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CELEBRATING  
**God's**  
FAITHFULNESS  
70 years  
and  
beyond



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# Editorial

"Great and marvelous are Your works,  
Lord God Almighty!  
Just and true are Your ways,  
O King of the saints!  
Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?  
For You alone are holy.  
For all nations shall come and worship before You,  
For Your judgments have been manifested." (Rev. 15:3-4 NKJV)

It is always appropriate for the saints to praise our God for Who He is, and for the great things that He has done, especially the great things He has done in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name". (Ps 103:1)

This year marks the 70th year since the formation of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Happy Anniversary RCNZ! But more than that, this relatively short period of time is a celebration of the faithfulness of our God, not only in the past 70 years, but since the beginning of time. The Scriptures as a whole celebrate and make much of the LORD and His mercy and grace toward his creatures – rebellious creatures at that. And God made that known when, in the fullness of time, He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. So, there is much to celebrate.

In the scheme of history, 70 years is, well, a drop in the bucket. But in the lives of His people it marks nearly three generations who may recount the glorious things that our God has done.

Those who are our forebears in the faith came out from the Netherlands to a foreign land in hope of a better life after WWII. They wanted to make a contribution to this new home and so joined churches which they thought would become their new spiritual homes. It wasn't long before it became quite apparent that these churches were not according to the expectations of these new immigrants, especially when they became more familiar with the English language. It seemed that they could not sing the LORD's songs in a foreign land – and so there were moves to start a church that would represent all that they held dear and understood to be biblical and confessional.

Help came from a variety of churches around the world which have helped to mould the RCNZ into what it is today. In our early days our churches felt the impact of the CRCNA and OPC in the USA. Early on we adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith along with the Three Forms of Unity (some just referred to them as the Four Forms of Unity). The broader courts of the church were known as Presbytery rather than Classis.

Over the last couple of decades, we have become sisters with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, United Reformed Churches and more recently the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

It is evident that over the years we have sought to be faithful to our God, however weak that may have been. However, by God's grace let us seek to be faithful to our calling and continue to bear witness to His faithfulness into the future.

*SOLI DEO GLORIA!*

Many thanks to all our contributors who bring us snapshots of our church history over the last 70 years. We have had more than anticipated, so our anniversary issue continues into the August issue.

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.

# Tasman's Legacy — the Reformed Churches

HANK SCHOUTEN



Since the reformation of the sixteenth century, when rebellion against Catholic rule was the rallying cause of the Dutch Republic, religious difference has been the basis for forming most of its major institutions.

Enmity and division ran so deep that the whole society was structured along sectarian lines. Each church fostered its own organisations running in parallel, but separate from, those of the rival denomination. Schools, hospitals, trade unions, professional guilds, farmer groups, newspapers, broadcasters and political parties all ran on sectarian lines.

Adherents to one church patronised businesses operated by people of the same denomination – a child needing glasses would go to the catholic or protestant

optometrist, householders would pick plumbers or carpenters with the right religious credentials and customers preferred to patronise the shop keeper who went to the same church.

While the power and influence of the churches has crumbled since the Second World War, most Dutch immigrants were born and brought up in this old divided sectarian society. Even their migration to New Zealand was promoted in the main by church-run immigration organisations.

Many have since let their religious affiliations lapse, but it was hardly surprising that the Dutch brought their convictions with them and have put their own stamp on New Zealand religious life.

A distinctive Dutch religious institution which grew amid the migrant community

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*The congregation out the back of St James Presbyterian Church, Dunedin, after a service conducted by Rev Everts.*

*This article is an excerpt from a book entitled "Tasman's Legacy" by Hank Schouten, and can be found on the NetherlaNZ Foundation.*

*Used with permission.*

[www.netherlandsfoundation.org.nz/dutch-connections/](http://www.netherlandsfoundation.org.nz/dutch-connections/)





*The churches played a big role in Sponsoring migrants. Dick Vanderpyl (left), Reformed Church treasurer and synod clerk for many years, was on hand at Auckland Railway Station for the Arrival of Mies and Arie Koelet after their all-night journey from Wellington in 1957.*

was the Reformed Church. It was started locally to meet the particular religious needs of the Protestant migrants, but the deliberate decision was made very early to make it open to the wider New Zealand community. More than 40 years later, it is still overwhelmingly a Dutch church, albeit with English language services. This is a label which has church members bristling, but a Dutch cultural anthropologist writing his thesis in 1986 described it accurately as a Dutch immigrants' church, an island on an island.

When they arrived it was assumed that Dutch Protestants would naturally find a home in the local Presbyterian churches, and many of them did. But a small devout band, predominantly from the stricter Gereformeerde (Re-reformed) congregations, were disappointed to find that local ministers lacked the fiery commitment they expected. Mealy-mouthed services in a language they did not understand did not help either.

Word of dissatisfaction got back to the Netherlands and Dutch clergyman Dr H Holtrop was sent out in 1951 to assess the situation. He reported that the Presbyterian Church suffered a general lack of evangelic fervour and advised the small groups of like-minded migrants to form their own church.

In Auckland, a group led by Bill van Rij maintained contact with the church in the Netherlands and communicated with fellow Dutch protestants in Australia, who established their own Reformed Churches in late 1951.

The first treasurer of the group was Dick Vanderpyl, a young bachelor who coincidentally travelled out on the Groote Beer with Dr Holtrop. Vanderpyl originally joined the Parnell Presbyterian Church and

was impressed with the fellowship, but when he understood English better, he began to feel the sermons were not as good as he had been used to.

Opinion was divided on whether a local church should be formed. Vanderpyl, who later served as synod Clerk and treasurer of the Reformed Church for many years, initially favoured staying with the Presbyterians. He had seen the pain of schisms in the Netherlands and he also argued the formation of a Dutch church would hinder assimilation in New Zealand. It was even suggested that a separate church could jeopardise continued migration. He urged it was better to stay within the Presbyterian Church and try to change it from within.

"The possibility of establishing a new church was considered and rejected by many," Vanderpyl says. "There was a real hesitancy about such a step, most of us were young and unmarried and were keen to be absorbed into the newly chosen society. But again and again the missing link of the orthodoxy for faith ... forced us back to square one."

Eventually it was decided to call a minister and seek his guidance, a move that effectively set the church in motion. Rev W Deenik toured the country, speaking to the various small groups, meeting with Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist clergymen and studying their teachings. Deenik teamed up with Rev E Dykstra, who had been called to Wellington, and in February 1953 a statement was drawn up saying why the Reformed Church should be established. The following month Deenik presided over the meeting that formed the first congregation in Christchurch. Auckland and Wellington followed soon after.

The establishment of the Reformed Church was a disappointment to the Presbyterian Church, which had set up a special ministry in 1950, Rev W van Wyngen had come out to provide a link between settlers and the church and other ministers, including Pieter de Bres, had followed soon after.

Proceedings of the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1953 record the receipt of letters and a statement from Revs Deenik, Dykstra and Scarrow. The assembly expressed its regret that settlers of the Re-reformed Church tradition had not been able to see their way to worship within the fellowship of the Presbyterian Church. "We are deeply sorry that the traditional differences which have existed in Holland are to be continued in New Zealand."

The five-page statement from the three ministers said the principal reason for establishing the Reformed Church was that they were unable to find a church which faithfully retained the scriptural confessions of the Calvinist Reformation.

A nationwide Reformed Church organisation was quickly cemented in place, with the first national synod in Wellington held just four months after the first congregations were formed.

Pieter and Elizabeth Wierenga provided the venue for that meeting, it was the front room of their flat in Wilson Street, Newtown.

It had just been vacated by another couple, they had a week to clean it up for the meeting that was to confirm the establishment of one of the most cohesive Dutch groups in New Zealand.

The Wierenga's were brought up in Reformed Churches at the heart of Bierum and Godlinze, two small towns in Groningen, close to the German border. Their partially subsidised migration was arranged through the church agency, the voyage on the Sibajak began in mid-September, 1952, and they arrived exactly six weeks later on November 2.

There was a Reformed Church minister on the boat and they attended his services, but in Wellington they had no idea which church they should attend. They had other

pressing problems of making a new start – job, learning English and finding suitable accommodation – and Elizabeth was pregnant with her first child.

"For the first month we didn't go to church at all," Pieter Wierenga says. "We could have gone to the Presbyterian Church but we did not know what Presbyterian meant."

Other young migrants were in the same position, among them the sons of Dominee (Rev) Euwe Dykstra.

"We had a fair idea that some of the Presbyterians were quite liberal," Wierenga says, "so the decision was made that in the meantime we should stay out of it and find out some more. We were looking for a leader and Deenik was in Auckland, so that was no use to us. None of us had much of an education – we were all pretty good tradesmen, but that was it. The Dykstra boys decided that we should get their dad out here.

"When Dykstra came out he met the Presbyterian ministers. He found the Presbyterians gave their ministers authority to teach things that were unbiblical. There was nothing to stop less strict ministers baptising children of parents who were not prepared to make a commitment to the church. That does away with the meaning of baptism as people are promising to bring their children up with biblical teaching.

"There were seeds there of what Lloyd Geering was teaching. Geering who was teaching at Knox College was later tried but let off on charges of heresy for denying the resurrection.

"We had services in Dutch in the beginning but that was not for long. Everybody realised that if we wanted to make an impact we should do away with Dutch as soon as possible. Our idea was not to have a Dutch church but to have a church with a sound Reformed biblical base. The hope was that other people not happy with the Presbyterian Church would see that and join as well, but that never really happened.

"First of all Rev Dykstra had to learn English. He had schoolbook English but he was not fluent. We first started singing in English, using hymnbooks from the Reformed Church in the United States – one of the boys had an English girlfriend and she thought it was terrible. Then we had one service in Dutch and one in English."

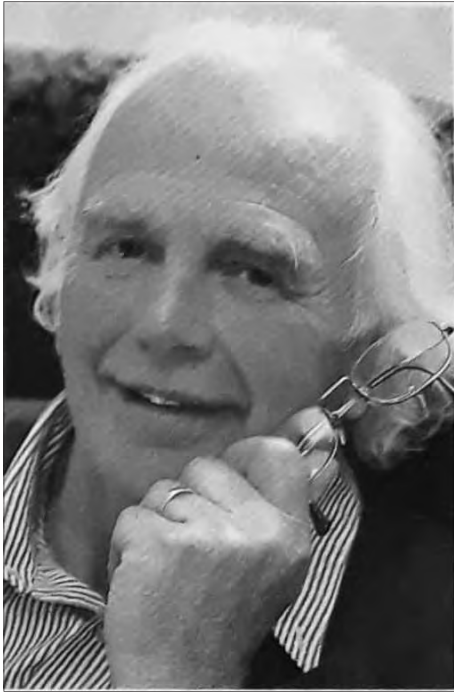
The first services were held in the Baptist Church in Boulcott Street but after about six months relations with the Baptists

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*Presbyterian church service in Upper Hutt for the Dutch provided by Rev Pieter de Bres, 1957. Photo by Jan Fijn.*







*Pieter Wierenga – he and his wife gave up their front room to provide the venue for the first Reformed Church synod.*

*Below: Wellington's Reformed congregation posing after a service at the Congregational Church in Cambridge Terrace.*

*Below right: The Wierenga family and friends at Island Bay on the way to afternoon church in their little red Austin truck.*

became strained. The Baptists were against smoking but many of the Reformed congregation were smokers and lit up as soon as they were outside. Services shifted to the brick Congregational Church in Cambridge Terrace, where they continued to be held until 1970, when the congregation bought an old church in Brooklyn.

The church became a magnet for the Dutch, its pull was strong enough to submerge traditional differences between the separate strands of protestantism which seemed to matter less in New Zealand.

It became a place where the new immigrants could meet, compare their experiences and above all exercise their native tongue. It also provided a valuable support network both for the men and women, all of whom were struggling to make their way, coping with home-sickness.

As Wierenga describes it, "there was more to pull us together than divide us." But 40 years later the different strands are still there. "I can still point them out and they pull us up from time to time – they are good watchdogs for the purity of worship."

Rev Dykstra was a good preacher and leader of a young congregation with equally young and inexperienced elders, but the minister belonged to the old tradition – he was a respected elder figure who stood above rather than among his church members.

After five years, Dykstra was encouraged to look for a new call and the church took on Rev Scarrow, who had left the Presbyterian Church in Auckland, disgusted with a church ruling which allowed members to become Freemasons. Scarrow, a former bushman and wrestler, was a tall, powerful man with a talent for preaching to children. His specialty was drawing simple stick figures on large sheets of white paper to illustrate

stories from the Bible. This was also ideal for the Dutch, who were still struggling with their English, but for the purists in the church there was not enough meat in his services.

A younger firebrand was next – Arent de Graaf a highly energetic man with a red Volkswagen emblazoned with the words "Jesus Saves". The story goes that he was always in a hurry – once when stopped by a traffic officer and asked to explain his speeding he replied "The Kingdom of God is always in a hurry." Later a number of American ministers were called by various Reformed congregations, but more recently ministers have come either from Australia or from within the New Zealand congregations.

The church remains a strongly conservative element in the Dutch community and some members have been associated with the Christian Heritage Party, a political group formed by people who see a need for a Christian philosophical base in politics. The party was modelled on a similar party with a high migrant involvement in Canada, and was very active in opposition to homosexual law reform. The formation of a Christian party also echoes the party political system in the Netherlands.

Members of the Reformed Church have also been very active in the formation of Christian schools in Auckland, Hamilton, Hastings, Masterton, Carterton, Silverstream, Wainuiomata, Christchurch and Dunedin. Nel van t'Wot, the first principal at Silverstream Christian School and now principal of Liberton Christian School in Dunedin, says their underlying philosophy is to inject Christianity into the curriculum so that religion is not regarded as separate from the rest of life.

A stalwart of the Reformed Church in



Christchurch is Aalt Verkerk. Verkerk, whose meat products have become a household name in New Zealand, was a signatory to the formation of the first congregation in 1958. It had only 23 families who met in hired halls. Services were initially held in Dutch, the switch took place as the congregation became more familiar with English. Now Christchurch has two reformed

churches with a combined congregation of about 600.

The Reformed Church is marked by the conservatism and devotion of its membership. Verkerk, an office holder in the church since 1958, epitomises this, each week writing a new biblical text on a blackboard in his shop and forbidding any work to be done on the Sabbath. His life

is centred around his religious beliefs and he cites a text about Abraham going to a new land. The text, which was read when he took his confession of faith, said Abraham first built an altar, put up a tent and then dug a trench for his cattle to drink from. Verkerk interprets this as the basis for his own priorities: church, family and work – there is no room for anything else.

## Recollections of the past

The late Mr. and Mrs. Jan and Corrie Vos had been our sponsors since the days we were set to emigrate to New Zealand. Our arrival in Wellington on the 8th of March, 1962 on the SS Zuiderkruis was the beginning of a new and adventurous life. On that beautiful morning, Port Nicholson literally reflected the beauty of the harbour basin and its surrounding hills with the calmness of a millpond and an eerie quietness. Of course, we got to know the 'real' Wellington and its characteristic gales later on, but that's another story.

After berthing and the ensuing formalities dealt with, we were greeted by Messrs. Jan Vos, Warner Ceelen, and possibly Jaap van Selm, whose truck was used later that day to transport our 6 cubic m. wooden container to our first 'home' in New Zealand.

Riding with Mr. Vos's 2½-ton flat-deck Bedford milk truck, down Adelaide Road, past the huge Millard stand of Athletic Park we arrived at 12 Freeling Street in Island Bay. Incidentally, my father also joined the other six milkmen already in the Wellington congregation later in the year. Apparently, there was a good living to be made in the milk-delivery business.

As a 14-year-old, seeing all those ancient-looking shops with their associated verandas at the front resting on poles on the edge of the footpath, I mischievously suggested that the poles were there for tying up the horses. Not sure if it was appreciated! Everything looked so old, including the numerous old jalopies, not worthy of the name car, as per my European standards, not to speak of my mother's opinion about NZ fashion of the day.

However, what I want to bring into focus, is the generosity of the congregation

of the Reformed Church of Wellington. To my mother's astonishment, and probably the children's as well, was the fully-stocked kitchen cupboards with groceries, – enough to feed this migrant family of six, for about two weeks. This was done for every family that lived there, and perhaps even for every migrant family, I do not remember.

I believe my father was given 10 pounds (NZ currency at the time), called "landing money/landingsgeld" on arrival, and that was all we owned, apart from the furniture and personal belongings that were unpacked later that day. But this was the lot of most early migrants, judging from the many stories I have heard over the years. So, not having to buy groceries for the first two weeks was literally a God-send.

The house at 12 Freeling Street was owned by the church and was known as the sponsor house. It had been divided down the middle, each half deemed to be large enough for a family of... The six Jongepiers would be joined by the soon-to-arrive Holtslag family of five three weeks later. A full house, one might say!

Our two families had already been friends in the Netherlands for years in Amersfoort, so knew each other well. Too much of a good thing? Well, perhaps, but we moved to a larger home in Houghton Bay, with the friendship of the two families still firmly intact.

My wife Marian and I have formed very strong bonds with John Holstlag and his lovely wife Maria over the years, and still to this day. A greatly valued friendship!

Currently, we continue to be members and serve the Lord, in the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, but also resided in Christchurch and Masterton in years gone by. God has blessed us abundantly with our many years in this beautiful and free country. We look forward to the anticipated commemorative celebrations.

*To Him be the glory,  
Andre and Marian Jongepier*

## Dear Brothers and Sisters in New Zealand

Congratulations on celebrating 70 years of God's faithfulness to his children who worship in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand! We have fond memories of our years with you from 1980-1984 when we were on loan from the Christian Reformed Church of North America. When people ask us in our retirement, which church was our favourite, we always reply, Christchurch, New Zealand. The conversation which follows always brings back memories of many saints who have now gone to be with Christ! We continue to receive your weekly newsletter to this day! I, Paul, also remember my frequent weekends spent in Balclutha, Dunedin, and Oamaru where I was also privileged to present the good news of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. May God continue to bless you as you minister in Christ's name for years to come.

On a more personal note, we are now living in Victoria, British Columbia where we share a home with our daughter Andrea and family. Our daughter Sara and family live in the USA. They are all well and faithful in their church communities.

*Yours in Christ,  
Paul and Linda Stadt*

# After seventy years ... what now?



Some of the oldest buildings  
throughout the RCNZ.

Below: Building of the  
Wellington Reformed Church.

(Opposite): Buildings of the  
Hamilton, Dunedin and  
Oamaru Reformed Churches.

In 1993 our churches in New Zealand celebrated and gave thanks for our 40th anniversary. The late Dirk G. Vanderpyl's 'Trust and Obey'<sup>1</sup> was subsequently published and widely distributed. His book explored the reasons and vision for the establishment of yet another Christian denomination in New Zealand. In his introduction, Vanderpyl wrote,

*'The Reformed Churches of New Zealand are forty years old now. In the Bible forty years represent a generation. Those of the 'first hour' are now grey and, before long, will also 'be gathered to their fathers.' (Judges 2.10) Another generation has risen and it is therefore good for us to reflect upon our history. It is good for us to think about what made us separate from the mainstream of Christianity in this land and refuse to join the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.'*<sup>2</sup>

That weighty tome (some 600 pages!) is and remains good and necessary reading. After all, ignorance of the past dooms us to repeat the pitfalls our fathers dug and fell into. Therefore, if you are not familiar with this book, get hold of a copy. Take up and read!

Vanderpyl explains (and justifies) *who* we believe ourselves to be as confessional Reformed churches. This is something all too easily lost sight of today. It takes great pains to explain *why*, before God and conscience bound, we became a separate denomination in 1953. It tells the story, warts and all, of *what* has happened and been achieved during those years.

In the summary and conclusions, Vanderpyl issued a challenge:

*'But it [our journey] must not end there. The institution of Reformed Churches must not be for our own self-preservation and gratification. Our churches should at all times (as a recent Synod affirmed as our priority number one) be a means of the spreading of the Gospel in the context of the Reformed Faith that was once for all delivered to the Saints of old.'*

*Not to us, not to us  
But to your Name be the Glory,  
Because of your love and  
faithfulness.*

*(Psalm 115.1)*

***So help us God!*<sup>3</sup>**

Thirty years on, as an insider for the past 45 years, I have asked myself, before God and before our nation, have we indeed become the Reformed Churches **of New Zealand**? That calling and task is necessarily unfinished. Therefore, what now and what next?

## **Remaining faithful to Scripture and Confessions.**

In terms of maintaining our confessional integrity, 'sticking to the rails no matter what', we have, I believe, remained





solidly 'on track'. Praise and thanks be to God! Our churches and their assemblies have remained utterly committed to upholding and maintaining our reformed witness and character. Our creeds and confessions, pointing us to the Bible as God's inspired, inerrant word, have remained the compass whose direction we have striven to maintain in a church orderly manner. That fact is not a boast, but rather an expression of humble praise and thanksgiving to God's faithfulness and mercy. I wholeheartedly believe that our commitment to be a Bible-based, Bible-believing church has remained central and constant.

Thus God, by means of his Word and Spirit has enabled us to remain committed to teaching the whole counsel of God. Our corporate worship, in particular the preaching, has striven to remain Christ focused and centred. We have, by and large, sought to teach sound biblical (therefore reformed!) doctrine in our second services and through ongoing catechetical instruction to our young people. I mention these features because they have been sadly lacking in nearly every other denomination in New Zealand. To compromise in teaching, explaining and maintaining our reformed identity will have tragic consequences indeed. We have and must continue to maintain our distinctive reformed identity.

### **Our responsibility to the wider body of Christ in New Zealand**

However, faithful submission to God's inerrant Word and confessional integrity is only part of the reason for our existence as a separate denomination here in New Zealand. Christ's command to be salt and light is not just a call to us as individuals, but also us as a federation of churches. Self-isolation as a denomination, keeping ourselves unpolluted by means of mile-high walls is never an option. Salt isn't meant simply to preserve itself. Light isn't meant to be kept under a bushel.

Therefore the question: what have we done to be salt and light these past thirty years?

It has always been a hundred times easier to split a church and create a new denomination than it is to reunify it. Christ's high-priestly prayer in John 17 never ceases to challenge us. Remember these words? The Lord prayed '...that they (those who will believe in me) may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, **so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**' [John 17.21]

When the RCNZ was established in 1953 our founding fathers were convinced that there was no New Zealand church to join. Driven by necessity we went out on our own. Other Christians in New Zealand, regarding us as foreign and branding us as a 'Dutch Church', let us go our own way. We, in spite of all our efforts to assimilate and be a New Zealand church, were not really accepted as such. Being seen and heard as a Bible-believing, confessional Reformed [Presbyterian] Church was trumped by our foreignness. We were Dutch Reformed – not really Kiwi.

After 70 years, the label 'Dutch' is not so prominent anymore. Thankfully, the question I was once asked regularly, 'Do you have to be Dutch to join your church?' is a thing of the past. So what about our testimony to New Zealand Christianity? Where and how?

Some years ago, when I was doing some part time teaching at the then Bible College of New Zealand (Laidlaw today), a friend and colleague described the reformed faith as 'the best kept secret in New Zealand.' True, that 'secret' has started to be revealed as a result of many (broadly) reformed voices in the United States – voices that are also being heard here. However, it seems to me that our churches have been content to let others blow the reformed trumpet while we do our own thing in our small corner. We have lacked any real focus on addressing and, where possible, having formal input and witness to the wider Christian community.

The RCNZ's founding pastor, the Rev J W Deenick, in a letter dated 1953, written under the heading, **'Why did we establish a Reformed Church?'** pointed out, 'We sincerely hope and pray that those New Zealand Protestant Churches that have the same confessions as we have but fail to teach accordingly, will wake up and return to the Biblical teaching and discipline, which was originally their practice. **If this would happen, we would be able to associate ourselves with those Churches and consequently there would be no reason left to maintain our newly formed denomination.**'<sup>4</sup>

Did any churches 'wake up'? What have we done to wake them up? What did we do when they did?

### **Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.**

Some 20 years ago, Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand was established. These folks were driven to separate from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, New

Zealand. Like us, they wanted to be true to the Westminster Confession of Faith. They define themselves as follows: *'The constitution of the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand which is subject to and subordinate to the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Book of Church order...'*<sup>5</sup>

Isn't that almost exactly where we as a denomination take our stand? On the day the Grace Presbyterian was officially established, I was invited to be present and speak on behalf of the Bucklands Beach congregation and the RCNZ. The event took place at Manurewa and the Rev Peter Boyd listed eight reasons for their establishment as a new denomination. What struck me with the force of a sledgehammer blow was that these were exactly the same reasons the RCNZ believed itself called to form a new denomination in 1953! So I, admittedly somewhat inappropriately, asked them, 'Why are we separate brothers?' The Grace leadership, for a number of reasons, wanted to have and maintain their own identity and not be swallowed up in the larger and more established RCNZ. However, their reluctance has surely been



matched by ours. Our churches have hardly gone out of our way to reach out and strive to do what it takes to start a meaningful relationship with them either!

We have seen a significant group of churches 'wake up and return to ... Biblical teaching and discipline.' We did promise that 'if this would happen, we would be able to associate ourselves' with them.

Isn't it time to revisit our original vision and begin doing what our founding fathers longed for? Wouldn't it be a testimony to our belonging to and being part of Aotearoa?

### Input into the wider Christian community

The past 30 or so years have seen the deep and wide impact of the reformed faith in North America. Influential speakers and authors have been used by God. In Australasia most evangelical theological colleges and seminaries are broadly and overtly reformed. That's something to be thankful for. But what contribution have and could we as Reformed Churches of New Zealand be making?

In recent years a number of Anglican congregations, folks who separated themselves from the broader Anglican Church in New Zealand, have been established, especially in Auckland and Christchurch. The 39 Articles to which these churches are committed are fundamentally reformed! Do we have something to contribute? Have we tested and tried to do so? I point to John Calvin who, back in 1552, wrote a letter to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer<sup>6</sup> in England. In it Calvin laments that the body of Christ 'lies bleeding' and that he is willing, 'with pleasure to cross ten seas' to attend a church conference Cranmer was organising. Calvin adds, 'It must be counted among the worst evils of our epoch that the churches are thus separated from one another.'<sup>7</sup>

Calvin saw that as churches we need to reach out to one another. I am not advocating uniting with these brethren, but setting up a platform or means to meet, encourage and help each other is an imperative as members of Christ's body. There are often conferences, speakers and special courses from which all of us could benefit and demonstrate a real expression of mutual respect as fellow members of Christ's body. For example, should there be a meaningful point of contact between our churches where, at the very least, we could inform and invite each other to opportunities to

learn and to share? We have much to offer theologically and in our teaching material. Establishing a meaningful relationship act with them and other Bible-believing, evangelical churches is as much a God-given task as is outreach to unbelieving NZ.

### Concluding comments

Surely part of our mandate as RCNZ is reaching out to and doing everything we can to work with and alongside fellow churches who have a vision and confessional commitment similar (though not necessarily identical) with our own? At age 70 this remains a task unfinished.

What stands out are at least two challenges that we need to work on:

1. Genuine dialogue with the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. Let us do what, in Christ and for his glory, we can to reach out.
2. A national platform for dialogue and sharing with fellow reformed believers needs to be established. Isn't it high time we, at the very least, follow the example of our Reformed and Presbyterian brethren in North America and form something similar to NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches)? This is in order to get to know, support and unite in proclaiming the reformed faith here in Aotearoa.

### References

- 1 D.G. Vanderpyl, Trust and Obey (National Publication Committee, RCNZ, 1994)
- 2 *Ibid*, p X,
- 3 *Ibid* p 590
- 4 This letter was published in 1953. The full text is available in *Trust and Obey*, p71 Emphasis mine.
- 5 Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand Book of Church Order and Missions Handbook [2011] p 20
- 6 Theodore Beza: The Life of Calvin, Letter XVII: Calvin to Cranmer.
- 7 For an excellent article about Calvin's thoughts on church unity, see J.H. van Wyk, *To cross ten seas: Calvin on the unity of the church ... a more responsible ecclesiology* [2010].

*Mr Dirk J van Garderen is an emeritus minister and a member of the Bishopdale Reformed Church.*



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- E-mail: [wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au](mailto:wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au)
- Address: PO Box 89, Launceston 7250, Tasmania, Australia.

For more information, contact the Principal, Mr Daniel Coote

- E-mail: [cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au](mailto:cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au)

# Personal reflections on 70 years of the RCNZ

JOHN A HAVERLAND

I am a son of one of the many couples who came from the Netherlands in the early 1950's and were instrumental in founding the Reformed Churches of New Zealand 70 years ago. What follows are my personal reflections on my parents, my own life, and this denomination, which I love and appreciate.

My parents, Gerard and Johanna Haverland, arrived from the Netherlands by ship in 1952. At that time many young people left the Netherlands because of the shortage of housing and the lack of opportunities in the post war years. The NZ government offered single young Dutch men and women an assisted passage by boat. In return for their passage they were bonded to work for the NZ government for two years. My parents married in December 1952, very soon after their arrival in Christchurch. I was born five years later, followed over the next eight years by my siblings Michele, Ron and Gary who, with their families, are all members of various Reformed churches in NZ.

The Reformed church of Christchurch was instituted in March 1953 and my parents joined in April. The first minister was Rev Boelens from the Netherlands who arrived in May 1954. He was followed in 1963 by Rev van der Schaaf who came from Perth. He was 52 but from my viewpoint as a six year old he seemed very old! Sadly he died in January 1969 at the age of 58 from throat cancer. In mid 1969 he was followed by Rev Bill Wiersma who served for ten years. Towards the end of his ministry the congregation had grown to over 500 members and the Cornwall Street church was packed every Sunday. The session began to think about establishing a daughter church and called Rev Dirk van Garderen and his family from Australia to be the pastor. They arrived in January 1978.

My father was very involved in the Christchurch congregation and served as an elder for many years, beginning already in his mid 20s. He recalled those early days and the long discussions in the session and

at synod about the Church Order and the confessions. He acknowledged that all the elders were young and inexperienced. One of the Christchurch elders was Wiebe Gorter, who was 35, and they regarded him as the senior elder! My father sometimes served a couple of terms without a break and continued to serve into his early 80's. My mother was very hospitable and we often had people over to share a Sunday lunch.

From a young age, about 6 or 7, I sensed a call to the ministry. The primary influence on my life in that direction was the encouragement and example of my parents. Others in the Christchurch congregation encouraged me, especially elder Johan Janssen, and one of my teachers at Middleton Grange, Don Capill, and his wife Helen. Another significant influence was the ministry of Rev Bill Wiersma who was my pastor during my formative years. I recall stimulating catechism classes with profitable discussions. In 1976 I professed my faith in the Christchurch congregation. During these teenage years my friendships and social life were focused in the church and I was closely involved in the youth group and a young people's Bible study.

In order to prepare further for the ministry I studied for a BA at Canterbury University with a major in history and a minor in English Literature. When I completed my degree I was uncertain where to study as the RTC was going through a time of theological controversy around the Christian philosophy of Dooyeweerd.<sup>1</sup> I decided to remain in Christchurch and studied Greek and Hebrew while doing my own programme of Christian reading. During that year my thinking clarified and I became convinced I ought to train at the RTC. I began my studies in Geelong in 1979 for a Bachelor of Divinity degree.

In my first year one of the founding lecturers of the RTC, Prof Alec Barkley, taught me church history and homiletics (preaching). It was a privilege to have him as my lecturer. My fellow students and I were also privileged to have Prof Ray Zorn

lecture us in Systematic Theology. He had been the minister in the Reformed Church of Hamilton before being appointed to the college and was a lovely godly man with a comprehensive grasp of this subject. His wife Edith was a godly and hospitable woman and as single students we enjoyed a number of meals at their home.

At the end of my second year of study I met Harriet van der Kolk who lived in Melbourne and attended one of the Reformed Churches. She was the eldest daughter of the late Rev Willem van der Kolk who died at the age of 35 in a swimming accident. We courted during my third and final year of study and married in 1982.

In August of that year we moved to the USA so that I could pursue a Master of Theology degree at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. After a busy and blessed year there we moved to Bucklands Beach in Auckland to begin a vicariate.

Those were the bad old days when some vicars were placed in churches without a supervising minister. This was the case in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach. Thankfully I had good elders who supported, taught and trained me. The vicariate at that time was only six months. After passing my exams I was called by the Bucklands Beach church and was ordained on the 17th June 1984. As far as I am aware I was the first son of the Dutch immigrant families to be ordained as a minister in the RCNZ. We served there for seven years and had a wonderful time of fellowship with the members. Our four children were born during this time.

In the late 1980's there was a lot of discussion and debate in the RCNZ about theonomy, which literally means, "God's law". The theonomists believed that the Old Testament laws ought to be applied now unless they had been specifically abrogated in the New Testament. This view was causing division in our denomination. I recall that voting in our synods in the



1980's was very predictable and was conducted along party lines. (Thankfully this is no longer the case). In keeping with the usual practice, the synod appointed a study committee to present a report about this. I was the convenor and co-reporter for this committee and we presented our report to the synod in 1989. The report, and a change of ministers in the denomination, helped bring about a greater unity.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of my seventh year in Bucklands Beach I received a call from Bishopdale and agreed to fly down and talk to the session. I needed to ask them whether a prophet was welcome in his home town and church?! About a third of the members of this church had been members of the Christchurch congregation in which I had grown up. The Bishopdale session assured me that no one had raised this as a problem. In December 1990 we said our tearful farewells to the members of Bucklands Beach and in January 1991 I was installed as the minister of Bishopdale and served there for 13 years. During this time Dovedale was established as a daughter church.

At the end of 2003 I received a call from Pukekohe and we moved here in January 2004 with our four teenage children. I have served here for 19 years. At the time this article appears in print I will be 66 years of age and am very thankful to be serving as the pastor of this church and as a minister in the RCNZ.

Our denomination has often been dependant on calling ministers from other Reformed Churches in the world. Thankfully, as time has gone on we are producing more of our own men as pastors. Some of them are sons of RCNZ ministers, namely Joshua Flinn, Nathaniel Rademaker and Graeme Zuidema, and there are a few other ministers' sons in training at present, namely Andrew Bajema, Joshua Rogers and our son Peter Haverland. Let's pray that in the coming decades we may see more men from our own churches take their places as pastors and preachers in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Lord willing they will be serving when our denomination celebrates its 100th anniversary!

Our churches were founded with a concern for a biblical, faithful and reformed witness in New Zealand. In reformed

denominations overseas we have seen this heritage lost in just one generation. Over the next 70 years we need to watch ourselves and guard the truth so that we remain faithful to the teaching of the Bible and our Reformed Confessions.

1 Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) and his brother-in-law Dirk Vollenhoven (1892-1978) developed a neo-Calvinist philosophy more commonly known as Reformational philosophy, which emphasised the sovereignty of God over all reality.

2 For more information on this debate and report read chapter 30, D G Vanderpyl, *Trust and Obey – A forty year history of the RCNZ 1953-1993*

*Mr John Haverland is the minister in the Pukekohe Reformed Church.*



Wellington Ladies Presbyterian

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Further information is available in the Information Pack which can be downloaded from our website at [www.reformed.org.au](http://www.reformed.org.au)

# Seventy years RCNZ

JOHN GORIS

Seventy years of Reformed Churches of New Zealand: not to be compared with seventy years of exile for Israel/Judah. And yet, despite that painful experience for God's people, it was also a blessing for Babylon and Persia, through the witness of Israelites such as Daniel, Ezekiel, Esther and Mordecai. When God's people let their light shine, it will benefit others around them. And, of course, that is what we are meant to do, wherever we are in this world.

Many migrants from overseas, in our case notably so from The Netherlands, but also from many other nations, did not only seek a better future for their families away from post-War Europe and other regions, but also brought along their faith to share this with people in New Zealand.

When I look around in our Churches today (esp. those I am acquainted with), then I see people from China, Korea, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Nepal, Vietnam, and African countries, but also from Switzerland, Germany, Italy, England, and the Middle East: certainly a multicultural presentation!

We must not forget that the Church is not our "hobby horse", but God's witness to the good news, clustered in Jesus Christ.

## Growing ...

Personally my first acquaintance with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand was via the Rev. Bill Deenick, who pastored in Auckland in the early years. I sat next to him at a conference in the Reformed Presbyterian Church at Geelong, Victoria, Australia, where Prof Alex Barkley ministered.

Around the same time I also began to meet students who had come from New Zealand to study at the RTC in Geelong, among them Gerald Hanscamp and Carl Larsen, and at a later time Luke Brunt, as well as others.

It was in 1974 that I personally arrived in Auckland with our then family. The Avondale church had issued a call to us, while we were still in Toowoomba, Queensland. During those first years the Avondale congregation had a big "backyard". Every so often I travelled all the way to Kaitaia and Kerikeri, and various places in

between where we had "country-members". Now I can see the North Shore church reaching out to some of those places, such as Maungataupere.

Suddenly there were amazing developments: one Sunday morning in late 1976 a tall Niuean lady came in. She had missed her bus into the city to attend the Polynesian Church there. I remember preaching on "putting on the whole armour of God... , and having done all, to stand" (Eph 6). Indeed, to stand up for Jesus. She promptly stood up. Soon others followed. Before long other Niuean women came to our church the following Sundays, and then their men also came. Then suddenly a Niuean child died, and we were asked to arrange the funeral service. That led ultimately to many more attending. They asked if they could sing one song (in Niuean) in the morning services. Session agreed and subsequently... "they lifted the roof!" with their voices.

Their request for a Niuean service in the early afternoon was granted. I was given a Niuean Bible and dictionary. I was leading the whole service, but delegated some scripture reading and prayer in Niuean to some appointed people. The sermon was in English, but keywords were stressed in Niuean. It proved to be an encouraging experience. We had previously also done something similar in Dutch.

Apart from those developments we also looked into a possible outreach towards the Henderson area: Sunnyside-Glen Eden. These plans were not developed at that time.

Years later, when I was in Mangere East church, we attempted to do the same. These plans took shape, and we had an early Sunday morning service in Manurewa (later in Alfriston). This outreach was backed by a mid-week Bible study in the area. Sadly the Mangere church was closed by the end of the century.

Before the end of the eighties I moved to Nelson, where we stayed for about 9 years. It was a wonderful challenge to minister there. I recall that after a few years we noticed a growing number of Malaysian students were attending the local polytechnic. We organized outings and

Bible studies. One Christmas season they asked for an English-Chinese service. I went to the local radio station to ask if they could announce this. The manager said: Sure! Is it in Dutch and English? No, I said, in Chinese and English: Oh! That's great!

In September 1992, we began services in Blenheim, as two of our families had moved there. However, after about three years the services came to a halt, as the core families moved on. We also considered the possibility to explore opportunities on the West Coast.

Before the end of the century I received a call from Wellington to serve there, and that became my final port of call (to full-time ministry), serving there until I turned 70, a month after Christmas. After that there were regular times of pulpit-supply. The privilege of bringing the Word has always been a great joy.

At some stage in Wellington the Rev Gary Milne and myself were reflecting on church extension in the Lower Hutt area. Initially we organized lunch-time services in Lower Hutt. I believed that we should always be on the alert to consider new localities for gospel preaching.

One such opportunity came when a Chinese colleague asked if I would be willing to present the message of God's Word in the local Chinese Church, to reach the younger generation in English. I did so for a number of years. My eagerness to reach out to the Chinese dates back many, many years.

Although I have not been in New Zealand for the full seventy years, nonetheless for my fifty years or so, I have seen remarkable developments. However, the Church is not a building but a people, and neither is the RCNZ "just" a denomination, but a group of people who are called to be "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13f).

Foremost, it is not **our** name, but **His** Name that is the key, and our day by day label as Christians to ensure the spread of the good news in our New Zealand society!

*Mr John Goris is an emeritus minister and a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach.*

# From NL to NZ

LEEN VAN DEN BERG

In the providence of God the family of J W van den Berg (Father, Mother and 4 Children) arrived in Wellington on Tuesday 22nd July 1952 on the MV Sibajac. After disembarking we learned that we needed to take the overnight ferry to Nelson on the SS Ngaio which served the Wellington to Nelson route at that time.

We had followed Dad's brother, Jack to New Zealand and he lived on a market garden farm in Appleby near Nelson.

As an eight year old I cannot remember much of the finer details of our Church life on arrival in New Zealand. I do remember going to the Nelson Presbyterian Church in Nile Street, right next door to the Nelson Central School where my siblings and I obtained our primary education. The Presbyterian Church was quite a large building with a tall spire and I distinctly remember that at the evening services most of the lights were turned off when the sermon began. I have wondered about the possible reason for this practice and if it had any scriptural mandate. Was it perhaps an early means of saving electricity or even saving the planet? Or was it to save the embarrassment of those that were nodding off during the sermon.

Because learning English took time, it was a while before it was realised that the Presbyterian minister was not preaching what their confession taught and Dad began taking me to other churches such as the Baptist Church and the Methodist Church. Certainly the Baptist minister was a good preacher but their view of adult baptism was not Reformed. Around this time it was learned that a minister from Holland had been called to Auckland and contact was made to share concerns about the state of the churches in Nelson and how liberalism and even Arminianism were being taught. Before long a minister (Rev. Dijkstra) came to Nelson once a month to fill the pulpit and on other Sundays, initially anyway, we listened to tapes of sermons, some in Dutch and others in English usually in people's homes, later moving to various hired halls in Nelson & Richmond.

Progress was being made to establish a

Reformed Church in Nelson with a petition to the special synod in 1953 seeking to install a church in Nelson. Also a request was sent to the CRC in North America for the supply of Psalter Hymnals. The 1953 special synod voted in favour of Nelson becoming a church and in November 1953 the Nelson Church was established with a protocol signed by 10 adults. Nelson was the fourth Reformed Church to be established in New Zealand. Before services became regular, the first (and only) service was in the Presbyterian Church Hall which, after they learnt the intent to start a new Church, was instantly no longer available. Various halls were hired for Sunday worship, the Hebron Hall and the Rechabite Hall but we settled for a while in the Sports Hall in Trafalgar Street. This hall was a public hall meaning that on Saturday nights the hall was hired for sports or social occasions often leaving the hall smelling strongly like a brewery.

Before very long a more appropriate venue was hired and we began to meet in the WCTU hall (Women's Christian Temperance Union) where there was absolutely no fear of lingering brewery smells. I might be wrong, but I believe there was no organ or piano in this hall and for musical accompaniment we made do very well with my Dad playing on the cornet.

It was in the WCTU hall that I learnt a couple of very valuable lessons. Before the service we had Sunday School taken by Tante Dicky van Dyk. (All female adults were Tante, males were all Oom). In the exuberance of youth I tossed a pillow high into the air and when it came back down it was accompanied by an ornate glass lamp shade. The pillow was unhurt but the lamp shade smashed into many pieces. Lesson 1: 'what goes up must come down', I surely did learn that day. Lesson 2: 'break something and it will cost you'. It was impossible to purchase exactly the same lamp shade but the replacement was expensive enough, taking a long time to pay off with that slightly different lamp shade being a constant reminder to me of my folly.

About once a month we were visited by ministers from Wellington or Christchurch and further afield such as Rev's Dijkstra, DeGraaf, Boelens, Cooper, Venema, Pellicaan, and Scarrow. Some of these men wore a black toga on Sundays, much like a university graduate wears on graduation day.

Rev. DeGraaf used to like to fly over on Saturday evenings in the plane that brought the 'Sports News' from Wellington to Nelson. It was a small single engine plane and Rev. DeGraaf was able to take the controls sometimes. He was one who wore a toga and not only did he preach, but when necessary he played the organ as well, but needed to lift his hands high in the air to free them from the toga before hitting the keys with the opening chord.

It was 1958 when we began meeting in the Seventh Day Adventist church, which was a real church at last with an organ, admittedly it was a fully manual organ with foot pedals to pump the bellows.

In January 1960 I entered the work force as a Hydro Electric Apprentice in the New Zealand Electricity Department and during my first year, the J W van den Berg family became naturalised New Zealanders and our surname was Anglicized to become Vandenberg. After four years of my apprenticeship I relocated to Hamilton and became a member of the Hamilton Reformed Church. Rev Zorn was the minister and officiated when I professed my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ on Sunday 21st February 1967. Rev Tyson came late in 1967.

My work was at Whakamaru, a Power Station on the Waikato River about 20 minutes South of Tokoroa and it was there after we married, that my wife Alice and I made our first home. We also moved our church membership to the Tokoroa/Kerepehi church and worshipped in Tokoroa, initially with Rev GHW Kroon as minister and later with Rev Larsen. It was in 1973 that I was elected to serve as Elder and for the next 3 years attended the Session Meetings in Waharoa, half way between Tokoroa and Kerepehi in a small hall at the



back of a little country church. Those meetings were surely a test of endurance and I was seldom home before 1.00am, in winter with frozen feet.

In 1978 I was able to obtain a work transfer to Napier where we have lived to this day. We were made very welcome when we joined the Hastings church, boosting the church membership considerably and adding a 'broken in' Elder to the eldership pool. The LORD has indeed blessed us as a family and likewise the Hastings congregation over the years since we arrived.

Much of the early history of the Nelson, Hamilton, Tokoroa/ Kerepehi, Hastings and other Reformed Churches of New Zealand is recorded in the book "Trust and Obey" by D G Vanderpyl and should be available in your Church Library.

*Mr Leen van den Berg is a member of the Hastings Reformed Church.*

## The blessings I have received from Dutch migration to NZ

My ancestors were Huguenots from Southern France who escaped to England. I know many went to the Netherlands. My great grandfather came to NZ in 1855 and settled in Riverton.

In 1951 my parents got to know a recently arrived young Dutchman and he boarded with our family for a year. Two years later I joined a Boy Scouts troop and the Scoutmaster was a young Dutchman. I grew up in the Presbyterian Church.

In 1965 I won a scholarship to work in Sydney in the building industry. I attended the Sutherland Presbyterian Church which 2 years later separated and became the start of the PRCA, now a sister Church. The Church was led by Rev. G. Kerr who was a Calvinist. It was here that I learnt the doctrines of grace and the reformed faith. Also I met and married my wife. In 1968 we returned to NZ and worshipped with a little group called the Continuing Presbyterian Church, formed as a result of the Geering controversy. But this group did not have a future so in 1969 we joined the Mangere Reformed Church, the Sunday that the Rev. Arthur Palmer was installed. Then in 1978 the opportunity arose to do a Church plant on the North Shore. So with the Rev. Richard Flinn, 3 families from Mangere and 1 from Avondale, services were started 31st October 1978. The Lord has truly blessed that little beginning with a wonderful congregation now on the North Shore, having a mixture of people from many different nationalities.

We have been members of the RCNZ now for 54 years. In that time our 2 daughters and a granddaughter have married Dutchmen, so they are part of the family. We have also visited the Netherlands 3 times and have enjoyed the warmth and fellowship of the people we have met there.

The Dutch people have been a large part of my life since I was 9 years old and we have many lovely friends of Dutch origin. I am truly thankful to the Lord for the wonderful spiritual home that we have had in the RCNZ over many years. May the Lord continue to bless the RCNZ in the next 70 years and beyond.

*Don Petchell.*

*North Shore Reformed Church.*

## Senior's gathering at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Auckland church — March 2003



# “Christian Reformed Missionaries in the early history of the RCNZ”

CORNELIS P. VENEMA

When I was invited to write an article for this commemorative issue of *Faith in Focus*, I was delighted at the opportunity to tell part of the story of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Since I was not assigned a topic, I decided to focus upon a feature of the RCNZ's history that I know the best—the role of the Christian Reformed Church in the early, pioneer days of the 1950's and 1960's. My acquaintance with this history is firsthand, for I am the son of one of the Christian Reformed missionaries who was sent to help the newly-established federation in New Zealand, Rev. Richard J. Venema. Though I doubt that there are many members of the RCNZ today who remember this period, it was a formative and oft-remembered chapter in my family's history. Seldom did my parents and four siblings

fail at family gatherings to watch the slides of our time in the beautiful country of New Zealand, while fondly reminiscing about the five busy years we spent “down under.”

## The background

During the five years my family lived in New Zealand, my father served both the Reformed Church in Dunedin (1958-1960) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach (1961-1963). How did it happen that our family moved from a Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa, to a newly-formed Reformed church in Dunedin 8500 miles away?

Though the first churches of the RCNZ were composed predominantly of Reformed believers from the Netherlands who immigrated to New Zealand after WWII, they sought to establish a confessionally Reformed federation that was indigenous to an English-speaking nation. From the beginning, they recognized that the Westminster Confession of Faith expressed the common faith of the Reformed churches in the English language. They also recognized that their services should be in the English language.

Consistent with the desire of the RCNZ to be an English speaking, Reformed federation in New Zealand, correspondence was initiated with two confessionally Reformed denominations in North America: the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), which also had its roots in the Netherlands, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), which had its roots in the English speaking nations of the United Kingdom. In their correspondence with these churches, the RCNZ requested that English-speaking pastors be sent to help the new federation establish itself and expand its witness to the people of New Zealand.

*This picture was placed in the CRC Banner in 1958, with an article regarding the Venema's going to New Zealand on behalf of the Board of Foreign Missions.*





In my father's telling of the story, it "so happened" that he was serving at the time as the chairman of the CRC's Committee on Contact with Churches Abroad, a subcommittee of the CRC's Committee on Foreign Missions. In response to the RCNZ's request, my father contacted Rev. John Galbraith, then serving on the OPC's Committee on Foreign Missions, and they agreed that their respective denominations should do whatever possible to lend assistance to the churches in New Zealand. When the Board of Foreign Missions of the CRC expressed its desire to send CRC pastors to New Zealand, my father (with my mother's somewhat reluctant acquiescence) decided in July of 1958 that he should be among those who would go.<sup>1</sup>

If anyone still living in the RCNZ remembers my father (little dust ever settled under his feet), it will not surprise you that, after the decision was made in mid-summer of 1958, my father was commissioned by the Board of Foreign Missions to serve as a missionary in New Zealand. His specific assignment was to help the RCNZ as a missionary pastor and establish a radio ministry of the *Back to God Hour* in the Australasian region. Two months later our family of seven boarded the good ship, Himalaya, and departed from Long Beach Harbor (near Los Angeles) with our newly purchased Rambler station wagon (specially ordered with a steering column on the right side!) on a three-week journey to Auckland, New Zealand. From there we traveled down to the South Island and Dunedin.

### Dunedin (1958-1960)

Rather than attempt my own description of my father's work in the two churches he served in New Zealand, I have excerpted two lengthy quotes from my father's own telling of the story:

"When we approached Dunedin, a number of the members of that congregation were on the road to greet us. Arie Nugteren's van was standing on the roadside with a big sign 'welcome to the Venema family.' I was installed by the Rev. Boelo Boelens, a rather humorous but somewhat eccentric Dutch minister on Sunday, the 28th of September. Since this church had been in existence for a number of years with young elders, I never forgot Boelens' charge to me: 'it is up to you to put a face on it.' Up to that time, the church had one service on a Sunday, but no Sunday School, catechism or mid-week Bible studies of any kind. The members of the church were scattered over

much of the southern half of the South Island with an elder in Invercargill and another in Balclutha. Having lots of energy at that time of my life, we started Sunday School classes, a catechism class for the little children, and a young singles group that met for instruction in the doctrines of our faith. In addition, we started a mid-week Bible class that met in our home and was attended by nearly all of the members. We worshipped in a Scottish Hall that reeked of the beer that had been consumed there at parties the night before. We soon began worship services on Sunday night.

My preaching schedule went something like this: for two weeks I would preach in Dunedin in the morning, then drive the 50 miles south to Balclutha for an afternoon

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*The first picture is of the Zorns and Williamsons in 1963.*

*The second picture is of Ray Zorn and Sydney Cooper in front of the "Dutch Kiwi" sign in 1963.*





(Top) is the Bucklands Beach congregation in 1963.

The second is the ministers attending a minister's conference in Wellington in 1963.

service, and then return for evening service in Dunedin. Every third week I would visit various members of the congregation scattered around the country, usually leaving on Thursday, having a Bible study at a home in the Invercargill area, preach there on the Sunday morning, drive to Balclutha for an afternoon service, and go on to preach in Dunedin at night.

Somewhere along the line, I began making occasional weekend flights to Nelson to minister to this small church which until that time had no minister to serve them. I also made a number of visits to a De Reus family in Oamaru who, shortly after I left Dunedin, were used to plant a church there.

During my ministry in the South Island, the Synod of the Reformed Churches met in Dunedin and decided to form a Committee of Evangelism and Church Extension to which I was appointed as chairman. One of the significant and lasting achievements of that Committee was the formation of a Church Aid Fund for needy churches in their building programs. Since my salary and expenses were provided by the Christian Reformed Board of Foreign Missions, we adopted a policy that the churches I served would contribute 'salary money' into this fund. This fund was used to provide loans to needy churches, enabling them to have church facilities of their own.

Though we were in Dunedin for only two years, the congregation came to have a 'face' with many active and dedicated members. So, when the Church Extension Committee asked me to move to the North





Island to minister primarily to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach, the church was able to call a minister of their own, Rev. Peter Pelicaan.”

### **Bucklands Beach (1961-1963)**

“The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach came into existence when Rev. Alec Scarrow and members of his church broke with the Presbyterian Church due to its unfaithfulness to the Scriptures and tolerance of liberalism among its ministers. When the RCNZ was established, this church joined the new federation but retained the name ‘Reformed Presbyterian.’ I was installed as the pastor of Bucklands Beach in July of 1960.

The congregation in Bucklands Beach had many devout believers, but they were at times skeptical of the views and practices of other churches in the RCNZ. They suspected that some of these views and practices were more ‘Dutch’ than biblical. Practices like smoking or drinking alcohol even very moderately were condemned as sinful. Therefore, from the beginning there were tensions which existed between this church and the others. Since Pastor Scarrow was getting older and had a keen interest in evangelism, especially among the Maori people, it was decided that he would be engaged as an Evangelist for the churches, and I would serve this church as its pastor. The idea was that I, as an American, could possibly help this church become a more content body of believers within the denomination.

I thoroughly enjoyed my ministry in Bucklands Beach, though there were challenges. We developed many warm friendships there, and our children much enjoyed the beaches nearby. But the ministry had its difficulties and required considerable patience at times. For instance, at a Bible study, I was strongly criticized by an elder’s wife for teaching the doctrine of election! In our evening services, there were times when some of the elders would arrive sometime after the services had begun. I also learned that there were some real cultural and practical differences between those who were born in New Zealand and the few Dutch members we had. The native New Zealanders were inclined to be critical of the Dutch who were not all that faithful in attending prayer meetings. The Dutch were not pleased that some of the New Zealanders did not make it a practice to conclude their mealtimes with prayer. When we began an evangelism program of visiting



*The Rev. Sydney Cooper and family in the early 1960s.*

homes, offering Bibles to those who would promise to read them, the New Zealanders by and large enthusiastically took up the challenge with the Dutch being rather hesitant at first. Despite these challenges, it was a joy to see how these two groups with quite different backgrounds came to complement and learn much from each other.

While serving in Bucklands Beach I continued making periodic weekend visits to minister to the church of Nelson. I would also go to the churches in Palmerston North and Hastings when they were without a pastor. For a long time, I would preach in Bucklands Beach in the morning, then drive the 65 miles to Ngatea (eating the lunch Carrie had prepared for me in a bag on the way), and then return to lead the evening service at Bucklands Beach. After the Rev. Wim Deenik left the Auckland Church for Australia, upon my return from Ngatea, I would conduct a 4:00 p.m. service in Mangere.”

### **A concluding postscript: a surprising and unexpected providence**

As is evident from my father’s telling of the story, his service as a missionary of the CRC in New Zealand was a joyful period in his and my family’s life. You will not be surprised, therefore, to imagine his delight when, not long after my mother died in 1994, he had the privilege of serving the North Shore church in 1995. Thereafter, when a number of North American and New Zealand students, who received their theological education and training at Mid-

America Reformed Seminary, joined the ministerial corps of the RCNA, I shared my father’s delight at yet another surprising and unexpected providence!

As I recall the early history of the RCNZ, I am reminded of the wonderful words of our Lord in Zechariah 4:10 “For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice.”

1 The CRC Committee of Foreign Missions sent several missionaries to New Zealand and to Australia in this early period: Dr. Gerard Van Groningen who taught at the Theological College in Geelong; Rev. Sydney Cooper, who served churches in Christchurch, Auckland (Avondale), and Palmerston North; and Rev. Alan Arkema, who served in Australia. The story of the work of OPC ministers in the RCNA is well told by Rev. Jack W. Sawyer: “The Glorious New Zealand Experiment,” in *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. John R. Muether and Danny E. Olinger (2011), 447-70. OPC ministers who served in these early years included: Rev. Ray Zorn, Rev. G. I. Williamson, and Rev. Tom Tyson.



# THE REFORMED (PRESBYTERIAN) CHURCH

EVANGELIST: REV. J. A. SCARROW  
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## REPORT OF ACTIVITIES FOR JULY AND PART OF AUGUST. 1966

The last day of June was a time of thanksgiving and fellowship with my three ministerial brothers in the Hamilton manse. Truly it was a "summit talk" by what some lightly term "The Big Four." But how humbled and small we felt when we reflected upon the tremendous movements of God's Spirit upon the Reformed Churches throughout N.Z.

With Rev Deenik home again from overseas, and Rev Venema awaiting his induction to his new work in Bucklands Beach, and news of a second minister coming from the Christian Reformed Church of America, and bright reports from Dunedin, Invercargill, Christchurch, Wellington, and Palmerston Nth., truly we had much reason for thanksgiving.

Such a meeting of warm-hearted, brotherliness in the Gospel was an excellent prelude to a most wonderful six weeks of continual blessing. There were times of fellowship in study with groups and committees on personal evangelism, and although these groups are, as yet, small in numbers, there is, as in the case of the Auckland Church, an ambitious programme of activity planned.

During these six weeks a distance of over 3,000 miles, including a visit to Christchurch, has been covered; which means by car over 2,500 miles which costs the committee, at 6d per mile, £62-10-0. Rather high is it not? However £27-16-6 has been donated during the same period, the greater portion of which from a Presbyterian family that wishes to share in the work we are doing.

Two memorable visits, one to Pio Pio and the other to Hastings, makes all costs of time, energy and money fade into insignificance. At Pio Pio, where the kind hospitality was given by a doctor and his wife, and a High School master and his wife, (all friends of former years) many good contacts were made. Let me try to share with you one day spent at this place. After prayer at 6-30 a.m. with the Dr, his wife, the school-master and a district nurse, following the

surrounding district. That one day gave contacts with a farmer who had been blessed in the Graham Crusade and has been unsuccessfully seeking church-life of the sound gospel type. He showed keen interest in what we were able to offer in that respect. A Roman Catholic man, seriously ill, and disappointed in his church's teaching, after a lengthy talk, gladly entered into saying blessing on the authority of God's Word alone. In a shed at a stone-crushing quarry where eight men were having afternoon tea, a bright major openly confessed his onetime faith in Christ and now living in coldness of heart. His statement apparently had marked effect on his mates standing around. A little later, asking direction of another man, it was discovered that he was, two years ago an advocate for communism but was converted through "radio broadcast. You can imagine his and my delight when I was able to furnish him, immediately from my pocket, Rev. Eldersveld's sermons. How very interested he was to hear of the activities of our churches in N.Z. That same evening I was given the unusual privilege of addressing a Brethren prayer-meeting on the Sovereignty of God and His Electing Grace\*.

The next morning before leaving the town, while waiting in a garage to have my car serviced, I spoke, during their morning-tea break, to seven young mechanics who listened solemnly to the words of life. Only eternity will reveal God's dealings with hearts on such sacred occasions, and one dare

*Following Mr. Deenik's suggestion visits were made to John Nussie and the*

A road trip  
around New  
Zealand by  
the Rev. Alec  
Scarrow

Supplied by church archivist  
Hamilton Reformed Church.



not place more value upon one contact than another. However I must reserve space to tell of my Hastings visit where, just now, God is surely making vital history for His church.

Rev. deGraaf of Wellington, whose responsibility Hastings is had already been approached by two Presbyterian families who have refused to suffer any longer under false teachers who are trying to explain away miracles of Jesus, and advising their Sunday School staff not to teach such Old Testament lessons, such as Elisha's curse upon Eleazar. "For", say they, "GOD IS FAR TOO KIND TO DO A THING LIKE THAT". So upset are certain families, that there is a widespread disturbance throughout the district. Indeed a modern "Jennie Geddes" a young nurse rose up in church during a service, walked, with her Bible, to the front of the church, turned her back upon the preacher in his pulpit, and read and explained a few verses from her Bible, hoping to give at least one word of inspiration to a long starved congregation.

At our service on the Saturday night, two N.Z. Presb. families were present and, at the after church social time one of them told the whole congregation - "We have found at last the true Presbyterian church". By request I went back for an advertised public meeting the following Thursday at

which six Pres. families were represented. Two days were spent visiting a list of 20 addresses and without exception one met with a warm welcome and eager ears to hear our story and what we knew of the state of the modern church. Remarks were made such as "For years I have been waiting for something like this". From a young man "I have been sitting on the fence but I have climbed down tonight". From an elder "I have heard strange things from your lips. I must investigate". From a mother - "I am so anxious to give my children sound Bible teaching and to save them from the foolishness they are being taught in the churches". Another mother whose son is thinking towards the ministry, "I do hope you can persuade my son to go to some sound college".

On the following Sunday I preached in Palm. Nth., and some time was spent visiting in that district where some very encouraging developments in church life are seen. While there opportunity was given to speak to the young men of the Evangelical Union of Massey College. So interested were they that lecture periods were set aside in order to hear and ask questions, and the meeting went on for 2½ hours. I had, through this contact, the honour of the company, in my

car to Wellington, of a young man who is thinking towards the ministry, and his girl friend who came up from Wellington for the prospect of a talk together during that journey.

What joy it gives one to talk confidentially of the deep things with young couples, single or married. A young couple in Hastings, and another in Christchurch, shared with me, long into the night, the problems relating to assurance of salvation. In each case there is reason to believe that rich and lasting blessing resulted.

While in Christchurch, I visited a friend whom I had not seen since 1936, a woman who has been six years paralyzed, and possibly will not walk again. Oh, she said, on hearing the wonders of God's stirring in many hearts, "I wish I could be active once more to give you assistance in your Reformed Church".

So the story goes from day to day, from contact to contact, and how deeply grateful to God we are that He has brought us to this work for just such a time as this. It is our confidence that there is only one church and that is the Historic Church of the Reformation which was planted once more upon the Foundation Stone laid by Jesus Himself, and those who depart not from His Word will have cause both contending for and a sure promise of victory in the fight. Pray, therefore, for a nation-wide stirring, as is taking place in Hastings right now.

Yours in the fight, J.A.S.



# How the Lord “Moved” His Church

TIMOTHY ROTT, RETIRED PASTOR



*Mr Timothy and Mrs Georgette Rott*

In 2010, I left a teaching position at a Christian school in Pensacola, Florida. The Lord had renewed His call within me to preach, and I began to search for where the Lord would lead. As I searched in the States for a call, and nothing seemed to be happening, the Lord brought to mind a Christian brother, who I met in the US Navy in England and was assigned to the US Antarctic Mission in Christchurch. He had telephoned me from New Zealand about the possibility of serving a church there. That was 1997, and I did not sense the Lord’s leading to pursue the possibility of serving in New Zealand at that time. But, in 2010, as I searched for a call, the

Lord brought New Zealand to mind once again.

I searched for Reformed Churches in New Zealand, and the first site I found was the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. As I searched the site, the Lord led me to Christchurch, where my friend had been, and I discovered a vacant church, The Reformed Church of Christchurch on Cornwall Street. It all started with an email message to the Clerk of Session, a man I did not know but would be blessed to know very well, Ben Post.

My email was simple. I introduced myself as an ordained Teaching Elder/Pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America, and Reformed (Biblical) in theology. And I remember asking this question: “Have you ever considered having a Yank as a pastor?”

After Skype interviews and a visit to Christchurch to preach and meet the congregation, a call came from the Reformed Church of Christchurch – the Cornwall Street Church. My wife, Georgette, and I prayerfully considered the call and believed that the Lord was leading us to Christchurch, New Zealand. I was examined by the Presbytery in October 2010, and received their approval. Suddenly, my wife and I were packing to come on an adventure we never expected.

I had to quickly apply for a work visa so that we could come as soon as possible. The plan was to arrive in Christchurch in February 2011, and the Lord got the visas to us in January 2011. Everything was set to come to New Zealand. Our flight was scheduled to leave on 22 February 2011.

The evening of 21 February 2011 in America, Georgette and I were at a friend’s house for a farewell meal together. Georgette telephoned an aunt to say good-bye, and her aunt told us about an earthquake in New Zealand. The boys of the family, whom I had taught at the Christian school, got on

their computers for news about the earthquake. We learned a strong earthquake had hit Christchurch, with much damage and loss of life. The question now was should we go to Christchurch? Is it safe? Could we even get there? What should we do?

The friend we were with had capabilities to call overseas. We tried calling elders from the church to determine what we should do. The only person we could get through to was someone who had helped us a great deal during our previous visits, Sarah Van Leeuwen. I will never forget what she said when I asked about the earthquake. "Yes, it's pretty bad. Are you still coming?" Am I still coming? I didn't know the answer until Georgette and I talked and prayed. We had sold our house, our vehicles, and everything we owned, other than what was in our suitcases, was in a container on a ship to New Zealand. God had gotten us this far, He will help us the rest of the way.

We boarded our plane the next morning, 22 February 2011 in the States, and headed to Christchurch, not knowing what to expect. Upon arrival on Thursday morning in Auckland, I contacted elder Raymond Posthuma to find out the plan. He said that arrangements had been made for us to stay in Auckland with a pastor and his family until it was safe to come to Christchurch. We rescheduled our flight for the following Monday, not knowing if that was too soon. Pastor John Haverland picked us up at the airport and took us to his home, where we met his gracious wife. We had a blessed time with them, saw some of Auckland, and worshiped with the Pukekohe congregation on that Sunday. The call came Sunday afternoon that it was "safe" to come to Christchurch. The place where we would stay was undamaged and the utilities had been restored. Monday, we arrived in Christchurch and were greeted by our new friends and church family, and a city that was virtually destroyed. We could not believe our eyes! We were grateful we had seen the beautiful city of Christchurch before the destruction by the earthquake.

The ministry I thought the Lord was bringing me to had been completely "shaken!" Instead of focusing on renewal, we were now focused on survival.

Because the building on Cornwall Street was deemed unsafe to use, the Deacons worked quickly to secure the use of a 7th Day Adventist church in Papanui, not far from the church on Cornwall Street. Many other congregations wanted to use this facility, but the quick work of the Deacons secured the use of the facility – which the congregation would use for five years.

As a result of the extensive damage in Christchurch, a once abundant rental housing market had been greatly diminished. Searching for a place to live became an exhausting enterprise. We searched and searched day after day for a house, along with numerous others who had been displaced by the earthquake. We went to property managers' websites, as well as *TradeMe*, looking for new listings. We wondered if we would ever find a place to live. The Lord presented an opportunity to take over a lease and we now had a home. It took nearly five months for the search to end.

As activities began to settle into the "new normal," questions arose about whether we should return to Cornwall Street, or whether members should go to one of the other two congregations in Christchurch. During this time, several families and individuals left the church for various reasons, which raised the question of whether we were even a viable congregation. The Session called a meeting of the men of the church to determine who was committed to returning to Cornwall Street in a new or repaired facility. At that meeting, there was enough positive feeling to determine that we would remain a congregation on Cornwall Street. All we needed now, was help from the insurance company.

The manner in which the various insurance companies, including ours, were handling claims was very reminiscent of what I experienced in Florida after a hurricane. They are slow to settle, drag their feet, and alter their stories with regard to claims. After much frustration, the insurance company gave a cash payout, and a building committee was formed. Plans were underway to return to Cornwall Street!

During our three plus years in Christchurch, Georgette and I experienced numerous earthquakes. Many were very strong and caused things to rattle and move. After a time, they became a game. We guessed what the number would be on [geonet.org.nz](http://geonet.org.nz) to see who could come closest. We got pretty good at guessing, along with our daughter, Tiffany.

As my three year work visa was coming to an end, Georgette and I felt that the Lord was leading us back to America. Before my arrival, the church had been without a pastor for some years. We were praying that the Lord would fill the position without much of a gap, because of the church's fragile situation. He did better than that! He moved the heart of Pastor David Waldron to accept the call as the minister of the

Word and sacraments to the Reformed Church of Christchurch. David was there two weeks before Georgette and I returned to the States. We praised the Lord for His provision and answer to prayer! One interesting fact: I only ever preached at the old church location when we visited in 2010. After the earthquake, the building was unsafe to use.

The new facility on Cornwall Street was finished in 2016. Georgette and I were able to return to attend the official opening of the new facility. It was a blessing to see and to worship there with our brothers and sisters, whom we had the privilege of serving with.

This call from God to Christchurch is perhaps one that I have a slight idea why God brought me there. I believe He used me to help keep the church together so that He might use it to His honor and glory. A daughter of one of the families on the way to the Bishopdale church on a Sunday afternoon right after the earthquake made the remark that before the earthquake they had a church but no pastor. Now, they had a pastor and no church. The father was quick to explain that the church is not a building but the people. The congregation at the Reformed Church of Christchurch has proven this to be true! Look at what the Lord has done! Georgette and I were blessed to be a small part of the history of the Reformed Church of Christchurch, and to have blessed fellowship with our brothers and sisters.



# 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations at the Reformed Church of Christchurch

