

faith in **focus**

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**“I will be like the dew to Israel;
he will blossom like a lily.”**

Hosea 14:5

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Editorial**Fireside reflections**

You might be wondering about the title above. Doesn't it sound like something more appropriate for the nineteenth century rather than the twenty-first century? It surely suggests a way of life that belongs in the past.

I use this title, though because it's our fire - The Jayline Sapphire wood-burner - which has helped me to think a little on the nature of our lives today. Because as I was carrying up yet another box of wood from the garage, and loading up the fire again, I mused on how much goes into giving us the warmth from the fire. There is the wood which once was part of a tree. Wood which was sawn down and cut to size. Wood that has been subsequently bought, or kindly given. Then there is the storing of that wood which we did in the garage, the chopping of that wood to size (I've just bought a log splitter which one of our members sharpened for us), and the bringing of that wood next to the fireside. Of course, there's the actually feeding of the fire. And then once a year, there's the chimney sweep who cleans it all up. It goes on and on. A lot goes into the warmth we get out of that fire.

And yet what a warmth! It cheers you on a cold morning. In fact, it gives a comfort to much of the house, creating a healthy living environment and a natural social focus (other times of the year she is often nowhere to be found but come winter and the cat's right here!).

I wonder if we have lost a sense of this work in our world today? Everything is instant, you just switch it on. Or it's automatic, as it gives a constant temperature. And while that's well and good, especially for the old and the frail, I sense we miss something of what needs to go into things for us to truly appreciate what God gives us.

I know some have addressed this by starting a garden and being committed to following the seasons and working the soil. They miss that effort which we need to put in - the effort lost through instant coffee, tea bags, microwave meals, take-aways, and so on. And they miss the extra we get out. For isn't a real fire on a different level than the electrical heating, and the filter coffee better tasting than instant?

But transfer this idea now to our relationships. We can despair at the hours the family takes up. But what if they weren't there? How much anguish don't we see in those around who aren't able to have children, or who leave it until too late? And what difficulties aren't there when children don't have the physical presence and involvement of mothers and fathers? The list goes on and on.

And what about the Church family? Have any of us who have truly been committed to putting into Christ's Body ever gone short? Actually, aren't we enriched on a much higher level? That's work which is never wasted, however the pagan world may degenerate it. This is work being done unto the Lord Himself.

*"And if anyone gives a cup of water
to one of these little ones
because he is my disciple,
I tell you the truth,
he will certainly not lose his reward.."*

Matthew 10:42

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

What about dreams?

A response to 'Mosques and Miracles' by Stuart Robinson

Peter Bloomfield

A popular belief today

The problem with this book is not Robinson's appraisal of Islam but his doctrine of revelation. On this issue he has clearly cast his vote against orthodox Protestant theology as embodied in the historic creeds. 'It is estimated that of Muslims turning to Christ in Africa, 42% of new believers come through the experience of dreams, visions, angelic appearances or audibly hearing God's voice' (p. 273). He repeatedly claims that Jesus appeared to people, telling them to follow him. Robinson accepts these experiences as divine revelations, and has some very terse criticisms for those who deny it. Many other books make similar claims. They all accept divine revelation is continuing today just as it did in Biblical times. They all erode the sufficiency of Scripture. In many ways this notion of "ongoing revelation" is the scandal of the modern church.

Are these dreams really divine revelations? This question is especially important for churches holding to the Reformed Protestant Creeds. Their cessationist view of revelation denies any further revelatory **product** ("new revelations of the spirit") and any further revelatory **process** ("God's former ways of revealing His will to His people have ceased"). Those former ways included dreams, visions, and audible voices, but that has all ceased. We have "the whole counsel of God," quite sufficient to successfully evangelise the nations, Muslims included.

But throughout history people have claimed they received messages from God. It featured among the 1st century Gnostics, the 2nd century Montanists, the Medieval Mystics, the Pietists and Quietists in the 17th century, the Anabaptists in post Reformation times, the Quakers, and now in the Charismatic movement. Responses to modern claims about revelatory dreams can be identified in three categories.

The guarded acceptance of revelatory dreams

First there is a guarded acceptance, often by people who accept the Reformed Creeds. They don't want to abandon belief in the sufficiency

of Scripture, yet they find it difficult to reject the numerous claims that God did speak in a dream. So they say: *In the vast majority of situations I agree that new revelation is not necessary, but some situations are unique. Perhaps God provides new revelations where Bibles are scarce. The creeds are right for 99% of missionary situations but I don't want to limit God. I believe the sufficiency of Scripture is generally true, but I want to be open to any God-given experiences.* There are several problems here.

1) A self-contradictory view

For one thing it is self-contradictory. The sufficiency of Scripture is an absolute truth incapable of degrees. Either the Bible provides God's full and sufficient revelation for us or it doesn't. The notion that Scripture is quite sufficient *sometimes* automatically means it is also quite *insufficient* at other times. The word "sufficiency" becomes meaningless. We end up with the absurd confession; "I believe Scripture is sufficient revelation except in those circumstances where it is insufficient".

2) There are no exceptions

A second problem is that the creeds do not

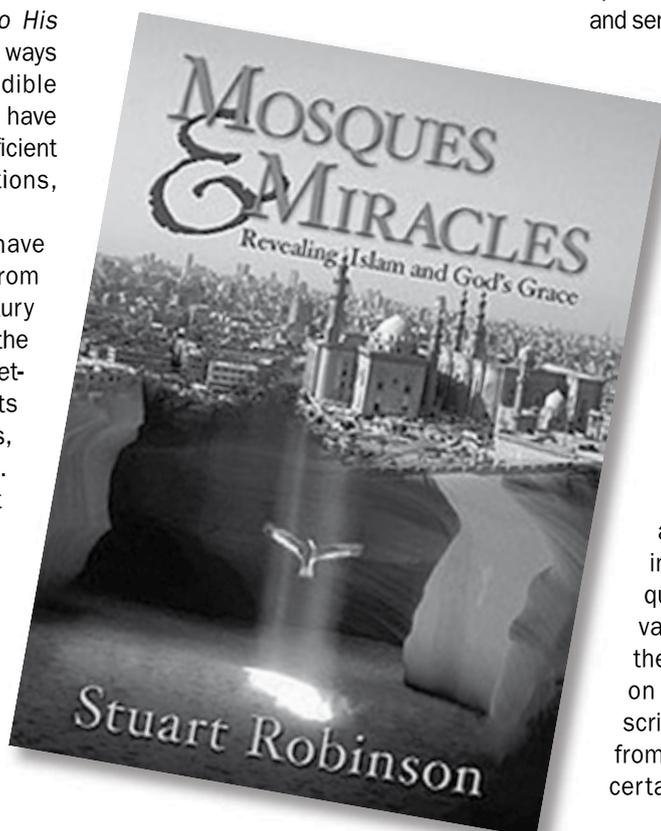
allow for exceptions. The only question to be settled is whether they are right or wrong. Many creeds speak with the same voice as the Westminster Confession on the cessation of revelation. If the creeds are right, none of the Muslim dreams are revelations from God, nor are any other alleged voices from heaven. But if the creeds are wrong on such a fundamental doctrine, where else are they wrong? If there's an error in the very first chapter of the biggest Protestant Creed (WCF), how can we believe the following 32 chapters? Did the most eminent theologians of the past get it wrong? Did the godliest and most learned assemblies on earth repeatedly make a mess of the doctrine of revelation? That's the real question demanding your verdict. "Guarded acceptance" seeks refuge in a halfway house that doesn't exist.

Worse, it tosses us back into the sea of subjectivity. The Reformation delivered the medieval church from this very thing. It was drowning in the ocean of mysticism and uncertainty. Once you reopen the door for private revelations you shut the door to truth and certainty. Every man then has his own private version of "God told me". Each man has his vision of Jesus or angels, each man hears voices, and each man is convinced God spoke. But it is all subjective, mere feelings and sensations. They cannot be tested or con-

tested. If you allow it for just one converted Moslem you can't refuse it for 1000. If you accept that God spoke to a man in Baghdad, you cannot deny it to another man in Brisbane. In one fell swoop the foundation of the Reformation ('sola Scriptura') has been denied.

The full acceptance of revelatory dreams

A second response, full acceptance of revelatory dreams, is the position taken in 'Mosques and Miracles'. This too has many problems, including inherent contradiction. It is quite ironic that Robinson accepts the validity of revelatory dreams knowing the entire error called Islam is based on precisely such a dream! He describes Muhammad's first 'revelations' from God, and how there was absolute certainty that he was called to proclaim



a new religion (pages 129-130).

Obviously Muhammad was wrong (and Robinson agrees). His dream was not a revelation but a nightmare (in more ways than one). His convictions are irrelevant. God did not speak to Muhammad that night. To believe otherwise forces you to say that Christianity is wrong, or the true God told Muhammad to start a false religion! So how does Robinson disallow Muhammad's dream? He allows modern Muslims to say "Jesus is God because he showed me in a dream", so how can Robinson deny the original Muslim from saying "Allah is God because he showed me in a dream"? How can Robinson choose between dreams? How can he judge between subjective experiences?

The supreme standard of truth

I assume it is because he treats the Bible as the Supreme standard of truth. In practice he is forced to agree with the historic creeds. All human opinions, beliefs, and experiences must be examined in the light of Scripture. Those that accord with God's word can be judged legitimate otherwise they are illegitimate. So Muhammad's dream is not divine revelation. Why then does Robinson criticise

Christians who apply the same Biblical assessment to every other dream?

The criticism becomes particularly virulent on page 242. Scepticism for these alleged supernatural phenomena is attributed to a gross lack of faith - "so bereft of faith as to be considered atheists if not in name then in practice". Blaming our Western culture Robinson's most trenchant comment deplores that "Our tradition places importance on articulation of the logical reasons for faith based on Scripture" (p 244). This is profoundly disturbing! In reality his complaint should be praise. To lament a logical Bible based faith is to depart from 2000 years of orthodoxy, opening the door to sheer superstition.

Another example of the same inconsistency occurs on page 268. At a taxi rank in Northern Iraq on the morning of 17th February, 2003. Ziwar (who converted to Christianity seven years earlier) was challenged by Abd al-Salam to revert back to Islam. When Ziwar refused, Abd al-Salam shot him with an automatic rifle. In his statement to the Police he claimed Muhammad had appeared in a dream telling him to kill Ziwar.

I assume Robinson would deny the dream

was divine revelation (though he doesn't explicitly say so). But how can he deny it? What is the only credible argument against every "God told me" claim? Only the written word of God, which says, "you shall not murder". So we are forced back to the sufficiency of Scripture. Abd al-Salam's dream (if it happened) is godless and anti-biblical. If Robinson accepts the Bible's judgement of this one dream why doesn't he consistently agree that it judges all dreams?

The denial of revelatory dreams

The third and correct response to these dreams and visions is to deny they are revelations. That doesn't mean they are from the devil or that they are inherently bad. And it doesn't deny that God may use such dreams in the process of salvation. God is pleased to use all sorts of human experiences (even very disturbing experiences) to awaken sinners. Men have been saved after dreaming of falling into a bottomless pit. It didn't really happen but God used their imagination as an instrument to soften hard hearts to the truth of the gospel. There is no need to assume that people who become Christians through dreams and visions are spurious converts. Perhaps some are, but the Bible shows some "conversions" will prove to be false no matter what the context. We need a proper assessment of dreams.

Dreams are simply common human experiences. They usually bear little resemblance to any sober reality. They are often bizarre and surreal. Being psychologically mysterious, they defy clinical explanation. They can be triggered by a host of causes not discernible even to the dreamer. There are no rules and no limitations in dreams. One man's dream is as meaningful (or meaningless) as the next man's dream. Dreams are just dreams are just dreams! They are no more (or less) significant than other human psychic experiences like hunches or the strange feeling of de-javu when it seems you are reliving your own history. Because God is sovereign he can use any of these things to accomplish his purposes. But they are not divine revelations. They are not to be baptised with the status of inspiration. They are not to be interpreted as "God told me" something. Consider an example.

A man dreams a shark is chasing him. As the beast closes in for the kill, his whole life flashes past the screen of his mind. The drama reaches fever pitch as the jaws snap shut around his torso and the ocean billows with his blood. Then he suddenly awakens and finds himself sitting upright on the bed. He is sweating profusely, his heart is racing, and he

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is terrified. But he quickly gets a grip on reality again. He realises it was only fantasy. There was really no shark chasing him at all. He has no gaping wounds and all his blood flows safely in his veins. It was totally unreal but it felt very real. That's how it is with dreams!

God can use dreams today

Yes, God could use the man's dream to convert him. As he reflects on his frightening vision, the Holy Spirit causes this man to face his mortality. He realizes he will die one day. He will be in far greater danger than any shark attack. He will stand guilty before the God who made him, loved him, and provided for him, whom he has denied and defied all his life. He has no excuse and no hope. The

dream has softened him to the gospel. He is now prepared to receive the truth and follow Christ, maybe through a message God will cause him to hear next week, or maybe through the gospel he has known and ignored from childhood.

If it is possible to dream about a shark it is also possible to dream of seeing Jesus or hearing God's voice. But that doesn't make any of it real. In every case it is a figment of the mind. We are not certain of how and why dreams occur, but one thing is certain. It is a serious mistake to claim they are revelations from God. It is irrelevant how convinced a dreamer is that God spoke. All that was true for Muhammad but he was radically deluded. And all that is true for every major cult leader

in history. They all believe God appeared to them but they are all wrong. That is the verdict of orthodox Christianity throughout 2000 years of history. That is why the acceptance of revelatory dreams is the shame and scandal of the modern church.

The Rev. Peter Bloomfield is the minister of the Bald Hills Presbyterian Church of Australia. This review of 'Mosques and Miracles' by Stuart Robinson, City Harvest Publications, Australia, 2004, was published in 'The Presbyterian Banner', the denominational magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, and reproduced here under a reciprocal arrangement we have with them.

World in focus

Christians attacked in Southern India

In Guharat, India, Jamubhai Choudhary and his wife, Jatherbin, suffered serious axe wounds and fractured bones they claimed were the works of Hindu radicals. Also, Rev. K. Daniel was murdered in Hyderabad on 20 May in an attack where acid was poured all over his body. The Christian community in that city in Andhra Pradesh state are very disturbed and know the attacks were religiously motivated yet officials deny all claims of religious involvement. "Pastor K. Daniel had been threatened many times by the local Rashtrya Swayamsevak Sangh," said Sam Paul of the All India Christian Council. Fellow councilman Samson Christian added that the Hindu radicals have changed their way of attack to make it seem as if they were "personal disputes."

+ Compass Direct PO Box 27250, Santa Anna, CA 92799-7250, (949) 862-0314 info@compassdirect.org

Retirement of David Feddes from The Back To God Hour

The Back to God Hour is our favourite Christian Radio broadcast. For half an hour each week a message in agreement with the standards of the Heidelberg Catechism is broadcast across America and in many other parts of the world. For many years its brilliant speaker was Peter Eldersveld, followed by Joel Nederhood who once spoke at the Leicester Banner of Truth Conference. Since 1990 David Feddes has been the preacher. Each month the messages are mailed out in booklets or sent on line.

They are all preserved on the website (www.BacktoGod.net) which is a useful resource. David Feddes has resigned from this work and will finish at the end of June, and we are sad to hear of his departure. Those elements of experiential Calvinism which suffuse his preaching have been particularly helpful. He has taken a sound position on women in office and feminism. He has also opposed the practice of homosexuality.

United Reformed minister, Doug Barnes said of David Feddes, "What truly will be missed is Rev. Feddes' bully pulpit. He's one of the few remaining prophets in Israel willing to stand on Carmel and challenge the prophets of Baal on their own turf. As such, he's often been termed 'a troubler of Israel.'"

Feddes is leaving to pursue Ph.D. studies and contributing in a more academic setting. He is going to miss the opportunity of proclaiming Christ to so many people in so many places. We will miss reading his weekly sermons which has become an enjoyable and profitable routine.

+ Geoff Thomas, 'Banner of Truth'

Christian prisoners denied visitors

Five East African Christians were arrested at a private Christian worship service three weeks ago and are not being allowed to have any visitors at the Riyadh prison facility in Saudi Arabia. A friend of the prisoners went to visit them on 10 May and was told that visitors will only be allowed after one month. According to Islamic law, the

Muttawa can only detain a person for 24 hours but the regular police can detain people for up to five days. "However, in practice, persons [are] held weeks or months and sometimes longer," the US State department's 2004 human rights report on Saudi Arabia says, "and the law gives the Minister of the Interior broad powers to detain persons indefinitely."

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Two congregations become one

On 17 May, Charlotte Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (USA) dismissed Rehobeth Presbyterian Church at Waxhaw, North Carolina, to First Presbytery of the ARP Church. Permission was also granted for Rehobeth Church to keep its property. Now Rehobeth and the Waxhaw ARP Church will unite into one congregation, with Rev. David Satterfield as the pastor.

+ Waxhaw ARP Church, PO Box 1299, Waxhaw, NC 28173 (704) 243-1299

Hungarian churches protest proposed budget cuts

After plans to cut educational subsidies were announced in Hungary, Hungarian churches appealed to the country's constitutional court. Without the the government subsidies, many church-run schools will have to close their doors. The current plan calls for a 20 percent reduction in the 2005 government subsidy to church schools.

Hungarian Reformed Church General Secretary Zoltan Tarr hoped the appeal

would have significant impact. “[The Government’s] budget was put together in violation of agreements – it’s having a serious impact on church life. It isn’t a good sign that we’ve had to go to the highest legal body for a solution.”

Government officials said the changes, which will also apply to state schools with falling pupil numbers, reflected the need for education reforms in line with demographic changes and were meant to make Hungary “more prosperous and more just.”

Leaders of other historic religious communities churches are also against the proposal, including Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Jewish leaders.

+ *Magyarországi Református Egyház, Reformed Church in Hungary, Bishop Gusztáv Bölcskei Abonyi Utca 21, PO Box 5, 1146 Budapest*

Calvary Presbyterian Church of Ghana inaugurates new building

On 21 May, according to ghanaweb.com, Calvary Presbyterian Church of Ghana inaugurated a new building intended to function as the pastoral station for the Ga Presbytery. The building cost 600 million cedi, which according to the exchange rates on www.xe.com is about US\$66,500. It includes four living rooms, a study hall, and toilet facilities. The Chairperson of the Ga Presbytery, Dr. David Nii Anum Kpobi, inaugurated the building. The inauguration was accompanied by compliments from Professor Mike Oquaye, Minister Of Energy and Member of Parliament (MP) for the area. Oquaye praised the church for its contribution to education and health in the area.

+ <www.ghanaweb.com>

Carroll College appeals to religious freedom

Carroll College is involved in a struggle with its faculty over unionization. Reacting to a move by professors to create a faculty union, the college countered that it was a religious institution, and so could deny its professors the right to form a union in order to maintain the integrity of its mission. Carroll College has Presbyterian roots, and is claiming that its commitment to Christianity remains. Some faculty deny this, saying that Carroll College is in fact today a secular institution. In January, a regional office of the NLRB (the National Labor Relations Board) rejected the college’s claims, but in February, the NLRB agreed to review the decision from its local office. Since Carroll College has appealed to freedom of religion as one of its defenses, the outcome of

this case could have a significant impact on future treatment of the issue.

+ *Inside Higher Ed*, <<http://www.insidehighered.com>> + *National Labor Relations Board*, <<http://www.nlr.gov/>>

+ *Carroll College, 100 N. East Ave., Waukesha, WI 53186 (800) CARROLL*, <<http://www.cc.edu>>

Versatility of adult stem cells demonstrated

The proposed value of embryonic stem cell research is that those stem cells are very versatile, able to differentiate into just about any other kind of cell in the body, and thus their therapeutic potential is great.

However, scientists at Griffith University in Australia say they have demonstrated that adult olfactory stem cells can do virtually the same thing. With these stem cells, they have reportedly derived heart cells, brain cells, liver cells, nerve cells, and more. With the debate over embryonic stem cell research going on in the US Government, these findings could be of crucial significance.

+ “*Multipotent stem cells from adult olfactory mucosa*,” by Alan Mackay-Sim et al., found in *Developmental Dynamics*, <<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/jhome/38417>>

Conflict over worship at Hollywood First Presbyterian Church

Regional officials of the Presbyterian Church (USA) have taken over the wheel at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, putting the pastor on paid administrative leave. The pastor, Rev. Alan Meenan, has been at the center of controversy within the church because of changes to the church’s traditional fare. Over two years ago, Rev. Mr. Meenan started an alternative, contemporary worship service called Contemporary Urban Experience to broaden the church’s appeal. According to Meenan, the new worship service has attracted 350 new members.

However, many of the long-time members are unhappy at the de-emphasizing of Presbyterian traditions of worship. Moreover, it was discovered that Rev. Mr. Meenan had not disclosed a US\$856,000 budget deficit. The Presbytery of the Pacific, which has jurisdiction over First Hollywood Presbyterian Church, received over 100 letters of complaint over the situation from the church members.

+ *Hollywood Presbyterian Church, 1760 N. Gower St., Hollywood, CA 90028 (323) 463-7161* <<http://www.fpch.org/>>

Serbian law may discriminate against unrecognised religions

The government of Serbia is drafting a law

that may discriminate between so-called “traditional” religious groups and all others. According to Miodrag Zivanovic, president of the Adventist Church in Serbia, the Constitution and the draft law itself ostensibly recognise all religious groups as equal, but in practice some articles and official regulations make a distinction. The situation has become more complicated because in mid-March, the process of drafting the law was withdrawn from the public view, and Religion Minister Milan Radulovic has given the vague promise that “When the time comes, all will be informed.”

+ *Adventist News Network, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600 (301) 680-6306*,

adventistnews@gc.adventist.org.

+ *Forum 18, Postboks 6663, Rodel=F8kka, N-0502 Oslo, NORWAY*, <<http://www.forum18.org>>

+ *Milan Radulovic, 4 Cross St., Eastwood, Nottingham, NG 16 3 GX* <leader@broxtowe.gov.uk>

Sect fights for right to use hallucinogenic tea

On 18 April, the US Supreme Court agreed to review a circuit court decision to allow a religious sect to use hallucinogenic tea in its rituals. Based in Brazil, the sect is called O Centro Espirita Beneficiente Uniao do Vegetal, and combines elements of Christian belief with traditions originating in the Amazon basin. O Centro Espirita Beneficiente Uniao do Vegetal uses hoasca tea, which has hallucinogenic properties, in its services. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has supported the sect’s prerogative with amicus curiae brief. Also two evangelical organizations, the Christian Legal Society and the National Association of Evangelicals, have come out in support of O Centro Espirita Beneficiente Uniao do Vegetal.

+ *The Presbyterian Lay Committee, PO Box 2210, Lenoir, NC 28645 (828) 758-8716*

Souther Baptists say Public Schools toxifying children’s faith

Rev. Grady Arnold, a Texas pastor, and David Scarborough, a Tennessee minister, submitted a resolution on 31 May that would warn all Southern Baptists of the “toxic spiritual nature of the government school system.” Arnold believes that the Southern Baptists have waited long enough and that public schools are having a devastating effect on the children’s faith. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) did a survey that said 88 percent of children that graduate from government schools leave the church and never come back. The resolution suggests that their church members be warned of the devastating effects of sending their children to secular

schools only, churches become more active in starting Christian schools, or have them home schooled. The resolution was considered at the annual meeting of the denomination in Nashville, 21-24 June. + *World Reformed Fellowship, 5637 Bush River St., Columbia, SC 29212 (803) 772-1000*

'The Believer's Church' attacked

A church in India was fired upon the night of 29 May. According to Rev. S. Prim Vaiphei, pastor of the church, some people standing watch at the church trained their lights on an approaching jeep, at which the people in the jeep opened fire. None of the about 30 Christians in the church were harmed, except for one person who fell in a ditch and sustained minor injuries.

This attack was not the first suffered by the Believer's Church in Lamding, Thoubal district, Manipur state. The church had been attacked on 23 November, 8 March, and 19 April. Someone had warned the church before the attack took place, and reportedly the court had issued an injunction calling for police protection. The police were not present at the time of the attack, however, and Sub-Inspector N. Manikant of the Thoubal Police Station denies there was such an injunction.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0314*

New Bishop in Kyrgyzstan

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kyrgyzstan, which is in central Asia, west of China, elected Rev. Alfred Eicholz as its new bishop. The Kyrgyzstani church belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELCROS), the regional body bringing together Lutheran congregations of German tradition in Russia and other successor states of the former Soviet Union.

+ *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 8765 W. Higgins Rd, Chicago, IL 60631 (800) 638-3522*

Calvin College students protest Bush visit

On 21 May, President Bush gave a speech to the 900 graduating seniors at Calvin College's 85th Commencement ceremony in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The day before, between faculty, alumni, and friends, 823 people took a full page ad in "The Grand Rapids Press" with a signed petition protesting the President's visit. Another one third of Calvin's faculty, 130 professors, took a half-page ad the day of Bush's visit saying that, "No single political position should be identified with God's will." Nicholas Wolterstorff, the originally

planned speaker, was offered a seat on the bench with the president and said that he would rather weed his garden. Despite their efforts, 5,000 people showed up to the event and the protests were not even heard. Chuck Walton, a Christian Reformed Church pastor in Iowa, says that Calvin College is big enough to embrace on-campus gay entertainment yet they will not stand a visit from the president of the United States. Walton responds to the college's actions by saying, "I don't get it."

+ *Calvin College, 3201 Burton St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4388 (616) 526-6000*

'Monkey Business' to tell truth about Scopes' evolution debate

In July 1925, John Thomas Scopes was prosecuted and found guilty of teaching evolution in a high school class room. According to the authors of "Monkey Business," Marvin Olasky and John Perry, "it's not the trial, it's the distortion of the trial that had an impact." The coverage of the trial was done by reporters with selfish agendas to promote their own religious beliefs. "It was a perfect example of how religious an ideological views of reporters strongly influence their coverage," said Olasky. While writing the book, Olasky and Perry found out that the whole trial to begin with was a publicity stunt. The city of Dayton, Tennessee, needed something to boost the economy after a mining accident left the area empty. Town leaders took it among themselves to respond to the American Civil Liberties Union advertisement that wanted to challenge the Butler Act that made it illegal to teach anything contrary to divine creation and convinced Scopes to be the defendant. The stunt worked. Two-hundred reporters came to Daytona to see the "trial of the century." However, Olasky said, what it became was a battle about two religions and world views.

+ *Baptist Press, 901 Commerce St., Nashville TN, 37203 (615) 244-2355 <www.bpnews.net>*

African churches discuss differences and unity

Leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) and the United Reformed Church in Southern Africa (referred to as URC) have met informally, and both agree that the talks were constructive. The NGK had refused to acknowledge ministers ordained by the URC, because the URC subscribes to the Belhar Confession, and the NGK does not. After the talks, the URC agreed to draft a written statement of its complaints.

Moderator of the URC James Buys said

that a crucial issue for the URC is the significance of having a solid confessional stance. Buys said, however, that he was encouraged by the talks, which seemed to go deeper than previously.

+ *Dr. Willie Botha, Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), PO Box 4445, Pretoria 0001, South Africa, [27](12) 322900 x 2252*

Name of Prostitution Recovery House honour long-time worker

On 4 June, the main residence for a Presbyterian Church (USA) prostitution rehabilitation program was named for one of its long-time care givers, Ann Hayman. The name of the program is the Mary Magdalene Project. Hayman first started this work of rehabilitating former prostitutes 25 years ago. Hayman is now program director, and lives with four former-prostitutes in the now Ann Hayman House. The House is located in Reseda, California.

Those in the Mary Magdalene Project are required to sign a covenant agreeing to participate in certain programs. According to a PCUSA News, the women are taught "decision-making, stress management and self-esteem enhancement skills." Hayman herself says that about 70 percent of the women have drug issues, about 85 have suffered incest, and about 50 percent come to the program straight out of jail.

+ *Ann Hayman, Program Director of the Mary Magdalene Project, (818) 708-7234, <ahayman@mmp.org>*

+ *Martin McCombs, PhD, Executive Director of the Mary Magdalene Project, PO Box 8396 Van Nuys, CA 91409 (800) 371-7230, <mccombs@mmp.org>*

AFA ends Disney boycott after almost a decade

The American Family Association's President Tim Wildmon believes that they have "made their point" after nine years of boycotting Disney. In 1996 the AFA stated that Disney had declined in moral and family values since the days of its founder, Walt Disney. The height of the boycott was in 1997 when the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution, "On Moral Stewardship and the Disney Company," stating that Southern Baptists must take stewardship so seriously that they should not patronise The Disney Company or any of its related entities. The resolution criticised Disney for, "increasingly promoting immoral ideologies such as homosexuality, infidelity, and adultery." The reason for lifting the boycott came because of the pending departure of Disney chief Michael Eisner, Disney splitting from Miramax films, and Disney's involvement with "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," a Christian classic by C.S. Lewis. Wildmon says that

Disney is still on "probation" and under close monitoring.

+ American Family Association, PO Drawer, 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803 (662)844-5036

US views on homosexuality differ from Canada and Britain

A Gallup study shows that on the issue of homosexuality, the United States couldn't be more different from Canada and Great Britain. In a margin of 54-42 percent, America sees "gay marriage" as "morally wrong" while 60 percent of Canada and 61 percent of Great Britain see it as "morally acceptable." Only Belgium and the Netherlands have legalized "gay marriage" but it is predicted that while seven out of 10 of its provinces have homosexual "marriages," that Canada will be the next to legalize "gay marriage." On the other hand, the US has the Defense of Marriage Act that prohibits the federal government from recognizing "same sex marriages." Along with that, 18 states have amendments that ban "gay marriage" and at least 10 other states considering leaving only Massachusetts as the only state that will recognise

"marriage" between homosexuals.

+ The Gallup Organization, Corporate Headquarters, 901 F St., NW, Washington, DC 20004

DRC considers issue of homosexuality

According to the REC News Exchange, the South African government is considering legitimising homosexual unions. Meanwhile, the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) has been examining its policy and considering how to approach the issue of homosexuals in the church. The executive officers of the NGK have said that, at present, the church's stance is that marriage is between a man and a woman only, and that if the South African government decides to legalise gay unions, they should not call it marriage. The officers also said that individual cases are decided by individual congregations, with the higher church government available for consultation. While these discussions are taking place, the church leaders have asked their members to operate with love and compassion.

+ Dr. Willie Botha, Dutch Reformed Church (NGK), PO Box 4445, Pretoria 0001, South Africa, [27](12) 322900 x 2252

Romanian Ambassador dies

Romanian Ambassador Aurel-Dragos Munteanu died at age 63 on 30 May after battling cancer for two years. Before he died, he had accomplished many amazing things for his country. Munteanu, after being a core person who helped bring down the Communist regime, became the post-revolution Permanent Representative to the United Nations for Romania. Munteanu quickly gained Most Favored Nation trading status with the United States after becoming the Ambassador of Romania. Ambassador Munteanu founded with a close friend, Joseph K. Grieboski, the Institute on Religion and Public Policy in May 1999, serving as its Executive Vice President and Liaison to the United Nations.

+ Lidiya Zubytska at the Institute on Religion and Public Policy, 1101 15th St., NW Suite 115, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 835-8760 <IRPP@ReligionAndPolicy.org>

Religious oppression in Eritrea

On Saturday 28 May, according to Compass Direct, police in Eritrea interrupted a large wedding, arresting the bride, groom, their wedding party, and at least 250 guests. Of these, about 70 who were members of government-banned evangelical churches were retained in custody.

Those who were members of government-sanctioned churches—the Eritrean Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran churches—were released.

In September of 2001, the government of Eritrea jailed its detractors and put a lid on private media. In May of 2002, the government banned all churches except the Eritrean Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran. It is estimated that there are today several thousand political prisoners in Eritrea and about 900 Christian prisoners.

On Wednesday 25 May, Eritreans in America gathered outside Eritrea's Embassy in Washington, DC in protest of the Eritrean government's abuses. Some believe the wedding raid, which was three days later, was carried out in response to this.

+ ASSIST News Service, PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842-2126

Premier issue of Presbyterian Heritage

The premier edition of Presbyterian Heritage for Spring of 2005 has been released. In its own words: "Celebrating the past, anticipating the future," Presbyterian Heritage magazine is dedicated to telling the story of Bible-believing Presbyterians and others committed to the historic faith of the Protestant Reformation." The magazine is to be released biannually, in spring and

IN TOUCH

Subscriptions to the IN TOUCH magazine are available. This is an opportunity for those interested who do not have access to or have joined a Cadet and Calvinette Club (Cadets and Calvinettes will continue to be supplied through their clubs). The cost is \$15 per year for four issues.

This is a Reformed Churches of New Zealand children's magazine especially written for 8 - 15 year olds.

It is filled with stories, photographs, puzzles, Bible studies, Cadet & Calvinette Club news, competitions, poetry, crafts, cooking and Camp News.

If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ15 (or \$AU15), with your details, to the National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 7 Winchester Avenue, Pinhaven, Upper Hutt. (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)



fall. Presbyterian Heritage is published by Presbyterian International News Service, and the first issue includes an article about what Presbyterianism means by the Service's founding editor, Dr. Frank Smith. The Editor-in-Chief is Robert Shapiro. The cost of a subscription is US\$1.00 per issue, but each issue may be viewed for free online at <www.presbyterianheritage.info.>
+ Business Office, Presbyterian International News Service, 6470 Bentley Trail, Cumming, GA 30040 (920) 564-6207

Sentamu named Archbishop of York

Queen Elizabeth II has approved the appointment of the Rt. Rev. John Tucker Mugabi Sentamu, Ph.D., Bishop of Birmingham, as the next Archbishop of York, replacing the Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. Dr. David Hope, who resigned earlier this year.

Bishop Sentamu was born in Uganda in 1949 and trained in the law and served as a lawyer and a judge prior to emigrating to the United Kingdom in 1974, partially to escape persecution under dictator Idi Amin. Sentamu read theology at Selwyn College Cambridge where he received masters and doctoral degrees; he then served in a variety of posts in England before becoming Bishop of Stepney in 1996 and Bishop of Birmingham in 2002.

As Archbishop of York, Sentamu will carry the title "Primate of England" (the Archbishop of Canterbury carries the title "Primate of All England") and will be second in seniority only to Rowan Williams, the current Archbishop of Canterbury. Sentamu is the first Black Archbishop in the history of the Church of England and

has opposed the ordination of homosexual priests and has also spoken out against the war in Iraq.

+ Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr., *Christian Observer Correspondent*, 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445

Presbyterian Church of Ghana commissions 24

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) has recently commissioned 24 ministerial probationers who have completed their studies at the Trinity Theological Seminary. Rt. Rev. Dr. Frimpong-Manso preached the sermon, and exhorted the newly commissioned ministers to preach the risen Christ, and not the prosperity gospel which neglects eternal salvation.

Frimpong-Manso also reminded them of their calling to be "set apart" to Christ and to live holy lives. He warned them against following the pattern of some who go out to exploit, shame, or divide the church..

+ Presbyterian Church of Ghana, PO Box 1800, Thorpe Road, Accra, Ghana Tel: +233 21 662-511

ECUSA crashes meeting

Acting in complete defiance of the Primates of the Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church (USA) has sent their delegation to the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council currently underway in Nottingham, England. In a statement released earlier this year, the Primates requested that ECUSA voluntarily withdraw its representatives, however the US church has sent a full delegation led by Catherine Roksam, Suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of New York and a member of the pro-homosexual organization Integrity.

The American Anglican Council reports that a number of those present at the ACC meeting have expressed dismay at the reception afforded the ECUSA delegation in light of their defiance of the Primate's request for voluntary withdrawal. The AAC has also reported that a second group from ECUSA will make a presentation on Tuesday, June 21; despite the Primates' request that ECUSA explain their actions in consecrating an openly homosexual man, V. Gene Robinson, as Bishop of New Hampshire, it appears that the bulk of ECUSA's presentation will deal with the experiences faced by homosexuals.

+ Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr., *Christian Observer Correspondent*, 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445

Christian widow keeps custody of children

In Jordan, a Christian widow has won a case to retain custody of her children. After Siham Qandah's husband died serving with the U.N. Peacekeeping Forces in Kosovo, an Islamic court produced a "conversion" certificate, which was unsigned, but which the court said proved Qandah's husband had secretly converted to Islam. Now forbidden by law to handle her two children's finances, Qandah asked Abdullah al-Muhtadi, her brother who had converted to Islam, to be their legal guardian. However, Muhtadi reportedly began pocketing some of the children's support money, and then tried to gain full custody over them. However, a Jordanian court of appeal has now rejected his claim permanently.

+ Compass Direct News Service, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799 (949) 862-0314

The Saints in ancient British history

Wynfrith – St. Boniface

Patricia van Laar

"Wie Dokkum zegt, zegt ook Bonifacius."

So said the headline in the Dutch News Weekly, April 26, 2004. The article then proceeded to take the reader on a tour through Dokkum, where 1250 years before, on June 5, 754, Boniface and 52 companions were set upon by a gang of thieves, described as "Friese boerenpummels" (which means, I am told, unbelieving Friesian dunderheads). The reporter made a contrast with today, for

strangers cannot imagine being knifed to death in Dokkum. It has been said that visitors today are far more likely to be hugged to death!

At the time this report was written, the people of Dokkum were preparing to commemorate the anniversary of the death of 'Bonafatius' or 'Bonafacius', with a festival of ten days' celebration. Included was a choral presentation, telling in song the story of this eighty year old missionary from Crediton. He had for the third time come to bring

the gospel to the area, thinking that at last he was getting a foot in the door, only to be murdered by a band of xenophobic Friesians, who thought such a large group of Christian travellers must have much wealth to be plundered, and so, to their everlasting shame, hacked them to death. [There is a fictional Dutch joke that his murder was caused by his mocking the Frisian tongue!]

Unlike St Ninian, it is not a case of where to find sufficient information about Boniface for this article, but what to cut out. Which is

rather odd, for until I learned about him at theological college, I hardly knew he existed! This is not unusual in the English world; he is far better known in Continental Europe than in England. Most Englishmen would say, "Boniface, who was he?"

Translation of the Dutch newspaper article

"Who speaks of Dokkum speaks of Boniface.

1250 years after his death he is still alive! 1250 years after the famous murder recorded in schoolbooks, his anniversary is observed. In 754, Boniface was murdered in Dokkum, where a memorial of the anniversary of the English missionary's death (5th June) is still kept. Not only Dokkum, but also Crediton in England, where he was born, and Fulda, Germany, where he is buried, stand quiet on the anniversary of his death.

Boniface, born c. 675 AD, journeyed for the first time to Friesland in 716 to preach the gospel. Without much success, he went back to England. Two years later, he received an official letter of instruction from the pope (Gregory II) asking him to take up again his mission work in NW Europe. He was in upper Germany as organiser and reformer of the young Frankish church. In 754 he went again to Friesland, where he fell into the hands of robbers, who in brutal manner murdered him and 52 of his companions."

The article continues, "Round the grave in Fulda, legendary stories have given rise to a cult. In Dokkum a "Boniface Club" was established. For the past years, about 10,000 pilgrims per annum came. Even in 1990 a child was spontaneously cured of whooping cough after immersing himself in the spring. About 1200 people stretched a banner 2 kms. long in the middle of Dokkum and hurled up a national tri-colour flag of 450 kg."

Let us now search beyond the legend and cultus, for truth!

The life of Boniface

Boniface was born c. 675 (perhaps earlier) in Wessex, if not in, certainly near Crediton. This was a border region, on the frontier between the English and the British (Celtic) kingdoms, near present-day Wales. It was a violent age in a violent area. The poem, "Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief," dates back to this time. It was 'rustler country.' According to Willibald, his first biographer, Boniface's parents owned estates, and his father, who was lord of a village, entertained visiting preachers. It is unlikely that he was from the highest nobility, but

rather from a prosperous landed family.

Boniface was baptised Wynfrith, an Old English name, *wyn* meaning 'pleasure' or 'joy'. When his father became seriously ill, in superstitious fashion, perhaps a legacy from pagan years, Wynfrith was 'sacrificed for the salvation of his father's soul'. This meant that at the age of seven, he was sent to the Benedictine Abbey at Exeter. His father recovered, but it was a painful 'sacrifice', for it is reported that as the favourite son, his father had intended to make him heir of his father's estates (in which case we would never have heard of him!) Several factors involved the practice of giving children to a monastery. Sometimes it was to ease the financial burden of very large families, sometimes the ones given were offspring of multiple wives. Boniface had several brothers and probably sisters too.

Educational opportunities

The Abbot Wulfhard became a father to him. For those able to examine it, the record of Boniface's studies give a valuable glimpse of the extensive range of topics pursued at a comparatively small Anglo-Saxon monastery in the late 7th century. During that period, monasteries in England served as centres for the propagation of the faith, and as schools to train clergy. Missionaries came to Exeter from almost every centre of Christian learning, giving a variety to the pupils from the Irish, Roman/British and Gaulish traditions. From the Irish would come the Biblical emphasis of St Patrick; from the Anglo/Saxon Church, evangelistic pursuits; from Rome, ritual, music, patristic and classical learning. Greek influence, too, came from the appointment of a Greek Archbishop of Canterbury.



As a boy, Wynfrith imbibed the learning of Exeter, but as a man found it inadequate. So he transferred to Nursling, near Southampton, for further new and advanced education of the type introduced by the great English scholar Aldhelm. The learning imparted by English church leaders was intensely practical, focused on improving the general well being. It is said they had their heads in heaven, but their feet firmly on the ground. He also benefited from the life long work of his contemporary, Bede, who made Christian scholarship available to his fellow monks. Wynfrith eventually became head of the Abbey School. The results of his preaching in Europe are described as astonishing. Yet his superior strength lay less in his preaching than in his teaching, and this teaching was his greatest contribution during his later European labours.

Why leave England?

It is possible that Wynfrith was motivated by a desire to take the Gospel of Christ to the home of his ancestors in the continent of Europe. Adamnan, Abbot of Iona (who wrote of Columba) was his contemporary. He informs us, "As Beowulf in the legendary poem slew the monster Grendel, so Columba, Augustine and Boniface went out to slay dragons of a different kind, to overturn heathen idols in temples and to destroy pagan gods."

So in 716, although over forty years of age, Wynfrith set out on his first mission to Frisia (Friesland). It is considered possible that the example of the Celtic missionaries who had gone from Ireland to Scotland inspired him. There may have been some desire to impart the gospel in the homeland of his Saxon ancestors.

Willibrord, Archbishop of Utrecht, an Englishman from Northumbria, had been working amongst the Friesians for twenty-five years, facing great difficulties, especially with the rebellion of the Friesians against their overlords, the Franks. Wynfrith journeyed there in 716, but his similar failure in the propagation of the gospel was probably the cause of his deciding on the need for the support of a strong secular power. He returned to England, sought papal approval of his intentions, and two years later received his first official letter of instruction from the pope (Gregory II) that he should again take up his mission work in North-west Europe. In 719 he set out once more for Francia.

Boniface's journeys

The full account from 719, when Pope Gregory II made him missionary to Germany under the name Boniface, is too lengthy to

be given here. From 719 – 721 he worked under Willibrord in Frisia, but in 722 was consecrated as a bishop by Gregory on November the 30th, on his second journey to Rome. From this date, he took increasing responsibility in reforming the Frank church, which had been a mixture of Christianity and paganism, of organising the Bavarian church, founding monasteries and bishoprics, and establishing church provinces. His main helpers were English, whom he brought over in sizeable numbers to serve with him. His duties were manifold, organising churches, instigating and supervising reforming councils, evangelistic journeys far and wide, founding evangelising and teaching monasteries, establishing church provinces.

To understand fully the geography of Europe at that time would require also a study of its history. Bear in mind that the countries of Europe as we know them today, were not yet defined. Germany was not yet Germany. At the end of the sixth century the Franks held sway over most of Western Europe, controlling a confederacy of many loosely defined states. From the time of his return, Boniface's work took him from one end of this huge region to the other. The record of his promotions, his activities and his movements, is known in greater detail than any previous British/English Church leader. Almost 'annual reports' are given, from 719 onwards. He journeyed from London to Rome, all over modern France, including south to Marseilles, and to Germany and Holland. His visits took him to Bavaria through Salzburg, through Innsbruck, and in particular, to Fulda in Germany. His travels took him also from the coast to Utrecht and to Dokkum; Coblenz, Mainz; Hesse, Thuringia, Bavaria; Innsbruck, Salzburg; Rheims in northern France to Arles and Marseilles in the south; from Cologne to Strasbourg. In the course of his missionary labours, he travelled to the farthest corners of modern France, Germany, and Holland. No mean feat for a middle-aged man without the benefits and comforts of modern transport!

Promotion in office and 'Promotion to Glory'

Boniface was appointed by Pope Gregory III as Archbishop of Mainz in 747, with greatly increased responsibilities. However, in 754 he decided to hand these responsibilities to his disciple Lull, in order to return to mission work in Frisia. This, his first love, became a last service and a lasting memory of him. His death at Dokkum in that same year, humanly speaking has been regarded as a tragedy, as he was still going strong,

even though he was now old, over eighty.

He had accomplished much in the last twenty or so years of his life, from 734 – 54, although he himself did not always see this, and felt much frustration and some dissatisfaction. The best of English talent was exported to the European Continent, perhaps to the harm and deterioration of their home country. It is said that this began as a trickle, grew to a stream and by 747 had increased to a flood. Some of his own relatives were numbered amongst the English helpers, including at least one female cousin.

Boniface is still better known on the continent than in his native land. Commemorative activities in 1954 and 55 began to redress this, and in 1960 the new (nuclear) power

station at Nursling was named Winfrith, bringing the comment, "Surprising, but not inapt!" The celebrations of 2004 drew further attention of the English Church to this great man.

So God continued and continues to weave His tapestry, with His silver chain of links threading through it. [I changed my metaphor from golden to silver links, as more appropriate. Silver tarnishes, as every housewife knows. Are we not all his tarnished children, needing His "polishing cloths" ?]

We are being woven into that tapestry as what may be the final portion of the picture, who knows? Many of us may well have silver links back to Boniface himself!

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Bishopdale

Calling Committee: It is a while since we have reported on our activities. The committee consists of Fred Braam, Don Capill, Peter Mahoney, Rob Moot, Richard Vanderpyl, Mike Vannoort and Alf Schinkleshoek. The Convenor is Mike Vannoort. Since the Rev John de Hoog declined our last Call we have asked two other ministers from the Christian Reformed Church of Australia to visit us but they have declined to do so. Meanwhile we have been gathering information on another group of ministers from Australia and this process is not yet complete. The other issue the committee is dealing with is how the ministry of our church should be structured. A paper will be included in the AGM booklet about this. These will be issued on Sunday 19 June. We will discuss this as a congregation via the fellowship group meetings on 22 June as well as at the AGM on the 29 June. We believe that before we call again we need to have consensus on this issue and we look forward to your input.

Note from the Elders. It was with great joy

that we could interview four young people of the church who have expressed a desire to publicly profess that they are followers of Jesus Christ and want to make this church their spiritual home. This is a wonderful fulfilment of the promises made at their baptism as infants and is something that we want to praise God for. Natalie Bangma, Andre Posthuma, Anna Verkerk and Nadia Verkerk will make their Profession of Faith some time next month.

Bucklands Beach

Men's Breakfast: The second of the four men's breakfasts planned for 2005 will be held on Saturday, 11th June from 8.00am till 10.00am. Brothers, please keep this date free! The usual fee of \$5.00 applies. Bookings with sr Gonny van Garderen. If you have not booked do it NOW! Special guest speaker will be br Jim van Rensburg who will share something about being a Christian in his work and workplace. Just a thought: consider bringing a friend! This activity is a great way to introduce friends or workmates to our fellowship.

Today, the 50th day after the celebration of Christ's resurrection, we remember and give thanks for Pentecost. It was originally a Jewish feast that seems to have been known under several different names. In Deuteronomy 16.10 it is referred to as the 'Festival of Weeks'. In Exodus 23.16 is called the 'Feast of Harvest' and in Numbers 28.26 the day of the first fruits. The first of the newly planted

crops were beginning to be harvested and were offered to God in thanksgiving. For us today, Pentecost marks the beginning of a different kind of harvest - God's kingdom. That harvest which began on Pentecost Sunday as described in Acts 2 must continue until the Lord declares the harvest season over when he comes. Are we still involved in this harvest today? Are you?

Historical records show that the original church building here at Bucklands Beach was opened on 14th May, 1955 - exactly fifty years ago. There is little sign of it now (unless you look at the foundations!). The building was very much the effort of a number of volunteers - most prominent among whom were brothers Philip Brooks - who came from Nelson to help, and Tom Posthuma. Philip has never been able to leave the place since! God has been good and gracious in giving our fellowship a home over these past fifty years.

Christchurch

Congratulations to Nicholas Alberts and Kirsten Dam, who recently announced their engagement. We pray that the Lord may bless you and keep you as you anticipate walking down life's road together as husband and wife.

Dovedale

Next Sunday, DV we have the privilege of celebrating the Lord's Supper together so today we will read the form in preparation for this. Next Lord's Day also, we rejoice with Gary and Margaret Haverland as Mark receives the sign and seal of baptism.

Dunedin

Hearty congratulations are extended to John Weegenaar on having reached his 80th birthday on the 2nd of this month and also to Jean Tromop who celebrated her birthday on the 3rd. May our gracious Lord who blesses abundantly give you both many more years in our midst.

We have the privilege of witnessing the sign and seal of the covenant to Hannah Elsin Miller with the baptism at today's morning service in Oamaru. "God graciously includes our children in his covenant and all his promises are for them as well as us (Genesis 17:7, Acts 2:39). Jesus himself embraced the little children and blessed them (Mark 10:16) and the apostle Paul said that chil-

dren of believers are holy (1 Corinthians 7:14). So, just as the children of the Old Covenant received the sign of circumcision, our little children are given the sign of baptism. We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God's own children." (Liturgical forms, number 2.) May the Lord also bless and strengthen Hannah's parents, Andrew and Katrina, as they instruct their children in the Christian faith and lead them by example in the life of Christian discipleship.

Westminster Confession: Lisa and I recently enjoyed Rev Gary Milne's company together with his wife, Carol, and daughter, Andrea. The occasion was Gary's graduation as a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Otago. Gary's thesis topic was The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation, and it asks the question: Is the cessationist clause of WCF 1:1 intended as a strict denial of the possibility that any supernatural revelation for the purposes of salvation could take place after the apostolic period? Or did the authors of the WCF, as some scholars argue, allow for a more flexible view in which such divine revelation through extraordinary means might still take place? Gary's thesis explores these questions in the light of modern debates over the interpretation of the Confession's language and its implications for the church today. For those interested, a copy of Dr Milne's thesis has been obtained for our church library. Hans Vaatstra.

New Service Time for Birchleigh. The usual monthly service will be held at Birchleigh Rest Home again today. The nursing manager has requested we come earlier as they change shifts at 3:00 pm and are wanting to deal with patients' needs soon after the changeover. We will therefore try beginning at 2:00 pm and see how that works out. Bruce Duthie

Foxton

Profession of Faith. Session was pleased to endorse David Galuszka's desire to do his public profession of faith before the congregation on the 12th of June. We are thankful that the Lord has brought David to this position through his Word and Spirit and we pray for his continued care of David as he seeks to live a life of thankfulness.

Hamilton

Even Though, Still. If I had the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of John, the meek-

ness of Moses, the strength of Samson, the obedience of Abraham, the compassion of Joseph, the tears of Jeremiah, the poetic skill of David, the prophetic voice of Elijah, the courage of Daniel, the greatness of John the Baptist, the endurance and love of Paul, I would still need redemption through Christ's blood, the forgiveness of sin.— R. L. Wheeler.

Synod 2005: The organisation of Synod 2005 is underway. We need helpers from the church community to ensure it runs smoothly. A Synod 05 form has been placed in your pigeon hole which will enable you to tell us how you can help. Please complete and return it to the Synod pigeon hole by Sunday 5 June. Once we have sufficient helpers, we will be contacting you with further details. ~ Frits & Geraldine.

Welcome Home! Today we welcome back Charlie and Hayden Bosgra. Charlie has been helping out painting a church in Japan where Christianity is a very small minority. Having people over from as far as New Zealand must have been a huge encouragement for the local congregation as well as a witness to the surrounding community. Hayden has been doing mission work in Ecuador for a year. We look forward to hearing your stories!

Hi Ladies. Ladies Proposed Retreat. In your pigeon hole today you should find a questionnaire regarding a Retreat which we are planning to have later this year (October). If you are interested PLEASE fill out as quickly as you can so we can determine what you want most. Pls return to: L Kamphuis or J Hemmes' pigeon holes or into their hands. Thanks and can we stress there needs to be action taken promptly.

Hastings

We rejoice with the Meinsmas and the de Jongs in the safe delivery and birth of Esmé Ruth Meinsma just over a week ago.

Next Sunday morning, D.V., we will have the joy of seeing Neal and Paula Grant, Phil and Kerrin Parker and Emily Choi re-affirm their faith. Also Rick and Alisha Meeuwssen and Cynthia Lui will make public profession of their faith. Alisha and Cynthia will be baptised as well as several of the children of these families: Kristy, Jayden, Hayley, Jade, Adam, and Aaron. In accord with our Church Order, Art. 63, we ask anyone who has a lawful objection concerning any of these who intend to profess their faith to make their

objection known so that everything may be done decently and in an orderly manner.

Senior Delight: It all began with a very attractive invitation. How could one refuse a night out with friends, especially when transport has been arranged to and fro. When I observed an elegantly dressed male in black suit, white shirt, black bowties, and black cap, alight from the family 'limo' outside my front gate, my immediate thought was, "just as well I didn't remain in my tennis sneakers". As we travelled to Napier, picking up fellow friends, nineteen other senior guests were being treated with the same intrigue and fuss. On arriving at our first call, there were heaps of smiles, chatter and laughter. We were greeted and seated with such aplomb. The setting was De Nieuwland style. Rob announces that it is Nellie Braam's birthday. With great gusto we sing birthday wishes. As we await hot tasty chicken, or pumpkin soup, our mental skills were tested. Sorry Rob, our two horses remain jockey-less, and as for the hats, they can remain on the heads of the chauffeurs. Time to progress. We are blessed with a beautifully fine evening. The wheels are in motion. Where to now? Orchard territory. We descend upon the Van Beek residence. Warm greetings all around. We mix and mingle as we seat ourselves before the main course. Such a choice. Wine and fruit juice complements a lovely meal. Photographs galore. We are reassured, on development, our eyes won't be red because of modern technology. Our chauffeurs begin to usher us all towards the appropriate vehicles. Doors open, shut, safety belts, air in the tyres, rolling, rolling, rolling. It looks as though we are motoring towards our just desserts. It does not pay to surmise. When was it last you were taken on a joy ride on two wheels, around and around on a round about. What is this? Pulling up and parking outside the Rose and Shamrock. The chauffeurs confer, smiling broadly, they have us en route again. Too expensive there! We've arrived. Oops, one must await the chauffeur. This could grow on you. Chauffeurs and progressive dinners. Carla, wife of chauffeur Kaijser is there to greet us. Once more it is musical chairs. No, it is not another menu set before us, but another tantalising teaser. We excel ourselves. Is this dessert, no, it is awaiting. Is there room? Certainly. The food is blessed. Throughout the evening, select verses from Psalms 73, 121, and 145 were the chosen Biblical readings. During the course of the evening a cake glowing with lit candles is brought forward. We break into song. Sharing best wishes to

Nellie. To complete this happy evening coffee is served. It has been a blessed evening of fellowship, revelling in each other's company. We have much to be grateful for. We would like to thank the Social Committee, and other helpers for the time and commitment you all poured into this wonderful surprise evening. To Lance, Steve, Arnold and David, your service was impeccable. We hope you all enjoyed the evening as much as we did. Hopefully you all had a choice of nibbles too. To those who perhaps were unable to attend, I'm sure there'll be more surprises to come. We thank God our Father in heaven for the love and commitment bestowed upon this happy occasion.

Brenda Neal

SHORT REPORT OF AUCKLAND PRESBYTERY MEETING HELD 20TH MAY, 2005

After being welcomed and the meeting opened by the Rev. John Haverland, the Rev. John Ter Horst took up the chair. Besides the usual house-keeping, items of interest were as follows;

- John Haverland reported on the 'Reformed Fellowship' meeting held at Grace Theological College on 5th April at which 15-20 pastors and elders from various churches in the Auckland area of reformed persuasion and 'Reformed Baptist' brothers meet for a time of fellowship. It was felt to be a worthwhile exercise and another is planned for 5th July, Lord willing.

- The Rev. Dirk van Garderen reported on plans for the next annual Presbytery Study Day being planned this year by the Bucklands Beach congregation 23rd July, Lord willing.

- The CO Article 47 questions were asked of the following congregations (and a few highlights noted); Bucklands Beach: Dirk van Garderen has prepared a Basic Bible Study course (in simple English) which he teaches to a group of 7-8 Korean people; there is an improved attendance at the evening Services, including more young people. Four Indian families have become members recently. Hamilton (Aberdeen): The brothers reported thankfulness for the Hamilton Christian School on the board of which the Hamilton churches have a number of members. A number of Church members teach Bible in Schools and the kindergarten connected with the Church also serves as a good point of

Mangere

It has been quite a month this past April. There has been the funerals of two people very dear to us (Lenie Bylisma & Kelvin Millhouse), the visit of Rev. Kossen, also in connection with one of them, and the wedding of Jonathan & Esther. And this together with the other events happening in our own families and relationships (I know that for some of you it has been a new focus in study or employment). We pray for those mourning the loss of loved ones. Their lives won't be the same any more. But may they, together with us all, look to the Lord who hold all our lives in His hands and be comforted in their faith in Him. And we thank the Lord for those recently joined together in Christian marriage. May they more and more depend on Him and grow in Him.

contact with non-Christians. They report encouraging attendance at the evening Services and expressed appreciation for the preaching assistance they had received in their vacancy. A number of young people had professed their faith recently, for which they give thanks. Hukanui: In regard to missions and evangelism, mention was made of the support of the congregation for the Hargoorts in New Guinea; a local missions group which does street evangelism in Hamilton City on Friday nights and conducts a beach mission near Opotiki each summer. They also reported improving attendance at the evening Services. They are again considering re-locating. A leadership training course run by two elders began recently with attendance of 25 at the first evening. Time was spent in prayer for these congregations.

- As all the Auckland Presbtery ministers are either booked up or feel unable at present to take the studies at the Family Camp this year, it was decided to ask the South Island Churches whether one of their ministers would be able to help

- Church visitation reports for 2004 were discussed and some items of interest discussed.

- The Presbytery bylaws as updated by John Haverland and Dirk van Garderen were adopted with a few amendments.

- The next meeting date was set for 29th July.

Masterton

Congratulations to Br. and Sr. Bart and Tineke Gysbertsen with the birth of Megan Carolyn. The Lord added to their family a big healthy daughter. The Lord gave life and spared life, praised be the name of the Lord!!!!. Also an added blessing for Opa and Oma Gysbertsen.

Rev. Kloosterman accepting our Call: With gratitude and praise to God I am pleased to accept the call to the Reformed Church of Masterton. I thank the Lord for His abiding faithfulness and trust that He will continue to make the way clear for us to come to NZ. Thank you for your prayers on my behalf. I look forward to working with you as we go through the immigration process. May God bless you with a refreshing Lord's Day. In Christ, Rev. Peter Kloosterman.

North Shore

Congratulations to John and Marielle Posthuma on the arrival on Monday of Anton Paul, a little boy (so John described him) of 9lb, 2oz. Marielle and Anton are both well, for which we give thanks. May the Lord bless you and your family with much joy in this little fellow - and especially eternal joy in God.

Whoops! However hard you try, it always seems to happen. Congratulations also to Marié-Louise Smith on graduating this year, with a B.A. On another personal note, Paul van Wichen marries Anita this coming Saturday in the United States. Let us pray that the Lord may be gracious to them.

Palmerston North

Congratulations to Josh and Monique on the arrival of Hamish Paul, on Monday evening, 23rd. We rejoice with you and pray the Lord's help and grace for you as you raise Hamish for him. The baptism is set for 26th June.

Congratulations to Theo and Lucy on the birth of a baby girl on Friday 3rd June. Mum and baby are both well. She is called Annemieke Elizabeth, and weighed in at 4.5 kilos. We rejoice with you, Theo and Lucy, at the Lord's goodness, and pray for you that the Lord will give you his help and strength in raising Annemieke for him.

Afrikaans' outreach. Dr. Jan Leon-Cachet will lead an outreach service for the Afrikaans' community in the church at 5.30pm of 19 June. Please let this be known to any Afrikaans' speakers you know, either in Wanganui or other parts of the Manawatu/New Plymouth/Wanganui region. It would be good if our local Dutch Speaking members could also attend.

Pukekohe

I will be leaving tomorrow to spend this week visiting the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. John Rogers and I will be attending lectures, visiting each of our NZ students and having various meetings with the faculty and the board of the RTC and with the deputies of the CRCA.

Silverstream

Website update. Andre and Anita Holtslag have updated their website with family news and 38 photos. Here is their address: "http://www.onzies.zoomshare.com"

Covenant Baptism: Today we give thanks that we can witness the baptism of Audrey Ana, daughter of Jos and Lauren Knol during this afternoon's worship service. May the Lord bless the vows that you make today and give you grace and wisdom to bring Audrey up in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

We give thanks to the Lord for the birth of Conrad Maximus Steenhof, to Lana & John. Mother and child are doing well. Conrad was born on Thursday, in the Hutt Valley Hospital.

Wellington

Thanks from the Reformed Church of Kapiti-Mana. With heartfelt appreciation we would like to thank the congregation of Wellington. You have contributed a lot of your time and prayers to the work in Kapiti-Mana. You have also given ample for the coffers of our young church to be able to bring the Word of God to people who have started a new life in a new country. We are grateful to the Lord for a congregation like yours and we want to bring Him the honour. We pray that the Lord will bless each of you this coming year. May

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor;

Thank you for the good work you do in producing the Faith and Focus magazine. It must not always be easy to produce a magazine that is "reader friendly" for all age groups. Nonetheless, we pray that the Lord may continue to bless your efforts and that the Faith and Focus magazine may be used by Him to extend His kingdom on earth.

In light of our prayer and hope that God's kingdom on earth will be extended, I am becoming increasingly concerned about how some articles published in Faith and Focus are rather negative towards anyone who may have a different understanding of the Christian faith than what we do. I realize that sometimes the best defense is attack, but somewhere along the line some articles fail to defend our faith in a positive, loving, caring and gracious manner.

An article on the back of the recent June F&F entitled, "What was the Reformation about" is an example of what I mean. Where is the love of God for sinners who repent? Where is "there but for the grace of God go I?" Where is there a call for prayer for the lost? Sadly it is missing.

Why is it that some are so quick to criticize those who have dared to speak well of the recently deceased Pope? From Rev. Billy Graham, President Bush, our own Prime Minister, conservative Baptists, to the editors of Challenge weekly; all are criticized for their comments.

Now some of the points made in this particular article certainly still need to be made today but it's all a little one-sided. Isn't there anything good we can say about the Roman Catholic Church? Do we always have to stand in judgment of everyone who thinks different than we do? Are all in the

Synod on the World Wide Web

To follow what's happening at Synod 2005, this year being held from September 3rd - 9th at the Reformed Church of Hamilton, you can visit <http://synod.rcnz.org.nz>

You will find downloadable copies of all Synod reports, as well as a mailing list as with our previous Synod for news and updates.

Roman Catholic Church lost for all eternity [shudder the thought]? Is it not true that the Roman Catholic Church has been in the past and continues to be outspoken about some of the very things that also concern us? For instance, their view on marriage, abortion, civil unions, homosexuality and other moral and ethical issues we readily applaud.

Of course, Br Milne is right when he mentions that the Roman Catholic System of Doctrine doesn't save anyone. However, are we then to infer that the Reformed System of Doctrine does? If that is the case then we would be sadly mistaken. Please understand, I am not trying to drive a wedge between our doctrines / confessions and Scripture. On the contrary, we believe that our creeds and confessions are a faithful summary of what Scripture teaches. That is why we are ministers of the gospel in the reformed churches.

However, if we are to infer that our doctrines can save people, then we have become Roman Catholic, perhaps not in practice, but certainly in words. For then we are saying that our precious reformational solos of "Christ alone" and "Scripture alone" is not sufficient, but Christ or Scripture **and** our reformed system of Doctrine are necessary to be saved. May that never be for if we go down that road than what we are actually saying is that the Reformed Church is the only true church and I dare say that none of us need to be reminded that Christ's Church is far wider than just the RCNZ.

So what shall we say about the recently elected Benedict XVI? Shall we also criticize him from day one?

I point your readers to an article by Peter Jones [well known author of "The Empire Strikes Back" and others] in the highly regarded *Christian Renewal* magazine¹.

"For Bible believers, his [Ratzinger] courageous positions, made in the light of a deep and informed commitment to biblical theism, have created a bulwark against rising world paganism... This very powerful ecclesiastical figure, even then the No. 2 in the Vatican hierarchy, warmly received us, an unimpressive group of French orthodox Protestant/Reformed theologians, for two hours. His critique of Bultmann was superb. We Protestants then took an hour to present the case for orthodox Protestant theology. Cardinal Ratzinger listened with rapt attention. Our time together was not a casual, nor perfunctory "audience," but a genuine theological exchange.

I was impressed by his intellect,... and by his theological wisdom and by his openness to biblical theology. As we left, we gave him

a bound copy of Calvin's Institutes, and he graciously accepted my article on the apostle Paul as the last apostle. Clearly my article did not change his mind about the papacy, but I have it on good authority that he has been reading the copy of Calvin's Institutes.... When Ratzinger said in his homily at a pre-conclave Mass in St. Peter's, denouncing the essence of paganism: "We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as definitive and has as its highest value one's own ego and one's own desires"; When, in his first address from the Vatican balcony he spoke of the "joy in the risen Lord, trusting in his permanent help"; When, in his first papal homily in the Sistine Chapel, addressing all Christian churches, he said: I take this opportunity to send all of them my most cordial greetings in Christ, the only Lord of all"; I did think: "That's the same Ratzinger I met for those two hours seventeen years ago..."

...How do Protestants respond, seeing that Rome often masks the pure Gospel of grace and sometimes places Christ behind Mary and even the Pope? The massive glistening white marble statue of Mary on a hill dominates the city of Santiago, Chile, with the head of the Serpent under her feet, while a small figure of Christ on a little cross below, to the left, is hardly visible...

...How do we respond? This morning Robert Godfrey, historian and President of Westminster Seminary in California (where I am adjunct professor and scholar in residence), ended our daily chapel by announcing the name of the new pope. He then did something few Protestants do. He prayed that the Spirit might lead Benedict XVI into a deeper and fuller understanding of Scripture and the Gospel.

Knowing what I learned about this man in that short but meaningful encounter, surely this prayer is not in vain.

When I read this article by Peter Jones, I thought to myself, "What a gracious way of writing about someone whose understanding of the Christian faith and system of doctrine you don't see eye to eye with." Peter Jones lovingly mentions those things with which we disagree, yet he is able to refrain from damning personal judgment. And what a lovely prayer that Robert Godfrey prayed, that this new Pope will be led "into a deeper and fuller understanding of Scripture and the Gospel."

Why are we in the Reformed church? Some of us have little say, for we are brought by our parents and what a privilege and blessing. However, some of us do have a choice. The reason why I am in the Reformed Church



is because God in his grace has brought me here and I love our understanding of the Christian faith and believe it to be biblical. I love the way our confessions reflect Scripture's teaching and I wholeheartedly adhere to them. I also adhere to the reformational solos – Christ alone, Scripture alone, Faith alone and last but not least, Grace alone, the one that is strangely missing from "What was the Reformation about" article. Perhaps if we focus on that missing one a bit more, we will be less critical with our pens and keyboards and bring ourselves to pray the prayer that Robert Godfrey prayed for those with whom we do not see eye to eye.

Finally, in all of this, let us never forget the essence of the gospel: that God's desire is that sinners repent and turn to His Son for their only salvation. May that be the driving conviction that drives our pens and keyboards as well as drives us to our knees in prayer. Perhaps if we cannot find the love of God in Christ for sinners in what we write, or if we cannot find anything good to write about others but only sit in judgment, then it may be better if we don't write anymore but leave it to others who can. May the Lord keep his Bride pure and faithful and extend his kingdom on earth.

Rev. John Zuidema

Reformed Church of Foxton.

¹ Peter Jones, "Habemus Papum" *Christian Renewal*, May 11 2005.

Reply

In reflecting on the Rev. Zuidema's letter a number of aspects came to mind:

1) The Rev. Milne's article, "What was the

Reformation about?" is clearly a tonic to everything else we have seen and heard and read regarding the death of Pope John Paul II. It provided a necessary balance to the plethora of material we have had on how great he was, etc;

- 2) The Rev. G. Milne in his article may well fail the criteria "to defend our faith in a positive, loving, caring and gracious manner." But then he is in good company. I'm quite sure the true prophets of the Old Testament and the true apostles of the New Testament would fail this test, too. For while those men were divinely commissioned to preach to the lost and wandering, when there is error in the church, and especially amongst church leaders, they are very negative about it;
- 3) The Reformed System of Doctrine is not an alternative amongst a huge smorgasbord of Christian beliefs today. It is

the Scriptural doctrine that as members we profess in our public Profession of Faith and as office bearers we affirm in the Form of Subscription. It is because it is Scriptural that it saves people. No where did the Rev. Milne deny that there were Christians in the Roman Catholic church. He did clearly, though, show how it teaches wrong doctrine and so leads her people away from the gospel;

- 4) If the Cardinal Ratzinger listened in rapt attention some seventeen years before and received a copy of Calvin's 'Institutes', which he apparently read, he has heard the gospel. He is no misguided seeker stumbling down a wrong alleyway in his desire to faithfully follow the Messiah; here is the leader of a huge denomination continuing to lead millions away from the grace found alone in Jesus Christ;
- 5) The Rev. Zuidema says that some of us

have little say about being in Reformed churches. Then he differentiates them from those who have a choice. The former are brought in by their parents and the latter by the grace of God. I don't believe we teach or practice this;

- 6) Yes, let's not forget the essence of the gospel: "God's desire is that sinners repent and turn to His Son for their only salvation," This is why the prayer Robert Godfrey ought to have prayed (as Rev. Zuidema quoted it) is that the new pope become converted. And if the Spirit has already so worked in his heart then we pray that he either work to truly reform the Roman Catholic church according to God's Word or himself join a faithful church. Now, that would be a testimony to God's grace!

Home mission in focus

Hans Vaatstra

Christianity Explored

A new evangelism tool enjoying considerable popularity is Christianity Explored (C.Ex.), produced by Rico Tice, the associate pastor of All Souls Church in London and Barry Cooper. Like the well known, but older "Christianity Explained" (Michael Bennett, Qld., 1979) C.Ex. is based on the gospel of Mark and is primarily about Jesus Christ and the Christian life. However, while Christianity Explained is made up of six one hour sessions C.Ex. is a 14 session course which looks at the Gospel of Mark in greater depth and explores other themes including the Church, the Holy Spirit, Prayer and the Bible. The course runs like this:

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Jesus- who is he?

Week 3: Jesus- why did he come?

Week 4: Jesus- His death.

Week 5: What is grace?

Week 6: Jesus His resurrection.

Exploring the Christian life- weekend away or day away: The Church, The Holy Spirit, Prayer, The Bible.

Week 7: What is a Christian?

Week 8: Continuing as a Christian

Week 9: Choices- King Herod

Week 10: Choices- James, John and Bartimaeus.

The 14 talks listed above are all on video which is a great help to those who may not have much time for preparation. C.Ex. is designed to introduce people to Christianity in a non threatening way and can be run for 5 people or 50. It can also be used in a variety of different settings such as; alongside a preparation course for marriage;

CHRISTIANITY EXPLORED

for interested parents involved in a local playgroup; in prison or a university setting. If you use the videos the course can even be used one to one.

Throughout the course participants are encouraged to study the Book of Mark and explore it thoroughly on their own. The aim is to help people answer three questions that

cut to the heart of Christianity: Who was Jesus? Why did Jesus come? What does Jesus demand of those who follow Him? The course also explores the problem of sin. Participants are shown what Jesus has to say about the human heart, God's wrath, judgment and hell so that the wonder of God's unmerited love can be properly considered. Participants are also given ample time to consider the cost of following Jesus.

C.Ex. can also be run along similar lines to Alpha, commencing with a meal, followed by a review of the previous weeks topic and then the next topic. Once again, the presenter does have the option of running the course 'live' or using the videos supplied.

Materials required include a study guide for each participant, leaders edition, plus a copy of the "How to Run the Course" booklet and if you prefer to run the course with videos, the video series. Publicity

materials such as posters, invitations and logos may also be downloaded from the C.Ex. website. For further information contact SU Wholesale, PO Box 760 Newtown, Wellington or check out the Christianity Explored web page.

A feminine focus

Disappointed with Life?

Paul Tripp's "Lost in the Middle: Midlife and the Grace of God"

Sally Davey

Don't be mistaken – this book is not a joke, something to give your friends when they turn 40, to tease them about the onset of middle age. It is a book for anyone who has ever been disappointed that life hasn't turned out like they expected – or hoped. Is that you? Have you grown up picturing yourself doing this or that by the age you are now, only to find that health difficulties, educational or career failure, lack of financial success or family turmoil have robbed you of the rosy picture you once had for yourself at age 25, 35, 45 – or 75? I could have done with this book when I was struggling with the prospect of childlessness in my early 30s. Perhaps you could use it now – facing a big blow to your health in your 20s; redundancy in your 40s; or the continued, hard-hearted rebellion of your children in your 60s? Tripp's book, a profound blessing like all his others, points us to the big themes of Scripture and the hope that the grace of God brings us.

The focus on youth

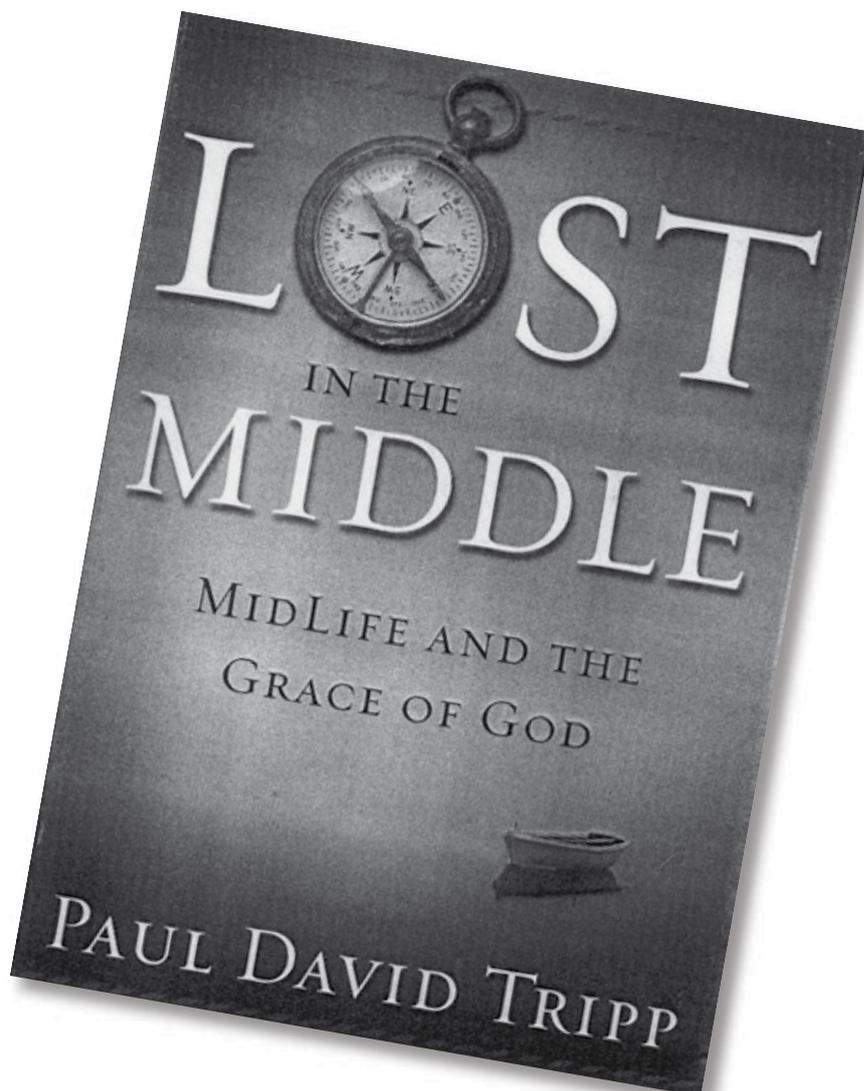
Our culture is geared towards youth, and towards what we can achieve – and enjoy – in the vigour of our youth. The loss of youthful looks and the waning of youthful energy is grievous to us. We dread its coming, and deny the earliest signs of it. We somehow have unrealistic dreams of what we will achieve in the period before, say, 35 or 40; and view the years after 45 – or certainly 50 – as a grey blur of "past it" or "too late". The exciting things of life: romance, marriage, having children, getting going in a stimulating and rewarding career, are all supposed to happen in these early years of adulthood. It's young adulthood that really seems to matter, in most people's eyes. Well, there is a certain truth in this, from a Biblical point of view. The choices we make and the life-habits we establish in our

younger days do have a big bearing on the direction our lives take. Serious sins committed, and bad decisions made in our youth take a lot of undoing in the decades to come. Sometimes we slip into very bad habits as a young person: we neglect Bible reading and prayer, we give too much time to our work, we fail to become well-acquainted with good teaching, we don't instruct our children properly. Perhaps we even know more about what happens on *Shortland Street* than we do about the content of Paul's epistles. We fall in love, far too much, with the things of this world. Materialism has softened and slackened evangelical Christians all over the western world. Perhaps we have been spared some of the worst excesses – we are not as wealthy as our American or Australian brethren, and do not face all of their temptations – but yet we have still become full and denied God and said, "Who is the Lord?" (Proverbs 30:9) The thing is, our

sins have consequences, and their results compound. Middle age with its discouragements and disappointments arrives, and we find ourselves without the spiritual resources to deal with what has come home to roost. Midlife, in other words, is a shock. But it is God's big wake-up call.

The reality of midlife

At least, that is how Paul Tripp sees it, and I think he is absolutely right. In this book he sketches with considerable insight what happens when people experience the pangs of midlife. And he provides a solid, reformed Biblical framework, both for making sense of what happens, and for how to think and act when the sting of this, or any similar disappointment, hits. The book is full of the stories of Christians who are going through these kinds of experiences, and are excellent illustrations of what he is telling us. Tripp is a full-time Biblical counselor at the Christian



Counseling and Educational Foundation in Philadelphia (originally founded by Jay Adams), and many years' experience helping people through these kinds of problems is behind everything he says.

There is a common theme in most midlife "crises." Something happens to shock people into an awareness of what they have done over the years to sow the harvest they are now reaping. Perhaps a mother has her last child leave home – and suddenly, her whole focus in life has gone. She has lived for her children, and now they are all scattered. A man who has lived for his work, climbing the career ladder, his evening hours spent at meetings or on the phone with customers. He has never found the time know God better. Suddenly he has a stroke at 50 and finds he lacks the spiritual resources to deal with the crisis. A woman who loves her work, is totally engrossed in the exhilaration of a professional career, socialising with her workmates, is seldom to be seen at church activities and never in Christian works of service, turns 40. "Do I want to be single?" She asks. But young men at church were never interesting enough, and somehow she could never bring herself to get serious about a non-Christian. "It's too late..." she sighs as she looks around her chic townhouse and remembers all her girlhood friends, married with teenaged children. "What have I been living for?.." Angst sets in.

The thing is that a sudden shock of the kinds described above jolts us to face reality – the spiritual reality of where we are now, and causes us to consider where we have gone wrong. Often, regret sets in. Forced to see ourselves more realistically than we may have done for years, we begin to see our sin in sharper focus. It is easy to become totally discouraged at this point, and spiral downwards into dispirited inaction. Or we may try and shift the blame: "If only I'd had a more patient husband, I wouldn't have been tempted to be such an angry person myself." "If only we'd had a bit more money, we could have had a bigger house and then there wouldn't have been so many family arguments..." We may even become bitter at our circumstances, and envy those who seemed to have it so easy; for whom life has shone with one success after another: children who did well at school, who got good jobs and who love the Lord; good incomes and nice homes; lots of grandchildren who live nearby; recognition and influence in the church – the list goes on. We may become angry with the people around us – or withdrawn and cynical. Often we give up on what could have been useful participation in

church ministries. (We can hide this by giving others the impression we've done it for so many years it's time for a break, time to give younger people a turn – and so on). We may let go godly habits of Bible study and prayer, entertain theological doubts, and generally give ear to the notion the God has given us somewhat of a raw deal in life. These are the kinds of ways we might be tempted to respond to the feelings of suffering a big disappointment, midlife or otherwise, brings into our consciousness.

A wake-up call

But the wonderful thing about such moments is that they give us opportunity to wake up, and take stock. They are God-given moments of hope. This is how Tripp urges us to see them. He helps us along, taking our arm and leading us on a conducted tour of the landscape of our lives. But he does this armed with the tremendous power of the Scriptures to show us our sin – and the path to repentance, forgiveness and rebuilding so that we can, as he puts it, sow new seed and have another harvest. It all depends, he stresses, on how well we do the necessary archeological digging in our lives, to discover what it is there in our hearts that has produced such a disappointing harvest so far.

He shows us the kinds of golden calves we are inclined to manufacture, and worship. We all tend to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator; and to substitute the physical for the spiritual. We prefer the immediate, the visible, the tangible – a good bank balance, nice restaurants, a better car and a lovely home – to sanctifying, effort-requiring Bible study, a diet of solid theological reading, self-sacrificing service to unattractive and needy people, or to simply "doing without" in order to further the spread of the gospel by whatever means. We use the good things that God has given us to build our own personal golden calves. What are our particular idols? Our children? Our relatives? Our sport, our boating trips, prestigious-model car, our job or our business? Is it status among our friends, a youthful appearance, or influence in the church – honour among men? But there is hope! If God has gotten our attention through some means (perhaps the removal of your golden calf) He will also enable you to repent, to melt down that calf, and begin the process of replacing it with Himself.

The basic things

There are some other things Tripp tells us, also basic to the "big picture" of Scripture. For one thing, we need to re-

member who, and Whose, we are. We are not our success, or our relationships, or our righteousness, or our possessions. We are sinful creatures, saved by grace, and consequently children of our Father in heaven. This means thinking differently, and acting differently. It means making different decisions, choosing different ways to spend our money and use our time. It means spending more time with some people and less time with others; and it means having an entirely different attitude to the things we do with, and for people. We no longer need to spend valuable energy and resources on impressing others. We will no longer expect the wrong things, even the impossible, from our husbands. We will no longer see them as existing to make us feel good, to provide the kind of love and attention only God Himself can give. We will serve in our church silently, unobtrusively, and be quite happy in that. We won't be expecting the recognition or praise of anyone else. Why worry, when God sees all we do? And given what He Himself has done for us, it is the least we can do for Him. Having a better realization of our vertical, spiritual identity sets us free from the crippling slavery of a horizontal, man-pleasing identity.

The bigger picture

Further, and quite simply, Tripp reminds us that the Scriptures keep us going, and on the right track, by means of the glimpses they give us of eternity. We, who are God's, do not belong to the here and now: we are pilgrims and strangers in this world, and belong to another, eternally greater. Having a glimpse of the end to which we are headed enables us to understand the middle of our story so much better. We get things wrong when we try and make midlife assessments from the middle of the plot. And certainly, this is the message of the Bible as a whole. Abraham and his descendants "looked for a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:16), and this kept them going through their long wanderings. When writing of Christ's resurrection, and the hope this gives us, Paul reflects that if it were not true, then "we of all men are to be pitied." But the resurrection did happen, and we too will be resurrected. Because of that, death is swallowed up in victory. This being true, we can look forward and press on, "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord our labour is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:54-8). This theme of hope climaxes in triumph in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation given

to the Apostle John. Commentators on this book almost invariably emphasize this. The glimpses of heaven that Revelation gives symbolically are designed to encourage the weary and suffering believer; and this was especially so for its first readers, early Christians about to undergo persecution for their faith. Tripp gets especially enthusiastic when opening up some of these passages for us. Excelling in the use of words (he's a great writer), he is at his most eloquent when he is taking us through some of the scenes of heaven in this book. Commenting on the praise of the four creatures and the twenty-four elders around the throne in Revelation 5 he writes:

"The overwhelming theme of their song of praise to the Lamb is this: 'You are worthy to open the scroll because you *did it*. You shed your precious blood so that you could pur-

chase the redemption of people from every tribe, language and nation... You won! You defeated sin! You gave them freedom from the one thing they could never escape!... Before the foundations of creation were laid down, you devised a plan, and you executed every detail of it. You harnessed nature and exercised authority over every single thing in human history with one goal in mind, the salvation of your people. You did it! You saved each one of your children from sin!'

From the perspective of the completed story, this overwhelming fact dominates their praise: the success of redemption. In eternity, many of the things that seem to matter so much don't matter anymore. The size and luxury of your house doesn't matter anymore. Your physical strength or beauty doesn't matter anymore. Family vacations, cars, clothes, and

bank accounts *do not matter* anymore.

What really matters

Redemption is what matters. God has entered this horribly sin-broken world to redeem lost, rebellious, and self-absorbed people from their slavery to everything else but him. And he has welcomed them into citizenship in his kingdom of glory forever and ever. This is what matters! If you are one of God's children, this is what he has been working on all along. It is the project that God has been unwilling to leave incomplete. It is the one thing for which this fallen world has groaned for century after century."

Take a look at the great story of redemption that runs throughout the Bible. As Paul Tripp says, it "tells you everything you need to know about midlife crisis."

Take him at his word.

Mission in focus

Janice Reid

A letter from Surinam

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from all of us in Surinam in the precious and glorious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We were asked to write an article about the mission work to which the Lord has called us in Surinam. Up to 1975 Surinam was a Dutch colony. Tucked in between English Guyana to the west and French Guyana to the east, on the north coast of South-America, it is a tropical country, receiving on average about 100 inches of rain each year with very high humidity. With the importation of South African slaves hundreds of years ago, the influx of contract workers from the East Indies, and the aboriginal people of Surinam, we live in a multicultural country. The present government seems to be able to keep the "peace" among all these cultures, which is a singular achievement! The official language in Surinam is Dutch, the social language is Sranan Tongo (Surinam Tongue), and English is widely understood and spoken by many. The population of Surinam is about 450,

000, which is not much for a country four times as big as the Netherlands.

My name is Gerry Mynders, my wife's name is Marja, our youngest son is Gerry jr., and our youngest daughter is Marlinda. We came to Surinam late August 2003. We left behind 3 married children, a son, and 8 grandchildren in Canada, where we have lived for 29 years. Marja and I were born and raised in the Netherlands. In 1974 we and our first child immigrated to Canada. Having worked in construction until 1994, I began to study at Redeemer College and University, after which I did my seminary training at Heritage Theological Seminary. Early 2002 we were approached to take over this mission work of the OPC (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) in Surinam. Marja and I visited the work in July 2002, and accepted the call soon thereafter. In June 2003 I was ordained as missionary/evangelist by the Presbytery of Michigan and Ontario.

Four mission works

We have four missionary works to take care of in Surinam and want to write something of each of them. First there is the Reformatie Kerk in the capital city Paramaribo. We have a Dutch worship service each Sunday at 5pm. After the service there is Sunday school for the children and a Sermon discussion for the older ones. Marja takes care of the Sunday school, the Sermon discussion is led by Ken Singh and myself. Brother Ken Singh studies

theology, is 36 years old, married to Jenny, and they have two lovely children, Andrew and Cara. Reformatie Kerk is a small mission church, some of its members with their children moved back to the interior due to housing problems and finances. Besides our family, most people of Reformatie Kerk are former Hindustan of English Guyana.

The next work of which we want to write is the Klein Powakka Presbyteriaanse Kerk. This mission church is located south of Paramaribo in the beginning of the interior of Surinam, where the Arawak Indians live.



The people of Klein Powakka church are all coming from the Roman Catholic church. On Sundays we have a worship service at 9am. Brother Ken comes along on Sunday, and while we make the church ready, he picks up a number of people from Groot Powakka (about 14 km down the road). After the worship service Marja leads the Sunday school, Ken leads the Sermon discussion, and I take care of the Catechism class.

We also work in the Esther Hof leprosy colony, in Paramaribo. Most residents of this colony are older folks, many of them missing parts of their legs, arms, feet, or hands, due to leprosy. Three times a month someone comes to lead a church service. The first Sunday of the month we are there, on the second Sunday the Evangelical Brother Congregation (Moravian or Herrnhutters) are there, and on the fourth Sunday the Roman Catholic church have a service at Esther Hof. The people are very appreciative and thankful for the work we do there. Last year we had 3 volunteer mission workers from Canada, who worked for the summer months at Esther Hof to help these people with all kinds of activities. Marja helps out in Esther Hof when the people come together for prayer, Bible reading, singing, and other activities such as taking them for a tour. Many of these people are wheelchair-bound, some are blind due to wrong medication years ago, but all of them are physically affected by leprosy. It is amazing to see one of these people, with very twisted fingers,

nonetheless playing the organ on Sunday.

The fourth work in which we are involved is having sound Reformed/Presbyterian professors coming to Surinam to instruct Surinam students in theology. Even though the country has been under Dutch influence for hundreds of years, the Dutch people have failed to bring Reformed theology to this country. However, by God's grace a door has opened for true Biblical teaching, and this open door needs to be preserved. Presently we are setting up a theological library at the Reformatie Kerk where students may come to study. It is not always safe to lend books, so the rule is that the students may read in the library, or can make photocopies when needed. There will also be computer access for the students. This is a wonderful opportunity for the spread of the true gospel.

Last year November we had Dr. J.C. Whytock of Canada teaching two courses at the Reformatie Kerk, "Missions" and "Systematic Theology." This coming November we hope to welcome again Dr. Whytock as he plans to come to teach on the Book of Acts. Last February Dr. J. van Bruggen of the Netherlands came to teach a "Homiletics" course at Reformatie Kerk. He was invited by ETS (Evangelical School of Theology) with whom we work closely. It is also gratifying to see that these classes are attended by students from all kinds of denominations, such as: The Brethren, Full-Gospel (Pentecostal), Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Moravian (Herrnhutters), and

others. What is even more amazing is that sound Reformed/Presbyterian professors are instructing those students!

Surinam's religious situation

As you can understand, we are a busy family, having much work laid upon our shoulders. The most important work in this country is the preaching of the Word of God and theological training. Surinam is saturated with Pentecostalism. As of old, the Roman Catholic Church cares only about numbers and not teaching; the result being that superstition and the worship of evil spirits is rampant in RC mission churches! Biblical teaching is desperately needed. Please pray that the Lord will work with His Spirit in the hearts of all the students so that they may understand truly what the Word is saying; and that the instructions of foreign professors may be blessed to their souls so that they may pass it on to those to whom they minister. Pray for real conversions, especially among the Arawak Indians, and that the Lord would call men from this culture to be trained and equipped for Gospel ministry, so that they may be a blessing to their own culture. Indeed, there is a great need for God to raise up men from each culture to preach the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ the Lord to their own people. Pray for the mission churches, that the Lord will open the hearts of the parents and children so that the good seed of the word may grow up to bear fruit to God's glory alone.



The Mynders' family

Most people in Surinam come to mission churches to seek financial betterment. The religious statistics of Surinam state that almost 50% of the inhabitants profess to be Christians, but "few know much of a personal faith in Christ and Christian belief is often mixed with spiritism." Let us pray that they may, by grace, receive the unspeakable gift of Jesus Christ in their lives. Pray for the folks in Esther Hof. Many attend the worship services, yet not all know Christ as their Savior. Pray for revival, so that all the churches will return to the Word of God, their members seeking to live upright and holy lives before God.

Much prayer is needed for this country's church leaders who are seeking unity as churches so as to shine forth as servants of Christ in this dark, sinful country. They need to appreciate that unity can be found only when there is true unity in and through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pray that we would be enabled to fulfil the Great Commission of Matthew 28, to make disciples of all nations, Surinam as well as New Zealand. Are you involved in this beautiful task? If so, then you also know about the glorious promise connected to it, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Our experience is that mission work can only be effective through God the Father, with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We have no wisdom or any strength in ourselves! Praise be to God's glorious name, and let Him receive all the honor and glory!

The Mynders' in Surinam

MIF prayer notes

1) This month *Janice Reid* is travelling around the South Island churches, sharing news of her work, teaching English in a restricted country of Asia. Please pray for her health and strength, and also for safe travel back to her country of ministry. Pray for effective settling into that country for a second year of service, and that she would quickly re-establish contact with the people to whom she has been ministering in the past.

2) *Wally and Jeannette Hagoort* says: "I will be in and out of (name of town) for the next 2 months or so. Please remember the leadership team here, especially the young leaders who are new in the faith, as they deal with temptations and opposition. We have a man from our church in a nearby small

village. The latest report is that there are 15 or so new brothers and sisters up there with him. Please remember him and this new small congregation and the many others like it scattered across this country."

3) Please pray for **Wally and Jeannette Hagoort** and their fellow Reformed Missionaries, as they plan and prepare to establish a Leadership Training Centre in Papua New Guinea. Ask the Lord to provide a suitable

property, the necessary funding and a blessing upon this development.

4) **Janice Reid** continues her work of training Christian radio announcers in developing nations. Please pray especially for the staff of FEBC's Family Radio in Phnom Penh, and the Tabqha team in Batam; for God's guidance as they reach out to their communities with the news of Life.

Henry Murray School for the Deaf
P.O. Morgenster
MASVINGO
Zimbabwe

17 June 2005

Dear Sir

RE: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF DONATION ASSEMBLED IN NEW ZEALAND.

I am writing this letter to acknowledge receipt of US\$11, 367.34 translating to Z\$102 306 060 donation by the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. On behalf of the staff and the deaf children who benefited from the fund, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the National Diaconate Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand for the generous donation. The donation goes a long way towards the financial assistance of those families which would have been unable to send their deaf children to school. The money was used to pay school fees for 23 children who come from very poor families. These children would not have been at school had it not been for the generous donation you have availed to them. The gesture has also helped to bring both the children and their families closer to the Almighty God. We

hope our good Lord will continue to work through the Christian Community in New Zealand to uplift the lives of the children at Henry Murray School for the Deaf.

The school is charging Z\$1 500 000-00 per child per term as school fees for the year 2005. The fees for the whole year are Z\$4 500 000-00.

For the second year running, our community at Henry Murray School are excited that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have continued to financially assist us. You have relieved the immense pressure which the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe was enduring. Thank you so much. The situation this year is that 20% of the student population have managed to pay school fees and the rest have failed. The situation has been worsened by the economic down turn and the drought experienced in Zimbabwe this year.

The good Lord should keep on blessing you for the good work you are doing for the people of God around the country. Please keep on praying for us so that we continue with the service of the Lord at this school and in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe.

Yours in Christ,
Ishmael Chigumo.
HEADMASTER

Children in focus



Sonshine Korner



Synthetic Jewels:

Read: Matthew 7:21-23

Alicia had looked forward to spending part of her summer vacation with her aunt in Colorado. Not only was Aunt Dee her very favourite aunt, but she owned a jewellery store, and Alicia loved to roam around, looking at all the beautiful gems.

"Is that a ruby?" Alicia asked the first day she visited the store. She pointed to a ring in the display case. "It looks like the one you gave Mom for her birthday."

"It's not exactly the same," Aunt Dee replied, taking it out and handing it to her. "Your mother's is the real thing; this one is synthetic."

Alicia looked at the ring carefully. "Synthetic?" she asked. "I'm not sure what that means."

Aunt Dee laughed. "Well, I guess you could call it a fake; it's simply not a real ruby-it's man-made," she explained. "It looks very much like a ruby, but it costs a lot less."

"Lots of people could be fooled," commented Alicia, as she handed the ring back to her aunt.

Aunt Dee nodded. "Many people wouldn't be able to tell the difference, but a trained eye can tell that it's not the real thing," she said. After a moment she asked, "Did you know that there are even synthetic Christians?"

"Synthetic Christians?" Alicia repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean people who look like Christians to us, but they aren't really born again," explained Aunt Dee. "There hasn't been a change inside. They're able to fool a lot of people I'm afraid they sometimes even fool themselves, but actually, they're fakes. Jesus talked about people who even call Him 'Lord' but don't really know Him at all. We can't always tell who truly knows God and who's faking it, but God knows."

Alicia nodded thoughtfully. "I wouldn't mind having a synthetic ruby or other gem," she said, "but I'm awfully glad I'm a real Christian and not just a fake. I'm thankful Jesus died for me and that He is my Savior. I know He forgave my sins and made me His child!"

MEMORY VERSE:

"The Lord is good, . . . He cares for those who trust in Him." Nahum 1:7

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Are you a genuine Christian? How do you know? Do you think it's because your parents are Christians? Or because you live a "good" life

and do all the things you see other Christians do like attend church, read your Bible, do nice things, even pray? Those things don't make you a Christian. The Holy Spirit has to work in your heart so that you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You have to be born again (John3:3). Pray about it today.



Synthetic Jewels Word Find:

Find the words from the list below hidden in the puzzle. They are in all directions.

Happy hunting! 😊

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H S Y P Z F E E Q H V G P X M G U D T U
J G J R E A L V T B O Q O S N S L K L N
W R E M K C E D E I D H C O R J S L R R
H E W K G M I R A C L E S E D M G N I F
C K E Y S E H P O R P B O T A L K E E W
H A L A R T N R F R S D S N D D I L M Z
U F L I S E E N D O L T M U D S B F R S
R C E U Y H A L B I A A J B O I B O E L
C Y R A T H I D V X D Q H S B I I N X O
H T Y A U H T E W E C X Y N Y V C A Z R
E P F M C Y O M O H Z N I G A A O E P D
X A X V K Z Z V R Z T A N S Y I R K R I
R R J F H T C I K H G I I O I N P P A P
U E K H U H S I E A R I W E H T T A M S
B N K X A T N T N A P E R S O N A L V S
Y T A N I G I R O Y D O Q T G B W D F N
H S G A D C O N E V A E H K Q Y S E P I
A E N O U B F A I R O C E G V N E M W S
D S M E T J E S U S C H R I S T R O G B
U O E V A G R O F D E L O O F T A N A Q
R M L O O K L I K E G M J F Y A C S P Y
    
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- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| BIBLE | FAKE | LOOK LIKE | PROPHECY |
| BORN AGAIN | FATHER | LORD | READ |
| CARES | FOOLED | MAN MADE | REAL |
| CHANGED | FORGAVE | MATTHEW | RING |
| CHILD | GEMS | MIRACLES | RUBY |
| CHRISTIANS | GOOD LIFE | NAHAM | SAVIOR |
| CHURCH | HEAVEN | PARENTS | SINS |
| DEMONS | JESUS CHRIST | PERSONAL | SYNTHETIC |
| DIED | JEWELLERY | PRAY | TRUST |
| EVILDOERS | KINGDOM | PRECIOUS | WILL |



Report on the Banner of Truth Conference, Pennsylvania, 2005

Leo de Vos

Sitting in my study now, it is hard to believe that just a few weeks ago I was cruising south down State Highway 15 beside the Susquehanna River from Toronto, Ontario to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in order to attend the Banner of Truth Conference. Some of you might recognise the Susquehanna from the biography of Jonathan Edwards, for it was somewhere beside this river that he spent a winter preaching to the Indians and gasping for breath in a smoky tepee.

This was at least the 8th pilgrimage I have made to attend the Banner of Truth Conference in Pennsylvania. The name of this organisation may be known to some of you from the books or magazine you own or take

it, and is only temporary. And God promises that there is grace sufficient.

Edward Donnelly, professor of New Testament language and literature and College Principal at Reformed Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland, then addressed us powerfully on preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Among six principles on this topic, he urged us to explore the parallels and to look for the proper typology. He then stated, "We are terrified of seeing Christ where He isn't. But the greater danger is to miss Him where He is!" His last point was that we must love the Person of Christ. Though Spurgeon had some major exegetical failings and flaws in his historical-redemptive method, his love for Christ shines through in all his preaching. Later in applying his principles by preaching

I could not help thinking—he is surely not a Dutch husband!)

Stuart Olyott, who exercises an itinerant ministry among Welsh pastors and churches in difficulty, demonstrated preaching the gospel in simplicity to all members of the church including the lambs. His dry sense of humour was always shining through somewhere. When asked how long we should preach, he implied that ten minutes seemed too long from some ministers!

I would like to encourage a few more of our own ministers to attend the Banner of Truth Conference. Here are a few benefits that I have experienced at each conference. The first is the wonderful fellowship in meeting other believers from a variety of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. I



out of your church library. Banner of Truth was formed in 1957 to reprint experiential, Calvinistic literature, mainly authored by Puritans. (A good source of information on the Banner is its website.) An old joke at Banner Conferences is that you can't meet any Banner of Truth authors for they are all dead! Those familiar with good books will know that the Banner is now publishing many excellent contemporary authors like Sinclair Ferguson and Iain Murray. The Conference treats one to preachers who are indeed alive, and who preach as dying men to dying men!

The opening Conference sermon was preached by David Campbell of the Carlisle Grace Reformed Baptist Church on 2 Corinthians 12:9 about Paul's thorn in the flesh. That God sends us thorns in the flesh (various trials) to humble us in our ministries and to draw us nearer to Himself was balm to the weary souls of the 175 ministers and elders at the conference. The painful discipline of trials is intended for our good, must be necessary or God would not send

on Psalm 102, Donnelly gave us this choice line: "Though eternity is in the heart, cholesterol is in the veins!"

Joey Pipa, who should by now be well known to us in New Zealand, without notes, powerfully preached some excellent sermons on Colossians. From the first verses of Colossians chapter three, we were exhorted to seek conformity with Christ, and were shown that God has given us the power to do so. In urging us to seek the things that are above (Colossians 3:1ff) he asked us how we began our day—with Christ or with the Internet, the stock market, or the newspaper. At one point, Dr. Pipa said that it was likely that some at the Conference were addicted to Internet pornography. He urged anyone so ensnared to repent!

Preaching on Colossians 4 which reminds husbands of their responsibilities, Dr. Pipa asked what they should do when husband and wife cannot agree on an indifferent matter. Why not love your wife in such a way that you give in to her preference? (At that

find this helps us from being too narrow in a sectarian sense, or from thinking that we are the only field of God's work. Plenty of time is allocated to meet others. A second benefit is the stacks of excellent books with discounts from 40 to 80 per cent. The Air New Zealand people checked my luggage and fortunately I could max out with 32 kilos in both bags! A final benefit is the model of ministry presented to us. Few of us in New Zealand have opportunity to hear some very gifted preaching from such proven men. At the Banner Conference, being at the receiving end of this preaching and teaching is a rich blessing. For those who would find it difficult to attend such a Conference in America, the Banner of Truth hosts a conference every two years in Sydney. I hope I have given you a desire to attend the Sydney Conference this February. One advantage of Sydney is that you can attend with your wife. In America the conference is limited to men only.

When “Win” is Sin!

Sjirk Bajema

You cannot avoid it in today's world. From the television commercials, the magazine advertisements, through to purchasing your petrol and right down to the sticker on your everyday household groceries, the message is constantly there: Win!

And what you can win is almost anything! It's so easy! (Another message.) You just text your details to a number, fill in the coupon, or slash the card.

It's well proven that many are not shopping today on the basis of balancing the household budget but on what

chances they have to win things. It's those who decline the free scratchie or the invitation to put your receipt in the lucky draw box who are somehow regarded as the alien. Because they tell you: What have you got to lose!

Ah, a catchy phrase. For it could well be that you don't lose anything financially. Entry was free. But that's only materially - spiritually it's a whole different story. Then we have indeed lost something - something that matters for everything. You see, what someone does by first entertaining the idea of winning a prize like that and then actually doing what's involved in entering such a

draw is to essentially not accept the place where God has put them.

This is a strong accusation. But why would you want to have something which is not ordinarily yours? Charles Spurgeon makes the scriptural point that each of us needs to accept our station in life - the place where God has put us. He wrote: “The place of our habitation is fixed, and we are not to remove from it out of whim and caprice, but seek to serve the Lord in it, by being a blessing among whom we reside.” It's by seeing that we have a divine purpose behind where we are that we actually bring the divine into everyday life. To use a colloquial expression: Then it's not pie in the sky - it's the sky in the pie!

We know that those who get rich quickly by winning such things as lotto are not really happy. Many end up poorer than what they were before they won the big draw. They thought that it would change their lives but underneath they weren't changed at all - they were still the same.

How different that is to those who have godly contentment. While they may struggle with life this side of heaven, including being battered by 'luck', they have true inner peace. They know that in works of faith they may count on Jesus' fellowship. Why look for Lady Luck when we have the Lord Jesus? As Spurgeon further says, “It is when we are in His work that we may reckon upon His smile.”

So let's show that we leave nothing to chance. And when they ask why we don't, tell them about the treasure you have in heaven. That's the treasure they can have too. The treasure that shines in who we are and through what we are doing - here and now!

