

faith in  
**focus**

Magazine of the  
Reformed Churches  
of New Zealand

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Remember your Creator in the days of  
your youth ...

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## Editorial

You might be excused for thinking that this issue of *Faith in Focus* is for young people, seeing that the cover, the first three articles and the book reviews that follow are for young people. Well, if that is what you thought – you're partly right. But this issue has plenty for everybody, not just the young. In fact, I would encourage parents to read the articles and encourage any young people living in your home to read them too. After all, these articles are about them, and they were written to challenge them.

Today, the pressures put on young people by the world around them is somewhat different to when I was a young man. Nevertheless, the issues are the same for each generation of young people born and raised in the church of our Lord. There is great pressure on them to comply with the standards and norms of New Zealand society, which seems to adopt the sinful philosophy "live and let live", and "if I'm not hurting anyone else then that's ok, Jack". But, God, whom we serve and to whom we belong in and through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ says, "... but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behaviour; because it is written, 'You shall be holy for I am holy'". (1 Peter 1:15-16)

And make no mistake, the pressure is on! All forms of media today are selling this message. You can see it, hear it, read it, on television, radio, newspapers, books, music CDs, DVDs and movies etc. Then there is pressure to work on the Lord's Day, and the difficult question of what is and what is not appropriate employment – need I go on? I suggest you read the articles.

Mr Bryan Hoyt writes on "Forgetting something?", and presents a challenge to the young (and not so young) to "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth". Mr Martin Geluk asks "Why do Reformed Churches have public Profession of Faith?", and deals with four major questions that some young people have about this part of church life. Mr Robert van Wichen writes about "Falling in love with someone who isn't a Christian", and shows why it is wrong to marry an unbeliever. This is not just a young person's problem! Mrs Sally Davey reviews Robert Godfrey's *An Unexpected Journey: Discovering Reformed Christianity* and Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck's *Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion*, both of which sound most compelling.

Mr Martin Geluk and Mr Sjirk Bajema tell us all about the "Conference on the state and future of the CRCA".

Mrs Anna Baird writes about A Rocha Field Study Centre in Vancouver, Canada, and tells us about their work as Christian conservationists.

World in Focus and Focus on Home feature again in this issue. Thank you to all those contributors and helpers who made this magazine possible.

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## Knots Untied – J.C.Ryle – p158

There is a Church outside of which there is no salvation, – a church to which a man must belong, or be lost eternally .... It is made up of all God's elect, – of all converted men and women, – of all true Christians.

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 Dort, 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.

# Remember your Creator in the days of your youth (1)

## Forgetting something?

### Young, full of life, and looking forward to the weekend?

The older you get, I've heard, the simpler you'd like life to be. I'm young still, but I want to spend a little time reminding spring chickens like myself that no matter how much you achieve in life, you'll feel defeated at the end, if you forget where you're heading. So, to young people who've grown up going to church and are uncertain about what you're going to do for the rest of your life, this really does apply to you.

Let's reduce life on earth to the simplest it can be. With something to eat every day, shelter from the cold and wet, and safety from serious danger, you would be living a life capable of being sustained for a very long time. Anything less, and you would be on the brink of death.

Sounds rather raw. It's reminiscent of something Thomas Hobbes famously wrote: "the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". He was talking about life reduced to the barest existence, and he didn't think it was much worth living for. He went on to describe how humans have formed societies, agreements to serve and protect each other, governments, and other boring things, in order to build a better existence.

\* \* \*

For many people, including many Kiwis, "solitary, poor, etc etc" describes life fairly accurately. But chances are, that's not you. So what about life as a Kiwi in 2010 is it better? Do you really think you're a happier, more fulfilled person because you have to turn up at work every morning and finish late in the evening, having spent the day doing much the same thing as yesterday? Because you're going to spend the next four years of your life at polytech or university sitting in a lecture hall, perhaps learning a little?

Or are you a bit less cynical, a bit more goal-focused? You're convinced that all this rat-race is going to lead somewhere, eventually? One day, you'll have a big mortgage-free house with an orchard behind it, a beautiful family, and a cold drink waiting for you on the porch. Then you'll be happy. One day, you'll achieve great things, all because you put in the hard yards early on in your life. Perhaps you're working so hard because you'd like future generations to live a life worth living, a life better than the life you have now.

Many people don't think quite so far ahead, but you still have plenty to live for. You've got rugby on the weekends, summer barbeques, curling up in front of a DVD on a winter's night. Life is a bit dull at times, but it's got its perks. Perhaps you just enjoy growing, developing, learning.

Perhaps you don't see the problem at all – you love life, and can't imagine it any other way. Every moment of your day is enjoyable. (Maybe you should write a book. I'd buy it.)

**Well, good for you. Those are the things you serve.** Your happiness, your family, your weekends, your goals, the future generations.

You might think I'm being a bit blunt. Well, I'm not actually condemning you. I can understand living for all of those things (except the rugby ...)

Whatever gets you out of bed in the morning, as they say. But, as enjoyable as life is with all of those things, I don't think *any of them* really makes up for the struggle of existence.

But I'm not the one you have to answer to.

\* \* \*

I don't know much about heaven, but it has little to do with sitting on clouds playing harps for eternity. If you could imagine a world where the most beautiful music you've ever heard sounds like a broken record in comparison, where the fastest car you've ever driven, the world's greatest art, conversation, architecture, technology, food, gardens, all seem like children's



toys, you might be getting closer to the truth.

**But the picture's missing something.**

If you're an artist, imagine meeting Leonardo da Vinci. Imagine playing music with the Beatles, appearing on Top Gear for a drive with Jeremy Clarkson, or walking through the Guggenheim Museum with Frank Lloyd Wright. These are the people who have created the things we love. Some of them represent the greatest artistic achievements in history.

We love the idea of meeting men and women like these who have created great things. Most people will never get the chance.

In heaven, you will stand face-to-face with the Person who created the greatest artwork ever. You will walk with Him through museums of His work. He will stand next to you as you paint pictures of his breathtakingly beautiful creation.

“Every person has a different path in life ... choosing to serve God involves some practical, here-and-now choices.”

You will play music with Him. You will sit at His table, eating, drinking, and talking about things you never imagined.

You'll find it hard to believe you could have ever thought that living for anyone else was worthwhile. You'll truly realise how worthless it was to spend your life living in pursuit of a drug-addicted rock star's next concert, a multi-billionaire director's next film, or even a quiet, peaceful life.

Life forever with God is worth living for. But it doesn't take a genius to realise that "living for life with God", even during this life, is going to be different than the living we've all been doing so far – solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short, in spite of all the perks.

So what's different? Well, you probably know the rules, and the importance of your heart being right (over and above just doing the right thing), and you probably know about forgiveness, and the fact that you can talk to the Person who made you, at any time, like an awe-inspiring friend. Those things are all very different in someone who lives for God.

**But let's look at how you let God shape your life.**

Remember, let *God* shape your life. You can't do it yourself, and that's not a life worth living anyway.

It's a little hard to be specific at this point. Every person has a different path in life, and rightly so. But choosing to serve God involves some practical, here-and-now choices.

**Choose to serve God all of your days.**

From now, to the end. Don't wait. Don't set aside a little time for yourself.

**Choose to talk and think about things that God loves.**

This isn't a question of whether you're allowed to say certain words, or to avoid R-rated movies and music. Those are good questions, but I won't try to answer them. Christianity goes much deeper than that.

This is a question of what your life is

focused on. Do you read romance novels? That's not a sin. Do you share them with your friends, revel in the gossipy juiciness? Maybe you should start asking yourself some hard questions.

Do you lose your temper sometimes? You should work on that. But are you filled with anger, always annoyed with people? Your life needs to change.

Do you watch R-rated movies? Well, bad things are out there, and we can't avoid them. But do you watch those movies because you love the arrogant swagger of the guy with the gun? The deliciously suggestive, and quite frankly sinful, sexual undertones? The feel-good (and rather shallow) story of self-achievement? I'm not saying to stop watching. I'm suggesting you should give some thought the focus of your life and the center of your desires.

**Choose to live your life with people who serve God.**

It's not *just* a question of which church you go to, or whether you go to church, or whether your friends happen to be Christians. It's

more a question of how dedicated to serving God are the people you spend time with. The late-night discussions you have with them. What movies you watch with them, and what you talk about afterwards.

**Choose to deny your desires, in favour of what God wants for you.**

It's not just about choosing God when there's a conflict between His desires and yours, trying to find a way to make your desires work together with God's somewhat inconvenient plan for your life. It's about choosing God *every time*. Sometimes God's desires for your life will be the same as your own – that's nice, but if you find yourself thinking that way, you're thinking back-to-front.

Does God want you to study for 10 years to be a doctor? Then pursue that life!

Does God want you to be wealthy and successful? Then pursue that life (but don't forget about the camel and the eye of the needle!)

Does God want you to live in a leaky hut, providing medical aid for a small unheard-of-village in South America, and die forgotten? Pursue that life!

Does God want you to be an ordinary middle-class church-goer? Pursue it, and make it extraordinary!

Of course, just because God has placed you somewhere, that doesn't mean he'll want you to always stay there. God intends us to change and grow forever.

No, it's not wrong to have desires – it's good! But you'll be living a better life if you're less concerned about your desires.

**Choose to accept wisdom from other people who serve God.**

It can be humbling, sometimes, to have other people tell you how to live your life. But if you find "What does God want for my life?" a hard question, this is part of the answer. It can be hard, but remember what's at stake.

If you're trying to serve God, you'll find yourself working harder than you need to if you're doing it without other people.

\* \* \*

While you have time and energy, remember your Creator in the days of your youth.

**Bryan Hoyt**

# Remember your Creator in the days of your youth (2)

## Why do Reformed Churches have public Profession of Faith?

**Martin P Geluk**

Sometimes young people in the church ask why do we in the Reformed Churches have public professions of faith and when is it the best time to do it?

It is a fair question to ask because it is pointless to do things in the church without good reason. Before we try and answer the question, we should note that it is not just Reformed Churches that have this practice. Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches also have a specific occasion where one becomes a full member of the church. With these denominations just mentioned it is usually done at a much younger age, even before you are a teenager. And because you are expected to become a full member at such a young age it is almost done automatically. This article will show that a public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus should be done at an age when you can understand the biblical plan of salvation and also be able to exercise church membership in a responsible manner. Children are not able to do this as yet. But young adults could. In Baptist churches one can only become a full member when you receive

believer's baptism. Other churches of different denominations simply regard someone a member when they have been attending for a while and when they do not show up anymore then they are no longer considered as members. These churches do not practise a public profession of faith as such.

So why do we have public profession of faith? Some may argue that we do not need to have it at all. It could be any of the following reasons:

- The Bible does not say specifically that you have to stand up in church before all the people and publicly confess that Jesus is your Lord and Saviour.
- If you are already a Christian and believe that you are a child of God then it does not change anything if you make or do not make a public profession of faith.
- Faith in God is really a personal matter between God and me and I cannot see why everybody else in the church has to be involved.
- As a Christian I do not want to be identified too closely to one particular church and therefore I do not want to be tied down to one particular

church. There are many Christian churches and I want to be free as to where I feel I belong.

Let us look at each of the above in turn and our answers will also shed light as to when a young person can publicly profess faith responsibly.

**The Bible does not say specifically that you have to stand up in church before all the people and publicly confess that Jesus is your Lord and Saviour.**

This is quite correct; the Bible does not specifically say that. In the days of the New Testament when, through the preaching and teaching of the gospel, people became convicted of their sin, repented, and believed in Christ, then they were regarded as followers of Christ. They joined other believers in their worship of God. And there were no different denominations. There was just the one Christian church.

However, it was not long before false teaching entered the church through people who, either unintentional or



“The Session should examine baptised members, who wish to become communicant members, concerning their motives, doctrine and life.”

deliberately, misunderstood what Jesus and the apostles had taught. We see this already in the New Testament letters to the different churches. They often correct wrong views and rebuke those who were responsible. False teaching does not surprise us. There are many truths in God's Word that are difficult to understand because our minds are sinful. When people are converted to Christ then it can still take a while before their thinking and behaviour conform to God's standards. During that process of sanctification they think, say and do things that are not yet biblical. The leaders in the early church, therefore, found it necessary to satisfy themselves that those wanting to join the church were Christians indeed and that their basic knowledge of Christ and God's Word was biblical. And when in the fourth century Christianity was legally permitted to exist, some wanted to join the church for the wrong reasons. This became another reason for an examination.

How did the elders of the church find out if people were really converted and had the right motives? By asking questions. And how could the church know that those wanting to join were genuine Christian believers? By the elders telling the church that they were satisfied with the answers they had received from these new believers. These new believers also publicly professed their faith in Christ in the presence of other believers. This was probably done in a very simple and informal way and was of course a very joyful occasion. If at a later time it became clear that the new member was not a Christian after all then it was not just the elders of the church who had been misled. The church could also point to the person and accuse him or her of making a false profession.

So whilst the New Testament does not specifically say that the first Chris-

tians wanting to join the church had to make a public profession of their faith, it soon became the practice in the early church. And that practice has remained with the Christian church for a long time and we should continue with it because unbiblical thinking and false motives are still around. Therefore the Session should examine baptised members, who wish to become communicant members, concerning their motives, doctrine and life. Subject to satisfactory assessment, baptised members become communicant members on professing their faith in a public worship service in accordance with the form for the public profession of faith prescribed by Synod.

**If you are already a Christian and believe that you are a child of God then it does not change anything if you make or do not make a public profession of faith.**

It is true to say that you do not become a Christian when you make a public profession of your faith. A public profession of faith is really an outward commitment of an inner conviction. And that inner conviction may have been there for some time. Especially when you have been blessed with Christian parents who had you baptised as a child. God has a covenant with believers and their children [Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39]. God promises them to be their God, which means that He will be to them the God of salvation. Baptism is a sign and seal of God's promise. Baptism is not a sign of one's faith. Some churches see it that way and therefore they will only baptise those who show they have faith. But in the Reformed understanding of Scripture we have always believed baptism to be a sign of what God promises.

Through the faithful Christian upbringing of Christian parents, through the preaching and teaching of the Christian church, and where possible, through Christian education in a Christian school, a child of the covenant grows in the love and knowledge of Christ. But it does not always happen. A covenant child can be disobedient to God's Word and rebel. If there is no repentance and true faith then such a child is a covenant breaker and will receive God's judgment. But if by the grace of God the covenant child begins to increasingly understand what it means to be a child of God and wants to be a Christian believer, then that will begin to show. These are the years when the child becomes a teenager and then a young adult. It is a wonderful blessing for the Christian family, the Christian church, and the Christian school, to see a covenant child develop into a young Christian believer. And of course, for that young Christian believer it is also a great blessing. It is not always easy to live Christianly in a pagan world but through daily repentance and faith, with regular Bible reading, study and prayer, you know and believe that God is your Father and you are His child.

In other words, as a child of the covenant, having received baptism as a sign and seal of God's covenant promise, you have responded to God's call to follow Christ. The covenant has two sides. One side is God saying He will be your God. The other side is you responding to God in faith and obedience.

How will the church where you are a baptised member know that you now have a personal faith in the Lord? How will the elders of the church know this? If you are genuine and sincere in your walk with God then it will show in your Christian lifestyle. You will want to make it your practice to read God's Word every day, be diligent in prayer, faithfully attend the church services, and become active in the work of the church. The church and its elders will see this and also know it from home visits to you and your family.

The time has come, therefore, for you to also be strengthened in your faith through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The preaching and teaching of the Word is already helping your faith to grow. God has also given the Lord's Supper for this purpose. In the Lord's Supper you identify with Christ and His church. Only believers can partake in this sacrament.

Now how can the church best admit

you to participation in the Lord's Supper? It cannot be left entirely up to you because God has charged the elders of the church to exercise supervision over all what the church does [Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17a]. Therefore, you can ask the elders to have a talk with you about the genuineness of your faith, your motives and your knowledge of the fundamental teachings of the Bible. The elders will be most keen to hear this from you. It is an answer to their prayers and a blessing from God on the preaching and teaching of His Word through the home, church and the Christian school. And how will the other members of the church know all this? Through you making a public profession of your faith in the Lord Jesus. The whole church will be delighted and your fellow believers have an opportunity to unitedly pray for you and support you as a fellow Christian.

So whilst a public profession of faith does not make you a Christian, because you are that already, it does bring a change in another way. The whole church has now seen and heard that you too are a fellow believer and you can take your rightful place at the Lord's table.

### **Faith in God is really a personal matter between God and me and I cannot see why everybody else in the church has to be involved.**

This is true only up to a point. Yes, faith is very much a personal matter. You are called by God to repent and believe. Others cannot do this for you. If you are born from Christian parents then as a young child you believe what your parents believe because they teach you what to believe. But there must come a time when you have to think for yourself and decide to personally believe in God.

But no Christian believer exists on his/her own. God calls those who believe in Him into His church. All believers are part of His body and each part is needed in order to have the body work properly [1 Cor. 12:12ff]. The church is Christ's body and the Lord is its Head and Ruler. God calls us to serve one another in the church. We need the support, prayers, help and guidance from other Christians in order to be a blessing to the world, win others for Christ, and be an instrument in God's hand to transform society.

It makes perfect sense, therefore, for a Christian to join a church and become involved with other Christians. You need other Christians in many ways. You need the elders of the church to watch over your doctrine and life. As a Christian you even have a duty to do what you can to keep the church holy and pure. But in order to be part of the church you need to confess your faith.

Here are some Scripture texts that support the above:

*"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised from the dead, you will be saved" [Romans 10:9].* Yes, you can confess this to yourself but what is the point if you already believe? It makes more sense to confess to others that Jesus is your Lord.

Then there are a number of texts that have Jesus saying that if you will acknowledge Him before others then He will also acknowledge you before His heavenly Father. But if you are ashamed of Christ and disown Him, then He will be ashamed to mention you, and disown you, before His Father [Mt.10:32-33; Mk.8:38; Lk.9:26; 12:8-9].

Matthew 3:6 says, *"Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River."* People were not doing this quietly between John the Baptist and themselves. John was preaching to a lot of people and everybody could see and possibly hear those who confessed their sins.

How do people know that you are a Christian and have the Spirit of God in you? 1 John 4:2 says, *"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God."* And verse 15, *"If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."*

So you cannot be a closet Christian. If you are truly a child of God then you will acknowledge Christ openly and

unashamedly. Now if you are willing to do that before your family, friends, at school, university, at work, yes, wherever you are, then why be reluctant to make a public profession of your faith in church. One would think you would be very happy to testify in the presence of other Christians that Christ is also your Lord and Saviour.

Some are shy and reserved. Yet even so, when you as a Christian are somewhere and you have to make a stand for or against someone or something, then you will want to honour and obey Christ your Lord. It is a lot easier to publicly confess Christ in the church before other believers than it is to pagans who might persecute you.

### **As Christian I do not want to be identified too closely to one particular church and therefore I do not want to be tied down to one particular church. There are many Christian churches and I want to be free as to where I feel I belong.**

It is sad that we are starting to hear this more frequently. If you are the one saying this then it is clear that the spirit of individualism has got to you. Basically you want to be a church member on your own terms. You want to decide what you will accept or not accept according to your own feelings and insight. You might attend one church for a while and enjoy it. But then something the church does, or something people do, might upset you, or disagree with you, or you get bored or tired, and you leave and try another church. And after a while it is likely that the same process will be repeated because you are expecting things to always go your way. In the end you will not be happy anywhere and you may quit church altogether.

“You cannot be a closet Christian. If you are truly a child of God then you will acknowledge Christ openly and unashamedly.”

We need to understand a few things here. Firstly, for a church to be a true church of the Lord it must have biblical preaching, biblical administration of the sacraments, and a biblical form of discipline. We call these the three marks of a true church. Christians must look for these three marks when joining a church. And a church that practices these three marks will also have a concern for the lost and seek to bring them the gospel. A church not having these marks is not really a true church but a false church.

Secondly, God's church manifests itself in the local true church. The church is not out there somewhere. It does not make sense to say that you belong to God's church but are not a member of a local church. If you are not a member of a local church then you do not have commitments or responsibilities and no one can hold you accountable. The New Testament does not agree with that at all. You need to be a part of the body, the church, and under Christ the Head of the church. And the only way to belong to God's church is to be a member of a local true church.

Thirdly, you need to realise that not every true church is exactly the same. There are many denominations and even among those that have the marks of the true church there are differences in the understanding of Scripture. After two thousand years of church history we cannot undo that anymore. We humbly confess before the Lord that it is a sin that His church on earth is divided. We are now not talking about divisions between true and false churches. These divisions are necessary. We are talking about divisions among true churches. These divisions are about different interpretations of Scripture's teaching on certain doctrines. Christians having these

different understandings of Scripture can still have fellowship with each other when they all believe in the one Lord Jesus Christ and all acknowledge that the Bible is the inspired, authoritative, infallible Word of God. Yet there remain differences in interpreting what the Bible teaches about certain aspects of our salvation. For example, we speak about a Reformed [or Calvinistic] understanding of Scripture and an Arminian understanding of Scripture. The following shows the differences between the two. TULIP is the Calvinistic understanding and CURB the Arminian understanding:

- T Total depravity.** Every aspect of our being is tainted with sin. It blinds us to the truth about God.
- U Unconditional election.** God's choice to save some of the human race.
- L Limited atonement.** Jesus died for the elect, not for everyone.
- I Irresistible grace.** Once God's Spirit begins working in our hearts, we cannot resist God.
- P Perseverance [or preservation] of the saints.** Once we believe, we will never fall away from God.
- C Conditional election.** God's electing love is based on our acceptance and belief.
- U Unlimited atonement.** Jesus died for everyone, not just the elect.
- R Resistible grace.** We have the ability to say no to God's Spirit working in our hearts.
- B Backsliding.** We can lose our salvation even if we are true Christians.

There are other differences as well among Bible believing churches, like the biblical understanding of the church, the doctrine of the covenant, and the administration of the sacraments, baptism

and the Lord's Supper.

If you have grown up in the Reformed Church then we hope that you are familiar with a Reformed understanding of Scripture, which is most consistent in its interpretation of Scripture. We encourage you to continue your membership in the Reformed Church and make your public profession of faith and participate in the Lord's Supper. But in this day and age it does not always go like that. People often visit other churches of different denominations and are attracted to church programs and activities that please them. You need to ask yourself – am I attending this church because it seems to meet my felt needs, or is it because the preaching and teaching truly reflects a Reformed understanding of Scripture? Be aware that many churches operate on the lowest common denominator. That is, they major on Biblical teachings that most Protestants agree with, but avoid Biblical teachings they fear will divide people. So people in those churches will hear that Jesus saves and that God loves us and that we must love one another. But there may be little teaching about the depth and extent of sin and God's judgment on it, Christ as the substitute-Saviour, predestination, the covenant, and the kingdom of God.

Finally, once you have decided which local church you are going to belong to, having made sure that it is a true church, then you must remain a member there. One reason for not staying in a local true church is when you have to move and live far away from your home church. You can still remain a member but you need to worship with other Christians in a local true church. Another reason for no longer remaining a member of a local church is when that church ceases to be a true church and no longer will listen to its members trying to reform the church to what Scripture requires the church to be. Once again, you need to find another true local church. But if the above reasons do not apply then you ought to remain a faithful member of your church and do what you can to help your church remain a true church. Not trying to make the church conform to your personal needs and expectations but trying to keep the church what Christ, the Head of the church, wants His church to be.

*Mr Martin P Geluk, is Minister Emeritus, and has served in several churches in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia.*

## EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

### HUTT VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Hutt Valley Christian School is currently based in Wainuiomata. It is our intention to move to a new site in the Hutt Valley starting from 2011, Lord Willing. We will have vacancies for two positions one of which will be principal.

Please contact Mrs Janny De Vries at Wellington (04) 564 8552 or email [admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz](mailto:admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz) for further details.

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# Remember your Creator in the days of your youth (3)

## Falling in love with someone who isn't a Christian

**Robert van Wichen**

Falling in love can be intoxicating. We find ourselves 'irresistibly' attracted by a member of the opposite sex. Suddenly we can hardly imagine life without that person. But what if I am a Christian and my sweetheart is not? Should I pursue a relationship? Should I propose marriage or accept a proposal of marriage?

These questions can be challenging to answer. That is because what we want and what society says about relationships clash with the Bible. I will explain. When we fall in love, we can feel overwhelmed by our emotions. Every fibre of our being cries out, "I need this person. I cannot live without him or her." Other voices insist, "If it feels good do it!" or "Love is bigger than what you believe." But the Bible says, "No! A believer must not marry an unbeliever." So before allowing romantic love to blossom, we should be clear where the other person stands with God.

### **Abundant biblical evidence**

There are many passages in the Bible that address this issue. But we will focus on just one—2 Corinthians 6:14-18. The general principle is stated in the first sentence of verse 14: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers." Picture two very different animals yoked together. Take, for example, a cow and a sheep. It simply does not work. Likewise it does not work for a Christian and a non-Christian to be yoked together in life. The extent of this principle may be debated, but every Christian should be able to agree that this principle applies to courtship and marriage. If the principle is irrelevant to a relationship as close as marriage, it is hard to see how it could apply to other more distant relationships.

God gives us reasons for this principle in verses 14-16. After saying, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" the passage continues: "For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?" Belial is another name for Satan or the Antichrist. It can be difficult to think of unbelievers in these terms, particularly someone with whom I have fallen in love. We seem to have so much in common. But the bottom line is that Christians and non-Christians are fundamentally incompatible. Jesus Christ divides all of humanity down the middle. You are either for Him or against Him. There is no middle ground.

At some point, marrying an unbeliever will bring heartache. Marriage involves

two lives becoming one, but where a Christian and a non-Christian marry this cannot happen fully. Imagine two people setting out from Christchurch. One is going to Nelson to live and the other is going to settle in Blenheim. While they can travel together part of the way, at some point they will part company. So also Christians and non-Christians at some point must part company, even in marriage. Their commitments are fundamentally different; they have different destinations in life. This will result in growing unhappiness and could even lead to a complete parting of ways in divorce. Therefore it is unloving for a Christian to contemplate marrying a non-Christian. Sure, sometimes an unbelieving spouse may become a Christian. But we must never presume on God's grace. Indeed, there is a risk that the faith of the believing spouse will shrivel up and die.

But there is an even stronger reason



“As Christians, our love for God is to transcend all other loves. To do anything else is sinful and offensive to God.”

against marriage between Christians and non-Christians. And that is God’s love. To be a Christian is to have experienced God’s love, infinite, boundless and free. There is no greater love. Our relationship with God is far closer even than marriage. As it says in verses 16 and 18, “For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” and “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

By virtue of Jesus’ life and death, God

now lives in us by His Spirit and loves us as His children. This love transcends all other loves. As Christians, our love for God is to transcend all other loves. To do anything else is sinful and offensive to God. So where romantic love clashes with God’s love, romantic love must die so that our love for God can grow. This can be painfully difficult, but we must remember that Jesus calls us to “deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him.”

We need to add a caution. Sometimes the biblical requirement to be equally yoked is abused. It is extended to pro-

hibit marriage between Christians from different denominations. While it can be unwise to marry someone with different theological convictions, it is not necessarily wrong. However before pursuing a relationship, it would be prudent to seek counsel from those with more wisdom and objectivity than yourself.

The Bible is clear. Believers should only court and marry believers. This may involve sacrifice. It may mean heartache. It may even mean that we never get married. But out of love for God, we must say “No” to those who do not love Jesus. To be loved by another is wonderful, but it does not compare to the glory of being loved by God. So the question that each of us must answer is this, “Whom do I love most?” If it is God (and it should be), we will only want to marry someone who also loves Him.

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## Books in focus

Sally Davey

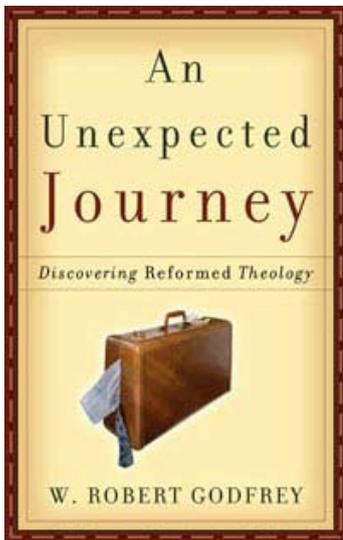
*Dear young people...*

Sometimes, I know, it is not easy to appreciate the church you grew up in. Sometimes it seems a lot easier for those who weighed things up in adult life, took a good look, and plunged into membership because they wanted to. And sometimes it can be frustrating hearing those same people telling you why you ought to appreciate the church you grew up in. Now, even though I am one of those who became a member-by-conviction in adult life, I would like to suggest that you read two books. They would both help you very much. They would answer many of your questions. They would deal with some of your worst frustrations. They would even help you a great deal when you’re trying to explain to your friends (who are in other churches, or no church at all) why you are in the church you’re in. And best of all, these books are well-written; they are written by people who sympathise with you (even though at times you will find them rebuking you and suggesting you should think differently). They are even, in places, hugely funny, because they describe our warts in a truthful, though unflattering way. They are written by people who are “in the fold” – Reformed church people – but they have a pretty good idea of how we look to those outside the fold. (I would have loved them when I was 22, still outside, looking in and investigating). So, here they are...

***An Unexpected Journey: Discovering Reformed Christianity***  
by W. Robert Godfrey (P&R Publishing, 2004). 150pp.

This book is written by Dr Bob Godfrey, President of Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California, since 1994. But don’t be put off by that – he is a friendly, conversational writer who is telling us about his teenage and early adult years – how he was converted through the witness of a Reformed Church friend, included in the life of a local Reformed Church congregation, and shepherded in the faith. Godfrey tells how he learned about the Bible and the spiritual disciplines, how his studies in history at high school and university helped build on what he was learning as a young Christian, and the ways he went about deciding what should be his calling in life. In telling us his story (a spiritual autobiography), he is also telling us a lot about the important topics of Reformed theology.

It is a clever, and very simple book, really. Because Dr Godfrey grew up



without a background in the Reformed faith, and with no experience of what church life according to the Scriptures looks like, he is, you can tell, eager to describe it so that readers can understand it and appreciate it better. And he knows that a simple testimony really covers a lot of the important topics of Reformed Christianity. To put it simply, as he tells his story he is explaining what it means to be a biblical Christian. Here is how he introduces the idea:

"Today we continue to see the fruit of Calvinism in various denominations and theologies. But the appeal of historic Calvinism seems significantly diminished in our time. Many Christians have no knowledge about Calvinism as a great spiritual expression of the faith. The few who have are likely to know it only in relation to theology or scholarship....

As important as the intellectual defence of the faith is, Christianity is more than theology. Much more. But how can we come to see and appreciate that comprehensive character of Calvinism?"

He notes that Christian autobiography is an ancient and powerful way of tracing the path of God's grace in a life; but that Reformed Christians have often been reticent to write about themselves, perhaps thinking, like Calvin, "I do not speak willingly about myself." Godfrey does not want to reverse this reticence, rather, show how Reformed teaching works itself out in the life of a Christian, and thereby show its vigour.

How does he do that? By telling how he was introduced to church life, how he was taught the faith – and showing from Scripture that this is how it ought to be. He has chapters on the Bible and its trustworthiness, and one on "Disciplines for Christian Living" in which he explains

how the various activities in the life of the church taught him how to understand the Bible, enjoy worship and make good use of the whole of Sunday. In a chapter entitled "Certainty", Godfrey describes how the strong convictions of Reformed teaching first attracted him, then deepened in his own thinking as he came to see how biblically true they were. This happened in step with his study of the Reformers at Stanford University, where he came to see that though Luther was a great leader – and a very quotable one (!), it was Calvin who gave the church clarity and a comprehensive view of what the Bible teaches.

Further chapters deal with his growth in understanding during his twenties, his decision – over time – that his calling lay in seminary teaching, and the way he met and married his wife. (Decisions about marriage and career being perennially high-interest topics for young people.) He goes on to write about the historical rootedness of Reformed Christianity (a good thing), and the way Reformed convictions help us make sense of the way God calls us to live in two kingdoms – his church and the ordinary realm of everyday life in society. Godfrey ends this little book with chapters on worship (a subject he is passionate about, having gone back to the Scriptures to test the truth of what he had "inherited" in the church), and on a personal love of his, the Psalms.

His last word?

"For forty years [the Reformed faith] has been for me a satisfying truth. As many people have encouraged and helped me in living that faith, so I hope this book will help others find the joy of Reformed Christianity."

I hope it will help you, too. (And the others you lend it to).

The other book is

***Why We Love the Church:  
In Praise of Institutions and  
Organized Religion***

by Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck  
(Moody Publishers, 2009), 234pp.

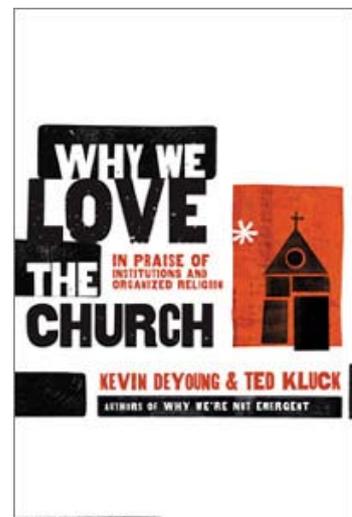
Who would not want to read a book of which J.I. Packer says, "Bible-centred. God-centred. As I read, I wanted to stand up and cheer"? Well, maybe you don't know who J.I. Packer is (he is nearly 84!), but think someone of the calibre of R.C. Sproul and Don Carson, only British and Anglican. So what does

Packer like so much? A lot, really.

This book is written to answer the problem of churchless Christians – or those who think they can love Christ, but not his bride. Now, you might not be in that category, as someone who grew up in a jolly good church and who wants to be part of it... But if you are not disgruntled, are you ever far from grunted?? (This, to quote one of the four categories of Christians they try to help in eight chapters of good-humoured and wise counsel). Besides, if you are committed to church life yourself you may well have friends (at school, at university, or at work) who are either disillusioned with church or who don't believe they have any obligation to belong to one – and you want to help those friends. This book is just what you need.

Kevin and Ted's writing style is unique: Kevin (the pastor of their church, University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan), writes theological chapters carefully laying out the reasons why four different groups of Christians should love, and be part of, Christ's church. Ted, a sports writer and a church member, gives personal, experience-related reasons why being part of the church is a good place to be in life. He is an exceedingly funny writer with a droll, at times black-humoured way of expressing things. What he is not is tacky or irreverent, though – and he is prepared to say the hard words needed. He is also able to laugh at himself: "but I'm a horrible person" is how he concludes a description of what annoys him – at times – about some aspects of life in the body. Kevin also exhibits a dry, wry wit that embellishes an astonishing grasp of serious theological questions for someone as young as he and Ted both are.

As Kevin puts it at the outset, there



are four groups of Christians in need of counsel here. They are:

1. *The Committed*. "We hope to spur you on to keep working hard... Further, we hope this book can give you a thoughtful response to former churchgoers you know and love."
2. *The Disgruntled*. "Lots of churchgoers are still committed to the church but pretty ticked off at her limited impact and corporate failings. We sympathize with some of the frustration. But we also hope to show that the frustration is sometimes out of proportion to the offense and at other times misguided."
3. *The Waffling*. "Here we are thinking of those who are currently in churches, but more or less uninvolved and quietly dissatisfied... You are intrigued by the notion of churchless Christianity

and wonder if checking out of Sunday morning might be the way to go. We hope to show you that such a move would be not only biblically unfaithful, but harmful for your soul."

4. *The Disconnected*. "These are the ones getting the most press these days – the Christians (sometimes ex-Christians) who have left the church in their quest for God ... We hope you will read this book with an open mind, considering what the Bible says about the importance of the church..."

Kevin and Ted have also written another, best-selling book, *Why We're Not Emergent*, in which they take on the Emergent Church movement; and this new book is a kind of positive sequel to that critique. This book is not so much a foundational textbook defining the theology of the church as a defence

of the importance of the church for a modern, evangelical world that seems to be losing its convictions about Christ's body. It is very much rooted in contemporary questions. It is very relevant to the objections and excuses people are putting up today.

So here you are, with my warmest recommendations,

*Sally Davey*

**P.S.** Just a quiet tip – never lend someone a book with a view to its helping them without first reading it yourself. (You want to be able to discuss it with them afterwards!) <http://www.monergismbooks.com/image.php?type=P&id=16940>

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## Conference on the state and future of the CRCA

**Note:** Rev Sjirk Bajema, now a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in Melbourne, attended this Conference and subsequently wrote a report on what took place at this Conference in the June 2010 issue of *The Presbyterian Banner*. His report was accurate and informative and most of what follows is from Rev Bajema. I have omitted some sections from his report and added some other comments.

**M P Geluk**

A historical event occurred in the Box Hill Reformed Church on the 24th and the 26th April, 2010. In response to an invitation extended by the Reformed Church of Box Hill, Vic. and the Christian Reformed Church of Macarthur, NSW, members and former members, deacons, elders, and ministers of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia from around the nation gathered to discuss, deliberate and decide on a response to what the two Sessions described as a "gospel issue" – an issue which had

introduced false teaching into their federation of churches.

### The background

Naturally, one cannot understand what this was about until the background to such a meeting is clearly outlined. This was what the Rev Terry Flanagan of the CRC of Macarthur did during the opening session of the conference. In his presentation, the Rev Flanagan first laid out some of his perceptions about the present situation within the CRCA. He spoke of a political character permeating the church assemblies, particularly the synods. Further, he said that decisions are being made pragmatically instead of putting God's desires first. During the conference Dr Noel Weeks also made the comment that procedure must never become more important than the truth of Scripture. Dr Weeks said that in order of priority the church must adhere to the following: 1. Scripture. 2. Reformed Confessions. 3. Church Order. 4. Procedure.

The Rev Flanagan also noted that the term "Reformed" is often treated as a cultural term rather than a theological position. For some, the expression "the

church must continually be reforming" is not understood in the sense of the church examining its beliefs and practices in the light of Scripture, but changing the church's procedures. Thus speakers of different theological persuasions are being used on the condition that they understand and respect the Reformed culture and ethos. But what speakers from outside the denomination should be asked to do is to defend and uphold the Reformed faith and not simply be asked to not compromise the Reformed faith.

The line of having speakers with orthodox beliefs was crossed with the choice of Dr Tony Campolo as keynote speaker for the Youth Convention, a decision proudly announced by the Youth Committee at the 2006 CRCA Synod. At that stage, most delegates thought that Campolo was broadly evangelical. In early 2007, however, the Youth Committee was alerted to the fact that Campolo had become far from evangelical. This was followed by email interaction between ministers about Campolo's less than orthodox beliefs and teachings. The Rev Terry Flanagan quoted Campolo as saying that Muslims

may well be in heaven too. Quoting Matthew 24, Campolo asked that if Muslims showed Christ's compassion, who was he then to judge that they would not be saved? Campolo concluded, "I've got to believe Jesus is the only Saviour, but being a Christian is not the only way to be saved." Th Rev Terry Flanagan then drew out the fact that no minister in the CRCA has disputed what was stated about Campolo's beliefs. Those facts are not disputed – rather, it's what you do with those facts that becomes the defining issue. Essentially, Campolo is not a Christian and he doesn't hold to the Gospel. During June 2007 the Victorian Convention Planning Committee (CPC) wanted to know what they should do (each State takes it in turn to host the biannual CRCA Youth Convention). They were informed that there were Reformed speakers available for the same subject. Their response was to send a survey out to the Sessions about their thoughts on Campolo speaking at the Convention. It was a survey that revealed "only" ten sessions stood against him. The CPC quit, and in July 2007 five churches in Victoria organised "The Gathering" with the already-booked Tony Campolo. Terry Flanagan emailed those five ministers and they wrote back acknowledging his concerns, but not agreeing with his conclusions. In August 2007 the Synodical Interim Committee (SIC – the CRCA's Synodical Moderamen) exonerated the CPC and criticised the ministers who had opposed them. This letter had to be ratified at the next Synod in May 2009, as all their inter-synodical actions must be approved of by the subsequent synod. That synod, despite being reformed about Campolo's beliefs and teachings, endorsed the SIC's letter. The Rev Terry Flanagan noted how one of the modera-men even noted that if he had known earlier about Tony Campolo he might not have approved of him as a speaker but that wasn't the issue now. The Synod voted 16–9 in favour of the SIC letter. As a result of that synodical decision to approve the letter endorsing Campolo as a speaker, the Rev Terry Flanagan has resigned from the ordained ministry of the CRCA. Following this, Classis New South Wales attempted to call a special synod to deal with the issue, but only one other Classis supported them (Classis Maroondah of western Victoria). The support of three classes is required to call a special synod. The Rev Flanagan drew on Scripture to support their concern. In Galatians 1:8-9 Paul opposes those who

“Campolo says you can be saved on the basis of good works without faith in Christ – a worse position than those Judaizers the apostle Paul opposed in his letter to the Galatians.”

teach that salvation is through faith in Christ plus good works. Campolo says you can be saved on the basis of good works without faith in Christ – a worse position than those Judaizers the apostle Paul opposed in his letter to the Galatians. But the divine word is that it can be the Gospel only – no matter who tells you otherwise, even if they be apostles or angels from heaven.

#### The procedure

Even before Terry Flanagan had given his background, the meeting was constituted by the two Sessions, with the Rev. Martin Geluk (a retired minister and member of Box Hill whose active ministry involved a number of different positions within the denomination, including serving twice as Chairman of CRCA Synods) appointed Chairman, and Elder Max Koster (the

Chairman of the Macarthur Session) appointed Vice Chairman. The Chairman outlined the procedure; making clear what the aim and the purpose of the Conference was not, what it was, the kind of speeches and remarks that were acceptable, and the spirit with which participants were to conduct themselves at this time. He read out a proposed "Introduction" which would be part of the closing Resolution. He made it clear that the motions passed would be those the attendees of the Conference would be encouraged to take back and lay before their respective sessions. Some ministers in the CRCA [had] said that the Conference was acting against the Form of Subscription but the "Introduction" made it quite clear that those attending the Conference were actually upholding the Form of Subscription by defending



The Box Hill Reformed Church, Victoria.

the Reformed faith as summarised in the Reformed Confessions. Some in the CRCA also said that the Conference had no right to convene and would cause divisions in the CRCA. But the "Introduction" also said that CRCA members had the right to discuss decisions made by the assemblies of the denomination and it cannot be objected to if this was done in a more organised manner. The "Introduction" also made it clear that all resolutions of the Conference will be passed on to the Sessions of the churches in the CRCA and hopefully these resolutions will reach the various Classes and from there to Synod 2012.

The Conference followed three subject headings – "Gospel Faithfulness", "Denominational Integrity", and "Denominational Unity" – and to each was appended proposed motions to facilitate debate and discussion. It was clear that

*Points of Calvinism and set forth views that are Arminian. He proclaims he is for social justice, yet lays the blame for the Holocaust on the Lutherans and the Reformed. Justification by faith is basic to the belief and proclamation of the gospel. A man who says that Muslims may be saved by good works without faith in Christ has placed himself outside of the sphere of Christian belief. For any church to approve and sponsor such a man, knowing his beliefs, is to bring into question the church's commitment to the gospel. It also shows an indifference to the offence offered to Christ and risks the withdrawal of His blessing.*

Following much discussion of this subject and discussion around it, the meeting clearly condemned Campolo's teachings as "abhorrent"; stated that the SIC appointed by Synod 2006 and the 2009 Synod had erred, jeopardising

*Leaders must show themselves to be people worthy of trust and respect and, in the absence of convincing evidence to the contrary, members are to respect and obey their leaders. When a serious issue arises for a significant section of the church that calls into question the integrity of part of the church, then trust is at risk. The procedure of the majority of the tribes in Joshua 22, in openly confronting those they believed had erred and the procedure of the Jordanian tribes in openly stating their reasons, is a model for us of the way threatened trust should be restored. The present lack of trust has reached the point where we must seriously question whether we can support certain denominational causes and agencies without participating in the wrong course taken by certain people. Attempts to silence discussion have only added to the lack of trust. We declare that the order of authority in our church is: 1) Scripture, 2) the Confessions, 3) Church Order, 4) generally accepted practice. Any attempt to change the above order undermines the foundations of our church. Biblical concerns should not be silenced by charges of going against generally accepted practice, especially when the alleged practice has no basis in the Scripture, the Confessions, or the Church Order.*

Those who raise any concern against the direction and practices of the CRCA are quickly sidelined as negative and out of touch with the realities of everyday church life. This same criticism was levelled at the "Conference": however, the meeting responded by stating clearly that they have been transparent whilst denominational agencies have not been. There was also a motion pointing out that the use of Matthew 18:15ff against them was quite incorrect as this Scriptural passage has nothing to do with public discussion but applied initially to private sin. Rather, the Conference stated that Galatians 2:11-14 showed the correct biblical model, with Paul publicly raising with Peter the wrong he had done. The motions passed under this subject heading included a call to sessions and congregations to assess whether they should be contributing to all denominational causes and agencies, and giving guidance as to how this could be done according to the CRCA Church Order.

“It was agreed that those sessions who had organised The Gathering had not been faithful to their vows to uphold and defend the gospel and called on them to repent”

considerable planning had been done before the Conference by the Sessions of Box Hill and Macarthur: this aided the proceedings and helped to keep matters on track.

### **Gospel faithfulness**

In the Preamble to this section it was stated:

*It has been well documented that Tony Campolo taught that Muslims can be saved by their good works and without a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Dr. Campolo was invited by The Gathering to speak to the young people of the CRCA and had said other things that were inconsistent with biblical truth. Campolo proclaims that he is an evangelical, yet he denies salvation by faith in Christ. To The Gathering he proclaimed that he was Reformed, yet he lambastes the Reformed faith in his blog. He has denied the Five*

the CRCA's right to be called a Christian church through supporting the invitation to Campolo. It was agreed that those sessions who had organised The Gathering had not been faithful to their vows to uphold and defend the gospel and called on them to repent; called upon Synod 2012 to humbly declare they had compromised the subscription vows of office bearers attending Synod 2009 by not taking action against the false teaching of Campolo, and to bow in a time of repentance before the Lord; and urged Synod 2012 to gladly reaffirm that the truth of Scripture (as summarised in their Confessions) must reign supreme over the CRCA and its procedures.

### **Denominational integrity**

In the Preamble to this section it was stated:

*The church is a relationship of trust.*

### **Denominational unity**

In the Preamble to this section it was stated:

*A significant change in the public face*

of the CRCA has been how people can visit various churches of the CRCA in worship and not know that they were worshipping in a Reformed church or churches that belong to the same denomination. Over the past years it has become evident in the CRCA that the various Forms for Baptism, Lord's Supper, Profession of Faith, etc, in the Book of Forms are not read in their entirety, or not read at all. Also, that the Reformed Order of Worship in the church's liturgy is not always adhered to either. Church Order, art. 57b and the 1985 Synod and 1988 Synod, art.63.8 show the importance of the liturgical forms and the Reformed Order of Worship. The Forms have a good teaching content and previous Synods have explained why as Reformed Churches we ought to follow the principles and elements of the Reformed Order of Worship. The lack of observing the Church Order and previous Synodical requirements regarding the Forms and order of worship have resulted in disunity in the CRCA. Disunity sadly leads to fragmentation. Furthermore, the Reformed understanding of Scripture, as given to us in our Confessions, is not always clearly taught to our young people, as required by Church Order, art.65 a & b, or if taught then not always by people who themselves are sufficiently knowledgeable of the Reformed understanding of Scripture.

This subject touches on the "dumbing down" that the Conference believes has been happening for a number of years already. It is primarily a "dumbing down" of the Calvinistic character of the CRCA but it also takes in a general "dumbing down" theologically. In times past those who had been brought up in Reformed churches, having regularly attended worship services and been taught as youth in catechism classes by their ministers, came into adulthood well versed in Reformed theology and practice. Many of those men went on to ministry and eldership in a range of both like-minded denominations and not-so-like-minded denominations. Now many churches no longer have these classes but have "youth nights" where the young people are more catered for in terms of entertainment than education. Another time-honoured practice of preaching through the Heidelberg Catechism in one of the Sunday worship services – usually the PM service – has become watered down, either because a local church has only one service a Sunday or a local church simply ignores that requirement. Even

the recent decision to allow the use of other denominational confessions, or other significant Reformed summaries has not changed this direction. The last motion passed here urged the CRCA churches to practise biblical preaching that upholds and defends the Reformed Confessions, through inviting only those preachers who hold with conviction the Reformed faith, rather than compromising it by allowing visitors to the pulpit with a nominal nod.

#### **Those who were there**

This article began by saying that there were members present from CRCA churches around the nation. It was an attendance that exceeded the expectations of those organising the Conference. But the make-up of those who attended was even more interesting, because it was a wide range of age groups and reflected

but they do not believe this was the right approach to take. They said that the right response was to take it up with the next synod in 2012. But doing that would have been against their Church Order. For in the CRCA Church Order, no old business can be reintroduced to any Church assembly unless it has new grounds attached to it. Those organising the Conference and those attending it showed the long-standing patience of concerned folk within the CRCA as they seek yet again to take up their concerns with their denomination – knowing all along they could get their case dismissed on a technicality. One noticeable absentee was any form of representation from the Reformed Theological College. This was not stated publicly, but for a conference of such seriousness one would have expected some leadership from those among the "brightest and best" within a

“A dumbing down of the Calvinistic character within the CRCA also takes in a general dumbing down theologically.”

a high proportion of those who had come into the Reformed Churches over the years. Many of the names were not Dutch names but were English, Scottish, Irish, Sri Lankan or South African – even Hungarian! They were those who had joined the Reformed Churches exactly because of its solid Calvinistic basis. These folk are by-and-large fully involved in the life of their local congregations and beyond their congregations, through Reformed mission and education. They are not rebellious and negative people, but have the most positive joy in the precious doctrines of grace! The singing was a joy to hear and to join in. They are brethren of like mind.

#### **Those who were not there**

There were those who had wanted to be at the Conference but who couldn't be because of distance or other commitments. But there were many who were not there who could have been. A number of CRCA ministers and elders shared the concerns about Tony Campolo

denomination – whether that advice was for or against what eventuated from the Conference. And why not recommend it to the RTC students? Regardless of their views, it was an ideal learning situation for them.

#### **Conclusion**

How does one summarise what was a quite intense and involved two days? Well, the unity amongst those there was quite marked. They were all concerned, and deeply so. Their concern was illustrated by the decision of the 2009 Synod to do away with the time-honoured tradition of conducting Church Visitation by use of a broad-ranging Questionnaire which deals with all the aspects of a congregation's doctrine and life. Instead, the Synod replaced it with a vague covering of the four aspects of the FourFold Task – a model in which neither preaching, teaching or pastoral work is mentioned at all.

Please pray for the CRCA. Pray that there may be unity in what really matters

– the gospel. Because then it will show in a renewed love of the confessions and the worship which exalts the Lord. The Website for the decisions of, and other material related to, the Conference is: <http://www.2010conference.info/> A 21 page booklet has also been printed which has in it: Introduction, Motions passed regarding Gospel Faithfulness, Denominational Integrity and Denominational Unity, Dr N Weeks's article "Functional Deism in the CRCA", and the Agenda. Copies can be obtained from Box Hill Session, PO Box 217, Box Hill, Vic. Aust. 3128.

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*Mr Martin P Geluk, is Minister Emeritus, and has served in several churches in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia.*

## Janny Hendrika VANDENBOS

Born on 18th August 1932 – went peacefully to be with the Lord on 16th May, 2010. Loving wife of the late Peter (died 4th May 2000). Beloved mother and mother-in-law of Judith and Kevin, Esther and Gerald, Miriam and Anthony. Loved oma of Shane, Darren, David, Esther, Andrew; Jonathon, Daniel, Jason; Luke, Samuel, Rebecca, Leon. Loved great oma of Riva, Zac, Josh, Zane and Brierley.

*"The Lord will keep you from all harm, he will watch over our life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."*  
Psalm 121: 7-8.

## World in focus

### **New play opens about Free Church of Scotland minister and Knox Church of Dunedin, New Zealand founder Donald McNaughton Stuart**

A 29 May 2010 article by Charmian Smith in the Otago Daily Times titled "Knox Founder Stuart's Private Life Revealed" reports that playwright Richard Huber's play *Voice of Heaven*, celebrating the 150th anniversary of Knox Church in Dunedin, New Zealand, will be performed at the Knox Church 3 and 4 June 2010 at 8:00 p.m.

The play explores the relationship between Free Church of Scotland minister and Knox Church of Dunedin, New Zealand, founder Dr. Donald McNaughton Stuart and his wife, Jessie Robinson Stuart, an Anglican, who chose to remain an Anglican after the marriage. Mrs. Stuart died in childbirth two years after the Stuart's arrival in New Zealand from Great Britain, and the three surviving sons each experienced great difficulties as adults after being raised by a maternal aunt who died two years after arriving in New Zealand, and then by the family's alcoholic housekeeper.

Another play was written about Dr. Stuart in 1998 by Simon O'Connor in honour of the 150th anniversary of the founding of Otago, New Zealand, by the Free Church of Scotland.

+ *Otago Daily Times*

### **Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland condemns visit to Scotland of Roman Pontiff**

A 10 June 2010 article by John Ross in *The Scotsman* titled "Pope's Scots Visit Condemned as 'Offensive'" reports that the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (FPCS), in a statement arising out of the official protest lodged at the 2010 FPCS Synod meeting, has characterised the state visit status given to the upcoming tour of Great Britain by the Roman pontiff Pope Benedict XVI as "particularly offensive" because it gives "that recognition and pretended legitimacy which [the Roman Pope] claims in opposition to the principles of the Reformation."

The statement continues: "We deny that [the Pope] is the head of the Christian Church or that he has any civil power which should receive recognition by any State, particularly one which has renounced his pretended jurisdiction."

The FPCS describes the Papacy as "deceitful and unrighteous," in light of the recent global exposure of child abuse by Roman Catholic clergy, and suggests that the Pope has connived in a cover-up of the widespread sexual abuse of minors by Roman Catholic clergy.

The FPCS concludes: "We find it particularly offensive that this visit will commence in Edinburgh [Scotland] where, 450 years ago, under the brave and godly leadership of John Knox and our other Reformers, the jurisdiction of the pope was forever abolished."

+ *The Scotsman*

### **Uniting General Council 2010 Meeting 18-28 June 2010 at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to merge World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council**

The Uniting General Council 2010 began its eleven day meeting on 18 June 2010 at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to merge the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council into one body called the World Communion of Reformed Churches – a worldwide affiliation of 80 million Christians from 108 countries coming together as one body in Christ.

Attending the council meeting is Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), who expressed the desire to see the same level of cooperation between the WCC and the merged group as has existed between the WCC and the two groups that are merging.

Tveit commented: "We now see a more visible unity of Christ in the spirit of fellowship," and said that though the merger is bringing more people together around the table, "Unfortunately, we don't all yet share the Eucharist, but we do live out of the same baptism."

+ *World Communion of Reformed Churches*

### **Acton Institute acquires Christian's Library Press, Publishes New Book: 'Ecumenical Babel'**

The Acton Institute (AI) has acquired the imprint of the Grand Rapids, Michigan-based book publisher Christian's Library Press (CLP). Since 1979, CLP has published influential texts on Christian

leadership, stewardship, and theology, and will continue to pursue an active publishing schedule under the administration of the AI.

The first CLP book published under AI's oversight is *Ecumenical Babel: Confusing Economic Ideology and the Church's Social Witness*, by Jordan J. Ballor, which is a critical engagement of the ecumenical movement's approach to ethical and economic issues. *Ecumenical Babel* updates a line of criticism articulated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Ramsey, and Ernest W. Lefever. Arguing for the continuing importance of Christian ecumenism, Jordan J. Ballor seeks to correct the errors created by the imposition of economic ideology onto the social witness of ecumenical Christianity as represented by the Lutheran World Federation, the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Council of Churches. *Ecumenical Babel* is a voice for sustained ecumenical dialogue, vital ecclesiastical witness, and individual Christian conscience.

+ *Christian News Wire*

### **Pro-life leader describes Gulf of Mexico oil spill as another case of 'It's the Stupidity, Stupid,' and describes thirty-five year-old, inexpensive cleaning method being ignored**

Journalist and marketer for sixty years, and President of the pro-life organisation The Movement for a Better America, Dennis Howard, is bringing attention to a "low-cost, common sense" cleanup method for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, which he unsuccessfully tried to market thirty-five years ago, but was stymied because of the low cost, and thus low profit margin.

Howard says that Canada's millions of acres of sphagnum peat moss have the characteristics of repelling water, absorbing eight times its weight in oil, floating on the top of water, and is easily strained or skimmed off the water, adding: "The residue can even be used as a fuel. It sure beats letting seabirds and wildlife soak up the oil. Nothing else can do this job as efficiently. Dispersants will only turn the Gulf [of Mexico] into a huge, toxic waste dump."

Howard, who helped bring to market the first home smoke detectors and unsuccessfully marketed to the airlines a modest-cost airplane fuel tank system that prevents explosions and fireballs in crashes and other fuel tank breaches,

now heads The Movement for a Better America, a non-profit educational organisation that concerns itself with another major cause of loss of life: abortion.

Howard comments: "I'm afraid [abortion is] another case of 'It's the stupidity, stupid.'" According to our research, 52.8 million abortions have cost [the U.S.] [US]\$38.5 trillion in lost [Gross Domestic Product] since 1970, and that number is growing by [US]\$2.5 trillion a year. Here again, we see stupidity at work. Abortion is destroying us as a country, but our leaders don't seem to care enough to stop it or prevent it."

+ *The Movement for a Better America*

### **Planned Parenthood of metropolitan Washington DC erects fence around public sidewalk and property, and threatens arrest of "trespassers"**

Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington DC has erected a fence around a public sidewalk and public property outside of their 1108 16th Street Northwest, Washington DC, abortuary, and are threatening to arrest anyone that "trespasses" on the public property surrounded by their fence.

Reformed Presbyterian minister and Director of the Christian Defense Coalition, the Rev. Patrick Mahoney, has applied for a permit to hold a prayer vigil 8 June 2010 at 11:00 a.m. on the public sidewalk leading to the entrance of the Planned Parenthood abortuary.

Members of the pro-life community for several years were able to pray, counsel, and maintain a pro-life witness on the public property and sidewalk surrounding the Washington DC Planned Parenthood abortuary, and the pro-lifers would rather risk arrest than to surrender their First Amendment rights. The pro-lifers additionally want to make clear that they will not be bullied into silence by an organisation that has no respect for the law, the First Amendment, or for social justice.

Mahoney and his pro-life colleagues are being represented by the American Center for Law and Justice.

+ *Christian News Wire*

### **As U.S. Deaths in Afghanistan war reach 1,000, Afghan Legislator calls for execution of Christian converts, and young teen girls forced into marrying much older men are flogged for running away from husbands**

A 29 May 2010 Afghan Voice Agency article titled "US Toll Reaches 1,000

Deaths in Afghanistan War" reports that the 1000th U.S. serviceman of the Afghanistan War was killed by a roadside bomb on 29 May 2010.

A 2 June 2010 ASSIST News Service article by Dan Wooding titled "Afghan Parliamentarian Calls for Execution of Christians: Taliban Ideals Alive and Well in the Parliament" reports after a video was broadcast by the Afghan television network Noorin TV of Christian men being baptised and praying in Farsi, deputy secretary of the Afghan lower house in parliament Abdul Sattar Khawasi said: "Those Afghans that appeared in this video film should be executed in public. The house should order the attorney general and the NDS (intelligence agency) to arrest these Afghans and execute them."

A 4 June 2010 Assyrian International News Agency article titled "Child Brides Escape Marriage, But Not Lashes" reports that two teenage girls, age thirteen and fourteen, forced to marry men much older than themselves, donned boy's clothing and escaped from their husbands. The girls traveled for two days until they were detained by police and returned to their home village in the Ghor Province, where the girls were publicly and savagely flogged for running away from their husbands.

Videos of the beatings were smuggled out to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, which released them 29 May 2010 after unsuccessfully lobbying for Afghan government action.

The New York Times has posted one of the videos on its website.

+ *Afghan Voice Agency*

### **Presbyterian Church of Nigeria cites divine providence in ascendency of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan to the Presidency of Nigeria**

A 5 June 2010 ThisDayOnline article titled "God Ordained Jonathan's Presidency, Says Church" reports that a communiqué issued at the end of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria's General Assembly Executive Committee meeting says that the ascendancy of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan from the position of deputy governor four years ago to the exalted post of President and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces is a manifestation of the Scripture that says that "the race is neither for the swift nor the battle for the strong," (Eccl: 9:11).

The communiqué urges President Jonathan to allow himself to be used of

God to transform Nigeria, and to face, as a matter of priority, the challenges of peace and development in the Niger Delta, curbing the high incidence of violence in Nigeria, development of a regular and affordable power supply, electoral reforms, and fighting corruption.

+ *ThisDayOnline*

### **Free Church of Scotland missionary David Ford blogs from Bible Seminary of Colombia**

Free Church of Scotland (FCS) missionary David Ford, who teaches New Testament and Church History at the Bible Seminary of Colombia (BSC) in Medellín, Colombia, has written a 2 June 2010 article on the FCS website titled "Executioner's Steps," where he expresses concern about the future of the BSC due to current due bills of UK£40,000 with only UK£2,000 in the bank.

Ford writes that the thirty staff members of BSC are currently without salaries, that all financial reserves have evaporated, and says, "the Seminary's just not sustainable in its present form. Generous donations this month will simply waylay the executioner."

Ford additionally writes that some of the normal seminary business goes on as usual, and that God is God and so seemingly impossible problems can be solved "in unthought-of ways."

Ford concludes that the entirety of the problems "leaves me shaken, nervous, and in a fog. Jesus' 'of little faith' disciples perhaps felt the same."

The editor asks each Presbyterians Week reader to consider bringing Professor Ford and the BSC before the Throne of Grace.

+ *Free Church of Scotland*

### **The historic struggle between Presbyterianism and Erastianism**

Assistant Professor of History at Patrick Henry College, ordained minister in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), and assistant in the teaching ministry of Good News Presbyterian Church in Frederick, Maryland, the Rev. Dr. William VanDoodewaard, on 25 May 2010 published on the Gospel Coalition website an article titled "The Church: Her Authority in Christ," which begins by asking why officers being ordained in denominations such as the ARP, in addition to church doctrinal agreements, accept "the government, discipline, and worship of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church as agreeable to

and founded on the Word of God" and promise "to submit in the spirit of love to the authority of the Presbytery in subordination to the General Synod, and to promote the unity, peace, purity and prosperity of the Church."

Dr. VanDoodewaard then addresses one of the reasons for such vows, which is the historic struggle between Presbyterianism and Erastianism – Erastianism being defined as undue subservience of the church to the state – then presents the history of this struggle during the 16th to 18th centuries. The writings of Andrew Melville, George Gillespie, and Ebenezer Erskine on several aspects of Erastianism are examined, Erskine concluding that the issue of patronage in the selection of ministers amounted to "invasions and encroachments made upon the authority of Christ."

Dr. VanDoodewaard then discusses the Erastian influences upon the Erskine College and Theological Seminary supporters in their actions, including a lawsuit, following the March 2010 called meeting of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian General Synod.

Dr. VanDoodewaard concludes the essay, stating, "the heart of the matter for the life of the church is not whether institutions are retained, or properties kept: it is far more crucial that informed vows of both confessional subscription and church governance be upheld in a spirit of determined, compassionate love for the body of Christ's church. For when the vows of pastors, elders, and members fail to be meaningful, and accountable, the church herself fails to be the church, the living gospel, of her Savior and King, Jesus Christ."

+ *The Gospel Coalition*

### **World Evangelical Alliance issues statement on crisis in Afghanistan for Christians and other non-Muslims**

The Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) issued a statement on 24 June 2010 expressing concern over the recent developments in Afghanistan, calling for the death of converts from Islam to other religions. The anti-Christian reaction followed the airing of a controversial television documentary on 27 May 2010, on 'Afghan Christian Converts' by a local television station in Afghanistan, wherein they revealed the identities of a some supposed Afghan Christian converts.

The WEA RLC additionally expressed concern about the statements made by Afghanistan officials including the

President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan H.E. Hamid Karzai. It is reported that the Karzai has instructed government officials and the Afghan intelligence agency to take immediate and serious action to prevent further conversions from Islam.

The WEA RLC calls on the worldwide church to pray for Afghanistan that there will be respect for the freedom of religion and that the government of Afghanistan will take a all necessary action to safeguard the lives and the rights of all Afghans and expatriates working in Afghanistan.

+ *World Evangelical Alliance*

### **Researchers asked to hide scientific debate over maternal deaths**

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) At a meeting on maternal and child health research in Washington recently, United Nations (UN) staff and abortion advocates told scientists they should "harmonise" their findings or discuss them "in a locked room" so that the press could not report maternal death numbers that conflicted with the ones they use to lobby policy makers and major international donors. Ann Starrs, co-founder and president of the abortion advocacy organization Family Care International (FCI), told a roomful of scientists to "lock all the academics in a black box and have them come out with a consensus set of numbers" or "at least hide that there is disagreement" and "infighting."

+ *Susan Yoshihara, Ph.D. and Catherine Foster*

### **IPPF report calls for youth sex rights and reveals new UN funding**

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) The abortion giant, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), has just released its latest financial statement. The report boasts of increased spending on youth programs and a significant increase in funding from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), with an overall 20% boost in income as compared to 2008. In 2009, IPPF raked in a staggering \$140 million, the bulk of which came from government grants. Sweden, the United Kingdom and Japan top the organisation's list of government donors, accounting for 40% of grant money received.

+ *Samantha Singson and Terrence McKeegan, J.D.*

### **CEDAW Committee elections promise more of the same in abortion promotion**

NEW YORK, July 2 (C-FAM) Elections to fill openings for half of the 23 seats of

the committee charged with monitoring compliance to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) were held at United Nations (UN) headquarters this week. Prior to the vote, delegations actually campaigned, leafleting the crowd with promotional material in support of their candidates. Nearly all of the 186 states parties to the CEDAW treaty cast ballots as representatives from Turkey, Paraguay, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Bangladesh, Slovenia, Mauritius, Timor L'Este, Switzerland and Croatia were elected to the committee.

+ *Samantha Singson*

### **New wave of deported Christians from Morocco**

Most of you have probably been aware of the waves of outrageous deportations of Christian foreign workers from Morocco, which with the most recent deportation of 26 Christians amount to the total number of 105 deported during the last several months. All Christians have been deported without any due process and only very few were able to appeal. The foreigners have been given only few hours notice before being forcibly escorting to the country's exit ports, separation with family members and deprivation of ministries they have led for years. Sources report that at least two Moroccan Christians have been beaten in recent days. According to VOM Canada Moroccan officials have cited "proselytism" as the reason for the deportations.

*WEA Religious Liberty – June 2010*

### **Maryam and Marzie acquitted in Iran**

During the last several months we have been following closely the case of the two Iranian ladies, Maryam Rustampoor and Marzie Amirizadeh, arrested for their Christian faith and conditionally released in November 2009 after 259 days in Iran's Evin Prison. This month the Christian community around the globe rejoiced greatly at the final acquittal of all charges of the two Iranian believers on 22nd May 2010. International sources report that the women fled the same day they were acquitted to another country after receiving a warning from the Iranian judicial authorities that "any future Christian activities would have severe consequences".

*WEA Religious Liberty – June 2010*

### **Crisis in Uzbekistan**

The Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA

express serious concern over the recent developments in Uzbekistan where a church was raided by police without a warrant, seizing property and detaining eight church members and subsequently imposing jail terms and heavy fines on them.

On 16th May 2010, a Christian church in Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan, was raided by police, the secret police, tax inspectorate, fire Inspectors and the sanitary-epidemiological service. The 500 church members who were in the midst of the Sunday service as well as the Sunday school children were videotaped by the police. After a 5 hour search, which was carried out without a warrant, the police detained eight church members including the Assistant Pastor Artur Avanesyan. They were kept in detention for 24 hours without any food or water and were not allowed to contact their families. Equipment including computers and printers as well as Christian literature was confiscated. Letters of permission given by parents of 392 children to attend Sunday school were among papers taken away by the police.

On May 18th the district court sentenced three of the church members to 15 days imprisonment. Heavy fines were imposed on two members, equivalent of five times the minimum monthly salary (approximately US\$ 110) and three members were fined almost eighty times the minimum monthly salary (approximately US\$ 1,775). The church in Uzbekistan expressed shock and dismay at the harsh verdict.

Tashkent City Church of Christ is a registered church established in 1999 and was regularly scrutinised by the Tashkent Justice Department – as required by law. The church leaders expressed their concern that this incident is a clear sign that authorities are trying close down the church.

The raid on Tashkent City Church of Christ is the latest in a series of similar raids on Protestant congregations this year. There have also been several instances where Christian leaders have been convicted of various false charges.

The WEA RLC is deeply concerned about the recent raid and arrests of church members and the apparent deterioration of religious rights in Uzbekistan. We call upon the government of Uzbekistan to ensure the rights of all Uzbek citizens and call upon the world wide Christian community to stand in

solidarity with the Uzbek church and pray for justice and equality for the church in Central Asia.

*WEA Religious Liberty – June 2010*

### **Christians expelled from village in Pakistan**

250 Pakistani Christian families were ordered to leave their homes in Khanewal district, Punjab province in the beginning of June 2010. The order of the head of a Muslim village came after believers strongly objected to sexual assaults on girls and women by Muslims in the region. According to sources most of the village's Christian men work in the fields of Muslim land owners, while most of the Christian women and girls work as servants in the homes of Muslim families, where they are often abused. Christians are afraid to protect themselves by filing an official complaint, as complaint against Muslims often results in registering false charges against Christians under the "blasphemy" statutes in Pakistan.

*WEA Religious Liberty – June 2010*

### **Christian shot in Iraq**

On 7th June 2010 the 34-year-old Christian businessman Hani Salim Wadi was shot and killed in front of his home in Kirkuk, Iraq. According to the available sources the witnesses of the shooting have described it as a "targeted killing," which has brought fear of renewed violence against Christians in Iraq. During the recent months there have been other serious attacks against Christians in Kirkuk and Mosul.

*WEA Religious Liberty – June 2010*

### **Restriction over church activities in Russia**

Forum 18 News Service has reported on disturbing restriction over Christians in the Southern Russian Republic of Dagestan. In the beginning of the year 2010 the authorities cancelled a five-year agreement for prison visits with the Hosanna Church – the largest Pentecostal Church in the Southern Russian Republic of Dagestan. The earlier positive assessment of the church's work with drug addicts has also been changed. Such restrictions on churches' social work are disturbing and not well accepted even among some Government representatives. It is believed that the restrictions are more a result from personal initiative of individual officials and negative public attitudes.

*WEA Religious Liberty – June 2010*

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## Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

# Gleanings from our bulletins...

### Bishopdale

Pastoral Notices. Congratulations to Jeremy and Sara-Jayne van Ameyde on the birth of their daughter Lily on Thursday morning.

Opportunity to meet for prayer today: This afternoon, there will be a time of prayer here at the church. We will begin at 3:45pm, and will meet in the double Sunday rooms. In particular, we will pray for Ann Stagg, Marjory Vanderpyl, and Heidi Posthuma.

### Christchurch

Pastoral. We rejoice with Bryan and Alexia Hoyt with the safe arrival of Caleb Timothy on Thursday. Mother and son are doing well. We are thankful to the Lord for this gift to you. May He grant you much wisdom as you raise him and Maria. May the Lord grant all parents much patience and wisdom as we raise our children in the fear of the Lord.

Pastoral. Last Sunday morning we announced that Session was working towards having Dr Tim Rott and his wife Georgette to come and meet with us. This has now been confirmed and they arrive this Thursday morning 17th (DV). Dr Rott will lead the worship services on the 20th and 27th and there is also a congregational meeting planned for the 24th at 7.30pm. Further material is available this morning – please see your elder for your copy. Dr Rott has asked for your prayers as they prepare and travel here.

Pastoral. On Saturday morning the Lord called home our Br. Ids Dijkstra. Br. Ids desired for some time to be with his Lord: he had a sure comfort and knowledge of his salvation through Christ. We give thanks for the comfort this gives to us and also his family as they grieve their loss. May the Lord grant them his nearness and strength, particularly as a number of them travel here to Christchurch.

Wanted. Someone good with numbers, reliable, willing to take on the weekly

task of putting the song numbers on the board each Sunday. Height would be an advantage but not necessary, as a step-ladder will be provided. Full training will be given. For offers of interest, please see Marcus.

### Dovedale

Service opportunity. This note comes via my involvement with the Hornby Minister's association: The Hornby Baptist church on Waterloo Rd runs a podiatry foot clinic for the elderly in their church hall every three weeks. It is intended as a medical service to bring people into a church building where they are surrounded by Christian material and Christians keen to explain "the hope that lives with them (1 Peter 3:15). Volunteers are urgently-needed. We need people who will help with filling the foot spa and massaging feet. Training is given, ph.349 9396 (Unless the Lord provides volunteers it will close down!)

Pastoral Notes. We give thanks to the Lord with the news of the safe arrival of Ephraim Roelof Couperus, born to Br. and Sr. Louis and Joana Couperus on Thursday afternoon. Both mother and baby are well. We praise the Lord for answered prayer and covenant blessings to His people.

### Dunedin

Profession of Faith and Baptism. We remind the congregation that next Sunday, Lord willing, Julia de Ruiter and Tjarko and Olga Edze will make a public profession of their faith. If anyone has any objection against these three publicly professing their faith, please make your objection known to one of the elders or the pastor so that your objection can be given full consideration. We will also have the privilege of witnessing the baptism of the Edzes' children.

Pastor's Long Service Leave. It won't be long before Lois and I will be heading off to the US of A for seven weeks of Long Service Leave, 13 July to be exact. For those who may not know what long service leave is – our synod decided many years ago that it would be beneficial for both ministers and their congregations to give the ministers a lengthy break from their work after several years of service. This is similar to the sabbatical that is given to professors at universities

and theological colleges. The length of the leave granted is accumulated over the years of service at the rate of one week of leave for every year of service. The idea is that this is to be taken as a lengthy break after a number of years of service, not merely a week added to the annual holiday given to each minister. On this long service leave Lois and I will be visiting with her 93- and 97-year-old parents at their home in Smolan, Kansas, and then travelling with them to the Rocky Mountains near Denver, Colorado, for a reunion of her family on the occasion of her parents' 70th wedding anniversary. After that week we will be travelling to Tyler, Texas for a week-long reunion of my family (my brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews and grands), about 80 of us will be gathering there. Some of the grandnieces and nephews we have never seen so this will be a very special time for us. For the rest of our time we will be making a big loop from Texas, going east through the southern States to Knoxville, Tennessee and then northwest through Ohio and Indiana to Chicago and finally through St Louis and back to Smolan, Kansas. We will leave from there to return to New Zealand on the 31st of August. Home, sweet home, will be in our sights by 2 September after 35 hours of travel and some layovers.

Pastoral Notes. At its last meeting Session decided to discontinue the worship services in Timaru in view of the slim numbers of leaders and congregation. Do pray that our brothers and sisters there may find suitable spiritual homes and that strengthened ties with the Oamaru congregation may be possible. Pray also that a Reformed witness in Timaru may continue and ultimately be re-established as a viable congregation.

Ministerial Profile. Rev Mark Wheat is a Texan by birth and has since 2006 been the associate pastor of Tyler Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Texas. He is employed by that church 60 percent of fulltime and derives the balance of his income from his own business as a personal trainer in a gym. Originally from a Baptist background, Rev Wheat underwent his theological training at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. By the time of his graduation in 1990 he had become convinced of Reformed doctrine through personal reading and study. Appointed as

the associate pastor of Greenville Christian Fellowship, South Carolina, he became increasingly aware that his Reformed views were not compatible with those of his church. Unsuccessfully pursuing a position in one of the Reformed Baptist churches in Grand Rapids in 1996, he returned to Texas with the intention of again trying to work in the Southern Baptist Churches. After several interviews, however, it became apparent that such a situation would not work. Later the family began to worship at Tyler OPC and Rev Wheat was invited to preach there. After reading about infant baptism he came to accept the practice as biblical whereupon his four-year-old child was baptised and the Wheats joined the church. Being encouraged by the principal pastor to become an OPC minister, Rev Wheat embarked on a course of study and examinations and was eventually granted licensure and approved for ordination by the local presbytery. This year Rev Wheat will celebrate his 50th birthday and, together with his wife Lorie, their 20th wedding anniversary. They have three daughters, Justly (16), Honor (3) and Selah (7 months), and a son, Evan (5).

### Hamilton

Hi Ladies, let's go for a walk around the lake on Saturday, 5 June at 2pm. We will meet in front of the café and walk from there. If the weather is bad, we can stay and have a cup of coffee together. Love to see you there.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (Prayer Cal. 6 June) This church has its beginning in the migration of Scottish presbyterians to Ireland early in the 17th Cent. Late in that century the covenanters separated themselves into what became the Reformed Presbyterian church of Ireland. They are mainly found in Northern Ireland. There 37 congregations with approx. 4000 members. On the whole they have a faithful membership, who show strong commitment to Word of God. Prof. Barkley, the late principal of the RTC came out of that denomination.

From the Pastor: Congratulations to Jack Mans who turned 80 on Friday!

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has its early beginning in 1738 in Pennsylvania. The first congregations were found by Scottish and Irish immigrants. The denomination has had many up and downs during its long history and the present body continues to hold to the Scriptures as the Word of God and the Westminster standards and currently

it enjoys steady growth. There are now about 77 congregations spread through the USA with about 4,400 members.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India The history of this church goes back to 1835 when an American Presb. missionary, the Rev. James R. Campbell, started work at Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, North India. These and other presb. missions later exercised a great influence on many churches of Manipur South in North East India. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North East India has existed officially since 1979, it has about 4200 members spread over 29 congregations.

### Hastings

Fifty years anniversary of the Reformed Church. Many of you will know that this year in September the Hastings Reformed Church will be celebrating its 50 years anniversary DV. A small committee has been set up to organise this event, and we will be keeping you informed through the bulletin on what is happening and if we need your input in certain areas. Invites will be sent out at the end of the month with more details on when and where. For the mean time, we are requesting old or new photos, memoirs, anything that would be of interest on the history of the church and its families. These will be put in an online book which Dan, Bonnie and Fiona are putting together. If you have something, please put it in the 50YACCC pigeon hole. Thank you.

From the Pastor. This week our brother and sister Leen and Adrie Westerlaken intend to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary, please join with us in remembering this blessing from God after the morning service during our fellowship and coffee time.

### North Shore

Church Library. A new book has been added to the library – *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* by Donald S. Whitney. This book will help you to look beyond your spiritual activity to access the true state of your spiritual health. His questions cut to the heart of the matter: Is your character becoming more like Christ's? Are you spiritually healthy or just spiritually busy?

### Palmerston North

Pastoral Notes from Rev Hans Vaatstra. We rejoice with the Akkerman family at the safe arrival of Marie Alison on Tuesday evening. Both mother and child

are doing well thanks be to God.

Warm congratulations to Wibbo and Lisa and the family on the safe arrival of a healthy baby girl, Emma Elisabeth this past Thursday! Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Pastoral Notes from Rev Michael Flinn. Congratulations to Dini Hoeksema on her 80th birthday last week. Dini was able to go to Auckland to celebrate this with family.

Seniors' Mini "Wedding Expo". We will be meeting on Thursday afternoon, 24th May, at 2 pm to 4 pm at Harmony House. Bring your wedding photos- albums and a plate. Show us how beautiful / handsome you were. Would we recognise you now? Come and share in some fun and fellowship together.

### Pukekohe

From the Pastor. Alan Johnson's condition continued to deteriorate through this past week and the doctors were unable to treat his lung disease. Alan died on Friday evening surrounded by his family. Please remember Dawn and the family in your prayers.

Benji and Alanna Alexander were married yesterday. We wish them a long and happy marriage. A warm welcome to family members and friends who are here over this weekend for this happy occasion.

### Wellington

From the Pastor ... Daniel & Cynthia Wang were blessed with the safe arrival of a baby daughter last Sunday. Both Cynthia and the baby are doing well. Their daughter doesn't have a name yet, because the Chinese way is to arrange a set of Chinese characters in the best possible combination that reflect the expected personality, girlish symbol as well as related with her birth day and birth time! In the meantime, she does have a nickname "西西" which remembers both 新西兰 (New Zealand) and 西安 (Xi'an).

Session Report. The elders meet on Tuesday evening and, after meeting with Stephen Geuze, were delighted to agree to his request to make public profession of his faith. This will take place, Lord willing, on July 25.

# A Rocha – mission with a difference

## Anna Baird

Today, as I sit at the computer to write, I find myself in the office of A Rocha Field Study Centre in Vancouver, Canada. Since we arrived a few months ago, my husband Lynton and I have been involved in a wide variety of activities: conducting bird surveys, cooking communal meals, creating educational resources, praying corporately, weeding, watering seedlings, counting frog egg masses. The list goes on.

How did we end up here doing what we're doing? And why have we said goodbye to our families, friends and jobs in New Zealand to spend a year involved in this work? I hope this will become clearer as you read on.

## What is A Rocha?

A Rocha (pronounced a-rosh-a) is an organisation founded by Peter and Miranda Harris, a missionary couple from Britain, who moved to Portugal in 1983. Gripped by the desire to obey God's command to be stewards of Creation, they set up a field centre near an estuary in Alvor, to study and protect the thousands of migratory birds that pass through there each year. The name A

Rocha comes from the Portuguese word meaning 'the Rock'.

A Rocha International now operates in 19 countries. Peter and Miranda continue to lead A Rocha internationally, and are now based in France. A Rocha describes itself as an 'international conservation organisation working to show God's love for all creation.' It seeks to work out its 'commitment to environmental action through community-based conservation projects, with a focus on science and research, practical conservation, and environmental education.'<sup>1</sup>

## How did we get involved?

We first heard about A Rocha's work in 2007 when Lynton was asked to speak about A Rocha at a conference. In the following year, we were invited to attend the inaugural conference of A Rocha Aotearoa. We eagerly accepted when we saw that the keynote speaker would be Peter Harris. We thoroughly enjoyed his talks, and appreciated his clear explanations of the important role Christians have to play in caring for Creation.

We came back inspired to take on the challenge of starting a local A Rocha group in Wellington. A small core group in Wellington slowly emerged as we

held various talks with guest speakers, grew an email database of interested people, met for potlucks and prayer, and partnered with other conservation groups already operating in the Wellington area. The group meets monthly and has been involved in a number of projects including developing educational materials for teaching Creation care, growing and selling native tree seedlings, and reintroducing a rare native mistletoe species to forest on private land in Paraparaumu.

Being involved in A Rocha has been a great encouragement to us both. We have appreciated being able to integrate our faith with our love and concern for the environment. Our Reformed heritage blessed us with the understanding that God is Lord over all spheres of life, and that how we live our daily lives is to be done in worship to Him. By becoming involved with A Rocha we are learning how caring for birds and trees and frogs can be an act of worship to our Creator. More on that later...

For some time, Lynton and I had been planning to take a year out to live overseas and do some volunteering. Because we fully concurred with the goals and vision of A Rocha, and had a fairly good understanding of their international projects and how we might be able to participate in them, the natural choice was to volunteer with them. By the end of the decision-making process it was clear that we would be spending six months here in Vancouver and six months at the Field Study Centre in Watamu, Kenya.

So now we are here in Vancouver, living onsite (with about ten others) at the field centre and getting involved in all areas of centre life. The work here is focussed on restoring the watershed of the Little Campbell River. This river is important for salmon and many other creatures, including several endangered species. Science projects focus on the wildlife in this area, and monitoring work and practical projects are conducted to improve the health of the river. The centre also provides education programmes hosting over 2,000 students every year. On-site there is a large vegetable garden



Lynton and Anna Baird (on left) with other volunteers, conducting a weekly bird survey at a nearby park.

that provides food for the centre and also provides a weekly supply of vegetables (in the harvest season) to about 35 individuals and groups who have shares in the garden.

Lyn and I are involved in a variety of areas at the centre, including continuing some research into the population and distribution of frogs and salamanders living in nearby ponds, assisting with the education programs, and assisting in the daily demands of running the centre.

After our time working here, we plan to go to another A Rocha centre which works in a very different context. Mwamba Field Study Centre is in Watamu, a Kenyan village in the coastal district of Malindi. The centre is situated close to the Arabuko-Sokoke forest (the largest remnant of dry coastal forest in East Africa) and Mida Creek Estuary. Both are unique and important habitats for bird and wildlife conservation in East Africa. The Malindi District has some extremely rich and diverse habitats and the area is considered internationally important for bird conservation.

However, a rapidly increasing population and extreme poverty has placed heavy demands on the forest and estuary. They face illegal logging, poaching, over-fishing, and land clearance for sugar cane plantations. A Rocha Kenya is seeking to address this situation by working with local communities to achieve a sustainable balance between the wellbeing of the people and the natural environment. ASSETS (Arabuko-Sokoke Schools and Eco-Tourism Scheme) is a program that has been developed to address these concerns by providing secondary school bursaries to students living around the forest, using funding from eco-tourism within the forest. Families benefiting from the scholarships commit to caring for the forest and take part in restoration work of the forest. People who formerly logged the forest illegally in order to provide for their children, now have a means to educate their children and protect the local environment.

High quality scientific research is also a key part of the work A Rocha does. A Rocha Kenya collects data that provides vital information for managing and protecting vulnerable and threatened sites. During our stay at Mwamba, we anticipate helping with the education, research and restoration programs.

Before I conclude, I would like to answer some nagging questions some of you may be asking...

### Why bother?

Or to refine the question a little more, should caring for the Creation *really* be a priority for Christians? As you might have guessed, I would answer a resounding 'Yes!'. Here's why:

Firstly, it is good to care for Creation because God has appointed us as the stewards of the Creation. Being stewards of the earth is an integral aspect of our identity and role here. We are the caretakers of our Master's beautiful creation and have been given dominion over it, in the same way a servant might be given authority over his master's estate while he is away. The servant is not given authority to destroy and pillage the estate but to protect and enhance it.

Secondly, caring for Creation is a direct way to love our neighbour. We all rely on the natural environment for our wellbeing and that is especially true for the world's poorest. Of the recent natural disasters in the last few years, many of them have hit the poor worst of all. Many times this is because the environment around the world's poorest people has been stripped bare, unable to provide any barrier against floods, cyclones, droughts and famines. For an

example of this consider reading about the plight of the people on the island Hispaniola, when flash flooding hit the severely deforested island in 2004, as well as a Christian organisation's response to this.<sup>3</sup> Restoring these environments is a way of loving our neighbour by alleviating the suffering of the world's poorest people.

Thirdly, Jesus' plan for the world is comprehensive. As we care for Creation and work for its restoration, we have the privilege of participating in God's kingdom work. Colossians 1 is a beautiful passage that shows how all things have been created by Christ, all things have been corrupted because of the Fall, and all things will be restored, through Christ. Romans 8 tells us that creation is groaning and will one day be rescued from the bondage it has been subjected to.

Francis Schaeffer explains how this should affect Christian conduct here and now:

"On the basis of the fact that there is going to be total redemption in the future, not only of man but of all creation, the Christian who believes the Bible should be the man who — with God's





Lynton Baird with one of the frog egg masses that he has to count.

help and in the power of the Holy Spirit — is treating nature now in the direction of the way nature will be then... God's calling to the Christian now, and to the Christian community, in the area of nature — just as it is in the area of personal Christian living in true spirituality — is that we should exhibit a substantial healing here and now, between man and nature and nature and itself, as far as Christians can bring it to pass."<sup>4</sup>

### Why work for a Christian conservation organisation?

Firstly, Christians have a distinct approach to conservation. Many conservationists look at the problems facing the environment today and (understandably) feel a deep sense of despair. They see humans as the main cause of environmental crises. However, the solution is not the eradication of the human race to save the animals, rather humanity needs to take seriously its responsibility to act

as loving stewards of the creation.

We are drawn to the work of A Rocha because it balances a concern for people with a concern for the rest of creation. It recognises that people need to use the earth's resources to survive, but it labours to show a way where people can live in harmony with the rest of the Creation.

Secondly, Christians bring a unique and much needed perspective to the work of conservation. In an oftentimes despair-filled field, Christians can bring the good news that we do not have to give up hope because we are not the ones who can avert the world from catastrophe, but God the Creator is. Though by His grace we work with Him for the healing of the earth, it is God alone who will ultimately restore it, when He creates the new heavens and earth.

Thirdly, a core commitment of A Rocha International is to work in partnership with other conservation groups

and individuals. This provides many opportunities to share with people that we don't just love Creation, but we love and worship the King of Creation.

In conclusion, I would ask that each of us recognise our God-given calling as Creation's stewards, and work together with our families, churches, and communities, to care for the part of Creation that God has entrusted to us.

### What can you do?

You can begin by taking small steps to reduce the negative impact you have on creation in areas of food, packaging, transport, energy efficiency, waste, and consumer spending.

For more ideas go to [www.blessedearth.org/resources/creationcaretips.html](http://www.blessedearth.org/resources/creationcaretips.html).

You can also work positively to restore the local environment by joining with other organisations already involved in the area such as Forest and Bird. There are also local A Rocha groups in 5 major New Zealand centres. More information can be found at [www.arocha.org.nz](http://www.arocha.org.nz). Or contact your regional council for details on conservation work already being done in your neighbourhood.

### References:

1. [www.arocha.org/ca-en/index.html](http://www.arocha.org/ca-en/index.html)
2. <http://www.arocha.org/int-en/who/commitments.html>
3. <http://www.ctlibrary.com/cj/2009/november/32.54.html>
4. Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology*, chapter 5, Tyndale House Publishers; 1970

### More resources:

- *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth*, by Nathan L. K. Bierma. Available from Geneva Books
- *Serve God, Save the Planet*, by Dr. Matthew Sleeth.
- *Under the Bright Wings*, by Peter Harris
- [www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org)
- [www.lyntonandanna.blogspot.com](http://www.lyntonandanna.blogspot.com) to stay informed of our work