

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 36/3 APRIL 2009



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

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Ph/Fax: +64 4 527 4379
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

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

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

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

Subscription per volume:

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

Production Staff:

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

Editorial

Holy Scripture describes the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as His body. At the Lord's Supper we hear "This is my body which is broken for you". 1 Corinthians 12 speaks of the church, God's people, as one body with many members and a variety of gifts working together for the benefit of that body. There is no escaping the fact that we experience unity, diversity, trouble, strife, individualism, etc; and that these will continue in the Lord's church until He comes again. In the meantime, we are not to be content with any post-modern philosophy that would threaten the well-being of His Bride.

In this issue we read about "Life in the Church – What it means for us" in terms of "Christ's 'flesh and blood' Body"; and this includes the ways it is to function for the good of the whole. There is a lot to learn about how we should deal with one another to the glory of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, but that is what the communion of the saints is all about. The elders are a very important part of this communion, especially its government, the maintenance of the truth, good order and godly living.

These topics are highlighted by the meditation "Dead and buried ... the end?" We all know that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was not the end. And it is not the end for the true Christian, as the Scripture says:

"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection ... if we die with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him ... having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him."

Romans 6:5,8-9

Not only is there the opportunity for continuing thankfulness, but optimism too, because the Lord cares, provides for and nourishes His church, and all because of His resurrection and being seated at the right hand of God.

I hope you enjoy this issue and find it uplifting.

Photo Credits:

Cover – A plaque at Bluff. Photo by the Rev J Goris (Emeritus).
See his poem on the back page.

*Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood
so established, that, unless we love the truth, we
cannot know it.*

Pascal

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

Dead and buried ... the end?

Stephen D. Doe

The first shovelful of dirt skitters across the wood, making a dull sound on the lid of the coffin. The pile of freshly dug earth awaits the workers who will come to cover it. Mourners look down into the hole and then walk away. What do you say at that moment? Buried. Dead and buried. The end.

For family and friends, the finality of that image may remain imprinted in memories. Burial seems to be the closing testimony to death's permanence. Men fear and seek to hide from death. Job's friend, Bildad, calls death "the king of terrors" (Job 18:14). Not much has changed. A Christ-denying world can only see death as a cruel joke, or avoid thinking about it, or accept it with a weary sorrow. There is still a rush to hide the dead from sight. The world is filled with graves and tombs and the ashes of funeral pyres. Some graves are gaping trenches into which hundreds of bodies are pushed. Others are only shallow depressions with just enough dirt to hide the sight and smell of death. Death, burial ... the end.

The Christian church has for many centuries confessed that death and burial took in Jesus Christ. The Apostles' Creed confesses that he "was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell." Hundreds of years later, the Westminster Larger Catechism reaffirmed that:

Christ's humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried, and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day; which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, *He descended into hell.* (Q. 50)

The reality of death and burial encompassed the Son of God. But with Jesus it was not the end. The grave clothes and the sealing of the tomb were not to hide the smell of death (John 11:39), but to be the stage for God's mighty work. In Johannes Vos's suggestive comment, Christ's burial is "a necessary fact of the gospel" (*The Westminster Larger Catechism*, ed. by G. I. Williamson, p. 112).

Necessary fact of the gospel

What we as fallen creatures experience as the inevitable payment or wages for sin (Rom. 6:23), Christ experienced as part of his humbling of himself in order to redeem God's people. By dying and being buried, Jesus Christ submitted himself willingly to what comes to mankind naturally. He saves the elect from death's power by uniting himself with them in suffering and death, so that Christians may be united with him in resurrection life.

The death of Jesus Christ played a key part in the saving work of Jesus Christ. It demonstrated that he was a true man, subject as we are to death itself. In fact, it was his goal in becoming a man. He partook of flesh and blood "that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb. 2:14–15). Jesus didn't just weep at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35); death came to him and he submitted to it.

The way, and the truth, and the life

Consider who it was who died. He was "the Author of life" (Acts 3:15), in whom was life (John 1:4). Christ declared himself to be "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Like the Father, he

gives life to whom he wishes (John 5:21). He had life in himself by right and gift as the Son of God, "for as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (John 5:26). Yet Christ died and was buried.

The life-giving, eternal Son of God, in becoming man in order to redeem dying sinners, was humiliated for the sake of his people. He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as the obedient servant of the Father. Dying and being buried are part of our lot as Adam's descendants, but the Son freely drank of this cup for our sakes.

In his humiliation, our prophet Jesus Christ died and was buried. The prophets were killed for declaring the word of the Lord (Matt. 23:30–35). Jesus was the final prophet (Heb. 1:1–2), who proclaimed "the will of God for our salvation" (Shorter Catechism 24). He went to Jerusalem as a prophet and died there (Luke 13:33–34). And, like the prophet Jonah, Jesus Christ was delivered from death, having been "under the power of death for a time" (SC 27; cf. Jonah 2:5–6 and Luke 11:29–30).

The final sacrifice

In his humiliation, Christ our priest had to be buried and continue "under the power of death for a time." His death



was a priestly “offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice” (SC 25). Other priests had offered sacrifices according to God’s command. But it was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin (Heb. 10:4). Those sacrifices had to be offered again and again because the priest himself needed to have his own sins removed (Heb. 7:27). The finality and sufficiency of the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made, however, was vividly shown in the humiliation of his being buried, putting an end to all other sacrifices (Heb. 9:26).

In his humiliation, Christ our king was

“The life-giving king, Jesus Christ, not only identified with us in our dying and being buried, but showed that death itself must yield to him.”

humbled by being put to death and being buried, so that he might execute his office “in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies” (SC 26). The king who died disarmed and shamed the rulers and authorities through the very instrument of his death (Col. 2:15; cf. Heb. 2:14–15). The life-giving king, Jesus Christ, not only identified with us in our dying and being buried, but showed that death itself must yield to him. Paul reminds us that the last enemy to be not merely restrained but conquered is death itself, which Jesus conquers for us (1 Cor. 15:26). By the believer’s union with the Savior, he or she becomes a victor over death and the grave as well.

Christ, in his resurrection power, goes with us through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4). Death itself is gain for the Christian because it brings us to the Savior (Phil. 1:21–23; 2 Cor. 5:6–8). Paul’s recitation of the gospel doesn’t end with “that he was buried,” but with the triumphant words “that he was raised on the third day” (1 Cor. 15:4). The gospel necessarily includes the death and burial of Christ, for his resurrection means that “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to

death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18). He was “declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). Jesus Christ had to be humbled by death and by being buried, so that death might be our entrance into glory.

His exaltation – our exaltation

Christ is rightly called the firstborn from the dead (Rev. 1:5). The words sung by David, that God would not allow his holy one to undergo decay (Ps. 16:10), had to await Christ’s humiliation under

the power of death for a time to find their great fulfillment in his resurrection. Humiliation gave way to exaltation as Christ was raised up from the dead on the third day and ascended into glory. Christ’s humiliation means our exaltation as we die with Christ to sin and its power over us now (Gal. 2:19–20; Rom. 6:8) and, finally, forever.

When the Christian walks away from a grave, he must do so in hope. The seal on Christ’s tomb is broken. The power of death has been shattered. The humiliation of the Son of God, who was buried and continued “under the power of death for a time” (SC 27), means that through our prophet, priest, and king, Jesus Christ, “the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection” (SC 37), when we will be “raised up in glory” (SC 38).

What a hope!

The dirt may be piled up, but the child of God has been delivered from the estate of sin and misery, facing death itself and the pains of hell forever (SC 20, 19), by Christ’s humiliation and exaltation. The hope of everlasting life and a final end to death and burials comes because

Jesus Christ was humbled by dying and being buried and then was exalted in his glorious resurrection. Hallelujah, what a Savior and what a hope!

*Jesus lives, and so shall I.
Death! thy sting is gone forever!
He who deigned for me to die,
lives,
The bands of death to sever.
He shall raise me from the dust:
Jesus is my hope and trust.
Jesus lives and reigns supreme;
And, his kingdom still remaining,
I shall also be with him,
Ever living, ever reigning.
God has promised; be it must:
Jesus is my hope and trust.
Jesus lives and death is now
But my entrance into glory.
Courage, then, my soul, for thou
Hast a crown of life before thee;
Thou shalt find thy hopes were just:
Jesus is the Christian’s trust.*

Christian Gellert

The author is pastor of Bethel Reformed Presbyterian Church in Fredericksburg, Md. He quotes the ESV. Reprinted from New Horizons, April 2007.

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Life in the Church

What it means for us (1)

Christ's 'flesh and blood' Body

John Westendorp

Loyalty and commitment are not strong features of modern Aussie culture – and from my limited experience of New Zealand culture – ditto! Friendships today are often shallow and short-term. We too quickly move on to new relationships. We dabble in some communal group for a while but before long something new strikes our fancy so we switch. “Been there done that! Time to move on!”

Our highly mobile, transient society doesn't help matters. In Tasmania in 1976 our retired neighbour had lived there, in the same house, all his married life. He had never travelled more than a hundred kilometres away from Devonport and had never even visited the state's capital, Hobart. But he knew everyone and everything that mattered locally. In contrast I am presently living in my 19th residence in 12 different cities and towns. Loyalty and commitment have been undermined by our high degree of mobility and our fast pace of life.

This loss of loyalty has affected marriage relationships, although obviously, other factors are involved too. One young lady walked out of her marriage after five years with the comment: “Well, we didn't do bad, we stuck it out for five years!” Her tone of voice sounded as if I needed to congratulate her. Loyalty counted for nothing... not to her husband, nor to the God before whom she had made her vows. All across the nation spouses are packing up and moving on – too often for no other reasons than boredom, disinterest or that someone else has ‘turned them on’.

This loss of commitment affects the church too. Why is it that people who have been born and bred into a certain church community can just leave the friends and family they have been part of for decades and join a bunch of total strangers, not because they moved elsewhere for work reasons, but simply because they felt it was time to move on?

Okay, I don't want to be simplistic.

There have often been horrendous stories behind a switch of churches. I understand that someone can become so hurt and disillusioned that they feel a need to start afresh somewhere else. But the lack of loyalty and faithfulness to the local church bothers me... for three reasons.

First, we always end up taking ourselves along to our ‘new’ church. Maybe, to begin with people will be especially welcoming... it's always nice to see a new face! But somewhere along the line my new friends are going to see the real me with my shortcomings and idiosyncrasies. That may simply start the cycle of difficulties off all over again. It might be much better, in the long run, to stay and work through the difficulties – hard as that may be, instead of taking the easy way out.

Second, to walk out on the church may even be a denial of the gospel of Christ. If Christians can't work it out and have to walk out instead the only winner is *The Enemy*. We who know the gospel of forgiveness and new beginnings should never have to walk away from “home”.

Third, many today justify themselves for walking out by claiming that they are not giving up on the real Church – the spiritual Body of Christ – only on this local congregation. Such people have forgotten that the Body of Christ is first of all a group of real ‘flesh and blood’ people here and now in this local community. It makes little sense to commit ourselves in loyalty to Christ as the Head, without a corresponding commitment to His ‘flesh and blood’ Body locally. “The Body of Christ” is a group of real flesh and blood people – not some nebulous spiritual entity.

Loyal and committed with a wrong view?

However commitment to ‘the Body of Christ’ has another side to it. I can imagine some of us reading up to this point with a measure of self-contented smugness. We are the committed ones. We wouldn't walk out on the church the way others have done. We are loyal...! My concern however, is that it is possible to make essentially the same mistake... even while patting ourselves on the back



for our faithfulness to the church.

I say this because we, who wouldn't dream of leaving the church ourselves, too often allow others to leave without so much as a murmur of concern. During my thirty years of full time ministry I have often been grieved by the ease with which we allow people to leave us... often for no other reason than that they don't want to be part of this church anymore.

Am I exaggerating the problem? I think not! Please check a church directory from your congregation of ten years ago. Compare it to the current one and many churches will find a large number of people no longer worshiping with them. It's too easy to blame those who left us for their lack of commitment,

“The job of holding together a church made up of a great diversity of real flesh and blood people is far too great for a few office bearers. All of us need to learn the gentle art of enfolding others in our love.”

or for their faulty view of the “Body of Christ”. But with how many of them did we actually plead not to leave? How many of them did you personally visit to listen to their pain? Maybe the fault wasn't just their lack of commitment... maybe it was just as much our own lack of compassion and concern.

The point is that it is also very possible for the loyal and committed to work with a wrong view of the “Body of Christ”. Our loyalty may also be to some nebulous entity (called ‘the institutional church’) instead of to the real ‘flesh and blood’ Body of Christ made up of real people.

Okay, I am well aware that some who left could not have been persuaded to stay in any case. Their minds were made up. Or perhaps their agenda (Charismatic...?) was so different that it became impossible to stay unless they changed. But what about the many others who left simply because they didn't feel that they belonged, or because

there was too much hurt and nobody seemed to care?

Even now there are such people on the fringes of many of our congregations. These folk are not just part of an institution, they are flesh and blood members of the Body of Christ. Will our love be strong enough to hold on to them? Or will we see yet more resignations in the time ahead?

Perhaps another factor from our side is a tendency to see our office-bearers as the people whose job it is to keep the church together. They need to challenge people to greater commitment to the Body of Christ. Well, that's true! But they above all need to stimulate all of us to be the kind of loving community that no one wants to leave.

Furthermore, if we leave it to the pastor or the elders and deacons to keep the church together we are doomed to fall apart. The job of holding together a church made up of a great diversity of real flesh and blood people is far too great for a few office bearers. All of us need to learn the gentle art of enfolding others in our love. We not only need to work at becoming a warm welcoming community, we also need to work at being the kind of community that no one wants to leave.

Serious case of planks

In this whole matter of being members together in the Body of Christ we need a healthy dose of realism. For example, it is generally true that other people's faults are usually more glaring than our own. We readily see the splinter in someone else's eye but we have a blind spot for the plank in our own.

For this reason it's easy to be loyal to the ‘invisible church’ of all ages. It's

much harder to be loyal and committed to the real ‘flesh and blood’ people that make up our local church. A poet put it well:

*Oh, to love the saints above...
that will be glory.
But to love the saints below...
that's a different story.*

If you are still thinking “All this certainly applies to the congregation in general but not to me!” then we have a serious case of planks still creating some optical problems? And if your attitude is prevalent enough, then no wonder people leave.

Okay, in fairness I need to say that in many of our churches we have lots of wonderful warm-hearted folk who go out of their way for others. But I still find it more than a little sad that in many of our churches someone can spend almost a year in our midst without so much as a single invitation from the congregation to enjoy Christian hospitality with one of our families. And that really does happen!

Of course this raises the question whether invitations into our homes is what makes the difference between someone staying or someone “moving on”. Surely we can minister to one another after church out in the church courtyard or hall, over a cup of coffee? And can't we show compassion by chatting to someone in the foyer or in the car park?

I'm not so sure. Paul's “*Practice hospitality!*” (Rom.12:13) is not just an interesting and helpful suggestion. It is an obligation that the Lord lays on those who are determined to love God and their neighbour. It is one of the ways in which we Christians demonstrate that Christ is still working in this world through real ‘flesh and blood’ people. That's why Peter repeats that exhortation and adds that we in the church are to do that without grumbling (1Peter 4:9).

Hospitality

I'm putting this article together in the week after Christmas. We have just remembered again that when God saved us He didn't do so from a safe and remote distance. Jesus took on our ‘flesh and blood’. He lived with us and ate and drank with us. He, Almighty God, was born of the Virgin Mary in order to relate to us as a real ‘flesh and blood’ Person – in the intimacy and nitty gritty of daily life. And when He wanted to speak about the wonderful relationship we can now

have with Him He described it in terms of Him coming in to dine with us and we with Him (Rev.3:20).

In other words, hospitality amongst us as Christians isn't just a nicety. It is a way in which we live out, in an incarnational way, what it means to be part of a Body of real 'flesh and blood' people.

That gives the whole issue of church members looking out for one another a gospel perspective. Jesus saved us veiled in flesh... wearing our humanity! In that way He entered fully into our human experience.

In fact, every other month or so, we remember this in the church in a very tangible way. The baby Jesus grew up and the God-Man eventually offered His human body up in death so that we might live. We commemorate the wonder of that mystery in bread and wine. But we do that together, communally, as 'the Body of Christ'.

The Bible uses this very telling 'Body' language for the church of Jesus here on earth. It also uses that language for the church universal. But to get to that church universal you cannot get around the real 'flesh and blood' Body of Christ here and now. We sit together around the table as human beings with all our peculiarities and all our frailties. We celebrate the sacrament with people whom we may not like very much but whom

we are called to love as ourselves. We sit around the table knowing only too well the skeletons that there are in some other people's closets and hoping that no one will notice our own.

The challenge then is for us to live that Body-life out, not just as we sit together around the table, and not just as we gather for a worship service, but as we go about our daily and weekly routine. The Lord has put us together in a real flesh and blood Body so that we might show proper care for one another – even for someone we may not like all that much... even for someone whose past we know only too well.

Painful process

It seems to me that by far the most New Testament exhortations call us to work at being the kind of community in which the love of God is seen in action. The remarkable thing of course is that all this is possible at all. The 'Body of Christ' consists of people of different ethnic backgrounds and different personality types, a great variety of character traits and an even greater variety of likes and dislikes. Yet the cement that binds it all together is the self-sacrificing love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, if it is His self sacrificing love that binds us together then that makes us realise too that being a real 'flesh and

blood' Body of Christ here on earth will never be easy but painful. It cost Jesus a great deal to love us the way He did. On that first Christmas it meant laying aside His glory. In Gethsemane it meant agonising over what was to come. On the cross it was three hellish hours of God-forsakenness. It was tough love that pulled us out of hell and into heaven. It will be tough love too that builds us into the kind of community of which the world will say, "See how these Christians love one another!"

You and I naturally tend to shy away from anything that costs us pain. If Jesus had done that there would have been no Christmas and no Good Friday and no Easter. And if we do it today there will be no caring and sharing community at your church. May God give us the grace needed to be a real caring and sharing 'flesh and blood' Body of Christ.

Rev John Westerndorp has served four different congregations in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia since 1976. He retired to Toowoomba in 2006 to care for his late wife, Ali. John helped out the Christchurch congregation for four months last year and is presently preparing for another four months there.

Life in the Church

What it means for us (2)

The offices in the church

Rev Leo de Vos

What is office?

An office is the station (or the stations) in life to which God has appointed each of us. All of society is ordered through God's appointed offices. For example, I have been called by Jesus Christ through his church to be a minister of the Word, but I am also a husband and a father. I have to juggle these offices carefully, for while the work of preaching and pastoring is demanding, I must also be a husband to my wife and a father to

my children. So I hold several offices and each has authority under Christ in its own area. We must be careful to guard the sanctity of every office in which God has placed us. For example God has not called me to lay down household rules for the other families in our congregation – I may do that only for my own family. Sometimes at School Association meetings I have felt that some people have expected me to speak with the authority of a minister. However, I have been convinced that I have been attending as a parent of my children in the school.

Clarifying Wrong Views of Office

If we do not understand office in the church we are going to get ourselves into ever deeper problems. We have difficulty understanding office because our egalitarian society has erased distinctions about office. Parents, police officers and others in authority are not given the respect due to their office under God. And this same problem is creeping into the church. It is common to hear the argument of equality being used to oppose the special offices in the church. It goes like this: since we are equally created in the image of God, what gives

some people the right to have authority in the church over others? (It would be amusing to ask the police officer who stops you speeding what gives him the right to ticket you since we are all created equally in God's image!)

We are also mistaken if our view of office is limited to a position of service. James Boice articulates this view when he writes: The proper relationship of clergy to lay persons is *service*. According to Ephesians, the clergy are to direct their energy to equipping the saints. They are to assist them and train them – which is the main or essential work of the church as it relates both to the world and to the body of the church itself. Jesus exemplified that pattern of service. “He came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom

to office is he truly called by Christ to serve in office. Gifts are not enough to make a man a deacon, elder or minister. The church must first recognise the gifts and then Christ must appoint that man to the office of deacon, elder or minister through the calling of the church. Ordination means that an office-bearer has been separated to serve officially, that is with Christ's authority.

Difficulties about office can be clarified if we understand the distinctions commonly made in reformed theology regarding the office of believer and the special offices in the church.

The Office of Believer

God has appointed every Christian to the office of believer. This means that as members of Christ we share in

insight into Scripture writes: “Believers are a priesthood of kings and a royalty of priests. And their work is to proclaim the praises of God, their Saviour. That is the task of prophets”. (*The Glorious Body of Christ*, p.128).

Reformed believers treasure this doctrine because the church of Rome drew a sharp line between clergy and laity. The Roman church exalted the special offices high over the laity. Rome teaches infallibly while the laity accept this teaching without question. Rome rules while the laity are always expected to submit without question. Against this wrong emphasis the reformers turned back to the Bible which teaches that every believer holds the office of prophet, priest and king.

Writing a half a century ago, R. B. Kuiper's comments are still thought-provoking:

“Today there is a crying need for another revival of this doctrine. Protestantism, which once extolled it, now largely neglects it. To name a number of instances of such neglect is not at all difficult. How few church members today are serious students of Holy Scripture! In how few supposedly Christian homes is the family altar held in honour, at which parents pray with and for their children and teach them the Word of God! How few, on returning home from a preaching service, follow the example of the Bereans and search the Scriptures whether these things are so (Acts 17:11)! How few churches find it possible to maintain an active organisation for their men! How few organisations of women in the churches, besides sewing and raising money for the church, engage in Bible study! How few church members are capable of leading in prayer in public! How few of the communicant members of the church are qualified to serve as elders and deacons! How few church members realise it is their solemn duty to admonish their erring fellow members! How few are able to teach the youth of the church! How few, in times of doctrinal or other controversy, refuse to follow the clergy blindly and insist on studying the issues for themselves! How few engage actively in evangelistic effort!” (*The Glorious Body of Christ*, p.130).

So who can say that there is noth-

“The reformers turned back to the Bible which teaches that every believer holds the office of prophet, priest and king.”

for many” (Mk. 10:45) (*Foundations of The Christian Faith*, p.625).

Now I highly value what Boice wrote about Christ-like service. I happen to devour almost everything Boice penned! And I highly recommend you read him too. A strong dose of humility will do us good as office-bearers. Office-bearers who push their weight without the humility of Christ contradict exactly what their office must exemplify. But let us not forget that the office is an appointment with God's authority. So if I am a sacrificing father but refuse to warn and discipline my children, then I am not exercising Christ's authority in this office. The same holds true for elders in the church. If we serve with humility but refuse to exercise the authority of Christ, submitting fully to his Word, we are seriously neglecting our office.

There is another notion that gifts and office go together. So if a person has great gifts for office, this gives him the right to exercise these gifts as he chooses, such as in preaching and teaching in the church without ordination. But the problem is that the gifts must first be recognised by the body of believers. And only when the Session has ordained the gifted member

his anointing to be prophets, priests and kings. Who has not read or even memorised the lovely language of our Heidelberg Catechism: “But why are you called a Christian? Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess His name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin, and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity”. (QA. 32). You will notice in this answer that the Catechism teaches that in Christ the believer is restored to the same three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king which Adam had received in creation. As a prophet I am anointed to confess Christ, as a priest I am anointed to offer myself to Christ and as a king I am anointed to fight against sin and rule with Christ.

In just one sentence the apostle Peter ascribes all three offices to believers: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). R.B. Kuiper with keen

ing for members of the congregation to do? The idea only ministers, elders and deacons are called to real service in the church, while the rest of the congregation sits back, is completely wrong!

The Special Offices

While all believers are anointed by the Holy Spirit to be prophets, priest and kings, it does not follow that all believers are ministers, deacons and ruling elders. The study of church history is instructive because it warns us against becoming unbalanced. We have already seen that the reformers responded to Rome by emphasising the office of believer. However, some groups, like the Plymouth Brethren founded by John Darby, denied all special offices in the church. So today in Brethren churches every male has the right to prophesy or preach. Though Darby died in 1882, his influence can still be seen in many churches.

The Scriptures make it plain that Christ has appointed special offices in

the church: It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12). Paul and Barnabus on their first missionary journey "ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). The apostle Paul exhorted: "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17). What did the apostles command the elders in Ephesus? "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). And the church chose the deacons to care for the poor. They were ordained to this office: They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:6). Kuiper writes: How clear that the apostles recognised special offices

in the church! (*The Glorious Body of Christ*, p.134).

Implications

Although the special office-bearers are nominated to office and elected by the congregation, in their exercise of the office of believer, the special office-bearers serve and rule under the authority of Christ. The implications of this are clear. Office-bearers had better submit to Christ and His Word themselves for their authority is derived from Christ. And when believers respect their office-bearers they show respect for the rule of Christ Himself: "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17).

Rev Leo de Vos is Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Wainuimata.

Movie in focus

***The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* Rob Vosslander**

My wife and I hardly ever go to the movies, so when we do it is a real treat. Particularly if the tickets are freebies. So it was recently that we attended a preview of *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas*.

Set in World War Two, the movie is an adaptation of the book written by John Boyne. We're aware that the book is used in some high schools as part of the English programme, and a good choice it is.

Without giving the plot away, the story focuses on Bruno, the nine-year old son of a high-ranking Nazi officer. Bruno's father is posted from Berlin to the country for a special assignment of great importance to the *Reich*, which proves to be the running of a death camp. Seeking to overcome his loneliness, Bruno develops a friendship with a Jewish inmate named Shmuel. Enough said: it would be spoiling things to say more.

By and large the film preserves the integrity of the book. A significant dif-

ference is that the former is told from an external point of view, whereas the book is written from the boy's. This lends a certain intimacy to the book; however, the actor artfully depicts the boy's innocence, indeed naivety.

The husband's unpleasant assignment takes its toll on the family, creating stress in the marriage. This has led some to criticise the film for making us feel compassion and empathy where it does not belong: for the Nazis, rather than for their victims. I think this concern is overdrawn: the movie does not glorify the perpetrator or diminish the suffering of the victims. It does, however, highlight the pervasiveness of evil, and its corrosive effects on all who come into contact with it.

The ubiquity of evil is emphasised in another way: all the actors speak proper English. The high ranking Nazis sound as if they'd just walked out of the House of Lords. In using English voices, I wonder if the director was emphasising that evil is a universally human, and not merely a Nazi, attribute. This then shifts the focus from what *they* did back then,

to what we are capable of now.

Beside the English accents, the actual plot of the book and the movie is unrealistic. Shmuel and Bruno could never have met. Given his family background and education, it is unlikely that Bruno would have been anything other than a faithful member of the *Hitler Jugend*, as indeed his sister Gretel was. And there is no way that Bruno could have come to the end he did. But to strain at details is to mistake the genre (historical *fiction*, not history *per se*). Just as the details of a parable should not be strained, to do so here would be to miss both the story and its message.

I'd recommend both the book and the movie for teenagers and up. Each tells the same story, but differently, and each is shocking in its own way. In the course of the screening we heard several gasps from the audience. Subsequently we realised that, given the town we were in, there would likely have been a number of Jews in the audience. If the movie touched us, we can only think how it might have moved them.

RCA U.S. army chaplain Clark V. Poling among honored at 65th Four Chaplains Memorial Service

The 65th Annual Four Chaplains Memorial Service was held 25 January 2009 at New Bedford, Massachusetts' Seamen's Bethel to honor the four U.S. Army chaplains who sacrificed their own lives by giving their life jackets to other soldiers aboard the USAT Dorchester troop ship that sank off the coast of Greenland on 3 February 1943 after being struck by an enemy torpedo.

One of the four, Chaplain First Lieutenant Clark V. Poling, was an ordained minister in the Reformed Church in America and served at the First Church of Christ in New London, Connecticut and at the First Reformed Church in Schenectady, New York, before entering the chaplaincy shortly after the start of World War II.

The four clergymen linked arms, sang hymns and prayed as the Dorchester went down, and survivors reported that the last thing they heard as the ship slipped beneath the north Atlantic water was the Lord's Prayer. Each was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart posthumously.

The editor remembers in the early 1960's seeing a depiction of the four Dorchester chaplains in their final moments at a now long-closed wax museum in Washington DC.

+ *The Standard Times*, 25 Elm Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts 02740, 508-979-4440, Newsroom@S-T.com

+ *Arlington National Cemetery Website*

+ *Reformed Church in America*, 4500 60th Street Southeast, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49512, 800-968-6065, questions@rca.org

Institute for Creation Research marks Charles Darwin's 150th birthday with February 2009 Acts and Facts

The Institute for Creation Research is marking the 150th birthday of "On the Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life" author Charles Darwin on 12 February 2009, by publishing in the February 2009 issue of *Acts and Facts* more than a dozen scientific, theological, historical, and apologetic articles to use in refuting those who "embrace some form of compromise with the atheistic theories of naturalism, causing them to subjugate the inerrant Word of God to

'fit' with that which is alien to the text of Scripture."

+ *Institute for Creation Research*, Post Office Box 59029, Dallas, Texas 75229

Myanmar officials close Christian churches

Authorities in Rangoon, Myanmar (Burma), during the week of 11 January 2009, increased restrictions on Christian activity in the city and in the surrounding areas.

Several major city churches, including Wather Hope Church, Emmanuel Church and the Assemblies of God Church, were forbidden from holding church services, and a 5 January 2009 ban on Christians meeting in "unauthorized" places (residences) was continued.

The Burmese news agency Mizzima quoted an unnamed Burmese Christian who claimed that 80 percent of churches in Rangoon were affected by the order.

+ *Open Doors USA*, Post Office Box 27001, Santa Ana, California 92799, 949-752-6600, Fax: 949-752-6442, usa@opendoors.org

Rome Bringing Back the Doctrine of Indulgences

In a 9 February 2009 New York Times article, reporter Paul Vitello describes how in recent months the Roman Catholic Church is again making available the spiritual benefit of indulgences, what Vitello describes as, "a sort of amnesty from punishment in the afterlife."

Pope John Paul II began reversing the post-Vatican II minimization of the doctrine of indulgences, and this reversal has gained much greater momentum under Pope Benedict XVI.

Vitello simplifies the complex doctrine as follows: "According to [Roman] church teaching, even after sinners are absolved in the confessional and say their Our Fathers or Hail Marys as penance, they still face punishment after death, in Purgatory, before they can enter heaven. In exchange for certain prayers, devotions or pilgrimages in special years, a [Roman] Catholic can receive an indulgence, which reduces or erases that punishment instantly, with no formal ceremony or sacrament."

"There are partial indulgences, which reduce purgatorial time by a certain number of days or years, and plenary indulgences, which eliminate all of it

until another sin is committed. You can get one for yourself, or for someone who is dead. You cannot buy one - the church outlawed the sale of indulgences in 1567 - but charitable contributions, combined with other acts, can help you earn one."

A significant number of the ninety-five theses Martin Luther posted on the door of Wittenberg Cathedral on 31 October 1517, thus igniting the Protestant Reformation, dealt with the abusive practices surrounding the unbiblical Roman doctrines of Purgatory and indulgences.

+ *New York Times*, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, New York 10018, 212-556-1234, executive-editor@nytimes.com

+ *The Vatican*

Christian Defense Coalition calls on President Obama to withdraw consideration of Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius for Secretary of Health and Human Services

The Christian Defense Coalition on 10 February 2009 called upon President Barack Hussein Obama to withdraw consideration of Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius for Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) due to her close ties to late-term abortionist George Tiller, her veto of a Kansas bill that would have reduced late-term and coerced abortions, and because Sebelius' appointment would open the door for taxpayer funded abortions which was a strong part of the Presidents' healthcare plan during his campaign.

Reformed Presbyterian pastor and Director of the Christian Defense Coalition the Rev. Patrick J. Mahoney said, "On the campaign trail, President Obama talked about his desire to reduce the number of abortions. This was especially true in his talks with faith groups and organizations. However, President Obama's policies put him in direct conflict with his promises."

"The Christian Defense Coalition and other groups warned Americans if Barack Obama were elected he would become 'The Abortion President.' This became a reality when only days into his Presidency, Mr. Obama reversed the Mexico City Policy which will greatly expand abortions worldwide. It is tragic to consider that the first promise President Obama broke in office was his promise to reduce abortions."

"Now he is considering appointing one of the most radical pro-abortion politicians in the country as the HHS Secretary. It is difficult to imagine that on the campaign trail President Obama talked about unity and the danger of extremism."

+ *Christian Defense Coalition*, 540-538-4741

Conway Celebration Church of Conway, Arkansas assists Reformed Church of Nepal

Pastor Cary Cox and Elder Steve Wingo of Reformed Baptist Conway Celebration Church in Conway, Arkansas, recently traveled to Nepal to meet with church planter since 1980, Ram Nepal, and the Himalayan country's President Dr. Ram Baran Yadav, who was elected in 2008 following the abdication of the country's king.

Pastor Cox said that church planter Nepal was born in Nepal into a Hindu family, became a Christian at an early age, and planted 300 churches in his home country while Christianity was still illegal. Cox tells how church planter Nepal was imprisoned several times, and while imprisoned met several politicians that had been imprisoned for their faith. When persecution of Christians in Nepal reached the point where church planter Nepal was receiving death threats, Nepal fled the country and came to Dallas, Texas where he founded a church for Asian immigrants called International Christian Fellowship and established another church in Washington DC.

Cox goes on to describe how church planter Nepal's family and orphans Nepal had raised kept the churches going in his absence and planted other churches. After the Hindu Yadav became Nepal's first democratically elected leader, freedom of worship was given to Nepali Christians.

All of the churches planted by Ram Nepal are organized under the name Reformed Church of Nepal (RCN), and church planter Nepal has assembled a group of U.S. pastors to help train RCN pastors. The RCN churches additionally sponsor orphanages and schools for the orphans and for children in the church's communities.

+ *The Log Cabin Democrat*, 1058 Front Street, Conway, Arkansas 72032, 501-327-6621, Fax: 501-327-6787, scott.morrissey@thecabin.net

+ *Reformed Church of Nepal*, G. Post Office Box 3230, Kathmandu, Nepal, 977-1-5528320, Fax: 977-1-5534885, reformednepal@wlink.com.np

+ *Association of Charismatic Reformed Churches*, 695 Eagles Nest Drive, Austin, Arkansas 72007, 501-982-7756, kirkandliz@gmail.com

Black pro-life religious leaders in Oakland, California to support pastor convicted for talking to abortion clinic patients

Black pro-life religious leaders including the Rev. Johnny Hunter, president of Life Education and Resources Network (LEARN), an African American pro-family, pro-life organization with members in 27 states, are in Oakland, California to support the Rev. Walter Hoye II, who was convicted 15 January 2009 of two misdemeanor counts of unlawfully approaching abortion clinic patients in violation of Oakland's recently enacted ordinance prohibiting any contact with abortion clinic patients within one hundred feet of an abortion clinic. Hoye faces up to two years in prison and US\$4 thousand in fines when he is sentenced by California Superior Court Judge Stuart Hing on 19 February 2009.

A 14 April 2008 report by the National Center for Health Statistics states that in 2004, thirty-seven percent of pregnancies for black women ended in surgical abortion, compared with twelve percent for non-Hispanic white women and nineteen percent for Hispanic women. In 2004, 453,000 black babies were aborted while 418,000 white and 269,000 Hispanic babies were aborted, according to the federal report.

Pastor Stephen Broden of Dallas, Texas said, "This is a deliberate attempt to silence the Church and its prophetic role in protecting the innocent lives in our community and especially Black babies. Pastor Hoye represents a legacy of resistance by Black preachers to injustices perpetrated on the beloved community. Prenatal murder of Black babies by the abortion industry should be resisted by every black pastor across this country."

+ *Christian News Wire*, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington DC 20006, 202-546-0054, newsdesk@christiannewswire.com

+ *LEARN INC*, Post Office Box 9400, Fayetteville, North Carolina 28311, 910-488-9936

Iraqi Christians marginalised and vulnerable

Christians in the northern Iraqi province of Nineveh are awaiting the results of 31 January's provincial council elections. Nineveh, where most of Iraq's remaining Christians live, is majority Arab but ruled mostly by Kurds due to the Sunni Arabs having boycotted the 2005 elections. Now, however, the Arab majority has struck back through the ballot box and is set to wrest power from the incumbent Kurds. The Christians are marginalised and vulnerable in the midst of these

warring and vengeful ethnic nationalists. The Christians' appalling plight is almost never reported, as if they do not even exist. But there is this remnant, threatened by Kurd vs Arab ethnic conflict and the al Qaeda-led jihad for the imposition of fundamentalist Islam.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 515 | Feb 2009

Update: Tensions high in Nineveh

As was expected, the Sunni Arabs defeated the incumbent Kurds in the elections and will now take power in Nineveh. Last weekend (21 & 22 February) the Iraqi military launched Operation New Hope (Arab units with US assistance) in an effort to control the situation in Mosul. A reported 74 'terrorists' were arrested. Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani warns that if the situation between Kurds and Arabs is not resolved prior to the departure date for US troops from Iraq 'it will be war between both sides'. However, many observers believe war could be imminent. There are reports of escalating clashes between Arab Iraqi army units and Kurdish peshmerga (armed) forces. A long violent battle for northern Iraq (see RLP 468) may be just beginning. Pray for the remnant Church in northern Iraq.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 518 | Feb 2009

Totalitarianism blights the church in Zimbabwe

Robert Mugabe's secret police extended ZANU-PF totalitarian control into the Anglican Church in Harare in 2001 by directly interfering in church affairs to secure the pro-Mugabe Rev. David Kunonga as Bishop of Harare. In 2007 the church split after the Anglican Church of the Province of Central Africa deposed Kunonga and replaced him with Bishop Bakare. In 2008 the High Court ruled that the factions share church premises. But Kunonga has defied this and, with the collusion of Mugabe's police, seized church properties and expelled mainstream Anglicans who continue to suffer intimidation and persecution. Bishop Bakare is appealing for prayer. The Primates of the Anglican Communion have urged the Church 'to observe Wednesday 25 February 2009, Ash Wednesday, as a day of prayer and solidarity with the Zimbabwean people'.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 516 | Feb 2009

Infertility – How to help

A fictional letter written by Lydia van der Wel

Dear Friends,

Thanks for asking about how you can support me at the moment. I've been struggling with infertility now for about 18 months. I want to be really honest with you about things that hurt me and things that help.

Throwaway lines hurt pretty deeply even though people barely realise what they say. These include comments like, "It's about time for you to have kids", "Wait til you have kids, then you'll know the meaning of tired..." or "Don't have kids they're hard work."

Most of you don't have medical training. So when you start suggesting remedies, treatments or cures I smile and nod but inside I've switched off. I've been poked and prodded evasively by many doctors, done my own research, and checked out alternative treatments. I don't need medical advice. That's covered.

And when it comes to treatments and ethics, please don't share your opinions until I ask for them. These issues are between God, my husband and me. We'll seek godly counsel and it might be yours, but please wait until we're ready to hear it.

Success stories wear a bit thin after a few years. I know people exist who have been barren for 11 years and then had four children. But my heart can't hold onto such a hope. I need to live in the reality that I don't have kids. And I might never!

And I know you've heard of infertile couples who fell pregnant after selling all they had and going on a holiday... or moving to a warmer climate... or seeing some Chinese doctor... or going vegetarian. But if I followed every ingredient of every success story I've heard, I'd be broke and probably still not pregnant. When you feel the urge to say, "I know a couple who..." please stop.

One thing I hear so often is, "Just relax – you want it too much." Well of course I want it – didn't you when you tried to fall pregnant and succeeded! When you say this it, I feel guilty – as if it's my fault I'm not pregnant. Statistics show that 80% of fertility problems come from diagnosable causes, so relaxing does nothing to cure them!

It's often said to me, "It'll happen one day". I know you want to encourage me but unless you can see God's plans for me, those words are actually meaningless. Often you try to encourage me with "God's in control", "It'll happen in God's time" or "Just pray about it". You and I know these things are true, but when you tack them on the end of a brief conversation, it seems to me like you're just trying to avoid the bigger, uncomfortable questions I have. If God is in control and kids are a blessing – why is he withholding them from me? Has he forgotten me? Does he love me?

I know in my head God's in control but my heart is breaking and I need you to let me speak in my rawness – like David does in the Psalms – pouring out my heart to God, asking him my questions, and being broken before him. And then, only then, gently point me to God. Remind me of God who loves me (because sometimes I truly wonder if he does). Point me to God who holds me and comforts me and only does what is best.

Often people say, "You can always adopt" – as if it is some consolation prize. If we're going to adopt (and that's not certain), it's not because we lucked out on the real deal. It will be because we feel that's what God wants for us.

As you read this, you may feel bad because you've said some of these things. Know that I don't say this to make you feel guilty – I know they are natural reactions and well meaning. I'm just letting you see how my heart works.

And there is plenty that you **can** do.

One of the best things you can do is listen to me. Ask me questions about what it is like, rather than trying to provide answers. I often feel very alone in my struggle, so having a friend to share how I feel is a huge relief.

And as I speak, I might cry. Please just let me – I need to let it out sometimes. Feel free to cry with me and give me hugs – I need plenty of them. And please understand that I might talk about the same struggle over and over again. Like all grief, it takes time to find peace. So please just keep listening and be patient. One day this grief will subside and then you'll have your happy friend back again, but til then, please stick by me, because I need you.

Something that might help you be patient is reading a bit about the struggle I face. I can recommend some books and there is plenty of information on the Internet.

We're all different when it comes to what sort of support we need, so don't assume that if you would like one type of support, I'd like the same. Just ask me what is most helpful. I'll try to be honest. Some of us like being asked about how we are going or how doctor appointments are going etc. Others prefer to keep it quiet and will bring it up with you when they need to talk. And either way, some days, I mightn't need to talk because I'm okay.

Also, my journey isn't predictable for me or anyone else. Some days I think I'm fine and then fall apart or vice versa. So if you're wondering how I'm going or if something is particularly difficult for me at the moment, you'll need to ask.

So even though it's hard to ask, I appreciate questions like, "Am I talking about my kids too much?" or "Is it hard to be around my kids at the moment?" "Is helping out with creche too much at the moment?" Often, I'll be okay with it, but you asking the question shows that you are aware of my struggle and that means so much to me.

This sensitivity is so important. When you send me an invite to a baby shower, a little note at the bottom saying "I'd love you to come but understand if you don't" means you understand if I have to decline the invite. Remembering me at births or baptisms or on Mothers' day also means a lot to me. A card, a hug or a genuine "how are you?" can make those days that little bit easier and less lonely.

And please understand that sometimes I need some space from things – sometimes I even need to avoid the baby aisle in the supermarket! There may be days where I need to step back from baby showers, pregnant people, family gatherings. It will only be for a time – I am working on being able to cope.

I know announcing your pregnancy to me is a hard thing to do – you feel bad and I feel sad. So if I cry, please know I'm not angry with you, just sad for me. Please don't play it down and pretend you're not excited – that makes it even harder not easier. And maybe tell me when I don't have to be sociable for the next few hours, so I can cry if I need.

It would be great if you could remember my husband. Ask him how he is occasionally. He has an emotional wife and no baby – two things that he is sad about. Men aren't the same as women, but they still need support. Knowing someone cares about him helps me too.

Often in this struggle it is easy to lose sight of reality. I can feel like friends and family don't really love me because I haven't got children. I can feel like I'm a failure or that I don't fit. I can feel like God doesn't love me. Please listen to my thoughts, and gently challenge me to see that it's not my fault, that I am loved and that God is still with me.

I appreciate your prayers. At times I get so sad I can't pray. Pray for a baby. Pray that I would learn contentment in all circumstances.

I know this is a lot to take in. And there are probably many things I've left out. But just ask and listen if you are wondering about something. And know that I won't be sad about this forever. God may give us children or he may help us be content with no children.

Thank you for being willing to walk along side me on the roller coaster ride. I need you. I can't face it alone.

Love from your friend with an empty cradle.

The first article Infertility – the Silent Grief, *appeared in* Faith in Focus 35/10 November 2008.

How women started the culture-war

This series of 6 excerpts from Nancy Pearcey's book *Total Truth* addresses some big questions.

(Part 1)

Modernization brings about a novel dichotomization of social life. The dichotomy is between the huge and immensely powerful institutions of the public sphere . . . and the private-sphere.

Peter Berger

I had just spoken on a panel at a large secular university when a woman in the audience stood up and said, "I'm not a feminist, but . . ." That was a pretty good tip-off that she was about to say something from a feminist perspective.

"Why didn't this program mention any women? None of the speakers cited works by women. Why are you ignoring half the human race?" The woman glared around the room, then added: "Don't bother to answer." She began to stalk out of the auditorium, staging a dramatic exit.

I grabbed the microphone.

"Don't leave," I said. That night I had talked about the divided concept of truth that runs like a chasm through all of Western thought. "The fact/value split is not merely academic," I said. "It has been incarnated in modern social institutions as a split between public and private life—which affects even the relationships between men and women."

That got her attention, and the room grew hushed. I explained that the two-story conception of knowledge has restructured not only the university curriculum but also the home, the church, and the workplace. This is an important aspect of the two-tiered division of truth, because it reminds us that it is not just a matter of ideas but also a powerful force reshaping the way we live.

Women and the Awakening

Come with me back to the middle of the Second Great Awakening [in America]. In 1838, a controversial article appeared urging laypeople to "think for themselves" in matters of religion. Ordinarily, a message like that would hardly have caused a ripple. As we have seen, the call to ordinary people to read and interpret the Bible for themselves was a central theme in the evangelical movement of the time. What made this article so controversial, however, was that it was written by a woman—and she was calling on women to read the Bible for themselves: "I believe it to be the solemn duty of every individual to search the Scriptures for themselves, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, and not be governed by the views of

any man, or set of men."

Once the evangelical movement had embraced spiritual populism, it was difficult to contain the logic of equality to white males. In terms of sheer numbers, the Awakenings reached more women than men, especially younger women. The revivalists also permitted women to pray and speak publicly, and even to become "exhorters" (teaching assistants), which scandalized critics. Moreover, because the revivalists stressed the emotional side of religion, their message seemed to be pitched especially to women. They began to speak of women as being more naturally religious than men, and urged wives to be the means of converting their more worldly husbands.

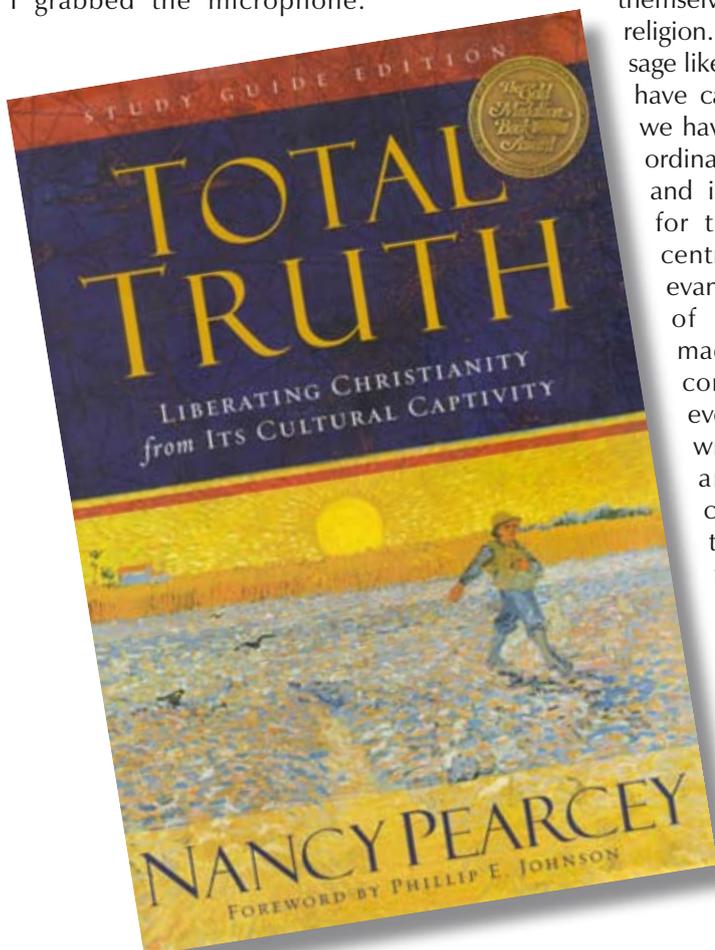
Like the other trends we have traced, this one has continued into our own day. American churches still typically attract more women than men, giving rise to the stereotype that religion is for women and children. This pattern is so widespread that some have spoken of the "feminization" of the church. "Men still run most churches," one study concludes, but "in the pews women outnumber men in all countries of Western civilization."

Interestingly, this is not true of other faiths: In Eastern Orthodoxy, the membership is roughly balanced, and in Judaism and Islam men actually predominate. So the pattern cannot be explained by saying that men are just naturally less religious than women. Instead, Western Christianity is unusual in this regard. Why is that?

The answer is found in the split between the public and the private, fact and value, which cast Christianity into the upper story. This was not merely a change in ideas about religion; it involved changes in the material world as well—in the institutional structures of society. Once we grasp this process, it will shed new light not only on the state of evangelicalism today but also on issues like the role of the church in society and the roles of men and women in the home.

Households at work

Historically speaking, the key turning point was the Industrial Revolution,



which eventually divided the private realm of family and faith from the public realm of business and industry. To grasp these changes more clearly, let's start by painting a picture of life before the Industrial Revolution.

In the colonial period, families lived much the way they have lived for millennia in traditional societies. The vast majority of people lived on farms or in peasant villages. Productive work was done in the home or its outbuildings. Work was done not by lone individuals but by families or households. A household was a relatively autonomous economic unit, often including members of the extended family, apprentices, servants, and hired hands. Stores, offices, and workshops were located in a front room, with living quarters either upstairs or in the rear. This meant that the boundary between home and world was highly permeable: The "world" entered continually in the form of clients, business colleagues, customers, and apprentices.

This integration of life and work actually survives in pockets of modern society. When I was twelve years old, my family lived for a year in a small village outside Heidelberg, Germany. To go shopping we would take a large basket and walk down the street to the baker, then the butcher, then the grocer, and so on. Each storefront was located in the front room of a house, with the family living upstairs or in the back rooms. Husband and wife worked together all day, and school let out at noon (all the way through high school), so the kids could come home and help out too, stocking shelves and running the cash register. Each business was a genuine family enterprise.

One evening when I visited a small gift shop down the street, a woman came out of a back room with a baby on her hip. She waited on me holding her baby in one arm, then waved goodbye and went back to making dinner. As late as the 1960s, in German villages, one could still experience the pre-industrial form of the family enterprise.

What did the colonial integration of work and life mean for family relationships? It meant that husband and wife worked side by side on a daily basis, sharing in the same economic enterprise. For a colonial woman, one historian writes, marriage "meant to become a co-worker beside a husband . . . learning new skills in butchering, silversmith work, printing, or upholstering—whatever special skills the husband's work required."

A useful measure of a society's treatment of women is the status of widows, and historical records show that in colonial days it was not uncommon for widows to carry on the family enterprise after their husbands died—which means they had learned the requisite skills to keep the business going on their own.

Of course, women were also responsible for a host of household tasks requiring a wide range of skills: spinning wool and cotton; weaving it into cloth; sewing the family's clothes; gardening and preserving food; preparing meals without preprocessed ingredients; making soap, buttons, candles, medicines. Many of the goods used in colonial society were manufactured by women, and, as Dorothy Sayers writes, they "worked with head as well as hands."

Now, the fact that all this took place in the home meant that mothers were able to combine economically productive work with raising children. It also meant that fathers were much more involved in raising children than they are today. In fact, we cannot understand changes in women's roles unless we consider changes in men's roles at the same time.

Communal manhood

In the colonial period, the husband and father was regarded as the head of the household—and headship had a highly specific definition: It was defined as a divinely sanctioned office that conferred a duty to represent not his own individual interests but those of the entire household. This was an extension of the classical republican political theory discussed in chapter 10, in which a social institution (family, church, or state) was regarded as an organic unity where all shared in a common good. There was a "good" for individuals, but there was also a "good" of the whole, which was more than the sum of its parts—and this latter was the responsibility of the one in authority. He was called to sacrifice his own interests—to be disinterested—in order to represent the interests of the whole. Husbands and fathers were not to be driven by personal ambition or self-interest but to take responsibility for the common good of the entire household.

We might say that the culturally dominant definition of masculinity was "communal manhood," a term coined by Anthony Rotundo in *American Manhood*. It meant that a man was expected to rank duty above personal ambition. To

use a common phrase of the time, he was to fulfill himself through "public usefulness" more than through economic success.

In their day-to-day life, fathers enjoyed the same integration of work and childrearing responsibilities that mothers did. With production centered on the family hearth, fathers were "a visible presence, year after year, day after day" as they trained their children to work alongside them. Being a father was not a separate activity to come home to after a day at work; rather, it was an integral part of a man's daily routine. Historical records reveal that colonial literature on parenting—like sermons and child-rearing manuals—were not addressed to mothers, as the majority are today. Instead, they were typically addressed to fathers. Fathers were considered the primary parent, and were held to be particularly important in their children's religious and intellectual training.

Each household was a small commonwealth, headed by a Hausvater (literally: "house father"). In the mid-nineteenth century, writes historian John Gillis, "Not only artisans and farmers but business and professional men conducted much of their work in the house, assisted by their wives and children." As a result, "There was no difference between [the Hausvater's] time and that of his wife, children, and servants. They all ate and prayed together; they got up and went to bed on the same schedule." Indeed, surprising as it may seem, "Males . . . were as comfortable in the kitchen as women, for they had responsibility for provisioning and managing the house. Until the nineteenth century, cookbooks and domestic conduct books were directed primarily to them, and they were as devoted to décor as they were to hospitality."

In terms of the father's constant presence in the home, nineteenth-century America was actually closer to the world of Martin Luther than to our own. "When a father washes diapers and performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool," Luther wrote, he should remember that "God with all his angels and creatures is smiling."

This is not to idealize colonial life, which was often a rugged life of back-breaking labor. Yet in terms of family relations, there is no doubt that families benefited from an integration of life and labor that is extremely rare in our fragmented age.

Sally Davey

Recovering the lost art of conversation

Recently I had one of those revealing moments – a little incident that illustrated a significant trend, and which set me thinking about where it had come from and where it was probably going. It was at the end of a day in Christchurch; and as usual, I had gone to the supermarket to buy the week's groceries before driving home. Joining the checkout queue, I parked my trolley in behind a young woman wearing earplugs and seemingly



engrossed in reading text messages on her mobile phone. Her turn came to have her groceries checked out. She piled them on the conveyer, and the checkout operator scanned them, but there was only vague eye contact between the two women. The checkout operator then smiled, and asked the customer to swipe her card. She did so, but said nothing. Perhaps she did not even hear, because she was still connected up to her ipod and absorbed by its music.

Without saying so much as one word to the checkout operator, this customer sloped off out of the supermarket with her groceries. Wheeling my trolley up, I asked the operator how it felt to be dealing with speechless customers who don't even remove their earplugs to interact with the person speaking to them. "Terrible", she admitted. "The other day I even had a girl in here who was talking on her cell phone right through the checkout. Even when I was asking her something. Makes you feel like you don't even exist." Yes, I thought, that's it. As if you don't even exist... We are losing the habit of giving those we are physically with our full, undivided, and courteous attention. We are losing, fast, the art of genuine conversation.

My thoughts wheeled back to some observations of a friend. She had been telling me of the experience another friend of hers had had a while ago. This friend, a recent widow, had arranged to meet a couple of girlfriends for coffee in a café. During their time together, both these friends had received calls on their cell phones, and had remained sitting at the table, talking at length with whoever had called them. For some minutes my friend's friend had sat in silence while the other two talked. When it looked like they were both settled in for lengthy conversations, she gave way to her discouragement and simply left the café. Her two "friends" were more interested in someone intruding from outside, than they were in the person they had arranged to be with.

Now, it's not that I've got a "thing" about cell phones. They are convenient. But people sometimes use them thoughtlessly, even rudely. The real problem is the lack of value we place on conversation; and our ignorance of

what conversation actually *is*. Here are some thoughts.

What is conversation?

It seems to me that conversation, or exchanges of speech between people who are face to face with each other, is one of our most important daily human activities. Conversation is, above all, a gift of God. He uses it to do a great deal of good through us. We may also, of course, use it to do a great deal of harm. As the apostle James exclaims, "How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!" (James 3:5) But it is through talking with each other that we also express love, that we comfort, encourage, teach and exhort one another. It is through speaking that we share the gospel. We must use words and speak to people if they are to believe the message of salvation. Kind actions are helpful, but they are not enough. People need words, explanations, and answers to their questions. We need to have people with us, and talk with them.

It is true that there are many means of communication these days, and some even resemble aspects of conversation. Telephone calls, in which we can hear the other's voice, and respond to tone and nuance, come closest. But voices are only part of the rich interchange that personal proximity provides. They are certainly better than written media, such as text messages and emails, but face to face is best of all. We can see the expression on the other's face, and have the possibility of clearing up misunderstandings, apologizing straight away if our words hurt, or simply explaining more clearly if we are misunderstood. It seems to be a rule of thumb that the more sensitive an interaction, the more important it is face to face, when at all possible. Sometimes we hide behind the more "distant" written media, especially email. But it is much kinder, and I believe wiser, to communicate by voice. A friend once told of having an argument by text message when only a kilometer or two away from the person with whom she was quarrelling. I was amazed. "Why on earth didn't you just get in your car and drive around and sort it out?" I asked. We both had to admit, it was a silly situation to be in!

The priorities of conversation

Being with people, especially if we have planned the meeting, makes those people important. Personal conversation requires that we give the people we are talking to a priority on our time and attention. The phone, machines in the background, small children tugging at the arm should all come second to the person with whom we are speaking. Attending to them, without apologising to the person we're in conversation with, is just rude. Anyone sneaking a glance at a text message, tapping answers under the table, typing instructions into their computer, or just letting their eyes wander around the room, is giving the other person the clear message: "I'm not with you". To show genuine love, to offer a heartfelt apology, to make a humble and considered rebuke, or to convey compassion believably, we need to show those we are with that they have our complete, undivided attention. To do anything less is to lose our credibility.

Naturally, good conversation takes a lot of effort. Concentrating, especially when the person we're talking with is being a long-winded, or possibly self-absorbed conversationist, can require considerable dedication. Thinking of helpful, wise, tactful and clearly-worded contributions to a conversation can, at times, tax the mind and imagination. A long session of conversation can be mentally exhausting. But it is absolutely, incontrovertibly, worth the effort. I'm convinced that such occasions frequently show us God at work in people's lives.

Not so long ago, I asked someone for another perspective on what enhances or detracts from conversation. She came up with a checklist of conversational dos and don'ts, which I've prioritized for the sake of clarity. They include some pithy observations: Above all, she advised, don't interrupt. That is the ultimate proof you are not interested in what the other person is saying. You should listen more than you speak (someone said we have only one mouth, but two ears!) Don't use someone else's contribution simply as the springboard for your next point: really listen to them. Leave gaps in the conversation for others to fill. Don't try to outdo other people's stories. Don't say "That's just like me" or "I know someone like that". (Those are simply levers to get back to the fascinating subject of "me, me, me...") Don't listen merely in such a way that you are (clearly) just taking notes to assess the person speaking. And do laugh at other people's jokes,

even if they are not all that amusing. You'll notice from the evidence of this list that conversation is as much the art of listening as it is speaking. And that is just shorthand for saying that we should consider the ideas, opinions and thoughts of others as more important than our own.

Cultivating the art

It is obvious that by thinking about conversation, by exploring ways to improve our interaction, and by applying the principles of Scripture to what we say and the way we say it, we are going to get better at it. Experience, over time, will also make us wiser, kinder, gentler and more edifying practitioners of the art of conversation. We can also help our

need to learn to recognize the signs that we have "lost" or bored others. Glazed expressions and wandering eyes are a sure indication! "Being a bore" was what this used to be called.

One way parents can greatly help their children, especially as they reach the teenage years, is to show them how to enter into adult conversations. There comes a time when, quite naturally, children start to lose interest in children's topics, and gravitate toward adult subjects. They often begin by staying in the living room with the adults, and listening in to (suitable) adult conversations. As they listen, they are learning ways to interact, and over time will have their own occasional, appropriate contribution to make. Parents probably

“Conversation, after all, is not something that just “happens”. It is an art to cultivate and a gift to use generously in God’s service.”

children learn how to make good conversation with grace, clarity and tact.

Parents used to make a point of teaching their children these things. It was called, in former generations, "cultivating the art of conversation". I quite like the expression. It suggests that conversation takes thought, effort and creativity. The idea was that you needed to learn some basic guidelines for conversation (usually based on good manners); and also learn how to be an *interesting* conversationist. Parents encouraged their children to become well-informed on subjects of general interest, and taught them how to discuss such subjects in ways that others would find interesting, and with which they could interact. They showed their children what witty, gentle and kindly humour involved. Some of this general concept can well be applied by Christians. It should be our goal to talk about what interests others, and to which they will be able to respond. We should make sure we know what we are talking about, and also that we avoid being overly opinionated, to the point of lecturing those we talk with. We

need to help them understand how and when to contribute, as it is easy for young people to be over-confident and over-bold in the way they say things in adult company. Sometimes, of course, young people err the other way, and seem to have nothing at all to say to adults other than sheepish grunts. I have noticed, with appreciation over the years, that it is sign of good parenting when the teenagers in a family have learned to speak pleasantly, unassumingly and respectfully with other adults.

Conversation, after all, is not something that just "happens". It is an art to cultivate and a gift to use generously in God's service.

Fraternal Greetings

from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to the first General Synod of the Reformed Churches of South Africa meeting at Potchefstroom, January, 2009

Explanatory Note: When I reported on the 2006 RCSA Synod that took place in January 2006, I mentioned a very significant decision taken at the end of Synod to thoroughly integrate their Churches. But to understand that, and my greetings to the 2009 **General Synod** (below), a little background is required. One really has to speak about the RCSA as a family of Churches in which there are five levels of Church court; (using our terminology) Session, Presbytery, Regional Synod, then three National Synods: Afrikaner National Synod (299 Churches, 27 classes, 90,000 members and 238 ministers), Middellande Synod (mainly in the Mpumalanga area (around Johannesburg and Pretoria and mainly Tswana, some Venda and a few Zulus; about 115 Churches, 57 ministers, membership unknown), and the Soutpansberg Synod (Venda, in north Transvaal; five Churches, four ministers, membership unknown). Then, at the broadest level, there is the General Synod (comprising delegates of all three National Synods) which, until 2009, had never met because of all sorts of difficulties.

By majority vote, the 2006 Synod decided to dismantle the three National Synod structure and unite all the Churches at presbytery level, subject, of course, to acceptance by the Middellande and Soutpansberg Synods. It was a pretty brave move and would be something that has not been achieved by either of the other two (Dutch) Reformed families of churches (NGK & NHK). Many brothers were very concerned about the proposal and it is fraught with difficulties; some practical – but not simple! (See my 2006 report if you're interested.) The Middellande Synod took it on board; at this point, only about half the Soutpansberg churches have done so. That and the fact the RCSA is 150 years old this year set up the thrust of my greetings which follow. One other small point: we were severely restricted to the time we had, hence I gave no report on anything to do with our Churches at the present time, which is usual. I hope to have a report on the Synod for the next edition of Faith in Focus.

Mr Chairman, brothers and sisters of the Reformed Churches of South Africa, I bring you sincere Christian greetings from your sister, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

I want to congratulate you from the heart today that you have finally been able to call and have a General Synod. I was not able to be with you on the afternoon of last Afrikaner Synod when this was decided. But I was thrilled when I heard it. This is my sixth visit to South Africa, my fourth synod in Potchefstroom. I have read some South African history. I have talked to many Afrikaners over the years and at times to some of the black peoples of South Africa also. I am certainly no expert, but I know enough to know that such a decision was not going to be easy for anybody. But you made the decision. And Synod Middellande

made the same decision and a good number of the Soutpansberg Churches also. So here you are today. You may be very thankful to the Lord for that. You may not be proud. But I and your sister Church are proud of you all.

In the reports to the last Afrikaner Synod, there were listed many of the possible problems that would have to be worked through in uniting at Classis level instead of at the level of General Synod only. But two, if I recall well, that were not listed occurred to me straight away. I am sure many others were aware of them also but they were too sensitive to be written, I suppose. I thought immediately: this is a wonderful decision, but will those brothers and sisters from Middellande and Soutpansberg be able to own the outcome really as their Church? For they will be outnumbered

several times over by Afrikaners. Furthermore, I thought: this is a wonderful decision, but whose agenda will it really be at the General Synod of 2009? And whose agenda is it? It is, in effect, the agenda of the Afrikaner National Synod. But you brothers from Middellande and Soutpansberg are here! And brothers, on behalf of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, I honour you for it. We of European origin ought to be humble in the face of your willingness to join your Afrikaner brothers even though, from a human point of view, you could be forgiven if you had feared for your own identity.

But fearing for one's own identity is not unique to you. So I honour you Afrikaner brothers also. For on the wider scale, on the broad canvas of South African society, let alone the continent of Africa, you brothers of the white tribe, as you have liked to call yourselves at times, also took a risk with your own identity. When you might have been tempted to pull up the laager and protect what of *julle eie* you might feel you still have (do I have the correct phrase?), you did not do so. You extended your hand and your brothers took it.

And so you have, black and white, before the eyes of all, put flesh on the wonderful truth that "we look not on things below but on things above" for "our citizenship is in heaven." Well now, as of yesterday and today, with your debate on what may be sung in the Worship Service, you are all being put to the test. And you will pass it brothers only as you follow the example of our Lord Jesus before he went to the cross. We read that Jesus, "*knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from the supper and laid aside his garments, took a towel and ... began to wash the disciples' feet*" (John 13). It only is as we find and constantly remember our identity in God in Christ that we are able to humble ourselves and wash each other's feet.

As a result we could go to the church last Thursday and sing the praises of God in Afrikaans, Zulu, Sotho and Setswana,

including one in Setswana to a tune that I grew up singing in New Zealand fifty years ago. It reminded me of what Isaiah 60 says about all the nations bringing their riches into the new Jerusalem. Now, if I could have heard that young lady singing the descant of that same tune, Crimond, to Psalm 23 and a few others in English, then it would have been very heaven!

I realise that you wish this evening to be primarily a time of rejoicing but let me thank you for sending a delegate to our last Synod, the Rev. Stephanus de Bruyn. I am charged by my Synod to express our thankfulness for your decision at your last Synod, 2006, with regard to women in the office of deacon. Our prayers are that you will continue in that direction and that the Lord will lead you in all your discussions at this Synod and the decisions you have to make, that they will all be according to his Word, promote his glory and advance the Gospel in the world. On that latter point, the more I get to know you, the more busy I find many of your people and congregations to be with reaching out with the Gospel to the lost. You are an example to us. May the Lord richly bless you.

In conclusion, brothers & sisters of the GKSA, may I also congratulate you on the attainment of 150 years of a distinct existence as a faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is quite a milestone and we rejoice with you in it. Somehow, to me, congratulations on such a milestone seem not quite right, for it is the doing of the Lord, not ours. So it is really a time for thankfulness to him, and I am sure that that will be your emphasis also. Yet, at the same time, the Lord works through means and he has worked through your desire to be faithful, and for that we honour you. Stick to that commitment.

"The God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in you what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever."

The Lord bless you and go with you.

John Rogers, Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

You are invited to the

15th Hamilton Easter Convention

10th-11th April 2009

Theme:

How Well Do You Know Jesus?
Insights from His Emotions in the Gospels

Speaker: Dr. Steve Voorwinde
New Testament lecturer at the RTC in Geelong, Victoria

Convention Venue:

Hamilton Reformed Church
9 Aberdeen Drive
Dinsdale, Hamilton

Inquiries

Pieter van der Wel
Ph. 07-853 3144
E-mail ecap2009@gmail.com

Meeting Times:

Fri 3.00 & 7.00 pm
Sat 10.30 am, 1.00 & 3.00 pm

A bookstall will operate on Friday and Saturday

A crèche will be available for the afternoon sessions

Convention addresses are:

Friday

3.00 pm Does God Have Real Feelings? (Divine Emotions in the Old Testament)

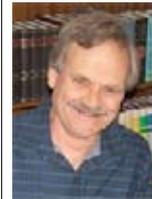
7.00 pm The Compassionate King (Jesus' Emotions in Matthew)

Saturday

10.30 am The Man of Sorrows (Jesus' Emotions in Mark)

1.00 pm The Sympathetic Saviour (Jesus' Emotions in Luke)

3.00 pm The Loving Lord (Jesus' Emotions in John)



Dr. Stephen Voorwinde (b. 1947) is Lecturer in Greek and New Testament at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Victoria.

Dr. Voorwinde pastored churches in the U.S.A. and Australia before joining the faculty at the RTC in 1985. His areas of expertise include the New Testament, Koine Greek and Hermeneutics.

Dr. Voorwinde's doctoral dissertation on the emotions of Jesus in John's Gospel was published in 2005 under the title, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* He also has written *Wisdom for Today's Issues: A Topical Arrangement of the Proverbs* (1996). He also writes articles for Christian magazines and theological journals

Dr. Voorwinde is a regular speaker in academic and church settings around Australia.

Conference attendance is free, but could you please register if you are coming so we know how many people to expect, esp. for catering purposes.

You can register by e-mail at <http://hamilton.rcnz.org.nz> or <http://www.trbc.org.nz>

If your church has received Easter Convention pamphlets, you can use the attached registration form

Afternoon tea and supper will be provided as well as a light evening meal on Friday and lunch on Saturday for those who register for this.

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

First South Island FAMILY CAMP

JANUARY 2010

Saturday 2nd till the Saturday 9th
Teapot Valley Camp, Nelson.

Start preparing to attend.

Volunteers are needed to organise various activities. Let us know the talents and gifts you are willing to share by contacting us; Phone 03 544 5501 or m.slykhuis@xtra.co.nz

Note: This additional camp. And therefore does not replace North Island Camp

As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God

Matthew Parris

Before Christmas I returned, after 45 years, to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland. Today it's Malawi, and The Times Christmas Appeal includes a small British charity working there. Pump Aid helps rural communities to install a simple pump, letting people keep their village wells sealed and clean. I went to see this work.

It inspired me, renewing my flagging faith in development charities. But travelling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too: one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my world view, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.

Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa: sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

I used to avoid this truth by applauding - as you can - the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It's a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white, working in Africa, do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write; and only the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it. I would allow that if faith was needed to motivate missionaries to help, then, fine: but what counted was the help, not the faith.

But this doesn't fit the facts. Faith does more than support the missionary; it is also transferred to his flock. This is the effect that matters so immensely, and which I cannot help observing.

First, then, the observation. We had friends who were missionaries, and as a child I stayed often with them; I also stayed, alone with my little brother, in a traditional rural African village. In the city we had working for us Africans who had converted and were strong believers. The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, an engagement with the world - a directness in their dealings with others - that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.

At 24, travelling by land across the continent reinforced this impression. From Algiers to Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon

This time in Malawi it was the same. I met no missionaries. You do not encounter missionaries in the lobbies of expensive hotels discussing development strategy documents, as you do with the big NGOs. But instead I noticed that a handful of the most impressive African members of the Pump Aid team (largely from Zimbabwe) were, privately, strong Christians. "Privately" because the charity is entirely secular and I never heard any of its team so much as mention religion while working in the villages. But I picked up the Christian references in our conversations. One, I saw, was studying a devotional textbook in the car. One, on Sunday, went off to church at dawn for a two-hour service.

It would suit me to believe that their honesty, diligence and optimism in their work was unconnected with personal faith. Their work was secular, but surely affected by what they were. What they were was, in turn, influenced by a con-

“Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's biggest problem – the crushing passivity of the people's mindset”

and the Central African Republic, then right through the Congo to Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya, four student friends and I drove our old Land Rover to Nairobi.

We slept under the stars, so it was important as we reached the more populated and lawless parts of the sub-Sahara that every day we find somewhere safe by nightfall. Often near a mission.

Whenever we entered a territory worked by missionaries, we had to acknowledge that something changed in the faces of the people we passed and spoke to: something in their eyes, the way they approached you direct, man-to-man, without looking down or away. They had not become more deferential towards strangers - in some ways less so - but more open.

ception of man's place in the Universe that Christianity had taught.

There's long been a fashion among Western academic sociologists for placing tribal value systems within a ring fence, beyond critiques founded in our own culture: "theirs" and therefore best for "them"; authentic and of intrinsically equal worth to ours.

I don't follow this. I observe that tribal belief is no more peaceable than ours; and that it suppresses individuality. People think collectively; first in terms of the community, extended family and tribe. This rural-traditional mindset feeds into the "big man" and gangster politics of the African city: the exaggerated respect for a swaggering leader, and the (literal) inability to understand the whole idea of loyal opposition.

Anxiety - fear of evil spirits, of ancestors, of nature and the wild, of a tribal hierarchy, of quite everyday things - strikes deep into the whole structure of rural African thought. Every man has his place and, call it fear or respect, a great weight grinds down the individual spirit, stunting curiosity. People won't take the initiative, won't take things into their own hands or on their own shoulders.

How can I, as someone with a foot in both camps, explain? When the philosophical tourist moves from one world view to another he finds - at the very moment of passing into the new - that he loses the language to describe the landscape to the old. But let me try an example: the answer given by Sir Edmund Hillary to the question:

Why climb the mountain? "Because it's there," he said.

To the rural African mind, this is an explanation of why one would not climb the mountain. It's... well, there. Just there. Why interfere? Nothing to be done about it, or with it. Hillary's further explanation - that nobody else had climbed it - would stand as a second reason for passivity.

Christianity, post-Reformation and post-Luther, with its teaching of a direct, personal, two-way link between the individual and God, unmediated by the collective, and unsubordinate to any other human being, smashes straight through the philosophical/spiritual framework I've just described. It offers something to hold on to to those anxious to cast off

a crushing tribal groupthink. That is why and how it liberates.

Those who want Africa to walk tall amid 21st-century global competition must not kid themselves that providing the material means or even the knowhow that accompanies what we call development will make the change. A whole belief system must first be supplanted.

And I'm afraid it has to be supplanted by another. Removing Christian evangelism from the African equation may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete.
The Times. December 27, 2008

Matthew Parris is a columnist for The Times, London

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Slum-a-thon! What would it be like to sleep in a shelter constructed only of cardboard? To have only one blanket to huddle under in the cold? To go to bed with only a few handfuls of rice in your stomach? For millions of people in the world, this is a daily reality. And for one night, the youth at Avondale are going to be experiencing this reality. On February 28th, rain or shine, our youth group members are going to be spending a night on the back-yard of Glenn's flat sleeping in huts constructed out of nothing but cardboard boxes and tape. No cellphones, no t.v., no X boxes... from 4pm till 8am we will each have the bare luxury of one blanket plus a small bowl of rice. We are seeking sponsorship for our "Slum-a-thon" so if you'd like to support us please see one of the youth group! All proceeds go to the Samoa Missions Trip in July.

A special welcome to Rev. Arthur Palmer, who will lead us in worship this morning. Rev. Palmer last preached in Avondale 28 years ago (!) and was minister at Man-

gere, 1969-1980. Although retired, Rev. Palmer is a lecturer of Greek and Hebrew at GTC (Grace Theological College) and is a member of the GTC board.

Bishopdale

Pastoral: Next Sunday morning, Lord willing, Aiden Schinkelshoek will profess his faith and we will celebrate the Lord's Supper together. So in the coming week, let us examine ourselves - repenting of our sin, rejoicing where we see spiritual growth, and renewing our commitment to the Lord.

From Robert van Wichen's desk... It is our privilege this evening to witness the baptism of Adam de Reus. A warm welcome to visitors who have come especially for this occasion.

Invitation: On Saturday 21st of February Rebecca Bangma and Brett McGirr will be married at 1pm at the Papanui Methodist Church, cnr Harewood Rd and Chapel St. We would like to invite you to share this joyous occasion with them. We look forward to seeing you there. The Bangma family

Buckland's Beach

Pastoral. Our warmest congratulations to the Wilson family. God in his goodness and grace has blessed Raewyn and Daniel with a son and David with a little brother, Benjamin Charles. Benjamin was born on Wednesday, 4th February at 6.30pm at home. All went well and is

well with this healthy little 7.7lb (3.2kg) baby. Praise God! We look forward to getting to know him. In this connection a warm welcome to the grandparents Couperous who have come from Hastings to see and share in this special moment.

Pastoral. This coming Thursday (12 Feb) our brother Joshua Brooks will leave us in order to take up what he anticipates will be a two year course of study at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. His intention is to obtain an associate degree in theology. Joshua has been interested in diaconal mission opportunities with an organisation called 'Engineers Without Borders' and believes that the Lord is calling him to equip for this possibility by undertaking some biblical and theological training first. Joshua, we commend and commit you to the Lord and will continue to pray for you.

Meanwhile brother Luke Scheepers, who completed his degree in Architecture last year, has also decided that he wishes to keep on studying. He intends to begin a three-year course in Theology at Laidlaw College (formerly the Bible College of New Zealand). Great! May the Lord use and bless this course to strengthen and equip you for his purposes Luke!

"Jumping in Puddles". Creation Films have made a documentary called "Jumping in Puddles". There will be special

screenings of this at Berkeley Cinema on the 18th March. It is the story of the Mangatepopo river tragedy with the specific focus on Natasha Bray and her inspirational saying which caught the attention of the nation.

Christchurch

SWISH LADIES. On Friday 27 March at 7.30 pm we will be having the first Reformed Churches of Christchurch Swishing Party here at Cornwall St. The convention for swishing parties is apparently a straight swap of clothes with no money crossing the palm. However, ours will be different! Each item will be bought for at least a gold coin, with the buyer deciding whether they would like to pay more based on the amount they love it, can afford, and the quantity of clothes they are purchasing. The money raised will go to the TEAR Fund micro-enterprise scheme. This way women will be helping women in at least three ways: 1) by taking the opportunity to de-clutter

our closets, 2) by providing each other with beautiful clothes at a very small cost, 3) by allowing at least one woman in another country to start a small business to get herself and her family out of poverty using the money we send as a loan. She will repay that loan over time and the money will be redistributed to another to use. So, please start your de-cluttering now and bring those clothes in to Esther Smith or Liana Havelaar.

From Pastor John. It's great to be back in your midst after four months away. I look forward to the next four months with you and pray that it will be a time of rich blessing for the church and for the wider kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It hasn't taken long to settle back into a routine after arriving back last Tuesday afternoon. Thanks for the welcome back that you've given me at the various functions I've already attended. I've already been spoilt too by invitations for meals, various things left at my unit and even

already some used postage stamps to sort through in my pigeonhole in the Session room...! I bring you greetings from the Toowoomba Christian Reformed Church in Oz – from whom I am “on loan” until end June. I'm saddened (like all of us) by the homecall of brother John Prins. Last year I played a game of chess with him on several occasions and we did some 'stamp stuff' together. I thank Corrie and the family for allowing me to use their unit. That has allowed me to come and again be part of the Maranatha Homes community for the duration. This morning we want to 'officially' recommence our year's activities as a congregation. We'll do that in the liturgy this morning as we have a time of commissioning leaders, teachers and a whole host of volunteers. It's especially appropriate for us to do that today as we have our Harvest Thanksgiving. We praise God for continuing to send us sunshine and rain and so bring about another season of harvest and reaping. Spiritually we are aware that Jesus said that the fields are white for harvest and that therefore we are to labour to bring in a harvest of souls into the Kingdom. As we dedicate ourselves to that today may the Lord make this a blessed year in the life of “Christchurch on Cornwall.”

Notices...Wedding Banns. Jason Van Maanen and Claire Chapman have signified their desire to be united in marriage in this church on Saturday 7 March 2009. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at 1.00 pm on that date.

Dunedin

Congregational Meeting. A congregational meeting is to be held, DV, on Wednesday 18 February at 8pm to consider the part-time ministry proposal for Oamaru and Timaru. It is proposed that Rev Jim Klazinga be called as an elder and employed on a half-time basis for 2009 with a view to a call to the ministry thereafter. As with the former proposal, Rev Klazinga's preaching and contact time will be divided equally between Oamaru and Timaru. The congregation is asked to approve the revised budget and the appointment of Rev Klazinga as an elder.



60th Wedding Anniversary

of

ROY AND ANNE (Saathof) PUDNEY

*With sincere thanks to the Lord
for his abundant blessings.*

On 9th April 2009 (DV)

Mike & Shirley Pudney (Te Awanga)
Jason (Christchurch)
Tim & Anita (Hobart)

Nonny & Bruce Lee (Tauranga)
Heidi & Paul (Tauranga)
Antony & Natalia (Auckland)
Philippa & Graeme (Hamilton)
(Ezekiel)
Tessa & Sam (Auckland)
Julia (Auckland)
Tristan (Brisbane)

15 Hikanui Drive, Havelock North

*“We rejoice because of what
God has done through our
Lord Jesus Christ, who has
now made us God's friends.”*

Romans 5:11

RTC LADIES AID

If churches require more Ladies Aid stickers to go on their collection boxes please contact Gea Willemse at: minister@hamilton.rcnz.org.nz and they will be sent out to you.

Foxton

Thank you. Dear friends, I would like to thank you all for your prayers, thoughts, and visits since the time Jens was diagnosed with renal cancer – especially your love over the past year. It was not an easy year for us – both mentally and physically. But God gave us strength with a lot of help from doctors, nurses and the children. Now, Jens is with the Lord and has no suffering anymore. I miss him deeply, but also have peace within me. Feel free to always ring or visit me! God bless you all! Love, Janneke.

Hamilton

Pastoral: Early on Tuesday morning of this week, our Lord took Sr Alie Vethaak home to glory at the ripe old age of 91. Yesterday we gathered to celebrate her life and to express our confidence that she is now with her Lord in glory. Please remember her family, particularly Leida who has been caring for Alie for the last two and a half years, in your prayers as they adjust to life without Alie.

Hastings

From Pastor Hoyt. We rejoice today with Marco and Harmony de Boer as they bring Morgan for baptism. Baptism is the sign that we and our children belong to the Lord – that He is our God and we are His covenant people. It is a sign that reminds us that just as water washes away dirt from our bodies so we must be cleansed by the blood of Christ. Otherwise we are not acceptable to Him because of our sinful nature. But by His Spirit through faith in Christ, we are washed clean and so may come before Him to worship and serve Him. May the Lord continue to increase your love and faithfulness as you seek to train Morgan and also Kelsey in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Leadership in the home. The Pastors intend to conduct a training seminar on leadership in the home on Friday 27th February at 7:30p.m. We plan to give practical advice on conducting family devotions and on evaluating, together with our children, what we see and hear (in movies, books, on the internet and T.V. etc). Everyone is invited to attend, especially fathers.

Hukanui

Pastoral. We rejoice with Jono and Renee on the birth of Brierley Jasmine Termaat this past Wednesday afternoon weighing in at 10lbs!

Flame: Survivor Poverty. Seen the Sur-

vivor shows on TV? Now it's your turn. Survivor Poverty is a twist on the reality show and a chance for you to gain a taste of what it is really like to live in poverty. You will experience just how hard it is living without the many things we take for granted. Survivor Poverty will be held from 5-7 February and is for anyone 15 years and older. Talk to Peter van der Wel (027-600-5837) for an enrolment form and get your enrolments in ASAP.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: The Elders have received and accepted the membership attestations of the Bruwers. We welcome Barry and Marjan along with their baptised daughter Tina from the Reformed Church of Kimberley in South Africa. We also welcome their sons Deon and Manie from the Reformed Church of Bloempark. May the Lord bless you as you join with us in worship and service of the Triune God here in Masterton.

North Shore

News & Announcements. Next Sunday, Lord willing, Thomas Jelle Bredemeijer will be baptised.

Pukekohe

We give thanks to God with Warrick and Lydia Loveday with the birth of another healthy daughter named Paige. She was born early on Tuesday morning and weighed 4030 grams (8lbs 14ozs). She will be baptised DV on Sunday 1 March.

This Tuesday at 7:30pm we will have a Prayer Meeting for the whole congregation. There is much for which to thank God, and there are also many needs for which we can pray – in our own lives, in the church, in the community, in our nation, and in the world. As we begin another year of church life and activities let's come together to ask God for His blessing on all we do. The Session encourages everyone to come. Please bring a contribution for supper afterwards.

The pastor is making application to Spring Hill Prison to be a volunteer visitor there with a view to conducting Bible studies with prisoners.

Wainuiomata

Church family news. Happy Birthday to Anno Roggema who turns 85 on Wednesday.

Community Seminar. On Wednesday, 25 February at 7.30pm we plan to hold a

Community Seminar here at church, for all church members. Several community workers will be coming to speak to us. They will be talking about the work they are involved in, the most pressing needs in Wainui, and about opportunities for us to get involved. There will be time for you to ask questions of the speakers as well. More information about the speakers will be coming soon. We hope many members, old and young, are able to attend this event, because whatever your situation, there are opportunities for you to use your gifts and help those in need, here in Wainui.

CHURCH FAMILY NEWS. Congratulations to Andy and Natasha Rogers upon the birth of Quinn Huxley on Friday morning. Both mother and baby are doing well.

Greetings from the USA

My name is Erik (a.k.a. JanErik) Stolte and I am a first year student at Mid-America Reformed Seminary (MARS), studying with a view to being called to the gospel ministry. I have come to the States with my wife, Georgina (nee Loef), and our 6 children, Juliette (9), Johanna (8), Jacob (7), Rebekkah (5), Georgia (3) and Phillip (2).

We hail from the Reformed Church of Masterton in the sunny Wairarapa valley. We have been dairy farming for 11 years, being employed in various towns surrounding Masterton and for the past 7 years on a family farm in Carterton. I (Erik) have lived in the Wairarapa since I was seven years old, except for a short time in Palmerston North while studying at Massey University. Georgina was born and raised in Drury, Auckland and attended both the Mangere and Pukekohe Churches, until we married in 1998. Over the years we have been involved in the life of the church and our Christian school in various ways and in the last year and a half, before our departure, I served as an elder. The Lord has used this time as an elder to give experience in pastoral ministry as well as heightening my desire to serve the Lord as a preacher of the Word. The session in Masterton has been a great support to me, testing my desires and gifts and along with the congregation, sending us on our way with their blessing. The Wellington presbytery



equip for our service to him.

We seek to keep up to date with the 'goings-on' in New Zealand, by keeping in regular contact with our family and friends at home as well as receiving *Faith in Focus* and some of the local bulletins. If you are interested in keeping up to date with the happenings of our family and studies, drop us a line (stoltekiwi@att.net) and we will add you to our monthly MARS update emails.

In Christ's Service
 Christian Greetings
Erik (and Georgina, Juliette, Johanna, Jacob, Rebekkah, Georgia and Phillip) Stolte

has also been involved in this testing, sending a committee to interview me and subsequently giving their blessing. Additionally, the synodical deputies gave their concurrence.

Having arrived in the United States in August, God has blessed us with a local United Reformed Church, called Redeemer URC, which we have been able to attend. It is a neighbouring church of Lynwood URC, which the Holtslag family attended while Andre was studying at MARS. It is a small (for American standards), newly established church, of about 120 people. They have been very friendly and welcoming, accepting us with open arms and so we have enjoyed our fellowship there. The URC churches are much the same as our own New Zealand churches in doctrine and worship. Their songs are taken from the blue *Psalter Hymnal* with some supplementary songs and they use the NIV Bible. We have found this very helpful for the children as they know and are familiar with most of the songs and the liturgy in worship; even if there are some 'Americanisms'.

It has taken some time for our family to adjust and settle in the States, but the Lord, in his grace, has used many godly and caring people in the church to help us in our transition. The people at the Seminary have also helped us generously, granting us to arrive and settle into a furnished house. They have helped us in our orientation to the Chicago area and have been very kind and generous to our children.

The greatest difficulty has been to adjust from a farm setting, where the children had the freedom to run around

the property, to a town setting, where other people and their privacy is to be taken into account. We also miss our home country very much (with its beautiful mountains and scenery) as well as the people of our churches. As time goes on this will no doubt diminish, but we will always have a longing for home.

Having been farming for 11 years, studying has not come too easily to me, but the Lord has been good and gracious and in his strength I have been able to complete the first semester well. It is exciting being involved in the full-time study of the Word of God and in other spiritual matters. God's provision in giving this privilege and opportunity has made me very thankful.

At the conclusion of seminary studies our intention is to return to New Zealand and to serve our churches. Realizing that the shortage of pastors at present is great, we continue to pray with you, not only for those who are studying with a view to this work, but also that the Lord will raise up men from within our own churches to serve.

Many of you have prayed for us and encouraged us over the past half year. For that we daily thank our God and pray that God will bless you and our churches in general. We live in a country whose natural beauty daily sings the praises of its Creator. However, the lips of its people are mute in their praise to the King of kings. May we be lights and harvesters in the fields ripe for the harvest. We covet your prayers for our daily needs as well as for my studies. God is the one who equips and we daily rely on him to

No Mere Bluff!

We visited land's end:
 the Bluff

".... been there
 done that!"

Saw this
 read that!

And on that plaque
 above the ground
 words so profound
 left their sure mark:

"Mightier
 than the thunders
 of many waters,
 Mightier
 than the waves
 of the sea,
 The Lord on high
 is mighty!" Psalm 93:4

It's no mere bluff
 it states enough
 it stirs the soul
 for, oh the whole
 points to the truth
 of that great fact:
 Our Creator
 is much greater
 than all our troubles!

Wellington, October 1999

