commandments (vss. 4–11), reminding His wife that "I the Lord your God am a jealous God' (vs. 5). Throughout the Old Testament, God identified violations of the first and second commandments, not just as *idolatry*, but also as *spiritual adultery*.

Consequently, worship has everything to do with the covenant between the Lord and His bride. That's why it's so important and central to the faith and life of God's people. It's at the heart of who we are as individuals made and being remade in God's image. It's at the heart of who we are as the Church. It's at the heart of our relationship with the living God.

This is also why issues of worship can provoke such passion, including passionate disagreement. That tempts us to avoid these issues. But our Lord Jesus declares that *God is seeking worshippers* (John 4:23–24)! As we grow in our love for God, we will, like John Calvin, grow in our zeal that God be truly worshipped, as well as truly known.

If our Lord grants such zeal, it will drive reformation and renewal in every aspect of the Church's life. It will even renew our evangelistic and missionary

zeal. John Piper helpfully exhorts:

*Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.... Worship ... is the fuel and goal of missions.... When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth, the light of missions will shine to the most remote peoples on earth.... Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centred on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to "declare his glory among the nations" (Ps. 96:3). Even outsiders feel the disparity between the boldness of our claim upon the nations and the blandness of our engagement with God. (John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* [Baker, 1993], pp. 11–12)*

It is of the utmost importance, then, that our hearts be gripped by the real point of worship.

What is the real point of worship?

What, then, is the real point of worship? In the Old Testament, God called His people to gather for public worship at a central sanctuary (the tabernacle or temple). Why? Because that's where God specially revealed His presence in order to meet with His people. In Bible shorthand, His "name" was *there*. God commanded, 'But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will



choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there. There you shall go' (Deut. 12:5). He promised, 'In every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you' (Ex. 20:24). After Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, he prayed to God, 'that Your eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where You have promised to set Your name' (2 Chron. 6:20).

This meant that God's Old Testament people had to go to Jerusalem to meet with him — even when it involved the inconvenience of travelling great distances! That's the significance of the Samaritan woman's question to Jesus: 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship' (John 4:19–20). In other words, where can you meet with God? Is it on Mt. Gerizim (as the Samaritans said) or is it in Jerusalem (as the Jews said)?

Jesus responded, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews' (vss. 21–22). In other words, the Jews followed the Old Testament form of worship and it was correct — for the time of the Old Testament. But 'the hour is coming,' Jesus said, when Old Testament worship will be outmoded.

Indeed, Jesus went on to say, 'The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth' (vss. 23–24). When did that hour come? When the Christ came (vss. 25–26)! Jesus, the Christ, did come. He fulfilled the Old Testament forms. He transformed them. He ushered in the New Testament.

Because of the finished work of Jesus, God no longer limits his church to one nation (Israel). Now, the church is an expanding, international community.

Because of the finished work of Jesus, we no longer worship in shadows (that is, temporary Old Testament forms that were designed to point to Christ and prepare the way for Him). Instead, we worship 'in truth' (John 4:23–24; cf. 1:17; 14:6).

Because of the finished work of Jesus, we no longer go to a physical sanctuary in Jerusalem to meet with God. Now we go to a spiritual sanctuary in *heaven itself*. Why? Because that's where Jesus is! If God's Old Testament people had to approach him through one *place*, God's New Testament people have to approach him through one *person*. We approach the triune God through Jesus (John 14:6). God's presence is no longer in the temple. It is in Jesus.

God's Old Testament people needed a priest to enter the presence of God *for* them. Jesus is our High Priest, and because of His finished work all of God's people are priests who can go into God's

very presence *through* him (Heb. 10:19–25; 1 Pet. 2:4–5).

Now we worship 'in spirit' (John 4:23–24). God is spirit, and now we approach him in his heavenly sanctuary by his Holy Spirit (Phil. 3:3; Rev. 1:10), the living water that Jesus promised (John 4:10–14; 7:37–39). In this way, we actually 'come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel' (Heb. 12:22–24).

At the same time, our Lord meets us in our earthly worship assemblies, just as he promised, 'for where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them' (Matt. 18:20). Just as God put His name in the Old Testament temple (Deut. 12:5), so now he puts His name in the New Testament temple. And that temple is Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 2:19–22) *and* those who are united to Jesus Christ, His Church (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–5)! Now Jesus personally declares God's name in the midst of the church's worship services (Heb. 2:12; cf. Ps. 22:22)!

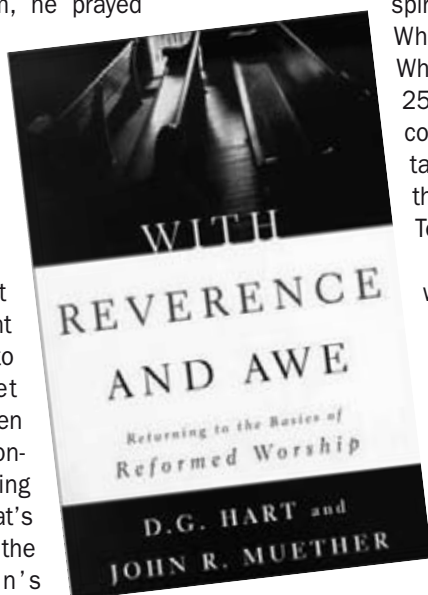
This is why the Church's worship services are so very different from any other kind of meeting we have. Public worship is, first and foremost, a spiritual meeting between the triune God and His covenant people. The Father draws near to His people through His Son by His Spirit, and God's people draw near to the Father by the Spirit through the mediation of the Son (Eph. 2:18). True worship is nothing less than communion between God and His people.

What difference does it make?

This is why a worship service is not really a sharing session, although there's a place for that. This is why a worship service is not essentially an evangelistic program, either, although there's a place for that, too. A worship service is not first and foremost a meeting of people with each other. Above all else, a worship service is a meeting of the living, triune God with his assembled covenant people. God's people assemble for 'communion with God in His public ordinances' (DPW 1.5).

This is why the DPW says:

As a service of public worship is in its essence a meeting of God and his people,



By the way, true worship is not something that can be stimulated artificially. A bigger, louder band and more sentimental music might do more to stir people's emotions. But that is not genuine worship. True worship is a response from the heart to God's truth (John 4:23). You can actually worship without music if you have seen the glories and the depth of what the Bible teaches.

John MacArthur

the parts of the service are of two kinds: those which are performed on behalf of God, and those which are performed by the congregation. In the former the worshippers are receptive, in the latter they are active. It is reasonable that these two elements be made to alternate as far as possible. (3.1)

This is why we *preach*, rather than *discuss*, God's Word in a worship service. The minister has been formally recognised by the Church to serve officially as God's herald. When he faithfully proclaims Scripture, the Lord uses him as an instrument to speak personally to his people by his Spirit through his Word (Rom 10:14–17). In this way, the Lord puts His 'name' in the midst of His people.

This is also why worship services are *a duty* and not an option for believers. 'Let us draw near to God... Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing' (Heb. 10:22, 25 NIV). This is why an informal gathering with your family or with a parachurch group can never serve as an acceptable substitute for public worship with the Church on the Lord's Day (Ps. 87:2). The Lord's 'name' isn't there!

This is why *promptness* to worship is important. If the President of the United States arranges to meet with you, do you keep him waiting? Yet in public worship the King of kings and Lord of lords Himself has arranged to meet with you! How much more important it is to show up punctually and not to absent yourself from the meeting, except for emergencies.

This is why *appropriateness* in dress and demeanour in worship is important. In public worship, you enter the heavenly Holy of Holies to meet with the Sovereign of the universe. Do you act accordingly?

This is why *preparation* for worship is important. Our sinful hearts are 'bent to backsliding' from God (Hos. 11:7 KJV). We are too weak to 'get anything out of worship' unless the Holy Spirit empowers us to profit from the means of grace (see, for example, the prayer in Eph. 3:14–19). But do you admit your need? Do you seek him for ears to hear and hearts to heed the voice of the Great Shepherd? Or do you thoughtlessly breeze into His presence?

And this is why the question, 'Is your worship contemporary or traditional?' misses the point. I've found that when people ask that, they are almost always assuming that worship is merely a meeting of people with one another. But the more important question is, 'Do you see worship as a supernatural encounter between the living God and his people?' That's primary. Questions about styles of music, etc., are not unimportant, but they are secondary.

Each Lord's Day, then, as you gather with your church in the name of the exalted Christ, remember that you gather together first and foremost to meet with God. 'Come *into His presence* with singing!... Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise!' (Ps. 100:2, 4). When His Word is read and proclaimed, listen eagerly to His voice and don't harden your heart against it (Ps. 95:7–8). And as the congregation prays and praises, 'ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come into His courts! Worship the Lord in the splendour of holiness' (Ps. 96:8–9).

The author is pastor of Christ Covenant OPC in Indianapolis, Ind. USA, and a member of the Committee on Revisions to the Directory for Public Worship. Unless otherwise indicated, he quotes the ESV. Reprinted from New Horizons, June 2007 under the terms of a reciprocal arrangement we have with them.

CONFERENCE on REFORMATION THEOLOGY

As you may have heard, there is going to be another Conference on Reformation Theology next month (October). As in previous years, it will be held in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. The topic this year is

WORSHIP

And the speaker (for all sessions) will be **DR JOEY PIPA** of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina. Dr Pipa has become a friend to many of us, and we've all profited from his gifted expository preaching.

DATES:

Auckland

12/13 October 2007 – Reformed Church of Mangere

Christchurch

19/20 October 2007 – Reformed Church of Dovedale

Wellington

26/27 October 2007 – Reformed Church of Wainuiomata

Christians believe that true worship is the highest and noblest activity of which man, by the grace of God, is capable.
(John Stott)

Is this how you view worship? Perhaps... Certainly, those committed to biblical truth about God's holy character, his hatred of sin and his sovereign command of all he has created are more likely to approach worship with reverence and awe. But we live in an age when there is bitter controversy over worship; and we ourselves are not immune. There are wars about music, arguments about style, a demand for informality and inclusiveness so that everyone feels good. How are we to deal with this strife, and find answers to our own questions?

The only way is to turn to the Scriptures and study the matter. Careful attention to biblical truth is the way the Church has always solved disputes such as this; and when the Church has done so, God brings blessing out of the strife.

At the Conference there will be teaching from the Bible on topics like: What should worship include? What should we sing? How should we pray? Why do we have Bible readings? And what about preaching, and the sacraments? There will also be sessions in which Dr Pipa will answer your questions. This helps reinforce what we're learning and is a lot of fun.

Join us in October at the **NEW ZEALAND CONFERENCE ON REFORMATION THEOLOGY**. Come and find answers to your questions, gain a new appreciation for what we do when we worship, and learn truth that you can share with others. Bring your friends!

Sermon notes and songs for small fries

When your child learns to write he is ready to begin taking sermon notes

Sharon L. Bratcher

Say, what?

Let's say that little George is 4 or 5 or 6 years old and he knows how to write his name and how to write all of his letters. Now he can get started! All you need is a regular notebook (or half size) and a pen or pencil.

Before you go to church you should talk with him about the worship service, and how important it is to be quiet and still and to listen to God's Word being preached.

Hopefully he has already been sitting in church for a while and has become accustomed to obeying in this manner. Explain to him that he is old enough now to begin taking sermon notes!

As you listen to the sermon, write in the notebook a simple sentence that you have just heard the minister say. Remember to write it in the type of lettering that little

your child, you can decide whether to have him write 5 sentences, or 10, or more. As he improves, he will be quicker and will accomplish more. He may keep it up throughout, or he may tire. I usually found it beneficial to 'push' my child to do just one more after he said he was getting tired of it. This helped him to develop endurance.

After the service, take the notebook home. If you will take a few moments to read it over when he is present, and to show it to your spouse, he will see that this is important to you and it will help him to strive to do it well. If he is able, you might even have him read it as a part of your family Bible reading time.

This activity teaches him to take notes, because as he gets older you will ask him to listen and write down parts of sentences that he hears. It doesn't matter if he gets all of the words — just that he is listening

not just being forced to sit quietly for his parents' sake. It says to him that he is capable of taking sermon notes, just like the 'big people' do. It also helps if he sees those older than him participating in this way.

As his notebook progresses you could use it during the week to help him remember what he learned on Sunday. If you are enthusiastic, he will be also.

When your child is old enough to sing a song he is old enough to learn Psalms and Hymns

Little George is capable of picking up any song that he hears. So if you regularly sing words of praise to the Lord in your home and in your car, he will soon know all of the words as well. Good quality music that truly honours the Lord is just as fitting for children as it is for adults. They do not need off-key vegetables* to get their attention. You might teach your children the Psalms and Hymns by methodically going through your church songbook and learning to sing all of the first stanzas. What a wonderful preparation to be ready for whichever ones the minister thinks fit best with his sermons for that day!

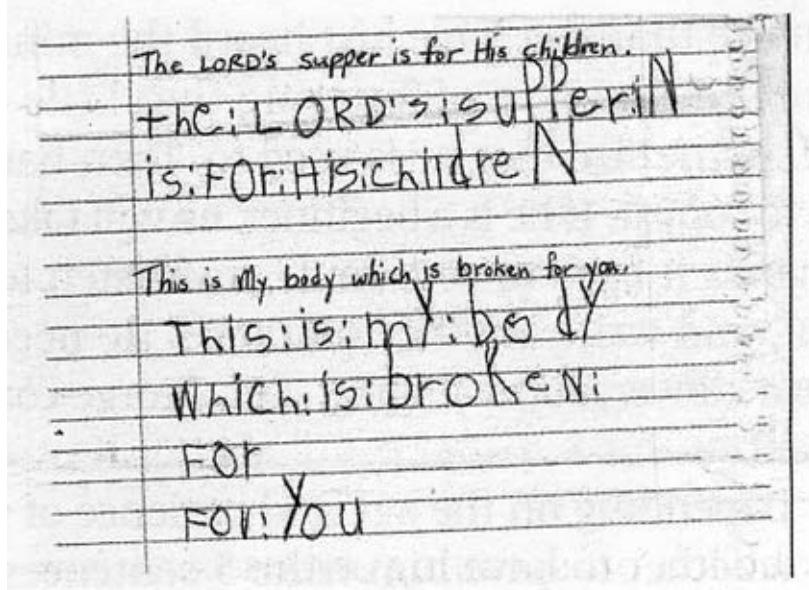
Another way that you can assist your child in worship is by finding out ahead of time, if possible, which hymns or psalms will be sung next Sunday. Then you can sing that one at home a few times so that it becomes familiar to him. If it's one that was unfamiliar to you this could benefit everyone and improve the musical part of the worship of our Lord. If enough people are interested in knowing ahead of time, perhaps you could ask the minister if he could email the titles or page numbers to the congregation by Thursday or Friday of each week.

All of this serves to teach our children that what happens on Sunday is important and that it is not a Sunday-only activity. Preparing for worship and reflecting on it afterwards bring it to the forefront and promote our spiritual growth.

Again, a little enthusiasm goes a long way.

When your child is old enough to read he can begin reading the Bible

What an excitement it is for little George



Notes written by a six-year-old

George will be able to read, in the size that he is used to. Then hand it to George and tell him to copy it. If he is a beginner, he will take awhile to do so. When he hands it back to you, smile, and listen to the sermon for a moment, and write another sentence. He needs to remember not to have a conversation about it. Let George complete this second one as well.

Depending on the age and patience of

and getting some of them. Eventually he will progress to where he can find the main points and summarise them, but that's a long way off.

This activity also gives him something very worthwhile to do during worship. It is directly involved with the worship, as opposed to just being a toy, a page to colour, or a series of 'o's' to fill in, in his bulletin. It says to him that he is worshipping too,

to help read one of the Bible verses at a family Bible reading time. Maybe he can only identify half or two-thirds of the words, but he is sure trying. Soon he will want to be able to read the other words too, and that will encourage him to learn the rest of his phonics. What a goal!

Historically, most schools were started so that people would be able to read God's Word. George will appreciate that he too is included in the Bible study. He also won't need to fuss for attention if he

is already included in taking a turn.

When your child is old enough to speak he can pray

He might repeat after Mom or Dad, or he might add his own simple words of thanks and request. But he should not even be able to remember a time when he did not pray several times every day.

Worship is the central, most important thing that we do in our entire week. It is the time that we humbly come to confess

our sins, give our thanks, sing of His glory, ask for help, and learn of His grace. When we teach our children right from the start how to worship, we accomplish the most important task that we must do.

* If you don't know what this refers to you haven't been exposed to *VeggieTales* – animated videos featuring talking vegetables.

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The redemptive-historical approach

Part III – The application

Paul Archbald

So far we have considered the basic principles behind the redemptive-historic or Christ-centred approach to interpreting the Scripture. We have also seen why it is called "Christ-centred," and some of the ways in which the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed in the Scripture. This focus upon Christ does not mean, however, that application must be ignored. It is more a question of *which* applications, than *whether* we have application.

When it comes to the application of a Scripture passage, it is hard to say, "Here is the correct application and it is the only one." Preachers, for example, will have differing opinions even on the basic thrust of a text and its Christ-relatedness. Not surprisingly, therefore, applications will vary widely.

We may also make a distinction between primary and secondary applications. Some applications may arise from a minor point made in a text, others from the main thrust. A preacher may also use a text to *illustrate* some application that arises from another text, though he should make clear that his comment is extraneous to the text at hand.

Sometimes, taking a redemptive-historic approach will result in a completely different kind of application than that which arises from an exemplaristic or moralistic approach. At other times, the general direction of the application will be the same, though something more will need to be said about the Lord Jesus Christ. Often, the difference will lie in the pathway one takes to arrive at the application. Is it derived by moving

directly from the characters in the story to us, or is it derived by moving from the characters to Christ, and thence to us?

Eli and sons

For example, the fate of Eli's sons (1 Samuel 1, 4) might be used as an illustration of how serious consequences can result from permissive parenting, though that is not the point of the account as it is recorded in 1 Samuel. If a preacher does use Scripture in this way, he should make it clear that this is not really the point of the story. The point of the story, I would suggest, is that things had come to a not-so-pretty pass in Israel. If this is what was going on in the priestly families, imagine how bad it was in the rest of Israel. How desperately they needed faithful prophets, priests and kings to point them to a better Prophet, Priest and King! How desperately they needed to be pointed to Christ! Application would then focus on our need of Christ in a fallen world where corruption even enters the church. I suppose one could focus on the wild behaviour of "P.K.s" (preachers' kids) as evidence of that – though I'm not sure how many pastors would be eager to do that!

David and Goliath

The story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) is one of the best-loved and most-abused of the Old Testament. It has often been preached as a fine example of what a believer can do if he just has faith. If you just have faith, you can overcome even the most gigantic of problems – your "Goliaths." Some interpreters have really gone to town on the details, speculating

about what David's five, smooth river-stones represent.

This kind of interpretation is typical of the exemplaristic approach. The application is made by drawing a direct connection between the Old Testament saint and the New Testament believer. Because David's experiences are so similar to ours, it is assumed that the application involves our imitation of David.

The problem with this kind of approach is that it ignores the fact that Jesus Christ stands between David and us. Our connection to David is through Him. First we must see how David points to Christ, then consider how to go from Christ to us.

I would suggest that there are at least three ways in which David points to Christ in this passage. First, we are being prepared to regard David as a good shepherd-king – in contrast to Saul. He deals with Goliath the way he has dealt with lions and bears, while tending the sheep. For David cares about his God and his brethren. Saul is a king like those of the nations. He trusts in armour and the strength of a man's arm. David trusts in God, as would the Great Shepherd-King, Jesus Christ.

Second, David is deeply offended by Goliath's blasphemous attacks upon the Name of the Lord. Psalm 69:9 foretells that the Christ would be consumed with zeal for God's house. Think of how He dealt with the money-changers at the Temple.

Third, David's defeat of Goliath delivers Israel. David points ahead to the Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Who defeated Satan, sin and death.

If these are the main respects in which Christ is revealed in this text, how shall

we apply it to the modern believer? Why does the New Testament present Christ as our great Shepherd-King, Who is consumed with zeal for His Father's house and delivers His sheep? So that we accept Him as such! In a way, *faith* is also the main application with both a redemptive-historic and an exemplaristic approach. There are, however, two main differences: How we got there – by means of the David-Christ-us connection, as opposed to a similarity between David's experiences and ours; and the fact that the application concerns faith in *Christ's* great victory, rather than the need for us to have a great faith like *David's*.

The persecution and vindication of David

Many of David's Psalms involve a plea to God for rescue from enemies. David certainly had his fair share of opposition from within Israel and without – Philistines, Saul and Absalom, to mention a few. In Psalm 140 David asks God to thwart the wicked persecutor and to preserve and rescue His servant. He knows that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor.

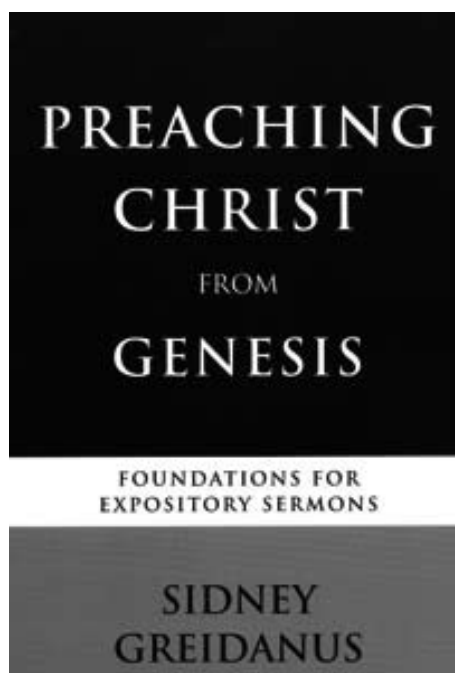
Those who are eager to jump straight into application that is relevant to the believer today might talk about how we should turn to God for help whenever we are persecuted by evil men. We can leave it to Him to vindicate us instead of seeking our own revenge. Many examples could be given of how men may cause us harm, even within the church, along with the ways in which we wrongly seek to pay them back.

If the interpreter is endowed with a deep concern for the plight of the poor, he might spend some time exploring the ways in which the rich oppress the poor. He might stress that we must do what we can for those who are needy, because the Lord has a special concern for the poor and afflicted.

What we must remember, however, is that David's suffering of persecution points to Christ in His rejection by men. Likewise, David's plea for, and enjoyment of vindication, points to the Father's vindication of the Son of David. This is evident from Christ's quotation of David from the cross – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46/Psalm 22:1). Similarly, Matthew applies Psalms 22:18 and 69:21 to Christ's experiences on the cross (Matthew 27:34-35).

Bringing in this connection to Christ

results in a shift of emphasis in the application of Psalm 140 (and 22 and 69). Instead of focusing simply upon how we should trust God to vindicate us when men assail us – and in the meantime make sure we help rather than oppress the poor – we will focus upon trusting that God will rescue us from our greatest oppressors, Satan, sin and death. He will do so because the Son of David was oppressed and afflicted in our place, especially on the cross. Because of him we will be vindicated, though we do not deserve it in ourselves. For God maintains the cause of



those who are poor and afflicted – those who are afflicted for *Christ's sake* and who turn to *Him* in their extremity. It is this that enables us to endure persecution at the hand of Satan's human allies. If we want to bring in the subject of our response to human persecutors, this is the point at which it could be done – as an example of how trusting Christ for our deliverance makes a difference to the way we respond. But the focus of the application should be upon looking to Christ, rather than acting like David.

The seeking of wisdom

As a further example, consider Proverbs 4:1-9. Like much of the Wisdom Literature, there is here a call to seek and acquire wisdom. As in the example above, the interpreter might chose to make the application on the basis of a similarity between the Old Testament saint and the New Testament believer. In Old Testament times, God

calls His people to seek wisdom – as He does here in Proverbs 4 – and He does the same in New Testament times (James 1:5). Wisdom is needed for handling afflictions and temptations. It is even needed for handling happy experiences. Therefore we must seek Wisdom from God.

Once again, I would suggest that the problem with this approach lies not so much in what it says, as in what it does not say. In Proverbs, as I mentioned in the previous article, Wisdom is personified as a woman who is to be greatly desired. In Proverbs 4, a father advises his son to desire this woman and go after her, as a suitor might single-mindedly pursue the woman on whom he set his affections. In the New Testament, we find that Jesus Christ is the real Person who lies behind this personification of Proverbs. He is the Wisdom of God (! Corinthians 1:24). The call to seek Wisdom in the Wisdom Literature therefore becomes a call to seek *Christ*, to desire and pursue Him above all else. In Proverbs 4, the emphasis is simply upon the intensity of the seeking. In the passage in James, the emphasis is upon seeking Christ the Wisdom of God so that one may be able to handle temptation in all manner of life-situations.

The Beatitudes and gospel proclamation

In my opinion, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-23) are frequently misconstrued because of moralizing tendencies. Many books have been written on this portion of Scripture by eminent commentators: Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Arthur Pink, and John Stott, amongst others. With all due respect to these men – and their very edifying writings – they tend to turn the Beatitudes into a series of moral commands – "Be humble, gentle, merciful" and so on. The most extreme of these is in Martyn Lloyd-Jones' *The Sermon on the Mount*, where the Beatitudes are presented as a kind of order of the believer's experience of spiritual growth, from conversion on.

This approach tends to play down (though not totally ignore) the Old Testament background to the Beatitudes. Comparison with passages such as Isaiah 61:1-3 and Psalm 37:11 shows that in the Beatitudes the Lord Jesus was basically heaping together a number of Old Testament terms for the people of God. Essentially, the terms are based on the fact that God's people were those who, in their affliction, looked to God and His

righteousness, mercy and peace. They looked to the day when Messiah would bring blessing and joy to replace tribulation and oppression. In other words, *this is the Gospel in Old Testament terms*. In Matthew 4:23, we read that the Lord was going around “preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.” Matthew 5 gives us the first taste of what that Gospel entailed. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount then goes on to outline how that Gospel affects the believer’s moral behaviour and relationships. But here at the start, we have the proclamation of the Gospel as such. Christ is saying that this is now the day of gladness that the Old Testament prophesied, when God’s afflicted people would be blessed by the coming of the Messiah. The structure of the Beatitudes is therefore not, “Be this or that!” It is “Blessed are these and those, because of certain promises.” The proclamation of the Gospel should not be turned into a moral imperative, even though it has moral implications.

The Messiah is revealed in other ways in the Beatitudes. He comes as the Suffering Servant. He fits the description of the one who is blessed – He is persecuted, poor and afflicted. He is also the One who receives blessing and vindication from His Father, which he shares with us. In Him, we inherit the earth, and much more.

I suppose one could draw a secondary application from the fact that those blessed are those who look to God in their extremity. But the primary application, as with other instances of Gospel proclamation, is that we must *accept this truth with great joy and gladness*. The Christ has come, and He comes with vindication and blessing. We must rejoice in this even though, for a little while, we still endure affliction.

Being what we are

Having said that Gospel proclamation must not be turned into moral imperative, I must also caution that moral imperative must not be turned into nothing but a Gospel proclamation. Ephesians 5:1-21, for example, contains many imperatives: Be imitators of God! Walk in love! Immorality must not even be named among you! Do not be partakers! And so on. These are implications of the Gospel, as verse 2 makes clear.

That link to the Gospel is important. While we should not turn moral commands into Gospel promises, neither should we ignore the connection between Law and Gospel, command and promise. In this area too, Christ must be held forth. Law

and Gospel both reveal Him, though in different ways.

There are at least three ways in which Christ is connected with any Biblical command. First, He is the One who has kept that command perfectly, on our behalf. Secondly, He is the One who has covered our *failure* to keep that command, by His sacrificial death. Third, He is the Perfect Example for us to imitate out of gratitude for His work on our behalf. In applying the Law, we must remember that it has more than one use. It shows us our need of Christ, as well as providing a rule of gratitude for what Christ has done for us. These are things that should be said without playing down the fact that here we deal with commands about our behaviour. In the application of this and other passages that deal with Law, sufficient practical examples should be given so that we all know, by God’s grace, what it means to practise this law in our own situation, out of the motive of gratitude.

The line we must take

I have tried to provide here sufficient examples to give some idea of proper lines of application in different kinds of texts – historical narrative, Wisdom Literature, Gospel and Law. Sometimes, the exemplaristic approach results in incorrect application of the particular text – though it may be in line with some other text, and therefore edifying. Often, however, the end-point will be similar, whether one takes a redemptive-historic or exemplaristic approach. But the line we take, how we get there, is important. For it involves the holding forth of Jesus Christ, as well as doing justice to the context of Scripture.

May the Lord grant to all who seek to handle His Word accurately – especially preachers - the ability to see and explain the thrust of the text and to proclaim the Christ who is revealed in each text. May He also use us as means to challenge each other in the application of His Word to our daily lives.

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World in focus

Glasite House seeking new congregation

Scotland's Glasite movement contributed to Alexander Campbell's development of the Restoration Movement in America, spawning a spectrum ranging from the United Church of Christ through the Churches of Christ (Non Instrumental) to the Latter Day Saints. John Glas departed the Church of Scotland to establish his own ministry in Dundee in 1725.

The Edinburgh meeting house is one of the most impressive of some 30 erected across Scotland. According to reports in *The Scotsman*, the chapel, designed by renowned Edinburgh architect Alexander Black, was the city base for the Glasite sect and remained in use for around 150 years until the late 1980s. At that time the local body declined to the point it could no longer maintain the building, and it was conveyed to an historical trust.

'With a spectacular glazed dome in the roof, the room remains almost exactly as it would have looked in Victorian times — with original wooden box pews, blind arched walls and a large pulpit, designed by David Bryce in 1873,' noted Jane Bradley of *The Scotsman*.

More recently, the building has been occupied by the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). When a six-month repair process became necessary, the congregation moved to more satisfactory facilities and consequently the building is seeking an appropriate new occupant.

Glasite congregations opposed the established church and never developed a ministry in the full Presbyterian style. Glas died in 1773 aged 78 and was buried in Dundee. Son-in-law Robert Sandeman developed the movement in England and America. While Glas dissented from the Westminster standard on the spiritual nature of the Church and the function of the civil magistrate, Sandeman added a distinctive doctrine as to the nature of faith which is recorded stated on his tombstone: 'That the bare death of Jesus Christ without a thought or deed on the part of man, is sufficient to present the chief of sinners spotless before God.'

+ *Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, Glasite Meeting House, 33 Barony Street, Edinburgh EH3 6NX*

Adolph Eichmann's demonic spirit lives on

On the 18 July 2007 broadcast of Faith and Action Live, F&A President Rob Schenck reported on the recent prayer vigil by hundreds of young people in Wichita, Kansas at the facilities of abortionist Dr. George Tiller who

is known as 'Tiller the Killer' for his specialty of aborting late-term babies.

Schenck described Tiller's so-called women's health clinic as 'America's Auschwitz,' describing how the clinic's crematory chimney emits black smoke into the surrounding air containing the ashes of aborted babies.

Schenck additionally described how Tiller is now skirting the recent US Supreme Court decision outlawing partial birth abortion by injecting foetal poisons like Digoxin into the late-term unborn child, who is then delivered dead a few days after the poison has had time to kill the baby.

+ *Faith and Action in the Nations Capital, 109 Second St. NE, Washington, DC 20002 For more information see www.faithandaction.org*

Carolina church obtains restraining order

A congregation in western North Carolina has been granted a temporary restraining order that prevents the presbytery or the Presbyterian Church (USA) from seizing control of the congregation's property and assets. The order, signed 2 July by Judicial District 29A Superior Court Judge James Baker, will remain in effect pending a hearing to determine if First Presbyterian Church in Marion owns its property. The Presbytery of Western North Carolina and the PCUSA are also making claims.

Rev. Mr. Jim Wilken, pastor of the church, referred all questions to the congregation's attorney, Stephen Little. Barbara (Bobbi) White, general presbyter of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, said, 'We were shocked and saddened. Without any discussion or notice, we were served with the TRO and complaint and a couple inches of paper' supporting those legal documents.

'We did invite the pastor and session to come before the presbytery's committee on ministry or the presbytery council,' she said, 'just to help us understand their thinking behind this action and to try to bring reconciliation and to listen to their concerns. They refused to come on the advice of their legal counsel.'

+ *First Presbyterian Church, 79 Academy St., Marion, North Carolina 28752 (828) 652-5717*

NHS gives its blessing to Paganism

FOR some NHS hospital patients, it would seem the help of one god is just not enough. Pagan chaplains are, for the first time, to offer counselling and prayers to the sick in Scottish wards.

NHS Tayside has agreed with Scotland's 30,000 Pagans a ground-breaking deal that will allow bedside healing rituals, meditation

and special prayers. But some of the more exotic aspects of Paganism — not least the carrying of flaming torches — will have to stay outside.

Pagan patients will also receive advice on getting well soon, including keeping a 'healing goddess' next to their bed.

But the move has outraged some Christians, who claim it represents an insult to the nation's religious heritage. One senior member of the Church of the Scotland claimed it proved 'the devil had been busy' in Tayside.

Modern Paganism is characterised by the worship of gods and goddesses linked to nature and the seasons. Pagans flatly reject claims they are Satan-worshippers and insist theirs is a religion of tolerance and harmony with nature.

Under the agreement reached between NHS Tayside, which runs Dundee's Ninewells Hospital, and the Pagan Federation Scotland, newly trained Pagan chaplains will be officially allowed access to wards to minister to patients.

A Pagan hospital visit will involve meditation, prayers, private counselling and possibly a simple healing ritual, which might include the use of healing stones.

However, Pagans have decided to tone down what are seen as the more exotic and striking forms of Pagan worship and ritual, such as carrying flaming torches.

Under the agreement, the Pagan chaplains are not allowed to use their time in hospital to attempt to spread their own faith, and they may only minister to patients who have requested a Pagan visit.

Tina Stewart, the Hospital Visitor Coordinator for the Pagan Federation Scotland, said, 'We have had a very successful meeting to discuss the needs of the Pagan patient. Things are moving forward. There's an understanding that patients of all faiths should be treated equally and that they all have the right to pastoral care while in hospital.'

John McIntyre, spokesman for the Pagan Federation, added, 'There is a lot more recognition of Paganism in Scotland nowadays. There are about 30,000 people in Scotland who would regard themselves as Pagan and many people are very sympathetic to elements of Pagan belief without necessarily calling themselves Pagans. The equality of men and women and caring for the environment are all parts of the Pagan outlook, and most people would agree with these things.'

However, the move has angered churchgoers. Moira Kerr, a Kirk elder who in 2005 campaigned against a move by Tayside to remove a communion table from a hospital chapel in case it offend non-Christians,

said, 'I'm very saddened to hear about this. Scotland needs to get back its Christian heritage which has done so much for us over the years. There's no doubt the devil is at work in this.'

Gordon MacDonald, the parliamentary officer for the Christian values charity CARE, said, 'I would question what the point is of all this. Very few people in Scotland identify themselves as being Pagan by faith and I would have thought a health board would have better things to do. This is a sign of how much confusion there is in society nowadays. People need to think through the values which we have received from our Christian heritage, such as respect, the value of the individual, and personal freedom.'

But Osama Saeed, Scottish spokesman for the Muslim Association of Britain, said, 'As a minority faith ourselves, I don't think Muslims would object to others receiving pastoral visits. Nothing illegal would be happening and people have the right to spiritual care.'

Rev Chris Levisson, who advises the NHS in Scotland on provision of chaplaincy services, said, 'The fact is that we treat patients of all religions and faiths — and even those of none — equally. If they ask for care and a visit from a particular religion then the duty is to facilitate it, as far as that is possible.'

He added, 'There has been research from elsewhere which suggests that patients who receive visits from chaplains can do better in hospital than those who don't. The very fact of having a person come in and talk and show that others care, can itself help the process and even get a better outcome. It is actually one of the most cost-effective elements of care.'

A spokeswoman for NHS Tayside said, 'If people ask for a chaplaincy visit, of whatever faith, we will facilitate it, without making any judgment.'

PAGAN medicine, in its modern form, is based on trying to rediscover and develop ancient wisdom relating to herbs and natural remedies.

Ancient druids were the healers of their time and thought that mistletoe could cure all manner of ills and even make a person who wore mistletoe invisible. Some druids insisted on cutting mistletoe using a golden knife or sickle at special times, such as midsummer or during special phases of the moon.

Regardless of the merits of a golden sickle, some herbs the druids venerated have recently been found to have more to them than previously thought.

The herb meadowsweet, for instance, has been found to contain salicylates, which are aspirin-like substances that help reduce inflammation and relieve pain. It also contains tannins and other constituents that help protect the stomach and intestines from acidity and ulceration, which

can be caused by too much aspirin.

In addition, St John's Wort was used in the past to treat emotional and nervous conditions, such as depression, anxiety and tension.

MURDO MACLEOD (mmacleod@scotlandonsunday.com)

Turkey: Converts subjected to official harassment

Local district fines Christians for collecting tithes and offerings.

In a bizarre twist in the criminal prosecution of two Turkish Christians for 'insulting Turkish identity,' an administrative district authority in Istanbul has ordered the converts from Islam fined for 'illegal collection of funds.'

Hakan Tastan and Turan Topal, on trial for insulting Turkishness under the nation's notorious Article 301, were summoned to Istanbul's Beyoglu police headquarters on Sunday morning (July 1) just before church services began at the Taksim Protestant Church, where Tastan is a member.

'Three plainclothes policemen were waiting for me at the church,' Tastan said, 'saying I was wanted at the police station.'

With their lawyer out of town, he telephoned Topal, and the two agreed to go along to the police station.

'I thought probably the police were acting on last week's Interior Ministry decree,' Tastan told Compass, referring to a June 28 directive sent to all the nation's governors ordering extra security for Turkey's religious minorities in the wake of rising violence against non-Muslims. 'But it turned out to be something entirely different.'

The two Christians were both presented with a separate 'penalty' sheet from the security police division linked to the Beyoglu district, ordering each one to pay 600 Turkish lira (US\$461) for breaking a civil law.

According to the one-page decisions, the two men were guilty of violating section 29 of civil administrative code 2860, which forbids the collection of money without official permission from local district authorities.

Evidence of the alleged misdemeanour, the forms noted, was in the hands of the gendarme headquarters in Silivri, 45 miles west of Istanbul, site of the two Christians' trial. The men were shown no documents or alleged evidence of the accusations against them.

'What is this? Just more harassment,' Topal told Compass. Both he and Tastan have been subjected to surveillance and even secret filming by Turkish gendarme and police authorities over the past year.

'This is ridiculous,' the men's attorney, Haydar Polat, told Compass today. 'It has nothing whatever to do with the original case against my clients. Now we will have to open a case against this administrative order within 15 days, and it will take at least a year to get these unsubstantiated charges dropped.'

At a previous hearing in January, leading prosecution attorney Kemal Kerincsiz had accused the congregation of Tastan's church of breaking Turkish laws by collecting offerings without official permission from local civil authorities.

Former Muslims who converted to Christianity more than a decade ago, Tastan and Topal were arrested for two days last October

Teachers wanted

Wainuiomata Christian College and Silverstream Christian School are presently seeking committed, flexible, and enthusiastic Reformed or Calvinistic Christians to help teach Christian youth. Our aim is to develop a biblical world and life view in our students as well as provide an academically sound education so as to equip students to serve the Lord in this world.

We have the following vacancies for classroom teachers (full or part-time) commencing in January 2008:

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Interested people can obtain a Teacher Application form and/or more information by contacting us at:

e-mail: admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz

telephone: (04) 564 8552/ fax (04) 564 9305

Postal: PO Box 43-127, Wainuiomata 50148 New Zealand.

www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz

and then put on trial before the Silivri Criminal Court in late November.

In addition to charges under Article 301's restrictions on freedom of speech, the two Christians are accused of reviling Islam (Article 216) and secretly compiling files on private citizens for a local Bible course (Article 135).

'Poisoning Youth'

Before the Christians' third trial hearing on April 18, prosecutor Kerincsiz spoke at length to journalists gathered outside the Silivri courthouse about the case.

Deploring changes in Turkish law that he said 'removed missionary work from being a crime' in Turkey, the ultranationalist lawyer called the two Christians part of a 'dangerous group.'

'They have a large amount of money from an unknown source,' Kerincsiz was quoted as saying in an April 18 report from Ihlas News Agency.

Claiming they had 'poisoned hundreds of youth' over the last two years, the lawyer demanded that the government take action against them. He claimed the defendants lived luxurious lives, using everything from expensive cars and sexual temptations to deceive young people in grade school and high school into converting to Christianity.

In court, however, Kerincsiz has failed to produce any solid evidence of these allegations.

During the hour-long hearing on April 18, a representative from the regional gendarme headquarters that ordered the initial investigation testified, along with one of the teenage boys accusing the converts.

A 17-year-old identified as Oguz Y. took the witness stand for the prosecution, although he admitted under questioning that the defendants had never forced him to change his religion or join in their activities.

At the close of the hearing, the presiding judge warned local police that he would open a contempt case against them if they failed to produce all three of the plaintiffs at the next hearing, set for July 18. The trial will take place in the tense run-up week before Turkey's snap parliamentary elections on July 22.

Despite a large media contingent on the scene, national coverage of the Silivri trial was muted the following day, after news broke that same afternoon of the brutal murder in Malatya of three Christians.

The two converts from Islam and a German Christian had been tortured for several hours at a Christian publishing house office before the five young attackers slit their throats.

Ankara Warns Court

But two days later, the nationalist *Yeni Cag* newspaper reported on the Silivri trial with a front-page banner headline, 'Missionary

Fear,' followed by an inside page headlined, 'The trial that scares the [Justice] Ministry.' According to a Justice Ministry communiqué partially reprinted in *Yeni Cag's* April 20 edition, the Turkish government warned the Silivri court that news about the case in the international press could cause the European Union to 'call us to account.'

The Silivri court was reportedly requested to send copies of the indictment and the complete case file to the Justice Ministry in Ankara.

More than 300 of Turkey's writers, journalists, historians and other intellectuals have been indicted under Article 301 for defaming 'Turkishness,' a concept which remains undefined.

A majority of the country's influential nationalist factions supporting this law also oppose Turkey's bid to enter the European Union (EU), warning that Europe wants to force Western values and reforms onto Turkey that are contrary to its Muslim heritage.

The EU has demanded that Turkey either scrap or amend the restrictive law to meet European standards of freedom of speech.

ISTANBUL, July 3 (*Compass Direct News*)

Homosexuality dominates DRC[SA] Synod

The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (South Africa) faced major issues in church unification, land reform, baptism (and re-baptism), crime and violence, pastoral education. However, the issue that received the most attention in their four-day meeting, 4-7 June, was the report about homosexual members and ministers.

In 2004, the last full General Synod created a high-level task force asking it to re-evaluate the church's policy on homosexual members. That synod also apologised to its gay members and their families who were wounded by the church's judgements and exclusion. Still, this task force did not come with a clear resolution, but a sharply divided report.

Besides the report, this synod also had a case to deal with. One of its ministers, Laurie Gaum, appealed his suspension to synod. The church had removed Gaum from office on grounds of homosexual conduct. In addition, 500 individuals, most of them members, circulated an open letter, urging synod to receive its gay members as full members. There were five publications in different media, some from committee members themselves, and three of these were given to all synod delegates.

In an executive session, the synod also restored the ministerial credentials of Laurie Gaum, mainly on procedural grounds. In the course of the various judgments and appeals, the charges had been altered. The synod further declared that since Gaum had been cleared of this charge, he could not be retried

for the same incident. The synod's decision also avoided what might have been a lengthy legal battle in civil courts, which Gaum was prepared to wage. Gaum now faces a decision whether to remain a minister, since he has so far declined to pledge celibacy in homosexual relations.

+ REC Secretariat, 2050 Breton Rd, SE, Suite 102, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546. (616) 949-2910

Fathers and Aboriginal child sexual abuse

John Howard has taken on a big issue in a big, bold way. The plight of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory has been crying out for action and the PM has acted. Gradually, every state and territory has fallen into line and Kevin Rudd has joined with his support. The sweeping plan was inspired by a shocking report on child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory in indigenous communities.

The PM's measures are drastic but necessary: bans on takeaway alcohol and X-rated pornography in indigenous communities, a federal takeover of townships on Aboriginal land, quarantining family welfare payments so at least half is spent on food and other essentials rather than booze, making welfare payments conditional on children attending school, compulsory medical checks for Aboriginal children and a significant boost in police numbers.

The 'Little Children Are Sacred' report was made public in Darwin last week. The nine-month inquiry went to 45 indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. It said that 'rivers of grog' fuelled widespread child sexual abuse.

The tragic thing is that little girls need their fathers, as Prison Fellowship President Mark Earley said recently in USA. 'Many of their adult attitudes are formed by good father-daughter relationship.' Abuse messes everything up for years.

Dr. Meg Meeker puts it in her new book, 'STRONG FATHERS, STRONG DAUGHTERS' — 'Most are good men... but you are good men who have been derided by a culture that does not care for you, that has ridiculed your authority, denied your importance, and tried to fill you with confusion about your role. But I can tell you that fathers change lives.'

Meeker has seen a lot of girls stranded in the sexual wasteland, with sexually transmitted diseases, depression, eating disorders, and underage pregnancy. Dr Meeker found that the girls involved in damaging behaviours are the girls who don't feel loved and valued by their fathers. Fathers can ensure that their daughters grow up with healthy ideas about sexuality. 'You don't have to be an expert on STD's, or anything else, to guide your daughter away from this wasteland. You just have to do your job as a dad. Talk to her, even when

she doesn't seem to be listening. Teach her about the God who loves her and made her. Set boundaries for her. Spend time with her. Listen to her. Maybe it doesn't seem like a big deal to you, but you wouldn't believe the difference it makes to her. Your children may not tell you that now, but their lives will always be a reflection of your love and commitment. You can take that to the bank.'

Rev The Hon Dr Gordon Moyes AC MLC, taken from 'Christian Voice in Politics' 28/6/07

Oriental Orthodox reach historic accord

Through an agreement signed on 13 July 2007 in Cairo, Egypt, the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church have 'solemnly declared their unity of faith, their commitment to common witness and their readiness to deepen and expand collaboration, leaving behind more than two decades of tensions.' The three churches belong to the Oriental Orthodox family, which also includes the Syrian, Indian, and Eritrean churches. These churches have world-wide Diaspora.

In a letter to the heads of the other

churches, Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa and Abune Paulos, Patriarch and Catholicos of Ethiopia and Archbishop of Axum, as well as to Catholicos Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church (See of Cilicia), who played an instrumental role as mediator. Pope Shenouda III served as one of the WCC presidents from 1991-1998; Abune Paulos currently serves as one of the WCC presidents, having been elected in 2006. And Catholicos Aram I served as the WCC central committee moderator for two terms from 1991-2006.

+ The Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, 630 Second Avenue, New York, New York 10016

Taliban seizes Presbyterians

Some time between 13 July and 20 July a delegation of 23 people from the Saemmul Presbyterian Church in Bundang, South Korea, went missing in Pakistan. Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, identified by the Associated Press as a Taliban spokesman, claimed the Presbyterians were in safe hands. Oh Soo In, identified in published reports as a spokesman for the Saemmul congregation, stated that captives

were in Afghanistan on vacation, expecting to volunteer in hospital near Kandahar.

Apart from short-term missionaries like those in Afghanistan, the nine-year-old Saemmul church of 3,800 members sponsors 50 foreign missionaries. Collectively, South Korea is believed to have an excess of 12,000 missionaries on the foreign field.

+ Centre International Réformé John Knox, Secrétariat, 27, chemin des Crêts de Pregny, 1218 Grand-Saconnex / Ge - Suisse

The slave trade is expanding

Two hundred years after William Wilberforce moved the British to make it illegal; the slave trade is still going on, bigger than ever — estimated at around 27 million people worldwide. The practice is fuelled by those with money taking advantage of people who are poor in order to obtain free labour or sexual favours. Slave holders operate in American neighborhoods without local people even realising it. Mission Frontiers provides suggestions and resources for learning about the modern slave trade and how to combat the evil. This issue is available online at Mission Frontiers.

+ Rick Wood, 1605 E. Elizabeth St., Pasadena CA 91104 RickWMF@aol.co

A feminine focus

Why bother with History?

Sally Davey

(This is the first in a series of articles dealing with the general subject of education)

I am a history teacher. That is to say, I've taught history in all sorts of places over the last 30 years. It's work I love, and hopefully some of my students have become as enthusiastic as I am. History is a fascinating study. It's all about people. And yet the most amazing thing is that when I ask people if they've ever studied history the very few who have say, 'Oh, it

was so boring – all those dates...'

What on earth is happening out there? It's incredible! How in the world have people got such an impression of this wonderful subject? I have yet to meet the history teacher who teaches in a way that would even remotely resemble the memories of these apparently bored high school students. So what, then, is the problem with history, and why are so few people studying it these days? Could the reason be that history is simply unimportant or irrelevant? Are there any important consequences in New Zealanders not learning it? Are there any special reasons Christians should study it? I've thought about these questions quite a lot over the past twenty years or so, and what follows are some of the thoughts I've had as I've tried to answer them.

The present situation

First of all, what *are* the facts? Do we as a nation study history? Apparently, a few of us do. With our current system of unit standards in the NCEA regime, it is a little hard to deduce what proportion of

students in each year of senior high school take the different subjects; but a rounding of figures over the past 2-3 years results in the following approximations: around 1 in 6 students doing NCEA Level One take history, one in 10 of Level Two did history, and one in 8 of Level Three did the subject.¹ This, you would have to agree, is not a large portion of our high school population. And bear in mind that the large segment of our population who never take history between the ages of 15-17 never did it before, either. Social Studies (introduced in the 1940s to replace history and geography in Forms 1-4) has always been more a series of unrelated topics in the study of culture than a connected subject providing students with an overview of where western culture has come from, and what their particular place in it is. In other words, it does not teach them history.

Well, if the average student does not take it, and if the average parent (now probably in his or her 40s) does not encourage their offspring to study it, what are



the reasons? Over the years, I have asked many questions and tried to probe this problem. It seems to me there are several. Firstly we live in an age when technical expertise is valued more highly than an ability to understand what is going on in our culture, and learning to think critically, analytically and reflectively. This results in a thirst for a high school education that will provide students with practical skills that (as students and parents perceive it) will enable school leavers to get a good job and make money. This attitude was alluded to by my 15-year-old nephew, Robert, when I asked him if he had thought of taking history for NCEA Level One. He replied, 'Yes – history is interesting, and I wouldn't have minded doing it, but it was in the same subject group as art, and I wanted to do that. I suppose most people in my year would say history would be interesting, but it's not as good for getting you a job as, say, computers.' That, in a nutshell, is the problem. Given the choice, students and parents will often opt for what seems to be the subject most obviously related to the practical problems of the workplace. That, after all, is the way we have been all trained think for the last 70-odd years by the disciples of John Dewey, the great promoter of 'education for life for the ordinary student.'

There is little choice

But Robert's answer to my question also points to a second reason students do not take subjects like history: there is too little choice at high school. This is not because there are too few subject options offered for NCEA, but because New Zealand students are only allowed to do around six at a time. So, subjects are arranged in groups and you get to choose one per group. Then, by the time you enroll for English, Mathematics and Science (compulsory at Level One) you only have two or three more choices. Furthermore, the spreading of students over the many subjects often means that there are too few students to offer a class in a particular subject. The result is that subjects like history and languages are sometimes not offered at all in smaller high schools. My niece, Susannah, who is 17 years old, made the following comment: 'I personally think we ought to be able to take a lot more subjects, not just 5 or 6. In Europe they have to do 10 or 12, so you

have a lot more choice. In the U.S. [she was there 18 months ago and attended high school with a friend] they all have to do European History and American History, and I think that's much better.'

Susannah went on to add that science teachers and career advisors often put pressure on students to keep up the three sciences, since if they end up wanting to do science at university they will find it hard to pick them up without the previous background at high school. No doubt this is true: the sciences use terminology and concepts that are peculiar to themselves and you cannot readily learn them without direct instruction, from the basic steps upward. A subject like history, by contrast, does not use technical vocabulary and one simply needs an enquiring mind and the willingness to read widely. Students assume – and probably rightly – that if they love history and want to pick it up later at university, they can. But how many do?



It takes effort

Finally, there are the perceived problems of difficulty – and effort. Most people I talk to think all that learning of dates is not only boring, but hard work! (You'd have to be dotty about history to put up with it!) But even given that memorizing dates is not a major part of studying the subject, it is true that you will have to be prepared to read a lot – and the more widely you read, the better you will succeed in history. However, that in turn is one of the blessings of being a history student. You will become a very well-informed person who understands human nature and our times because you have read so much about them. But you will also have to write essays. That, it seems, is enough to make many students shudder. This is partly due to what has *not* gone on in the earlier years of schooling: pupils do not study the formalities of language or learn how to write cogently and effectively. And because they are not required to read a lot of good literature, they do not learn what good writing that articulates a clear argument effectively actually looks like. They do not learn how to write good essays themselves. What a shame! In consequence, they look for easier options. Here is what Susannah said: 'History is perceived as being quite difficult – don't take it if you want an easy option – instead take information manage-

ment or tourism studies – they are called 'cabbage subjects.' But somehow I despair of a society that has been brought up on a cabbage diet rather than solid food.

The influence of post-modernism

On a slight tangent, I should add that recent post-modern thinking has added to the dilemma. In a world that regards all attempts to explain the past as merely personal interpretations whose perspective depends entirely on the ideology of the interpreter, a dark skepticism about the possibility of knowing the past truly and objectively at all throws great doubt on the relevance of the subject. If history is only a vehicle for someone's personal axe-grinding, why should I learn it unless I want to become part of this particular agenda? And I can see that history is being used this way in the curriculum. It used to be argued that the old 'survey' method of teaching history simply reflected the ideology of democracy – the history of western civilization was taught, in other words, to show the rise of democracy, and what a good thing it was. However, at least it was still a survey of where we have come from. What we have now is a curriculum that offers topics related only by themes such as 'Conflict' or 'Race Relations.' The point is not what a student actually learns about the modern United States or South Africa (for instance), but what fuels the hatred of racial discrimination. Analysing and locating that hatred is the driver in studying history for those who want to keep looking for it in today's world. It is not to teach students how the continuity of the past fits together at all. Past situations are only relevant if they illustrate some situation in the present, as we understand it. No wonder people begin to wonder if history is relevant at all.

What has made us what we are

If these are the reasons for the decline of history, what are its effects? The first and most obvious effect is that more and more we are becoming a society that does not know who we are because we have very little understanding of the developments that have made us what we are. That missing knowledge is extremely useful! I could use countless examples to make a case for this; but consider how important it is to know the trends in thinking that led to doubt in the authority of Scripture in the nineteenth century, and to the adoption of an atheistic, evolutionary view of the origin of man. Couple this with a huge growth

in optimism about human nature, and in the possibilities of technology to solve the problems of human life. The result: rejection of God and the Scriptures in the twentieth century, a Nazi holocaust, and the sexual rebellion of the 1960s and beyond. A broad-brush overview of the past two or three centuries of European thinking helps us make sense of the moral and spiritual chaos we now face. When we are able to recognise the trends that have led to our chaos we are much better able to understand it, address it and speak with those caught up in it. We become better apologists, evangelists and more responsible, compassionate Christians.

A sound training in the major trends in the history of Europe, Britain and the West has generally helped make the difference between a usefully educated person and one who has little idea of what makes our world 'tick.' Consider some of the twentieth century's leading statesmen. Have you ever read Winston Churchill's speeches and realized the extent to which his knowledge of history gave power to his arguments? He was an amateur historian, and although he had not put much effort into his studies at school, his education had been very sound. He certainly put it to good use in sketching verbal pictures of all that England stood for as he urged the British people to stand firm, against all odds, in their great hour of peril in 1940. His speeches had power because he knew the past, and he knew what must be preserved. He was conscious that England had faced threats from the Continent before. This knowledge steeled his conviction that Germany was again becoming a menace in the early 1930s. No one believed him, and most thought him a foolish war-monger. It was his knowledge of history that enabled him to keep his convictions in the face of general ridicule. But Churchill is not the only historically-aware Prime Minister Britain has had. My sister Jane remembers a television interview in which Paul Holmes was attempting to reduce Margaret Thatcher to either anger or tears (he probably didn't care much which it was) over her recent dumping by the Conservative Party. Thatcher quickly pulverized Holmes, using historical example and sound argument to show that her Prime Ministership had not been based merely on her own ego. She actually stood for something worth defending; and did it well. His emotional cheap shots missed the mark. Consider for a moment. What better source may we draw from when we want to make a point about

our social, political or moral situation? What knowledge better prepares us for sensible conversation, discussion, debate and wise action than an understanding of what our society has been before?

Not knowing oppresses us

A second consequence is that people who don't know the past are much more easily controlled by unscrupulous leaders, or by those who have an evil agenda. People who have studied history have an awareness of how tyranny develops over time; what forces in society tempt individuals to grab for power and bring others to a point where they give up their freedoms, submitting to tyranny. The historically-aware are usually the quickest to discern these developments, and among the first to sound the warnings (again, Churchill in the early '30s). Sometimes, when I think about the historical ignorance of our own society, I fear for its future.

People who know the past also know a lot more about the human heart, and its potential for good and for evil. They are aware of the range of outworkings! Thus they tend not to be fooled by promises based on false optimism. They know, for instance, that science will not solve all our problems. The use of technology is entirely dependent on the ethics and the state of the hearts of those responsible for its development. The same technology may generate power, or blow up cities. It may prevent disease or be used to start a pandemic. After all, it was a modern, efficient, industrialised and seemingly Christian society that ran the gas chambers of Auschwitz. (You might ask why the Lutheran churches in Germany failed to work out what was happening and stand up against Nazism. Well, these churches had fallen prey to an inward-looking, sentimental type of Christianity known as Pietism, and by the early twentieth century they were not very interested in wider developments in society. Apart from a few brave individuals, they succumbed to the Nazi programme to use the churches to promote their aims.) Frightening, isn't it?

Arrogance about the present

Another feature of people who don't know the past is that they generally have an ill-founded arrogance about the present.

Because they are quite unaware of the high points reached at earlier moments of our history (usually those moments when the gospel was having its greatest effect) they tend to believe things are about as good as they can get. This may especially apply to Christians who don't know the past – it's amazing what silly things I've heard contemporary Christians say about modern church life! You would think, from listening to them, that the Church has never really known before how to make Christianity clear to unbelievers. (Evangelism has actually been done a lot better many times in the past.) Likewise, due to some good convictions faithfully carried out, the influence of the Scriptures has at other times penetrated far more deeply into various cultures than it does into ours today. Did you know, for instance, that our current literacy levels are appalling when compared to 17th century New England (which were about 100%). And why was that? The Congregational churches of New England were convinced that everyone needed to read and write so that they could study the Scriptures for themselves. Thus their society was highly literate, biblically knowledgeable, and God-fearing. Did you know that at different times our culture has experienced more honest politicians, more

faithful churches and higher levels of morality? Wouldn't it be useful to know about them? I find that Christians who know the past are more likely to pray, and to work, for greater faithfulness – in their own lives and in the world in which they live and move. They are not complacent.

The value for the Christian

Clearly, I'm convinced that a lack of historical understanding is bad for any society! But is there a reason that Christians, in particular, should be familiar with the past? Yes, I believe there is. Several reasons, in fact. First of all, the Bible is a historical book. It contains a great deal of history; and it teaches a particular view of history. It is incumbent upon us to know what it teaches about history. The Bible teaches that God is the Creator, in control of all history – He began and will end it, and He has all its developments in his hands. He has determined the times and places that we shall live in (forget dreaming about being Jane Austen!). He sent His Son into this world to live, die and rise again in history.



Christ is the focal point of all history; and Christianity is the supremely historical religion. We need to think of our faith historically, and take heart from the fact that God is working all things out, *in time*, for His good purposes.

The Scriptures also teach us that faithfulness to God will have good consequences, over time. Our lives, and our whole society's (should many live righteously), will bear good fruit for him if we remain faithful. Conversely, sin has both individual and social consequences – negative ones. For instance, think of a society such as 18th century England, and what happened there as a result of the Methodist revival. The poorest people, those living the messiest lives, were converted and suddenly they started being honest, hard-working and thrifty. England changed as a consequence. Many of these people, their lives transformed, became middle-class, so much so that by the beginning of the 19th century, the Methodists were chiding themselves for losing touch with their roots among the poor. Yes, the Bible does encourage us to think in terms what we can learn from history: it is full of such lessons in the history it tells. Our usefulness as Christians will be enhanced



if we heed these warnings and continue to apply them.

The command in Scripture

One further lesson – and an important one – is that Scripture always commends the teaching of the past to the next generation. Why? That they may know the glorious deeds of the Lord. This is the message of Psalm 78; and while it applies particularly

to the record of God's great actions in Scripture (especially the Exodus), the lesson may also be applied to the lives of the great heroes of the faith. This is the intent of Hebrews 11. Those who have gone before us in faith encourage us, and we do well to study their lives. Likewise, and even though we do not have an inspired interpretation of their faithful deeds, we may study the Christians of post-biblical history with profit. Think of great men of faith like the Christian politician, William Wilberforce, or his friend the writer, Hannah More. Their faith will inspire our own. Study their history!

The lessons in church history

Another important reason that Christians need to know more of history is to gain a better appreciation for the role of the

Church. God's people should know much more about their history than they do. In fact, I'm sure that part of the reason we have such a weak view of the Church today is that we simply don't know enough about the role the Church has played in history, and the ways in which it has influenced society. A good survey course in the history of Western Europe and Britain would overflow with good examples. What a pity so few adults today have enjoyed the benefits of this! Such a survey would also remind us that what Jesus promised Peter in Matthew 16:18 is true — the gates of hell will never prevail against the Church. It will never be destroyed by the evil one in this world. History has borne this out. In fact, history has also proved that Acts 1:8 is true: the Church has gone on and on, taking the gospel further and further until the ends of the earth (you could put New Zealand somewhere near this point!) have been reached.

Are you a student? Are you a parent? Do you want to be a well-informed and useful servant of God in today's world? Let me plead with you to study the past. Is history worth the effort? Yes, in every way!

(Endnotes)

1 Information supplied by the New Zealand History Teachers' Association

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Holiday Club 2007 — It's all over for another year. We are thankful to God for keeping us safe and, mostly, dry over the 3 days of Holiday Club. What a fantastic time we had. A BIG THANK YOU to the approx. 36 people from the congregation who were involved with the Holiday Club programme this past week. There was a great group of children present and we were thankful for the opportunity to bring

the gospel to them and to show them, and their parents, Christ's love during the three days. The comments we received are all of - thanks and appreciation for all that has been done for their children. This morning, in the church, you see the remains of a great effort by a great team of people who all contributed in different ways: working in the kitchen, being a Group Leader, being an Activity Centre Leader, BBQ'ing and looking after 26 3 and 4 year olds for three days. A BIG thank you to those young Mums who attended and helped to look after different areas as well as looking after their pre-schoolers. We hope that those of you who were not there will have a real thirst to get involved next year and to share this wonderful opportunity with us. - Many thanks, Wilna and Helen

Visit by David Waldron — 30 July and Shared Lunch. Session has extended an

invitation to David Waldron to spend the weekend of 29-30 July in Avondale. David is currently serving a vicariate under Rev. Bruce Hoyt in Hastings. David is scheduled to arrive at Auckland Airport on Saturday morning, 29 July, and will Lord willing, lead both worship services on Sunday. We would like to ask everyone to bring a plate for a shared lunch, immediately after the morning service.

Bishopdale

Lord willing, Tim Nugteren will profess his faith in the morning service on 22 July 2007.

Evangelism course: Starting this Friday at 7:30 pm here at Bishopdale and continuing on Saturday morning, Prof. Bill Berends will conduct three sessions on the topic of Evangelism. If you are thinking of attending please acquire a questionnaire

from Marguerite Braam. If you borrowed one of the booklets last Sunday please return this to her also so it can be further circulated. Those from Bishopdale coming to the Friday session are asked to provide a plate for supper.

Bucklands Beach

Ethnic dinner. Please keep 18th August free as we will be having an Ethnic Dinner & Variety Evening. So dust off those ethnic cookbooks and old skits and get ready for an evening of fellowship and fun. Start thinking about activities for the variety entertainment items. For any ideas and suggestions, please talk to anyone on the social committee.

Dovedale

Do you qualify to be a slave?? Are you aged 10 and upwards?? Willing to give up 1-3 hours of your time over the next few months to help someone in the church out?? Able to garden, babysit, cook, clean, iron, wash cars, mow lawns etc. Then volunteer to be a slave at the upcoming Talent Evening. All funds raised at this evening will go to a Community Health project in the slums of South Delhi, India. It only takes a few hours of your time to help people in need.

Dunedin

Visit by Dr Bill Berends. Dr Bill Berends, lecturer in systematic theology at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, will give a lecture and PowerPoint presentation on 'The Millennium: A study on things to come — Are we on our way to heaven?' This will be on Tuesday 10 July in the church hall. Dr Berends is also visiting the churches in the South Island in order to keep us up to date with what is happening at the RTC. This should be an interesting and edifying evening so please keep the date free. We do hope you can come along.

Session Notes. It was noted that Rev. J. Klazinga has been scheduled to preach in Dunedin on 29 July and in Oamaru on 26 August. Session discussed the possibility of meetings between the congregations and Rev. Klazinga with a view to a calling him to home mission work in Oamaru and Timaru. As the Dunedin visit will immediately follow a Presbytery meeting in Christchurch, where Rev. H. Vaatstra will remain, it was agreed not to hold a meeting at that time in Dunedin. Instead Rev. Vaatstra and at least one other elder will attend the Oamaru meeting on 25 August. An invitation would

be extended for interested members from Dunedin to attend also, and a full report of that meeting would be given later in Dunedin if necessary.

Hamilton

Pastoral: Next week Debbie Singleton will join this church by publicly professing her faith (DV). Please remember Debbie in your prayers as she prepares for this.

Tomorrow (July 23rd) the ministers and wives (including retired ministers, vicars and interns!) from the Auckland presbytery will be meeting at the Willemses' place. These gatherings are held three or so times a year and provide a time of informal fellowship and encouragement.

Hastings

Heart sisters. When I walk around looking for a Heart Sister to pass on a little surprise, I see lots of expecting faces turning to me. Husbands and children are just as excited about these surprises. One Sunday, Anneke was approached by a young boy who asked her. 'Are you my Mum's Stepsister?' Isn't this cute! Just over two months to go till the unveiling, still lots of time left for some more little surprises etc. If you are running out of ideas or have any problems (like not getting anything) please see me. Keep up the good work, Hermina.

From the Pastor. We rejoice with Rick and Alisha Meeuwsen this morning as they bring Julia for baptism. Truly baptism is a precious sign from God. Although we are sinful by nature and therefore we pass on this sinful nature to all our children, yet we are reminded in baptism that God washes away all our sins through the blood of Christ in whom we trust. It is this precious truth we must teach to our children when they sin. Although their sin means they are guilty before God, yet through faith in Christ all their guilt is removed. Praise God, His grace is greater than our sin.

Hukanui

After more tests it was determined that Aiden Roux's liver surgery did not have the desired effect. With that in mind, a liver transplant becomes more urgent. At the same time, both Paul and Sharon have testified to the comfort and strength which God has provided and continue to seek your prayers for Aiden.

Mangere

Pastoral. Last Sunday afternoon it was good to see a large group from the Free

Reformed Churches in Western Australia. One was an old friend, and there was a minister from their denomination present also. We thank the Lord for fellowship we can have across the world.

Masterton

Wedding Banns. Clarence William Stolte and Elise Marie Snoek have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the wedding will take place, the Lord willing, on Saturday the 21st of January at St Luke's Church, Masterton. May the Lord grant this couple grace to fulfil the vows they will make before God and men, and enable Clarence and Elise in their relationship to reflect the relationship and communion between Christ and His church.

Nelson

From the Pastor. Yesterday many of us met with Mia Mesman's family to farewell her from this life and to give thanks to God for her life of quiet faith and perseverance. We could rejoice that Mia knew where her hope lay, in her Saviour God, Jesus Christ. In so many ways, this is no small comfort. Scripture in places compares our natural lives to a mist that appears for a time and is then gone (Jas 4:14); and a shadow without much hope (1 Chron. 29:15). Life here is short, and our preparation for eternity must be the real business of our lives. Many have wondered why God does not simply take home His children as soon as they come to repentance and faith. This world is not the Christian's home, after all. The reason any of us stays here on this foreign soil is to reflect the glory of God to a dying world and to testify to His grace to those who languish in ignorance.

Church notices. Retirement: Ralph Adams intends, Lord willing, after many years of faithful and loving service to retire at the

HOUSE SITTER WANTED

HOUSE SITTER (must love dogs and cats) wanted in the beautiful Geelong area of Victoria.

We are seeking someone to house sit during the academic year 2008 (mid February to mid November). This may suit someone from interstate who would like to attend the RTC for one year. There is no rent to pay, only your own living costs. But the job comes with some responsibilities. Interested? For more details phone 0418 520 205 or email us on trendy@bigpond.net.au

end of March 2008. A committee has been formed to look for a replacement Minister. Br Tjibbe De Boer is chair of this committee. Any suggestions or preferences can be directed to Tjibbe for further consideration by the committee.

Welcome into membership for Dede and Alta Huyser and Willem. Session wishes to advise the congregation that after meeting with Br Dede and Sr Alta Huyser we have agreed to accept them into communicant membership of our congregation. Therefore we warmly welcome them into our fellowship, along with their baby boy, Willem.

From the Pastor. We rejoice with the Aarsen family at the birth of little Reuben on Wednesday evening late. Both Louise and baby are well, and the parents pleased, even though they seem to have mislaid the girl recipe. Jokes aside, with one of the current gastric viruses having taken up residence in their household, our prayer is that mum and baby may be spared from this.

North Shore

Rangitoto Island. A mid winter adventure — climb to the top of Rangitoto — this Saturday 7th July. Ferry leaves Devonport Wharf at 9.25 am or if you prefer Auckland City Wharf at 9.15 am. Return leaves Rangitoto at 4.00 pm. Bring your lunch, wear your walking shoes and have a fun day out. If the weather is unsuitable, we'll postpone the

trip until Monday 9th. Any queries, please see Don Petchell.

News & Announcements. The Lord has blessed Jack & Renate with a baby boy, Gareth Jan, born last Thursday, and weighing in at around 8½ lbs. All is well, for which we may thank the Lord. Jack & Renate, congratulations, and may the Lord give you much joy in Gareth and may he know the Lord's saving mercy from an early age.

Pukekohe

From the Pastor: We rejoice with Warrick and Lydia with the healthy birth of their daughter Bianca last Tuesday. Lydia and Bianca are both doing well and we thank the Lord for this wonderful gift of new life.

Silverstream

Pastoral Notes: We give thanks for a very encouraging response to the Holiday Bible Club. On the busiest day, 45 children attended, of whom 21 were from our congregation. A number of parents attended the break-up and BBQ, and most expressed great appreciation for the Bible Club, pleading with us to do it again next year. These families received our new brochure providing information about the Reformed Church of Silverstream. The same material is to be used on our church website, which is still a work in progress. Please pray that the Lord may use our endeavours to reach those who do not know the Gospel, and strengthen others who are already His.

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Meet the Hacquebords*

Not far from the Ukrainian Carpathian Mountains and close to the Polish border lies the largest city in western Ukraine — L'viv. Also known as L'vov in Russian, L'wow in Polish, and Lemberg during the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 750-year-old L'viv has been claimed by many different nations and empires. Today it is very much a Ukrainian city, functioning as a picturesque and vibrant cultural and intellectual centre for all of Ukraine. It is here that the patriotic heart

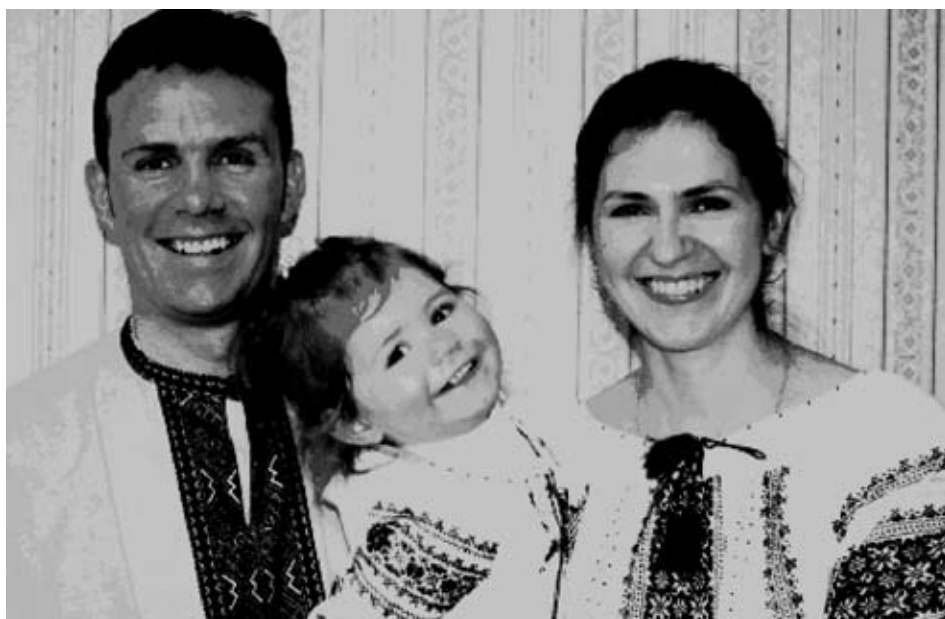
of the new Ukraine beats most fervently. As it did during the Orange Revolution of 2004–2005, the western portion of Ukraine — with L'viv at its head — will continue to set the tone for patriotism and national identity in a Ukrainian nation that is still searching for its own identity — and its soul.

Heero

Heero became interested in serving in L'viv for the first time in 2001 while visit-

Letter to the Editor

I would like to thank the editor for including the excellent article on pornography by Ian Wildeboer in July's issue of *Faith in Focus*. The dark world of pornography is all too often avoided by Christian publications because it is such a difficult topic to talk about. Due to the shameful nature of this sin, many people try to struggle with it alone. However, being accountable to someone who knows about your struggle is an important weapon for the battle. Setting Captives Free (<http://www.settingcaptivesfree.com>) is a Christian ministry that offers online courses to help break addiction to pornography. With much prayer and support the war with pornography can be won.
Many thanks, Lynton Baird



Heero and Anya Hacquebord, with daughter Juliette.

ing that city. Born on the southern tip of Africa, Heero was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church. Although his parents were also raised in that church, they did not experience God's saving grace until Heero was three years old. At age six, Heero consciously trusted Jesus Christ to be the Savior and Lord of his life for the first time, and felt a call to serve as a minister of Jesus' church.

In 1986, Heero and his family left their home and relatives in South Africa and migrated to the United States. Settling in Madison, Wisconsin, Heero finished high school there before attending Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he graduated with a B.A. in European history. Little did Heero know that his Father was preparing him for a much more personal encounter with European history.

After college, Heero studied at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, where he received an M.Div. While taking his first and last missions class in seminary (during his last quarter of studies), Heero was struck by three important truths while reading the assigned texts: Missions is all about God seeking His own glory (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, by John Piper). It often represents a more pressing need than pastoring in the U.S. (*In the Gap*, by David Bryant). It involves fairly ordinary and — yes — sinful men and women, who are used in extraordinary ways by God (*From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, by Ruth Tucker).

Reflecting upon these truths with his professor, he was advised to go overseas on a short-term missions trip to test what seemed to be God's call on his life. While still struggling with his own theological persuasion and understanding of Scripture, Heero finally decided to sign up for a two-month internship in Odessa, Ukraine, with Mission to the World (MTW), the mission board of the Presbyterian Church in America. At the same time, regional home missionary Jim Bosgraf, by then a friend of Heero's family, connected Heero with Bethel Presbyterian Church in Wheaton, Illinois, where Heero was invited to be an intern for four months in order to fulfil his seminary's requirements for graduation. This internship with the Rev. Lendall Smith at Bethel OPC proved to be so valuable and enjoyable, that Heero gladly accepted the opportunity to work as an intern for another twelve months upon returning from Odessa, Ukraine.

Although he experienced an enormous amount of culture shock when he arrived



Downtown L'viv

in Ukraine, God used the two-month experience there to call Heero to serve in that part of the world.

After returning to the U.S. in August 1996, he was approved by MTW to return to Ukraine as a short-term missionary. And so, while interning once again at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, Heero was also raising support, studying Russian, and generally preparing for moving to the 'bread-basket' of the former Soviet Union. On April 20, 1997, the Presbytery of the Midwest (OPC) ordained him to serve as an evangelist with MTW in Ukraine.

In the fall of 1997, at the young age of 26, Heero moved to the southern Ukrainian shipbuilding city of Nikolaev (named after St. Nicholas). There he followed up on the work of two mission teams that had started Bible studies and even a worship service through their ministry in public schools. Heero served for four years as the pastor of this young congregation, working with a team of married and single MTW missionaries.

Although they experienced many trials and eye-opening tragedies as first-time church planters in a foreign culture, the Lord blessed and established the work of this young team. The Nikolaev congregation was particularised on July 30, 2006, with the ordination and installation of its own elder and the election of a Ukrainian pastor!

Anya

Born on the frozen tundra of northern Russia, Anya's young life above the Arctic

Circle was steeped in the atheistic teachings of Soviet Communism. While both her parents are from Ukraine, Anya's father was stationed in Russia as a colonel in the Soviet Navy, while her mother worked as a music teacher. Anya's family moved to Nikolaev, Ukraine, in 1986, where Anya finished school (with an emphasis on English) and set off to the capital city of Kyiv (Kiev) for further study. After receiving her masters' degree in international economics and working for several companies in Kyiv, Anya's expertise developed into public relations, representing the U.S. company of Procter and Gamble in Ukraine. Little did Anya know that her Father was preparing her for a much more personal encounter with the United States.

Heero and Anya first met in Nikolaev due to the sly and persistent efforts of an elderly lady who was a good friend of Anya's mother and also of Heero's Russian teacher. Since Anya was not a believer at that time, though, Heero and Anya decided not to pursue a closer friendship.

During the next year, Heero prayed for Anya's salvation almost every day, and increasingly so after the same lady gently manipulated him into seeing Anya again. When they did meet again fourteen months later and began to communicate regularly, Heero was able to explain the gospel to Anya. Though her understanding of the good news was initially mostly intellectual, it became quite personal when she realised, through the Ten Commandments and Matthew 5, that she had indeed fallen far short of God's standard of perfection.

Coming face-to-face with the dark reality of her own moral failure, all Anya could do was to cry out to God for help.

Heero and Anya were married a year later in Kyiv, where they helped to plant a second Presbyterian church. Heero did not serve as the pastor of this new church, but coached and trained a young Ukrainian man in planting and pastoring this congregation. In spite of the fact that much work was done by many different people in trying to establish this new church, it finally held its last worship service in November 2006. Although that church has closed its doors, it did so with the assurance that God's Word does not return to Him empty, but accomplishes the purposes for which He sent it — even though those purposes are not necessarily the same as ours.

After spending eighteen months raising

financial and prayer support for their ministry in Ukraine, the Hacquebords (Heero, Anya, and their two-year-old daughter, Juliette) have now returned to Ukraine as long-term missionaries of both the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Mission to the World. Although there are currently about ten congregations in the newly established Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ukraine, there are no congregations at all in western Ukraine. The Hacquebords sense God's call to move to L'viv and help spearhead a Reformed church-planting movement in that city and the surrounding region.

Western Ukraine has had a significant Catholic influence, and there is no record of a Reformed church ever existing in L'viv. A number of evangelical congregations are active in L'viv, but only a very small percentage of this city's population of almost one

million actually seems to grasp the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ and have a personal relationship with the only Saviour of mankind. The Hacquebords hope and pray that through their service, and that of their team members, many people in L'viv will come to see that religion is not the same thing as saving faith, that being good is never good enough, and that making the sign of the cross on your chest is not the same as having the blood of the cross wash your sinful heart.

Please pray that our gracious God will open the hearts of the citizens of L'viv and western Ukraine, and that He will make the Hacquebords strong and faithful in proclaiming His gospel in every word and deed—to the glory of His eternal name!

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Meeting our big sister

The 2007 OPC General Assembly

Dirk van Garderen

From the perspective of our denomination in New Zealand, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church [OPC] in North America is a **big** sister! There were approximately 140 delegates representing 19 presbyteries who attended the 74th General Assembly (GA). The meeting took place at Dordt College (Iowa) from June 13–20. I found being there both a huge responsibility and a rare privilege.¹

Big Sister

'Big' is a relative term. Check out the statistics compared with our own in New Zealand and she seems huge. The OPC's statistician, in his report to the GA, pointed out that they consist of 255 local churches, 57 unorganised mission works and a total membership of 28,445. Total offerings for the year were \$45.9 million (an increase of 12.6% over 2005). There are 462 ministers (surprisingly), 1,028 ruling elders and 758 deacons.

However, in North America, the OPC is small when compared with her closest sisters in that country. There are 12 denominations in North America with which the OPC has official 'fellowship'.² The *Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* [ARPC] (in which the Rev. Frank van Dalen serves as the Executive Director of World Missions) has a total of 45,573 members (2005). The *Presbyterian Church in America* [PCA], in many respects the OPC's closest sister in America, has 331,126 members with \$595,293,060 income (with only 49% of churches submitting reports). The *Reformed Church in the United States*, at its 260th Synod (!) reported that it consists of a 'mere' 16,000 members! The *Korean-American Presbyterian Church* has 45,350 communicant and 9,930 non-communicant members, 950 ministers serving in 23 presbyteries. They grow at an average rate of 5% p.a.³ Keep in mind that this is only the tip of the proverbial (theologically reformed) iceberg.⁴

I list these statistics to give you some idea of how it feels when representing a denomination like ours, which, apart from the newly established *Grace Presbyterian Church*, is the *sole* confessional reformed denomination in our country! What luxury

to be able to have large numbers, and the ability to exercise choice in deciding where, within the reformed family of churches, you feel most at home. If you have an issue of minor difference, there is almost always another Reformed denomination that will fit your preferences. I was struck by the minor differences that keep churches from uniting with one another. By way of example, I quote from the *Report of the Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations* [CEIR] in their discussion with the newly formed *United Reformed Churches in North America* [URCNA]⁵. The report contains *Statements of Agreement* between the two denominations in anticipating of entering into a correspondence relationship with them in July 2007. I found the following statement in the report:

While the statements of agreement focus on the agreement between us, we recognised that there are details of our church order and practice where there are significant differences between us, such as:

1. The URC does not generally lay hands on ruling elders at their ordination, while the OPC does.
2. The URC generally uses the word 'church' to refer only to the local church and the holy, catholic Church, while the OPC also speaks of the 'regional church' under the oversight of the presbytery and the 'whole church' under the General Assembly as further manifestations of the church.
3. The URC requires ministers to preach catechetical sermons, while the OPC does not. Some OPC ministers would be uncomfortable with such a requirement since they are committed to preaching through the books of the Bible. While the method of catechetical preaching produced considerable discussion there was general agreement that the whole counsel of God must be preached.
4. The URC encourages special attention to Christmas and Easter in its church order, while OPC does not have such a provision.
5. The URC requires the use of particular forms for sacraments, ordination, marriage, etc., while the OPC allows for greater liturgical freedom.
6. The URC Church Order prescribes two

worship services per Lord's Day, while this is not the practice in some OPC congregations.⁶

Two thoughts came to mind as I read this. First, what a *luxury* to be able to call these differences 'significant' and remain separated! Second, what a huge *responsibility* before God and the watching world rests on the shoulders of the family of reformed/Presbyterian churches in North America. How can these denominations possibly sidestep Christ's high priestly prayer for unity (*John 17.20,21*)?⁷ It is astounding to me that these denominations that remain separate merely for cultural, historical and, to my mind at least, non-substantial differences, and can afford to do so based on reasons that are difficult to justify biblically and confessionally.

The 74th General Assembly

What was the General Assembly like? Without going into details, allow me to share a few impressions.

Procedures and protocol

There was the parliamentary protocol on the floor of the assembly. Because of the sheer size (and I suspect tradition) of the GA, *Roberts Rules* (a book of biblical



Addressing the GA on behalf of RCNZ



Dordt College where the General Assembly was held.

dimensions!) is carried by most 'commissioners' (delegates). Procedures and protocol were extremely strict and rather overwhelming to someone like me used to small presbytery and synod meetings where almost everyone intimately knows everyone else. The GA regularly had to consult its resident expert and *Robert's Rules* when it came to determining how and in what manner an issue should be dealt with. I found this both helpful and frustrating at the same time. Helpful because it structured discussions, especially on those occasions when many wanted to speak (some more than once!). Complex procedural motions limited and defined the manner and the time allowed for presenting an issue. Such procedures, once agreed, were adhered to with great strictness. It was also frustrating. Much time was spent on determining protocol and procedures, especially at the beginning of the GA. Points of order were taken regularly. These often wasted time and interfered with the flow of debate.

What I appreciated was that the first day

and a half of the Assembly was spent in temporary Advisory Committees whose task it was to address the reports, overtures and appeals and formulate procedural motions for dealing with the issues and propose amendments (with grounds) when this was considered desirable.

Foreign missions

The highlight of the GA for many of us was the report of the *Committee of Foreign Missions*. The report, or rather presentation, was dramatic in every sense of the word. Pictures and video clips illustrated what is happening in each of the fields. Various missionaries who were present at the assembly used this time as an opportunity to describe what is happening and the challenges and needs facing them. Mr Wingard, a long term missionary, reported on recent events in Eritrea. A very moving account of recent persecution was given. An entire congregation (including OPC missionaries) was recently arrested and imprisoned on a Sunday morning while at worship. There

were also reports on the work in Ethiopia (Mr Curto) and Uganda (Mr Proctor and deacon Mr Robert Wright) where Barry and Anne James are currently serving another term and where John and Sheryl Rogers hope to go later on this year.

The most moving part of the report that brought tears to my eyes concerned the death of a young missionary worker, the Rev. Matthew D. Baugh in Haiti. Mr Bell, a very gifted linguist working in one of the world's most troubled and violent countries, was killed as a result of a motorcycle accident on May 4, 2006. He left behind a wife and five children. It is sometimes difficult to understand God's ways. I was also deeply touched that the OPC had asked for gifts to support Mr Bell's widow and children. In excess of \$1 million dollars was raised for this purpose.

The Directory for Public Worship

The anticipated highlight of this GA was to be the finalisation of the proposed revised version of the OPC's *Directory for*

the Public Worship of God. The revised directory has been in the making since — wait for it! — 1948, but very intensely since 1989! The hours spent on it are just about impossible to calculate. The *proposed revised version* needed to be ratified by the General Assembly before being given into the hands of presbyteries for what amounts to provisional use. More than a day was spent on this. Those who were there became noticeably exhausted during those long, weary hours.

The result? Well, apart from a few proposed amendments (which were endlessly amended and debated and, usually, rejected!) little progress was made. It is back on the agenda for 2008 (and who knows, for a few years to come!). Why did this happen? One reason is the very nature of an assembly of this size. There is a real danger of doing the work of the committee all over again during its plenary sessions. Another reason is more fundamental. The attention to *detail* found in the *Directory*, detail which, on paper at least, determines *everything* that shall, will, should, ought to or is advisable, appropriate, well, fitting, permissible in a worship service is *enormous*. The basic issue, it seems to me, is between those who do *not* want these kinds of directions and prefer more general principles, and those who, for the sake of denominational *uniformity* (as opposed to unity) do. You can imagine the kind of discussions I heard and was a part of at meal times.

Christian discipline

What struck me was the seriousness with which this denomination takes the third mark of the true church — discipline. An entire day was spent on three cases. The major one that took something like 7 hours concerned a young man who, in spite of worshipping twice on the Lord's Day and attending mid-week activities, was nevertheless *excommunicated* for his steadfast refusal to participate in the Lord's Supper as the OPC celebrates it. In fact he has not, in good conscience, been able to find *any* church on earth where he could partake. He appealed the sentence passed on him by the Presbytery. Is a refusal to participate in this means of grace and thus to undermine the unity of Christ's body indeed censurable to this extent? Would the OPC do the same to someone who refused the *other* sacrament (covenant baptism) for themselves or their children? It does *not*!

What was striking, to me at least, was

that these disciplinary sessions were never 'closed'. Anyone was welcome to witness what was being said — including the persons appealing or complaining. I found this both challenging and refreshing in its openness and frankness as compared to what I have experienced in our denomination.

Illegal aliens in the USA

The final part of the proceedings that produced a fine report and debate had to do with an issue that truly vexes the U.S.A. today — the question of what to do about the millions of illegal aliens in that country and, specifically whether they can be accepted as church members and officers. While this matter was not resolved, the effort made by the OPC in dealing with this issue biblically is commendable indeed.

Off the floor

The best way to get to know what lives in and really is a denomination is not so much on the floor of its meetings as during the meal times and social gatherings afterwards. It was at the level of one-to-one conversation with a wide variety of pastors and ruling elders that I was able to get a feel of what the OPC is all about. I found varieties of emphasis and style in worship and practice. Many of the congregations are small, isolated and struggling. The challenges of the world bite deeply into the mindset of individuals and churches. Some of the stories I heard were familiar to me as well.

By way of example, one very interesting topic had to do with the celebration of Communion (Lord's Supper). When asking about frequency I was told that all churches celebrate it at least monthly with many of them doing weekly — even in cases where (as is very common) there is only one service on the Lord's Day. Access to the table is restricted to communicant members. However, when asking at what age full communicant membership was given to children, one pastor cited that he was prepared to consider this as early as

6 years of age and certainly by 8 onwards — depending on maturity. My impression is that the norm is around the age of 10 or 11. Food for thought and further reflection!

What was also special for me was making new friendships with a number of OPC men as well as various representatives from other denominations abroad. It was good to meet up with the Rev. Peter Naylor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales (where the Rev. Chris Kavanagh currently serves), to make friends with the Rev. Douw Breed, past moderator of the Reformed Church of South Africa (GKZA) and Rev. Rowland Ward of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The fellowship we shared was real and inspiring. For me, attending the GA was a wonderful and challenging experience. I am thankful for the opportunity that was given to me.

Notes

¹ 'Rare' is an understatement. Checking through the records, I found that our denomination's first contact with OPC was a letter date 1 Feb 1954 when Mr Bill van Rij wrote asking that we 'open our doors to each other's ministers...'. The OPC responded by enabling men like Williamson, Zorn, Tyson, Nilson and more recently Sawyer to come over. Some of these men had a profound influence on the confessional shaping and development of our churches in the 1960s. This led GI Williamson, in a meeting I attended in 1995 in Mangere, to address us as the OPC's 'closest sister', a description still accorded to us today.

We in NZ have only had fraternal delegates at the OPC's General Assembly on two previous occasions. In 1978, Prof R.O. Zorn, then principal at Geelong, was asked to represent our churches and the Reformed Churches of Australia. This was possible because he happened to be in North America at that time. In 1994 the Rev Jack Sawyer, who had returned from NZ weeks before, represented us as well. I was the first person to be sent specifically as a representative of our churches!

² There are 3 tiers or layers of fellowship.

a. *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*: where churches are Reformed in their confessional standards, church order and life. (There are five North American denominations as well as 13 overseas ones in that category.)

b. *Corresponding Relations*: where contact is be-

ing taken to get better acquainted with a view to entering into category A. There are 6 American denominations in that category.

c. *Ecumenical Contact*: where mutual contact is maintained via the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

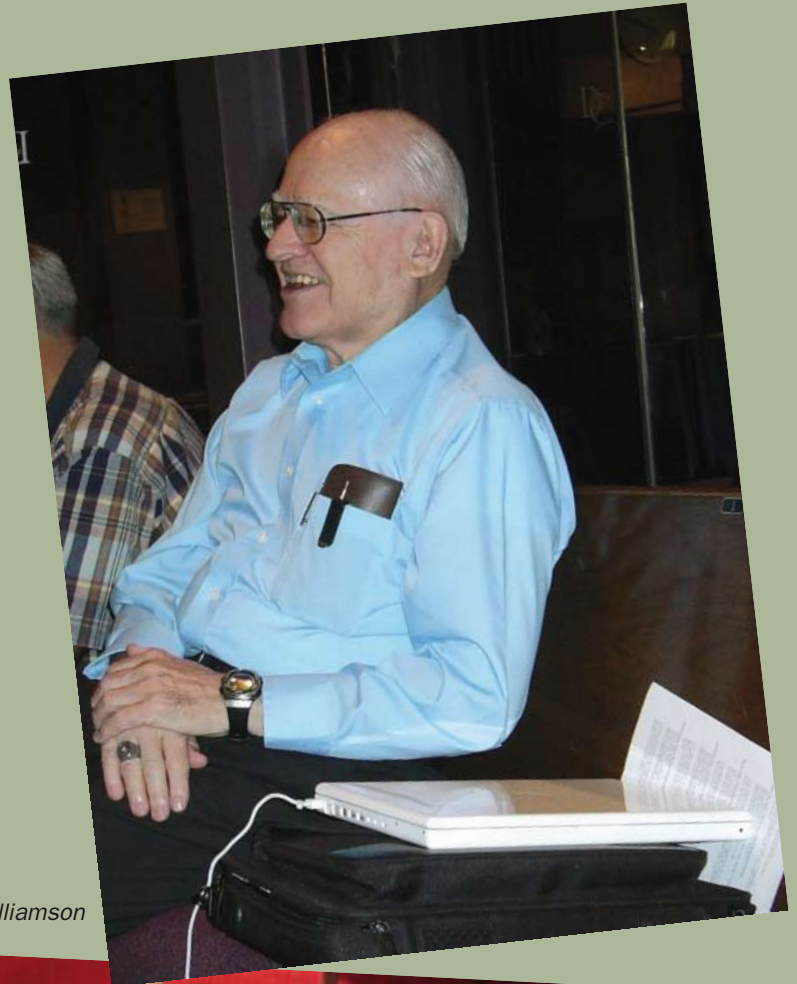
³ Interestingly there is a 'New Zealand Presbytery' of KAPC as well. There are about 5 congregations (Auckland and Hamilton). Some preliminary discussion has taken place with them as a result of their request to *merge* with our denomination.

⁴ By way of example, my daughter Delinda worships at a church in Columbia (Missouri) called *The Crossroads*. This church, a part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in North America, has well over 2,000 people attending. There were 400 in the new members class during 2006. A third (morning) service will commence in September this year to cater for an expected 3,000 worshippers! This in a city no larger than Hamilton! I found this church to be overtly reformed, embracing, teaching and loving Reformed doctrine with joy and enthusiasm.

⁵ This recently formed denomination (a breakaway from the Christian Reformed Church in North America), is also in the process of becoming a sister of ours. Two of our men (Klazinga and Kloosterman) have come from that denomination. It is also closely associated with the Mid America Reformed Seminary [MARS] where vicar Andre Holtslag trained.

⁶ *Agenda for 74th GA page 1112.*

⁷ The point is taken! What about *our* responsibility with respect to *Grace Presbyterian Church* where, when all is said and done, what keeps us apart is just as 'significant'?



Rev G I Williamson



The General Assembly in session