

faith in **focus**

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**“Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?”**

Psalm 113:5-6



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Editorial

In this issue we look at the Church. And especially we look at what the hallmarks of the biblical church are. Because unlike what many may think nowadays, it's not about being successful in the world's eyes. It's about being faithful in the Lord's eyes. Peter Hastie's article is a help in understanding this, as is also his interview with John Benton. A further help is a book that has reached some popularity in the Christian press. Perhaps that's because of the author, Joshua Harris, who had got many people in the Christian community thinking about biblical courtship. And while his style of writing is very readable, I like to think that he is also raising an area many Christians do want to consider from God's perspective.

But of course we cannot ever separate the Church from the Resurrection. The Easter event marks a change in the early church. After Easter Sunday, the whole attitude of the apostles and the early church is positive. It's when we live out what we are in Christ that He is shown through the local church. The fact that there is a disparagement of the church nowadays testifies to a serious problem in those who profess Christianity. They fail to recognise that the Church is founded by the one true God, and provides the only way to eternal, joyous life.

What does it mean that Christ is the organic Head of His Church?

It means that the church has no life apart from Christ and receives from Christ whatever life it has. It means that the church was originated not only by Christ, but also from Him, and cannot continue to exist for a moment apart from Him.

It means that the church in all its members lives and operates only through Christ.

It means that one and the same Spirit, even the Holy Spirit of God, dwells both in Christ and in His church.

It means that the life which Christ has imparted to the church and keeps imparting to it in His very own.

What glory for the church!

R. B. Kuiper

Photo Credit: Chris Kavanagh

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Choose to lose

An Easter reflection

Hans Voschezang

Our lives are mostly filled with routines. Every day follows a set pattern. The alarm goes off, we get out of bed, we go to the bathroom, make ourselves breakfast, get in the car and we commute to work. We follow the same routine almost every day. We are creatures of habit. But when something happens out of the ordinary, it seems that our whole day is upset and we start to forget things. More than we realise, we depend on our daily routines. On the other hand, there is such a thing as obsessive-compulsive disorder which is an extreme dependence on routines. Most of us may not like it when something disrupts our normal pattern in which we do things, but we are flexible enough to adapt and make do. That is not so with obsessive-compulsive people. Sufferers of this disorder become literally 'stuck' when something gets out of place. For example, a simple thing like brushing your teeth can become a problem.

I once saw a young man, his mouth full of toothpaste, standing 'frozen' at the bathroom washbasin because the glass of water he needed to rinse his mouth with had been set on the left side of the tap of on the right where, to his mind, it simply had to be or he could not move to the next step in his daily routine.

Lives tipped upside down

I mention all this because when we read Mark 16, you can see how much Jesus' resurrection upset daily routines. Each of the three women who walked to Jesus' tomb had their own views on what was correct, and what wasn't. The stability of their lives depended on this. We read in verse 1 that when the Sabbath was over, they bought spices. This was because the law said that they were not allowed to buy anything on the Sabbath. Think of that. Jesus was in the tomb, and these women knew that He had been put there without proper burial preparations.

Taking care of this simply had to wait. The death of Jesus notwithstanding, the Sabbath still had its routines and regulations to be observed. So I imagine that these women, in spite of their inexpressible misery, went through their normal Sabbath routines on the day after Jesus died.

So the Sabbath came and went as always, the sun rose and set, and on the first day of the week it rose again. At dawn, as early as possible, they walked to the market to buy the spices. They made their way to the place where they knew Joseph of Arimathea had taken the body of their Master and Friend. Again, the world of predictable patterns remained in place for these women. This was not the first body they had embalmed and it wouldn't be the last.

They set a protocol on how they would embalm Jesus' body, once they got to the tomb.

On their way, it occurred to one of them that the last thing they had seen this man Joseph do was to roll a large stone in front of the cave. They had not planned it quite right after all.

They figured that even with the three of them, they would be unable to remove this stone. It would take at least a half dozen strong men to do that. But when they got there, the stone had already been shoved aside. Although unexpected, this fact alone did not strike them as bizarre. Probably they expected Joseph of Arimathea back at the tomb, and maybe he was already embalming the body.

In any event, they did not approach the tomb warily: they just marched in.

They did find someone in the tomb, but it wasn't Joseph or anyone else they had ever met.

In fact, this brightly clad young man looked strikingly peculiar. His presence in the tomb terrified the three women and they gasped for breath. The young man told them not to be alarmed, then alarmed them even more by turning their tidy world upside down. They fled the tomb in terror, unable to say a word.

Mark tells us that they were 'trembling and bewildered,' and who on earth can blame them?

Can you imagine the level of total shock they felt? For these three women on that Easter morning, the earth-shattering shock was nearly too much to comprehend. If the dead can't stay dead, then much of what they knew or thought they knew, was wrong. And you don't just absorb that kind of information in a minute or two! When your world is so suddenly and drastically transformed, you start to wonder about lots of other things. It takes time to sort things out.

Lives turned the right way round

It's important to remember that when faced with new realities, you have at least three choices of how to respond.

- 1) You can choose to stay bewildered. You can let this event knock you completely off your feet and choose to stay there. You can withdraw into yourself, refuse to talk about it, and refuse to believe anything ever again. You can become a hard-nosed cynic. A sneering figure on the sideline of



life, stuck there. You can't get over the shock.

- 2) You can engage in world-class denial. You can look at the facts but choose to ignore them. Sure, if such-and-such a thing were true, you would be forced to revise your whole way of thinking. But it never happened. And so, you cling to your old ideas by refusing to accept anything new.
- 3) You can choose to slowly absorb this new information. You may get the shock of your life, as anybody would, but eventually you pick yourself up. You embrace the new truth and then go through the long and sometimes painful process of re-assessing life in the light of this new evidence.

This latter one is the Easter choice, when faced with the incredible proclamation that Jesus rose from the dead. You can be agnostic and cynical, saying that you don't know what to make of this and you aren't going to try. Who cares, anyway. Or you can deny it. The whole thing is fiction, fantasy, a pious wish.

Or you can move past the shock toward acceptance, which will change you totally and completely.

That's the Easter choice. The problem is that we don't even realise we face a choice. Believing that Jesus rose again from the dead is something we remember every year: it's part of our life's routine. Is that what Easter has become for us? We believe it happened, but then, we 'we've always believed that. So, what's the big deal? Easter is no longer shocking for us. It surely doesn't make us re-evaluate everything else we think we know. Anyway, do we want everything changed in our lives? We much rather go on in life relying on our daily routines. We don't have to be obsessive-compulsive to dislike having our routines disrupted. In fact, we avoid being knocked offstride if we can.

Mark's Gospel ends in bewildered and fearful silence. Maybe this is Mark's way of showing us that the Easter event changes everything, or at least it should. So it's only proper to be dumbstruck by it, as these three women were at first.

In the light of this new reality, we face the same Easter choice as these women. We can stay stuck and silent, denying the whole event and acting as though it never happened, or we can work at it to accept this new reality, re-adjusting everything else in our lives accordingly. Mark lets the shock remain and leaves questions unanswered in order to force the Easter choice on you and me today.

What are we going to do with this amazing idea that God does not want the dead

to remain dead? If we believe that, what else needs to be changed in our lives as a result?

We face the Easter choice: We either believe this and make it part and parcel of our entire life, or we live as though it never happened. If we embrace this truth, we cannot pretend that the rest of our life's routine can proceed unaffected.

You know, it's not surprising that in Mark 16 the women do not meet Jesus, but that makes perfect sense. There was no reason for Jesus to stay around. He had already gone ahead of the women and His disciples. Jesus was in Galilee. What was He doing there? Well, who knows? God did not raise Jesus from the dead to be put on display. Jesus was raised by the Father so that He could be set loose in this world. He went ahead of His disciples because that's what resurrection means: He is always up ahead of us, always going out in advance. He is moving with renewed life and busy at work, bringing in the fullness of His Kingdom.

His life going on before

Easter means that Jesus lives and He is always ready — waiting each morning when you unlock the door to your office, or step in to your classroom, or when you commute to work, or whatever it is you are doing. Jesus is set loose in this world because God knows

that there is work to be done.

There is still far too much death, far too many individuals, corporations and governments running roughshod over life in a never-ending quest for dominance, money and control.

Jesus is set loose in this world because, even in the Church, our Lord is never finished calling us to discipleship. He is challenging us to find creative ways by which we become bearers of life who lift up the downtrodden, encourage the despairing, protect the life of the innocent and helpless.

If we want to see Jesus, we have to follow Him to the Galilee of this fractured and broken world, where Jesus is as often as not a disturbing, unsettling presence. He does disrupt routines. He does set new agendas. He does call us to alternative ways of living.

Easter declares that there's a new future we are called to embrace and believe. The risen Christ is on the loose, on that first Easter and also today. And He calls us as His brothers and sisters to follow Him to a new life in the Galilee of our world, and to unimaginable joy of the world to come.

Is there a choice?

Adapted from the messages 'The Easter Choice' by Dr Scott Hoezee and 'Going Ahead' by the Rev. Leonard J Vander Zee

It's that time again!

How the world tells you it's Easter

Sjirk Bajema

Well, we know it's Easter. Who couldn't help but be reminded with the plethora of Easter Bunnies running around, Easter Eggs in the shops, and all sorts of other pagan entities? This was all out on display in the shops by early February!

And there's another way the media lets you know what time it is. They pull out of their hat another 'devastating' attack on the Gospel. With headlines like 'Discovery Rocks Christian Faith' they publish yet another of their annual articles, definitely timed for this time of the year.

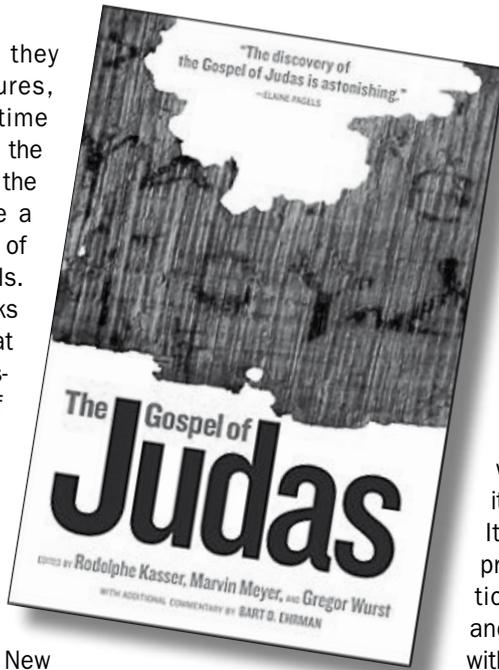
One year it was 'The Jesus Seminar' research group. After years of study they allegedly came to the final conclusion that of all Jesus said in the gospels, only one small

sentence could actually be verified as genuinely His words! Of course, what the media don't tell you is the real truth. For aside from the fact that those theologians were one and all completely unbelieving, the results came out of a series of votes they held amongst themselves and have no verifiable data to support them.

Last year it was 'The Gospel of Judas.' 'A shattering find' — or so they say. But a discovery it certainly is not. For it is Gnostic in origin. And as those who know a little church history will know, the gnostics were as Christian in the early New Testament church era as the Mormons are Christian today. For while they, like the Mormons, loved to use the name 'Christian' they were as far away from believing the gospel as any one could be.

Like the Mormons they had their own scriptures, which sects in that time dressed up to look like the gospels and letters of the New Testament. I have a book with some fifteen of these letters and gospels. It's called 'The Lost Books of the Bible'. And that doesn't include 'The Gospel of Thomas' or any of the Gnostic works.

Its no wonder that the early church councils spent quite some time weeding out the spurious work and being very clear on what belonged in the New Testament canon – and that was already a long time before 'The Gospel of Judas' appeared.



And who is the main promoter of this latest headline? None other than National Geographic. This openly-evolutionistic organisation, though generally publishing a fine nature magazine, has always been clear in its religious outlook. It has consistently promoted an evolutionary perspective and endorsed those with such a view.

And what will they draw out of the hat this year? Who knows? Well, the Lord certainly knows. He will hold

them all to account – even the famous Hollywood film director! Actually, especially the famous Hollywood film director, because he is in a much more responsible position. Much as he may like the sound of cash registers ticking over those movie sales, there will be another sound he will have to hear – the Lord's judgment. He will have to account as to why he did not tell the right account. Thousands of years after the event, Scripture is still absolutely true. The apostle Paul put this issue quite starkly in his first letter to the Corinthians. He wrote there, *If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.*

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:19-20.)

Let's pray that its truth will become savingly true for those who presently do what they can to disprove it.



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Size or spiritual health?

Listening to the Lord on church growth

Peter Hastie

One of the features of church growth theory over the last few decades has been its preoccupation with the size of the local church. In our increasingly urban world, the gurus of church growth have exhorted us to renounce 'smallness' in favour of 'bigness'. One of them has trumpeted 'bigness' as the solution to effective world evangelisation. "Big buildings, big car dealers, big supermarkets, big shopping centres are the norm...People are conditioned to think big in the city...we cannot afford to keep our churches small...the size of the modern city demands that we think big."

However, if 'smallness' is the underlying difficulty, one would expect to find numerous references in the New Testament to it and also, presumably, some strategies to remedy the problem. But when we search for such information, the evidence is by no means easy to find. In fact, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack because none of the New Testament writers make the point that larger numbers of people in church

make a congregation more useful to Christ. So if 'smallness' in itself is not a church's problem, what is?

It's about the spiritual

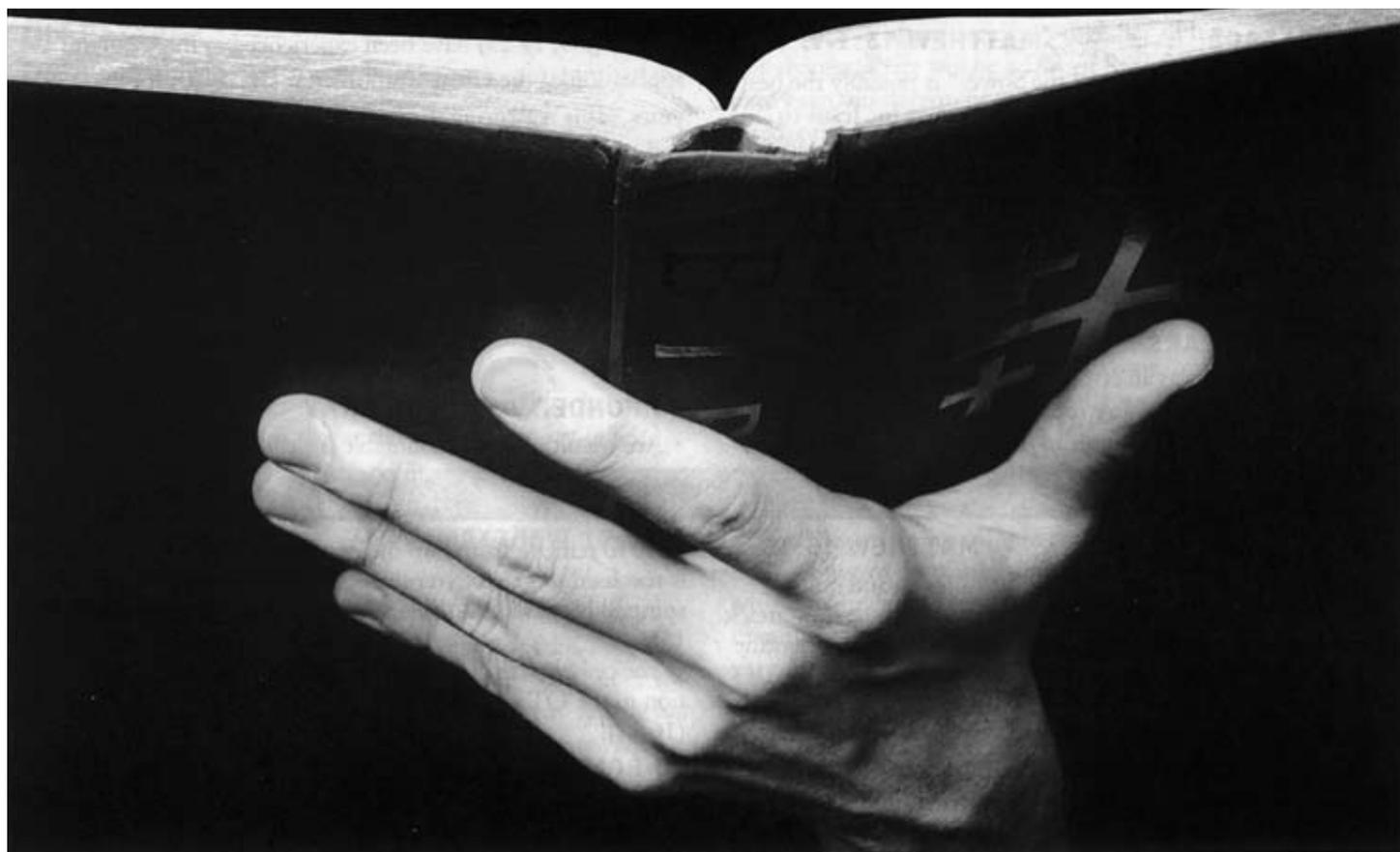
In a word, the Bible says that the problems of the church are always spiritual and largely arise from the unrelenting warfare in which we find ourselves. It is sad that many Christians today don't see it. Having been raised in a materialistic and secular culture, many of us have difficulty in accepting the reality of Satan and the existence of demonic powers. Nevertheless, the apostles teach that just as Satan attacked Jesus in the wilderness as He readied himself for the task of redemption, so Satan also targets the church. This should not surprise us because the church represents Christ in bringing salvation to the world and by providing an environment in which believers can experience spiritual transformation. As Paul says, the church is 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' whose purpose is to make known 'the manifold wisdom of God' to all the nations and the heavenly powers (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians

3:10; Matthew 28:19). Since the church has such a strategic role, the devil's interest in destroying it is perfectly understandable.

The question is: how does he go about his task? Paul's letters provide us with some insight. In writing to the Ephesians, he counsels them about 'the devil's schemes' (6:11). The term *schemes* is used elsewhere in the letter in a context which suggests cunning and deceitfulness (4:14). Used here in connection with Satan, it implies that Satan does not always launch frontal assaults but specialises in less obvious subversive activities. The use of *schemes* in the plural suggests that Satan's attacks may be ongoing and take a variety of forms. Some may be overt, such as persecution, whereas others may be less obvious. Donald Grey Barnhouse once commented that one of Satan's most successful ruses was to get his agents past Presbytery ordination committees so that he gained control of pulpits across the nation.

Revelation's references

While Paul has much to say about Satan's strategy against the church, it's in the book



of Revelation that we find the most direct references to his schemes and tactics. One of the characteristics of Revelation is the number of times that Satan and his supernatural forces are mentioned in the book. Indeed, there are more references to Satan and his work in Revelation than anywhere else in the New Testament. Furthermore, the references are spread uniformly throughout Revelation and cover every dimension of the underworld from direct attacks against the church to the 'deep things of Satan' (2:24). We are fortunate to have this information because as Barnhouse reminds us in *The Invisible War*, one of Satan's cleverest strategies is to keep us in ignorance of his being and the fraudulent nature of his claims. Thus, the book of Revelation is of real help because it gives us a comprehensive account of the many ways in which the devil tries to destroy the church.

Most importantly, Revelation reminds us that life for the church is war. It's a war that Satan has begun in heaven and which he continues upon the earth (12:7, 17). His aim is to destroy the church and devour it (12:4, 17). He's a specialist in deception and his malevolence knows no bounds. He will stoop to any means to achieve his ends (12: 9, 10, 12). Whether Christians actually believe this is a moot point. During a war a nation takes its security seriously; it prepares for possible attacks. But do believers today think that Satan is a more deadly enemy than terrorists, or realise that he can be covertly at work in our denominations, theological colleges, and local churches? This is the question that the book of Revelation forces us to answer.

Perhaps the most helpful insights that we gain into Satan's tactics against the church are found in the Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3). These seven churches represent the universal church. In this sense, they are an invaluable guide in demonstrating how Satan prosecutes his war against the church in every age.

Interestingly, when we compare these letters with the rest of Revelation, we find nothing in them that explicitly indicates persecution from the Roman authorities. On the contrary, the trials of Christians are more directly linked to sinister forces such as Satan and hostile Jews (2:9-10, 13). Further, John lays the blame for the churches' troubles on perhaps less obvious causes such as false apostles, heresy, false prophecy as well as idolatry and immorality (2:2, 14, 20). All these threats are spiritual in nature and are a sign of the devil's handiwork. Indeed, the frequency in these letters of such expressions as 'Satan', 'the devil', 'false apostles',

'Satan's throne', 'idols', 'Jezebel', 'sexual immorality', and the 'deep things of Satan' is sufficient to alert us that the major danger facing churches is not their 'smallness' but Satan's schemes.

False teachers

So what are some of these schemes? Let me mention a few. The first and most obvious tactic that Satan uses against believers is to infiltrate false teachers into the church. The reason for this should be obvious. Satan knows that we are saved and sanctified through our knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 1:1). Since this is so, Satan also knows that if he can compromise the ministry of the word, he has struck a major blow against the church.

We should not be surprised at this phenomenon. I once had a conversation with an older minister who confided to me that he knew he was an unbeliever at the time of his ordination. In fact, he told me that he did not believe in the deity of Jesus and had misled the Presbytery when they had questioned him about the matter. He served for over twenty five years in several Australian states before he was led to Christ by a stranger on an aircraft. God had mercy on this man, but what of the congregations which he had deceived week after week until his conversion? In more recent times, Dr Peter Cameron, who was found guilty of heresy by the Presbytery of Sydney, confided to a reporter from the Sydney Morning Herald, who later published the statement, that he had knowingly entered the Presbyterian ministry as a 'double agent'.

It is interesting to note that in at least half of the churches mentioned by John, false teachers and a watered-down gospel constituted a problem. Just how prevalent these issues are today is anyone's guess, but it highlights the need for extreme vigilance in our presbyteries, theological colleges and churches. The presence of false teachers among us is utterly destructive of our spiritual life and sense of mission.

Further, John highlights the fact that false teaching comes in many forms. He refers to the 'doctrine of the Nicolaitans', the 'teaching of Balaam' and the false 'prophecies of Jezebel' (2:14, 15, 20). Although it is not explicitly stated, I think we can presume that there was something seriously wrong with the teaching in Sardis (3:1-6) and Laodicea (3:14-21) as well because in neither church was there any real sense of spiritual life. All this serves to warn us that Satan, who is the arch-deceiver (12:9), targets the pulpits and teaching programs of our churches.

Church leaders must always be alert to this possibility and guard the gospel.

Fierce opposition

Satan's second tactic is to stir up violent opposition to the church so that Christians become afraid to witness and fall into silence. In the first century there seems to have been extreme hostility to the churches in Smyrna and Pergamum that was stirred up to a large extent by the Jews (2:8-17). The frightening nature of this threat is expressed in phrases such as, 'the devil is about to throw some of you into prison', 'tribulation', 'testing', and 'be faithful unto death' (2:10). The severity of the persecution becomes clear when we read that 'Antipas, my faithful witness, was killed' (2:13). This opposition serves as a reminder to us that 'suffering', as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, 'is the badge of a true Christian'.

But not all suffering is of a physical nature. Satan realises that sometimes he can inflict more pain upon the church through the shame of slander than through physical threats (2:9). Slander was the preferred weapon used by the earliest enemies of Christianity. They spread rumours that Christians were cannibals because they ate 'the body of Christ' at the Lord's Supper. They accused them of debauchery because they shared in a common meal that was known as the 'Love Feast'. When Christians refused to acknowledge the divinity of Caesar, they were vilified as traitors and atheists. Persecution is nothing new.

Today, the devil attempts to silence the church in many places through threats of violence. The fact that the vast majority of Iraqi Christians have fled their country in recent times is a reminder that Satan will do whatever he can to eliminate Christian witness in a culture. The various forms of anti-vilification and anti-conversion laws in many democracies today are a further attempt to use the sanction of official force to stifle Christian comment and witness. The source of the trouble, however, is ultimately Satanic.

Scandals

Another tactic employed by Satan to discredit the church is to lure believers into scandals, especially involving sexual immorality (2:14, 15, 20, 22). Whether Christians realise it or not Satan actually sets traps which are designed to catch them in situations of moral compromise. Once these actions become known, the person is disgraced and the church maligned. When a church leader is involved in immorality, Paul describes the

resulting shame as falling into the 'devil's trap' (1 Timothy 3:7). Satan knows full well that if he can bring discredit upon a church leader, then outsiders will be disinclined to hear the gospel.

This explains why it's so important that pastors, elders, and ministry leaders have a blameless reputation both within and beyond the church. The consequences of serious moral failure on their part blunt the ability of the church to reach its community with the gospel. The recent fall of Ted Haggard in the United States illustrates the damage that can be done when prominent Christians are lured into infidelity. Satan knows this and specialises in 'setting traps' for those with pastoral responsibility.

People-pleasers

The last tactic that I want to explore is the way in which Satan encourages the appointment of 'people-pleasers' into churches' pulpits. It seems apparent from the complacency and lifelessness in the churches of Sardis (3:1-6) and Laodicea (3:14-22), that the ministry of Christ's 'sharp two-edged sword' (1:16) had been blunted. The preaching was powerless. Why? We can only speculate about what might have been happening, but the level of self-satisfaction in the church suggests that the pastors had capitulated to a 'give-people-what-they-want' style of ministry that left them comfortable in their materialism and self-love. It seems that both these churches had lapped up the witty

reassurances, small talk and soothing words of the audience-driven preachers and had forgotten that they needed a more confrontive style of preaching that included the themes of sin, righteousness and judgment.

The lesson of the Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation is plain: the size of a congregation should not be its chief concern; of far more importance is its awareness of the tactics that Satan can employ against it.

The Rev. Peter Hastie is the Themes Editor for 'The Australian Presbyterian', the publication of the (continuing) Presbyterian Church of Australia. This is used courtesy of a reciprocal arrangement we have with them.

Lean and fit

The special part of small churches

John Benton talks to Peter Hastie

Dr John Benton is the pastor of the Chertsey Street Baptist Church in Guildford, Surrey. He was converted at the age of fifteen and later obtained a doctorate in science in theoretical chemistry and quantum mechanics from the University of Sussex. While an undergraduate student there he met his wife, Ann, and in his own words, 'I've been doing the follow-up ever since.' He later taught at Liverpool University.

He was called to be the pastor of his

church in 1980. John also serves as the managing editor of *Evangelicals Now* and has written several books, including *Losing Touch With the Living God*, *Slandering the Angels*, *Straightening Out the Self-Centred Church* (all in the Welwyn Series), *One World, One Way*, and *What's Going On Out There?* He has also written *The Big Picture for Small Churches – How To Thrive and Survive as a Small Congregation* (Evangelical Press) in which he emphasizes that it is the health of a church, not its size, that is important.

John and Ann have four children, Matthew, Tom, Jessica and Owen and they live in a small street nearby their church in Guildford.

John, why did you decide to write a book about small churches? It's a sort of a counter-cultural thing to do in Christian circles, isn't it?

Yes, I suppose it is these days. I did so for a number of reasons. First, this church was fairly small when I first came to it. If you compared it with the bigger churches in Guildford, it seemed insignificant. Obviously the church is not as small now and the congregation has grown in size and maturity. Chertsey St Baptist Church is part of the Reformed Baptist movement. Generally speaking, our denomination is made up of fairly small churches. Now it happened that a few years ago I was asked to go and speak up in the north of England to a conference up in Yorkshire about encouraging small churches. This forced me to think through a lot of issues and so my book on *The Big Picture for Small Churches* encapsulates my understanding of what the Bible teaches about this subject. I love small churches; I have preached in many of them in the UK. They are all very dear folk and I understand the anguish that they sometimes feel because of their smallness. They are good people but somehow they feel that they are not as good as other people who are in bigger churches, and my heart just goes out to them. And that's what prompted me to write my book.

As soon as I started thinking along these lines I thought, 'John, you had better put pen to paper on this one and write to encourage



other people.' So I started to write. The funny thing is that the more research I did on this subject the more I realised that the Lord so often starts in a very small way. God's interested in things that are small. I know that may sound counter-cultural, but it's certainly biblical. He takes one man, Noah. He takes one couple, Abraham and Sarah, and He works from there. So I felt that I was clicking into something that was very important. I think it's particularly important in our modern culture where everything is big and you are made to feel useless unless you are big. God doesn't think like that.

John, what's your real concern for small churches and what exactly do you mean by a 'small church'?

The reason why I am concerned for small churches is that in the West, as well as in parts of Asia, a large number of churches fall into this category. While I am well aware that the mega-churches are the ones that seem to attract all the interest and attention these days, the reality is that, for the most part, Christians are more likely to find themselves in a small to average-size church. So it makes sense to me to think carefully about how I can encourage and support believers who find themselves in such a situation.

What is a small church? I wasn't quite sure to begin with. I asked Christian Research, which is a UK group that does a lot of statistics on churches. They gave me this rule of thumb: a small church is any congregation with less than fifty people in attendance. An 'average' church, they said, is anywhere between fifty and one hundred and fifty people. Anything above one hundred and fifty they categorised as 'large'. They added that any church in excess of three hundred and fifty people was 'very large'. So, according to Christian Research, any congregation of less than fifty is 'small'. However, in all honesty, I'm aware of congregations of between fifteen and twenty people. So my heart is very much for these dear folk. When I write about small churches I am thinking of congregations of between fifteen to forty people, and there are lots of these sorts of congregations around – far more than we expect.

Is there anything wrong with a church being small? Is it a sign of poor leadership or spiritual problems?

Not necessarily, although it could be. I think that Christians need to understand that there is nothing wrong with being small. When Paul shared the gospel in Philippi, the church that developed there

was quite small in its earlier stages. It probably consisted of Lydia, the business woman, the jailer and his family, along with the slave girl from whom Paul had cast out the demon. Obviously the church grew from there. Paul also mentions other churches which met in houses in the first century, so they wouldn't have been very big (see Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15). The point is that we don't consider that a baby or child has a problem simply because they haven't reached the size of their father or mother.

Furthermore, sometimes God's strategy is to keep churches small. Although the Western media has hardly noticed it, over the last fifty years the world's greatest spiritual awakening has been taking place in China. Christian demographers believe that there are now over sixty million believers there. Yet many of these Christians meet in small fellowships. In a book called *Operation China*, the author points out that in Yunnan province there are about three hundred Christians amongst the Jino people. They live in the jungle and mountainous areas of the province. The author says that there are thirty one churches among the Jino. Do the maths to calculate the average size of each of those churches! Obviously, they are very small. Nevertheless, God has raised them up and it seems that these small groups are best suited to serve the Christians there at the moment.

The size of many of the Protestant churches in France today is also a case in point. Missiologists have suggested that smaller churches, never exceeding forty to sixty people, are right for their situation. There are a couple of cultural reasons for this. First, French people seem to be suspicious of large and powerful churches based on their experience of the behaviour of the Roman Catholic Church in the past. They are more attracted to a church with close personal relationships as in a family. Of course, this only works where churches are relatively small.

The second reason why the French seem to prefer small churches is that their cultural values of liberty, equality and fraternity are important to them; they like to have their say in decision-making. Being in a small church makes it more likely for this to happen. So I think that in certain situations small churches can be the design of God. In China and France this seems to be the case.

Should people be discouraged by the fact that they attend a small church? If not, why?

No, I don't think people should be discouraged by the size of their fellowship. It seems to me that the most important question to ask is: are they receiving faithful Christian ministry and is God really working in their lives? Having said that, I understand that in a society of large corporations, big governments and giant shopping malls it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that unless an organisation is really big it's not worth looking at. The day of the corner shop seems to be disappearing.

Unfortunately, television has conditioned us into thinking that it's only things that are

big and newsworthy that are worth thinking about. Gradually, people have become sensitized to this way of viewing life. It's a cultural bias that really has no basis in Scripture. Christians need to remember that God often starts in small and rather insignificant ways. Jesus makes this point when he talks about the coming of the kingdom. It comes in an inconspicuous manner (Mark

4:30-32). I think this gives us enormous encouragement not to be downcast by numbers. The Lord can save in whatever way He chooses – whether by many or by few. We need to recognise this cultural bias towards bigness for what it is – a worldly idea with no foundation in the Bible.

Having said that, I want to add that if our churches are small because we know there's something spiritually wrong and we are doing nothing about it, then that's an entirely different matter. But simply being small is not a problem in God's eyes. I don't think we should be discouraged simply because of our size. Large numbers at church are not necessarily a sign of health, as Jeremiah reminds us (Jer 7: 1-15).

Is there any indication in the letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation that there's something wrong with being a small church?

No, on the contrary, there appears to be some recognition that it is okay to be small. In the letter to the church of Philadelphia, Christ says: 'I know that you have but little strength...' (Rev 3:8). Some commentators, like John Stott, have suggested that it seems likely that what is meant is that the congregation was not large. The letter to the church in Philadelphia is one of only two letters amongst the seven in which Christ does not accuse them of wrongdoing. Since



the churches in Philadelphia and in Smyrna faced serious persecution, it is more than likely that they were smaller than the other churches who were rebuked.

Do you think God has a special strategy in having lots of small churches around the world? For instance, there are some situations in Communist and Islamic countries where it's impossible to have large public gatherings. Are small groups of believers part of God's plan?

Yes, I certainly think that's true. I've already mentioned the phenomenon of smaller churches in France and China and some of the cultural reasons for this. There are obviously some situations where people are more comfortable in smaller churches than larger ones. There is no doubt that people prize a sense of family in their church where each individual feels that they are known and where they believe they can contribute. Again, that only works within a group of probably less than a hundred people. Once you get bigger than that you start running into the problems of saying 'Hello, are you new here?' and the person replies, 'Well, actually I've been coming for the past nine months and you've obviously never noticed...' Unfortunately that's the sort of thing that often happens when the church gets bigger. So I think God does have His strategy in that.

On the other hand, I want to make it clear that we should always want to grow. God expects us to grow in spiritual maturity and to be involved in evangelism. Christians should be seeking to witness to the lost. I certainly don't want to give the message that it's alright to be small and you needn't try to grow. I am not saying that. What I am saying is, 'Let's try to grow through witness and service, but let's recognize that the size of the church is in God's sovereign hands.' We must be obedient to the Lord and reach out, but let's not thrash ourselves if under God's sovereign purpose there isn't immediate revival or enormous growth.

If the smallness of a church is not the real problem, what is?

The real problems that churches face are spiritual in nature. I can't find anywhere in the New Testament where 'smallness' as such is flagged as the real spiritual problem. The problems with churches are never to do with numbers. The idea that we have solved our problems if we grow the church in size is wrong. An increase in numbers may simply

mask more serious issues. The letters to the Seven Churches in the Book of Revelation remind us that the basic problems that churches face are spiritual ones.

What are the spiritual problems that cause you more concern than small numbers?

The things that concern Christ are doctrinal deviation, moral failure, factions in the church, people fighting one another, worldliness, and a lack of heart for evangelism. The number of people in a church is never mentioned as a problem. God can work with any number of people – whether by many or by few. The Bible says that (1 Samuel 14:6).

I often remind small churches about the story of Noah. It was eight people against the world. Eight – that's all! Was the whole world wrong except these eight people? Yes,

it was. Often the devil comes to people in small churches and says 'Who do you think you are? Isn't it rather arrogant to think that in this town of thousands of people, you alone – just the twenty or thirty of you – have got it right?' Yet this was precisely the situation for Noah and his family.

The whole world was wrong; only Noah and his small family were saved. No one else survived the flood.

We see the same principle at work in Gideon's war against the Midianites. God actually says to Gideon that he has too many men in his army. The reason why God used only a small number of men was that He was concerned that people might think that Israel's success in battle was due to the nation's strength and not God's power. If this happened, the Israelites would be tempted to give glory to themselves. They would go around saying, 'Well, of course, we have this wonderful army etc'. However, God wanted to put Gideon in a situation where it was totally obvious that there was no other reason why the Israelites had won the battle apart from God himself. That's why the Lord cut down Gideon's force to only three hundred men.

The same principle applies today. Is anyone surprised when people are taken along to some enormous evangelistic meeting with thousands of people and suddenly 'get religion'? I don't think anyone is surprised because they put it down to crowd control, manipulative preaching and lots of emotional music. People know that you can produce these sorts of effects in large crowds. They

just put it down to the hype, you know, to the emotion of the situation. But if people are saved in a small congregation where there are none of those things, then it does make people think 'what on earth has got into them?' It might just be that they begin to take seriously the fact that God has met with these people.

The Scripture tells us that God works through small and simple means. Moses uses a rod to separate the Red Sea and to provide the Israelites with water in the wilderness. Jesus uses a small boy's lunch to feed five thousand people. Small things in the hands of the Lord can have huge effects. That's when the glory goes to God. I believe that it's important for small churches to see themselves in that kind of way.

You've said that the basic problems behind the dwindling churches in the UK are not sociological. In your opinion, what are the real reasons behind the decline of the influence of the church in the UK?

I think a number of things need to be mentioned here. First, I believe that it's the judgment of God upon our land. We are suffering under the Lord's discipline. England went through a cultural crisis in the 1960's. I grew up in this period and I think one of the great turning-points was the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1961. That was a moment of moral crisis in the nation. Second, I think the church has become far too middle-class and has lost the notion of radical discipleship. Today, Christians have settled for a comfortable view of life and our expectations as far as jobs and standards of living are concerned are no different to unbelievers. Christians want a nice salary, a large house and enjoy their church experience, but they don't want to be challenged to live a life of sacrifice as radical disciples. The simple fact is that the church no longer understands what it means to 'take up the cross.'

The other problem is that the church has kept a culpable silence on serious moral issues of our day such as abortion, homosexuality and the like. When these issues were first raised I don't recall any national church leaders speaking out vigorously against these things. Even evangelicals went quiet. They ignored it all and said that their task was simply to get on with evangelism.

So there was no prophetic voice raised against these things?

Not a word, as far as I can remember; not even from men whom I respected as



great leaders. They seemed to be culturally disengaged. Of course, I could be wrong because I was a lot younger at the time, but I just don't remember hearing any notable British church leaders speak about these issues until Dr Francis Schaeffer stood up and condemned abortion. I distinctly remember that. But all through the sixties I don't remember any of the evangelical leaders standing up and saying 'Look, we ought to be organizing ourselves against this and we ought to let the parliament and our national leaders know that this is wrong'.

The sad thing is that it took about another thirty years for evangelicals to twig that the gospel actually has moral implications and that we had a responsibility to make God's will on these issues known. Some of our leaders have finally got around to doing it today but the nation is miles down the road from where it was then. And, of course, behind all these moral issues is the whole creation/evolution debate. Sadly, there are many respected evangelicals who have compromised on evolution. They have a foot in both camps. They try to make the Bible fit in with Darwinism without realising that the basis for our moral values with respect to family and sexuality are grounded in the creation ordinances.

What do you think of the church growth theory that has been so popular over the last twenty five years?

I believe that Christianity is about a change of heart, not simply a change of behaviour. The gospel confronts us with the fact of God, and the fact of our sin, and our need for redemption from judgment. Tragically, these things are being watered down today by many evangelicals. The problem is actually far deeper than most church growth theorists realise. It's not just a matter of attracting people to a service that they feel comfortable with. I mean, an attractive service will undoubtedly bring some people to the church, but there's got to be that heart engagement with God which is the Holy Spirit's work. That's the great matter.

So I don't think you can organise church growth simply by tinkering around with the style of worship. Of course, that's no excuse to hold a church service which is archaic and that deliberately avoids modern music. I love some of the modern music and I look forward to singing it. But I never forget that music does not equal conversion. Lots of people make the mistake today that if you just tinker with a few things around the edges and make everything modern and hi-tech, then people will be come and be

changed. But it doesn't work that way.

What sort of vision is needed by small churches if they are going to fulfil their calling to be faithful witnesses to God in this generation?

We need to be in real contact with our local community. When I first came to the church in Guildford I realised that we had lost contact with the community around us. We did not engage with our neighbourhood. But if we are going to bring the gospel of God's power to people we must be living amongst them. Think about Jesus' incarnation; He came and He lived among us. He did not commute back to heaven every night. He lived with us.

So a church must try to engage with its local community. That's the first thing. We need to share the gospel through practical involvement with the community, showing Christian love to our neighbourhood. If the local church actually helps the people who live in the immediate area then their hearts and minds are open to asking questions about the gospel. One of the interesting things about the New Testament is that when it talks about ordinary church members evangelising, like Colossians 4:5, 6 and 1 Peter 3:15, it usually speaks in terms of them answering, or being prepared to give an answer. It assumes that somehow people will be asking us questions because the way we live actually provokes our neighbours or friends to ask them. And that's the vision that I feel is absolutely necessary today. Again, that's not the way that the mega-churches think about their mission. They usually draw people from a very wide area and their emphasis is usually about putting on a big show. Obviously, I don't agree with that.

What are some of the ways in which a small church can witness persuasively to our secular world?

I believe that the secular world is a hard nut to crack but it is vulnerable at a number of points. The reality is that people are spiritual beings, regardless of their secular values, and so they do have a real hunger for spiritual reality. Therefore, when they meet Christians who really know the Lord and have a great sense of God about them, they sometimes become very curious about the nature of their faith.

It's also true that secularists are often afraid of what the future holds for themselves and their families in a world that is morally disintegrating. Again, the sense of uncertainty that grips them gives Christians

a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate why they can be confident about the future in a world that seems to be falling apart. And a church can do that through practical things like running a good, wholesome and exciting young people's club. What do secularists have to offer at this point? Not much as far as I can see. While there a number of alternative youth programs on offer, people are given no assurance that their kids won't be offered drugs there or that leaders will hold a certain moral or spiritual point-of-view. However, if a church runs a really good Christian youth club that is based on strong biblical principles, then that is a great opportunity for witness.

I think Christians should also try to help out other local organisations in unselfish ways. My own wife was for many years involved with the local school. She actually became the chairman of governors there for a while. When it came time for her step down, another of our elders' wives took on the role and became deeply involved. So our local school had the benefit of some really fine leaders over a period of years. And I think that kind of thing makes people feel that the church really does want to do them good and actually cares about them. It's often in situations like that that we find opportunities to share the gospel with people.

Another point that is often forgotten is that there are lots of lonely people in our materialistic world, especially those who are not well off. Secular materialism is all very well for the rich, but if you are not so well-to-do it can be very difficult as you get older and feel that you are not wanted by people. Showing hospitality to such people or going out of your way to visit them is a wonderful opportunity to show Christian love. So I think there are many ways like that that a good church can really use to make contact with people.

And it doesn't need to be big to do that?

No, it doesn't. At one level it is as simple as caring for our neighbours. My wife looks after a blind lady who lives two or three doors down from us. The blind lady has started coming to church. We're not quite sure yet where she stands yet spiritually, but this is the kind of thing that Christians ought to do their best to be involved in.

How do we know that a church is starting to make the right kind of impact in its area or its local community?

You can see that you have made an impact when people begin to trust the church. I

can think of times when non-Christians have come and said to me, 'John, you've been involved with us before; would you take our father's funeral?' I remember one occasion where a father died and we were asked, 'The boys are obviously missing their dad terribly. Can you make a special effort to get them along to the children's club at church and make sure they feel at home?' They obviously had nowhere else to turn. These kinds of incidents have convinced me that if people are going to take the gospel seriously, then Christians need to have built a certain level of trust with them.

Do you think it's very hard for newcomers today to visit a church? Do you have any suggestions as to how church members can treat newcomers?

It can be very difficult for newcomers to feel comfortable in a church service. I heard about a seminar on evangelism where people were seated at desks. And at every desk they found a pound coin, and they wondered what it was all about. The person giving the lecture was trying to make the point about how difficult it is sometimes for newcomers to feel at home in a church. So he said, 'Just so you can understand the kind of struggles that a non-Christian goes through when he goes into a church, I want you to take that pound at lunch time and go and place a bet at the local betting shop. Most of these Christians had never been in such an establishment and didn't have a clue about what to do. They were thinking, 'Oh, my goodness, what will I do if one of my friends sees me in this place?' And he got them to do the exercise. It was a good thing to do because it made these Christians realise how awkward it is for non-Christians to go into a church. They are scared their neighbours are going to be thinking, 'Maybe Harry has gone religious!' Visiting the betting shop was a valuable experience because it made the Christians understand the feelings and anxieties of those who come to church for the first time.

John, what do you expect the members of your congregation to do when newcomers arrive?

I like them to welcome newcomers with a friendly smile and I want them to be sensitive to their needs and feelings. I want them to talk to them, you know, some people tell you that they've gone to a church and 'nobody talked to me'. I think that's dreadful. I think that the first person who meets them needs to assess the kind of person they are. Do they need someone to introduce them

around or are they the sort of person who doesn't want to be made a fuss of? Some people want to be given a bit of space; they just want to come in and be a fly on the wall. So you really have to size up people and then treat them appropriately. That's not always easy. The one thing we must avoid at all costs is giving the impression that we think that we are somehow better than they are. We are all sinners, saved by grace. That's the kind of atmosphere we need to have in our church. The other thing that is helpful at this point is to introduce them to other people in the church who may have similar interests or work in the same field as the visitor.

Do we have any idea how people from radically different religious backgrounds are affected by the demonstration of Christian love?

When Christians love other people from different cultures and religions it can have a profound effect. For instance, we can leave a significant impression on people from a Muslim background. Islam is quite a harsh religion and Muslim women can easily feel downtrodden by it. If Christians show Muslims respect, even at a very small level, it can have a great influence on them because as human beings they respond to love. Genuine Christian love touches them at a very deep level.

Should small churches be discouraged if they can't devote many resources to the music ministry?

No, they shouldn't be discouraged. Worship is not principally about music; it's about the heart; it's about love to God; and it's about obedience and submission to the Lord. I've already mentioned that I love music, but music itself is not worship. Jesus warns us that 'these people draw near to me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.' I'm sure that the Lord would be more pleased with a congregation that has great difficulty with an old piano but whose hearts are on fire for Him, than the best electric guitars and drums that money can buy but with no genuine surrender. You can get swept away in the emotion of modern music when it's not matched with a real heart love for God. I really don't think small churches should be worried if they have relatively limited musical resources.

How important is the ministry of hospitality in the outreach if the church?

I think it is very important because it does two things. First, it says to the Lord, 'Lord, I

want you to be in my home. I'm not just interested in turning up to church on Sundays. I want to use my life for you. Hospitality is a way that I can open up a bit more of my life to God. Then, second, it's important because it makes people realise that you're interested in them. You're not just interested in a man sitting on a pew on Sunday; you're actually interested in friendship, in sharing something of your life.

You've spoken about the importance of a sense of 'family' in a church. What role can older people have in creating such an atmosphere in a congregation?

I think some of the most valuable roles that are played in the church are played by the older people. If they are still active and healthy there are a variety of things that they can do that can directly assist the outreach and pastoral care offered by the church. You know, very often retired folk can open up their homes to students or others who are living away from their families. That is a tremendous thing. Often retired people have more time to do these sorts of things than others. I have certainly seen retired people involved in very good follow-up work. They have invited people around who have recently become Christians and simply been there for them. When newer Christians have sometimes had problems or whatever, they have been there for them. I have had older people in our church who have taken initiatives in this regard and said, 'if you want to pick up the phone and talk to us, if you want to share with us the struggles that you are going through, we will be glad to listen and to pray with you.' When people who have retired from the workforce do this sort of thing they play a vital role.

Again, some older people can play a strategic role in the church through prayer. I can't emphasize this enough. Often they may not be well enough to get around and be involved in more physically demanding ministry, but if they are mature Christians they can be powerful intercessors behind the scenes. This is an essential ministry. They may not be able to do much entertaining or show hospitality because their health is not good enough, but they can still pray. Further, they can have a real pastoral ministry over the phone. They can show they care for people by ringing them up and, without prying, finding out how to pray for others in ways that will help face their demands and challenges.

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World in focus

3,000 Christians added each day in China

A report from Voice of the Martyrs, a US-based Christian group that works specifically to help members of the persecuted Christian church, reports that worship services are being broken up by police officers, participants arrested, Bibles confiscated, and Christian church buildings demolished. In spite of this, an estimated 3,000 people every day come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ in China.

+ Voice of the Martyrs, PO Box 443, Bartlesville, OK 74005 (918) 337-8015

National Council of Churches condemns murder of Editor

The murder of Hrant Dink on 19 January, in Istanbul, 'is a devastating development,' said Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, diocesan legate and ecumenical officer, Diocese of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America. 'The Armenian people around the world are mourning his death,' said Aykazian, who is also president-elect of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC).

Dink, 53, was the owner and editor of *Agos*, the largest weekly Turkish-Armenian newspaper in Istanbul.

'He's the latest victim of the Turkish genocide of the Armenian people that began in 1915,' said Aykazian. 'He died because he had the courage to say there was a genocide' by the Ottoman Turks against Armenians.

Dink had been convicted of insulting Turkish identity for publicly writing about the Armenian genocide and was given a suspended sentence. New laws in Turkey forbid public statements criticising the country.

+ The Armenian Church, Catholicosate of All Armenians, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Vagharshapat, Republic of Armenia

+ National Council of Churches USA, 475 Riverside Dr., Suite 880, New York, NY 10115 (212) 870-2227

Protestant churches in Germany launch process of renewal

Protestant leader Bishop Wolfgang Huber, at the close of a three-day congress on the future in Wittenburg, 27 January, said the mainline churches have reached a 'point of no return' and have launched a process of radical renovation and renewal which they hope will make them fit for the 21st century.

In the East German town where Martin Luther started the Reformation in 1517, approximately 300 representatives from the churches and public life discussed prospects and perspectives for a more agile and missionary-minded church in the coming decades.

The former 'people's church' in Martin Luther's home country has suffered continuous membership losses since the seventies. This decline is likely to continue, mainly because Germany is suffering from a severe lack of children.

If nothing changes, the total membership of the mainline Protestant churches will drop from 25.6 million to 17 million by the year 2030.

The annual income from church tax — currently US\$5.2 billion — will be cut in half.

Church attendance is also low. Less than four percent of all church members worship on an average Sunday. The aim is to stop membership losses and raise the average worship attendance to ten percent.

+ Evangelical Church in Germany, Herrenhäuser Strasse 12, 30419 Hanover, Germany

Analyzing the Federal Vision seminar

A one-day conference on 'Analyzing the Federal Vision' will be held on Saturday, 10 February, at Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina. The 'Federal Vision' is a new and troublesome set of doctrines that exists in the PCA (and other Reformed denominations as well). It raises questions that strike at the very heart of central doctrines. This 'set of doctrinal innovations' has already been deemed erroneous by the Session of WRPC. Recent rulings by the PCA's Standing Judicial Committee ensure that it will be a major topic of discussion at the 2007 General Assembly. This conference is designed to make these issues understandable to ruling elders, deacons, and laymen.

+ Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church, 2519 Woodruff Rd., Simpsonville, SC 29681 (864) 297-5257

Federal Vision lectures available

Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church in America of Greenville, South Carolina, is offering the lectures presented at its recent conference by TE Guy Waters on Federal Vision.

To listen to or download the lectures to your iPod or MP3 player, go to <<http://phobos.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=137539865>>

+ Dominic Aquila, Byfaithonline Newsletter, daquila@byfaithonline.com <http://www.byfaithonline.com>

Retired missionary and daughter killed in Kenya

A retired Presbyterian Church (USA) missionary and her daughter were killed in a carjacking on Saturday, 27 January, in Kenya.

Lois Anderson, former PC(USA) missionary in Africa, and her daughter, Zelda White, were shot in a village just a few miles outside the capital city of Nairobi, according to Doug Welch, the PC(USA)'s coordinator for Africa.

International news reports that the carjackers escaped with the vehicle but soon abandoned it. Two of them were later killed.

White lived with her husband in Kenya, and the Andersons had travelled from their South Carolina home for a family gathering.

The Andersons served as PC(USA) missionaries for more than four decades in Sudan and Kenya.

+ Presbyterian Church (USA), 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202 (888) 728-7228

Chaldean Seminary and Theological University reopened

The Chaldean Church's two educational institutions, the Chaldean Major Seminary and

Babel College, have moved from Baghdad and reopened in Ankawa, near Irbil, in Kurdistan. The move comes as a result of the growing insecurity in the capital city and other areas in Iraq. The decision to move was made official on 4 January, 2007, after closing down the two institutions.

+ Middle East Council of Churches, Office of International Ecumenical Relations, PO Box 5376, Beirut, Lebanon

Common statement of Coptic & Greek Orthodox Churches

On 16 December, 2006, a common statement was issued by the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa clarifying their position regarding the so-called ordination of the Reader Max Michel as bishop of Egypt and the Middle East by schismatic and non-canonical bishops who claim to be Orthodox.

In the statement, the two Patriarchs, HH Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church and HB Patriarch Theodoros II, rejected the false ordination effected by bishops who are not recognised by any Orthodox Church, the ordination's ecclesiastical and sacramental validity, as well as all the ordinations conducted by Max Michel.

+ Middle East Council of Churches, Office of International Ecumenical Relations, PO Box 5376, Beirut, Lebanon

Maurice Roberts chosen as next Moderator of FCC

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) have announced that the Moderator-designate of their next General Assembly is Rev. Maurice Roberts, currently minister at Inverness. Mr Roberts is expected to take up his duties as Moderator in May.

Mr Roberts was editor of the *Instructor* magazine for a number of years and edited the *Banner of Truth* magazine from 1988 to 2003.

+ Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Principal Clerk of Assembly and Press Officer: Rev. John MacLeod, Portmahomack, TAIN, Ross-shire IV20 1YL

Calvin announces new Centre

An innovative new centre at Calvin College has been established thanks to a US\$2 million dollar gift to the college from the Richard D. VanLunen Foundation. The VanLunen Center for Executive Management in Christian Schools will provide world-class executive management education for heads of schools based on the historic Christian faith (of which there are some 20,000 across the continent).

The centre will serve faith-based schools large and small across the US and Canada. And it will practice a big-tent philosophy, reaching out to schools from a wide-range of faith traditions, including Catholic, evangelical Protestant, independent Christian, Lutheran, and Reformed Christian day schools.

+ Calvin College, 3201 Burton S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546 (800) 688-0122

End of Catholic adoptions in Scotland

Prime Minister Tony Blair stated on 29 January that Roman Catholic adoption agencies must consider placing children with gay parents. Blair ruled that there should be no opt-outs for new equality laws.

Catholic leaders said the decision would mean the end for their two adoption agencies in Scotland. Peter Kearney, the church's spokesman in Scotland, said, 'It is impossible to see how a Catholic adoption agency could remain in business. This is a full-scale assault on religious belief.'

Blair did agree to give adoption agencies a

two-year 'breathing space' to adjust to the new rules, saying it was a 'sensible compromise' to an issue which had sparked weeks of bitter Cabinet in-fighting.

The agencies in Scotland, St Margaret's in Glasgow and St Andrew's in Edinburgh, found homes for 46 children last year.

The Blair government's decision has placed the Roman Catholic Church and the Grand Orange Lodge side by side on the front lines in the culture wars. On 29 January, Grand Master Ian Wilson of Scotland announced that the Protestant fraternity would support the Roman Church in its struggle with Blair. The

Grand Master told *The Scotsman* that leaders of the Catholic Church had a right to be heard on such moral issues in politics. Wilson spoke after Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor said, 'If people weren't able to act according to their conscience for the sake of the common good in our country, it would be a lack of freedom for religious conviction.' Wilson noted, 'There has to be more tolerance of the views of people of faith, and that includes the Cardinal.'

+ *St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society, 274 Bath St., Glasgow, G2 4JR Scotland, United Kingdom*

+ *Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland, Olympia House, 13 Olympia Street, Glasgow G40 3TA Scotland, United Kingdom <info@orangeorderscotland.com>*

In memoriam

Rev. Prof. Dr. Klaas Runia, 1926-2006

Another of the original faculty of the Reformed Theological College has left us. On Saturday, October 14, 2006 we were saddened by the passing of Professor Klaas Runia. His passing is a great loss to the wider Reformed community, particularly in Australia and The Netherlands, where his teaching, preaching and writing ministry spanned some 50 years.

We were privileged to have him as part of our College from 1957-1971 during which time he taught Systematic theology. He not only had a great influence on the RTC and its supporting churches, but was widely known and recognised in Inter-Varsity Fellowship, Overseas Christian Fellowship and similar Christian organisations. Many evangelicals in Australia will have read his *'Reformation Today'*.

As one of his early students, it was only later that I recognised the impact he has had on my life and ministry. Many years after, when both he and I were involved in the Reformed Ecumenical Council, he presented an address on the *'Uniqueness of Christ'*. Afterwards I remarked how much of his theology had rubbed off on me. With a twinkle in his eye he said: *'You could do worse!'* How true. Our generation of church leaders is greatly indebted to him for our theological formation. He instilled in us a love for the Scriptures and also the desire and obligation to treat theological opponents fairly.

Professor Runia is well known through the writing of many books and his contributions to journals and the *'Centraal Weekblad'* and other newspapers in The Netherlands. One thing I always appreciated about Runia's writing was that it was clear. You knew exactly where he stood and what he meant. Those who may not always have agreed with him at least knew what the issue was.

It is true that later in his ministry Runia did move on a number of theological issues, for example, women in office, ecumenical matters and no doubt some other things as well. (People in The Netherlands will know better!) His desire to be relevant is shown by the fact that he gave due attention to the charismatic movement when he published a book entitled: *'Op Zoek naar de Geest'* (In search of the Spirit).

Dr. Runia has earned deep respect for his theological contribution and involvement in the life and witness of Reformed/ Evangelical churches worldwide.

May his legacy live on in those who follow him!

Henk DeWaard.

Principal,

Reformed Theological College.



PCI selects John Finlay for Moderator

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has chosen Rev. John Finlay to serve as its moderator. The son of missionaries to Argentina and the father of an Armagh pastor, Finlay has been minister of Ballymena's Harryville Presbyterian Church in Co Antrim for 25 years. The new term will begin in June.

In his first public address after his election, Finlay expressed disappointment at the Blair government's determination to force gay adoption. According to published reports, Finlay accused the administration of pushing Christian opinion from the public arena in an increasingly secular society.

Roman Catholics greeted the election with warmth, noting Finlay's efforts to remove Loyalist graffiti from public spaces and to refocus religious concerns from communal conflict to opposing sectarianism and the pervasive drug culture.

+ *Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Church House, Belfast, BT1 6DW*

Concerned Churches in the PCUSA

The New Wineskins Convocation was held in Orlando, Florida, on Thursday and Friday, February 8-9. Over 500 delegates from 130 of the 153 member churches of the New Wineskins Association attended the meeting, which was held at the First Presbyterian Church of Orlando.

The Evangelical Presbyterian delegation to the meeting consisted of four moderators (Paul Heidebrecht, Bill Meyer, Bill Vogler and John Adamson), GA staff (Ed McCallum, Janet Bain, Jacky Gatliff, Jeff Chadwick, Marc Santom), Stated Clerk Jeffrey J. Jeremiah, Long Range Planning Committee members Nate Atwood and Mike Moses, and Bob Garment and Woody Johnson of the Florida Presbytery.

The Convocation's main event took place late Friday afternoon. Delegates voted unanimously to approve their Strategy Team's report, which includes two 'faithful options' for the future: 1) to remain in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and 2) to depart the PCUSA and seek admission in the EPC through the Transitional Presbytery the EPC will be voting on in June at our General Assembly.

The end of the session at which the vote was taken was memorable: Participants sang 'A Mighty Fortress' with energy and fervour.

Reports have used transitional presbytery and provisional presbytery indiscriminately. The final terminology will be selected at the EPC

General Assembly. The stated goal on all sides of the discussion is to produce a Presbyterian Church for the 21st century which is missional in nature.

+ Office of the General Assembly, *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*, 17197 N. Laurel Park Drive Suite 567, Livonia, Michigan 48152 (734) 742-2020
+ New Wineskins Initiative, 7435 E. Oxford Court, Wichita, KS 67226 (888) 754-9693

Back to God Hour reaching millions

The Back to God Hour's ability to reach people with the gospel through media has increased — and it shows in the number of people who are connecting with the Chicago-based electronic media ministry. In 2006, BTGH's nine language ministries received more than 1.7 million contacts from people in 170 countries around the world! That number is up from 1.3 million contacts in 2005, and 867,000 in 2004.

+ Christian Reformed Church, 2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560 (616) 241-1691

Mexican persecution of evangelicals

Persecution of evangelical Christians in the southern state of Chiapas 'is accelerating daily in the indigenous regions,' according to Mexico's National Bar of Christian Lawyers. Most of the problems stem from small-town leaders' insistence that evangelicals pay quotas for the festivals of 'traditional Catholics' — a blend of native 'traditional' religions and Catholicism — or else they will be expelled from their homes and their properties seized, said Alfonso Farrera, director of the bar. The organization directed by Farrera has told the government it has records of 200 cases of unresolved religious intolerance in Chiapas, including 'threats, intimidation, and robbery or expulsion from their communities or death.'

+ Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0304 info@compassdirect.org

Religion army rampages in India

About 25 members of the Hindu extremist group Dharam Sena (Religion Army) attacked a pastors' conference in Raipur, Chhattisgarh state, on Friday (February 2), injuring at least 10 Christians. The attack took place at about 3:30 p.m. as organizers were preparing the opening session at the Singh Palace banquet hall in Pandri, a sub-district of Raipur. "When the Dharam Sena barged into the hall, my female manager tried to stop them, but they manhandled her and then proceeded to attack the participants," according to Jay Prakash, the Christian owner of Singh Palace. The extremists shouted "Jai Shri Ram! [Hail god Rama]" as they beat the Christians with sticks, verbally insulted them and accused them of forcibly converting Hindus.

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

A feminine focus

*'Blest be the tie
that binds'*

Sally Davey

Introduction

We all love to sing in worship. In fact, our churches are notable for the way whole congregations sing so heartily. At times this is an important witness to the wider world. Think of those occasions, such as weddings or funerals, when there are often unconverted family members or workmates present. Few of them are in the habit of attending church — or even singing. The sound of a hundred or more people earnestly singing God's truth back to Him has sometimes moved such people deeply. Several times they have told me so themselves

It is good that we do this, but it does not just happen by itself. The habit of hearty singing, it seems to me, needs to be taught as well as caught. One generation needs to pass on the love of hymn singing to the next — with conscious effort. Children are

helped in this both by their parents and by their church as a whole. Probably the most important way that children learn to sing in worship is from the example of their parents. If parents love to sing, their children will pick up on their attitude and grow to love it too. Conversely, if parents have a negative, critical attitude to what is sung in worship, children will often be half-hearted in their own singing. It stands to reason. This is the passing on of attitudes that are 'caught' by example.

But it also needs to be taught, and it's worth thinking about some of the ways to do this. Mostly it has to do with the way we discuss singing and the content of hymns; and the way we actually sing them together. Surely homes have a part to play in this important aspect of worship. Good hymns contain a lot of biblical truth, and a useful thing is to discuss the ways the hymn develops these truths, verse by verse. (You could also discuss the ways the tune matches

these truths, e.g. joyfully or repentantly or reflectively). Some families I know include hymn singing in their family worship at home. In this way the children learn the hymns, often by heart, through frequent use. This is a good way of encouraging your children to enjoy the hymns, to appreciate the truth that is in them, and to love the tunes that go with them.

There is one more thing that helps this process greatly. And that is a knowledge of the hymn writer's life, and the circumstances surrounding the actual writing of the hymn. Have you ever found that you appreciated a book or a poem much more when a teacher told you something about the life of the author or poet, and explained what was going on in that person's life when he wrote that specific work? Somehow it comes alive, doesn't it? It helps you greatly to identify with it and make it your own. You understand it. Well, the same thing can happen with the hymns we sing. I thought I would try to help you by telling you the story behind some of them in the next few months.

To begin, here are some thoughts on John Fawcett's *Blest be the tie that binds*.

Background to 'Blest be the tie that binds'

I'm almost certain that none of you will have heard of John Fawcett. And yet, all of you will have sung at one time or another (probably many times) his hymn, *Blest be the tie that binds*. This is a hymn we often sing when the



John Fawcett

subject of fellowship, friendship or saying goodbye comes up. Perhaps because of this, I admit that I have been inclined to think of it as a bit of a tear-jerker; and somewhat too sentimental. However, since I came across the story behind this hymn I have come to appreciate it a great deal more. In fact, it comes from the pen of a man whose theological convictions are very close to our own; and out of circumstances that give genuine cause for moved hearts.

John Fawcett lived in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth (1740-1817). He lived all his life in small towns (probably more like villages) in the Yorkshire moors in England. You could say that his circumstances were quite obscure: the scenes of his life were in a remote backwater. This was especially so given the communications of his day. There were no railways, mail was very slow, and the only way of moving around was on foot or horseback over very poor, barely-formed roads. News would travel slowly from London to a place like Hebden Bridge (his village in Yorkshire).

Fawcett was one of a large family, and his mother was left a widow when his father died of a fever at the age of fifty. She was a Christian lady, and encouraged him to attend the Bradford parish church (Bradford was the nearest town in Yorkshire). The lecturer at this church was also the headmaster of the local school, and he taught young John the classics. Another man, the Presbyterian minister in Bradford, also taught John Latin. He was clearly a keen young student. By his mid-teens he was following an apprentice-

ship (fatherless, there was no family money to enable him to study full time). When John was 16 George Whitefield arrived in Bradford on his travels around the north of England, and he heard the famous preacher preach on John 3:14: '*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*' This sermon led to John's conversion; and subsequently he gravitated towards the Methodists and other non-Conformist churches in Bradford. These were the places he more often heard the teaching that had changed his heart so greatly.

Fawcett's theology

In 1758 Fawcett formally joined the Particular Baptists, the church he stayed with for the rest of his life. The Particular Baptists were strongly Calvinistic in doctrine; and until the middle of the nineteenth century, Baptists of Reformed persuasion were in fact the majority among English Baptists. (The missionary William Carey and preacher Charles Spurgeon are two of the best-known of their number.) The same year he married Susannah Skirrow, five years his senior. By this time he was also trying his hand at writing – both prose and poetry. He definitely had a gift for using words, and not long after gave up his secular work to devote himself to the Baptist ministry. In 1764 he settled at Wainsgate and afterwards at Hebden Bridge, both of which were in the parish of Halifax.

Fawcett, it appears, was a born pastor. He loved the work of the ministry, he was a genuine scholar, a devoted pastor, and a very gifted preacher and hymn writer. He simply loved his people; and worked hard at bringing the Gospel to their hearts, and visiting them. Apparently he preached about 200 sermons a year (around four a week). But it seems this area was not a fertile harvest field: Fawcett described it as 'a dry and barren place.' He must have worked very hard, because such was his reputation as a preacher that a gallery had to be erected in the church to accommodate the large congregations, many of whom traveled long distances to hear him.

A call from London

And his people loved him. Of this there is no doubt, for we see it in the events that led to the writing of *Blest be the tie that binds*. By the time Fawcett had been in the ministry for eight years, his abilities must have come to the attention of others in his denomination in London. How, we do not know. Possibly news of his preaching had reached the metropolis; perhaps some had read his sermons or other

writings; or maybe some of his early hymns had circulated as far as London. Whatever the means, it is striking that a preacher in a small country village in the north of England should have become known, by his early 30s, to Baptists in some of the more important congregations in the capital. But known he certainly must have been, for in 1772 he received a call from the Carter's Lane congregation of Dr John Gill. Gill was probably the leading minister and theologian of the denomination. In fact, one biographer states that by 1740 Gill was fast becoming 'the leading theological spokesman for the Particular Baptists in both Great Britain and America.' Certainly his books were read by influential ministers in New England; includ-

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims,
are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we are called to part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart
And hope to meet again.

This glorious hope revives
Our courage by the way;
While each in expectation lives
And waits to see the day.

From sorrow, toil and pain
And sin, we shall be free;
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity.

ing the famous preacher and theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Gill had been serving his congregation with his solid preaching for 52 years when he died.¹ Clearly, they were a well-instructed church. You can imagine the honour, then, for an obscure man from the far-off north of England to receive a call from such a church. It would have been the equivalent of a minister in a small town in New Zealand today receiving a call from a well-known church with an internationally-known minister in, say, one of the larger American cities.

Although reluctant to leave his people, the young Fawcett accepted the call. His congregation heard the news with consternation and sorrow – they were really distressed. They made many urgent appeals to their minister, but though touched, he still believed he should go. On the last day of his ministry among them Fawcett met with his people for a final service of worship. His possessions had already been packed on wagons, probably with the help of some of them. It would be a long, slow journey to London. The wagons stood waiting while he preached his farewell sermon. When the service was over, Fawcett was preparing to send the wagons on. Then all of a sudden, finally overcome by the pleadings of his congregation, he decided not to leave them. Straight away he told them this, and overjoyed by the news, the people rushed to the wagons and quickly began unpacking them and carrying the furniture back into the house! So John Fawcett stayed on with his poor but devoted people. He had given up much in worldly terms; for his stipend at Hebden Bridge never exceeded 25 pounds a year, and he would have been sure of much more at Carter's Lane in London. But, says one writer, 'he was wondrously rich with his many friends.' To commemorate this moving turn of events Fawcett wrote the words of *Blest be the tie that binds*, a fitting tribute to the love between him and his people – love of 'kindred minds' that kept him serving among them.

A daughter church

Five years later the church was able to establish a second congregation, and Fawcett moved there. He remained there for forty years (the rest of his ministry), and his labours were certainly blessed. In 1793 he was invited to become President of the Baptist Academy in Bristol; but as with the earlier call to London, he declined and remained with his church. In addition to preaching he wrote a number of books on practical religion – we would call that living

the Christian life. His best-known and largest work was *A Devotional Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, completed towards the end of his life in 1811. His aim in writing this commentary was 'to bring out clearly and powerfully from every chapter of Scripture such views as were best adapted to promote a devotional spirit.' Following its publication, an American college awarded him the degrees of M.A. and D.D. Like many faithful ministers he was concerned about the growth of Deism and Unitarianism in his day, and he wrote a poem entitled *The Christian's Humble Plea*, which was an answer to Joseph Priestley's attack on the divinity of Christ. In 1782 a collection of his hymns (in all he wrote over 160) was published with the title *Hymns Adapted to the Circumstances of Public Worship and Private Devotion*. But despite all his many gifts, and the way in which his labours had been blessed, Fawcett remained a humble man. In the preface to this last work he wrote:

'I blush to think of these plain verses falling into the hands of persons of an elevated genius, and refined taste. To such, I know, they will appear flat, dull and unentertaining... If it may be conducive, under divine blessing to warm the heart or assist the devotion of any humble Christian in the closet, the family or the house of God, I shall therein sincerely rejoice, whatever censure I may incur from the polite world.'²

Think of this humble man next time you sing his hymn; and be reminded of the great blessing it is to enjoy the loving fellowship of the believers among whom God has placed you.

Notes

- 1 GILL, John *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), Vol.22, p.250
- 2 http://www.cyberhymnal.org/bio/f/a/fawcett_j
For information about this hymn, and its author, I am indebted to Norman Mable, *Popular Hymns and their Writers* (London, Independent Press Ltd, 1957), pp. 83-5

Primary Teacher Wanted

The Christian School Association (Wellington District) [CSAWD] is presently seeking a committed and enthusiastic Reformed/Calvinistic Christian to help teach covenant youth. We have a vacancy starting in Term 2 2007 or as negotiated for a qualified teacher interested in serving the Lord in this capacity full-time:

Head Teacher of Primary School: This is a permanent position for a registered teacher reporting to the Principal, CSAWD Combined Schools (who is located at Wainuiomata). The successful applicant will be a team player who is able to supervise others and work as part of the Executive Team of the CSAWD schools. The role involves teaching a combined class full-time of Year 4-6 students (21 lovely Christian kids this year) as well as the day to day supervision of Silverstream Christian School.

The range of levels at Silverstream Christian School is Years 1-6 and is the elementary or "grammar" school run by the CSAWD. The secondary school (Years 7-12) run by the CSAWD is Wainuiomata Christian College. The CSAWD curriculum is Reformed and classical Christian in intent. We are committed to developing a biblical Christian worldview in our students at all levels.

Silverstream Christian School is located in Upper Hutt, near Wellington, New Zealand.

Applicants can obtain more information by viewing our website at www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz or by contacting us directly for an application pack. Applications close by Friday 30 March 2007 though late applications will be considered if we have been unable to fill the vacancy by then. Our contact details are as follows:

e-mail: admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz

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

Postal: PO Box 43-127, Wainuiomata 5014, New Zealand.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Grace Theological College (G.T.C). Courses from GTC for Term 1 (as below) are starting this coming Wednesday (7 February). GTC is a Bible college that is evangelical and reformed in its theological stance. We have been going to GTC over a number of years now and it has been a real blessing. Their biblical teaching and love for the Lord and each other has encouraged us greatly in our Christian walk. Course costs are kept to a minimum, with all courses taught at the GTC premises: 75 Rogers Road, Manurewa. If anyone is interested in taking a course we encourage you to do so as it is very worthwhile. For more details please see Tjeerd & Louise or contact GTC on 09-268-1469, email: enquiries@gtc.ac.nz website: www.gtc.ac.nz

Family prayer & praise items: Next Sunday, Lord willing, we will once again have the privilege of witnessing God's goodness as Zoe Eleonore Meinsma, daughter of Joshua and Heidi, and Scarlett Maria Ploeg, daughter of Chris and Madeleine Ploeg, are presented for baptism.

Bishopdale

Men's Christchurch Convention: This is a ministry initiated by St Johns Church, Latimer Square. This is their third convention and they have invited Mark Ashton to lead two talks on 'A Life and Death Partnership.' Mark Ashton is the Senior Pastor of St Andrew the Great, which is in Cambridge, England. This is the Church where the Moots worshipped for the last six months. The Convention is run over two evenings on the 6th and 7th of March (6:45pm-9:30pm), which is a Tuesday and Wednesday. This is a great opportunity to meet other Christian men in our city and be encouraged and challenged by what will be shared. Please see Richard Moot for more information.

Christchurch

Thank you. A very warm thank you for the visits to Aat during his stay in Elmswood Court and Palm Grove. Also for your prayers, love and support shown to me over the years of Aat's illness. Your attendance at the graveside and the thanksgiving service, the expressions of sympathy, the cards, flowers, visits, baking, etc, has been a great comfort for me and the family. Jannie van Egdom

Foxton

Congregational meeting: Last Wednesday evening, the congregation voted in favour of the following motion: "That the Reformed Church of Foxton proceed with the purchase of the Foxton Outdoor Bowling Club centre and sell the sections at the Main Street, Foxton." It is understood that some work will need to be done before we can

have regular worship services there. In the meantime, the COA along with interested parties will investigate carefully what needs to be done to make this new purchase a suitable worship centre. We pray that the Lord will give them wisdom as they do their work and come to the congregation with recommendations.

Land sale: Unfortunately, the purchase of the Foxton Bowling Club property as a possible worship centre for us has not eventuated. The COA and the building committee are again looking at all options and will keep the congregation informed of any developments.

Hamilton

Meditation: The Coal Basket Bible. The story is told of an old man who lived on a farm in the mountains of Kentucky with his young grandson. Each morning, Grandpa was up early sitting at the kitchen table reading from his old worn-out Bible. His grandson, who wanted to be just like him, tried to imitate him in any way he could. One day the grandson asked, 'Papa, I try to read the Bible just like you but I don't understand it, and what I do understand I forget as soon as I close the book. What good does reading the Bible do?' The grandfather quietly turned from putting coal in the stove and said, 'Take this coal basket down to the river and bring back a basket of water.' The boy did as he was told, even though all the water leaked out before he could get back to the house. The grandfather laughed and said, 'You will have to move a little faster next time,' and sent him back to the river with the basket to try again. This



Elder Jacco Verheij, presents Nathan and Lydia Walraven with a Bible commentary at their wedding in February

Mangere

Pastoral. This is our first Newsletter for this year. A year which is already nearly a month old. And a year which has already brought us through a lot. We think particularly of our Sr Hermien Voschezang, and family, with the passing away of Br Hans Voschezang. We will all miss him. But the loss is ours, for Hans it is all gain. We pray for God's comforting mercies and His help for those close to Hans.

Marriage banns. Congregations, Nathan Walraven and Lydia Anne Bartlett have indicated their desire to be united in Christian marriage. They want to begin their life together in the name of the Lord and in the presence of His people, and continue it to His glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at the Reformed Church of Mangere, 22 Rosella Road, Mangere East, on the 3rd of February, 2007, at 2.00pm, Lord willing.

time the boy ran faster, but again the basket was empty before he returned home. Out of breath, he told his grandfather that it was 'impossible to carry water in a basket, 'and he went to get a bucket instead. The old man said, 'I don't want a bucket of water; I want a basket of water. You can do this. You're just not trying hard enough,' and he went out the door to watch the boy try again. At this point, the boy knew it was impossible, but he wanted to show his grandfather that even if he ran as fast as he could, the water would leak out before he got far at all. The boy scooped the water and ran hard, but when he reached his grandfather the basket was again empty. Out of breath, he said, 'See Papa, it's useless!' 'So you think it is useless?' the old man said. 'Look at the basket.' The boy looked at the basket and for the first time he realized that the basket looked different. Instead of a dirty old coalbasket, it was clean. 'Son, that's what happens when you read the Bible. You might not understand or remember everything, but when you read it, it will change you from the inside out. That is the work of God in our lives. To change us from the inside out and to slowly transform us into the image of His son.'

Maas & Gerry ten Hove say THANK YOU! Many thanks for the gifts and lovely cards we received on our 50th wedding anniversary! It was overwhelming to receive such an abundance of warm feeling from our brothers and sisters in Christ and we thank our Heavenly Father for such brothers and sisters and such a milestone. Bless you all! With love in Christ, Maas and Gerry ten Hove.

Hukanui

Sebastian and Sarah Vos were blessed with a healthy baby girl on Thursday evening, a little sister for Peter. They have named her Alesia June, and she weighed in at a healthy 9 lb 10 ounces! Children are a wonderful gift from God and we pray that Sebastian and Sarah may receive wisdom and strength from Him as the care for and lead their growing family. Mission trip to Pakistan: Ralph van Dalen, Jonothan Termaat and Murray Williams leave on Saturday the 17th of March for Lahore in Pakistan, where they will be working at Sahiwal hospital, a Christian Hospital in the midst of a strongly Muslim area, the Punjab region of Pakistan. The hospital is part of the work of the ARP churches of America in Pakistan. Because of the events of 9/11 they have had difficulty getting foreign doctors working there. Our aim in the short time that we are there is to encourage the workers both in their work in the hospital, and in spreading the good news of the Gospel. To that end we will assist in the work of the hospital, performing needed surgery, and share our expertise with them. Further, we hope to gain a better idea as to what we can do for the future. Apart from the practical help and encouragement that we can give to the staff at this Christian Hospital, our intent is also to find out what further work and involvement we may continue to have in helping them in the future, and to determine the best way to do this. We return on Sunday

the 1st of April. We ask that you support us with your prayers so that the gospel may be clearly heard through our actions and our words. Yours in Christ, Ralph van Dalen.

Masterton

Pastoral notes: This morning we have the privilege of hearing the public profession of faith of Naomi Cressy. We thank the Lord for His faithfulness to the promises made at her baptism and manifest in her profession. The congregation is warmly invited to attend the opening ceremony for the new building of the Reformed Congregation of Carterton. This will be held on 10th of February at 10:00 am. It will be followed with refreshments.

Pastoral notes: Reminder: This evening our worship service begins at 6:00 pm.

We thank the Lord that Janelle and Michelle Kloosterman have come home. Janelle is doing well and continues to grow stronger. The Lord willing, Janelle will be baptised next Sunday morning.

Nelson

From the pastor. We rejoice with Jesse and Wendy Reitsma on the birth of Sarah Michelle (7lb5oz) Thursday morning. Both Mum and baby are well, and are now home.

North Shore

Special Milestone. Congratulations to Don and Jenny Petchell as they celebrate their 40th Wed-

ding Anniversary today! It is a wonderful milestone and really something to praise God for! May the Lord bless you and grant you many, many more. (May we say that you both look remarkably well – even after all these years together!) Don and Jenny are providing a special treat to have with our morning tea after the service.

News & Announcements. Today is Marlene van Tonder's last Sunday with us (her plane leaves at 3pm on 4th February) before going to Botswana to work with the Cronjés in Motopi among AIDS orphans and with the small Reformed Church there for the best part of the year. Marlene, we wish you travelling mercies and the Lord's blessing on your work there. May it be a great experience and may you be a blessing in the lives of those you have to do with.

Wedding banns. Two of our members, Jackson Flinn & Frieda den Hartigh, have requested to be married, about which we are very happy and wish them the Lord's blessings and many good years together. The wedding is planned for Saturday 10th February, in Te Awamutu, and will take place, unless we receive lawful objections in the next two weeks. As the old marriage form had it: 'Speak now or forever hold your peace.'

Congratulations to Peter & Michelle Brunton on the birth of their eighth son last Thursday, 1st February. All is well with both mother and son, as yet unnamed.

25th ANNIVERSARY

Reformed Church of Bishopdale

Is celebrating

25 YEARS

1982—2007

*We will be celebrating the 25th anniversary
of Bishopdale Reformed Church
14th & 15th APRIL 2007.*

SUNDAY 15 APRIL – THANKSGIVING SERVICE

*This will be an afternoon service to celebrate our
25 years, being thankful for the many blessings
God has given to us as a congregation.*

***All past and present members are invited
to this service.***

*It is with thankfulness to
God that we announce the
50th Wedding
Anniversary D.V. on
25 April 2007 of*

**Adrianus (Jos) &
Wilhelmina (Willy)
VERBOKKEM**



*“Casting all your anxiety upon Him,
because He cares for you.”*

1 Peter 5:7

*Congratulations and
much love from your
children & grandchildren:*

John & Esther Verbokkem
Nicola, Marcia & Stephanie

Helen & Raymond Van der Meulen
Paul, Saskia, Joshua & Jacqui

Martin & Ingrid Verbokkem
Daniel, Jennifer, Timothy & Hayley

Miriam & Roger Posthuma
Blair, Larissa, Luke & Ben

Wilma & Andrew Reinders
Catherine, Richard, Rebecca & Julia

28 Mohaka St., Wainuiomata

Congratulations to Peter & Michelle Brunton on the birth of their third grandchild and first granddaughter to Sarah & Sebastian Vos on Thursday, 8th February. All is well with both mother and daughter, as yet unnamed. May the Lord bless continue to bless both families and bring his covenant promises to us, and our children, to pass. May he also give both sets of parents much wisdom in bringing up these children to fear and love our Lord.

Palmerston North

Baptism. This morning we have the privilege of witnessing the baptism of Bonnie Leigh Bryant. We rejoice with Stefan and Hester and their wider family in the gift of another daughter and granddaughter, and in this sign and seal of her place as a covenant child in our congregation.

From the Session and Calling Committee....As Session and Calling committee we unanimously consider Rev Michael Flinn as being very suitable for our congregation for the following reasons:

He is a gifted Preacher and teacher able to convey God's Word to the whole congregation. We believe that his ministry would be particularly beneficial to us at this stage in the life of our congregation. We note that his preaching was received favourably on his visit here.

He has over 20 years experience in Pastoral Ministry- in two different congregations (both were home mission work initially).

He is able to relate well to young people (of whom we are blessed with so many) as well as older people.

He has the evident maturity to be effective in a diverse congregation such as ours and we believe Michael would be a good counsellor for the Session.

His family commitments at this stage in his life are less demanding since he has only one child left at home.

He has also expressed a concern for our situation (with two vacant pulpits and Foxton soon to be vacant) and has an evident willingness to help.

While he may well only be available for a three-year period, a shorter more focused ministry can certainly have advantages as well, particularly when this is appreciated in advance. As session we fully appreciate and support Rev. Flinn's desire to teach our next generation of Ministers.

We also note the particular need of both the session and the PN/Wanganui congregation to have wise and effective leadership at this time. For this reason it is a great blessing to have a man of Michael's calibre available for call in NZ. (Calling from overseas is a slow process and would mean our vacancy would extend for a much longer time). May the Lord our God continue to bless us abundantly and grant us His Wisdom and guidance at this time.

Congratulations to Theo and Lucy on the birth of William Jacobus Theodore de Klerk, 7lb 15oz, born last Saturday. May our gracious Father give you much strength and joy as you raise William for Him.

Pukekohe

From the Pastor: Our local ministers association has met for this month. I have been elected as the chairman of these meetings for this year. Please pray that these may be good times of fellowship and encouragement. Next month we will meet together for a day of prayer. We did this early last year as well and it was a valuable time together.

Over the holidays I heard another pastor tell his congregation that within three days we forget 70% of what we hear unless we consciously call it to mind. That is a depressing statistic for a preacher! He encouraged his congregation to try to recall the sermon during the week. That is a good suggestion. You could do that while having breakfast one morning, or while driving to work, or while doing the dishes. You could do that as a memory test over dinner one evening! The reading and preaching of God's Word is one of the most important means of helping us grow as Christians and so we need to do all we can to make good use of it.

Silverstream

Marriage banns. Keith van Kessel and Sisilia Telefoni have signified their desire to be united in marriage at the Reformed Church of Silverstream on 17 February, 2007 at 2.00pm.

If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on that date, the Lord willing.

Wellington

Celebrating 55 years of marriage. Next week Sunday 11 February 2007 we will have the privilege of celebrating (Lord willing) the 55th wedding anniversary of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, Piet and Bep Wierenga. Please join us for coffee and cake at the back of the church after the morning service.

RTC PRESS RELEASE

The Board of the Reformed Theological College is pleased to announce that it has called Rev Dr Murray Capill to the position of Principal of the College to commence on 1 January 2008.

Dr Capill brings to the role a wealth of experience in both pastoral and academic backgrounds. He ministered in New Zealand for 10 years prior to joining the RTC faculty in 2001 and is a sought-after conference speaker in Australia and New Zealand in the areas of preaching and leadership.

Rev. Dr Henk DeWaard, who has served the RTC from 1981 and since 1997 as Principal, will officially retire at the end of 2007. Even so for the next few years he will remain very much involved with the College in a lecturing and administrative role. Beyond that it will also allow him greater time to spend in mission, ecumenical affairs and teaching.

Avondale Friendship Club

I arrived a little late to the hall behind Avondale Reformed Church to the cheerful sounds of Christmas Carols. I had been invited to the Christmas breakup of the Friendship Club which has been meeting for over 22 years at our church. Inside, the group was seated behind a horseshoe arrangement of tables decorated with tinsel and pinecones, and paper plates at the ready. The singing was accompanied by Sharon on the piano and four Posthuma children on wind instruments, who were enthusiastically applauded at the conclusion of their playing.

I was impressed with the relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Around 18 students and 14 helpers chatted happily amongst themselves while the food was being organised. Up till now my only involvement with Friendship had been during our annual Friendship service, an eagerly anticipated time where the Friends, full of smiles and happy grins, are seated in the front of the church and take part in the service with a small skit dramatizing the text of the sermon and assisting the deacons with the collection. Here, as an assortment of cakes, chips, marshmallows, cookies and other goodies were distributed to an extremely patient and appreciative group of generally elderly looking people, my principal fear of being overwhelmed and overpowered by a number of needy people I did not understand was promptly dispersed.

As the "Chicken Dance" chirped in the background, I learned from foundation teacher Marius Stok and recently retired leader Annette Van Huysteen that the Friendship club meets once a week for one hour. During that time they all join in for some Christian songs and a Bible story before breaking into groups with their own individual teacher. Helping Morris, one of our Friends, picked up his Bible study material from an overturned bag. I noticed how similar it was to the "Footprints" material I use with my junior Sunday School class. Including the annual craft evenings and social event, a Friendship Club requires relatively little time commitment. Their recent BBQ, where caregivers were invited, has resulted in more caregivers actually staying for the weekly sessions as well.

The Friendship Club is made up of students of varying needs who predominantly come from IHC homes. Preferably you would have 1 teacher per student but this is not strictly necessary. The age of our teachers range from as young as 12 and offers opportunities for teenagers to those in their eighties. The Friendship Club is a great opportunity for service. It's fantastic for evangelism, both to Friends and their families or carers. Several Friends have professed their faith in Jesus in our church. The club is a ministry of our local church which meets the modest cost of running it.

What struck me from the evening was the low level of demand from the students and the complete absence of stress. They were clearly very content in this environment, and develop strong bonds with their teachers. Even after 22 years, foundation student Judy Stok proclaimed positively of Friendship Club, "I'm loving it!"

After one hour, everyone was picked up and left with a happy wave.

If you are considering this kind of ministry, contact Issjah Kleine Deters at issjah@actrix.co.nz who would love to run a session or demonstration with your home or study groups, or send you relevant materials. You should consider it!

Reuben Ploeg



SHORT REPORT, PRESBYTERY AUCKLAND (FEB 2007)

Auckland Presbytery had its first meeting for 2007 on Friday evening (Feb 23) at Pukekohe and Saturday (Feb 24) at Hamilton.

Auckland's road congestion resulted in the late arrival of some of the delegates on Friday evening.

Once underway, the meeting proceeded to examine Vicar Pieter van Huyssteen on dogmatics. This examination was sustained and as a result our br was declared eligible for call to serve the Lord

as a pastor under Article 12 of our Church Order. Churches in both New Zealand and Australia will be notified of this. Presbytery warmly congratulated Pieter and his wife Annette.

The Hamilton and Hukanui delegates, in response to the questions of the Church Order, Article 47, gave positive reports of the work in their congregations. Special thanks was given for a new pastor and the Beach Mission in which members of both congregations are involved.

Br Peter vander Wel was reappointed as Presbytery's stated clerk - for which the members expressed appreciation and thanks.

The Avondale congregation will receive

pulpit supply two Sundays per month during its vacancy from the ministers in the presbytery.

On Saturday the presbytery reconvened in Hamilton (Aberdeen Dr) in order to conduct the final examination of Candidate Michael Willemse who had accepted a call to serve there. This examination was subsequently sustained. It was announced that br Willemse's ordination would take place on Saturday, March 10th during a service commencing at 1.30pm.

Reporter: Dirk J van Garderen

Books in focus

'Stop Dating The Church!' by Joshua Harris

Reviewed by Sjirk Bajema

Here's a taste of what's in this book:

Robert lives in Gilbert, Arizona. He likes his friends to call him 'Fat Bob.' He loves life and people and enjoys laughing at himself. He's got a good job and faithfully attends church. But if you really want to see Robert excited, ask him about his Jeep. He talks

about it like it's a person. 'She's my baby,' he says affectionately. He searched for over two years to find just the right fellow and black Wrangler. 'It was spotless. Just gorgeous,' he recounts.

'Once I got the Jeep...well, of course I had to join the Jeep club,' explains Robert. The local club had over fifteen hundred active members. It offered meetings, parties, trail runs, and a website where members could exchange Jeep tips. 'It's a whole Jeep community,' Robert says.

Through the club, Robert was hooked up with guys who taught him the finer points of four-wheeling. As his Jeep-discipleship intensified, Robert's commitment only deepened. 'I was totally hooked,' he says. 'Every free moment was consumed. I was either working on a Jeep, planning a Jeep run, hanging out and talking Jeep, or going on-line to check our Jeep website.'

Unhooked

I met Robert at a Christian conference. He came with a group from his church to hear me speak. On the final night I gave a message about the importance of the local church. I started by asking, 'Are you married to the church? Or are you dating the church?'

The question unsettled Robert, 'God started speaking,' he remembers. 'He was asking me, 'Robert, what are you married to?' And the only thing I could think of was the Jeep club. It was obvious, but I'd never seen it before. I was married to the Jeep club, and I was dating

the church!'

So, what's your club? What are you passionate about? Is it your church or that sport or hobby? It's not hard to work out. You know the answer. Joshua Harris penetratingly exposes a major weakness in Christian lifestyle today. In seven short and sharp chapters, with excellent illustrations, he really gets under your skin. From considering what we miss when we have the dating mentality, seeing the Church from Heaven's perspective, the vital place of the local church, the difference your passionate involvement makes, how you choose the right church – with 10 very good key indicators, the difference that comes through respecting Sunday, and the commitment that needs to be made now, Harris really challenges us.

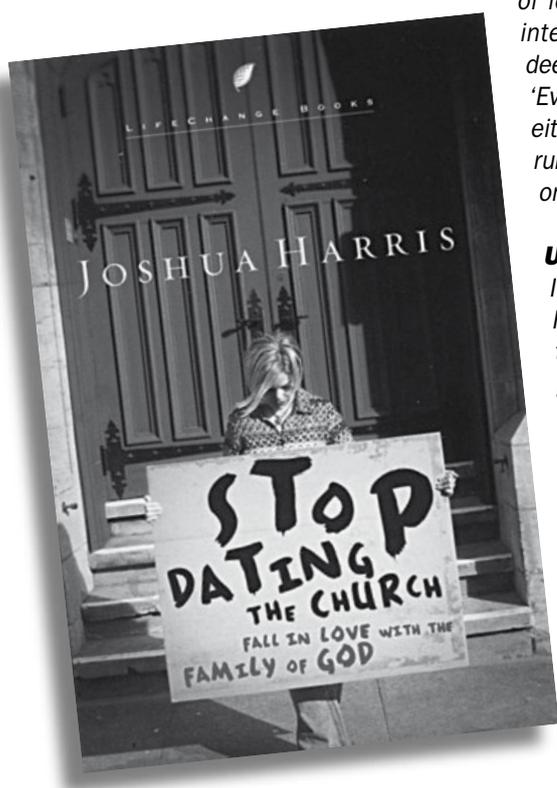
An excellent study

This would be good for a young adult's Bible study. Indeed, it would be good for an older adult's study too. You can download study group questions from Josh's website.

It would be good to give to that Christian friend who goes from church to church, never seeming to be able to settle down. It's good simply as a great and quick read.

With so much that's good about it, what can I complain about? Well, the price is a bit much. But then again, it's only a quarter of what a plumber gets for an hour. And the results of this work are going to last a lot longer!

'Stop Dating The Church! Fall in love with the Family of God' by Joshua Harris, Multnomah Publishers, 2004



To care through 'CARE'

Dirk van Garderen

There is a point when numbers are so astronomical that they become meaningless.

Take for example current HIV/AIDS statistics:

- Figures released in 2006 indicate that there are now 36.3 million people of working age now living with HIV/AIDS.
- 2.3 million children are also living with this condition.
- There are 15 million AIDS orphans in the world today.
- Cumulative mortality losses: 28 million in 2005. Without *increased* access to anti-retroviral therapy (ART), projected increases are given at 45 million by 2010 and 86 million by 2020.¹

When compared with what is happening in sub-Saharan Africa, where a vast majority of working-age HIV/AIDS sufferers live, *India's* figures are still sobering. Mr David C. Mulford, the USA ambassador to India, reported in November 2006 that over 5 million (5,000,000) people are affected in that country. The vast majority are infected through unprotected sexual intercourse. It remains a growing threat.

Mr Mulford pointed out that anti-retroviral therapy (ART) notwithstanding, there is still **no cure** for this condition. Therefore the problem of HIV cannot be solved by medical solutions alone, but must involve all sectors of society. He writes,

India is having some success in slowing the rate of HIV/AIDS infections. For example, HIV transmission rates in high-risk populations and spread among some populations in Tamil Nadu have been steadily declining. In that State, the U.S. joined with the National AIDS Control Organisation and a vast number of local non-government organisations in a project that reaches out to high-risk populations such as truckers, sex workers and migrant workers.²

CARE (Centre for AIDS Rehabilitation and Education) India, which our churches have been supporting via the denomination's *National Diaconate Committee* (NDC) since 2001, is based in Southern India – Tamil Nadu. In that state there are four centres where the CARE clinics are located: Madurai, Dharmapouri, Tutincorin and Chennai (formerly Madras).

The **CARE** project originally started in Madurai, where the founders, Mr Paulus and Mrs Rosy Samuel, live and base their work. Meeting and discussing CARE's ministry with them and their staff over a period of time and in varying circumstances proved to be an informative and, above all, stimulating experience for me.

The NDC's contact with **CARE** has been mainly via Mr Paulus Samuel. However, while he remains one of CARE's directors, he is now the Asian regional director of the Dutch diaconal organisation *Redt Een Kind* (REK = Save a Child). This ministry is concerned especially with children – orphans and, increasingly, children disadvantaged or orphaned as a result of the AIDS epidemic. Given that CARE India has direct and regular contact with over 3,000 families with an average of 2 children each, the existing field is enormous. Paulus Samuel speaks of an increasingly close relationship between REK and CARE.

The work CARE pioneered in the 1990s is now one of those receiving huge support from the Indian government and many other agencies. Furthermore, with ART medication increasingly available via government hospitals and the possibility that sooner or later there *will* be a cure for AIDS, CARE

Considering the background

is continually asking itself, '*What now and what next?*'

Mr Samuel believes that the existing programmes need to adapt to the changing circumstances continually and, in terms of a long term strategy, focus on the next generation – the children of HIV sufferers, many of whom are positive themselves.³

So what exactly is CARE doing today and is it planning to do in the future?

- The **clinical programmes** – providing counselling, medication (besides ART), food supplements and washing powder – continue. In Madurai the clinic is located almost next door to the huge Government Hospital in that city. People who are diagnosed as HIV positive are routinely referred to the CARE clinic. Once contact is established patients are free to make use of CARE's services or, if so inclined, not make use of it.

It was my privilege to visit these clinics in all four centres and to see this work first-hand. What was noteworthy was the professional and at the same time caring and compassionate nature of the work. Above all, I saw a ministry that focused on both **word and deed**.



Some of the young men who were being instructed about HIV by CARE workers. (Madurai)



Mr Paulus Samuel at the CARE Clinic in Madurai



Patient being interviewed at the CARE clinic (Madurai)

- **Education** is another vital part of CARE's programme. As they say, an ambulance at the top of the cliff is preferable to one at the bottom. Several of the male counselors have developed a very specialised gift in their ability to educate India's young men (15+ year old school boys) about the nature and causes of HIV. CARE's teams visit schools in and around Madurai.

I was invited to come to one of these meetings. About 60 young men from different villages around Madurai were seated in a school hall awaiting the CARE speakers. It was quite a solemn affair with the senior staff seated in front of the boys. (Was it to be informed themselves, or to keep an eye/ear on what the boys were seeing and hearing?) The CARE speaker had the boys absolutely enthralled as he, in a graphic no-nonsense manner, spoke about this killer disease. The

climax came from an unexpected direction. One of CARE's team members, a widow, got up and gave a very personal testimony. She spoke of watching her husband die, of now living as a 'positive' herself. The horror of this killer disease became very real. But, above all, she spoke of the hope and comfort that she has found in coming to know Christ Jesus as her Lord and saviour. I couldn't understand anything this wonderful witness said, but the tears and passion that were evident in her testimony as well as the deep compassion demonstrated by the boys spoke more clearly than English.

- **Outreach via direct evangelistic activities.** A feature of village life in India is what they call 'camps.' My preconceived understanding of a 'camp' is based on my experiences in this part of the world – Cadet camps, youth camps, family camps.

However, in India a 'camp' is usually a one-day or even a half-day meeting of a group of people. More like a rally in our way of thinking. Each month there will be a camp in one of the outlying areas where there is a cluster of CARE patients and their families. The whole family is invited because, once one member is found to be HIV, you can almost guarantee that the spouse and often several of the children, are infected as well. The purpose of the camp is to provide information, education, counselling, encouragement and practical help for the whole family. Two other features stand out. First, the social aspect of it. All participating families donate 5 rupees (about 20 cents) which goes into a common pot and is spent on the communal luncheon. (Indian cuisine, even camp style, is quite something!) Second, there is worship!



Addressing the children of HIV infected families. Many of them are themselves HIV positive



Addressing the Camp at Madurai. A great opportunity to preach the gospel!

It was my privilege to attend such a (monthly) camp outside of Madurai. I was told that this one was a little different from the usual camps, and in fact additional to them. Why? Well, this monthly camp is organised, supported and sponsored by leaders in the local Indian Christian business com-



Inside the temple at Madurai



Detail of one of the temple towers.



munity! These men donate one day a month for this evangelistic work.

When I arrived at the site it was a hive of activity. There were two meetings in progress. In the main meeting place (a wooden structure with a palm frond roof) there were about 150 adults listening to a variety of spontaneous testimonies from fellow HIV sufferers. The testimonies were extremely basic, along the lines of 'Jesus answered my prayers when...' I was also offered an opportunity to speak (via an interpreter) and found an audience absolutely rapt and eager to learn and come to a deeper understanding of the Gospel. The Christian businessmen, obviously from much wealthier backgrounds, were there to instruct, encourage and demonstrate the love of Jesus.

The second meeting on the site, under a similar but slightly smaller structure, was for children. Some 80 of them were being instructed by evangelists and teachers associated with *Child Evangelism Fellowship, India*. While unable to understand the details of the message, my interpreter (Mr Daniel Premkumar – a member of our Bucklands Beach congregation who was also in India

with his family while I was there!) explained what was being taught. It was a very sound, biblical message. The organisers were very conscious of the need to preach and teach the true Gospel in all its fullness.

What struck me most about the camp I attended was that CARE's ministry is also supported and strengthened by the Indian Christian community. If the local community is doing this, there is all the more reason for us to be confident in what is happening.

And what is CARE planning for the future? I will write on that in subsequent articles.

The Rev. Dirk van Garderen is a member of the National Diaconate Committee

Notes

- 1 These are figures released on World AIDS Day 2006 (Nov 1) gleaned from a report entitled *HIV/AIDS and Work: Global Estimates, Impact on Youth, and Response 2006*.
- 2 Article printed in the English language newspaper, Tamil Nadu, Nov 1, 2006
- 3 Estimates are that there are currently up to 30,000 positive children (up to the age of 18) in Tamil Nadu. CARE, because of its existing networks, is in contact with many of them.

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Impressions of Korea from an English teacher

by Evan Whetton

You may have heard stories about how more and more non-western countries are sending out missionaries for cross-cultural service. But have you ever thought about the problems those missionaries have, trying to learn the language in their new country of service? Many times, there are no dictionaries or teachers to provide direct translations between their heart-language and the new language; so they must learn English first, and then go on to learn their 'host country' language through English. A daunting prospect—much more work than would face most of us, if we were to take up missionary service.

To help these aspiring missionaries acquire proficiency in English, volunteers are sought to spend some time in Korea and

provide instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL), or simple conversational English classes. Evan Whetton from Mangere congregation recently spent some time there, doing just that. This is his account....

The Missionary Training Institute (MTI) in Soeul is a specialist training institute where aspiring Korean missionaries enrol to learn English for use on the mission field, or to undertake further studies in English speaking countries. Experienced missionaries who wish to improve their English also come here. The Institute is run by members of the conservative Hapdong Presbyterian denomination, and has close links with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of America. All the teachers are volunteers, several being retired missionaries, and come from all over



the world. At the moment, the three native speakers here are all from Commonwealth countries—Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Last month, there were people from America, Australia, New Zealand and Wales.

The students represent a wide variety of backgrounds. Most of them are Presbyterian, but that is a fairly generic term, covering everything from the less conservative Tonghap churches, to the Hapdong and Kosin churches, which are closer to the Reformed Church. Many Koreans will say that they are Presbyterian first. Then, if questioned

further, they will give their denomination. The second biggest group on-campus is the Methodists. The dominant mission agencies are WEC and YWAM, both of whom are quite charismatic. Campus Crusade for Christ also makes a showing, as does Jesus Disciple Mission. Both of those are primarily aimed at university students.

MTI students may be from different denominations, but they all share zeal and a desire to learn. Morning devotions are at 6:30am, and everyone is expected to attend. Many of the students are up before that, studying and praying. After morning devo-

tions, the teachers usually leave to get ready for class, but the students stay behind and pray for another 15 minutes, until breakfast time. That is impressive enough, but even more so when you realise that many of them stay up till after midnight to study.

Most MTI students have a few problems with English. One of the major ones that I have come across is that Korean has no articles (the, a, an,). The result is something like this “I watched movie with ... Movie was called”

Another big one is pronunciation. Koreans tend to tag ‘l’ on the end of several words, so ‘church’ becomes ‘churchi.’ In addition, several Korean letters are pronounced the same way. ‘K’ and ‘g’ are interchangeable, so the small island down in the south of Korea, although pronounced Kojé, is actually spelt as “Geoje.” Another one is ‘f’ and ‘p.’ ‘lf’ is sometimes mistakenly pronounced ‘ip.’ ‘B’ and ‘p’ are also interchangeable, so the port of Pusan can also be spelt ‘Busan.’ It can take quite a while to get it all correct!

The Church and its position

Churches are everywhere in Korea. An estimated 25% of the population are Christians, 25% Buddhists and 50% non-religious. The Presbyterian denomination can be split into four main groups, each with smaller offshoots. Tonghap is less conservative. Kosin is similar to the Reformed Church. Hapdong broke away from Kosin, but has similar theology. These are generalisations though. There is a lot of variation between churches.

Many church members are quite wealthy. Tithing is almost mandatory, and it shows. The buildings are extremely big, with offices for everyone. The churches usually have a dining hall large enough to seat almost the whole congregation, as people stay at the church for lunch, instead of just having a cup of coffee. They have all the latest electronic equipment, with big plasma screens and large speaker set ups, some of which would not disgrace a large concert hall. The ministers of the large churches drive around in Ssangyong Chairmans and Hyundai Equus-brand cars: Korea’s equivalents of the Ford Fairlane and Holden Statesman. Everything in both the large and medium churches in Korea bespeaks wealth. Even the smaller churches manage quite well.

Size is relative

In New Zealand, the average Reformed Church congregation size is around 100 – 120. 300 is regarded as a large church. Things are slightly different in Korea. A



medium church is often about 550-1000 members, with there being quite a few mega-churches. Mega churches are not confined to the pentecostal denominations, although the world's largest local congregation is. Pastored by Yongi Cho, it has an auditorium that can seat 25,000, and has 7 services each Sunday.

Several of the more conservative denominations also have very large churches. Chunghyun Presbyterian Church of the conservative Hapdong denomination has a congregation of about 13,000, and a building that could easily stand up against a European cathedral. It too has six worship services on Sunday. The reason many big churches have so many services is that the buildings simply cannot hold all the attendees. Even the smaller churches usually have more than two services per Sunday to accommodate all the members, with the doors opening at 5:30 am, some earlier.

A pastor whom I visited in the north of Seoul has a small to medium sized church. When asked about his membership, he gave the number as being around 550 adult members and about 300 children. Geoje Presbyterian Church, on Geoje Island, has over 1500 adult members, and has just built a new church, as it had outgrown its old one. The new church is a five storey building with a seating capacity of 3000. It also has many offices, along with the enormous dining room. In addition to this, they support seven assistant pastors and over 70 missionaries.



As well as the new church, an enormous new school building has also been built.

The Korean church has grown phenomenally over the past 50 years. This growth, although it has slowed over the past few years, is continuing still.

(My) General impressions

The first thing that struck me about Korea is the throngs of people. South Korea has a population of about 45 million people, and 70% of the country is mountains, so they are

jammed into a relatively small area. Seoul alone has over 10 million people. Everywhere you go, there are people.

China may be known for its bicycles, but Korea has well and truly embraced the car. Traffic in Seoul is horrendous—even during the quiet times, it is similar to Auckland's heavy traffic. Aggression rules here—the winner takes the space. There is very little concept of 'merging like a zip', so you just push your way in, using the horn for emphasis. The congestion is such that the scooter riders give up on the roads and ride on the footpaths. That is quite scary, as they move at quite a speed, especially the pizza delivery boys. I haven't seen an accident yet, but have had several very close calls, usually when they come up from behind.

A safety inspector from the west would have a heart attack in Seoul. I saw a neon sign, while being installed on a building, hanging from a Hiab. People had to walk directly under the sign to get past. There were no barriers whatsoever, and you had to walk over piles of building materials. Think of what would happen in New Zealand!

Another slightly horrifying sight is the electrical wiring. In most western cities, the wiring is underground. In the more crowded and older parts of town, the wiring is all overhead. It looks like a rather untidy spider's web, with random wires sloping diagonally to the buildings, all out in open air. The electricians who have to work on Seoul's power grid must be brave men!

To safety-obsessed westerners, Seoul may seem quite hazardous, but common sense is king. You use your head to stay

MIF prayer notes

Rev John Rogers will spend some months in South Africa, DV, teaching at a Reformed seminary. Please pray for safe travel, good health, and God's strength as he helps students to prepare themselves for future ministry in Reformed congregations around the country.

Dr Ralph Van Dalen, Dr Murray Williams, Jonathan Termaat and Evert Grul have just returned from a short ministry trip to the ARP hospital in Sahiwal, Pakistan. They performed surgery, provided training, and gave other assistance to the folk there. Pray for an effective and lasting impact as a result of their ministry.

Janice Reid expects to be in Cambodia for the first part of this month, completing training that was begun at the end of last year. Please pray for health, for safety in the precarious traffic of Phnom Penh, and for effective assistance to the staff at *New Life Radio* as they move into live programming for the first time in several years. Pray also for Janice's language study; she hopes to attend a residential language school in Salatiga later this month.

Walter and Jeannette Hagoort give thanks for their time in New Zealand during February and the early part of March. Please pray for energy and health as they settle back into work at the Mapang Guest House and with the two Reformed churches they oversee. Pray for God's enabling as construction continues and classes begin at the Reformed Leadership Training Centre.



out of trouble. On the whole, Seoul is probably a safer city to live in than almost any western city.

Korean food

A traditional Korean meal can be quite an event. One meal on Koje Island took over an hour. From memory, there were about 10 main dishes. It did not come as an entrée, main and dessert, as such. In Korean cuisine, a lot of different little side dishes are put on the table first. Those come free, and are refilled when empty. There are usually three or more types of Kimchi, the national dish. The main dishes then start making their appearances, one after the other. Once one is finished, it is replaced by the next. There is no such thing as separate servings, apart from the rice. If you want something, you just pick it out of the main bowl.

Kimchi holds a similar, or higher status than tomato sauce does in New Zealand. A distant relation to sauerkraut, Kimchi is made of cabbage leaves, garlic, chilli powder, onion, salt, and spring onions, and left to ferment. It has quite a potent

smell, and usually is kept in a separate fridge so as to keep the smell from corrupting the taste of other food. It has quite a strong flavour, tangy and hot, and I have heard it described as having an almost metallic taste. It is taken so seriously that Korea even has a Field Museum of Kimchi, which has documented over 100 different types.

A word of warning if you are thinking of visiting Korea. It's a good idea to learn how to use chopsticks before you come. Koreans, unlike the Chinese or Japanese, do not use wooden chopsticks. The chopsticks are made of steel, and are slim and flattened. They are also held much higher in the hand than Chinese chopsticks. This makes them a little difficult to grip and also to hold onto things as they just cross themselves, and whatever you hold gets flicked away. Once mastered though, they can feel more comfortable than the bulky wooden ones.



Summary

For a country that has pulled itself out of the almost complete devastation of the Korean War, South Korea is an amazing place. The people are incredibly single-minded. When their economy was hit in the 1990's, they did not

sit down and feel sorry for themselves. They tightened their belts, gave up their holidays, and got the country going again. The same attitude can be found in the students. They work hard. If they have problems, they do not moan - not in my experience anyway. The students' commitment is staggering. Everyone here at MTI is driven, to the point that several have given up extremely profitable jobs to become missionaries. They are also incredibly hospitable, They will do everything in their power to make you feel comfortable. Everywhere I have gone, so far, I have been welcomed. To help these people at MTI achieve their goal is a real privilege.