

fantasy literature
why is it so popular?

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Fantasy Literature: why is it so popular? (1) Fantasy literature: a Christian perspective | 3 |
| Fantasy Literature: why is it so popular? (2) "A sanctified imagination" | 6 |
| Letters from New Zealand | 9 |
| Church Polity Conference | 10 |
| Feminine focus A quiet and gentle spirit | 13 |
| World in focus | 15 |
| Books in focus | 16 |
| Focus on home South Island Ladies Fellowship report Wellington Presbytery report | 18 |
| Missions in focus Cush4Christ, dispelling the darkness | 20 |

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

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Editorial Assistant:

Mrs Sally Davey

Production Staff:

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

Copy Deadline:

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

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: nicwhare@gmail.com

Subscription per volume:

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

Editorial

I would be out of my depth in providing an informative commentary on the subject of fantasy literature, given the fact that the only books of that genre that I have read is *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* by J R R Tolkein, *The Screwtape Letters* by C S Lewis and some short stories that I read in high school.

It is a genre which is not everyone's cup of tea for a variety of reasons, one of which may be because it is not part of the reality that we identify with – other worldly, we could say. However, that doesn't alter the fact that many people read fantasy literature, so I think it is worth our time to have a look at it.

I found helpful a comment about this style of writing in Wikipedia:

"Fantasy has been distinguished ... by its style and its freedom of expression ... to use any story-telling element to strengthen the narrative; whether it be dragons, magic and castles Authors often engage in worldbuilding, constructing a framework or entire world against which the narrative plays out.

Symbolism often plays a significant role in fantasy literature, often through the use of archetypal figures inspired by earlier texts or folklore" (Indick, William. *Ancient Symbology in Fantasy Literature: A Psychological Study*. Jefferson: McFarland &, 2012.)

Interestingly, the Bible uses symbolism and some amazingly powerful imagery. In the Revelation of St. John, symbolism and imagery were used for the Christian's encouragement and comfort during a time of severe persecution. Other books of the Bible that incorporate these devices are Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah. It seems to me, if the Author of the Scriptures uses such creativity for the benefit of His people, it validates this style of writing, which could also be used for the benefit of the saints. Good examples of this are C S Lewis's books which have been a blessing to Christians, as was *Pilgrims Progress*, by John Bunyan.

However, there needs to be a word of caution. One needs to be discerning about the type of fantasy literature read, and our contributors write about this genre from a Christian perspective and give us helpful insight into this style of writing.

Mr Michael Flinn explores the realm of fantasy biblically.

Mr Paul Archbald considers the dangers and benefits of fantasy.

Letters from New Zealand contemplates the credit and debit columns of our church budgets.

Mr Hans Vaatstra provides a helpful summary of the Church Polity Conference in Palmerston North on March 4.

Mrs Jenny Waldron gives thought to a quiet and gentle spirit.

Mr Dirk van Garderen reviews *A Wind in the House of Islam (How God is drawing Muslims around the world to faith in Jesus Christ)* by David Garrison.

Focus on home gleans news from around the churches, with reports from Wellington Presbytery and the South Island Ladies Fellowship.

Mrs Emily Voschezang writes about her experience in South Sudan with Cush4Christ.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. 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.

NB: In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

Fantasy literature: a Christian perspective

Michael Flinn

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

(Romans 8:22,23 KJV)

The apostle’s words are a stark and compelling reminder that we live in a fallen world, which is under a condign curse from the Creator because of the rebellion of our first parents, Adam and Eve. The world is not the way God created it in the beginning and it is not what it will be at the End when the Lord returns. In the meantime, the world itself, and we who share existence with it, groan and travail. As fallen human beings, we are not content with what is – with the harsh reality of a world filled with pain, suffering, and death. We yearn for something that is both fundamentally and existentially better – something *different* – something perfect.

Those who have not yet heard the gospel and believed in Christ the Saviour blindly yearn without knowing what it is that they are seeking or what they are heading towards. But as Christians, we can have clarity and assurance. We await what our Lord has secured for us – our final and complete adoption, which will involve the redemption, the resurrection of our bodies and the creation of a “new heaven and a new earth” where there “shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things [will] pass away” (Rev. 21:1,4).

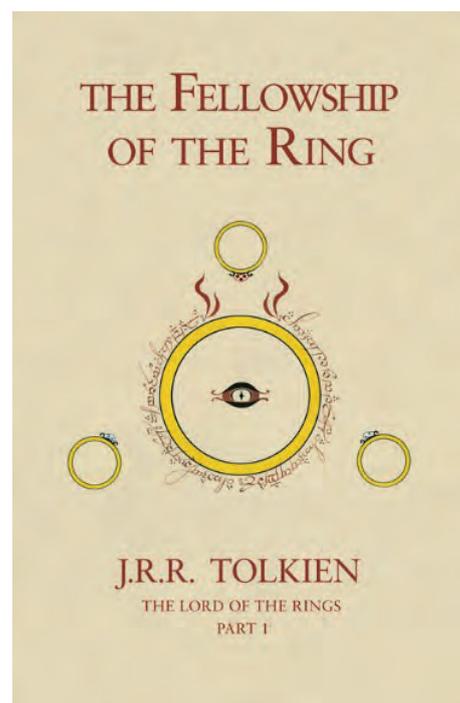
Because as human beings, we have been made in the image of the Creator,

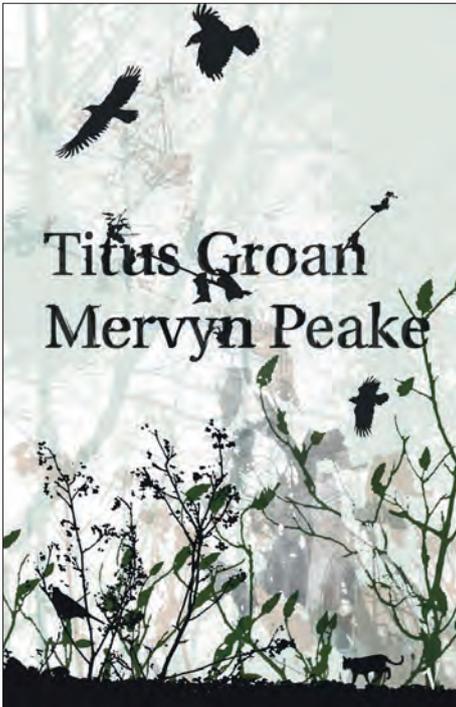
who formed the world from his own wisdom and understanding (Proverbs 3:19), we too have the ability to imagine, to “create” worlds in the mind’s eye, to fashion in our imaginations a world or worlds that are different from the one in which we live and to invite a reader to “come enter this world that we have created”. This is how J.R.R. Tolkien spoke of fantasy and fantasy literature in his essay entitled “On Fairy Stories”:

“I propose...to use Fantasy for this purpose: in a sense, that is, which combines with its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notions of ‘unreality’ (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the domination of observed ‘fact,’ in short of the fantastic. I am thus not only aware but glad of the etymological and semantic connexions of fantasy with fantastic: with images of things that are not only ‘not actually present,’ but which are indeed not to be found in our primary world at all, or are generally believed not to be found there.”¹

Tolkien described fantasy literature as a form of art in which the writer, through the use of words, “sub-creates” a new and different world, in which there are different cultures, different societies, different languages, different races of sentient beings, and different laws operating. Tolkien himself spent years creating and developing the languages and cultures of the various races in *The Lord of the Rings*, long before he ever sat down to write these opening words:

When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special mag-





nificance, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton.²

The fantastic and highly complex world depicted in Tolkien's novel was not the result of a "make it up as you go" approach. As he pointed out in his essay, it is not hard at all to think up and write the words: "the green sun". On reading these words, some of you might even be able to imagine such a phenomenon. However:

to make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art; indeed narrative art, story making in its primary and most potent mode.³

Consider these opening words from Mervyn Peake's stunning *Titus Groan*, the first novel of his Gormenghast series:

Gormenghast, that is, the main massing of the original stone, taken by itself would have displayed a certain ponderous architectural quality were it possible to have ignored the circumfusion of those mean dwellings that swarmed like an epidemic around its outer walls. They sprawled over the sloping earth, each one halfway over its neighbour, until, held back by the castle ramparts, the innermost of these hovels laid hold on the great walls, clamping themselves thereto like limpets to a rock. These dwellings, by ancient law, were granted this chill intimacy with the stronghold that loomed above them. Over their irregular roofs would fall throughout the seasons, the shadows of time-eaten buttresses, of broken and lofty turrets, and most enormous of all, the shadow of the Tower of Flints. This tower, patched unevenly with black ivy, arose like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry and pointed blasphemously at heaven. At night the owls made of it an echoing threat; by day it stood voiceless and cast its long shadow.⁴

Read that again; savour each sentence; close your eyes and imagine the scene that the writer is describing. Peake,

who was a poet, artist, and illustrator, was able to imagine and create with words a coherent, oppressive and dark world, both different from and chillingly similar to our own in which the characters live and act out their strange and complex lives. The prose is at times as oppressive and ponderous as the castle it describes, and the characters are both arresting and unforgettable. When I think of Peake, I'm reminded of the celebrated words of Robert Schumann, when he reviewed a piece by Frederik Chopin: "Hat's off, gentlemen, a genius". I have no idea what Tolkien and C.S. Lewis thought of Peake's work, but there can be no doubt that Peake, in the way that Tolkien described above, was able to produce not just a novel, but the much more rare achievement of a work of Art. Peake certainly displays "story making in its primary and most potent mode."

To those who would thrust aside such art because the world created by the writer is not "real" but only "imaginary", and therefore unworthy of our attention, Tolkien responded that the ability to "create" and speak of worlds that are similar and yet very different from the Real World in which we live, is part of what it means to be human. That said:

Fantasy can, of course, be carried to excess. It can be ill done. It can be put to evil uses. It may even delude the minds out of which it came. But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true? Men have conceived not only of elves, but they have imagined gods, and worshipped them, even worshipped those most deformed by their authors' own evil. But they have made false gods out of other materials: their notions, their banners, their monies; even their sciences and their social and economic theories have demanded human sacrifice...Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but in the image and likeness of a Maker.⁵

And I would add that since the Fall, we share with all other human beings, and even with the Creation itself, a sense of dissatisfaction with the Real World in which we live. For the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, living under the divine curse resulting from the Fall, there is a certain inevitability about writers *needing* to imagine and create

worlds that are different from our own. We cannot be satisfied with life in this fallen world as if that were all that is.

However, the fantasy novelist, when he imagines and creates his fantastic world, is still a fallen image bearer of the true Creator. Written upon his heart are the Laws of his Maker and while he does his best to suppress this knowledge (Romans 1:18), he still comes back to it again and again. Fantasy writers create worlds in which their characters live through and struggle with the issues that confront them. Their choices and actions are either good or evil. They are either heroic and worthy of emulation or they are not. The better novelists, in their imaginary worlds, explore themes that we in our Real Worlds can understand and identify with. We can imagine ourselves facing powerful and malevolent forces from without and from within the human heart. We can ask ourselves how WE would handle the temptation of power over ourselves and others and whether we would use such power for good or ill. We can admire the courage and fortitude of a Frodo Baggins, the friendship and loyalty of a Samwise Gamgee, and we can understand and feel mercy towards a Boromir, who through strong and courageous, because of his lust for power, was seduced into doing something wicked.

And although *The Lord of the Rings*, by Tolkien's own insistence, is not a Christian allegory, as Christians, we can nonetheless appreciate Aragorn, as Middle Earth's king in waiting, the hard, weather-beaten traveller, who had no stately form or majesty that any should look upon him (the common folk derisively called him "Strider"). This is a king who is mighty in battle, a warrior who wields a terrible sword against his enemies, but at the same time can heal people of sickness and disease with a plant called *athelas* or kingsfoil in the common tongue. Prophecy and song have been written of this king in waiting:

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not
wither,
Deep roots are not reached by
the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be
woken,
A light from the shadows shall
spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was
broken,*

*The crownless again shall be king.*⁶

As Christians, we can appreciate the messianic and eschatological tones of Aragorn's coronation:

But when Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. And then Faramir cried:

'Behold the King!'...

*In his time the City was made more fair than it had ever been, even in the days of its first glory; and it was filled with trees and with fountains, and its gates were wrought of mithril and steel, and its streets were paved with white marble; and the Folk of the Mountain laboured in it, and the Folk of the Wood rejoiced to come there; and all was healed and made good, and the houses were filled with men and women and the laughter of children, and no window was blind nor any courtyard empty; and after the ending of the Third Age of the world into the new age it preserved the memory and the glory of the years that were gone.*⁷

We can also appreciate the way in which Gandalf the Grey "dies" while fighting the terrible and demonic Balrog, sacrificing himself so that his friends can escape certain destruction, only to be "resurrected" and returned to his friends and to the world as Gandalf the

"... not all fantasy writers are Christians, and a far smaller number of those who are have the ability of a Tolkien or a Lewis. And many fantasy writers today are not Christians. For example, George R. R. Martin's favourite colour is 'grey' and his characters reflect this."



George R. R. Martin. <http://comicbook.com>

White. Again, *The Lord of the Rings* is not a Christian allegory, but Tolkien was a Christian, and it was his literary artistry that brought us these characters and events in his fantasy novel.

Of course, not all fantasy writers are Christians, and a far smaller number of those who are have the ability of a Tolkien or a Lewis. And many fantasy writers today are not Christians. For example, George R. R. Martin's favourite colour is "grey" and his characters reflect this. There are very few protagonists in his novels that are worthy of admiration – all are deeply flawed and immoral to varying degrees and the problem for Martin (and for Martin's fans) will be how to end his novels on a satisfying note. After a while, the political intrigue and violence of the never-ending "game of thrones" loses its savour and becomes boring and aimless. In Tolkien, there is a providential power that is back of and that predetermines the apparently chance events of the novel. All the events in which the characters are caught up are coming together and moving inexorably towards a conclusion. Speaking of the fact that the Ring of Power was picked up by Bilbo from the Shire, the "most unlikely person imaginable", Gandalf encourages Frodo with these words:

Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and

*not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought.*⁸

By contrast, in Martin's fantasy world, there is no providential power that is working out a predetermined plan ultimately to end evil and restore the world to its former glory and there are no kings like Aragorn son of Arathorn in *Game of Thrones*. This makes for depressing reading. There are no characters who are true heroes or heroines. Everyone is grey, immorality and evil are ubiquitous and, at least to date, there is no morally and spiritually satisfying conclusion to the endless game that Martin's characters play.

In conclusion, fantasy literature is a genre in which an author creates an imaginary world and invites the reader to explore it and its characters with him or her. This is by no means an easy task. Today there are many fantasy novels in print, but there are very few authors whose work will last. Of the writing of popular novels, there is no end, but the ability to create a work of Art is rare. Yet it is something to which we can aspire. As Tolkien has argued, the ability to imagine and create a very different world from the one in which we live, a Secondary World, if you will, arises from the fact that we as human beings are made in the image of the One who has created us and the world in which we live. And that world is fallen and

under a divine curse. I have argued from Romans 8, that as fallen human beings who live in a good but broken and cursed world, there is a necessity and inevitability to our imagining a different and a better world than the one in which we live. We yearn for something much better than the vale of tears in which we find ourselves this side of heaven. Fantasy writers attempt to give expression to that yearning. However, not all such authors are Christian and still fewer are artists. The worlds that these writers create are all too frequently sad reflections and extensions of our own. We can still benefit from reading such works of literature (in particular, the better works) but as Christians, we need to assess and evaluate everything we read against the standard of God's revealed Word.

- 1 J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", p.6. The essay can be downloaded from http://www.rivendell-community.org/Formation/Tolkien_On_Fairy_Stories.pdf.
- 2 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978, p.33.
- 3 Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", p.6.
- 4 Mervyn Peake, *Titus Groan*, Random House Books, Kindle edition, p.1.
- 5 Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", p.9.
- 6 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, p.186.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p.1004.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.69.

Mr Michael Flinn is a minister emeritus and a member of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Fantasy Literature: why is it so popular? (2)

"A sanctified imagination"

P. N. Archbald

Introduction

Some years ago I heard a talk by Dr. Noel Weeks, in which he commented on the safe, sanitized society in which we live. Many of the threats facing families in past times have been removed. In the past, a man had to defend his

family – from wild animals, robbers, soldiers etc. He was his family's "hero" and defender. God has equipped men so that they can carry out that task in a fallen world.

In the present time, however, there is nothing so tangible from which a man must protect his family. Moreover, feminism has tried to hand that task over to women. Consider the number of movies

that now feature women in the lead role, beating up all the men, and so forth.

How can a man be a hero and defender now? By playing out a fantasy role, either in gaming or escaping into fantasy-literature or movies – both of which offer heroism on an epic scale. Many women are also interested in fantasy-literature (though perhaps not so much the gaming), so no doubt there are other

factors at play. It is interesting, though, to note that the rapid rise in popularity of fantasy literature has coincided with the decreasing influence of Christianity in the West – and the rise of feminism. Perhaps another factor is that previously the Christian influence in society led to a seriousness of mind within our culture: Why waste your time on what is not real? Life is too short to waste time on such things! Whatever the reasons, there is no doubt that fantasy books, movies and games have enjoyed a massive rise in popularity in the last 50 years.

Is fantasy wrong?

In evaluating these trends, the first question to consider is whether a Christian may indulge in fantasy. Is it lawful, is it appropriate, is it helpful or harmful? Some Christians would argue that fantasy is inherently wrong, since it is not true to reality. It is a kind of lie.

In answer to this charge, I would like to point out that there are many other aspects of both conversation and literature, that could be placed in the same category: jokes; metaphor; acting and role-play; referring to a hypothetical situation in debate, or using a “slippery-slope” argument. For in all these cases, we frequently set up scenarios that contain “unreal” elements, or refer to things that have not yet occurred.

Of course, it could be argued that all of these devices are wrong or inappropriate. As with all ethical questions, our answer must come from the Scriptures. While it is true that the Bible does not discuss the merits or demerits of fantasy, the Lord Himself employs fantasy in His inspired Word.

Consider, for example, the books of Daniel Ezekiel, Zechariah and Revelation with their beasts and dragons, flying scrolls, chariots and horsemen etc. Christ is portrayed in John’s vision as the Rider on the White Horse (Rev. 19:1f). He comes with His army in wrath, with flaming eyes, a bloody robe and a sword coming out of His mouth. We understand the imagery. But the description is just that: symbolic images teaching about reality by means of fantastical elements. The Hero on the white horse versus the dragon and the beasts. This is the stuff of which fantasy-literature is made – though it is usually put to a different purpose.

Why does the Lord employ such a method? Michael Wilcock, in his commentary, *The Message of Revelation*, suggests that this genre of biblical lit-

erature is like the sacraments: potent images of truth, given to appeal to us at another level of our being. The sacraments appeal to our senses, apocalyptic literature appeals to our imagination. These parts of the Bible have therefore been referred to as a “sacrament of the imagination.” The Lord drives the truth home to us in different ways, appealing to various aspects of our nature – logic and reason in historical narratives and epistles, the artistic side with poetry, the imaginative side with books like Revelation, parts of Daniel etc. In that way, the whole person is covered.

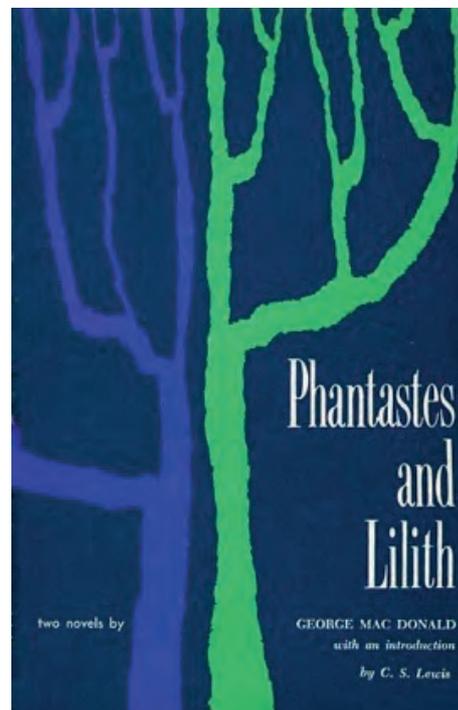
This implies that fantasy is not inherently sinful. It has been used by God for good reason. To be sure, man’s imagination has been affected by sin. Man’s use of fantasy is often corrupt. Ps. 73:7 says of the wicked that “The imaginations of their heart runs riot.” Similarly, “God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices (inventions)” (Eccl. 7:29). Imagination is an area of his life that needs to be sanctified, and put to a proper use in a godly manner – rather than rejected as useless or contrary to God’s purposes. Writing fantasy stories with a Christian message, such as we find with authors like George MacDonald, C.S Lewis and Stephen Lawhead, would be one way to have fantasy serve God’s glory.

The dangers

That is not to deny that there are certain dangers in delving into the world of fantasy. The proliferation of fantasy books, movies and games, since the 1960s has coincided with a lowering of public standards of decency. This is reflected in the fantasy genre, as well as in other areas. Fantasy books, movies and games often contain some, or all, of the following:

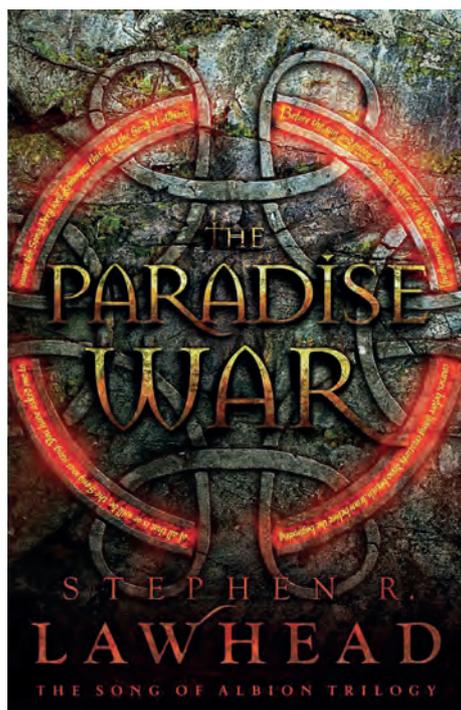
- Blasphemy
- Bad language
- Graphic sexual content, including homosexuality.
- Anti-Christian sentiments
- Feminist ideology
- A non-Christian world-and-life view.

In addition, some readers may be prone to using fantasy for escapist purposes. There is a place for relaxation and recreation in the Christian ethic. God Himself commands us to “rest” as well as work. Sometimes we escape the rigours of work for a holiday. But we are seeking to “recharge our batteries” in a



“While it is true that the Bible does not discuss the merits or demerits of fantasy, the Lord Himself employs fantasy in His inspired Word.”

“As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, making a caricature of the devil encourages people to dismiss the devil as mere fantasy.”



way that honours the Lord, so we can serve Him more effectively when we go back to work. The problem is not that we escape our normal routines for a short time; it is when escape gives way to escapism – when we make escape from our normal routines into a way of life, an effort to escape our dull or difficult lives, full stop! We are called to serve the Lord in this life – in the world, but not of it; not to put ourselves out of this world, into another fantasy world, so we don't have to face this one. We live in an escapist society. It is not surprising that non-Christian society wants to escape this world, for it constantly reminds them of God, and of man's sin. But a Christian should not be an escapist!

Escapism often leads to addiction: addiction to fantasy in games, books or movies. Addiction is another danger, as many parents have discovered when they try to get their kids off the X-Box or Playstation, computer or cell-phone. The Lord Jesus is our Master, and we should not be mastered by anything else (1 Cor. 6:12).

Much of the fantasy genre also involves demonic elements in the story. Sometimes the demons are presented as evil, sometimes they become allies of the “hero” of the story. This encourages a casual attitude to the demonic. As C.S. Lewis has pointed out, making a caricature of the devil encourages people to dismiss the devil as mere fantasy. Lewis himself wrote *The Screwtape Letters*, a fantasy book about the way the devil tempts us. But he used fantasy to warn the reader of the very real temptations of the devil. Much fantasy literature features devils for no good reason, and does not encourage the reader to take the demonic world seriously.

There is also the question of magic in fantasy stories. Deuteronomy. 18:10-14 makes it clear that God detests those who use magic – witchcraft, sorcery, divination, spiritism and so on. For magic is man's attempt to manipulate the supernatural world. It is, in a sense, trying to play God – to see or control the world, either in the present or for the future. That is why Lord's Day 1 in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 94, sees the shunning of magic as a requirement of the first commandment. Those who read fantasy need to be aware of this, because immersing oneself in material that treats sin as normal can de-sensitize us to the seriousness of the sin. If we are going to read such material we have to have a good reason: not just to be entertained

by what God detests.

This is where I see some difference between, say, Harry Potter and *Lord of the Rings*. It comes down to themes and authorial intent. Harry Potter is, so far as I can tell, just there to entertain, using magic (and Spiritism) to do so. Tolkien, on the other hand, used magic as a metaphor for the battle between good and evil. This becomes clear when you look at his explanation for Lord of the Rings, with all the “history” of Middle-Earth that lies behind it. Tolkien claimed there was no allegory there, but that the book developed under the influence of the growing darkness of Nazi Germany. The wizards are “sent” to help fight evil. Of course, there are “goodies” and “baddies” in the Harry Potter series, but they are probably just there to entertain.

Possible benefits

If we, as Christians are going to indulge in fantasy, we need a good reason. At the end of the day, whatever we do, we have to be able to see that it is glorifying to the Lord (1 Cor. 10:31). We also have to take care that we do not let ourselves be led to become more insensitive to sin.

Are there, then, any benefits from fantasy books or movies? Well, they can provide some relaxation, which can be helpful – so long as it does not lead to an escapist habit. Science fiction and fantasy can also provide helpful insights into the prevailing philosophy in society. They are often very “cutting edge” in that respect. They make a good “social barometer.”

This was driven home to me when, some years ago, I visited a “Star Trek” display in Washington D.C. The display traced the history of the social issues that the series took up -under the guise of science fiction. For example, the Cold War was represented by the Federation Vs. the Klingon Empire; romance with aliens took up the subject of racially-mixed marriage – and in the later series, gender issues.

Similarly, both science fiction and fantasy can be quite clever in reading present trends, and thus making some intelligent guesses regarding the future. Quite a number of scientific discoveries appear to have their origin in the imagination of writers like Jules Verne, or those who contributed to Star Trek. Think of cell phones, cloaking devices, and the hover-boards from *Back to the Future*. For the Christian, guesses regarding the outcome of social trends is prob-

ably more useful – whether Utopian or Dystopian. They can help us analyse our society as it is at present.

There may also be some advantage in having an active imagination when we are studying the potent imagery of the Bible – for example, in the apocalyptic literature. Throughout the history of the church, there have been many who have struggled to interpret such parts of the Bible correctly, because they are stuck in a wooden literalism. As I mentioned, it is possible that reading fantasy literature

can train the mind to think beyond the bounds of every-day life in this world. At the end of the day, interpreting the Bible depends on the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit. But He uses the gifts He has given, and the training we have received in God's providence. An active, sanctified imagination can be an asset in the interpretation of the Scriptures.

But whatever we read or watch or play, we must be careful. There are dangers in this area, as I have mentioned. If we do not bring Christian discernment

to it, but simply look to have fun, we may open ourselves to harmful influences. It is also important for believing parents to be aware of what their children are reading and watching. We are called to "Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) – not to be taken captive. That includes the thoughts of writers who use their imagination in weird and wonderful ways.

Mr Paul Archbald is the minister of the Reformed Church of Silverstream.

Letters from New Zealand

D. G. Vanderpyl

July 1976

Have you heard of the minister who had been telling his visiting grandchildren a fascinating bedtime story? The little one's had been listening breathlessly and when the tale had finally ended, one of the children took a deep breath and asked: "Grandpa, was that a true story or were you just preaching?"

The 1976 Yearbook will be out shortly with all the updated names, addresses and other information so helpful to the churches in their inter-church communications. Always of interest is the page with the membership statistics. For New Zealand the 1975 figures showed an increase of forty-one over the previous year but now 1976 is showing a decrease. It is only a small decrease, you will say; nine less than last year, but still, not too good is it now? Of course, we may say that it is quality, which counts, not quantity and we could marshal a few more apt sayings from Scripture and elsewhere to quieten our denominational conscience. But is that still good enough? I doubt it. I believe that there is basically something wrong with our concept of the purpose of the church and our membership so long as we, in our annual church budgets dedicate about 90% or more of the church's income to ourselves, i.e. the "keep" of our pastor, church property and other local expenses, while only a very small percentage of the total income is spent on evangelism and missions. I remember years ago, a church in the United States, where at each annual congregational meeting, after first es-

tablishing the cost of all local expenses, the whole church then pledged itself to double the amount of the budget. That church's motive for doing so was that for every dollar they would be spending on themselves, for the nurture of their own souls, they would also pledge another dollar for the outreach of their church at home and abroad.

It has been said that the willingness of financial support to the church does not depend on the size of one's income but on the spiritual condition of one's heart. The Rev. L. Reurich expressed in his church's news bulletin his disappointment that so few attended an evangelism meeting. Let me quote what bothered him so immensely: "What will the Lord say of us, who claim to have the full counsel of God, but seem quite content to keep it just to ourselves? What answer or excuse will we give our Saviour when He asks us where we were on this night of the evangelism meeting? Whether the cause of the Gospel did not warrant a better response than we could give? You see, it belongs to the essence of a true and Reformed Church to be a shining light in this world, and of that desire to be such there was but little evidence. It is surely time that we take a good look at ourselves, also as a congregation, and that we see what the Lord would have us do for Him in reaching out into the community for Christ. For the love of Christ and for the love of our fellow men, we certainly must examine ourselves in this matter, or else endanger the right to ourselves to be a Church of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Maybe it is high time that we start "balancing the books" somewhat differently with some adjustments on priorities. "Saved to Serve" is the title of a catechism series. Next time when our faithful book-keepers prepare their budgets, they should alter the "Debit" into "Saved" and the "Credit" into "Served". Wouldn't it be good then to hear the treasurer talk at the congregational meeting about saved entries on the left-hand side and served expenses to be met in the right-hand column?

The Hamilton committee for radio ministry has finally succeeded in getting the "Focus" messages broadcast on a national station, 1ZH, and on prime time, Sunday mornings. The 20-minute broadcast has a new format with some music between the introduction of the topic and the message. Some more stations have been approached, and with God's blessing on this type of ministry, the Reformed faith may be heard in years to come, right through the length and breadth of this country.

Wonderful opportunities to spread the Gospel and a great challenge to explore.

Abridged

Church Polity Conference



The Church is also physical. Jesus gathers people (Acts 13:2) into a human structure initiated by the Holy Spirit. Arrangements are needed to make it possible for churches to work and for people to gather for worship. Some say “as the Spirit moves me” and end up in different places. The book of Acts and the letters to the churches show that the Holy Spirit gathers people into organised churches.

What is Church Polity?

Proper church polity reflects the character of God: “God is not a God of disorder but a God of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). We are to reflect God’s good order. Church polity is not only a description but also a prescription, developed over time in a historical setting.

How did our reformed church polity come about? There are two aspects to it.

a) *It is required by Scripture.* 1 Cor. 14:33 & 40 “God is a God of peace ... therefore let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner”. In that same chapter the apostle Paul regulates worship. In his letters to Timothy Paul provides regulations for office bearers and the elements of worship. The Heidelberg Catechism LD21 QA54 provides a good summary of Scripture’s requirements where it asks the question, “What do you believe concerning the Holy Catholic Church? A. I believe that the Son of God through His word and Spirit out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to the end gathers protects and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith and of this community I am and will be a living member.” Jesus defends and protects the church through his representative office bearers, elders and deacons. Therefore church polity serves a pastoral purpose by helping members to grow in Christ, in unity, peace and holiness. Those who break the unity of the church are called to repentance (Matt. 18: 15-18), hence we have church discipline as the third mark of a faithful church.

b) *Development in Church History.* According to DeGelder church polity developed from the organisation of the Jewish synagogue. In some churches

Hans Vaatstra

Approximately 80 people attended the Church Polity Conference in Palmerston North on March 4, led by the Rev. Jan DeGelder, emeritus pastor in the Canadian Reformed Churches and lecturer in church polity at the CRC Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario. What follows is a summary of the conference.

Introduction

Mr DeGelder’s introductory questions were “What do we need church polity for? Does it fit with the spiritual character of the church? Is not the church’s task to preach the gospel and not concern itself with rules and regulations?” Some have thought so. The 17th century Anabaptists rejected rules and church offices because they argued ‘you can never regulate the Holy Spirit!

Three reasons were given for the need for church polity. The church is indeed a spiritual entity. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16.) Its members are urged to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), and are being built by God into a spiritual edifice (Eph. 2:22).

(top left) The meeting was opened by Palmerston North’s new minister the Rev Aaron Warner, whose brief address introduced the need to put or keep things in order in the church of God – for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (1 Cor 14:33)

(top right) The Rev Jan DeGelder

there is also influence from secular governments, for example the hierarchical structure in Episcopalian-type churches. During the Reformation of the church the government of the church actually ended up in the hands of the civil government under a system known as the Erastian form of Church government. However, later reformers including John Calvin struggled against the influence of the state and in his writings Calvin developed the principle of separation between church and state.

Foundational Principles

a) Christ is the head

Several passages in the New Testament describe the relationship between Christ and the church. These include John 15 (the Vine and the branches), John 10 (the Shepherd and his sheep), 1 Corinthians 12 (the Head and the body) and Ephesians 2:20 (the Cornerstone of the building). Therefore the church is a Christocracy rather than a democracy. Christ wants his church to be governed by his word, not by the state, a charismatic leader, human philosophy or tradition. Furthermore, the leaders of the church have the task of preserving the freedom we have in Christ. This freedom is not to be abused. It is the freedom of the obedience of faith with the main goal being the peace of the church under Christ as head.

b) The development of offices.

In the New Testament there is considerable teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit with an emphasis on the gifts of elders, pastors and teachers. Elders are not middle men between the laity and God, but according to Ephesians 4:11-12 they have the task of equipping God's people for works of service to build up the body of Christ. Their manual is the word of God, and according to Acts 20:28 they are made office bearers by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, good church polity requires that churches should have a plurality of office bearers (Titus 1:5) who serve as representatives of Christ to their congregation. The elders consist of ruling and teaching elders (1 Tim. 5:17) who are to see that justice, righteousness and peace are maintained in the church.

c) Working together

Mr DeGelder emphasised the importance of working together as office bearers. No office bearer may lord it over another (Church Order art 95). He also spoke



about the autonomy of the local church in the sense that session is the highest authority and that the authority of presbyteries and synods are limited in the sense that sessions mandate what is to be discussed in major assemblies and decide if any decisions taken should be regarded as binding on all the churches.

How order for the church functions in the church

a) Based on Biblical principles.

The New Testament doesn't provide detailed rules about church order but the church order is made up of rules formulated by the church fathers based on biblical principles. These rules must be within biblical parameters. The defining questions Mr DeGelder posited are as follows: Do the rules promote peace and justice? Do they honour Christ as head of the church? Do they promote freedom of conscience? Do they help resolve conflicts and restore relationships? Do they

(top) Behind the scenes was an enthusiastic kitchen crew, who kept us well watered and fed – many thanks for your service to the saints.

glorify God? Do they assist the church in its God-given tasks? Do they promote the priesthood of all believers and the peace of the church?

b) Allows flexibility

In the eyes of a secular lawyer our Church Order is not a comprehensive legal document but allows for flexibility and more than one interpretation. Its authors were not aiming for a detailed law book but for rules which were succinct, clear and helpful guidelines for our churches; designed to assist churches fulfil their calling according to the Bible and our confessions.

c) Practical applications

In the last part of the second session DeGelder answered a number of questions on specific practical matters. Three matters which generated considerable discussion were as follows i) the authority of the session relative to presbytery and synod, ii) the nature of concurrence in matters of discipline and iii) the discipline of those who resign or desert unilaterally.

i) The emphasis in the New Testament is on the local session as the highest ecclesiastical authority under Christ. Its authority is therefore original while the authority of the wider assemblies is delegated. (C.O. art. 35) Therefore major assemblies cannot overturn sessions' decisions, however in case of disagreement there is a right of appeal to a major assembly. (art. 28) Decisions at major assemblies are binding on local churches unless the decision made

is in conflict with the Bible or the Church Order, because they are decisions made by all the church together.

ii) Sessions are to seek concurrence from presbyteries in discipline matters before the second announcement before excommunication is made. (C.O. Art 78.2) According to DeGelder the primary purpose for concurrence is to ensure that sessions do not act without compassion or in haste and that the proper procedure is followed.

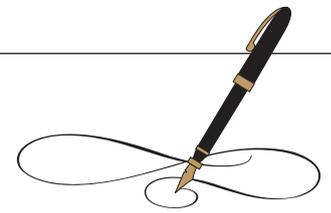
iii) With respect to those who resign from the church each case is different and must be taken on its own merits. However, where such resignations are sinful i.e. a communicant member resigning to get out from under formal discipline or resigning due to sin and unbelief, two schools of thought were put forward during the discussion. One maintains that the process to follow under such sinful circumstances is to proceed with excommunication according to the church order. Another is to accept the resignation and read out an appropriate statement to the church. Both views are held among conservative reformed Churches.

Overall, the conference encouraged participants to appreciate the spiritual nature of our Church Order as it promotes good order and peace in our churches under the headship of Christ and to the glory of God. Many thanks to the Rev. Jan DeGelder for his informative and enlightening address.

(left) Question time with Mr DeGelder and Mr Michael Flinn.

(right) Mr DeGelder appears to be an avid photographer and bird-watcher. He has been seen wandering about with his camera during the church picnic in Silverstream, and no doubt in Masterton too. His interest in our native species, was a good opportunity to purchase a book on "New Zealand Birds, beauty like no other" – a fitting gift at the conclusion of the conference.





A quiet and gentle spirit

Many in today's society are fixated with outward beauty, whether it be having cosmetic surgery to enhance or decrease various parts of the anatomy, or the latest makeup, hairstyles and fashion. Countless young girls are now wearing makeup and, if you are a teenager at school, it can be social suicide not to. Older women are being told they need face-lifts and special makeup techniques to minimise the effects of ageing. The fashion industry churns out the latest clothing and accessories, enticing everyone, particularly women, to buy, buy, buy. Outward appearance is everything (or so the advertising world would have us believe).

This is exactly what the Apostle Peter is writing about in 1 Peter 3:1-6, "Do not let your adorning be external - the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewellery, or the clothing you wear - but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening". Women, back when Peter was writing his letter, were the same as today; striving to be beautiful, fashionable and keeping up with everyone else. Christian women, on the other hand, are called to be beautiful on the inside.

Some women like to dodge this passage in 1 Peter 3, or relegate it to "women's" business, which everyone has read about before, (yawn) so let's not have these sorts of articles/blogs/books but have more "meaty" themes.

But the point is, this is a "meaty theme" for Christian women. God differentiates between male and female. We are equal in status before Him, as his chosen people, there is no distinction between Jew or Greek, (no racism or superior race in the sight of God),

nor slave or free or male or female, (no sexism either) for we are all one in Christ Jesus¹. The Bible has many things to say about how we are to live our lives as Christians, before a holy God. However, God also has many things to say in His Word about the different roles of male and female. For females, passages like 1 Peter 3 are crucial for us, so that we understand our place in God's grand scheme of things, and what is precious in His sight.

Let's deal with the outwardness of beauty; the braiding of hair, gold jewellery and clothing. In this passage, the Apostle Peter, (and in the parallel one in 1 Tim 2), is not forbidding women to have their hair braided or to wear gold jewellery; but he is saying that they are not to be preoccupied with it. Rather, Christian women are to focus on the inward beauty of a godly character and a gospel-driven life.

On the other hand, some Christian women spend too much money, time and thought on hair (straightening, curling, cutting, colouring, styling) or jewellery or clothing. There is to be a balance here, of focussing on the important, spiritual things and having the freedom to dress however you choose (though modestly,² of course). This is the freedom in Christ we have. The Greco/Roman women were renowned for their expensive and elaborate hair styles and clothing, which sounds much like today's society. These things may become idols to us, where we cannot go out in public without makeup on or we salivate over the latest fashion magazines or we spend stupendous amounts of money on our outward appearance. We are to be wise with the resources given to us, all of which come from the hand of God.

Inward beauty

Some people have taken this "quiet and gentle spirit" scripture to mean that women are to talk in whispers



... trust in the Lord, ask for His Holy Spirit to help strengthen and guide you. This is not about an outward compliance but a changing heart attitude, a transforming of the mind⁹ where we no longer believe the lies of the world. As your godly character shines through you, you will have an inner beauty that far surpasses anything that fashion, surgery or cosmetics can do. Be precious in God's sight!

and to be meek and mild. Others have thought a woman should basically be a doormat and utterly under the control of her husband, which is not how God describes marriage.³

Quiet and gentle spirit

The word "quiet" means to be attentive or to give unusual attention. Being "gentle/meek" encompasses the idea of power under control, not weakness. When God commands women to be quiet and gentle it is a position of strength, focussing on the tasks given to us, obeying His commands,⁴ trusting in, and waiting on, Him.

An acquaintance thought that having a quiet and gentle spirit meant she had to talk sweetly and quietly all the time. However, when she asked her daughter to do something, and she was ignored, the mother began to whisper loudly at her daughter until she was hissing at her, all the time maintaining a pleasant face and voice to me. This is not what the Apostle Peter meant.

I have a close friend who tends to talk loudly and often, and yet, as the beautiful Christian lady that she is, her love for the Lord shines through and she is submissive to her husband. Another dear friend has the catchiest laugh, which can be heard by everyone in the room. She, too, is a lovely Christian woman, whose godly character/beauty is evident to all, yet she can enjoy life with much volume. These women have quiet and gentle spirits and yet still show the character and individuality that God has created them with. They are strong women in the Lord and this radiates beautifully from them.

As I was growing up, there was a single old lady in our church who was a busy wee woman, always doing things for others. She was still rowing her dinghy and fishing well into her eighties, and she had a big vegetable garden. She would distribute the fruits of her labours to needy people in the church and community. She would visit the "old" people in the old folks home, in her faithful old VW. She was such a clear picture to me of a godly woman, who had the inner beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit. She was beautiful, wrinkles and all, because when you talked to her, (she was quite a chatterbox) her love for our Heavenly Father, and His work in her life, shone through. She has been an example to me ever since.

Submission

The Apostle Peter continues,⁵ "...holy women who hoped in God used to

adorn themselves by submitting to their own husbands...".

Submission isn't easy, but God in His infinite wisdom requires married women to be submissive to their own husbands.

We can all find things where we differ in opinion or firmly-held conviction from our husbands. Be it home decor, choice of car, how to bring up and discipline children or points of theology; there may be many times when we disagree, and we may not always handle it well. If we keep in mind God's plan for marriage and Christian living, how best can we deal with differing ideas? With a submissive mind-set and attitude, and trusting God for the outcome.

Choose a time when things are good between you both, and ask "How can I voice my differing opinion to you in a way that is godly and uplifting?" And when you do disagree with him, (a) speak gently and kindly, (don't put him or his opinions down), (b) be humble, (you may not know all the facts) and (c) respect him as head of the house.

For example: your husband may be dealing with a situation with the children, and you either totally disagree with where he is heading with it, or the way he is handling it. Rather than argue with him in front of the children, which is not at all helpful, ask him if you could talk to him for a minute in the bedroom (or somewhere quiet). There you can talk about the way you think things should be dealt with, and hopefully, you can reach an agreement. If not, you need to accept that you have presented your side and leave it there, and that God has given your husband the role of leader in your home and you are to submit to him. This is not popular nor easy to do at times, but Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit to help us in just these sorts of situations. He helps us to fulfil God's will to be a helper to our husbands and the Holy Spirit also helps us to submit to our husbands, and to become more godly in the process.

What if your husband is passive and won't take charge or make a decision? Nancy Leigh DeMoss, in her book *Lies Women Believe*, has an excellent section about lies women believe about marriage and she addresses this very question.⁶ She writes "We can take matters into our own hands and may even be able to achieve immediate results. But we usually end up with a bitter taste in our mouths, even resenting and blaming those we feel [who have] pushed [us] into taking action."

I have seen this time and again as I have counselled women with passive husbands. Often it has become a pattern over many years, to the point where the husband gives up on making any decision, because the wife makes it for him, or should he dare to make one, he is often criticised or over-riden, then the wife despises him for not being the head of the house!

DeMoss goes on, "What can free us from the drive to control the men in our lives? We must learn to wait on the Lord; in His time, and in His way, He will act on behalf of those who wait on Him. 'Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine

heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.'"⁷

Fear

We need not fear anything, (1 Peter 3:6) whether it be sickness or death of a loved one, personal attacks because of our beliefs, anxiety about the future or any other frightening or terrifying situation. The Lord is with us, through the darkest of times.⁸ Having a quiet and gentle spirit means we are strong in the Lord, standing firm on His promises and trusting Him fully for the future.

As you think about 1 Peter 3:3-6, and its impact on your life, trust in the Lord, ask for His Holy Spirit to help strengthen and guide you. This is not about

an outward compliance but a changing heart attitude, a transforming of the mind⁹ where we no longer believe the lies of the world. As your godly character shines through you, you will have an inner beauty that far surpasses anything that fashion, surgery or cosmetics can do. Be precious in God's sight!

¹ Gal 3:28

² 1 Tim 2:9

³ Gen 2:20-24, Eph 5:22-33

⁴ e.g. Rom 12:9-21, Gal 5:26-26, Col 3:1-17

⁵ 1 Peter 3:5

⁶ Nancy Leigh DeMoss: *Lies Women Believe* p151-156

⁷ *Lies Women Believe* p 156 Ps 27:14

⁸ Ps 23:4

⁹ Romans 12:3,4

World in focus

Does this offend you?

"I'm offended!" "That is offensive to me!" "You must not do that, because it offends me!" You will often hear statements such as these on television, the radio, or any number of media outlets. Those who use these types of sentiments throw them down like a gauntlet, daring you to continue. It is as if the fact that they are offended should cause you to stop whatever it is you are saying or doing that offends them. Somehow, "I'm offended," has become the verbal alarm that signals some sort of mistake or misstep on the part of the speaker.

The fact is, however, just because a person is offended is not necessarily a reason to stop saying or doing something. Jesus often offended people, but that did not stop Him from preaching and teaching the truth. When a person takes offense at something, it often says much more about the heart of the one who is offended than it does about the person who supposedly "caused" the offense.

On one occasion, after Jesus taught about how the Pharisees had abused God's Word, His apostles came to him and said, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (Matthew 15:11). It is almost as if the apostles thought like many people today. They seemed to be indicating that because Jesus had offended the Pharisees,

then He should stop teaching those ideas or change His message. Jesus, however, thought nothing of the sort. He knew that His message offended the Pharisees because of the hardness of their hearts, not because of the way the message was delivered. Jesus understood that the hearts of the Pharisees needed changing, not His message or even the way He delivered it. He responded to His apostles by saying, "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind" (Matthew 15:14). Surely we can agree that the Pharisees would have been further offended by Jesus' follow up comments. Their offense, however, was misplaced. They were blind to the truth. They should not have been offended at Jesus' message. Jesus' message was the truth that God had sent to set them free (John 8:32).

Zionica | apologeticspress.org

US divorce rate at lowest levels in over three decades

The divorce rate in the US has fallen to its lowest level in 35 years, according to a new report.

A study by the *National Center for Family & Marriage Research*, revealed that the divorce rate has fallen by 25 per cent from 22.6 in 1980 to 16.9 in 2015.

The report represented the divorce rate "as the number of divorces per 1,000 married women aged 15 and older".

Hawaii had the lowest divorce rate at 11.1 per thousand, closely followed by Wisconsin, Rhode Island, Delaware and New Jersey. The highest divorce rate was reported in Washington, D.C. with 29 per thousand.

The US rate has now fallen for the third consecutive year.

The report also found that the marriage rate for women aged 15 or older has increased to its highest level since 2009, with 32.3 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women in 2015.

Co-Director of the *National Center for Family & Marriage Research*, Wendy Manning, said: "The decline has stopped."

In England and Wales, divorce rates are also at their lowest levels for over 40 years.

The Christian Institute

France moves to ban Pro-Life websites

Pro-life websites in France could soon be banned after a Bill was passed in the National Assembly.

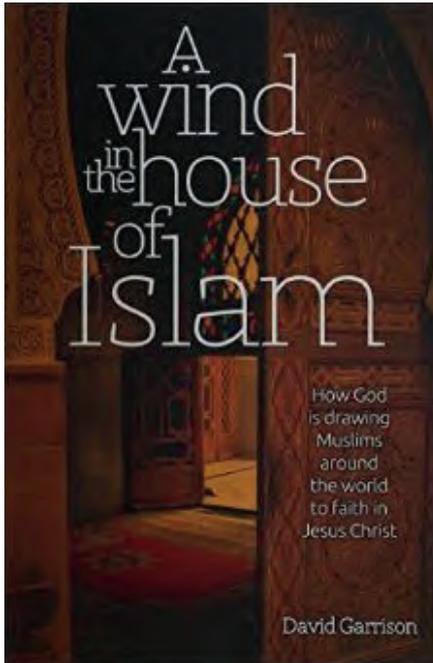
The "Digital Interference" Bill, approved after just one day of debate last week, carries a maximum prison sentence of up to two years and a fine of up to €30,000 for people who run sites which "exert psychological or moral pres-

continued on p17

A Wind in the House of Islam (How God is drawing Muslims around the world to faith in Jesus Christ)

by David Garrison, Publisher:
WIGTake Resources

Reviewed by Dirk J van Garderen



It all began with a 20 minute opportunity to do a 'quick read' of one of the books in our church library at Bucklands Beach. Randomly, or so it seemed, I picked up a little 302 p paperback entitled 'A Wind in the House of Islam.'

continued from p16

sure to discourage recourse to abortion".

The move has been heavily criticised by pro-life groups and political figures in the country.

Dr Joseph Meaney, the director of international coordination for Human Life International, slammed the Bill.

"We are in the realm of unrestricted pro-abortion propaganda and the most stringent censorship of free speech if it contradicts the view that abortion is a wonderful solution to crisis pregnancies", he said.

Dr Meaney added that even if the Bill should become law, it will be chal-

lenged in the courts.

The leader of the Republicans party group in the Senate, Bruno Retailleau, also criticised the Bill as "totally against freedom of expression".

Abortion is allowed on demand in France up to 12 weeks after conception and is funded by the state.

During the debate on the Bill, a member of the National Assembly said that it violated "the original intention" of the 1975 abortion law which encouraged seeking alternatives.

The Christian Institute

Three days later, thoroughly enriched and challenged, I find myself providing this brief review.

Ever wondered if God cares about the countless Muslims in this world? Given the current crises in the Middle East, the increasingly shrill cries for *Sharia Law*, *jihad*, the endless bombings and terrifying acts of terrorism, is God still there? What, if anything, is he doing? Has he rejected them?

David Garrison's, well-researched study is a genuine eye-opener. Time and again I had 'wow!' moments as I became aware of the 'big picture' as well as personal stories.

Garrison writes: 'A wind is blowing through the House of Islam. The House of Islam, *Dar al-Islam* in Arabic, is the name Muslims give to an invisible religious empire that stretches from West Africa to the Indonesian archipelago, compassing 49 nations and 1.6 billion Muslims. Dwarfing the size of any earthly kingdom, Islam directs the spiritual affairs of nearly a quarter of the world's population. But something is happening that is challenging the hold that Islam exercises over its adherents. Muslim movements to Jesus Christ are taking place in numbers we've never before seen.

For the sake of clarity and consistency, let's define a movement of Muslims to Christ to be at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptisms that occur over a two-decade period. Today, in more than 70 separate locations in 29 nations new movements of Muslim-background followers of Christ are taking place. Each of these movements has crossed the threshold of at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptized believers, all of whom have come to Christ over the past two decades. In some countries the numbers within these new movements has grown to tens of thousands.

Though the number of new Christ followers, between two and seven million, may be a statistical small drop in the vast sea of Islam, they are not insignificant...' (p5)

Sceptical? I was. Who? How? Where? Why? Garrison's study led him into what he calls the nine rooms of the house of Islam. These rooms: Indo-Malaysia, East Africa, North Africa, Eastern South Asia, Persian, Turkestan, West Africa, Western South Asia and Arab. The history and background of each 'room' is described – often an eye-opener in itself – as are the present tensions Muslims in each of these regions experience. Then Garrison shares some of the typical interviews he conducted as he travelled some 250,000 miles to each of these 'rooms'. Incredible stories of these Muslim believers (*Isai*) in *Isa* (Jesus) as Lord of their lives. What opened their hearts to Christ? What has happened to them as a result of becoming believers? Is it possible to be a follower of Christ in these cultures? Garrison's accounts are stirring to say the least.

The insights the author provides are often far from comfortable. For example, there is a lot of discussion on what constitutes a true conversion and how being a follower of Jesus expresses itself in the world of Islam. Some of the descriptions challenged my understanding of what defines a Christian. But such challenges are good and necessary and, above all, bring us face to face with the ongoing call to make disciples of all nations.

Read this book! Read it critically and analytically. It can be read personally and as a group, having 'Small Group Discussion- Discover for yourself' questions at the end of each chapter.

Garrison challenges his readers to do five things after reading this book: 1. Pray for Muslims. 2. Support outreach and ministries to Muslims. 3. Go to Muslims. 4. Minister to Muslims in our own com-

munity. 5. Share the gospel with Muslims. In a country like ours the presence of an ever-growing Muslim community presents a real challenge. If these communities continue to be isolated from

the rest of us, the situations recently experienced in London, Paris, Belgium and even Australia will also harden the dividing lines here in God's Own. Surely the one weapon that can address this is

the gospel of God's love to us in Christ. Who else in New Zealand is equipped, however poorly, to do this but we who call Christ our saviour and Lord?
Feb 2017



CBI New Zealand Newsletter February 2017

It is by the power of God's Word together with the Holy Spirit that people's lives are changed. Jesus Christ is the Word, the true light that gives light to everyone. "To all who receive Him, to those who believe in His name He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). This also includes the men and women in prison who are being called out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Thank you to the many people who support CBI in prayer and financially and to all the Instructors/Mentors who are faithfully marking lessons (some 4 a week) to encourage the students in the study of God's Word. We would love to hear from anyone who may be interested in being part of this ministry as an Instructor.

Here is some feedback we have had from Chaplains: "Thanks for all the good work you and your team are doing to change the lives of prisoners. I can assure you that all of the effort you are putting in for these men will have a long term positive effect on their lives. We continue to encourage more men to take up the CBI Courses." Another email expressed the following: "The men really appreciate the feedback from the facilitators (Instructors). Please pass this on to them from us in prison. Keep up the good work and God bless."

We are also very thankful to have Nina who has recently joined our office volunteers. She has been an assistant Chaplain in NZ prisons for many years.

It was also a special blessing to hear from one of our students last year asking if it would be possible for her to come to Hastings to meet us. Her mentor also travelled to Hastings for this special occasion. The student has never been in prison but her husband was and he encouraged her to enroll with CBI. This was in March 2008. She is so grateful for all the support and encouragement she has received throughout these years.

I would like to share the following student statistics with you reflecting the growth of CBI in NZ.

| | LESSONS PROCESSED | NEW ENROLMENTS |
|-----------|-------------------|----------------|
| JUNE | 156 | 40 |
| JULY | 145 | 34 |
| AUGUST | 211 | 50 |
| SEPTEMBER | 174 | 36 |
| OCTOBER | 179 | 35 |
| NOVEMBER | 195 | 47 |

Here are some student responses I would like to share with you. A GTB student wrote: "I find that the more lessons I do, I have more understanding of the Bible. I have never read the Bible but have read verses from the Bible and never really understood the true meanings of them. Now since I've joined up with CBI I have a better understanding of the verses I am reading from the Bible. Thank you."

After completing the Tier 1 Courses one student wrote: "Prison hasn't changed me. Jesus has changed me."

After completing the Survey of the Bible a student wrote: "I pray for all the CBI team who helped me on my journey. God bless you all. Thank you all so much. When I had times that were rough I read all your letters and it lifted me up. Thank you all so much. Thank you for all the help you have given me and prayer through all my hurt and pain. Coming to prison I woke up. I read the Bible and did these Bible Courses with CBI. My faith has become strong."

A student who completed Manga

Messiah and went on to GTB wrote: "I want to pray for all the people who run this program thank you so much. I have changed so much and it is showing as I've gained a low/medium class prisoner first time ever. [He was a member of the Black Power gang]. This means I can go from my high/medium part of jail to a more open part and have more time unlocked. So thank you for I know the Lord has done this. Amen. Heavenly Father in Jesus name keep me on this path as I am yours my Lord."

"Please pray for our growing group of followers in our unit. Our group meets every Sunday out in the exercise yard to discuss verses and share in fellowship. We now have 12 of us together which is fantastic. In God we trust and in His Son Christ Jesus we praise. I am enjoying these lessons and am also doing Christian poetry now. God bless."

"Thank you for your support CBI. I am so grateful for all your letters of encouragement helping me through my time to persevere and to stay strong."

After sending a follow up letter to a student we received this reply: "Thank you very much for getting back in touch with me. Thank you for not giving up on me. I have gained the support from an officer in another part of the prison to photocopy and hand out your study information and enrolment form so that other people may join this journey."

"I have enjoyed this Course (GTB) so much. Thanks to all the CBI Instructors that have marked my work and the encouragement letters I have received from you. It is such a blessing having your personal letters here in prison. I will never get rid of them ever. I look forward to the next Course. I pray for all of you at CBI to keep up the great work you do for me and other prisoners around NZ."

Please continue to pray for the ministry of CBI in the prisons and for those involved with the work of CBI in NZ. If you would like further information about Crossroad Bible Institute you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, PO Box 11005, HASTINGS 4158

Report of the South Island Ladies Fellowship 2017

This was held on Saturday the 4th of March at the Reformed Church of Nelson.

At 9 o'clock about 42 ladies arrived to get their name tags and enjoyed fellowship with each other in the hall. You can imagine the noise from all the conversations!

Then we went into the auditorium, where Marianne Draijer welcomed everyone and opened in prayer, after which we sang our Presbyterial Anthem.

We then listened to our first speaker Pastor Daniel Wilson.

The theme was 'Stop the Slide', living intentionally as Christians.

He started off with saying how nice it is to coast along, like on a bike free-wheeling downhill.

But at some stage we have to start peddling again to go back uphill. The same in our Christian walk, we have to work at it to stay focussed on Christ. How do we do this?

By making Bible reading a priority, a number of scripture passages were read to emphasize this point. And also praying consistently, because prayer is our life-blood. There are so many distractions in the world that pull us away from this focus. We are running the race of the Christian Life, to receive the prize at the end.

After a delicious morning tea, tasting a variety of muffins, we listened to both Pastor Daniel and also Raewyn Wilson,

about the Practical Specifics of the Christian Life, as a wife, as a mother, as a single person. There were many questions which were brought up and there was a good discussion.

It was good to learn more and to be encouraged in our faith and strengthened in our resolve to apply more zeal to be more Christlike and replace our bad habits with new obedience in Christ.

Lunch followed, with freshly baked bread, many salads and fruits, prepared by Elaine Borger

and four helpers.

After lunch a representative of each church present gave a report. We had ladies from the Reformed churches of:

Bishopdale, Cornwall St, Dovedale, Rangiora and Nelson. The Dunedin and Oamaru churches sent their apologies.

There was a 'Canvas Craft' in the hall in the afternoon, where we could make a wall hanging with a Bible text, using letters of different fonts and sizes.

For afternoon tea we had a 'Picnic in Isel Park'. The weather was beautiful, so it was nice to be outside..

In the evening about 23 of us enjoyed dinner at The Indian Café.

Elisabeth Vandenberg



Short Report of the Wellington Presbytery March 2017

The Wellington Presbytery met on the evening of the third of March so that delegates could attend the Church Polity Conference with guest speaker, the Rev. Jan DeGelder, the following day. The Presbytery meeting was opened with a devotion by the Rev. Aaron Warner on Haggai chapter one. This encouraged office bearers were to be diligent in building up their churches spiritually and numerically.

The Rev. Paul Archbald, on behalf of the Silverstream session, was given an opportunity to reflect on the manner in which questions are presented during church visitations. Some churches have

the practice of providing the church visitors with written answers to all the questions of the Church Visitation Questionnaire beforehand, so that during the meeting the visitors can focus on the more important questions. Several problems were identified with that approach. It does not do justice to the fact that all the questions have been carefully thought out and designed to be asked at the meeting. A certain amount of objectivity may be lost if the questioning becomes selective; with the result that one or more other important areas are overlooked. The Presbytery received this report for information with thanks.

Approval was given at this meeting to a proposal to place sessions on a roster for the spiritual oversight of youth camps run in the Wellington Presbytery.

The Presbytery heard that both Foxton and Masterton are still searching for an under-shepherd to serve their churches. In the meantime, both congregations have been blessed with the help of visiting ministers in the Reverends Jonker and DeGelder, respectively.

The Presbytery received letters from the Palmerston North session, including one from their New Plymouth elder, Mr James Cunningham, seeking 'in principal' support for the placement of a home missionary at New Plymouth. This was heartily approved by the delegates.

A request from the Masterton session for all the churches to assist with travel expenses for Rev Jan DeGelder's visit as speaker at the church polity conference was also approved.

The Moderator, the Rev. Ben McDonald, closed the meeting with a devotion and prayer.

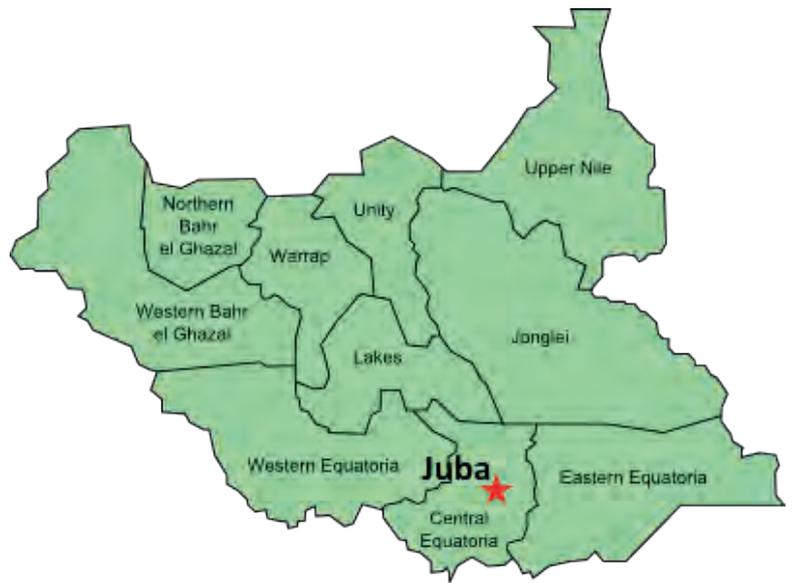
Hans Vaatstra, Reporter



Missions in focus

Emily Voschezang

Cush4Christ, dispelling the darkness



I didn't have much time to prepare. An urgent call went out in my denomination's magazine for a new teacher at our most demanding mission work, and they needed someone fast. Within a few weeks of reading that advertisement and talking to members of my foreign missions board, I was on a plane for the war torn country of South Sudan.

Nothing can prepare you for a move like that, but I was better positioned for the work than most people. I felt certain that my two years as a missionary teacher in Karamoja, Uganda – the frontier sister of the mission that runs Knox Theological College – had given me enough experience "roughing it" that South Sudan would be an easy adjustment. The mission board of my home denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), saw my previous work as excellent preparation for serving with the Cush4Christ mission and told me to be ready to hit the ground running.

South Sudan is no playground and I found that life as a missionary there was much harder than it had been in Karamoja. South Sudan has been racked by almost constant war from 1955 until its independence from Sudan in 2011, with the current South Sudanese civil war beginning in December 2013. An ancient Russian Antonov cargo plane landed me in the area of the country suffering from the most extreme levels of food insecurity. Even as we speak my dear friends and students in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state are now facing the highest rates of death by starvation of any region in the country, at about 30%, with the food crisis reaching catastrophic levels. Two million people across the country have been displaced, and many are living in camp conditions so horrible that aid workers say the Syrian camps are comfortable by comparison. The UN warns that South Sudan is on the brink of an absolute meltdown with the dire situation there being dubbed "the forgot-

ten crisis." South Sudan, they say, may soon fall into a Rwanda-like genocide. Although there has been no fighting so far in the area immediately surrounding the Cush4Christ mission, the effects of the war are obvious, and it is by no means an easy place to settle down.

The Cush4Christ mission is based in the village of Parot in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state. Many of the so-called "Lost Boys of Sudan" came from this area. The Lord has greatly blessed the small team of missionaries, who focus on church planting and pastoral training while also providing mercy ministries, a Christian radio station, and a Christian primary school. Since its inception in 2006, one year after the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War, Cush4Christ has watched the church in the surrounding area grow from a small group of believers to three large, established churches, fifteen mission churches and six fellowships, with over 2,000 people in attendance each Lord's Day. In June 2015 I became missionary number six, and really felt how significant a role one person can fill on such a small team with such a big vision!

Knowing the history of the area made me even more enthusiastic and ready to start my work as a Christian primary school teacher. I was truly going to a place with deep physical, emotional, educational, and most of all spiritual needs. The Cush4Christ mission founded Cush Christian School in 2012. The loss of consistent and quality education is one of the side effects of war, and in a region that has known almost nothing but war for decades, the literacy rate in the Cush4Christ area is about 21%. Knowing that an ability to read and understand Scripture is essential to the growth of the church, the mission decided to open a distinctively Christian primary school. Today the school has over 100 students. Students in the younger grades learn to read and write in both English and Dinka. In the upper grades they continue to read the Bible in Dinka, but do all their other work in English. The top students are now completing American 8th grade material in English, which is an incredible accomplishment! Cush Christian School has become well known in the region for providing the highest quality education. The students at CCS *love* to learn, and they liked to joke that they'd keep working till midnight if we'd let them sleep in the school!

My mornings were spent co-teaching conversational English with an inex-



Students at Cush Christian School.

perienced Dinka teacher named Kuan Kuan, and in the afternoons I joined two of my fellow missionaries in overseeing about 20 advanced students, who worked their way through self-teaching workbooks called "PACES." The mornings were both challenging and an awful lot of fun. I found myself in a classroom with about thirty Dinka children with no previous English instruction. Kuan's English was fair but not great, and I helped him plan and teach each lesson. I had worked regularly with Karimojong children in Uganda and wasn't too daunted by the language barrier. The children couldn't pronounce Emily,



(above) View of Emily's little house.

(below) Emily with the church ladies who gave her the Dinka name – Aluel Kur.

so they gave me a Dinka name, Aluel Kur. I loved it!

I still remember my favourite day early on at the school. It promised to be another blisteringly hot morning as I pulled worksheets and picture books from my teaching bag. Kuan had fallen ill the night before, and that day I'd be teaching on my own for the first time. Although I'd had a few weeks of daily, hour long Dinka language lessons, I wasn't what you'd call conversational, and the thought of miming my way through the next four hours was daunting.

My students were scheduled to begin a unit on the different rooms in a house. Our curriculum was designed for African students, but this lesson was obviously aimed at city kids! This, of all lessons,

would be much easier with a translator. Almost none of my students had ever been inside a house. Every single one of them lived in a one-room mud hut with a thatched roof.

The students wiggled and whispered, and a few had naughty grins. It seems to be a universal truth that students around the world love to take advantage of unprepared teachers! I was determined not to let the class get out of hand and fall into chaos. I motioned broadly across the classroom. "This is our home," I said in Dinka. "Come with me." All thirty students jumped out of their seats and followed me to one corner.

"This is the *living room*." I motioned for them to sit and racked my brain for the correct Dinka words and grammar. "I drink tea and talk to my friends in the *living room*." I pretended to take a sip and gab away like an old pal with one of my littlest students, Ngor, who just stared back at me, dumbstruck. The class burst out laughing. We hopped up and rushed to the next corner of the room. "This is the *kitchen*," I said in English. Again I scrambled for the Dinka words I needed. "I was dishes and I make *quin* and *kadang* in the kitchen." The students roared with laughter as I pretended to pound sorghum flour into the Play-Doh-like *quin* that was the staple of their diet. To be honest, I couldn't make *quin* if my life depended on it, and they knew it!

For the rest of the morning, as different classes of children came in and out of the room, we played raucous games of charades and "guess what Miss Aluel Kur might be trying to say in Dinka!" To my amazement, the students saw my vulnerability as I bravely stumbled through their language, and they met me halfway,



using more English than ever before. I was thrilled to hear them still practicing their new English words as they filtered out of the schoolyard at the end of the day. That day, my first day of teaching all on my own, laughing and running around the room with my kids, was a highlight of my time in South Sudan.

Yet the most significant and satisfying part of my work was the Christian counselling and discipleship I was able to provide to the English-speaking advanced students, particularly a group of seven teenage girls. From helping them through Scripture memory challenges, to talking openly about their fears of becoming an old man's third wife, I got to know my students deeply. As the girls sat under the tree outside my little one-room brick house on the mission, dropping biscuits into their tea to make the sickly sweet sludge they loved, we'd dive into the characteristics of the women of the Bible, and I soon found that these teenage girls were living out their very real and personal faith in a way that humbled and inspired me. Without being asked, they regularly cared for a blind, neglected elderly woman who lived alone in squalor. They saved the money they made as teaching assistants to help poorer families in the church. They read the Bible ravenously, and were full of honest questions. They prayed for the needs around them with passion and a child-like trust that God would answer. They challenged me, and I feel certain that with these young women growing into wives, mothers and deeply involved members of local churches, the Christian faith will have a firm foundation in the generations to come.

Despite my love for my work at the school and my relationships with "my girls", my time in South Sudan was necessarily cut short. Instead of the initial plan to stay for 18 months, I had to make the difficult decision to leave after five months because of constant, severe insomnia and an overwhelming sense of anxiety and panic that had gradually crept up on me. For some reason I simply wasn't able to handle the intensity of the situation there, and my health rapidly declined. However, I have no regrets about going to South Sudan. I am thrilled to be able to say with confidence that God

is truly fulfilling the promise He made through David in Psalm 68:31: "Cush will stretch out her hands to God." The original readers and listeners would have felt the full force of that statement. God proclaims that He is not only the God of Israel, but the God of all peoples on earth. In Isaiah 18, the remote people of



(top right) The church of Parot.

(below right) church dinner where the ladies share a meal of quin and kadang.

Cush – modern Sudan, northern South Sudan, and part of Ethiopia – are described as “a people tall and smooth... a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering.” Even the proud and mighty Dinka tribe, whose name for themselves, *monyjang*, means “men of men,” have stretched out their hands to God in submission, in praise, in prayer. Be encouraged! God’s kingdom is going forth powerfully, even in the darkest places on earth.

Emily Voschezang grew up in Rochester, New York, USA and spent two and a half years as a missionary in East Africa. She’s now happily married to a Kiwi and a member of the Pukekohe Reformed Church.



(top left) The Dinka language has over 400 words related to cattle, their prized possession.

(top right) Typical dwellings in the local area.

(below left) Emily’s former teammates at Cush4Christ.

(below right) Aerial shot of South Sudan.