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# PERSECUTION and the Christian

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

### The Editor:

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

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

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## Editorial

Persecution is an unpleasant and somewhat unwelcome word. It's not something that we think about until we are confronted with the words of Jesus in John 15:18,20, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you"... "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also".

I venture to say that most Christian believers in New Zealand would say we are not really persecuted in the true sense of the word, at least not compared to other Christians in other places and other times. However, for too many, it is an appalling reality – one that may involve imprisonment or even death.

Persecution of the LORD's people is as old as the hills. In the very opening chapters of Genesis, we read about Cain murdering Abel and the accounts of such hatred for God's people continue right throughout the revelation of Scripture.

If you casually browse the Internet, you would soon see many websites dedicated to the persecution of Christians. They exist to inform the world of what is happening, they provide advocacy and a range of other initiatives – all to aid those who are persecuted for their faith. In many countries if you are a Christian, then you are an enemy of the state and life is not going to be easy for you.

Most of the hot-spots of persecution are in the regions of Asia, the Middle East and Africa. What about New Zealand: is there persecution here? How should we view persecution, if and when it comes our way?

Our contributors provide some valuable insights into this subject, looking at the biblical teaching, at church history and today's context.

Mr Andrew de Vries explores the biblical teaching on persecution.

Mr Josh Rogers considers third-century Rome during times of persecution.

Mr Michael Willemse asks a serious question relating to our times.

Middle East Reformed Fellowship informs about the troubles in Egypt from a Christian perspective and Morning Star News give us some shocking, but, un-surprising news from Malaysia.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt continues with her series on Colossians, writing about godly maturity.

Mrs Harriet Haverland and her busy helpers keep us informed with notable news from the churches.

Mr Murray Capill writes about the need for harvesters.

Mr Jopie van der Linden (minister in the GKSALib) gives insight into the unique ministry of the Preaching Library.

Mr Ken Montgomery meditates on the scandal of the virgin conception, which is our Christmas meditation.

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 Dort, 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.

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# “Behold, a virgin shall conceive ...”

## Ken B. Montgomery

Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph less than nine months after they had been married. That was probably the basis for the Pharisees’ accusation against our Lord: “We were not born of sexual immorality” (John 8:41) – insinuating that Jesus was the result of an illicit union. The real scandal, however, is that Jesus of Nazareth was not conceived by a sexual union at all, because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (cf. Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). God ordained that his Son would be produced in the womb of his mother, apart from the normal means of human procreation. Thus, by the Spirit, God worked the quietest miracle of all.

The clear teachings of Scripture are usually among the first doctrines to be ridiculed by skeptics. This should not be surprising, for everything about “Christ crucified” – including the manner of his incarnation – is a stumbling block (Greek: *scandalon*) to the mind of the flesh (1 Cor. 1:22-25). God’s wisdom, revealed in Christ, capsizes human power and expectation. The miracle of Jesus’ conception in the Virgin Mary’s womb tells us from the very beginning that “salvation belongs to the LORD” (Jonah 2:9), so that “(our) faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:5). If any part of our Savior’s arrival could be traced to the will and work of mankind, then the gospel would cease to be about the *gift* of salvation and would instead become a message about human achievement, with the angelic chorus singing something like “Let us find the good in all of us” rather than “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14).

The Messiah came to his people in an undeniably miraculous way. Our wonder can only be magnified when we consider that this “sign” was announced long beforehand by the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). As a trailblazer clears away trees

and brush to make a path, the Lord through the prophetic word creates the way for the coming Messiah, revealing both *who* he will be (God with us) and *how* he will come to his people. It is worth considering the biblical context of this divine promise, as the setting illumines the redemptive significance of this prophecy and its fulfillment.

The Isaiah 7 passage focuses on Ahaz, the faithless king of Judah. During his reign, the kings of Syria and Ephraim had marshaled their armies to overtake Jerusalem. King Ahaz and all of Judah were terrified as they faced this double threat – their hearts “shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.”

The Lord then summoned Isaiah to bring word to Ahaz that the enemy alliance would soon be broken and their plans to seize the holy city would be thwarted. Isaiah faced Ahaz and declared, “It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.... Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken to pieces so that it will no longer be a people.” In short, Ahaz was told, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

To reassure Ahaz about the certainty of divine protection, the Lord commanded him to ask for a sign: “Let it be as deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But in a moment of feigned piety, Ahaz refused to ask for a sign; in disobedience, he rejected what God had offered. In response, the Lord rebuked Ahaz. But in spite of the king’s unbelief, God pronounced the miraculous sign to come: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive.” How does this background sharpen our understanding of this important prophecy about Christ?

### The ways of God

First, this promise shows that *God’s ways are not our ways*, for the sign certainly does not appear to resolve the nation’s immediate plight. Remember the powerful enemy forces that were knocking at Jerusalem’s gates. Ahaz might have thought to himself, “Perhaps I could raise my hands like Moses and see our adver-

“God works out his powerful purposes through his weak chosen vessels, so that the glory will belong to him and no other.”

saries scattered” (see Ex. 17). The Lord God could no doubt have intervened in this way for Judah as he had in past days, but here he chose to demonstrate his sovereignty in quite an unexpected way. God announced the sign of his presence in a maiden and her newborn son.

But was the gift of an infant boy, born to a young (virgin) woman, any way to win a war? Not for Ahaz, who sought the support of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and his army to rescue Judah (2 Kings 16:7-8). Judah’s king had turned to an earthly shield of defense, rather than turning to the strong tower of God’s heavenly name. Thus, the divine sign of the virgin birth stood against Ahaz’s attempt to “fight fire with fire.” The Lord and his kingdom would triumph in a way diametrically opposed to the way of the flesh: an instrument of inherent and apparent weakness (a virgin and child) would overcome those who had conspired to overthrow God’s reign. As John testifies in Revelation 12, the child and the woman prove from the heavenly perspective to be stronger than the dragon, Satan. This can only be true when God

himself is engaged in the battle.

The hostility between the heirs of God's promise and his enemies goes back to the declaration of war in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity ... between your offspring and her offspring." In Isaiah 7, we see a further disclosure of how the woman's seed would defeat the serpent's – "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The virginal conception of Christ is one of many extraordinary examples of how God works out his powerful purposes through his weak chosen vessels, so that the glory will belong to him and no other. Mary's exultant song reaffirms that God's saving providence topples the world's hubris and hierarchy: "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate" (Luke 1:51-52). The sign provided by God through Isaiah points to the singularity of divine wisdom in working contrary to the pattern of our natural expectations.

### Son of David

Second, we see the importance of the setting when we read that the promise of the sign came to Ahaz as a member of the royal dynasty of David. The prophet's rebuke included Ahaz, but it

also extended beyond him: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?... Behold, the virgin shall conceive ..." (Isa. 7:13-14). The sign of the virgin birth was indeed a seal of security in light of Judah's approaching foes. But it was also an antidote to the corruption of David's royal dynasty. This prophecy addressed the internal and spiritual barrenness of the "root of Jesse" as traced through the descendants of David.

Ahaz, as a "son of David," together with his predecessors and progeny, represented one great apostasy that contributed to the covenant nation's exile (cf. Dan. 9:8). God's judgment extended from the head (crown) to the feet (citizens) of society, beginning with the unfaithful kings who had failed to rule in righteousness. Therefore, during their captivity in Babylon the Davidic throne lay vacant, as "there remains in it no strong stem, no scepter for ruling" (Ezek. 19:14).

During the Exile, the results of royal infidelity and the nation's rebellion were painfully acute, for the covenant people were ruled by a foreign king in a foreign land. This provokes the question, does Israel's faithlessness nullify God's faithfulness? In short, will God's kingdom perish because of the disobedience of the sons of David? Certainly

not, for the Lord's covenant with David is sure: "I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom" (2 Sam. 7:12). God's promise to bring David's son (and Lord!) to his people would not fail, because he would create fruit by the Spirit, even when the flesh could not. The rebellious sons of David had grown spiritually barren, unable to produce a faithful heir. The Lord had to be the one to bring life from the dead, and so he sent his Son into the world: this too belongs to the significance of Isaiah's sign! So while Jesus would be numbered in the generations of David (Matt. 1:1-17), the household of David would not generate the final royal heir: this work belonged to the Lord alone.

Only a little while later, Isaiah expanded on the character of this promised Son when he wrote, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; ... Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this" (Isa. 9:6-7). The sign that confronted Ahaz would at the same time bring comfort to God's waiting people, for the word that lays low the flesh also lifts up those who embrace it in faith. Indeed, Christ's incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary is part of the scandal and the wonder of the gospel: "This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes" (Ps. 118:23).

The author is associate pastor of Redeemer OPC in Beavercreek (Dayton), Ohio. New Horizons, Dec. 2012.

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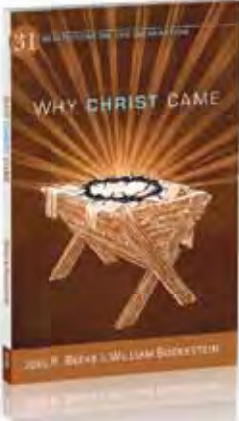
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-this forsaken place-  
our hapless lives to grace!

John Goris  
Nelson, Dec 1994

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# Blessed are the persecuted

### Andrew de Vries

There is something wonderfully refreshing about meeting a person who is candid about what they think. They say things how they are. There is no beating around the bush. If they don't like what you've just served them for lunch, they tell you. If they didn't like your sermon, they won't say 'the message was interesting today'<sup>1</sup>. The Bible is like that when it talks about persecution. It doesn't sugar coat the reality that the Christian life is not a picnic. It simply tells it like it is. It is refreshingly candid about the presence and benefit of persecution.

Firstly, the Scriptures tell us not be surprised when persecution comes. I always find myself recoiling in horror when I hear about another violent attack on Christians overseas. I am saddened, and angered, and often surprised. Whilst we in the west don't face such severe persecutions, we do face our own more subtle version. The outrage whenever we mention anything about biblical sexuality. The feeling of isolation when we are excluded from the next social gathering. The chuckles of neighbours that you choose to be 'just' a stay at home mum when you could be out doing something 'useful' with your life. And we are often surprised that these kinds of things could happen to us. We are being the kind of loving and faithful disciple Christ calls us to be, and it looks like everything is going wrong. We are surprised by persecution.

### You will be persecuted

But the Bible tells us we shouldn't be. Persecution in the Christian life is not a sign of getting things wrong, or some kind of anomaly in what is supposed to be a trouble free existence. Persecution is part and parcel of the Christian life. Jesus tells us "'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.'" (John 15:20). Paul tells us that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Tim 3:12). Peter says

"do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pet 4:12). The consistent message of the Bible is that if you are a Christian, you are going to have 'bad days'. Sometimes they will be 'very bad days'.

We have a saying: 'forewarned, is forearmed.' If I know that there is going to be some difficult questions at the congregational meeting, I can prepare myself. I can think through my responses. I can anticipate objections. That way I'm not flustered and floundering when the questions come. And it's the same with persecution. Jesus is forewarning us so that we can be forearmed. Persecution will come if you are living out your faith before the watching world. Persecution is not a surprise, but the norm in the Christian life. In fact, you should be surprised if you are not being persecuted.

### Our best days – a paradox

Secondly, the Scriptures teach us that our 'bad days', our days of persecution, can be our best days. When we think of what constitutes the life of divine blessing, the 'good life', generally we think in terms of having no worries. We think that sitting on the beach in Rarotonga sipping a cold one and having an ever expanding list of people who love and admire us is the good life. But Jesus turns our views of what the good life is upside down. Because the good life, the life over which he pronounces the divine blessing, is not the life of comfort and ease, but the life of persecution. Jesus says 'blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness<sup>2</sup>.' (Matt 5:10) Jesus is saying, what you perceive is your worst day living under my rule and in my fellowship, is actually your best day.

There is a very important qualifier that Jesus gives in this passage. Notice that the blessed person is the one who is persecuted *because of* righteousness. They are persecuted because they are Christ-like, they are the aroma of Christ in this Christ rejecting world. Jesus is

not saying that I am blessed when I am rude and offensive to a non-believer and they respond by being rude and offensive in return. Jesus is not saying you are blessed when you are persecuted for doing something wrong. As Peter says, 'If you suffer it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler...' (1 Pet 4:15). The employee who spends half

“Being persecuted is a life of divine blessing because as with other trials, persecution nurtures our faith.”

the day at work checking out Christian blogs and is then disciplined by his employer can't claim they are being persecuted because of righteousness. A church member who is argumentative and sows disunity by nit-picking at everything the session does is not being persecuted because of righteousness when the elders come and talk with them about their attitudes and behaviour. Jesus pronounces his blessing only upon the person who is persecuted because of righteousness.

### Mocking, despising Christ

So why is being persecuted the life of divine blessing? Because when we are persecuted it shows that we are in rela-

tionship with Jesus Christ. It is the evidence that he is ours, and we are his. Persecution is personal. When we are persecuted because of righteousness, we are not being persecuted because of who we are, but because we represent Christ in this world. We are his ambassadors and our presence in this world confronts people with the fact that they have to bow before the majesty and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. If they won't do that, they have to find a way to ignore, reject, mock or despise Christ. And that is what persecution is. It is a rejection of Christ himself, not of us. And that is why it is a reason to rejoice. It means that we are being identified with our precious Lord. It means he is at work in us, and that brings us joy. That is why after the apostles were jailed and flogged, they responded in the most startling way. 'The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing, because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.' (Acts 5:41).

#### **Nurtures faith**

Being persecuted is a life of divine blessing because as with other trials, persecution nurtures our faith. Suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope (Rom 5:4-5). This is certainly evidenced in the lives of those who've been imprisoned for their faith. Richard Wurm-

brand<sup>3</sup> the Romanian pastor writes about being kept in solitary confinement for two years. He had nothing to read, and only his thoughts for company. He was not a meditative man and was concerned with what this would do to his faith. Following his release he wrote: *The prison years did not seem too long for me, for I discovered, alone in my cell, that beyond belief and love there is a delight in God: a deep and extraordinary ecstasy of happiness that is like nothing in this world. And when I came out of Jail I was like someone who comes down from a mountaintop where he has seen for miles around the peace and beauty of the countryside, and now returns to the plain.* Persecution can lead us into joys of our relationship with Christ that we don't experience in times of peace.

#### **Reward greater than suffering**

Being persecuted is the life of divine blessing because there is a reward for those who are persecuted. Christians are not going to get rewards for being Christ-like from the world in which we live. You're not going to be thanked, or get little certificates, or a lovely ceremony from the council for your Christian life and witness. The rewards don't come today for the Christian, but in the future. We're not keen on the concept of delayed rewards, because we live in the world of instant gratification. If we

can't learn the piano in one lesson, we want to give it away. And if the Christian life doesn't give us comfort today, we're tempted to throw it in. But Jesus teaches us delayed gratification. Heaven is where we get our final reward. It is not our 'best life now', the best life is still to come. When we arrive at our heavenly home, the reward will certainly far outweigh any suffering we have every experienced in this life.

#### **More courage**

Finally, the Bible teaches us that persecution can serve the advance of the gospel. When we think about persecution we can easily become quite glum. 'No-body loves us, everybody hates us, I think we'll eat some worms' can be our pessimistic chorus of response. But in God's plan to draw men and women to himself, he often uses persecution. Think of Paul floundering in prison where he writes to the church at Philippi. The great church planter, evangelist, apologist, whom the Lord had used to bring so many to faith is now in jail due to persecution. And we think 'what a waste! What a victory for the kingdom of darkness.' But then Paul gives us his interpretation of his persecution – it has 'really served to advance the gospel' (Phil 1:12). Those in the palace guard begin to hear the good news about Jesus Christ. Those free Christians who hear what has happened to Paul are encouraged to preach the gospel more courageously. Persecution can serve God's purpose to advance the gospel.

#### **Advancing the gospel**

As you read the book of Acts, you notice that persecution is the very means God uses to advance the gospel. After the death of Stephen a great persecution breaks out against the church in Jerusalem (8:1). What happens next? Everyone apart from the Apostles scatter throughout Judea and Samaria. And what do they do? They preach the word wherever they go. In chapter 8 of Acts we discover that as a result many come to faith. Would they have come to know Christ without the fierce persecution experienced in Jerusalem?

Cal Thomas writes about speaking to a Chinese pastor in 1997 who was overseeing one of the largest house churches in China at that time. Pastor Lamb had spent half his life in prison for preaching the gospel. Cal had the following conversation with him.

**Cal:** Do the Public Security Bureau still



come around to observe your activities.

**Pastor Lamb:** "Not so much now,"

**Cal:** "Why not?"

**Pastor Lamb:** "Because every time they threw me in prison, the church grew."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps there is a prayer request that we need to add to our regular petitions before the throne of grace. 'Father, may we experience what it means to be persecuted because we love Jesus Christ.' Who would be bold enough to pray

such a prayer? Who knows what good could come if the Lord were to answer it. What spiritual blessing could come into our lives, into our churches, and for the eternal good of those who are not yet in the fold of Christ. Blessed indeed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

#### Notes

1 Please don't accept this as an open invitation for feedback on my preaching.

2 This must have been just as jarring to the ears

of the first disciples as it is to us, because it is the only beatitude on which Jesus elaborates. He goes on to say 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...'

3 Founder of Voice of the Martyrs

4 The blessing of Persecution by Cal Thomas, *Tabletalk Magazine*, June 2013, p74.

*Mr Andrew de Vries is a minister in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.*

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## Persecution and the Christian (2)

# God's preservation in time of persecution – a look at third-century Rome

### Josh Rogers

We look at the world around us today with all its upheaval and persecution of our fellow Christians, particularly in the Middle East, together with its unbelief and scepticism, and often wonder how we would behave were we to be persecuted and whether we would remain faithful. If we look at God's work with his people in history, we can see that he has not only preserved but also edified his church through persecution and controversy. An example of this is found in the third century AD in the Roman empire. Although it is often exaggerated, this was indeed a time of great upheaval politically, of widespread manipulation of the economy by price-fixing and deflation of the currency, and of violent persecution. For some three centuries a large chunk of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East had been ruled by the Romans, whose empire had become a cultural and racial melting pot with a single government, facilitating travel and trade. Religion in the third century was characterised by rejection of the classical Greek and Roman gods and an interest in mystery cults and foreign gods from the ancient Near East, as well as increasing worship of the emperor.<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that this era in history can teach us how to respond

to the doubts we face in our own age. We must remember, though, that before this age Christianity was unknown. As a result, there was no widespread Christian 'hangover' resulting from culture having been largely Christian previously.

#### Sporadic persecution

Since Christianity had become well-known from the murder of James by the Jews in around 50 AD there had been sporadic persecution of Christians throughout the Roman empire. Usually this was by a mob that had got out of hand and the authorities allowing the lynching to run its course, fearing that intervention would only cause a riot. The Jews were well-known for such persecutions, but ill-wishing pagans also betrayed individual Christians to the authorities, who would then question them and execute them, depending on whether they were willing to sacrifice to Caesar.

Strictly speaking, Christianity was always illegal because everyone had to acknowledge that Caesar (the emperor) was god. Persecution was a legal anomaly until the third century, which I will describe further below. Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia in modern-day Turkey, exchanged letters with the Emperor Trajan (ruled 98-117). A number of Christians had been denounced as

atheists, meaning they did not worship the pagan gods; and they were hauled before the governor to be tried. Only those who persisted were punished and only after they refused to sacrifice to the Emperor and stop worshipping Christ. As a result of this correspondence the

“We may wonder how we would behave under persecution; though God has not called most of us to suffer what we may think of as persecution.”

standard was to ignore Christians unless they were proven to persist in refusing to sacrifice to the Emperor or were guilty of crimes like anyone else.

Unlike today, where claiming to be a Christian can have its benefits, as it did for President Bill Clinton or as it did in the South African world of twenty years ago or so ago, there was no such attraction to do so at this point in the ancient world. Such nominalism certainly became a problem under Constantine, the first Christian emperor (ruled 313-337), because he gave priority to Christians for selection for a number of important public positions.

Public service usually involved sacrificing to pagan gods or acknowledging the divinity of the Emperor. Being a member of a guild or a tradesman's association frequently demanded participation in dubious practices and oaths or libations to pagan gods. Teaching involved instructing students in pagan culture, complete with its philosophy, theology, and ethics. Use of leisure time for Christians had to be quite different, since the theatre and public games either involved nudity or outright immorality, or were inherently violent, such as gladiatorial combat was.

Persecution in the third century began sporadically under Septimius Severus (ruled 193-211), who outlawed conversion to Christianity. Trajan's policy of

condemning those who were accused of being Christians and refused to sacrifice to the Emperor was continued. No attempt was made to hinder localised persecutions, such as that of Felicitas and Perpetua in Carthage in North Africa.

### Enforcing paganism

The emperor Decius (249-51) reigned during a particularly turbulent time in Rome's history. The economy was a mess and the barbarians were threatening to invade. His conclusion was that the abandonment of worship of the classical pagan gods of ancient Rome had brought these calamities upon the empire. Accordingly, he sought to put the situation right by requiring everyone to sacrifice to the gods. However, this measure was never universally enforced and Decius' persecution of Christians to enforce it was cut short when he was called away to fight the Goths. He died fighting them in roughly what is now Hungary.

Valerian ruled the Roman empire from 254 to 60. This era was not much more peaceful than Decius'. It was under Valerian's rule that Cyprian of Carthage, one of the African fathers, was martyred.<sup>2</sup> Valerian was engaged in a number of wars, including one with the Persians, who defeated and enslaved him.

The church had a decade of peace before Aurelian (270-5) came to the imperial throne. He was about to undertake

a persecution when he was assassinated. Widespread political and economic turmoil prevented further organized persecution until the reign of Diocletian, especially from 303 onwards. At this point Constantine's father, Constantius, governor of what is now Britain, France, and Spain, comes into the picture. He had refused to persecute Christians in his territories but died before he was able to defeat the Emperor. However, his son Constantine the Great took up from where he left off, and defeated the Emperor in Italy at the battle of Milvian Bridge (October 27, 312). The Edict of Toleration was published in March, 313. As a result, there was now a long period of peace for the church. Although it had taken three centuries it was not about to be undone and we are only now really seeing the decline of Christianity in Europe.

The church's achievements in the third century include deciding how to deal with those who deny the faith under persecution. This was a question which split the church in North Africa; but the orthodox church's decision was to require a number of things before the lapsed member could be returned to full fellowship. Cyprian of Carthage set a new standard for diaconal generosity and makes a good example of how wealthy Christians can serve the Lord with their wealth.



*Nero's Torches* by Henryk Siemiradzki. During the persecution of the early martyrs, one of the delights of Nero was to make the Christians into human torches, so his garden would be lit up at night.

### “Age of reason”

To return to our questions posed in the introduction, God has both preserved and edified his people in the present ‘age of reason’. Theologically, there are several achievements brought about by modern governmental pressure. Many people show prejudice to Christians’ involvement in politics in a way they do not show to Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, to choose a few examples. This prejudice is usually hidden under the guise of the separation of religion and state. However, it has become increasingly obvious that there is a big difference between the separation of church and state and the separation of religion and state. Laws concerning marriage and abortion and the advance of science in relation to these have helped to clarify our thinking on issues that we did not need to consider previously and to make our thinking on these matters more consistent. So, for instance, homosexual marriage is particularly perverse but no more wrong than bigamy or polyandry.

Scientific research on the unborn child shows increasingly that any distinction between human and not human must be either at birth or conception.

We have no guarantee of personal physical preservation in persecution; however, God will not abandon His people in time of trial (Romans 8:35-39). God will always preserve His seven thousand who have not bent the knee to Baal (I Kings 19:18). We also have the promise that God will preserve the faith of his elect (John 17:20-26). We may wonder how we would behave under persecution; though God has not called most of us to suffer what we may think of as persecution. He will give us grace to stand as the need arises (Hebrews 4:16). After all, how often is our faith attacked by the unkind scepticism of workmates or fellow students or the profane worldliness of those we deal with on a daily basis? We need to keep an eye on the future, but only one (Ecclesiastes 4:6); each day has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:34) and

how many tough days have come and gone regardless of how well we think we may have done? Accordingly, let us not become weary in doing good and persist in the faith (Galatians 6:9), doing little things right in what may well be a day of small things.

### Notes

- 1 Not much is known about mystery cults by definition, but they tended to have a secret gnosis (Greek for knowledge; that term is often used) and successive levels of promotion, which gave the follower increasingly deep knowledge of the religion. Examples include the Eleusinian mysteries near Athens, Mithras, and Magna Mater (Great Mother).
- 2 The Roman province of Africa covers roughly what is now Tunisia. It was the home of ancient Carthage before its conquest by Rome and was a fertile province which contributed a lot of grain to the emperor’s ‘bread and circuses’ programme. The other African fathers were Tertullian (145-220) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430).

*Mr Josh Rogers is a member of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.*

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## Persecution and the Christian (3)

# Is open persecution coming to New Zealand?

### Michael Willemse

*The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honoured among men.*

Psalms 12:8 (NIV84)

Here in New Zealand, we count ourselves amongst the minority of Christians in the world who are able to gather for worship in freedom week by week. For the majority of our fellow believers throughout the world, overt persecution is simply part and parcel of being a Christian. When they speak openly of their faith or gather publicly for worship, they are marked out for harsh treatment – in many cases from the governing authorities as well as from other groups. This has never been the experience of Christians in New Zealand, but is it possible that such opposition could arise here, too?

I want to suggest that it is not only possible but that, if God does not intervene, it is inevitable that Christians in New Zealand (and most other Western nations) will begin to experience the kinds of persecution we currently associate only with countries like Indonesia, India, China and North Korea.

### “God’s own” not truly Christian

Although New Zealand has often been colloquially referred to as “God’s own,” it has never been a truly Christian society, except perhaps among Maori in the early years after the Gospel came to New Zealand. Despite this, New Zealand has historically been very accepting – even affirming – of Christian values. In large part this is because of the Judaeo-Christian values on which the Westminster system of government we inherited from

England was based. Christian values have been entrenched in our culture and remnants of this can still be seen in things like Bible in Schools’ access to public schools, tax concessions to ministers and the opening of parliament with prayer.

But in recent years, there have been determined efforts to move away from a Judaeo-Christian view of the world and to weed out anything that smacks of Christian morality in both our legislation and our society. The effects of this can be seen everywhere in New Zealand.

New Zealand today is very different from the country in which I and those of my generation grew up. Fifty years ago, marriage was the norm and single parenthood and divorce unusual. Society was family-oriented, children’s innocence was something to be protected and children’s TV programming was free

“In the last few decades, NZ has become increasingly secular, individualistic and pluralistic.”

from adult humour and innuendo. Pubs closed at 6pm and television finished for the evening at 10.30pm. Acts of public vandalism were rare and many people left their doors unlocked day and night. People knew not just their neighbours but most of the people in their street and looked out for them as well. Sunday was generally accepted as a day of rest and, even for those who were not Christian,

a family day. On Sunday, shops were closed, there was no television advertising, no sports were held and no one would think of mowing their lawns. Authority figures such as school teachers, the police – and parents – were treated almost universally with respect and deference. Much has changed – and not for the better.

In the last few decades, New Zealand has become increasingly secular, individualistic and pluralistic. This can be seen in the passage of key pieces of social legislation. The introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit in 1973 has effectively made single parenthood a viable lifestyle choice and has contributed to family breakdown. The Bill of Rights 1990 and the subsequent Human Rights Act 1993 have created an environment where it is potentially illegal to hire a person because they are a Christian, to speak against a particular religious belief or to proclaim biblical teaching about same sex relationships. Sunday trading was also introduced in 1990, creating a further incursion into family life and putting pressure on many Christians to work on Sunday. The Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986 reflected a move away

from Christian morality and paved the way for the Civil Union Act 2004 and the Marriage Amendment Act 2013 – both of which directly undermine the foundations of our society by undermining marriage. The creation of CYFS (Child, Youth and Family) in 1999, further compounded by the removal of Section 59 from the Crimes Act in 2007, mean that, for the first time in our history, the government has begun to legislate on how parents may raise their children and has the power to remove children from parents who do not comply.

**Age of relativism**

These changes in law have not so much brought about the change in New Zealand morality as they have reflected the change which has been taking place. They stand as milestones charting New Zealand’s move away from moral absolutes to the slippery slope of relativism; in which popular opinion shapes what is wrong and what is right. But these legislative changes have also served to put a stick into the hands of those opposed to Christianity – a stick with which to beat Christians.

**Smorgasbord of religions**

The slide in New Zealand morality can also be seen much more broadly in our culture. Christianity is no longer viewed as the primary religion of New Zealand but just one choice among a smorgasbord of equally valid religions. Bible in Schools is directly under attack by David Hines and the Secular Education Network. There is increasing pressure to work or study on Sundays and many people cannot continue to advance in their chosen field if they are unwilling to do so. People no longer consider an act as being right or wrong – but only whether it “works for me.” Tolerance is the name of the game – everything is tolerated, except the view that some things are wrong. What was pornography in the 1960s is today’s clothing catalogue and signage in the department store. Billboards (even those outside a major church in Auckland) contain overt sexual innuendo and, in many cases, nudity. TV shows mock Christian values (as well as Christianity itself) and glorify the kind of behaviour to which God’s Word is diametrically opposed. Respect for age is almost non-existent and the rights of the individual are king. Anarchy is everywhere and authority figures are increasingly under attack – the number of police (and school teachers!) being

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“Part of the reason for the moral decline of this country is that we, as Christians, have lived as though this were heaven – neglecting our call to bear witness to a generation which is perishing.”

steps. As parents, we must teach our children to expect persecution and not to be fazed by it. As churches, we must do the same for our members.

*Persecution is for our good.* James says “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (James 1:2-3). God uses the flames of persecution to forge a faith that lasts. If the truth be known, it is comfort and complacency which are the deadliest enemies of our souls. But persecution builds our faith.

*We’re not in heaven yet.* Our sinful hearts tend to look for heaven on earth. We assume we have a right to the good life. In fact, part of the reason for the moral decline of this country is that we, as Christians, have lived as though this were heaven – neglecting our call to bear witness to a generation which is perishing. Persecution reminds us that this is not heaven. It sharpens our hunger for the world to come and reminds us of the hope we have and the horrible fate awaiting those who die without Christ.

*Light shines brightest in the darkness.* Paul says “Do everything without complaining ... so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine

like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life ...” (Philippians 2:14-16). As our society becomes increasingly immoral, our witness as Christians shines all the brighter. Our lives are more clearly contrasted with those who are without Christ, and the Gospel is more clearly seen.

*Persecution drives us to Christ.* Persecution reminds us of our weakness and vulnerability. It makes us cry out to the one to whom all authority belongs. It reminds us that Jesus has said “I am with you to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20.) It brings to mind words like “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” It causes us to lean on Jesus. It makes us realise that, no matter how great our sufferings, they cannot compare with what Jesus suffered for us – nor with the glory that awaits us. Persecution and not pleasure drives us to Christ.

Overt persecution is coming. But let us not shrink back in fear. Christ is still on the throne. He is able to keep us from falling and to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58.)

*Mr Michael Willemse is the minister in the Reformed Church of Hamilton.*

physically attacked rises each year. And the list goes on.

### **Hostile society**

All of these things are the outworking of a society which is increasingly hostile to Christian belief and to Christians themselves. Persecution is already here. But in another sense, it has only just begun. If New Zealand continues on its present course, persecution will intensify. Christianity will become increasingly costly – even here in “God’s own.”

So how should we respond to these things? How can we prepare ourselves for what is to come? Let me suggest some things to consider.

*Persecution is part of the deal.* Scripture is plain in saying that to be a Christian is to be persecuted. Jesus was persecuted and he said “if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” (John 15:20). Persecution is not something unusual. It belongs to being a follower of Jesus. It is a confirmation that we are walking in the master’s foot-

### **Postscript**

I had the opportunity to experience some of the things I speak of in this article when I appeared before the Government Administration Committee to present a submission on the Marriage Amendment Bill.

At the time that the Marriage Act 1955 became law, the understanding of marriage as being between a man and a woman was so commonly held that it was not even necessary to stipulate it in the legislation. However, it was evident just how far NZ has moved from the Christian principles on which it was founded when one of the MPs on the Committee stated that those who drafted the original legislation had intentionally left it “wide open” so that subsequent generations could define marriage in line with the social climate of their day. In less than fifty years, NZ has embraced what would previously have been unthinkable.

In addition, the atmosphere at the Committee hearings was palpably hostile to Christians, any reference to the Bible and even to anyone supporting a traditional view of marriage. The hatred of a Christian point of view could be felt. On the other hand, the Committee members were gushing in their support of those who supported the amendment, especially of those living an LGBT lifestyle – even when their presentations were evidently nonsensical. The cold winds of persecution have already begun to blow in NZ.

# A Christian perspective on the troubles in Egypt

## From the Middle East Reformed Fellowship

Security concerns have kept MERF's ministry centre in Cairo, Egypt closed for three days. So far, no staff or ministry partners have been physically hurt. Christians are especially targeted by Islamists because they are unarmed and cannot fight back. Yet, the international media has given little attention to the dangers facing Christian communities in Egypt.

About 38 people of Christian background lost their lives (including two police officers) and over 200 were injured by the Islamists attacks on police centres, homes, businesses and churches. At least 64 churches were attacked, including eight evangelical buildings. This was mostly in Upper Egypt, where there are significant numbers of Christians. Some were completely burned down. Over four hundred businesses and shops and many more Christian homes have been attacked, burglarised and/or burned. In the city of Malawi (central Egypt), Christian families have been forced from their homes taken over by Islamists from other cities.

The interim government pledged to

rebuild all destroyed churches. Egyptian Church leaders made public statements calling Christians to be forgiving and to trust only in the Lord's protection and not seek or expect any help from Western or other nations. Prayer chains have been established throughout the country.

There is special concern over the well-being of Muslim converts, pastors and others discipling secret seekers. Under Morsi's one year presidency, information was gathered on some that might have come into the hands of Islamic militias.

MERF's Arabic gospel broadcast and literature production continues in both Egypt and Lebanon. Several Egyptian staff are able to work from home. We thank the Lord for these and other MERF ministries in His plan to call out His people from among Muslims in Egypt and elsewhere. He seems to be preparing many hearts for the Gospel of God's grace and peace in Christ. Join us in earnest prayer for the safety of God's people in Egypt and Syria and for continued fruitful Gospel ministry.

## From Christian leaders in Egypt

The Muslim Brotherhood have been,

and remain very effective in portraying themselves as *the victims* to the media, pointing to how Morsi had been "democratically" elected and that the army "coup" was a major setback to the country's democratic progress. They have known what buttons to push with the Western press and this seems to be the version that most of the World is hearing – but it is not a version of truth that resonates with the vast majority of Egyptians.

And, while the loss of life these past few days has been most regrettable it has not only been Muslim Brotherhood supporters that have died, and there has been scant reporting on the Muslim Brotherhood's attempts to destabilise Egypt, its calls for violence against the government and its supporters; and there has been a total lack of reporting concerning weapons that the Brotherhood had in the camps and used against the army as it sought to dismantle the sit-ins.

We ask for your prayers for this important country – the largest in the Arab World, with the largest Christian Community in the Middle East. Please pray that:

- The current violence will end soon
- The effective rule of law and order will be re-established for the benefit of all citizens · There will be effective protection of church and other property against attacks by extremists
- Egypt will be governed for the benefit of all its citizens, with people of different persuasions able to live alongside one another peaceably
- Egyptian Christians will have opportunity to play an increasingly prominent and effective role in addressing the needs of all Egyptians and helping to bring healing and reconciliation in the country.

## From Infidels to Bible People:

The war in Syria is one of the greatest crises seen in the Middle East in the last 20 years. It has claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people, both Muslim and Christian. More than two million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries. In the midst of this crisis, our persecuted family is boldly reaching out. And the reactions of Muslims have been astonishing. "When you hear about one Muslim coming to Christ, it's a great thing, and everybody rejoices," said a VOM Syrian contact. "Today in Syria I'm not talking about one person. We're talking about hundreds and even thousands of Muslims coming to know Christ." Teams of believers are working in the refugee camps, providing Christ's love while sharing material aid, such as medical supplies and Bibles, as well as spiritual aid. Christians, widely considered "infidels" in Syria, are now often and affectionately referred to as "the Bible People." "This war is like a knife in the heart of the church. No human can stand that suffering. But there is God's presence. I can see Christ in the midst of darkness."

VoM National Contact

# Shocked, but not surprised: court in Malaysia bars non-Muslims from using 'Allah'

Arabic word pre-dating Islam common in Malay-language Bibles.

## Morning Star News

The ruling today by an appeals court in Malaysia to ban non-Muslims from using the word Allah to refer to God is shocking but not surprising.

Borrowed from the Arabic like other words in the Malay language, Allah is the common word for God in Malay Bibles. The word predates Islam, and Christians in Malaysia have pointed out that if the ruling is to be enforced, their very Bibles will have to be discarded. The appeals court ruled that if use of Allah is not exclusive to Muslims, it will cause "public disorder."

Thus the ruling manages to simultaneously violate both freedom of speech and freedom of religion – shocking to Western ears, but not surprising. As the *BBC* notes in a brief commentary, many Christians in Malaysia expected the ruling, believing it came in a bid by the coalition government's main party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), to secure Islamic votes. Christians are well aware that Islamist opposition to use of the word Allah by non-Muslims is rooted in fear that it could provide a point of entry for Muslims converting to Christianity.

The population in Malaysia is nearly 63 percent Muslim, according to Operation World, and Sunni Islam is the official religion. Christians in Malaysia, including many from the ethnic Chinese that account for 31 percent of the population, say they will continue to use the word Allah in spite of the ruling. At 2.6 million people, Christians account for nearly 13 percent of the country's population.

The appeals court ruling by three Muslim judges overturned a 2009 decision allowing *The Herald*, a Malay-language Catholic weekly, to use the word. Several church buildings were subsequently set ablaze, along with a few mosques.

The Rev. Lawrence Andrew, editor of *The Herald*, was quoted as saying he was "disappointed and dismayed" by the appeals court ruling, which he called a "retrograde step in the development of law in relation to the fundamental liberty of religious minorities."

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GUNMEN OPEN FIRE ON  
CHURCH WEDDING IN CAIRO,  
EGYPT

OFFICIALS IN NIGERIA PORTRAY  
SLAUGHTER OF CHRISTIAN  
FAMILY AS RESULT OF 'CATTLE  
THEFT'

CONVICTION OF CHRISTIANS  
FOR MURDER OF HINDU LEADER  
IN INDIA BIASED, UNFOUNDED:  
ATTORNEYS

POLICE IN INDIA REBUKE,  
THREATEN PASTOR FOR  
REPORTING VICIOUS BEATING

Veronica Hoyt

# Colossians for Women (3): *Living in Christ*

What do you think of when you hear the word “mature”? Especially at this time of the year, gardeners might envision ripening fruit or vegetables. Or, if you’re a mother you may long for the day when your child acts responsibly and thinks about oncoming traffic before crossing the road. More generally, we may use words like grown-up or adult, developed and fully grown, in our definition of maturity. Maturing is about change, development.

Maturity is one of the big themes of *Colossians*. A key sentence of this book is in *Colossians* 2: 6: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him . . .” Paul tells his readers that they need to develop deep roots in the gospel of Jesus, to keep growing, becoming more and more mature.

### What is godly maturity?

Two defining characteristics of Christians are that they have faith in the Lord Jesus and that they love all other believers (1:4).<sup>1</sup> These are key indicators that they are in Christ, and demonstrate that they have died, been buried, and have

now been raised with him, receiving a new life (2:12).

So, says Paul to the Colossian readers (and also to us in the twenty-first century), just as you received Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him. That is: keep growing, continue maturing. Earlier, he had stated his vision about this maturity. He writes that his wish for the Colossians is that they are filled with the “knowledge of God’s will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9). He wants this so that, as they mature, the Colossians would “live a life worthy of the Lord . . . [pleasing] him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God” (1:10). That, in a nutshell, is what maturity looked like in followers of the Lord Jesus in the first century after Christ.

It is no different today. Christian women, whether younger, married, single, mums of little ones when home is so important and the daily round of caring for needy children can be all-consuming, or mothers of the “middle years” when bumper stickers about the car being “mum’s taxi” sound all too real,

those in full-time employment outside the home, leaders of Bible studies or once-in-a-while-attendees, or of aging years, all have the same call: to mature in the Lord – to grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding, to know what pleases the Lord and then to do it.

### Limitless resources

The question is: how do we do this? How do we mature? We’ve already established in these articles on *Colossians* that Jesus is central in answering this question: in him we are already complete, with nothing to add from within ourselves (2:10). If I have died and risen again (in Jesus), then I am no longer my former self, but reborn. I am part of God’s new kingdom, begun in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and my new life is part of the restoration of all things he set in motion. Indeed, he has given me a new identity. I am God’s chosen one, holy and beloved (3:12), privileged beyond all imagination!

This is the foundation on which to live out of the principles of Christian living found in *Colossians* 3 and 4. The challenge we all face is to learn to live on the limitless resources that are in Christ, to move forward in him. Wendy Alsup in *Practical Theology for Women: How Knowing God Makes all the Difference in our Lives* puts it this way:

... apart from abiding in Christ and meditating on the benefits of our relationship with him, we will be hamstrung in every attempt to handle life on our own. Apart from him, we can do nothing. [A] word picture [in the Bible] of our unity with Christ is that he is the head and we are his body (*Colossians* 1:18, *Ephesians* 1:22-3) . . . [T]his analogy points to our supernatural connection to Jesus and our utter dependence upon him. A body has no power apart from its head.



“... think about the meaning of the word (submit), with its implication that the husband has responsibility for his wife’s welfare ...”

*Most of us have witnessed someone struggle with quadriplegia, paralysis of the body from the neck down. When our body loses connection to our head, we can’t feed ourselves, clothe ourselves, or control our movements. This is a perfect illustration of what happens spiritually when we are “not holding fast to the Head” (Col 2:19). We must hold fast to Jesus, abide in him, and take full advantage of the power available to us through our identity in him (p 100-01)*

Whatever you lack in spiritual maturity, God will provide. As Jesus said, “ask and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7) and, elsewhere: “you may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it” (John 14:14). Do you struggle to love somebody in your church or family? Do you resort far too often to yelling in anger at your children? Do you lie awake at night, worrying? Ask God to help you get over these things, to stop these destructive (and sinful) patterns. He has limitless resources and has promised to hear your requests. Nothing is too difficult for him. Don’t we teach our children when they are still very young that God always keeps his promises? Believe it for yourself, and, as you live it out, trusting in his provision, you *will* mature!

**Living relationally**

The focus of *Colossians* 3 and 4 is how we live out the reality of being in Christ. Chapter 3 contrasts what we were (such

as sexually immoral, impure, covetous, angry, prone to lie and slander), and instead highlights that the lives of those who have risen with Christ now reflect his person: compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, forgiving, and, above all, loving (3:12-14).

The changed reality in our relationship with God through Jesus also changes our relationships with each other. We recognise that the characteristics of the old nature destroy relationships; Christ-like behaviour, on the other hand, restores and builds others up. I’d like to focus on this for the remainder of this article, and again in a follow-up article. For now, though, I’ll focus on how maturity in Christ affects relationships within marriage.

Christ’s death and resurrection brings order and peace into our relationships, including our marriages. It hardly needs to be said, but marriages, too, have been affected by the fall (Genesis 3) and need redeeming. The good news of the New Testament is that these, too, are able to thrive once more. Since we have a new life in Christ, our marriages, too, will reflect the change within us. Our former selves value earthly things like personal autonomy and selfish wishes. Changed people, however, who are now in a right relationship with the Lord, recognise the beauty of harmony within relationships, of submitting to each other, and exhibiting the Christ-like characteristics of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, as found in 3:12-14. These changed personalities of both husband and wife are the bedrock of a marriage that pleases the Lord.

With respect to marriage, Paul didn’t establish anything new as such; he simply restated principles already established in Genesis 1. There is a New Testament focus in our marriages, however: married folk are to set their hearts on things above, to focus first of all on the Lord Jesus, putting to death their sinful natures and clothing themselves instead with all that is good. In this context, husbands are to love their wives and wives are to submit to their husbands (3:18-19). Marriage relationships such as these are beautiful, and mirror properly an even deeper mystery: the restored relationship between Christ and his bride, the church (Ephesians 5:32).

**Example for wives: submission**

How does this work out in practice? For example, what does it mean for a wife to submit to her husband? Paul doesn’t elaborate specifically, although we do need to read this short statement in the wider context of the rest of *Colossians*. We can find out a little more from parallel passages such as Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, and Titus 2, but the Bible gives very little detail, and so it is important that in a discussion about this we are not overly prescriptive. We can, however, draw some principles about the tone of our homes from 3:12-14, already referred to. We can think about the meaning of the word (submit), with its implication that the husband has responsibility for his wife’s welfare (she places herself under his love and leadership), and that in their submission wives lay down any assertions of independence. The etymology of the English word sub-



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mission also gives us some clues in how to understand this concept. It has in it the words “sub” (meaning under) and “mission” (an important assignment) – implying that a wife places herself under her husband’s mission.

This image helps me in my own marriage. In my case, my husband’s “mission” includes: leading our family spiritually/training our son to understand the gospel, leadership within our church as an elder, running a small business (and there are plenty of subsets of these). There’s no question that we’re a team and that, in many ways, we are on a mission together. At the same time, as a wife, my first responsibility is not to pursue what I think is important at the expense of my husband’s mission. To give an example, in our family we usually read a passage of Scripture after the evening meal. This is a prime opportunity for my husband to teach our

son, and for me, who has plenty of opportunity to teach him throughout the day, to step back. Because I know my son well, it’s tempting to clarify the question my husband asks, or to throw in too many of my own (by which time my husband is, once more, a background figure), or to interject with my own long-winded answer, or even to hijack the conversation altogether by raising some other point that results in a discussion between my husband and myself (leaving our son in the background). As a wife who supports her husband’s mission in teaching the Scriptures to our son, my role in this particular stage of my son’s life, is to say little, to take a back seat.

Of course, my marriage isn’t the same as yours. If you are married, what are your husband’s missions? Are you helping (or hindering) them? How can you support him better? Do you need to re-prioritise your life in order to do so?

To conclude, the peaceful, ordered relationship between husband and wife is a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the new life he has ushered in for all those who believe in him. It is a very tangible answer to Paul’s prayer in 1:10 that believers would live lives worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way: bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God. Husband and wife, then, are motivated by the gospel of the Lord Jesus, to relate in a Christ-like way to each other, and to respect (and obey) God in the gender distinctives that he has established in marriage.

This, then, is one example of godly maturity. Of course, there are far more, and I will write more about these in my next article on *Colossians*.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated all Scripture references come from *Colossians*.

## Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

# Gleanings ...

## BY THE GLEANINGS

### TEAM:

**Odette De Kock** – Auckland  
Presbytery

**Yvonne Walraven** – Wellington  
Presbytery

**Frances Watson** – Christchurch  
Presbytery

*Collated and Edited by* **Harriet Haverland**

## MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

The **Rev. Leo de Vos** plans to finish preaching in Wainuiomata on December 1<sup>st</sup> and then to take some leave. Leo and Carol hope to move to Hamilton early in the new year.

The **Rev. David Waldron** has received a second call from Bucklands Beach. He has also been asked to preach in Christchurch with a view to their placing him on a duo there.

The **Rev. Bruce Hoyt** has been officially released from his call as a minister

of the Reformed Church of Dunedin, serving in Oamaru, so that he can take up his call as the first minister of the Reformed Church of Oamaru. “And to make it official, I joyfully accept the call of this congregation to be your minister of the Word and Sacraments. May our

Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, continue to build His church in this place as we seek to serve Him in obedience to His Word.”

The **Rev. John** and **Mrs. Harriet Haverland** spent five weeks in Europe doing a tour through England as well as a tour

On July 27<sup>th</sup> 2013, the Lord called home to be with Himself,

MARIA ANNA (MARIETJE)  
**JOCHEM**  
AGED 98

Dearly loved wife of Arie (deceased) and loving mum of Cor, Daan (deceased), Anja, Wally, Dirk and their spouses.

Oma of 13 grandchildren and Oma-Oma and Oma-Maria to her 30 great grandchildren.



*“The one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it” 1 Thes. 5 vs 24*

that follows the footsteps of Paul through Greece and Western Turkey.

## 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARIES OF OUR CHURCHES

The **Reformed Church of Palmerston North** celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an evening of fun and fellowship on Saturday October 12<sup>th</sup> and a celebration service on Sunday October 13<sup>th</sup>.

The **Reformed Church of Bucklands Beach** celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a celebration service and an informal shared lunch on Sunday October 13<sup>th</sup>.

The **Reformed Church of Nelson** celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with activities on Saturday November 23<sup>rd</sup> and a thanksgiving service on Sunday November 24<sup>th</sup>. The actual anniversary date was November 21<sup>st</sup>.

The **Reformed Church of Hamilton** (Aberdeen) celebrated their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a celebration dinner on Saturday November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## MISSIONS

**Hukanui: Africa Inland Mission (AIM)** aims to plant 'Christ centered churches among all African peoples'. They do this by placing teams among the unreached or least-reached people groups in Africa to build relationships, learn about language and culture and thereby lay foundations for ministry amongst them. Marlene van Tonder is joining one of these teams heading to the Lopit people of South Sudan in December 2013. Lord willing, they will be there for two years living with the people, as the people live.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

**Bishopdale:** Evangelism at the A&P show, November 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, with the focus being on engaging in conversations about who Jesus is. To aid conversations we used an interactive survey and challenged people to consider who Jesus really is and what his message means for them today. To prepare our volunteers we had an orientation event.

## CAMPS & CONFERENCES

**South Island Young Adults Conference:** October 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> (Labour Weekend) at the RC Bishopdale, with "Gospel Living" as the theme and Mr. Murray Capill, principal of the RTC, as the speaker.

**Second Annual Auckland Reformation Conference:** November 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> at the

RC Avondale. This conference provides opportunity for instruction from God's Word, singing praise, fellowship with one another as we rejoice in our common Reformation heritage, and encouragement to hold fast to and proclaim anew the biblical doctrine of justification – the doctrine of which Martin Luther said "if this article stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses." "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"(Romans 3:23-24). Guest speaker this year is Dr Martin Williams, Lecturer in New Testament and Greek at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong and the theme is Justification Then and Now: Why This Great Truth Still Matters. Members of various reformed congregations around the city joined to share in the opportunity to open God's Word, sing, pray, and fellowship together.

**Fan the Flame:** November 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>. This annual conference is specifically designed for people who are thinking (or should be thinking) about whether God would have them serve in some area of ministry or mission work. Previous attendees found this a challenging, stimulating and helpful long weekend. It not only gives an exposure to theological study and life at the RTC, but also helps people wrestle with the gospel need today, with avenues of serving in ministry and mission, with the concept of "a call to the ministry,"

and with training options.

**Family Camp:** December 27<sup>th</sup> 2013 to January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014. With Rev. Peter Moelker taking the morning studies and Rev. Andrew de Vries doing the evening devotions, it makes for a week of refreshment for your soul, developing life-long denominational friendships, relaxing on the shores of Lake Karapiro and more.

**National Youth Camp:** January 2<sup>nd</sup> to

## Wellington Ladies' Presbyterial

Hear ye, Hear ye.  
The time is near ye.

Come for fellowship,  
Come to learn,  
It's time for Masterton to  
have their turn.

Check your diaries.  
Mark them well.  
Saturday, March 15, will be swell!

"Back to Basics" is the theme.  
Come Friday night if you are keen.

More information is on its way.  
Watch Faith in Focus in  
two months time.  
The details will come without  
the rhyme!

# Family Camp 2014

**27 December 2013 – 3 January 2014**  
**Finlay Park, Cambridge**

Devotional Leaders:  
Morning: Rev Peter Moelker – Always Reforming  
Evening: Rev Andrew de Vries – Justification by Faith

**For further information and to enrol online:**  
**[www.rcnzonline.com/familycamp](http://www.rcnzonline.com/familycamp)**

If you do not have internet access phone Sarah Kingham  
phone 09 238 6711

***For a week of refreshment for your soul.***



9<sup>th</sup> 2014 at Teapot Valley, Nelson, with Rev. Daniel Wilson leading the studies.

**Study Topic:** The Supremacy of Christ.

**Theme:** Superheroes.

**Equip Conference:** January 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> 2014 in Christchurch. The Gospel Training Trust is again running a camp for young people and adults (all ages!) who seek to be better equipped to study and teach the Bible (formerly known as the Youth Leadership Conference). Speakers: Peter Adam (formerly Principal Ridley Hall Theological College, Melbourne) on Ezra; and Joe Fleener (Assistant Pastor at Howick Baptist Church) on John's Gospel. More details – see <http://www.equipconference.org.nz/>

*We give praise and thanks to God  
for the*

## 60th Wedding Anniversary

*of*

# Pieter & Dini Braam

**Married 9 January 1954 in  
Dunedin.**

*Cast all your anxiety on him  
because he cares for you.*

1 Peter 5:7

*With much love from your children,  
grandchildren and great grandchildren.*

Fred and Marguerite  
Diane and Tony – Alex, James;  
Michelle and Anton – Austin,  
Madeline;  
Suzanne and Tim – Peyton;  
Andrew.

Harold and Adrienne  
Peter and Kirsten – Gabrielle;  
Daniel – Regan;  
Tammy and Nathan – Adelaide;  
Oliva.

Peter and Marianne  
Greer  
Ashley and Gareth

Philip and Nikki  
Ruby;  
Wilson.

Ingrid and Gerry  
Conan and Sarah  
Kerran  
Gerald (dec)  
Simone.

## ACTIVITIES

**Hamilton:** The F.L.A.M.E. Reformed Youth Ball Committee hosted the biennial Hamilton Reformed Youth Ball. The theme for the event was “Around the World in 80 Days” and was held at the Reformed Church of Hukanui. The evening consisted of dancing and socialising and was attended by around 70 youth from the Auckland presbytery.

**Masterton:** Kandahar singing and shared lunch: On October 6<sup>th</sup> we had a shared lunch with about eight elderly residents and their carers from Kandahar after church, as well as singing, with the Kidz Club children joining in.

**Pukekohe:** The annual Football Challenge was on again – youngies vs oldies. Oldies won 13:11. The oldies had a great first half and the youngies had a great second half, but not great enough.

**Hamilton:** The Hamilton youth hosted another combined quiz night for Aberdeen and Hukanui congregations. It was an open invitation event, encouraging members to invite people from outside church to come along. Teams were sorted out on the night.

**North Shore:** On November 30<sup>th</sup>, alongside the people we know from Cadets & Gems, Mainly Music and LABS, we as a congregation will celebrate Christmas and give thanks for the activities our various ministries have been able to undertake. There will be music, a good message, performances, food and fellowship.

## Kuyper Centre for Christian Worldview Studies

The RTC was originally set up with a vision to develop the college into a Christian university, where disciplines would be taught from a Christian worldview perspective. Despite repeated efforts to meet this vision such a university never eventuated. We trust that setting up the Centre will meet at least some of the hopes of our founders. It is fitting that this event should take place on Reformation Day, because it was Martin Luther who first recognised that all Christians are called to their various tasks by God. Later John Calvin and others broadened this insight to a recognition that we are to live every aspect of our lives to the glory of God. A more systematic approach to a Christian “world and life view” was developed late in the nineteenth century by Abraham Kuyper and his followers. It is this approach that we seek to build on, developing a Christian worldview that meets the challenges of our day and age. The launch of the Kuyper Centre took place on October 31<sup>st</sup> at the Maranatha Christian School in Melbourne. Colin Youl, spoke on “Worldviews: does your north hand know what your south hand is doing?” Following this the Centre’s director, Dr Bill Berends, introduced the purpose and program of the Kuyper Centre. You can visit the Kuyper Centre for Christian Worldview Studies at: <http://kuypercentre.org.au/>



## ALBUM OUT NOW!!

Far from the sophisticated sound studios of today's contemporary artists comes the authentic sound of grassroots Papua New Guinea. Accompanied by the guitar, and supported by chirping cicadas and the odd rooster, these young men and women sing praise to God. Their songs are sung in a variety of languages, straight from the heart, and bridge the culture gap with ease, communicating the artists' love for Christ alone.

[www.kuypercentre.org.nz/LongGrassTribe](http://www.kuypercentre.org.nz/LongGrassTribe) Visit the site to listen to samples and look at purchase options (Physical and Infinite Backing vocal sheet). Order CD via internet or by sending email to [longgrass@kuypercentre.org.nz](mailto:longgrass@kuypercentre.org.nz). DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR!



## **Wainuiomata Ref. Church mid-winter dinner held on 24 August 2013**

This year the organising committee for the mid-winter dinner was Mrs Wynne Veenstra and Mrs Wilma Reinders and the theme was for a Wedding Banquet.

We were asked to supply our wedding photos, which were displayed in a large frame in the hall and we had to identify the couples. We had some real problems identifying some couples, 20 or 50 years later.

Later in the evening we had a power point slide show, which revealed a few more antics associated with weddings of

our members – even showing some of our prospective future bridal couples!!

The church hall was magically transformed into a banquet hall, with eight tables set out beautifully, with candles, plates and silverware and place names allocated for 66 guests. Mrs Geraldine de Vries and Mrs Wendy Haverland did a wonderful job here, it was fit for a wedding, indeed!

Displayed on the walls were 13 weddingdresses, all from ladies who still had theirs, but no one was game enough to show them off.

Our MC, Mr Gary Veenstra opened the evening with song and prayer and prepared us for a scrumptious three-course meal, prepared by our famous cook Mr Allan Saunders and his team.

After soup, to help the digestion, Seth

and Esther de Reus took us through their game of presenting a non-perishable food item beginning with a letter of the alphabet which had been allocated earlier. It showed lots of poetic talent and a good supply of food for the local food bank.

Next, the main course, with a choice of dishes was beautifully presented and were enjoyed by all.

To keep our brains working we were given a list of 20 questions, which were to be answered by each table and at the end a prize was presented to the winning table. It certainly kept our brains working, try this: What were the restrictions on marriage for the daughters of Zelophehad? Guess which table won – our pastor's table won!

Before dessert, our ladies were tested on how well they knew their husbands.





They were presented with 12 pairs of lovely legs and they had to pick their own husbands feet. No worry for Carol, she found them in two minutes flat.

In the latter part of the evening there was the cutting a two-tier wedding cake, by the longest married couple, Jos and Willy Verbokkem at 56 years and the shortest, newlyweds, Ross and Shannon Baird at 5 months.

A lovely evening of fun and good food was concluded with coffee and wedding cake, and a round of applause was given for all those involved, including our teenagers under 18, who cleared the tables and did the dishes, to provide us with a lovely evening.

Pastor Leo de Vos closed the evening with prayer and a word of thanks to all involved.

**Jos Verbokkem**

## TABLE PRAYER FOR THE FAMILY

Father, for our food we thank You;  
Also grant Your Living Bread!

Open wide our eyes for seeing  
Bible truth for heart and head.

Heav'nly Father, may we listen  
when You speak Your Truth today!

Open wide our ears for hearing  
everything You have to say.

Lord, our God, You loved and saved us.

Christ, Your Son, taught us to pray!

Open wide our mouths to ask You:  
Fill us with Your joy this day!

*Scripture references: Deut. 8:3b;*

*Psalm 119:18; Psalm 78:1; Psalm 81:10*

*This prayer may be sung to the tune*

*Stuttgart PH 335*

*(Come, Thou long-expected Jesus!)*

## Acknowledgements

This issue of *Faith in Focus* marks the 55<sup>th</sup> that I have had the privilege to edit. I hadn't realised until looking through the stack of magazines in my studio that, next year, I would embark upon my sixth year as editor, should that please the Lord. I am very thankful for the encouragement, confidence and support that I have received from so many over this period.

Of course it needs to be acknowledged that there is a team of people behind the scenes who also help to make the production of this magazine possible. First among them are the contributors, who provide quality articles for the edification of the readers, here in New Zealand and overseas. Their efforts are appreciated.

Many thanks to the National Publications Committee for their continued support and confidence in me as the editor over the last five years and for their diligence in administration, finances and distribution of the magazine.

Many thanks to our regular columnists, Mrs Sally Davey (who will be back with us in the new year with a new column), Mrs Harriet Haverland and Mrs Veronica Hoyt for taking over "Feminine focus".

Many thanks to Flying Laser Colours for providing a high quality magazine with true professionalism.

I am very much indebted to Mrs Sally Davey for the amazing work she does as sub-editor, for her creativity, talents, eye for detail and practical assistance.

Finally, thank you the readers, for your support of *Faith in Focus*. As we look forward to entering the 41<sup>st</sup> year of publication, it is our hope that you will continue to read on with us. It is our desire to continue to publish articles that will build you up in "your most holy faith" (Jude 1:20). On behalf of the *Faith in Focus* team, we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season.

**Ed.**

# Harvesters needed

## Murray Capill

There's nothing new under the sun, and one thing that is definitely not new is the need for gospel workers. Two thousand years ago Jesus identified that as the critical kingdom issue, and things have not really changed. The harvest is still plentiful, the workers are still few (Matt 9:37).

The harvest is certainly plentiful. That does not mean it is easy to win people to Jesus but it does mean that now is the day of salvation. We are privileged to live in the era between the first and second comings of Jesus when the good news of salvation through him alone is being spread to the ends of the earth. We live in the day of grace. We live in the time when God is saving many people from every tribe, nation, language and people. We live in the age of missions.

We also live at a time when human need has never been greater. Despite all the advances in science, technology, education and lifestyle that are hallmarks of our time, people have never been more in need of truly good news. Even in the most affluent suburbs and cities people struggle with broken relationships, depression, guilt, fear and loneliness. Many people are deeply troubled by past abuse, by present relationship breakdown and by a constant sense of meaninglessness in life. Almost never do we read of crime being reduced, of jails having fewer people in them, of more marriages lasting longer, or of addictions being on the decline. Trouble seems to escalate, not diminish. And on a global scale we are more aware than ever, through endless media access, of situations of injustice, oppression, war, ethnic discrimination, famine, disease and natural disasters.

These troubled last days are, however, the days of gospel advance. They are days of mission activity and kingdom harvest. The needs are not only endless but the potential is enormous. There is huge scope for the gospel message of hope to bring the kind of change that nothing else can secure. The harvest is all around us – in our families, communities, workplaces and neighbourhoods.

But the workers are few. The number

of people equipped and deployed to spread the gospel, preach the Word, plant churches, reach the lost and disciple the nations is pitiful in comparison with the need. Even within our Reformed denominations the need for workers is great. We have too few people training for ministry to keep pace with the status quo, let alone advance the work of the gospel through church planting, team ministries and overseas mission initiatives.

Jesus' statement about the need for more workers, however, is bracketed by two tremendously important perspectives. First, it is preceded by his compassion for people. "When he saw crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36). Jesus did not have mission and pastoral care in two different baskets requiring two different kinds of people. He saw them as one and the same issue. Lost people need a shepherd; broken and desperate people need loving pastoral care. Mission and pastoral care belong together.

Gospel harvesters are therefore raised up as the needs of people are pressed against their hearts and they see the importance of loving, befriending and helping those with massive needs. Mission must proceed with a large pastoral heart for people and pastoral work must always lead to seeking lost and needy sheep who need the gospel above all else. The kind of workers we need are people who care deeply about the gospel and about people; who love mission and love people; who have a heart for evangelism and for edification, for Word and for deed. We need pastors, preachers, church planters and ministry leaders who have the loving shepherd heart of our Saviour, and who are passionate about his mission of seeking and saving the lost.

At the backend of Jesus' statement about harvest workers there is a second vital perspective. The foremost action to be taken is prayer! "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." The field is his field. The harvest is his harvest. And the workers must be raised up and sent by him. Our responsibility, then, is to pray. Pray that God would raise up a

“The number of people equipped to spread the gospel ... reach the lost is pitiful in comparison with the need.”

generation of leaders for the advance of the gospel. Pray that God would lay on the heart of many people the priority of the gospel. Pray that God would stir in many hearts a passion for evangelism. Pray that God would give to many future church leaders a large and loving heart for people.

May I urge you to join us in praying for more gospel workers? We have the privilege of training pastors and ministry workers of many kinds. But we can only train those God raises up. We can only equip those God is sending into his harvest field. We would love to be training more people – we know that our churches need more workers and the harvest field is ready and waiting. So pray for missionaries to be raised up from your church. Pray for the young men in your church, that out of them God would raise up some preachers. Pray for your church, that it may be a sending church. Pray for those who are currently training, that they may be well equipped for the vast work that lies ahead of them. And please pray for us as we chip away at our vision of "raising, equipping and supporting a generation of leaders for the advance of the gospel."

*Mr Murray Capill is the Principal and Lecturer in Pastoral Ministry at RTC, Geelong.*

# Preaching Library

Imagine you must preach a sermon this Sunday. No, not read a sermon. Not download a sermon from the Internet and then read it. You have to create a sermon from scratch and then preach it to the congregation. This is the actual situation of some of the Preaching Library users.

On Wednesday we received an e-mail. "Please help me, I must preach on Sunday for the first time." And then the whole story unfolds: how the preacher just suddenly disappeared. Nobody can get hold of him, and nobody knows where he is. This happened some weeks ago. A new preacher had to be appointed, but nobody was available. That is why he was given the job. He has a regular day job, but from now on he also has to preach on Sundays. Where to begin...?

Unfortunately, situations such as these are not uncommon in Africa. There are an enormous number of lay preachers. But even in the case of full-time preachers, the fact is that the greater majority of them have not received (proper) training. And most of the preachers who have had decent training lack the necessary materials they need to prepare a sermon for Sunday.

## **The Scriptures must speak**

This is where the Preaching Library aims to help. Not to distribute sermons (for how can one possibly distribute sermons that will be suitable to be read against such a broad spectrum of backgrounds and situations?). We try to provide material that will help preachers to understand the Scriptures, so that they can reflect on what the implication of it all is for their congregation. We deliberately search for material that will take the preachers back to the Bible itself.

This is the "meeting point" that we have: we want to help them understand the Scriptures better. We do not therefore start or enforce our confession and church background from the outset, but we begin with our common foundation: the Scriptures. From this starting point, we are presented with many opportunities to make contact with preachers and to walk with them on the road of a solid ministry.

The solid road along which we try to guide these preachers is exactly the same as that which we as believers and churches are going: to be reformed by the Scriptures as we go along. To give an example: we received a request for assistance with Acts 2 "where it is

clearly taught that all believers who have received the Spirit must be able to speak in tongues". We do not then become involved in an e-mail discussion about the issue. We send material that simply provides an exegesis of the relevant texts in Acts 2. It must then become clear from the exegesis that the passage is not about speaking in tongues, but about the languages of other population groups. The reaction to this? Sometimes we do not hear another word from such a user. Sometimes the user does not respond, but still places requests very often. And sometimes we get a reaction. Then we will discuss the issue further with him and send additional material to explain these matters further.

It becomes clear from these reactions, one eventually ends up working with the preachers who simply want to study and obey the Scriptures. These are the preachers who use the Scriptures as the norm for their lives and preaching.

## **Competence**

The aim is that preachers inform us each week what they want to preach about. We then try to find suitable preparatory material for them. As you can imagine, this takes place on many different levels. We deal with preachers who can use Greek and Hebrew as well as with preachers who can barely read English. When somebody registers, we try to obtain a little background information from the person. After the first few requests, one tends to get an idea on which level the person operates.

We also get many queries regarding pastoral cases. Unfortunately we cannot always handle this type of request. Sometimes such a request gives one the opportunity to offer some guidance as to how one should handle such situations. Most of the time, the approach is quite legalistic: we must teach the people to do this and leave that. We then try to focus above all on who the Lord is. For example: if the church contributions are scant, we would try to lead them to focus first on the Lord's providence. What has He done for us? How much has He given?

Like we said, the greater part of the preachers with whom we work have had



*Some of our staff working at our offices. They are scanning, proof reading and doing some IT work.*

“We no longer have to resort to smuggling books to help preachers. With the internet we can reach them in their homes!”

no proper training and neither do they have any real opportunity to receive it. We believe that by constantly and earnestly studying for their sermons with the material we try to provide them, they will keep on growing in competence for their ministry. We trust in the power of the Word and the Spirit!

There is a tremendous need in Africa for this type of education!

### Internet

The Internet as medium gives us enormous opportunities to reach people who used to be inaccessible and unknown. At present, we supply material to 3600 preachers in 35 different countries in Africa. Christians are persecuted in some of these countries. We no longer have to resort to smuggling books to help preachers. With the internet we can reach them in their homes! Some time ago we received an e-mail from a preacher from the Ivory Coast who tells us how churches and preachers have lost everything through the wars in this country. He describes the extent of the chaos in the church life as a result of the large number of people who are missing or have gone to live somewhere else. At least one can now still come to the preacher's aid via the internet connection!

We are often asked why do we bear all the costs ourselves and provide everything to the preachers free of charge. Is it not a good thing for them to pay at least something? First of all, what is important is that we try to reach



Two of our staff (from Zimbabwe) busy scanning material for ministers in Africa. The material is coming from Africa for Africa!

the very people who want to study the Word of God but do not always have the means to do so. Moreover, people do not always realise what it entails for our users to make use of this service. Some of our preachers have to pay a taxi to get to an internet cafe and then have to pay for every minute of internet use. It already costs them a bit to make use of our service!

There are many more of these preachers who really want to study the Word. May the Lord grant us the opportunity to reach them too! Fortunately we know that the eyes of the Lord explore the earth and that He personally guides the lives of his children.

### Gratitude and expectation

It is now five years since the project was launched. We are amazed at the way the Lord has granted progress and provided so richly. As the number of preachers and requests increased, our ability to manage grew accordingly. Time and again, the Lord provided new volunteers who were willing to help so that our project could expand as and when it became necessary.

There are still many challenges ahead. At the moment we have to reject a number of requests every week because we haven't yet got around to finding and evaluating material on various subjects.

We do not have the human resources to make more intensive contact with many of the preachers. We would like to provide help to preachers in Asia who are in the same situation as many of the preachers in Africa. We receive many requests for French material out of Africa. In all of this, we pray that He will provide to all those who knock ...; that He who renders people seeking will also provide so that they may find and rejoice – together with us who have become so used to the reformed wealth we possess.

*Please I don't have any literatures. How can you help me to have them. In this country the young Ministers are not previlaged to have these books to help them study and that is why most young Pastors are not fulfilled. hence kindly help my handicapcy.*

*I Ugboko (Pentecostal, Nigeria)*

*I have been using the Preaching Library for over three years now. As a pastor serving in a developing country, resources for sound Christian literature are so hard to come by, but even when they do, good commentaries are not readily available. So when I was introduced to the Preaching Library, a whole world*



*A former housewife sorting material in boxes, and helping to spread the gospel in Africa.*

*of access to very good commentaries was opened up to me. I often preach expository sermons through various books of the Bible, and sometimes my lean library would not have all the books I need to reference. Thank God that through the ministry of the Preaching Library, I have been able to promptly receive the material I have requested. This service has not only been a blessing to my soul as I have soaked myself into the deep theological goldmines of the previous and current generation of God's servants, but I know my congregation has also grown spiritually by feasting on a rich diet of biblical truth. It is my prayer that this ministry would continue to help pastors like me with free material so that we can become competent ministers of the gospel who correctly handle the word of truth.*

*I Makashinyi (Baptist, Zambia)*

*Mr van der Linden was born in Cape Town, South Africa, and is a minister in the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. Because of health problems he has to live and work indoors for most of the time, and through this circumstance, the Lord led him and his wife to start this project. There is a management team of six people, and volunteers all over the world. Their offices are situated in Pretoria, South Africa.*



*This project is part of family Van der Linden's life. Till last year the offices were in our living room. Everybody is smiling – we have offices now.*