

faith in
focus

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Editorial

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters {them.} {He flees} because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock {with} one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life."
John 10:11-17

There isn't a day that goes by, that we don't hear about the vast array of people promoting themselves as leaders in life skills, finance, sports, politics, religion, fashion, food, science, etc. You can find an expert/guru for just about anything. They promote themselves via radio, television or internet 24/7. Everyone of them have the solution for success for modern man, and much of what they promote is superficial and self-centred and appealing to the unspiritual of this world.

For the Christian, things are totally different. The One to whom we turn is the eternal Son of God – Jesus Christ – The Good Shepherd. It is so beautifully put in John's Gospel, where Jesus speaks clearly about who He is and what His mission is. He doesn't come to give the quick fix or a tip for success. No, He comes to bring restoration to the whole person, and shows himself to be the true shepherd of Israel.

Our lead articles deal with the theme "The Good Shepherd". Rev Michael Flinn looks at "The Old Testament origins of Christ as the Good Shepherd". Rev Peter Kloosterman looks at "Shepherding God's flock – a question of identification" – the elder as a shepherd, and finally, Rev Andre Holtslag looks at "The Deacon as Shepherd".

Dr Herm Zandman a former member of some of our churches in the RCNZ deals with the ethics of President Obama's restoration of federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. It is interesting reading.

Many thanks to all the contributors who have given so much of their time to make this magazine possible.

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The fewer the words, the better the prayer.

Martin Luther

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

The Good Shepherd (1)

The Old Testament origins of Christ as the Good Shepherd

Dr. Michael Flinn

*"Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock..."*
(Psalm 80:1)

It was a solemn and desperate cry of the heart. The northern kingdom had been conquered by the Assyrians in the 8th century B.C. The vine that God had brought out of Egypt was now open and exposed with no protection so all who pass by could pick its grapes (vss. 8,12). Even worse: The Lord's vine was now cut down, and burned with fire (vs. 16). Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, had fallen. So had the other tribes. Only Benjamin escaped, because that tribe was under the protection of Judah in the south. Psalm 80 therefore asks the God who sits "enthroned between the cherubim" to "shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh" (vss. 1,2). And a refrain calling for deliverance is repeated throughout the psalm: "Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved" (vss. 3,7,19).

Shepherd of Israel

In this context, the psalmist appeals to God as "Shepherd of Israel". Significantly, since it was Joseph's sons who had fallen, he refers back to an image that Jacob had used in the blessing of Joseph in Genesis 49:24. The Lord is the *Shepherd, the Rock of Israel*. For Jacob, this was a precious, comforting, and very personal picture of God. Already in Genesis 48, in another blessing pronounced on Joseph, he had spoken of God as the One who "has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (vs. 15). Jacob's life had been filled with setbacks and challenges. At 130 years of age, he stood before Pharaoh, and testified that his years had been "few and difficult" (literally: few and evil)

and they were not equal to the years of the pilgrimage of his fathers (Gen. 47:9). Nonetheless, through all those years of trouble and suffering, Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac before him, had experienced the protection, guidance and provision of his covenant Lord. All this was summed up in the picture of God as *Shepherd of Israel*.

Covenant people as the sheep

Corresponding to this image of God as Shepherd is that of the covenant people as *the sheep of God's pasture*, a flock that he led out of Egypt through the desert and that he guided safely to the promised land (cf. Ps. 74:1; 78:52-55; 79:13; Jer. 31:10). Moses underwent 40 years of preparation, learning first how to look after and care for the flocks of his father in law, before he was ready to lead the Lord's flock through that same wilderness (cf. Ps. 77:20). And later, David (whose role as king over the Lord's people was also a shepherding one) expressed in the words of Psalm 23 what it meant for Yahweh to be *his* shepherd. This is without doubt the most well known psalm in the Bible, and it is rich with pastoral imagery. Consider the following:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall
not want.*

*He makes me lie down in green
pastures,*

*he leads me beside quiet waters,
he restores my soul.*

*He guides me in paths of right-
eousness for his name's sake.*

What David is saying is that because the Lord is his shepherd, he will not lack for (or be in want of) anything. Why? Because God, as his shepherd, will supply all his needs, in precisely the same way that the faithful shepherd in the ancient world supplied the needs of his sheep.

J. Clinton McCann, Jr. explains:

Contrary to the usual understanding, the sheep/shepherd imagery is not aimed primarily at communicating a sense of peace and tranquility; it is intended rather to say that God keeps the psalmist alive. For a sheep, to "lie down in green pastures" means to have food; to be led "beside still waters" means to have something to drink; to be led in "right paths" means to avoid falling in a hole or to avoid falling prey to wild animals. In short, God "restores my soul" or better translated, God "keeps me alive."¹

It follows that for the psalmist, to know God and to walk with him is to rest in complete security, no matter what challenges or even dangers he is called to face. Verse 4 accordingly affirms that even if he is called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he will fear no evil, for God is with him as *his Shepherd*. The Lord's rod and staff are an ever present reality and a great comfort to him. McCann explains:

The similarity between the Hebrew words for "evil" (ra) and "my shepherd" (roi) is striking and catches the reader's attention. The effect is to pit dramatically the shepherd against the threatening evil. Evil is real, to be sure, but it is not to be feared. The shepherd's provision is "rod" in verse 4 makes sense, of course as a shepherd's implement; however, the word even more frequently signifies royal authority and rule (Gen. 49:10; Judg. 5:14; Ps. 45:7; Isa. 14:5). What is ultimately comforting is the assurance that Yahweh is sovereign and that Yahweh's powerful presence provides for our lives.²

This is even more striking when we consider that David, as the king in Israel,

possessed his own royal sceptre as the symbol of his own power and authority. David had armies at his disposal, and warriors whom he could send out to do battle with his enemies. But in writing this psalm, David affirms that these resources are not the source of his security and well-being. Ultimately, his only security (and the security of the nation of Israel) is the protection, provision and guidance of Yahweh as Shepherd. This becomes more explicit and striking in the final verses of the psalm, in which David expresses that the Lord prepares a table before him in the presence of

his enemies (vs. 5). To say that the Lord prepares a table for him is another way of saying that the Lord makes him lie down in green pastures. It is the role of the shepherd to provide food for the sheep. But here, the meal can be eaten *in the presence of his enemies*. In other words, the enemies are still present, but they are rendered incapable of doing him any harm by the invincible power and authority of the host. And David can rest in complete confidence, even eating a meal in front of those who, without this divine restraint, would almost certainly do him harm.

Given this picture of what it means for the Lord to act as the Shepherd of Israel, it follows that the civil leaders of his people were expected to act in a similar way as God's under-shepherds. Or to put it another way: The people (flock) of Israel were supposed to be able to enjoy a measure of peace, protection, and guidance from their kings (shepherds). And if the opposite were the case, if the flock languished wandered off, or fell prey to enemies, the unfaithful kings (shepherds) would be held accountable by THE Shepherd of Israel. This is precisely the dynamic that the prophet Ezekiel was working with in Ezekiel 34. The prophecy in this chapter is specifically directed against "the shepherds of Israel" (vs.2). Listen to the words of the Shepherd:

'This is what the sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care

of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them' (vss. 2-6).

The Lord therefore declares that he will judge the shepherds, holding them accountable for their failure to care for the sheep (vs. 10). And, he himself will step in and do the work that the unfaithful shepherds failed to do: "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep..." (vss. 11,12 cf. Isaiah 40:10,11; Jeremiah 23:1-8). Interestingly the implications of this are spelled out in language that is strongly reminiscent of Ps. 23:

I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements of the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice (vss. 13-16).

Turning now to the pages of the New Testament, it soon becomes clear that Jesus fulfils the role of Shepherd in a way that none of the Old Testament under-shepherds were ever able to do. McCann explains:

While in no sense a prediction of the Lord's Supper, Jesus is the gracious host who prepares the table that reconciles enemies and offers life (see Mark 14:22-25; in-

“The people (flock) of Israel were supposed to be able to enjoy a measure of peace, protection, and guidance from their kings (shepherds).”



terestingly, Mark 14:27 alludes to Zechariah 13:7, a passage about sheep and shepherds). In a story with obvious eucharistic overtones (Mark 6:30-44, especially vv. 41-42), Jesus feeds people. The crowd is to “sit down ... on the green grass” (vs. 39), a detail that recalls Psalm 23:2. That the allusion is not coincidental is suggested by Mark’s description of Jesus’ motivation for having compassion on the crowd – “they were like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 34). Jesus acts as both host and shepherd.³

Then too we have John 10, a well known passage in which Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd, who calls his sheep by name, leads them out to the pasture and protects them from the wolves. Given the Old Testament characterization of Yahweh as the Shepherd of Israel, this identification is akin to Jesus’ other demonstrations of divinity by calming the storm or forgiving sins. What is even more striking, however, is his declaration that the good shepherd *lays*

down his life for the sheep (John 10:15). While there are certainly overtones of self-sacrificial love embodied in the Old Testament description of Yahweh as the Shepherd of his people, John 10:15 can only be predicated of Jesus as the Son of God. In this way, Jesus fulfils the Old Testament shepherd imagery and takes it even further. Is it any wonder that the Jews were divided on hearing his words? John records that “many of them said, ‘He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?’” (John 10:20). But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” (vs. 21). Possessed by a demon and raving mad – or in his person and work the very fulfilment of the divine shepherd imagery of the Old Testament? The contrast between the two assessments could not be greater. But the fact remains that those who are his sheep hear his voice and follow him.

So then, Jesus fulfils and completes the rich and very comforting Old Testament picture of God as the true and faithful Shepherd of his people. To know and

walk with Christ is to have the peace and provision and protection that David expressed in Psalm 23. It is to be able to experience and enjoy the salvation from sin and judgement that the psalmist repeatedly called for in Ps. 80. We can thus call upon our Lord as the Shepherd of his people with the same degree of confidence, and even more so, because we know the lengths to which he has gone in order to forgive our sins and to restore us to peace with God.

Notes

- 1 J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Psalms*, p. 128
- 2 Ibid., p. 130. In connection with this, Psalm 2, a clearly messianic psalm, speaks of the Son of God asking for and receiving the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession (vs. 8). The following verse reads: “You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” The iron sceptre, or rod, was an instrument of kingly authority and power, and in the hands of the duly installed Son of God, is something that should inspire security in his subjects and fear in his enemies (cf. Micah 7:14).
- 3 Ibid., p. 135.

The Good Shepherd (2)

Shepherding God’s flock – a question of identification

Rev. Peter Kloosterman

Who is the pastor of God’s people? I ask this question because of my love for words and meanings. I enjoy thinking about how ideas and expectations are conveyed by the words people use. This question struck me a while back when I was talking with some elders about their pastoral ministry. It struck me because of the blank looks I received. Blank because “pastoral ministry” is a work equated normally with that of the pastor. This is understandable because of the easy word association. It’s easy to see the *pastor* as the one who is called to the *pastoral* ministry. This, however, is more than just word association. My dictionary defines

“pastor” as a Christian minister having spiritual charge over a congregation or a parish. There is good reason for those blank stares. If we follow the dictionary’s definition then pastoral ministry is the work of a Christian minister.

Broader view of the word “pastor”

So why is there a question? Because the Bible offers a broader view of the word “pastor”. The Bible teaches that the word pastor can refer to the minister of God’s Word and also to the elders¹. To see this as God’s determination we must again consider the term. *Pastor* is a synonym for *shepherd*. Let’s ask the question this way: who is the shepherd of God’s people? Scripture clearly teaches

that this is a task belonging to the elders. God’s word teaches this regarding the Ephesian elders whom Paul addressed at Miletus (Acts 20:17). He told them, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to *shepherd* the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (v. 28 emphasis added). If we substitute synonyms, Paul is encouraging the elders as overseers to *pastor* the church of God. These are the elders whom God has called as overseers. These are the rulers of God’s people, the elders who are commissioned in accord with the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Peter says it this way: “Therefore, I

exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, *shepherd* the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness... (1 Pt. 5:1,2 emphasis added). These two texts are God's word to elders, and for us as the church of Jesus Christ. An important question for our understanding of whose responsibility it is to shepherd the flock is, "Whom has God designated to be the caregivers for our souls?" It is the teaching of God's word before our personal preference or default practice, and it must be kept central. God says the elders are also the pastors of God's people. Their task is that of feeding and nurturing the flock. They must guard and keep the sheep secure.

Those blank stares mentioned earlier alerted me to something else; an idea that creeps in and substitutes identification for word association. The danger

is that the *pastoral ministry* is identified as solely the minister's specialty. He is the specially trained man, employed for the task. This is a danger because of the day and age in which we live; the day of specialists and technical certification requirements. If you have an appliance that breaks, not just anyone may repair it. The repairman must be authorised by the company or your warranty will be void. We face this "need of certification" in almost every area of life: health care specialists, building code requirements, education certificates, counselling services. We constantly face the question, "who is qualified to do a particular task?"

This is where a danger lies with the most complex area of our existence: our spiritual life. It is understandable that we look at the pastor as the specialist: he is the one with the degree from a theological college. He studies and proclaims the Word of God. He is the one who deals with spiritual issues on a daily basis. The trouble is not that we

have given him more to do. Pastoring God's people is part of his responsibility. But let us be aware of the danger of overlooking the elders because they don't have the same training and work. According to God's word, the elders are qualified to deal with our spiritual lives. Overlooking their work would be detrimental to the spiritual well-being of God's people because it bypasses the care that Christ appoints and brings to His people. That is dangerous.

An identity as Christian

Why is this important? Because knowing one's God-given identity determines the proper understanding of any activity. In other words, knowing who you "are" illumines what you "do". In Christianity there is a priority of identity to activity; a priority but not a separation. This, I believe, is one of the refreshing aspects of our identity as Christian. The Triune God – through the eternal calling of the Father, the redemptive work of the Son, and the application by the Holy Spirit – gives you an identity: "Christian." This identity is the fountain from which everything you do flows. This is not to suggest that what you *do* is unimportant, but what you do only reflects who you *are*. For example, I might cut my grass and tend my garden just as my unbelieving neighbour does. In fact, he might do it better than I. But through me God is glorified, where with the unbelieving neighbour God isn't. What is the difference? Not the work, but the identity of the person doing the work. But what if I am disobedient? Is my identity an excuse to overlook my disobedience? Certainly not, in fact, my disobedience might not be as visible as my unbelieving neighbour's. However, because of my identity as Christian, God will hold me more accountable. Knowing identity helps us evaluate and appreciate the work that is done.

God-given identity as pastors

Similarly, knowing an elder's God-given identity gives a depth of appreciation for his work among the Lord's people. Knowing the pastor of God's people entails more than just seeing the equality of work between a minister and [the other?] elders. It includes an understanding of their God-given identity. God says the elders, too, are the pastors charged with the care of His people's souls. Before we look at what they *do* we must: believe with certainty the designation of God's word about who they *are*?. What quali-

“God says the elders are also the pastors of God's people. Their task is that of feeding and nurturing the flock. They must guard and keep the sheep secure.”



fies the elders, above all else, for this task of pastoring is not their performance in the work but their God-given identity as pastors. This is where we are called to live by faith, to trust that God's design as revealed in His word is the best, that His care is specially designed for the well-being of His people's souls. We must resist the temptation to defer to the one whom we think can handle our spiritual life the best. There is a constant danger to place performance before identity; to look for a specialist rather than God's appointed office-bearer. That is to neglect the certainty of God's word. What holds us back from entrusting our souls to the care of the elders? Is it their lack of training? Their lack of experience? Some other weakness? Do we suppose their weakness impedes God's work? God's word teaches that His grace is most clearly manifest in the midst of weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9,10; Hbs. 5:1-4). So, the lack of special training should not be regarded as something that cripples the pastoral care of the elders.

A call from the Lord

How does an elder gain this identity? God's word teaches the origin of this identity resides in their calling. First, God gives some of the prerequisites for the call to office. These are the familiar qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. An elder must be one who measures up to God's qualifications. He must demonstrate in His daily life in home and society the centrality of the work of Christ. These qualifications, however, are prerequisites, not the identity of an elder. Those who exhibit these qualifications are not yet those who hold an office.

There is more that is necessary – a call from the Lord. Yet the call to office of deacon, elder or minister functions as a special call granted by the Lord. Hebrews 5:4, "No one takes this honour to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was." Like the special office of High Priest in Israel, the office-bearers in the church are called by the Lord. The Belgic Confession warns of this important recognition of the calling of God when it says "Therefore everyone must take heed not to intrude himself by improper means, but is bound to wait till it shall please God to call him; that he may have testimony of his calling, and be certain that it is of the Lord" (Art. 31). The call of God is involved in identifying the elders.

The Lord uses human agents to accomplish His sovereign purpose

Here we must be careful that our practice reflects a firm commitment to God's providence and His personal operation among His people. Acts 20 states that the elders had been placed as overseers in the congregation by the Holy Spirit. This indicates the Holy Spirit's work of establishing elders in the congregation. This is more than an internal feeling, however. The Spirit's work includes the use of human agency to administer the call to office. This is apparent from Titus 1 where we read that Titus was called to appoint elders in every city. There was apostolic commission and human instrumentality involved in the calling of elders. Similarly, the choice of an apostle to replace Judas (cf. Acts 1) and the choice of deacons in Acts 6 indicate that the Lord uses human agents to ac-

complish His sovereign purpose. This is why prayerfulness is a prerequisite for an election of an office-bearer. In the nomination and selection process of elders (which includes a vote by the congregation) we must pray that God would use this method for the accomplishment of His purpose. Prayer is essential so that we, and those appointed, may know that God has so directed the outcome that those appointed to the office may believe they are called by God Himself. This is the reason for their identity. They have been called by God. To be sure, they are selected by the congregation, but not in a vote of personal preference, but a firm commitment to prayer for God's sovereign and personal intervention so that those selected will know their identity and those under their authority will trust the identity of their pastors. Knowing identity is fundamental to appreciating the work they do. The elders must know that they work on Christ's behalf. They are His pastors. Those who receive their work must believe that the elders' care is that of Christ's. Pray that God would give the shepherds and the sheep the humility to know and trust the identity God has given the elders as pastors.

Note

¹ There is the special task of teaching and preaching for ministers in the Church of Jesus Christ. There is biblical warrant for this special or distinctive work in our history. But this is beyond the scope of the current essay.

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The Good Shepherd (3)

The Deacon as Shepherd

Pastor Andre Holtslag

I expect that if you are thumbing through the pages or have quickly skimmed through the contents of this issue of Faith in Focus, the title of this article may have caught your eye. After all, the metaphor

of shepherding is not commonly used in relation to deacons. Generally, we associate shepherding with the work of ministers and elders. And I must confess that when I was asked to contribute to this issue with its shepherding theme and to talk about deacons, I too was forced

to think through this association.

Thus, the first thing that we need to do is to see whether or not this is a valid association. Is it proper to view the deacon as shepherd? And if, as I hope to demonstrate, it is a valid association, we will move on to consider why it is

important for this association to be made, and how this shepherding role is fulfilled by the deacon.

Let us begin then by focusing on the appropriateness of considering the deacon as shepherd using the Scriptures, the Confessions, and the forms of our church.

Jesus establishes and defines office

The nature of office in the church has its source in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Colossians 1:18 reminds us, Jesus “is the head of the body, the church.” And as the head of the church, He is the one that establishes and defines office within the church. In terms of the authority of office, we see this, for example, in 1 Thess. 5:12 where Paul says, “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you *in the Lord* and who admonish you (Emphasis added – AH).” We see this also in Ephesians 4:11-12, where Paul is discussing the office as part of the Lord’s gracious provision for the church: “*It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* (Emphasis added – AH).”

It is in Christ then that we need to seek our understanding of office in the church. And one of the ways that Jesus Christ revealed Himself during His earthly ministry was as the Good Shepherd (John 10). In addition, in places such as John 21 and Acts 20, He very clearly revealed that office in the church was to reflect this aspect of His person and work. Now, because this has been treated elsewhere in this issue, we will not make this case again but assume the reader’s familiarity with it. And yet, as has already been mentioned, while we might all be familiar with the association of shepherding with the work of ministers and elders, it is not something that we normally associate with deacons.

Interest and love of Christ

In terms of the nature of the diaconate, the Belgic Confession of Faith says that deacons join with the Pastors and Elders of the church to form the council of the church. Together with them, they are part of the means by which “the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors chastened and restrained by spiritual means; also

that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities.” For a more defined understanding of the deacon’s role we can turn to the form for ordination. It distinguishes between the elder’s office and the deacon’s office noting that the elder’s office “is based on the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ,” while the deacon’s office “is based upon the interest and love of Christ in behalf of His own.” Similarly, it notes that the elder’s work “is that of ruling in the name of the ascended King, and as servants of the great Shepherd, caring for His flock,” while the deacon’s work consists of gathering the offerings, preventing poverty, distributing gifts according to need, and relieving the distressed with words from Scripture and prayer.

Returning then to the shepherd metaphor, let us consider the following question: In terms of ordinary shepherds, are they only acting as shepherds when they are wielding the crook and urging the flock in a certain direction, or are they also acting as shepherds when they hand out food and water and dress wounds? I trust you would agree that they act as shepherds in all of these activities. Remembering then that we are to understand this shepherding in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we may ask the same question in this way: Do we see Christ, the Good Shepherd, exclusively in the kingly, ruling, and caring office of elder, or do we see Christ, the Good Shepherd, also in the loving, poverty preventing, physical-need-providing, distress relieving, and word-of-encouragement-speaking office of deacon? Again, I hope you will agree that Christ, the Good Shepherd, is seen in both of these offices.

Well, let’s continue on then to ask why it is important for this association to be made? Why ought we to see the deacon as shepherd? And, more importantly, why must we see Christ, the Good Shepherd, in the deacon and his work?

The authority of Christ as an office-bearer

Firstly, one of the reasons why this is important is to prevent any undermining of the office of deacon. The deacon is not someone able to hand out collection bags or plates to the right pews in church and collect them at the back and bring them forward. The deacon is not someone who can arrange, organise, and help with refreshments or lunch after the

service, do the dishes, tidy up, and then lock the building when they leave. The deacon is not someone who can set up a good roster so that the mother of the new-born or the post-surgery recoverer has meals for a week or two. The deacon is a man (1 Tim 3:12), who is given the authority of Christ as an office-bearer in His church (Phil. 1:1 and Acts 6:2-4), to be a good and faithful undershepherd to the flock entrusted to him, by the Good Shepherd, in the specific shepherding areas that are peculiar to his office. He is a man called, by God, to reflect the love and interest of Christ for His own, to gather their offerings and to encourage them to offer, to prevent poverty, to distribute gifts according to need, and to relieve the distressed with Scripture and prayer. And our ability to see Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd is undermined when we substitute this biblical understanding of the deacon for one of our own invention, in any way, shape, or form. And conversely, our ability to see Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd is enhanced when we have men who are called, ordained, and installed into this office, and who serve as deacons earnestly desiring to be Christ to His people.

Christ mandated the offices

Secondly though, another reason why it is important to view the deacon as a shepherd is because of the church’s calling. In Matthew 28, Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” And for this to take place most effectively, He mandated the offices of elder and deacon (1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1). Yes, the Gospel Word needs to be preached. And so, certain elders must be set aside and ordained to this work (1 Tim. 5:17). And yes, the people of God need to be ruled and cared for. Thus elders must be ordained to this work (Titus 1:5). But God, in His grace, also provided the church with a description of those attributes that qualify a man to serve as a deacon (1 Tim. 3:8ff). Thus, for a church to properly fulfil its Matthew 28 calling, biblically functioning elders and deacons are not optional but necessary. Just as an overemphasis on diaconal type ministry can lead to a social gospel that neglects the Word, an overemphasis on Word ministry can lead to a pharisaical gospel that neglects the full need of the flock. The work of

elders, be they ruling or teaching, and deacons is vital and necessary for the church to fulfil her calling.

Thirdly though, another reason why it is important to view the deacon as a shepherd is because of the increasing secularisation of our culture. Whereas once the church led society in the provision of practical charity, this has now become a function of government. And the effect of this is that charity has been stripped of its spiritual roots in the law of love (Matthew 22:34-40). Charity has become simply another name for the redistribution of wealth by taxes. For many churches, the deacons' chief skill is the ability to direct members to the right welfare office, and a thorough working knowledge of government entitlements. Gone are the days, like those in the Amsterdam of the 16th century, when deacons oversaw committees that inspected orphanages, the homes for aged men and women, the eight schools supported by the church, and the various clothing industries and bakeries operated by the diaconate. Gone are the days when the deacons met twice each week and distributed money and other necessities on Thursday to the 600 plus who were in need. Or are they? Is it possible that the materialistic, greedy, credit fueled lifestyle that seems to be fueling this recession may bring us to a point where the church again takes up the mantle of charity that is part of her commission? Regardless of where economic recession will bring us, and despite this secularisation, charity is still needed. And even though government is at the forefront of delivering it, ably assisted by profit driven companies, there is still great need out there in our communities. Our church visitation questionnaire specifically asks what the deacons are doing "themselves to alleviate distress in the local community?" Diaconal ministry presents us with opportunities to demonstrate the interest and love of Christ the Good Shepherd to broken and needy people who are unlikely to walk into our worship services to hear the gospel.

Complex society

Fourthly though, and very much related to our third reason, we live in an increasingly complex society. 'Global village' is not just a term but a reality. Our lives are very much affected by world-wide concerns and decisions taken by others many hundreds and thousands of miles away from us. As my question at the end

of the third reason indicates, the way we live is influenced by the way our society and the world economy dictates. Materialism and its effects is rampant in the world and having an increasing impact within the church. Educational requirements mean many do not finish school until they are in their mid-twenties. And they may do so with considerable debt already. All this affects marriage choices, house purchasing choices, starting-a-family choices, stay at home mum choices, retirement choices, and availability-to-serve choices amongst others. How it

for greater diligence and attention to the work of this office. But how do you serve as a deacon when the government has an endless supply of welfare? How do you serve as a deacon when members of the congregation would rather die than open the books and ask for help from the church? How do you serve as a deacon when the problems faced by the flock are often so complex? How do you serve as a deacon when your church is not really sure how a deacon should serve? How do you serve as a deacon when the local food bank forbids

“Do we see Christ, the Good Shepherd, also in the loving, poverty preventing, physical-need-providing, distress relieving, and word-of-encouragement-speaking office of deacon?”

does, whether it really needs to, and what are alternative options are all part of the deacon's calling to shepherd the flock. It will not do for us to throw up our hands in the air and say, "Well, that's just the way life is now!" Creative thinking that analyses our culture and its social and economic impact against the teaching of God's Word is also part of the church's diaconal calling.

How do you serve as a deacon?

I trust you can see that this is an important subject. Speaking as one who has served as a deacon and one who thanks the Lord for the opportunity to serve Him in that way, permit me to make a personal observation before we move on to the final question of this article. It is my observation that we have a reasonably good understanding of what ministers ought to be doing. We also have a reasonably good understanding of what elders ought to be doing. Now, I say this humbly and do not mean to infer some sort of perfection in regards to the office of elder, teaching or ruling. Elders always need to evaluate themselves and each other against the light of Scripture, and there is much room

you to mention Christ or Christianity in any way? How do you begin to serve as a deacon, with this wide scope of possibility for creative diaconal ministry, when your church only sees the need for there to be two of you to collect the money, make sure the power bill is paid on time, and visit old Mrs X at least twice a month?

And these questions, and perhaps others like it, are what lies behind the final question that this article seeks to address: How does the deacon fulfill his role as shepherd?

Many variables

In large part, the answer to this question is in the material already discussed. The principles behind the work of the deacon are still those principles outlined in Scripture, and summarised in our forms and confessions. The deacon as shepherd means living out the interest and love of Jesus Christ for His people, generously, tirelessly, patiently, and creatively. The deacon as shepherd means training of the Lord's people to participate in diaconal ministry through example and instruction. The deacon as shepherd means encouraging the flock to seek diaconal

opportunities across the neighbourhood fence. The challenge is to practically apply those principles today. What possibilities exist within each congregation for shepherding deacons will vary from congregation to congregation. What possibilities exist within the community for shepherding deacons will also vary. What gifts and abilities within the congregation that the shepherding deacons can call on for diaconal ministry will also vary. Who is available to serve, and when, will also vary. As ever, it begins, continues, and endures only with prayer. We must seek the Lord in these things and pray that the Good Shepherd will direct every aspect of shepherding ministry to the glory of

God. What, who, when, and how needs to be surveyed and considered. What our neighbouring churches are doing well needs also to be surveyed. Can we learn from them? Can we fill in a gap that they are missing? Can we contribute to existing programs and enhance them with our contribution? And perhaps after this surveying, we should select one or two projects that we can do sustainably and well with the facilities, the people, the time, the gifts, and the resources that we have been blessed with as a congregation.

There is of course much more that could be said, both in terms of principle and application. Let me end then by

recommending *The Deacon's Handbook* by Berghoef & de Koster and *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* by Dr. P.Y. de Jong as excellent books that will aid members of the church and deacons in their study of these things.

And finally, in all of these things, we are both challenged and encouraged that the church belongs to the Good Shepherd. He will build His church (Matt 16:18)! May He continue to equip and empower each of us to faithfully serve Him in the work He has called us to do.

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A shepherd observes ...

Paul Davey

People think sheep are stupid. After 50 years of being around them, I'm not at all convinced that the charge is altogether fair! You may be assured that, depending on the breed - and there are considerable behavioural, as well as physical, differences between breeds - sheep are timid, flighty, gregarious, gentle and pretty robust creatures. So often it is the ignorance of observers, rather than the stupidity of sheep, that elicits this comment about the instinctive behaviour that sheep display.

I like sheep. I don't like working sheep with people who don't appreciate or un-

derstand them. When I send a dog out round them in the paddock I know what they are going to do and where they're going to run. We know what spooks them, and what encourages them. They're predictable and fair. I know what they need to eat to keep healthy and productive, and so long as they are kept healthy and well fed they'll be jolly productive. They provide the meat of kings and royal fibre; at least the Merinos we have do!

Two images from Isaiah 53, that are particularly vivid immediately come to mind. The first *All we like sheep have gone astray* refers to me, and you, and all the human race. Sheep, being rather defenceless herbivores have exceedingly developed flocking instincts. And so, they follow the leader in an extreme way. Good shepherds use this to their advantage. Bad ones don't understand, and work against sheep instinct to their own frustration, and sadly, too regularly,

the hurt of the sheep. On some of our high country stations where the rivers are not bridged the sheep have to cross through sometimes reasonably deep water when they are mustered. And sheep don't particularly like getting into water. Deeper water reduces their flight paths and makes them vulnerable to predators. When we get the mob tight against the water and one of the shepherds pulls one of the sheep through the river ahead of the mob (Kiwi for flock), the whole mob will usually follow, one, two or three abreast, so long as the shepherd does his job well.

The other image, *like a sheep before its shearer is dumb*, describes the Lord Jesus during his trial. Sheep are remarkably still and compliant with good shearers, who know their instincts, how to hold them comfortably, and are firm and gentle. The Lord Jesus knew his task and the sheep being shorn reflect His demeanour.

Mustering in big country, over the years, has depended a great deal on dogs. Good dogs with good shepherds meant the job got done really well. Interestingly though, in a paddock situation, untidy dogs' indiscretions are often easily corrected by sheep instincts, without any extra work on the part of the shepherd. If the dog cuts off one, or a few sheep, from the mob they will want to join the mob again and will usually do so quite voluntarily. Conversely, if a sheep is left in a pen on its own, it often panics, and in trying to jump over rails to get with others, runs the risk of injury. We, even like sheep, can get into quite a spot of bother if we want to go with the crowd, when the *Good Shepherd* (the Lord Jesus) would have us deny ourselves, and stand out on our own.



President Obama restores federal funding for embryonic stem cell research

Introduction

Within two years of taking office as President of the United States, George Bush stopped federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. During the fifth year of his administration he exercised his right of veto for the first time, rejecting Congress's bid to lift funding restrictions on embryonic stem cell research. He stated at the time that the vetoed bill 'would support the taking of innocent life in the hope of finding medical benefits for others. It crosses the moral boundary that our decent society needs to respect' (Babington, 2000).

Within two months of taking office as President of the United States, Barack Obama has now lifted the ban on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research (Lehrer, 2009). The reasons provided for this decision are complex, but may perhaps be summed up as a trust in science to pursue rigorously the good of mankind on the basis of scientific fact finding.

The aim of this article is to evaluate the justification of this policy reversal presented by President Obama and to assess it, the justification, as backlit by biblical ethics. To accomplish this, a brief consideration will be given to what is involved in embryonic stem cell research and how this relates to the biblical worldview. Next, the main aspects of President Obama's argument will be analysed in terms of the logical flow of reasoning and as per biblical ethics.

Characteristics of embryonic stem cell research

Put in simplest terms, embryonic stem cell research is biological research on stem cells derived from embryos and on their use in medicine (Anon b, 2009). These stem cells may come from aborted babies or from in vitro cultures. Stem cells differ from other kinds of cells in the body. All stem cells – regardless of their source – have three general properties: they are capable of dividing and renewing themselves for long periods; they are unspecialised; and they can give rise to specialised cell types. Hu-

man embryonic and adult stem cells each have advantages and disadvantages regarding potential use for cell-based regenerative therapies. Of course, adult and embryonic stem cells differ in the number and type of differentiated cells types they can become. Embryonic stem cells can become all cell types of the body because they are pluripotent. Adult stem cells are generally limited to differentiating into the different cell types of their tissue of origin. However, some evidence suggests that adult stem cell plasticity may exist, increasing the number of cell types a given adult stem cell can become. Large numbers of embryonic stem cells can be relatively easily grown in culture, while adult stem cells are rare in mature tissues, and methods

Genesis 19:36), not 'with fetus,' not with any other euphemism, but with *child* at any given moment from conception onwards. In the same manner, Psalm 139:13-16 makes the point that God saw the Psalmist as an embryo and already had him written in His book (Green, J. P., Ed., 1982:13, 15. 511). From the Biblical data the conclusion may justly be drawn that, in the sight of God, human life begins at the moment of conception. This means that, when a child is conceived, an image bearer of God has arrived on the scene. The life of such an image bearer is to be protected and nurtured. God Himself takes a dim view of terminating such a life for any other reason than that/those prescribed in His Word (i.e. in the

“Termination of embryonic life for the sake of science and medicine stands biblically condemned.”

for expanding their numbers in cell culture have not yet been worked out. This is an important distinction, as large numbers of cells are needed for stem cell replacement therapies (Anon a, 2009). It is easy to discern why scientists are attracted to embryonic stem cells from the perspective of research. Embryonic stem cells are greater in abundance and conceivably more flexible in application. The moral issue regarding embryonic stem cells is that some one (or, as the scientist might say, *something*) has to die for the greater scientific and medical good.

Biblical view of commencement of life

The Bible, when recording a woman being pregnant, writes about her as 'being with child' (cf. Genesis 16:11,

case of the ruling authorities wielding the sword of justice). Therefore the Scriptures denote the deliberate taking of human life as murder, which is punishable by death (e.g. Exodus 21:12; Numbers 35:16). The concept is carried through in New Testament teachings where Jesus reiterates the dictum not to murder (Matthew 5:21); and Paul reminds his readers that the governing authorities do not wear the sword for nothing (Romans 13:4).

The aforesaid is just a brief sketch to indicate that God forbids the taking of human life for any reason other than that of meeting out justice – toward some one who is a murderer. It may also be inferred that this human life starts, not after x weeks into the pregnancy or at birth, but at conception. Therefore, termination of embryonic life for the sake

of science and medicine stands biblically condemned.

President Obama's Argument

The full speech may be found on many web sites, such as <http://www.clipsand-comment.com/2009/03/09/full-text-president-obama-speech-on-stem-cell-policy-change/> (Clipper, O., 2009).

From the website listed above a number of paragraphs (presented in italics) have been taken (and I trust, not out of context) for critical comment in terms of logic and ethics.

The speech opens: *"Today, with the Executive Order I am about to sign, we will bring the change that so many scientists and researchers; doctors and innovators; patients and loved ones have hoped*

will incline all and sundry to applaud the lofty goals that are being aimed at with the change in politics. Indeed, the suffering is immense and it is noble to pursue alleviation of the same. In that regard the Christian argument regarding sanctity of life is being rendered ineffective, because the question would immediately be set before such a one: Whose sanctity of life are we talking about here, that of an unborn or that of some one who is already fully absorbed into a societal and relational network? This reduces the issue to one of personal choice rather than principle and becomes a mere tug-of-war between those who can shout loudly.

The President continues: *"But in recent years, when it comes to stem cell*

world views: Those who regard people as no different in essence from [other] animals can underwrite Obama's statement without qualms, because – to them – morality is determined by individual or collective opinions as to what is right and wrong. For such, an unformed fetus will make way for a relationally involved human being outside the womb. This is consistent and perfectly understandable. The plumb line of morality is subjective. Not so for the Christian, however. His plumb line is objective, i.e. the Word of God and this Word determines clear-cut moral injunctions regarding the place of the human embryo in the whole of life. President Obama closes this section with the assuring words that this pursuit will be done responsibly. That begs the question, because to do something responsibly, it has to be done in response to something, that is the issue must unavoidably be placed in a moral paradigm. Scientists cannot act responsibly and live in a moral void at the same time. The two are mutually exclusive.

"But after much discussion, debate and reflection, the proper course has become clear. The majority of Americans – from across the political spectrum, and of all backgrounds and beliefs – have come to a consensus that we should pursue this research."

In this masterly wrought piece of word craft the President equates 'the proper course' with 'the consensus arrived at by the majority of Americans.' The famous words of Norwegian poet Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) come to mind here: "The most dangerous force to truth and freedom in our midst is the compact majority" and "the minority is always right." The absence of an ethical framework in which discussion, debate and reflection takes place (which appears to be the case where people from 'all backgrounds and beliefs arrive at unity) leads inevitably to the lowest common denominator, majority rule.

I can also promise that we will never undertake this research lightly. We will support it only when it is both scientifically worthy and responsibly conducted. We will develop strict guidelines, which we will rigorously enforce, because we cannot ever tolerate misuse or abuse. And we will ensure that our government never opens the door to the use of cloning for human reproduction. It is dangerous, profoundly wrong, and has no place in our society, or any society.

The first sentence in this paragraph is loaded with ethical innuendo: What

“With the emotional tug on the heart strings of hearers and readers, the President sets the tone for a discourse that will incline all and sundry to applaud the lofty goals that are being aimed at with the change in politics.”

for, and fought for, these past eight years: we will lift the ban on federal funding for promising embryonic stem cell research. We will vigorously support scientists who pursue this research. At this moment, the full promise of stem cell research remains unknown, and it should not be overstated. But scientists believe these tiny cells may have the potential to help us understand, and possibly cure, some of our most devastating diseases and conditions. To regenerate a severed spinal cord and lift someone from a wheelchair. To spur insulin production and spare a child from a lifetime of needles. To treat Parkinson's, cancer, heart disease and others that affect millions of Americans and the people who love them.

With the emotional tug on the heart strings of hearers and readers, the President sets the tone for a discourse that

research, rather than furthering discovery, our government has forced what I believe is a false choice between sound science and moral values. In this case, I believe the two are not inconsistent. As a person of faith, I believe we are called to care for each other and work to ease human suffering. I believe we have been given the capacity and will to pursue this research – and the humanity and conscience to do so responsibly.”

President Bush made it very clear that embryonic stem cell research and moral values are closely linked. Arriving at the issue from the biblical perspective, he declared (see Introduction) that embryonic research involves the taking of innocent life in order to alleviate suffering of others. It is at this point in the speech that the beginning of a chasm must appear between people holding different

defines 'lightly' or its opposite here, what defines 'worthiness' over against the alternative, and again, by what standard is the work done responsibly? These statements are made in an ethical vacuum and entirely open to subjective interpretation. Interestingly, and contextually contradictorily, a strong moral statement is proffered regarding human cloning, but without explaining why this is dangerous and profoundly wrong, whereas embryonic stem cell manipulation is approved. Even to an outside observer, this paragraph must seem to be loaded with unfounded opinion and inconsistency in terms of ethical maturity. Furthermore, if the direction of such research in England is to be taken as a measure where research is moving, then the USA is not too far away from human cloning either, since the English government approved this kind of research in early 2008 (Jardine, L., H. Abdalla, et al., 2007; Zandman, H. 2008).

"We base our public policies on the soundest science; that we appoint scientific advisors based on their credentials and experience, not their politics or ideology."

This statement begs the question as to what defines 'sound science.' This question cannot be answered without entering the ethical minefield, because the issue of soundness is a value issue. In the words of Al Greene, "Every fact is value-laden" (Green, A., 1990), that is, the moment a human being handles a fact, such a fact or item is immediately subjugated to the ethical disposition of the handler and is no longer value-neutral. In the case of embryonic stem cell research it would appear that the scientific advisors would be self-selecting. Those who would qualify for selection in the context of the government's 'sound science' concepts would be those who are knowledgeable and deliberately involved in embryonic stem cell research. When a scientist was asked by the interviewer on Jim Lehrer's News Hour on March 9, 2009 who would be guarding the scientific research community in the context of embryonic stem cell research, the scientist answered that the NIH (National Institute of Health) would be the body designate. The interviewer then commented, "But isn't that a case of the scientists involved being asked to place safeguards on their own work?" The ensuing silence gave the answer: it is indeed a case of the fox guarding the chicken coop.

"And we honor those we know, who

used their influence to help others and bring attention to this cause – people like Christopher and Dana Reeve, who we wish could be here to see this moment."

Christopher Reeve (best known for his film roles as Superman) was paralysed in 1995 during an eventing competition. He very strongly advocated for embryonic stem cell research. His plight tugged at the heart strings of people the world over – and understandably so. Nevertheless, he would gladly see the unborn sacrificed so that he could receive a miracle



cure. For Christian America this man's approach to his situation was apparently disappointing.

"There is no finish line in the work of science. The race is always with us – the urgent work of giving substance to hope and answering those many bedside prayers, of seeking a day when words like "terminal" and "incurable" are finally retired from our vocabulary."

For the Christian, who is well apprised of what a fallen world entails, there will not likely be a retirement of those words from the vocabulary; this is most ironically so because the longed-for cure involves the termination

– making *terminal* – of human life in order, perhaps, to restore other human life. Death will continue to be with us; the question is merely whose death it will be: that of the as yet unborn, or that of the already born wounded ones. President Obama was very emphatic in honestly stating that to date no cure to any of the ailments mentioned has been found through embryonic stem cell research. This is supported by writings in the medical field (Zandman, H., 2008).

Conclusion

It is a noble desire to strive for solutions to debilitating ailments that try so many in our societies. The motive behind the decision is noble. The emotional appeal is real. It is unlikely that any one would have an argument with that issue. The question is about the chosen road to travel in this quest for cures.

The main intellectual problem regarding the explanation provided by President Barack Obama for his decision to lift the ban on federal funding for embryonic stem cell research is the absence of an ethical framework. It is this problem that bedevils all ethical issues which are being discussed among people who hold different world views (Zandman, H., 2006). The old adage 'a text without a context is a pretext' holds true in his case. Words loaded with ethical meaning are presented, but they all float in an ethical vacuum, despite the President describing himself as a man of faith. The speech vacillates between deliberately celebrating that vacuum on the one hand and imposing it on the other, leaving a question mark hanging over the expressed desire to provide the scientists with 'freedom' to do their research.

For those who enjoy analysing arguments and expect to find argumentation of the highest quality in a presidential statement, the speech is a treasure trove of fallacious arguments. There is appeal to sympathy (emotional pointers to sufferers), there are ambiguous assertions (terminal disease will be a thing of the past), there is evidence of argument by uninformed opinion (certain things will never happen under this government), there is an argument to the future (cures might happen), and there is internal contradiction (promising freedom unfettered by ideology on the one hand and promising strict guidelines on the other). Most seriously, the presentation is vacuous, with no plumb line against which

to set the presented ethical concepts. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist, the rulers of Russia understood the danger of an ethical vacuum. They invited worldview proponents (such as members of Accelerated Christian Education USA) to make presentations in order to establish worldview orientation for the nation's educational system. They understood that living, working and understanding must be done in context in order to arrive at meaningfulness. Without this, everything is reduced to pragmatism, despite the use of prestigious jargon to make the argument sound plausible. President Obama's speech is non-contextual and reduces his noble goal [of] justification to emotion-driven pragmatism.

Christians hearing this speech would remember the words of erstwhile President George Bush (Introduction) and wonder why the current man of faith has gone in a different direction. Mr

Bush made a clear stand on the Biblical premise that no one should take another person's life, because such is God's directive (cf. Exodus 20:13, which declares that we are not to kill human beings, *i.e.* murder – such is the meaning of the original Hebrew). Many Christians in the USA understand the seriousness of this action on the part of President Obama and they are highly concerned, as a friend who lives in America told this author. They are, in the view of this author, Henrik Ibsen's minority.

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Feminine focus

Sally Davey

The After-Church Conversation

I don't think I'm particularly good at this kind of conversation. But perhaps a lot of us feel this way. One friend puts it quite simply when she says that she doesn't "do mob scenes well". A room full of people sipping coffee, a loud buzz of interaction and small children yelling and shoving their way through adult legs is a scene hardly conducive to meaningful conversation. I admit that I far prefer longer, thought-provoking conversation about subjects of importance to the brief, hello-how-are-you interchanges which is all after-church conversation seems to allow. And yet – there may well be more possibilities offered in it than are immediately apparent.

What is the setting? Worship is drawing to a close, we sing a last hymn, the minister takes his place at the door and we all begin to file out. A few hardy souls race to the exit and after a quick word

to the minister, are out to the car park and into their cars. No after-church conversation for them! Others of us turn to the people next to us or behind us, and exchange greetings that may turn to minutes of conversation about their week, their family – or the weather. Perhaps there is a bit of congestion in the aisle as some cluster around a church member, sharing a particular joy or sorrow that has come her way in recent days. The majority of the congregation, however, files past the minister and set their faces towards coffee and catch-up in the more open spaces of the church hall.

How do we use this situation?

What is on our minds? Hopefully, the sermon is. Also, awe and reverence from being in the presence of God. We may be dwelling on the sin exposed in our hearts; new ways we ought to be glorifying God; or some concrete ways we may show more love to our fellow-believers. But of course we won't be in some cloud of our own; we are mixing with God's people, and there are church members to grieve with, rejoice with, exhort and encourage, and – hopefully – visitors to welcome. How, then, do

we use this busy crowd-situation to do the spiritual work with which our minds are engaged?

This is the problem as I see it. We want to talk about important and spiritual subjects, but the room is full of people. Lots of people claim our attention. There is Jane over there – and I must return this book – perhaps with a word or two about how much I enjoyed it. And here comes Phil – oh yes, I must remind him about the Home Missions committee meeting on Thursday night. Sue wants to catch up with me, Robyn wants to introduce her sister and I musn't forget to ask old Mrs Bennett if she needs a hand with her rose pruning next week... On it goes. It can even be difficult to extricate oneself politely in order to greet visitors before they drift out the door.

Is there a solution to this conundrum? I am certainly no expert, and I often find the challenges of the situation beyond me. It seems impossible to say useful and helpful things to so many people at once! However, I am very thankful that some people appear to have a particular gift for the after-church scene; and are able to sprinkle their warmth over everyone by word and gesture. Paul and I have a

relative who has this gift to a “T”. I have seen her walk into a large family gathering and begin working her way right around the room, greeting everyone with some warm, sweet, well-chosen word – offering sympathy to one, squeezing the hand of another, remembering to ask this one about a recent trip, that one about a new grandchild, teasing the gruff nephew and putting an encouraging arm around a shy great-niece. Aunty Pam is everyone’s favourite aunt. She seems to know exactly the word and gesture everyone needs. Churches are blessed with Aunty Pams, too. I know – I’ve seen some of you, both women and men, in action. What an asset you are – there is no one like you when it comes to welcoming strangers into the heart of the church.

Learnt from the experts

But aside from personal warmth, there are some particular strategies to consider. Just as I was puzzling over the question of the after-church conversation, Paul and I had the pleasure of spending a month in England. We had four whole Sundays to enjoy visiting churches where we knew – nobody! What a great opportunity it was to meet a lot of new friends, and to view the experts in after-church conversation at work. I learned some very useful things.

First of all, the good conversationalists had some good strategies. It wasn’t just that they were natural-born warm, outgoing people. It seemed to me that they had some well thought-out plans of action – things that they had probably discussed as a church. They were evangelistically motivated, but also polite. Some examples. The first church we visited was an evangelical Anglican church in the heart of London. Because it was difficult to make out the location of the church from the street address given on the web site, we found ourselves prowling along the street, at a bit of a loss. Lighting upon a young lady who was walking briskly along, better-dressed than most early Sunday-morning strollers, we asked her if she could help us. Yes, she said – I’m going there. Great! We entered worship with her. After the service (and a very good sermon on Daniel 3), this young lady sought us out and checked that we were fine. She didn’t lose sight of us, and came back for a word several times during coffee afterwards.

Adept at conversation

She wasn’t alone in her friendliness. An older, retired couple greeted us as

well. They were adept at interesting conversation, and because many of the church were away on a camp we were able to talk at greater length than might otherwise have been possible. Stephen and Sarah were a delightful couple, and it was clear that they were very active in a number of church ministries, using their many gifts and the experience gained from a lifetime in senior business positions and in the military. They, too, kept coming back to our conversation whenever they’d had to catch up with someone else. (This is clearly something to keep in mind when we are talking with visitors after church). Even their busy rector came over and said hello. He had been tied up in an intense conversation with a young man earlier on, but had seen us, and made sure to find out who we were and welcome us. Again, he proved to be an open, interesting man willing to share his life and his views on things with us. We were able to interact with him about his sermon, as well.

That same evening, we attended a completely different church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle (Spurgeon’s old

church), in Elephant and Castle in the south of London. It was encouraging to see this faithful church still going strong well over 100 years after Spurgeon’s death. The foyer was full of people when we arrived, and a very friendly lady a little older than us bustled up and introduced herself (they obviously look out for visitors here, too, I thought). She found us somewhere to sit, explaining that no one was allowed to go in and sit in the auditorium until five minutes before the service started. When everyone began to walk in, I could see that there was plenty of room for the visitors. There was no question of everyone grabbing their usual seats and leaving the remainder for the visitors! This church was a well-oiled machine, and I have no doubt that there was a careful plan for engaging visitors in conversation. People did not slip through the cracks here.

Another thing we noticed during our four Sundays was the various ways that different people show friendliness to visitors conversationally. Smiles, a warm (and **firm**) handshake, and genuine interest in the visiting Christian are all

“Never despise the opportunity to talk with God’s people after worship.”



important. But so, I found, was the simple step of introducing yourself with your full name – first name and surname – as you look your visitor in the face. I had never really thought about this, but when it's left to the visitor to introduce herself, and the church member half-heartedly responds with only his or her first name, the general effect is not nearly as friendly. Have you ever thought about that? Introducing yourself with your full name is an act of open friendliness to a visitor at church. We should do it as a regular, courteous custom.

Not all small talk

While we may get the feeling that all conversations after church need to be brief because there are so many people to touch base with, we need not be discouraged into the idea that it is all just small talk – unimportant stuff. If we get into a thought-provoking discussion, or if someone wants to take things further, we can always make a time to meet for a longer talk. Or, we could simply take him or her home for lunch, engagements permitting. This is just making a natural extension to coffee-time.

Scripture indicates that important conversations can flow on from matters of truth raised in worship. Luke records a number of such occasions in the book of Acts. In Acts 16, when Paul and his companions cross over to Macedonia, they meet with some Jewish women at a place of worship outside Philippi. Paul spoke, and Lydia, a well-to-do trader, was converted as a result of his message. Her response was to urge the whole party to come to her home and stay there. In this case, an important after-worship conversation led to many more, under her roof. The eventual outcome was the founding of the church at Philippi, which included not only Lydia's household, but also, presumably, the local jailor and his family.

Later in the same missionary journey Paul arrived in Athens, and gave his famous address to the pagan thinkers gathered in the Areopagus. There was a mixed response: some mocked him, but others engaged in conversation, telling him they wanted to hear more another time. As he left, a number of men and women joined him, and through further discussion some of them, writes Luke, believed. (Acts 17:32-4)

Instructive and tactful

The next such conversation was the one that occurred in Ephesus after an eloquent sermon preached by Apollos, a native of the educational centre, Alexandria. Paul's friends Priscilla and Aquila had heard him and, recognising that his understanding of the gospel was deficient, took him aside to "explain the way of God more accurately". No doubt they did it tactfully, and it seems that Apollos was willing to listen, because when he later wanted to cross over to Achaia (where Athens is situated), the local Christian leaders encouraged him, and wrote to the churches recommending him. On arriving in Achaia Apollos proved to be a powerful apologist and a helpful teacher of those who already believed. (Acts 18:24-8)

We can take heart from what is recorded here. Never despise the opportunity to talk with God's people after worship. God may use your conversation to build his church in ways far beyond your small expectations. Who knows where a simple word with another believer may lead?

Fan the Flame conference

RTC, Geelong, Australia

Jake VanderBurg

First of all I would like to thank the session and the congregation for assisting me to go to Fan the Flame. It's been my dream to go to see the RTC in action and to mix and mingle with others who carry a burden in their hearts for the gospel of Jesus Christ and His church. There were about 40 people aged from 15 through to a bit older than me. The average age seemed about middle 20s to 30. Twelve Kiwis came over (only 2 from the South Is). Most of the youth, 10 or so were from Boxhill. We also had people from other churches in the wider Geelong and Melbourne areas.

From the onset the program was brisk but included ample time over coffee breaks and meal times to meet people and to network. We were also placed in small diverse groups under the leadership

of a faculty member. These groups were for discussion, Bible study and prayer and the occasional duty. Discussion usually took place after the seminars to give opportunity to ask further questions and to pray for understanding and guidance as the seminars were usually quite challenging.

A time for challenge

Murray Capill as principal welcomed us to RTC and gave a brief outline of the weekend and gave us an opportunity to introduce ourselves. We also had a briefing on the churches within the RCNZ and CRCA and where the greatest needs are which is almost everywhere. Murray challenged us right from the start to humble ourselves before God and to use the weekend to think seriously about what God would want of us. Basically an interest in the RTC and what it offers is

also an interest in the Kingdom of God and our work in it. This weekend wasn't to be a fun time away but a time to be challenged and search our hearts. What the kingdom needs now is harvesters. What the church needs now are preachers, teachers and pastors and there isn't enough of any.

After Murray's welcome Steve Voorwinde took us for exposition using 2 Tim 2:1-13 and then prayer. Steve used Paul's message to Timothy to have about him suitably trained men to help him and to challenge us to always look to Jesus but also to consider Paul and his endurance, the soldier for his discipline, the athlete for his devotion and the farmer for his diligence.

Discipline required

Following morning tea we had the first of three seminars. Murray Capill took

the first on the Pastoral ministry as to what it was, its challenges especially time factors and the calling, appointing processes. This was very challenging as there is much to do in the day to day work in the church and every aspect of it could well be a full time job. We were left in no doubt that the pastors job requires much discipline but also can only be done effectively with the help of able trained elders. Another aspect is that in real terms the pastor should limit his week to 55hrs. This is reinforced at college were it is suggested the students keep to 55hrs a week for their studies.

After lunch I attended an elective on Leading small groups. Here we looked at the importance of small groups for Bible study within the congregation. This is where some of the best opportunities are for training, building up, outreach and study are facilitated. Considerations on age groups, social groups and equipping needs with in the congregation would determine the make up of some groups, not necessarily just on geographical or elder district groups. This seminar was lead by Graeme Hart associate pastor at Geelong Reformed Presbyterian church.

The second seminar was Studying an Old Testament passage and this was lead by Alastair McEwen. This was very interesting and gave us an insight on the type of study students do and how they go about it. Alastair took a small section of Judges 3:12-30 and we did an exegesis on it. We were asked to consider two things "what" was God saying and "so what" if He did. We were challenged to look at all Scripture with this in mind. Ultimately all Scripture points to Gods redemptive grace.

For the evening meals we went in small groups to various places for tea. Our host family was Ben and Maria (nee VanderWel from Hamilton) McDonald. Ben is an elder at Packinton St CRC and is currently studying for the Ministry of the Word. Maria has done a Dip of Min previously. We had a lovely evening of fellowship and Steve Voowinde got us to give our testimonies and then we all prayed for each other. Within my group were a number of young students and it was very encouraging to see how keen they were to seek the Lords guidance so early in life.

Missions and needs

On Sunday before worship at South Barwon CRC we spent time in small groups again this time to explore the concept of being humble before God.

Especially in admitting sin and waiting on Gods direction. After specific prayer we prepared for worship. Pastor John DeHoogs sermon was out of Proverbs and majored on wisdom and how to gain it. Particularly how to discern Gods call in our lives and not to just neatly fit into the most obvious path.

For lunch we helped prepare a typical African meal and this was hosted by Bill and Henny Berends.

After lunch Bill presented a seminar on Motivation for mission. Starting with Matt 9:35-38 which is a Biblical mandate to do mission. Bill then gave us a run down of the current state of missions and the needs around the world. Here we saw that about a third of the known world population had not yet been reached for Christ. These people lived in the most hostile and hard to

reach places. However by far the most outreach resources were going to the 2/3 population that was already reached. Projections are that resources will plummet with the global economic situation. But the biggest concern was the lack of willing workers for the Kingdom of God. We were challenged here to consider this as a very needy and important part of the ministry.

We had opportunity to reflect on this in our small group where we all felt quite overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible task. We prayed again and also prepared ourselves for worship. The afternoon worship was split over two churches, Packinton St CRC and the Reformed Presbyterian. I chose the RP's and enjoyed a service with just 3 Psalms (no instruments but lovely singing) and a sermon out of Revelation on the let-



Participants in Fan the Flame Conference '09

ter to the church at Laodicea. This was well preached by Pastor Graeme Hart with the ample use of data projector and lap top.

Required to train good preachers

After the evening meal we had a seminar taken by Murray Capill on preaching. Here we looked at the task of preaching as encouraged in Rom 10:14-15. Murray reiterated the colleges absolute requirement to train good preachers and that there is such a need for it in the church today. In fact all who would work for the Lord should be able to preach and teach.

We were reminded too that the task of preaching is to be a mouthpiece, that after all it is the Holy Spirit that causes the hearer to respond to Gods call. We looked at a number of revival situations and saw that it only happened because of Gods action. The preaching of Gods word transforms and this is the work of the Holy Spirit. However the preachers task is also to faithfully and skilfully preach and to connect the Scriptures to the congregation. Murray reminded us that preaching isn't just a biblical lecture or just transferring information. Nor is it entertainment. The key to a successful preaching ministry is to pray, pray and pray.

"Holistic" worship

On Monday Bill Berends opened the day with an exposition on Matt 22:36-37. We looked at how we understand "holistic" worship and Bill gave us examples from his time in Africa and how the locals worshipped contrasted to our rather subdued style of worship. Bill encouraged us to use our whole being

to worship, using our intellect, will and emotions. We were challenged to serve God with everything and to humble ourselves before God so that He could use all of our being.

Murray took us for the next seminar on Ministry Training models and RTC study Options.

Here we saw what RTC has to offer and how to access these study options. RTC is very aware that not everyone (or their church) is able to totally commit to four years in one go at Geelong. So they are exploring different options such as apprenticeships or block course type models. Also doing extended vicariate with a mentor is also being looked at. This will keep the student within their home congregations longer. More part time courses are being offered (some being Internet based) which allows prospective students to sample study and also to gain good credits in anticipation of taking on full time study. Within some congregations there is a mandate on the elders to be suitably skilled for their task, this may be certificate or Dip courses. RTC realises that there is a huge gap in vacancies and availability of candidates. We were challenged to seek Gods guidance for His church and to search our hearts for His directing.

Further questions

I also had an interview with Steve Voorwinde and was very encouraged by his comments and suggestions for me to ponder and the steps I should take to clarify my desire to do further theological study. He prayed with me and suggested I ask wise and discerning people to also pray for me.

Personally for me the weekend was

great. I felt very much at home, but was also very aware that my future attendance at RTC are dependent on many variables including how my family would cope. I came with an open mind and many questions and I left with many answers but also further questions. I enjoyed the fellowship and networking and observing that there is interest within our churches to further Gods work and that young people in particular are hearing the call. What I enjoyed most were the samplers of actual study courses and of course the uplifting prayer and worship times.

Your "own boss"

I enjoyed spending time with current students looking at how they cope with study and how they prepare for and carry out their study. As we were reminded at RTC you are your "own boss", you have to set your study priorities. There is a lot of discipline required, most of it in trying not to be distracted away from study. There are many other activities desired of students like running small groups, outreach groups, taking up office in the church you worship in and taking many services and writing sermons. Students are reminded to try to keep to 55hr per week spread over six days, the remainder is their time.

I believe I would cope with that and the level of work required. However as we were reminded at the conference it is not "here I am Lord I have all these skills and abilities to use in your Kingdom, use me" but to come in humbleness and say "here I am Lord" and then wait on the Lord of the Kingdom.

Yours in His Service

Jake VanderBurg

Book in focus

The Courage to be Protestant.

David F Wells

Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, UK), 2008

**Reviewed by Rev John Rogers,
minister of the Reformed Church
of the North Shore.**

A couple of years ago, the president of the Roman Catholic Apologetics Society in Auckland lent me a book on Roman Catholicism and fundamentalism,

thinking that it would speak to what he thought were my beliefs as an evangelical. I read maybe 150 pages and returned it to him, telling him that it didn't speak to me at all. The author completely misunderstood me – I certainly wasn't **that** kind of an evangelical and definitely not a fundamentalist. (Actually, it was a very bad book; it didn't even represent fundamentalists rightly or fairly. I know fundamentalists; I was brought up one and have my grandfather's books on

my shelf.) But as we talked further, he responded to my 'self-revelation' by telling me I was a very unusual Protestant. I replied that I didn't think that was true; I was just an ordinary Protestant (in the line of Luther, Calvin, Knox, Cranmer), but I had to admit that regular garden-variety Protestants are rather thin on the ground in the ecclesiastical garden right now.

It's kinda nice when you come across a big name who agrees with you. I am

presently reading David F Wells's latest book and he doesn't reckon the 'evangelical church' of the early twenty-first century is Protestant either – or at least, far too much of what believes itself to be the evangelical movement. And he tosses down the gauntlet with the title of his book: *The Courage to be Protestant (Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Post-Modern World)*, published by Eerdmans (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, UK), 2008 (so there you go, if you want to be relevant; it couldn't be more up to date). It's a real *tour de force*, as they say, beginning with the assertion that while

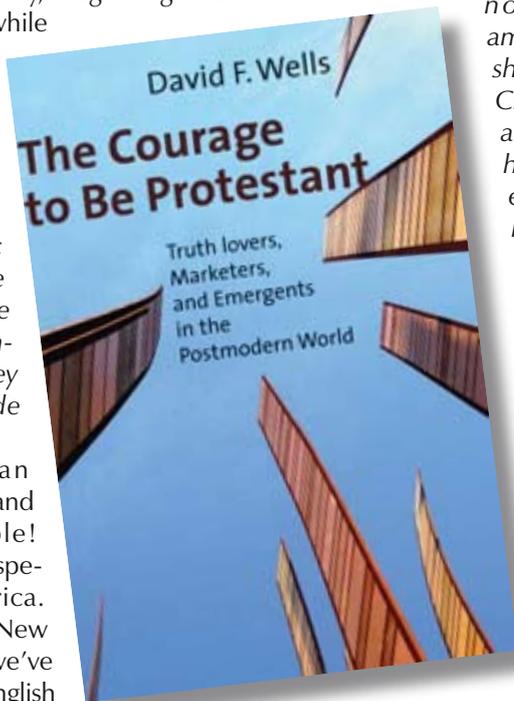
"the emergence of the evangelical movement following World War II has been a success story," the "truths of historic Protestantism are sometimes no more welcome in evangelicalism than they are in the outside culture."

Every Christian should read it – and it's very readable! Okay, it is written specifically for America. But, oh dear, poor New Zealand, thinking we've grown too big for English institutions (to prattle on about being grown up is the sure and infallible sign one hasn't). We have for a good thirty years or more latched on Uncle Sam's coat-tails instead, so the book applies to us equally. Chapter headings are: *The Lay of the Evangelical Land, Christianity for Sale, Truth, God, Self, Christ, and Church*. A real review would be nice, I guess, but maybe an appetizer would do the job better, from pp.131-133. After bemoaning the disappearance of the sense of the holiness of God from the modern church because, well, holiness is not a great seller (and let's not think that is not a problem for us either); Wells adds that

"... holiness is slipping from the grasp of American born-againers today! The evangelical movement is simply at sea when it comes to matters of holiness. In fact, according to a Barna study in 2006, there is very little difference between the born-again

and the non-born-again in understanding what holiness is. Of the wider American public, only 35 percent believes that God expects people to be holy, and within this category young people are less well represented than those who are older. As we think about the future, this is indeed a straw blowing in the wind.

But even among the born-again, fewer than half have any idea what holiness means. This ignorance, from



among those who should know what Christianity is all about, no doubt has many causes. It certainly is related to what churches are – or, more accurately, are not – teaching. It is certainly an outcome of the cut-rate Christianity now being marketed by the seeker-sensitives. It is an inevitable outcome of

the emergents' disposition not to think in terms of absolutes and not to be "judgmental" about the lifestyles and behavior of people. And by whatever route we have reached this point, it is also related to the fact that when it comes to spirituality, knowledge of the Bible ranks at the bottom of the list. So goes our knowledge of God as holy. So goes our understanding of holiness.

The truth is, the importance of holiness to Christian life is not something we come to understand naturally. It is not something we naturally desire. It is something we discover through God's revelation. But if that revelation is shelved and closed, if those who go to church rarely hear any sustained discussion of its truth, what should we expect other than this dismal misunderstanding?

When asked to describe what holiness is, only 7 percent of Americans rooted this in the character of God. Although 72 percent said they had made a commitment to Christ, and 71 percent said their faith was "very important" to them, and 60 percent said they were "deeply spiritual," only 16 percent said their faith was the highest priority in their lives. Barna's conclusion was that most Americans like the security of being able to think of themselves as "Christian," but most also resist the biblical responsibilities that go along with that claim. For the great majority, he says, being identified as a Christian is more about image than about substance. It is a cultural thing. It is all about creating a pleasing self-image.

We probably did not need Barna to roll out this revelation. It is there to be seen everywhere in America today. But where this state of affairs is most scandalous is in the churches that imagine themselves on the cutting edge of advancing Christian faith. What many of them are producing are so-called followers of Christ who are in it for their own spiritual comfort but who are at sea when it comes to understanding the significance of God's holiness for their Christian lives. And the reason for that, quite simply, is that many churches, obsessed with their own success, have made Christianity light and easy so that they can market it successfully. What are the consequences, then, of losing sight of the holiness of God, this aspect of the outside God [a phrase he uses to describe God's transcendence]? And, just as important, what are the consequences of seeing the holiness of God?

Our situation today is not that different from what pertained in much of Israel's history. The Old Testament people of God were religious, but often their religion made little difference. This, apparently, is exactly what we have in the born-again sector in America today. The ancient Israelites' religion was not an impediment to idol worship or to a whole assort-

ment of pagan practices. They had the written law and the temple worship. They had the prophets. They had all they needed to please God, but so often they would not listen. They would not reckon with his holy will. They became careless, living as if he were not there, living as if their ways were nothing more than a lifestyle choice, always hearing but never understanding, seeing but remaining blind hearts hard, ears deaf, eyes blind. And the problem? The problem was that again and again, with monotonous repetition, they lost sight of the holiness of God. And they paid the painful consequences for this, again and again.

Is this really so different from what we have now in the West? We have enough Bibles for every household in America a couple of times over. We have churches galore; religious organizations; educational institutions; religious presses that never stop pouring forth books, Sunday school materials, and religious curricula: and unparalleled financial resources. What don't we have? All too often we don't have what the Old Testament people didn't have. A due and weighty sense of the greatness and holiness of God, a sense that will reach into our lives, wrench them around, lift our vision, fill our hearts, make us courageous

for what is right, and over time leave behind its beautiful residue of Christlike character.

Is this a matter so impractical that we can claim that it has nothing to do with our lives? Is this really so abstract that we can dismiss it as not being "practical" and therefore as irrelevant to what is important to us on a day-to-day basis? We may claim that, and indeed, many in the evangelical church are doing so.

Let us not mince words. If we could see more clearly God in the full blaze of his burning purity, we would not be on easy terms with all the sins that now infect our souls and breed easy compromises with the spirit of the postmodern age. This is what leads to the casual ways in which we live our lives with their blatantly wrong priorities. If we could see this more clearly, the church would be filled with much more repentance and, in consequence, much more joy, and much more authenticity.

So what do we need to do? Quite simply, we need to find again the outside God. We have been busy fashioning evangelical faith mostly in terms of the inside God [God's immanence, his nearness]. Why have we done this? Because it has been in our interests to do so. God has been squeezed into the nooks and crannies of life that are private and where we feel the strains of

life, where we feel the need for his therapy. This is where consumers are in the hunt for Something. Pastors know that. Everyone knows that. And so, hungering for success and acceptance, the church has adapted itself to its context. When this happens, the church is reduced to being just another organization trying to perpetuate itself for its own reasons. It loses its seriousness. It loses its God-given purpose. It loses its way.

The reverse side of this is that as long as we are on this side of heaven, we can always find again what we have lost. We can always rejoin a path off which we have wandered. We can always find our way back into the blessing of God because God is more willing to bless us through Christ than we are to be blessed. We can always find again the outside God because this is how he has revealed himself in Scripture. It is this about himself he wants us to know, for without it we will be adrift on a sea of meaninglessness.

To all my colleagues: Get it brothers and read it. It's easy reading and it will be good for your spine; and by the Lord's grace, your soul and your congregation as well. But it is also a book that all Christians can and should read. It's not technical. It's plain language. I recommend it to all.

John Rogers

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

FAMILY ANNOUNCEMENTS: A new addition: John and Christine are happy to announce Michael Kirk Addis was born in the early hours (0.45am western time US) on Thursday (James' birthday) 11th June. All well. We give thanks to God for His gift of new life.

Vicar Daniel Wilson – last Friday, Daniel 'sustained' his Presbytery exam. By passing this exam, Daniel has been declared eligible for call although he will not be able to commence ministry until after the conclusion of his vicariate in September. Daniel gave a moving testimony as to why he felt called to the ministry. Daniel will be visiting a number of churches in the denomination and will also be meeting with the Avondale Session.

Deacons and others: The National Deaconate Committee have requested the North Shore deacons to run a conference especially for deacons in the Auckland

Presbytery. It will take place on the North Shore, on 12th September, starting at 9am until 12:30pm to be followed by lunch. The proposed subject matter is 'The Role of a Deacon'. Over the last few years we (at the Shore) have looked at this issue, and have tried to organise ourselves so deaconate is functioning biblically. We have not made it as yet, but we understand that other churches have considered this as well. The intent of this conference is to look at the functions that deacons should be carrying out, embedded in all ministries in the congregation. Therefore, this conference should not be confined to deacons, but

to all men who seek to see the church functioning biblically.

Bishopdale

Resource Consent Hearing. On Friday, the Christchurch City Council heard our application for permission to extend our facilities. The hearing proved longer than expected, starting at 9:15am and ending at about 5:30pm. We were represented by Cedric Carrenceja who helped us navigate through the intricacies of the Resource Management Act and the planning regulations. I gave evidence about the role of the church in the community and Sean Elvines gave evidence as an expert planner. Rob Bosma answered questions about the plans. Others from the church were there in support. Thank you to you all for giving up so much of your time. A number of our neighbours expressed their concerns about what we were planning, some forcefully. If the Council grants consent, which is reasonably likely, we may have to talk further with them and find ways to alleviate some of their concerns. Robert van Wichen

Pastoral. Glenys and Jonny Watson were blessed with another daughter, Alana Mae weighing in at 3.89 kg on Wednesday 3 June. We can rejoice with Jim and Helen Nugteren on the birth of another grandchild.

Bucklands Beach

Evening with Murray Capill. Murray Capill, formerly our pastor here at Bucklands Beach and currently the principal at the Reformed Theological College, is currently in New Zealand. He is willing to speak at a special meeting of the congregation on Thursday, June 18th. Let's make it a special fellowship night. Murray will be speaking on how to listen to a sermon!

Dovedale

Pastoral Notes. From next Lord's Day, it is my intention to change our doxologies to selection 488 for the morning service, and selection 211:23 (Alternate tune) for the afternoon service. The word 'Doxology' means 'word of praise.' We use it to end our worship because it is good and fitting for us to praise the God who has blessed us in and through worship. Perhaps you might be able to sing these doxologies as families sometime during the week?

New Members. Most of you will know that Br and Sr Dom and Gladys de la Cruz and their daughter Francesca have

been worshipping with us for some time. And so it is with great joy that we announce to you that we intend to welcome Dom and Gladys into the full communicant membership of this church. Francesca will also be baptised in the same service. If there are no lawful objections, this will take place in the morning service on Sunday June 14th, God willing.

Pastoral Notes. Amen! Last week, in the morning service, we looked at the final part of Paul's doxology in Ephesians 3:21. In the close of the sermon, we saw that the Bible calls us to add our "Amen!" to the different "Amens" of worship (Neh 8, 1 Cor 14:16, Rev. 5:14). Now, it maybe that some of us are not used to this, but at the end of prayers and at the end of the sermon, let's heed the Word of the Lord and give Him the praise and glory that He so richly deserves with a congregational "Amen!"

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. Last Monday night the Lord called to himself Henk Geerlofs after a short illness. Martha and the rest of the family are very much in our thoughts and prayers. We will greatly miss Henk, yet we are consoled in the knowledge that we do not grieve as those who have no hope. We are grateful that Rev Robert van Wichen could come from Bishopdale

and conduct the funeral.

We look forward to having Daniel and Raewyn Wilson—and their children David (2) and Benjamin (4 months)—with us here in Dunedin next Sunday and in Oamaru on Sunday 28 June. Daniel is currently serving his vicariate at the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach. He completed his Master of Divinity degree at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Taylors, South Carolina, USA in May 2008.

Hastings

From Pastor Hoyt. It was great to see the sun last Thursday! I hadn't seen it the whole time I was in Oamaru – the days were grey and rainy there and the highway into Dunedin was even closed by snow the day before I was to travel from Oamaru to Dunedin. Thankfully it was open and clear the next day. Despite the heavy dump of snow on the surrounding mountains, the clouds were so low that all we could see was the snow on the lower hills up to about 300 metres; above that it was grey. Seems like our NZ weather has forgotten that the world is undergoing global warming! I had a very good time in Oamaru & Timaru making 18 family visits over the 11 days I was there. The folks expressed appreciation for the pastoral visits. Many of them had not had visits by elders or

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Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. Matthew 7:24

With thanks and praise to our
Heavenly Father, we announce the

50th WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

of our dear parents and Opa and Oma

JOHAN AND TIETSIA LAMBERS (nee Regeling)

We thank God for His providential care over them during their married life, and pray that He will continue to guide them and that they may continue to put their trust in Him alone.

With love from your children and grandchildren.

a pastor for several years. Then I was able to meet with the full session and their counsellor (Rev. Nugteren) and give a report on my visits and also give my assessment and some suggestions for both the work in Timaru and the group in Oamaru. They certainly need our continued prayers as they seek to plant a Reformed Church in Timaru and also for the group in Oamaru as they seek to grow and become a self-standing church on their own. The elders in both Oamaru and Dunedin expressed their appreciation to our session for allowing me to go and assist them in this way.

Advanced Notice – "Bring a Guest" Dinner. A "bring a guest" dinner is planned for Saturday 20th June 7:30 p.m. at 903 Florence Street. This is a great opportunity to invite some of your non-Christian friends and/or relatives to hear international creation science researcher John McKay speak about the origins of the universe from a thoroughly biblical perspective. John incorporates a powerful gospel proclamation in his presentations and is an engaging speaker. To book a seat for dinner for yourself and your guest(s), please contact Neal Grant.

Nelson

Sermon notes am: When you sit down to a good meal, what is it that you appreciate the most? Most often, I think, we focus on the goodness of the meal and forget about the source of the meal, namely the one who prepared it. Yet the meal is an expression of the skill and heart of the cook. Some time ago I was assigned to examine a candidate in theology at one of our presbytery meetings: One pastor commented that he learned more about me than about the candidate. We reveal ourselves in the things that we do. This morning we look at the creation, the beginning of our history but, rather than only looking at the things that were made, we must lift up our eyes to the Maker who reveals Himself through that which He created. So now it is tea-time for Adam. What is placed before him? What does God reveal about Himself in that creation? And how is Adam to respond? And so it is for us. We live surrounded by the works of God. Do we see Him? Glorify Him? Or are we so nearsighted that we see only "things" and fail to glorify our God?

Palmerston North

Announcements. Warm congratulations to Sam and Dalena de Vries on the safe arrival of Zane this past week. Both mother and baby are well. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

This morning we welcome into church membership Marilyn Aday. We are delighted to have you join with us and we pray that you would quickly feel very much at home as a member of our congregation.

Pukekohe

Today we will witness the baptism of Grace Jochem, the first child of Tim and Jodie. It is a privilege to be able to see this sign and seal of baptism administered to another child of the covenant. A warm welcome to family members who are visiting with us for this occasion. On the subject of the sermon I commend to you two books in the church library: "Fatherhood" by Tony Payne, and "Shepherding a Child's Heart" by Tedd Tripp.

Ever Thine

Jesus, like a Shepherd lead me
all my life.

Do not like a sinner treat me
in my strife.

Saviour, from the devil free me,
make me Thine.

In my pain and sorrow see me,
Thou art mine.

Lord, when other help is failing,
Thou art not.

In times when enemies assailing,
leave me not.

Christ, King of kings, be Thou
my Light on the way
of life, all through the night
till it's Day.

*John Goris
Moe, November 1956*



"The Mighty One, God, the Lord, has spoken, and summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting". Psalm 50:1

Photo: Carl Leenders

Auckland Women's Presbyterian 2009

When Saturday, May 2nd dawned we ladies at Bucklands Beach were ready to host what we call the annual "Women's Presbyterian". This meeting has a long history and has been tremendously important and valued as a means of creating and maintaining friendships among the women of our churches. We had been praying, planning and preparing for what we hoped would be a memorable day.

The weather was dismal. Grey leaky skies discouraged a few from coming. However, the welcome given and received was heartfelt and warm as the ladies began to arrive from 9.45am onwards. The inevitable nametag and cuppa was a first priority. As everyone streamed in, we found this to be one of the noisiest times of the day. Beaming people welcomed, embraced and pecked each other's cheeks! It's good to see each other.

At 10.30 we were called into the auditorium and welcomed. After the reading of Psalm 139 and prayer, the first of our guest speakers was introduced. She was Deanna Watson who spoke to us about the importance of and different ways of creating memories. Her special focus was on taking care of and using photo albums as a legacy for our children and grandchildren. It's about more than pictures though. Through and by means of them we may give the next generation a wonderful testimony to the grace and love of the God in our lives.

Mrs Nikki Bray was the main speaker. She spoke of her life's journey in a most vivid and courageous manner. Her childhood experiences in a very dysfunctional 'family' consisting of a solo mother, a brother and different dads, homes and an orphanage were filled with uncertainty, rejection and abuse. It was awful. But, by the grace of God who is in control of all things, Nikki found Christ, began to experience the healing power that forgiveness and renewal brings. She actively sought out and, one by one met with and forgave those who had hurt her. What a challenge for us to forgive – especially those closest to us. Nikki herself had much to forgive her mother, and did so. In view of Mother's Day (the next Sunday), we were all challenged to recognise our mothers and, as necessary, rekindle or build up our relationship with them. We

were amazed at Nikki's willingness to tell us her story – and in particular her experiences with her mother. Imagine the emotion of the moment when we were told that Nikki's mother was there with us and, dramatically, pointed to the previous speaker, Deanna Watson. Christ transforms! We saw and shared it with our own eyes.

After hearing and being a part of this testimony, there was time for (much more muted!) discussion among ourselves and with the speakers. There was also time to look at and admire a number of 'creating memories' flower arrangements made by Marie Wimmers. Her work is simply stunning.

By 12.30 we were ready for lunch. Tables had been specially laid out for us and we were treated like royalty. Catering for 120 women was quite a feat and worked exceptionally well. What made it all the more special was a whole team of young people who were there to serve and help.

After lunch we were herded back into the auditorium for the 'business' part of our annual meeting. Each congregation in the presbytery presented a report on what the women in their church have been doing as a group. It's always good and often hilarious to hear about some of the things, planned and unplanned, that happen. Arrangements for next year's hosts were made.

The fun part of the programme consisted of two beautiful duets sung by Hachila Kumar and her daughter Karoline. They sang to us in their native language, Tamil and the other in English.



Main speaker: Mrs Nikki Bray.



Mrs Deanna Watson.



The tables ready to start groaning with a truckload of goodies the hall decked out to feed the multitudes.



The contestants in the fashion parade! All were unique and winners.



The sisters, all 120 of them, tuck into a special sit-down luncheon.

The capping off was a 'wearable art fashion show' in which some of the ladies demonstrated their ingenuity and creativity. Some of the pictures are worth a thousand words.

The day ended all too quickly with a cuppa and a call to drive home safely. A wonderful memory was created.

Gonny van Garderen



One of the several flower arrangements.