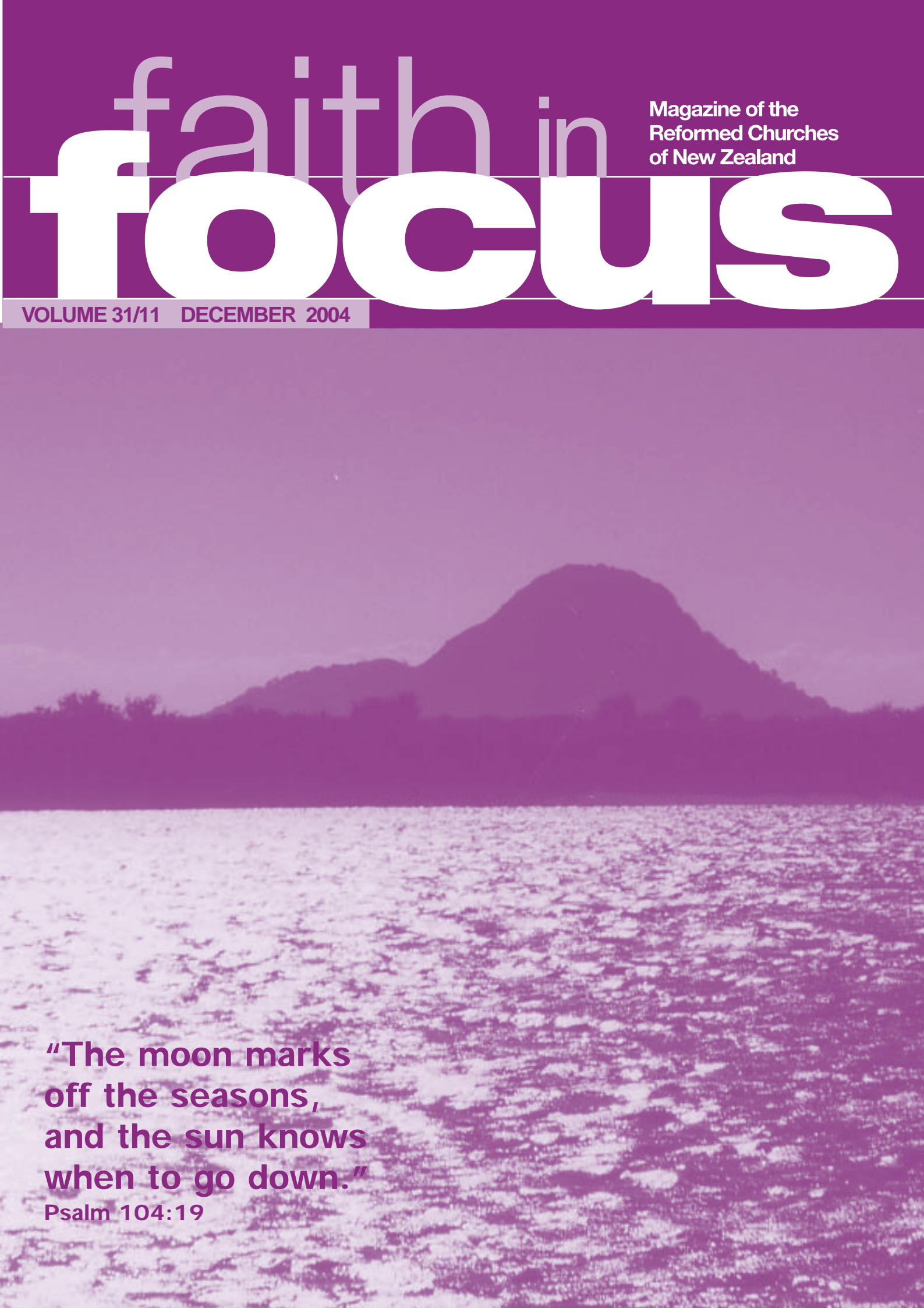


faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
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of New Zealand

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**"The moon marks
off the seasons,
and the sun knows
when to go down."**

Psalm 104:19

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Editorial

We come to the end of another year. Another year the Lord has granted us upon this earth. Christmas very much reminds us of that, for our years are dated from when Christ was with among us.

It is a year when much has happened. You have busy. But, could I ask you, has it been busy for the Lord?

In 1st Corinthians 3 the apostle Paul paints the picture of how a believer could have used his time on this earth. He describes how the work believers have done will be shown on judgment day. But he describes it in a way that it clear some will only just get through - "only as one escaping through the flames" he says in verse 15.

So how has your year been? Has your commitment to the Lord and His Church grown? Have you changed positively? Can you think of an area in your life the Lord particularly convicted you of and has been changing you in?

There is something in New Year resolutions. Because they recognise we do need to work on our lives. And as Christians it's something we should be doing all the time. So why not now?

I extend my thanks to the Faith in Focus team. This involves many, from the Publication's Committee right through to you, the reader. There's our contributors, especially the regular columnists, the proof-reader, typographer, printer, and myself, the editor. We pray that our serving you in this way has helped inform, equip, and challenge you again this past year. I believe you can see that in this December issue. From personal to philosophical, from local to global, it's all here. And through all of this may you meet Him in here - the Lord Jesus Christ through His gospel. Marantha - come quickly, Lord!

*"Enjoy the blessings of this day,
if God sends them;
and the evils of it bear patiently and sweetly:
for this day only is ours,
we are dead to yesterday,
and we are not yet born to the morrow."*

Jeremy Taylor

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

What could be more of a miracle?

An advent meditation

Sjirk Bajema

Do you believe in miracles? Well, we answer, of course we do! After all, we believe in God, don't we?

Perhaps, however, you're a little more careful. You need to know more precisely what is meant by a miracle. And then we go to the Oxford Dictionary, which says that a miracle is "a marvellous event due to some supernatural agency."

If we think about that definition for a moment, we have to say that all around us there are miracles. Our lives are miracles! Isn't it a miracle each time a child is born?

True, life itself is a miracle. The fact that we're alive and breathing is a marvellous event due to a supernatural event, which is God's Spirit making it happen.

As Christians, though, we would also agree that at some points God moves beyond the ordinary ways. Then He definitely does things in a very special way. And the Bible is full of these events — the healing of the blind, or lame, or dumb, the bringing back to life.

A special miracle

In Luke 1:39-45 we read of a very special miracle. The angel Gabriel had visited Mary. He told her that she would give birth to a son, and that he would be given the name 'Jesus', because He would be the Messiah. His would be the Kingdom, coming from the line of David, that would never end.

Mary naturally asked, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Then Gabriel told her about a miracle which would take place within her own body. God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, would cause her to become pregnant. So it would happen that the child inside her would be called the Son of God.

To prove that God was able to do this, the angel said, "*Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.*" (1:36f)

Mary and Elizabeth were cousins. So Mary would have heard about Elizabeth's unusual pregnancy. Yet it seems that she hadn't fully realised its significance as a genuine miracle.

This can be said for all of us. Unless we see through the eyes of faith that God moves in a special way, it's easy to forget the way that God moves, especially through miracles. Even though it happens in front of our own eyes we can still miss it.

As soon as Mary had been told of the miracle that was Elizabeth's pregnancy, she

went to Elizabeth to share in that wonderful event.

A special sign

We see this in the verses 39 and 40 of our text. There we're told, "*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.*"

Elizabeth was certainly blessed by being pregnant at this late stage in life. It was something she and Zechariah would have long hoped for. But as they got older and older it was a hope that would have dimmed considerably. And with the fading of that hope there came not only the sense of physical



Albrecht Durer's 1503 wood print of "The Visitation" – Mary greets her cousin Elizabeth

incompleteness, but also, as they were Israelites, a spiritual curse.

Yet, as we read in verse 36, "*she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.*" This was an **extra**-ordinary miracle! It was a situation where Mary could indeed see God working in a special way. A joy for Elizabeth but also a comfort to Mary, who has just been told herself of the completely different way that God is going to work through her.

Yet, why is it that God works sometimes through these strange ways? Couldn't John the Baptist have been born from Elizabeth while she was still younger, and able to cope a lot better?

God could have used the ordinary way if He wanted to. But it was in His plan to also work in other ways. God isn't limited to the

constraints that we think should be there. God's plan isn't our plan.

For example, if we were to plan the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, would we have Him come from a family line which included a prostitute, a father who committed incest, an adulterer, and murderers? I'm sure we'd want to make it a little more respectable than that! Yet God doesn't do that. He uses all these prime examples of man's total depravity in order to achieve His plan.

And with Elizabeth He's also showing the uniqueness of His plan. A woman way past child bearing — in fact humanly speaking, unable to have any of the physiological functions to start that process — yet she conceives! Verse 37 puts it in a completely different perspective, "*For nothing is impossible with God.*"

A special word

In God's plan these miracles take place — but what is God's plan about? Why is it that He has to act like this? Well, God's plan revolves around our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the whole Bible is really about. As C.S. Lewis in his book, 'Miracles', says, "every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the incarnation."

So, in every miracle of the Bible, a particular aspect of the coming of Jesus Christ and what He did on our behalf, is shown to us. No wonder Jesus Himself did so many miracles! He was, after all, **the Incarnation**, God come down to earth as a man!

Elizabeth, by bearing John the Baptist, also contributed to the work that the Lord Jesus would soon do. For John the Baptist would prepare the way for Jesus Christ — He would prepare the nation to receive her King!

In verse 35 Mary went to Elizabeth to share with her this miracle of God, but in the verses 41 till 45 this situation is reversed. As verse 41 says, "*When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*"

A woman six months pregnant naturally has junior often reminding mummy of his or her presence! On this occasion, however, Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit," and under His inspiration she knew the baby's movement was a lot different. It wasn't just a growing sign — it was a divine sign! Her baby was so joyful! And he was spiritually happy because the Saviour was there — within Mary!

A special seal

God's Spirit also led Elizabeth to exclaim, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!*" She's crying out in a loud voice because her heart is filled with surprise, and with thanksgiving, and — most of all — with love! There was no way she could restrain herself. And there was no way she wanted to be held back.

Now, "blessed" is a word that occurs several times in our text. How could that help us? What does it mean? Well, being blessed is being happy. But happiness can be just what a person feels at a particular point in time. One moment you can be happy, and the next moment you can be sad. Mary is blessed, though, all the time.

So being blessed is what a person is. A person is blessed when God's favour rests upon him or her. That's when the Lord delights in them. This is what the first psalm is about. Being blessed is a permanent position because it relates to **our standing** before God.

How is Mary standing before the Lord? Well, not only is Mary blessed, but she is also, as verse 42 says, "*blessed among women.*" Luke is telling us of a blessing to the highest degree. The phrase, "*Blessed are you among women,*" is telling us that Mary is **the** most blessed one among all the women upon the earth!

But why would this be? Is there anything Mary has done to deserve such a title? Far from it! In fact, it's only in her relation to

Jesus Christ that she is blessed, as we all are.

For Mary, the relationship is to the extent that she will bear our Lord and Saviour. For us, our blessedness is assured as we believe and act upon what God has done for us at Calvary. It's how we live out our relationship with Him.

Mary had true faith. Yet God also granted her the special privilege of bearing His Son, so that her faith — and ours — could be made real.

The verses 43 till 45 give us the rest of Elizabeth's song, as she cries out, "*But why am I so favoured, that the mother of the Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!*"

The Holy Spirit enables Elizabeth to recognise Mary as the mother of the promised Redeemer. That's why she calls Mary "*the mother of my Lord.*"

Elizabeth knew she had been given a miracle. Still, in her joy she also acknowledges that there, right in front of her, is a far greater miracle.

She could have been very jealous. She could have resented a far younger woman taking away from her glory. But Elizabeth didn't. Instead she is truly humble: she realises the immense blessing that she has with the mother of the Lord having come to her.

A special character

Humility — being humble. It has to be an important part of every Christian's character. This is what our Lord Jesus showed us perfectly. He accepted what was to come to pass as His Father's will, **yet** He rejoiced that He was able to do it!

The apostle Paul wrote about this in Philippians chapter 2. In verse 2 he says that in humility we should consider others better than ourselves — and that's because this humbleness was in Christ Jesus. He looked out for others: He lived and died for us!

Jesus taught us about that humbleness. In the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 He said, in verse 5, "*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*" Being meek is humbling yourself before God. We have to demonstrate our utter dependence upon Him.

And knowing how dependent we are upon God encourages us to be gentle in our dealings with others. We do unto others as God in Christ Jesus has done unto us.

A favourite phrase on many Christmas cards goes like this, "Wishing you a joyous Christmas!" God does wish us a joyous Christmas, but it's not something that people can do. It's not a matter how generous and kind-hearted people feel towards others at this time of the year. It's only a truly humble attitude, through the Holy Spirit, that opens for us the gates to true, deep and jubilant joy. That is the real miracle — not only that God came down to us, but that God is now in us!

The welcome

The story of how a baby made all the difference

Patricia van Laar

[The story of the Bible Courier belongs to our times - it happened just a few years ago. He was not a missionary, but a faithful indigenous Christian, trying in difficult circumstances and places to take the message of God's love to his own people, who often didn't want to hear. In countries like China, parts of the Philippines, and other countries, it is often not only difficult, but dangerous to be a Bible courier.]

The Bible courier paused before entering the village. He was always apprehensive as he approached one where he had never been before. His full bag of Bibles was heavy on his back. What kind of reception would he get? Would anyone welcome him? Would anyone listen to the story of the Christmas season, and receive the Bibles that he

carried so hopefully to them? He was soon to find out.

When they heard why he had come, angry villagers rushed at him. "Get away from our village," they shouted. "We don't want your stories. We don't want your faith. We don't want your Bibles. We don't want your Jesus. We don't want YOU." Seeing the tense atmosphere, the courier wisely decided to beat a retreat before they took up stones against him.

He hastily made his way out of the village in the direction he had come from. He carried the heavy bag on his back with an even heavier heart.

That night, as he camped out and prayed to God in his evening devotions, he had a strong impression that God wanted him to return to the village. "Return?" he thought, "How can I return? If I go back they certainly will stone me. Why should I risk that?" But

the longer he prayed, the stronger became the conviction that he should. Yet, not by the same route! Somehow, he felt sure, God wanted him to return a different way.

The next morning, not at all knowing why, yet positive of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he made his way along the rough road leading around the village to the opposite side. And as he trudged along, his alert ears heard a faint cry coming from the side of the road. He halted, and peered around until he spotted it, a little bundle of clothing abandoned to its fate and to the elements. He picked the bundle up. Inside the clothing was a tiny baby. Carrying the mite in his arms, he continued on his way. He approached the village, his heart beating fast. On the outskirts a cry went up, and the villagers once again rushed towards him, but what a change! Eager hands reached out for the baby, word spread rapidly, and a tearful

mother and father came hurrying to retrieve their little one. Excitedly they told him of the gang that had attacked the village just after the courier had been driven away, and these evil men, not content to steal just material possessions, had also stolen the baby and carried her off. The villagers knew full well why the child had then been abandoned. The brigands had discovered it was a girl baby,

not a boy! Of what use was a girl? To whom could they sell a girl baby?

Now the villagers crowded round the courier. How grateful they were that he had brought the little one back. Would he tell them more about his faith? Who was this Jesus he followed? So the courier was able to unfold the story of the season, the story of that other baby so long ago, a baby not

stolen from His Father, but given freely by His Father for the sake of them all.

“For God so loved the world, their world, their people, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

They listened, and eager hands now stretched out, not for stones, but for the Bibles he had brought them.

A foreign observer in my home land

Attending the 2004 Synod meeting of the United Reformed Churches in North America

Jim Klazinga

A Brief History of the URC-NA

The United Reformed Churches in North America is a rather young federation of churches. It formally began in 1995, when 27 previously independent Reformed congregations decided to form a provisional federation of churches. They initially called themselves “The Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches.”

Most, if not all, of these churches had either previously separated themselves from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, or they were new congregations established with a majority of members who had left the CRC-NA on their own. Reasons for leaving the CRC-NA dealt mostly with concerns over the interpretation and authority of Scripture, particularly with respect to issues such as women in office and theistic evolution.

Prior to this year, the URC-NA had four official synod meetings: in Lynwood, Illinois, in 1996; in St. Catherines, Ontario, in 1997; in Hudsonville, Michigan, in 1999; and in Escondido, California, in 2001. The fifth synod meeting took place this year in Calgary, Alberta, from the 15th to the 18th of June.

About 150 delegates from 80 churches attended synod this year. These churches came from six classes, with two of the classes located in Canada and four in the United States.

A Different Role

Personally, I had attended each of the previous four URC-NA synod meetings. You could say that as a delegate from one of the founding churches, the Reformed Church of Telkwa in British Columbia, Canada, I had a small part in the establishment and development of this denomination.

After moving to Christchurch in 2002, I did not anticipate attending any more URC-NA synod meetings. But lo and behold, where should I find myself in June of this year but in Calgary, attending yet another URC synod! Of course, my role this time was to be substantially different. No longer was I attending as a member of the club. Instead, I was an outsider, a visitor, an ecumenical observer from a foreign church.

Personal Blessing

On a personal level, attending the Calgary synod was a real blessing. It was great to see quite a number of old friends and colleagues, including members from both of the churches I had served in Canada. It was also good to make new contacts, especially with some of the other ecumenical observers.

While in Calgary, I stayed with a close friend and colleague with whom I had worked for eight and half years while in British Columbia. It was such an encouragement to see him for the first time since both of us had moved on to new congregations.

A Warm Welcome

The people from the Calgary congregation hosting the synod were very welcoming and hospitable. They were extremely organized and professional — providing all that was needed, and more. They made every effort to accommodate those of us coming from far away.

The response from many of the delegates to the presence of the ecumenical observers was also quite positive. I must admit that at previous synod meetings I had not been all that happy with the attitude demonstrated toward the foreign delegates. It almost felt as if they were burdens to be endured rather

than guests to be welcomed.

But being on the other side this time, I realized that either my impressions from previous synod meetings were wrong, or the attitude at this synod had markedly improved. This may have something to do with the fact that at previous meetings the federation was still in the process of sorting out its own identity, and so the focus had to be more inward than outward. But at this synod, the URC-NA was a more established denomination, and so they could be more receptive to those visiting from the outside. In any event, I was pleasantly surprised by how receptive the delegates were to the greetings I brought from New Zealand.

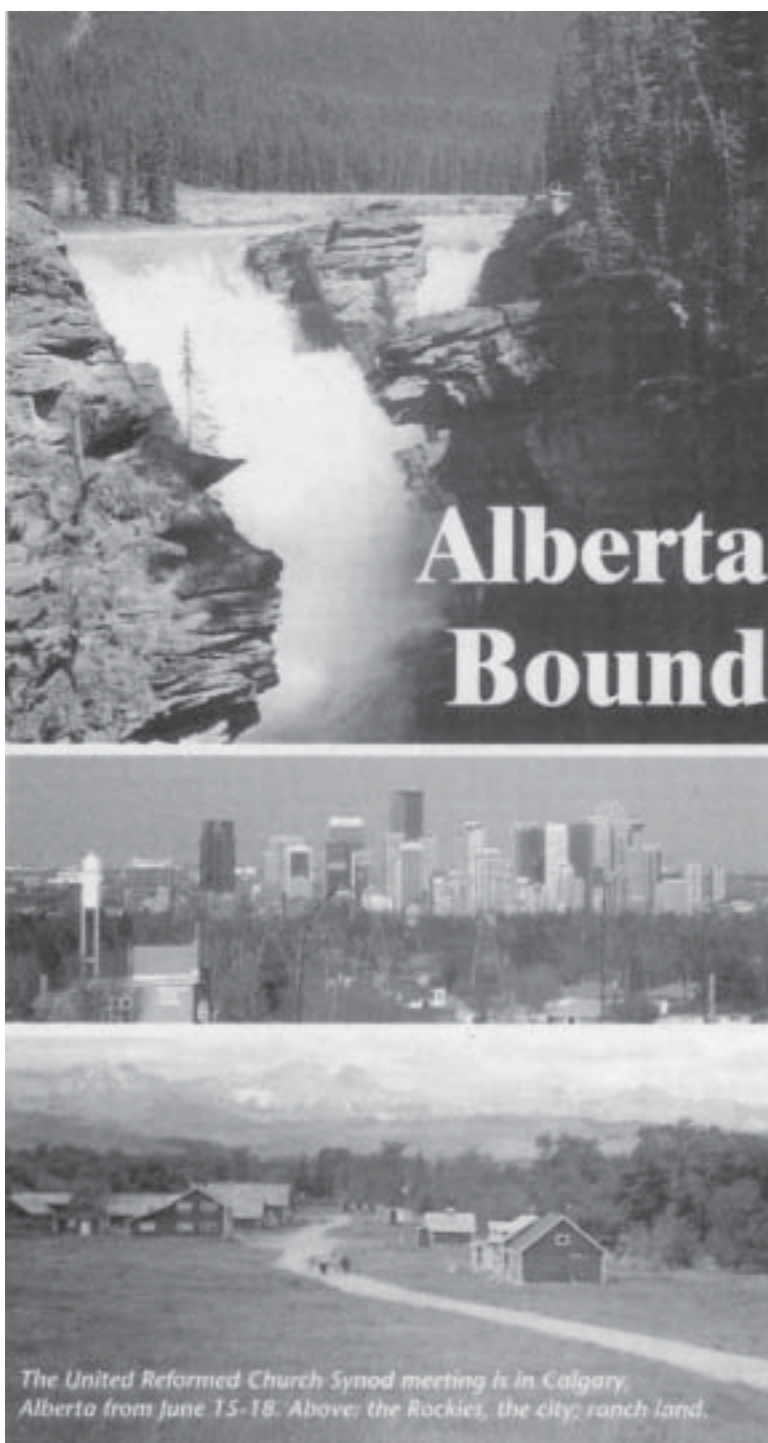
Addressing the Synod

Each of the denominations sending observers were given the opportunity to have one of their representatives address the body. Seeing as how I was the only RCNZ observer present, the task fell upon me to speak on behalf of our churches.

The visiting churches were basically divided into two groups: those visiting from other North American denominations, and those coming from churches outside North America. Of course, I was lumped with those coming from churches abroad, along with representatives from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and the Reformed Churches in South Africa.

Our three foreign churches were invited to address the synod on Thursday morning. We were each introduced by Rev. Ray Sikkema, a retired pastor serving as the secretary of URC Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad. Rev. Sikkema also happens to be a good friend of mine. He had served as pastor of my parents' congregation, and we were neighbours during the time I was serving in my first congregation. In introducing me to the synod, he spoke of a discussion we had during a seven-hour trip while I was still a student in college. I must admit, his memory is better than mine.

I've included the address I gave at the end of this article. Mind you, I had to digress



a bit from my prepared manuscript. Just before the foreign observers addressed the synod, the body had made a decision that I believed was unwise. They had decided to limit the sending of observers to foreign synods to once per year, due to concerns over cost. I addressed this in my speech by letting them know how in New Zealand, we didn't limit ourselves in this manner, but there were some synods we would send observers to only if it could be done at no cost to the denomination. They were very receptive to my input, even deciding later on to change their decision in response to what I had said. In any event, the rest of my speech

was pretty much the same as what I've included below.

Each of the ecumenical addresses was given a response by one of the synodical delegates. Rev. Sikkema had originally intended to ask one of my closest friends to respond to me. While this would have been nice on a personal level, I felt that it would not be entirely appropriate, since I was not there on my own, but as a representative of the RCNZ. And so Rev. Allan van der Pol was asked to respond instead. Rev. van der Pol is presently serving as the pastor of the URC in Cape Coral, Florida. From 1986-89, he served as pastor in our Nelson congregation.

Having had this personal contact with our churches, he was able to offer a very warm and appropriate response. In fact, I remember being quite moved by his words.

URC-NA Relationships with Foreign Churches

With respect to relationships with churches abroad, Synod 2004 decided to take a three-stage approach. The first stage is rather informal, consisting of a period of initial exploration where the two denominations exchange information and get to know each other.

The second stage for them involves the first step of formal relations, which they have designated "Ecumenical Contact." This step involves more formal recognition and discussions focusing on specific issues such as view of Scripture, confessions and worship. In some ways, these first two stages overlap, since many of the topics of discussion and exchange of information that they expect to take place under "Ecumenical Contact" will already be taking place in the period of initial exploration getting to know each other. It's just that the second stage involves a more formal relationship.

The goal of the Ecumenical Contact stage is to be able to reach the point where the relationship deepens enough so that the third stage, the second step of formal relations, can be reached. This step is designated "Ecumenical Fellowship." "The second step...will focus on the oneness of the URCNA with the 'foreign' federation, even though we are separated by geographical boundaries." (From the report of the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad.)

Ecumenical Fellowship involves among other things: mutual reception of one another's members to the Lord's Supper, mutual recognition of each other's discipline, mutual exercise of concern and admonition when needed, and agreement to consult with one another on important matters of doctrine and polity.

Granted, some of this language sounds a bit foreign to our ears. Suffice to say that reaching the Ecumenical Fellowship stage for them would roughly be the equivalent of our having a sister-church relationship with them.

The URC-NA and the RCNZ

At this point in time, our two federations do not officially have a formal relationship. But we are moving in that direction. Our synod in Christchurch in 2002 expressed the desire to work toward formal ties. And the URC-NA Synod Calgary 2004 officially decided to work toward the first step of formal relations, "Ecumenical Contact." In some ways, much of the work for entering this stage with them has already been done, given the contact we have had and the information that has

been exchanged. I'm sure that with continued contact, their next synod should have no problem actually formalising ties, establishing Ecumenical Contact with us, and eventually working toward full Ecumenical Fellowship.

The URC-NA synod ended up by deciding to send official observers to the major assemblies of churches with whom ecumenical relations are being established. Given that they also officially decided to work toward establishing such relations with us, it's likely that there will be URC-NA observers to our synod meeting scheduled to be held in Hamilton next year.

Other Issues

Obviously, the synod in Calgary discussed many other matters in addition to their relationships with churches abroad. Of more immediate concern to them is their relationship with churches in North America, especially with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Their two denominations are seriously considering the possibility of joining together. Synod received reports from a number of committees discussing issues that would need to be ironed out, including matters relating to Church Order, song books, and theological education. The process toward federative unity will be a long one, and you could say that this year's synod merely kept the process going, neither unduly hastening it nor slowing it down.

The synod also dealt with a number of matters relating to the issue of children at the Lord's Supper. Without going into too many details, it could be said that the decisions made basically upheld the traditional understanding of having young people admitted to the table only after being able to make a relatively mature profession of faith.

Other matters addressed included welcoming new churches into the federation, dealing with appeals against decisions of various classes, and a number of house-keeping matters.

Conclusion

I recognize that, for many of us in the RCNZ, the URC-NA seems a long way away. Many may wonder why we should bother trying to pursue further ties. I do hope the speech printed below can help answer some of those questions. Obviously, this is something close to my heart, having come from the URC-NA and still having many friends there. But even apart from these personal ties, I do believe such relations can benefit both of our denominations. We can learn from one another's experiences. We can support one another in our mission efforts. We can help strengthen one another as we deal with similar societal trends.

I'm thankful that I had the opportunity to

help in the strengthening of ties between our denominations by attending the synod in Calgary. And I do pray that the Lord may continue to work in our two federations for the edification of His people and the glory of His Name!

Manuscript of the Address Given to the Delegates at the 2004 URCNA Synod Meeting

Mr. Chairman, delegates to the 2004 synod of the United Reformed Churches, esteemed brothers, David confesses in Psalm 139: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." On behalf of some of your Reformed brothers and sisters who have settled on the far side of the sea, I bring you warm greetings in the name of our common Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thank you for the privilege of being able to speak to you today. I speak as a representative of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and as a member of our Inter-church Relations Committee, and on behalf of my local congregation, the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

We in the RCNZ are a fairly small group. We have only 19 established churches with about 3300 members. We are very aware of our small size, and our relative isolation from the rest of the Reformed world. We live in an island nation. But still, we do not want to be an island to ourselves. Thus, it is our desire to establish good relationships with other Reformed denominations.

Historically, we have had a strong long-standing relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The first Church Order we adopted was that of the CRC-NA. We received much support from the CRC in our early years. A good number of CRC ministers have served in our churches. And most of our churches even now still use the old Blue CRC Psalter Hymnal as their main songbook.

However, the same liberal tendencies that led to the formation of your federation forced our synod to officially cut ties with the CRC-NA in 1998.

Given that our relationship with the CRC-NA has been severed, and given the reasons for this break-up, we believe it only natural to seek to establish a relationship with you. We believe this would be the natural continuation of our ties to the confessional Reformed tradition in North America.

We have so much in common. The cultures we operate in are very similar. We are both members of the ICRC. We speak the same language, both in the actual words

we utter and in the truth we seek to convey through those words.

To demonstrate our commitment to Scripture and the confessions, RCNZ office-bearers are required to sign a form of subscription quite similar to your own. Like yourselves, we subscribe to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. Mind you, we have also added a forth form of unity: the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Our system of church government is very similar to yours. We call our consistory the session, and our classes presbyteries. But our church order traces its roots to the same continental Reformed tradition as your own.

Our synod meets once every three years. Our last synod was held in 2002. Our next synod will be hosted by our Hamilton congregation in the beginning of September next year. You are certainly welcome to send an observer, and I can say with confidence that he will be well received and even invited to participate in our discussions.

I believe any URC member visiting with us would feel at home in our worship services. Our liturgies would be quite familiar to you. We use many of the same liturgical forms. We preach the same gospel in much the same manner. Mind you, there are some relatively minor differences in matters of worship among our New Zealand churches, but certainly no greater than the differences existing already among your own churches.

Given all of our similarities, it is only natural that we should work toward formalising our ties. It would be good to mutually recognise one another, and to build a relationship, for the up-building of our two federations and the greater glory of God.

At our last synod meeting, our churches made three decisions with respect to the URC-NA.

1. To encourage the URC-NA in the progress they have made in establishing closer ties with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (so, incidentally, consider yourselves encouraged!)
2. To continue an exchange of information with a view to establishing a sister-church relationship with the URC-NA
3. That a delegate be sent to the upcoming synod of the URC-NA if it could be done at no cost to synod.

This last decision to send a delegate to your synod only if it wouldn't cost us anything, this does not suggest that we are not really interested in a relationship, as if we were a suitor too cheap to spend any money on the object of our affections. Rather, it merely is a reflection of the fact that we are quite small and our resources are limited.

What our decisions should convey is that we are interested in what is happening with you, and we do want to establish closer ties. It is my understanding that our term "sister-

church relationship” would roughly be the equivalent of your term “Ecumenical Fellowship.” That is what we would like to work toward, and I have come a long way from home to help us move in that direction.

To demonstrate this desire, I come bringing gifts. I have for you a copy of the minutes of our last synod meeting, a book detailing the history of the first 40 years of our history, a book containing a copy of our Church Order and a commentary on it, the latest copy of our denominational yearbook,

and four recent issues of the Magazine of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, Faith in Focus. I give them to you, Mr. Chairman, at no charge! I would also encourage anyone interested in learning more about us to check out our federation’s webpage, the address of which can be found in the printed copy of this speech. (<http://www.reformed-churches.org.nz/>)

I pray that we may be able to be of assistance to each other in the service of our Lord and Savior. In the words of Romans

1:8, we thank our God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. We encourage you in the deliberations you are engaging in this week, and we wish you wisdom in the decisions you make. May God continue to work in both our federations, for the advancement of His truth and the praise of His name! Thank you.

The Rev. J. Klazinga is the minister of the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

World in focus

Presbyterians & Jews discuss Israel divestment

Jewish and Presbyterian Church (USA) leaders held strained but polite dialogue about the PC(USA) General Assembly’s decision to divest from companies who profit from Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Both parties agreed on a mutual commitment to peace in the Middle East, but there was little yielding on the divestment issue.

“The Christian community tends to focus on the suffering of the Palestinian people. We in the Jewish community tend to focus on terrorism. Both are legitimate concerns. The suffering among Palestinians is deplorable. At the same time, there is a terrible terror against Jews in the Jewish State,” said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism.

After the close of the three-hour, closed-door meeting, Yoffie told reporters that the conversation did yield five agreed-upon actions to further Jewish/Presbyterian dialogue at both national and congregational levels.

+ PC (USA), 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202 (800) 872-3283

Home schooling on the rise

The US is experiencing a rise in home schooling as evident from the 1.1 million students home schooled last year. The National Center for Education Statistics reports the estimated figure reveals a 29 percent growth since 1999.

Parents who were surveyed by CBS News offered two main reasons for deciding to home school their children: 31 percent cited the environment of regular schools; and 30 percent wanted the flexibility to teach religious and moral lessons. CBS News also reported that “the 1.1 million home-schooled students account for a small-part — 2.2 percent — of the school-age population in the US, young people aged five through 17.”

+ National Center for Education Statistics, 1990 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006 (202) 502-7300

Tough decisions to be made by the Dutch Reformed Church

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) is starting the first of its biannual synods this month, which is a change from the former pattern of synods every four years. They will also make a change by not meeting in Pretoria, but in the southern resort town of Wilderness.

The synod is dealing with restructuring, such as mergers of several agencies and departments and realigning staff. The synod also faces some difficult doctrinal matters.

The key issue has been the place of the Belhar Confession, a document created to resist apartheid and now held as a basis confessional document by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URC). The last synod in 2002 decided to hold convents, loosely-structured meetings of church leaders. Convents have proposed adopting the Belhar Confession, and now two regional synods, from Western and Southern Cape and from the Eastern Cape, have declared they are ready to accept the Belhar Confession. A third synod, the Northern Cape, rejected the proposal.

The URC moderator, James Buys, has pressed the DRC to give a clear “yes” or “no” to the Belhar Confession. If the DRC General Synod in October does propose accepting the Belhar Confession, two-thirds of the congregations must still ratify it in each regional synod to approve that decision.

+ Reformed Church in America, PO Box 19381, Newark, NJ 07195-1938

Presbyterians in Malawi change position

After being opposed to the newly elected president of their country, Bingu was Mutharika, the Livingstonia Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawi has changed its position. The Synod had disapproved of the president’s election because they felt he won the vote through a

rigged balloting process. However, a statement released by the moderator and general secretary of the synod said, “we are encouraging you to go ahead with this difficult task.” The statement marks the synod’s approval of Mutharika’s recent attempts at “good governance and wag[ing] war against corruption.”

+ Worldwide Ministries, 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202 (888) 728-7228

Akinola has eventful visit to United States

The most Rev. Peter J. Akinola, Primate of Nigeria, is widely regarded as at least the second most powerful man in the Anglican Communion (some would place him higher — above Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams — due to the increasing influence that Africa is experiencing). An evangelical, Akinola is leader of the world’s largest Anglican province with 17 million members.

In an 6 October press conference held at Truro Episcopal Church in Fairfax, Virginia, the Nigerian leader announced the formation of the Church of Nigeria in America (CONA), a Convocation of parishes that will meet the needs of some 250,000 Nigerians currently living in the US. Speaking about the move, Akinola said, “The Episcopal Church has created a new religion that says what is sin is not sin. It doesn’t take the gospel seriously. We are not in communion with the Episcopal Church now.” CONA is affiliated with the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes.

At a later speaking engagement in New York City, some friction arose following the Archbishop’s request at St. George’s Church in midtown Manhattan that his comments remain off-the-record and spoken as one family member to another; it was requested that there were to be no photographs, no recordings, and no notes taken regarding his remarks, and no questions.

+ Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins, Jr. Christian Observer Correspondent

Group quits Episcopal Church over Gay Bishop

A coalition of conservative New England Episcopalians announced that they are forming four new congregations, including two on Cape Cod, that will not be part of the Episcopal Church USA. The new group will seek oversight from a foreign Anglican bishop who shares their opposition of the election of the Right Rev. V. Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire.

The new worshipping communities, which are independent of the Episcopal Church USA, have just a few dozen members and are meeting in private homes.

The Episcopal Church USA is the American province of the Anglican Communion, which comprises 38 provinces around the world.
+ *Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017 (212)716-6000*

Windsor Report released to much criticism*

The Lambeth Commission on Communion, also known as the Windsor Report, was released on Monday, 18 October at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The product of a commission that included conservatives such as the Most Rev. Bernard Malongo, Primate of Central Africa, the Most Rev. Drexel W. Gomez, Primate of the West Indies, and the Rt. Rev. Dr. N. Thomas Wright, Bishop of Durham and noted New Testament scholar, as well as some revisionists, the report calls on the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada to apologise for the consecration of Gene Robinson, an openly homosexual man, as Bishop of New Hampshire and the authorisation of homosexual unions respectively. In addition, those bishops who were involved in either activity are asked to consider removing themselves from Anglican Communion activities. Among other measures, the report calls for a moratorium on same-sex unions and the consecration of homosexual unions. Finally, the 96-page report calls for bishops to stop crossing diocesan lines.

The Most Rev. Peter Akinola, Primate of Nigeria, expressed appreciation for the labour that went into the report but said that it fell short of what was needed to deal with the reality that a "small, economically privileged group of people has sought to subvert the Christian faith and impose their new and false doctrine on the wider community of faithful believers." The All-Africa Bishops Conference will gather in Lagos from 26-31 October and will further address the crisis in the North American Church, Akinola said.

Several non-African leaders from the Global South are also expected to attend.

+ *The Lambeth Commission on Communion: <http://windsor2004.anglicancommunion.org>*
+ *Anglican Church of Nigeria: <http://www.anglican-nig.org>*

Malay woman fights for right to convert

Azlina Jailani, who adopted the name Lina Joy when she became a Christian in 1998, has appealed a second time for the right to change her religious status. Lina Joy first applied for official permission to change her religion in 2001. However, the judge ruled, "As a Malay, the plaintiff exists under the tenets of Islam until her death." Lina Joy recently appealed the decision on the grounds that it contravened Malaysia's constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. The Court of Appeal heard the case on 14 October, and a public announcement on the ruling is expected soon.
+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0314*

Pro-Gay Methodists asked to leave denomination

The United Methodist Action Committee of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) is calling for the "peaceful departure" of Methodist clergy who cannot abide by the church's standards on marriage and sex.

Same-sex unions and the ordination of clergy sexually active outside of traditional marriage are officially barred by the denomination.

In a statement approved earlier this month, the Committee observes that the 11-million member UMC "has made its decision on the issues of marriage and homosexuality. We recommend allowing a gracious exit for those who cannot or will not accept the essential beliefs on which the UMC is founded. The UMC should adopt a fair plan to permit their voluntary, peaceful departure, taking with them their local church property (if the congregation votes to leave) and pension rights."

+ *The Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1110 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 1180, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 969-8430*

Further charges for Christian in Saudi Arabia

An Islamic court in Saudi Arabia ignored Brian O'Connor's previous sentence of "spreading Christianity," under which he has already been jailed for seven months. He was sentenced on 20 October to three more months in jail, along with a punishment of 300 lashes, for alleged possession and sale of alcohol. O'Connor refused to accept the verdict, which may result in an even harsher penalty if he is still found guilty.

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799*



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Covenant College, founded in 1991, is a vital, maturing Protestant Christian school with 220 students across Years K – 10 (with plans to commence Yr 11 in 2006), situated in Gordon ACT. Applicants should be committed Christians of the conservative evangelical and reformed persuasion, who are members and regular attendees of a local Protestant Church. For further details and application forms, contact the Principal:

Mr Donald R Surtees, Covenant College
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Telephone: (02) 6294 2455

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Applications close on 26 November 2004

Jacques Derrida: destined to die

Reflecting upon a spokesman for this world

Veronica Hoyt

It was inevitable. It was going to happen ... sometime. Death. He wouldn't have acknowledged it, but "man is destined to die once and after that to face judgement" (Hebrews 9:27). And so it happened on October 9, 2004: Jacques Derrida died at the age of 74.

Derrida was a Jewish, Algerian born, French intellectual – a philosopher (although he would have denied the term), whose writings have had profound influence when applied to, for example, literature, linguistics, philosophy, law and architecture. He lectured in philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris (1960-1964) and at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (1965-1984); he also lectured regularly in the United States at John Hopkins, Yale, Cornell, and the University of California. Derrida was the founding director of the College International de Philosophie in Paris, and was most recently the directeur d'études of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

No sooner had Derrida died than the tributes started to roll in, led by the French President, Jacques Chirac. Describing Derrida as "a citizen of this world," Chirac said: "With him, France has given the world one of its greatest contemporary philosophers, one of the major figures of intellectual life of our time."

Yet, a more cautious and sober evaluation of Jacques Derrida could well be an echo of the words of Psalm 12:3 and 4:

May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue that says, "We will triumph with our tongues; we own our lips – who is our master?"

David wrote these words and no doubt he had particular flatterers and boasters in mind when he wrote this prayer to the God of heaven. Since that time, the world has seen many more such men and women, people who say, "we will triumph with our tongues," "we own our lips" and, "who is our master?" In their arrogance they think they can say what they like and deny any accountability to a higher Being – God. Derrida was such a person.

What is deconstructionism?

Derrida was the father of a popular school

of thought known as deconstructionism. He was influenced by, amongst others, Sigmund Freud as well as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger – two German philosophers who questioned the validity of concepts such as *knowledge and truth*.

So what is deconstruction? Derrida's ideas are outlined in three books, all published in 1967: *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Speech and Phenomena*. He spent the rest of his life reiterating, expanding, and applying the thoughts expressed in these books. He sought to 'dislocate' the way we traditionally read and interpret texts. Deconstructionist logic seeks to disrupt our normal interpretive mode: if the meaning of the text becomes unstable and undecidable, then literary (including Biblical) interpretation is doomed to become an endlessly

repetitive interpretive act – we can never get to the "centre," to truth in other words. Derrida's writing takes modern man to the limits of what is known as "conceptual thinking." He wrote about this in a (now) famous essay titled, "Différance":

The first consequence to be drawn from this [*that in language there are only differences without positive terms, vñ*] is that the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences.¹

Perhaps an example is in order here: *Paradise Lost*, by John Milton. Already in the opening five lines of this poem, Milton's intent is made clear: to explain from a Biblical perspective how Adam and Eve lost Paradise, which was then regained through Jesus, the "greater Man." In a deconstructionist reading of this poem, however, the reader might wrestle with the poem's distinctions between good and evil and reason as follows: *In this poem 'good' is seen to originate with God – 'evil' is the second comer. However, if we look more closely, we begin to see a reversal taking place. For example, if we try to locate a time when 'good' was without 'evil', we get caught in an endless regression. Was 'evil' before the fall? Before Satan's? What*

caused Satan's fall? Pride. Who created pride? God, who created angels and humans free to sin. We never reach a moment of pure goodness. So, we may reverse the hierarchy and say that there are no 'good' acts by humans until after the Fall. 'Goodness' comes only after 'evil'. God's prohibition itself presupposes 'evil'. Such a reading of Milton's poem can lead a deconstructionist to conclude that Milton was on Satan's side or that Satan was morally superior to God – evil has been substituted for good, although a deconstructionist would work very hard not to set up a new hierarchy.

Logocentrism

Derrida coined the term "logocentrism." Logocentrism covers that form of rationalism that presupposes a "presence" – such as God – behind language and text; for Derrida, logocentrism is the very foundation of Western thought. In a paper given at a symposium at John Hopkins University in 1966, titled, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences,"² he argued against this "*Being as presence*", speaking of the rupture between the "*desire for a centre*" and the (endless) "*process of signification*". Consequently, there is no centre, it is "*not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.*"

Derrida went on to state: "This is the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse ..." That's right: everything becomes discourse, open to an endless play of interpretations. Including the most precious (and most holy) literature of all times, the Bible.

However, when we place Derrida's refutation of logocentrism, and the Bible's most poignant and powerful use of the word *logos* (Greek for *word*), side by side, the contrast is breathtaking. Derrida's logic makes all meaning unstable, since there is nothing and no-one behind text to give it meaning. However, in John 1:1, we read: "*In the beginning was the Word ...*" The truth is simply put: there is a Being who is behind everything, including the Bible. The Word (that is, God) is the origin of all things, and underwrites the full presence of the world: "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1b-3).

And there's more to come. John 1 also



says: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (verse 14). The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of the fact that there is another world that impacts ours, and no amount of clever philosophy can cancel that out. Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, is the ultimate Referent who does not unravel into an endless play of signification. He is "*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (John 14:6). Derrida's system of thought denies this truth; indeed, it presents a way of thinking (and reading of text) that prevents one from ever attaining this truth.

Confused yet?

If this (much too brief) description of deconstruction confuses you, you're in good company. Most others find it so, too. Derrida's writing is dense, complex, elusive – and difficult to summarize! Put simply, Derrida didn't believe in absolute truth – except the truth of his own writing, of course. Many have fallen for his thinking, adapting and applying it to many areas of intellectual study, and to life itself. His philosophy has had enormous impact, right to the man of the street.

The maxim, "it's all a matter of interpretation" can certainly be traced to thoughts such as Derrida's. Derrida didn't believe in absolute truth. This may well be what Bill Watterson is commenting on in the Calvin and Hobbes comic strip, in which Calvin and his stuffed tiger play a game called Calvinball where the only rule is that there are no rules!

Deconstructing Marriage

Further, it follows that Derrida's writing has been highly influential in the application of Biblical truths and values in our society – or should I say, in the **departure** from Biblical truths and values in our society! Indeed, we need look no further than Derrida to get some understanding of the havoc being wreaked on marriage, for example. Not long before his death, Derrida had this to say to the French daily newspaper, *Le Monde*:

If I were a legislator, I would quite simply propose the removal of the word and the concept of marriage from the civil code. "Marriage," an incarnation of religious, sacred and heterosexual values with the accompanying vows of procreation and eternal fidelity, is a concession made by the secular state to the Christian church and in particular its monogamous form which derives neither from Jewish ... nor Muslim [traditions]. In suppressing the word and the concept of marriage, this equivocation, this religious hypocrisy which has no place in a secular state, there would be in its place a civil union, something contractual, refined, flexible and able to be adjusted between partners of whatever sex or number.

Derrida, then, has had tremendous input into modern thinking. But, like all men, he died. And, as Derrida grew more and more ill (he had pancreatic cancer), death haunted him. On the one hand he was philosophical about it, saying that learning to live meant learning to die. He recognised its inevitability. Yet, on the other hand, he admitted: "Less and less, I have not learned to accept death. I remain uneducable about the wisdom of learning to die."

There is tremendous pathos in this admission from the "the citizen of the world": *less and less, I have not learned to accept death. I remain uneducable about the wisdom of learning to die.* This man had so much to teach to millions who were so attracted to his philosophies about life and living, but, in the end, he was intellectually bankrupt. Despite having even written a book with the ironic title, *The Gift of Death* (1996), when confronted with it personally, the prospect of death offered no comforting philosophy. Indeed, in rejecting his Creator, the God of heaven and earth, Derrida had rejected the only escape offered man: full redemption through the blood of Jesus

Christ.

We live in a time when many of us wrestle with the impact of men such as Jacques Derrida. At times, their influence is overwhelming and we feel daunted and afraid. Yet, in reflecting briefly on the life and death of this man, we would do well to remember the confidence of David in Psalm 12: the Lord does silence (forever) the lips of evil men. What's more, God's words (of Truth) stand in stark contrast with those of these wicked men: *the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times* (Psalm 12:6).

Let's remain confident, therefore, confessing with David: *O LORD, you will keep us safe and protect us from such people forever* (Psalm 12:7).

¹ Derrida, Jacques. *Differance* (1968) in Easthope, A. & McGowan, K. *A Critical Cultural Theory Reader*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992. Pp114-15.

² Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference* (1967) in Rice, P. & Waugh, P. *Modern Literary Theory*. 2nd ed. London: Edward Arnold, 1992. Pp149-165.

Reformed Church of Dunedin

50th ANNIVERSARY

With thanks to God the Reformed Church of Dunedin announces the forthcoming 50th anniversary of her institution. To mark this occasion the Session and Congregation would like to invite former members and others who have been associated with the church to attend a celebratory dinner on Saturday 25 June 2005 and a worship service of thanksgiving on Sunday 26 June 2005.

To assist the organising committee in its planning, we would be grateful for expressions of interest. If there is a possibility that you may attend the celebrations please write to The Jubilee Committee, Reformed Church of Dunedin, PO Box 5088, Dunedin, or telephone Peter Braam (03) 456 0558, or e-mail pieterbraam@ihug.co.nz by 31 January 2005.

Mission in focus

Janice Reid

About your gifts Through the National Diaconate Committee

How long is a piece of string? You might be asking of the National Diaconate Committee: "How far did our 2003 Christmas Appeal response go?" Hopefully the following will go some way to answering that question.

The gathered fund came to a wonderful \$NZ16,800.55. That converted to Zimbabwe\$51million. The Zimbabwean economy is plagued by rampant inflation running at, not 4.5% p.a. nor even 45%, but in the range of 450%.

The Henry Murray School for the Deaf in Zimbabwe currently caters for 172 hearing-impaired students, whose ages range from 6 to 20 years. Our NZ support was to assist poor families at that school whose children would otherwise be unable to attend.

So, how far did that support stretch? It provided **board and tuition fees** (Z\$750,000p.a.) for **68 students** (40% of the roll). We now have the names of those assisted and know that 14 are orphans, 23 have lost one parent, while 31 have both parents but have a poor socio-economic background.

Our stated aim has been to strengthen the arm of the diaconal wing of the Reformed Churches of Zimbabwe and for the assistance that is supervised by the denomination. The Henry Murray School for the Deaf is a department of the Morgenster Mission of the Reformed Churches.

The school offers primary education to Grade 7 level, as required by the Ministry of

Education. The Mission Statement goals are: creating academic opportunities; developing communication and vocational skills and nurturing strong moral values; and to prepare students through face-to-face tuition for integration into society using the specialised equipment and techniques available. The academic emphasis is supplemented by carpentry and metalwork, computer education, fashion and fabrics, and agriculture. There is the assistance of an audiometric and ear-moulding workshop (the only sound-proof testing booth in that province). The staff complement is 31 teachers and 14 support persons.

Somewhere in the 'snail-mail' is a packet of letters from the assisted children, plus photos and video, which we hope to show to you in due course.

We have learned that their computer education module suffers through unserviced equipment and prohibitive repair costs. **Perhaps there is a technician in our ranks who would welcome the opportunity to do a short-term stretch of practical work in Zimbabwe servicing the equipment in this department?** Please contact me if you are interested.

Remember to pray for the children of Zimbabwe, the hearing-impaired children and



Church service at Henry Murray School for the Deaf



Home Economics class



In school





In the dining hall



Some of the facilities at Henry Murray School for the Deaf

the children in the Henry Murray School for the Deaf.

As we write this, the NDC is finalising the Christmas Appeal for 2004, about which you should hear shortly.

Carl Larsen



A feminine focus

The feminine virtue of purity

Sally Davey

Once upon a time it was considered a dreadful thing for a man to swear in front of a woman. Even a man known to be a bit rough round the edges would blush, stumble and apologise on discovering a lady had overheard his uncouth words. These days, it is the women who – unblushingly – use the foul language as well.

Why was it that men were so guarded in front of women? Well, it was generally accepted that women had high standards of decency and purity. At least, these were what fathers taught their daughters – and hoped

they would maintain. Certainly, a young man wanted to marry a wife who was pure in thought and speech as well as in behaviour. And to be consistent, if he assumed his mother and sisters had pure thoughts, he would treat other women as though bad language coming from his mouth would offend them as well.

Guardians of purity

Women, you see, were considered to be the guardians of purity in society. Most especially this was the case in a woman's home and family. By her example and her instruction to her children, she was relied on to exhibit

everything that was pure and wholesome in her thoughts, words and actions. She was there, too, acting as an influence for good on her husband, who had to mingle in the world of everyday business, frequently rubbing up against impurity and all its snares. Often all it took was the thought of wife or mother to inspire husband or son to resist bad language, smutty jokes or other sins of impurity.

You could say this sort of thinking has a long history, dating back no doubt to the age of chivalry – and of course, to the teaching of Scripture. But you may remember it was reinforced by the writers on womanhood in the days of the French Revolution. Edmund Burke was especially urgent about the role of women in the “little platoons” (families) who were to have such a softening and purifying influence on society. Hannah More, also, called women “to the best and most appropriate use of their power to raise the depressed tone of public morals.” This kind of thinking was refined and developed throughout the nineteenth century English-speaking world – and resulted in a high value

being placed on the importance of women.

This was also true in the New World, where women played an important role in establishing culture in the wilderness (places like Central Otago, the Waikato and the Manawatu). Interestingly, women gained the vote earliest in New World countries, and it is their role as civilising influence which was the most powerful argument used for the female franchise in countries like New Zealand. You may have assumed that it was early feminism that gained women the vote here in 1893. But in fact it was the argument (powerfully used by the Women's Christian Temperance Union) that the responsible, wholesome contribution women made to society as wives and mothers (not any outrage to their "personhood") that won the day in Parliament. Women wanted the vote here so they could elect members of Parliament who would carry legislation through Parliament to outlaw the sale of liquor, and thus curb a social evil that was so destructive in pioneer societies. The suffragettes were campaigners for purity, not for women's rights *per se*.

How things have changed

All this, of course, has been turned on its head today. It is actually insulting – according to the morality of our world – to assume a woman would be more offended by some coarse remark or gesture than would a man. (Unless, that is, she takes the remark or action as an unwanted overture – then it becomes "harassment.") Women seem to take just as much pleasure as men in uttering filthy swear-words, telling gutter-style jokes, and making unmistakably straightforward allusions to all manner of sexual activity. This is not, of course, to say that it is fine for men to engage in the above: it merely illustrates how far we have departed from the high ideals of purity – and purifying influence – we used to have for womanhood. I am certainly not a subscriber to conspiracy theories, and I don't believe it was an orchestrated plot of some feminist organisation to bring down feminine morality in this way. Nevertheless, this debasement is what one could expect as one of the later stages of a general decline in society such as is described in Romans Chapter 1.

There is something going on, though, which is worth pointing out. In fact, it has been noticed before. Hannah More observed that the promoters of radical revolutionary ideas (the ones that threatened to undermine the Christian foundations of society) made a mistake in addressing them first to men. Apparently there had been little effect when men had been the target of such ideas in the public, political arena. But later, when such promoters addressed them at women, and in a more subtle way, through novels and romances, they were more successful.

Hannah More was perceptive enough to see that immorality, presented light-heartedly, sympathetically or even amusingly, becomes much more acceptable – and perhaps especially so to the female mind. She observed that even adulteresses, by this method, were portrayed in an exemplary light. So if impurity of outrageous kinds could be presented as adventurous, spirited, or even courageous 200 years ago, how much more so today? Think of the way adultery and extra-marital affairs were generally treated in such a movie as *The English Patient*. We see a woman who admits she still loves her husband being drawn into adultery. Who was the boring alternative for the wife? Her adoring husband, who shared her background, and understood her, but was boring because of this. Who was the exciting, intriguing alternative? The single aviator with the exotic eastern European air of mystery. Who are we asked to sympathise with? The adulteress, "caught" in the middle in the confusion of wartime. We see this kind of treatment everywhere today.

Defining purity

But we should begin at the beginning and ask – what do we mean by purity? It is a virtue mentioned often by the New Testament epistle writers in their lists of graces we are to put on. Most often, we understand purity in its sense of moral or sexual purity – what we mean by being *chaste*, for instance. I'm sure the meaning may be seen as wider than this, in terms of general moral uprightness. This comes from passages like 1 Peter 1:16 "*You shall be holy, for I am holy*" – God is telling us to be pure because He is pure. Other passages teach that uprightness of life is the *purpose* for which we have been saved. We find this in texts like Ephesians 1:4 – "*... he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him*" or Colossians 1:21-22 – "*And you... he has now reconciled in his body of death by his flesh, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.*" However, on reading commentaries on passages that specifically use the word "purity" (at least in my ESV translation), it seems that moral purity of the sexual kind is most likely intended. Thus, when we look at texts like Titus 2:5, where older women are exhorted to teach certain Christian virtues to younger women, we find that Paul lists purity after self control as a quality young women are to learn. In his commentary on this William Hendricksen renders this word as "chaste" and observes that this understanding fits well with the idea that young women are also to be busy at home. Obviously, if one is actively engaged with useful service for one's family and guests, one is far less likely to be exposed to temptations to any kind of impure

thought or behaviour. This reasoning becomes even clearer when we look at the connection between the uprightness of younger women and God's honour that Paul makes in his closing command, "*that the word of God may not be reviled.*" I think it is especially true that impurity in younger women brings the name of Christ into disrepute. Churches in which younger women flirt and "misbehave" are justifiably viewed askance by the world outside.

Putting purity into practice

Well, how are we to apply these things ourselves? It seems to me that we can look at our life and conduct on different levels, applying purity to all of them. Firstly, and most basically, we should be pure in thought. What goes on in our minds is difficult to control, and easy to conceal; but it is in our thoughts that other, more obvious expressions of sin are devised and take shape. Jesus explained this most memorably in the Sermon on the Mount, when He taught that a man who looks at a woman with lustful intent has committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt. 5:28). So, if harbouring a "sexy" thought or allowing it to weave a delicious, romantic fantasy is as bad as committing adultery, we should be very careful where we allow our thoughts to stray. One obvious way of controlling them is to take care about what we feed them with. Clearly, we are bombarded with suggestions of impurity everywhere we look; but there are ways we can shut some of it out. I have never had a great exposure to television, partly through being too busy as a student to watch it, and too poor when first married to afford one (though by then our inclination to ever own one had gone, anyway!) – but mostly because, in 1973, my father removed ours from the family living room. He no longer wanted the immorality beamed from it to be viewed by himself or his teenage daughters. I don't think TV has improved since then.

And then, there are magazines. Just so that I was a bit more up-to-date with my examples, I had a look at some current younger women's magazines in a café recently. We all know how some of our more chatty household regulars have been transformed into more tabloid forms in recent years; but I looked instead for something more career-womanish, the type of thing you would read as a New Zealand woman in your twenties or thirties. I glanced through two magazines from August 2004. The major topics of interest in the first appeared to be how to lose weight and be happy, and how to deal with health worries; along with various articles on food, make-up and celebrities. All fairly harmless, though somewhat here-and-now stuff, you might say. But there were also articles that you wouldn't want your teenage daughter dwelling too much on: how to have an affair (by a private investigator who'd had

one and who now tracked the infidelities of others); and how to have better sex. The second magazine followed similar themes without the excesses. It seems to me more and more that we need to choose what we read – whether it be deliberate, careful reading, or that more passive, idle, flicking-through kind of reading that magazines lend themselves to. Even the latter can have quite an effect on our thinking, especially through their more visual impact.

Purity of speech

Secondly, we need to retain and develop our purity of speech. Paul is very specific about this in Ephesians 5: *“But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among the saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”* (vv.3-5) This rules out sexual innuendo, the unnecessarily earthy, and all manner of smutty or risqué humour. A few centuries ago it may not have been necessary to say this to women; but I am glad now that the Apostle made it clear for us all. It really pains me to hear this kind of foul (or even suggestive) talk coming from women’s mouths in a rough, rural setting; but it’s even more painful to hear it among young women brought up in Christian homes. We have no excuse when we know better, and have heard and been taught better.

How do we prevent it? It seems to me that we need to return to the principle of what we feed ourselves with – in this case, our ears. Do we listen to bad language on the television, at movies, or on the radio? The old adage of “garbage in, garbage out” still applies. It happens when the garbage goes in passively, as well. And it happens especially powerfully when it comes with music, because remembered rhythm repeats it over and over again in our minds. Much popular music will not stand a close examination of its lyrics, when the principle of purity is applied. Solution? Change the channel to something wholesome: *“whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* (Philippians 4:8) Does your radio station, your DVD, your CD measure up? What you are listening to today will probably be coming out of your mouth tomorrow – or the next day.

Where it comes from

Finally, there is our demeanour and behaviour. These, of course, are determined by what is in our hearts and minds. Out of

the heart the mouth – and expression – and behaviour – speaks. You can almost always tell quite quickly what is in a person’s thoughts by what is on her face, as I know to my shame when I am feeling irritable. Just as a sweet, gentle, loving heart will wear an expression that draws everyone irresistibly to her, an impure heart will wear a similarly unmistakable expression that draws quite the wrong sort of attention her way. Be in no doubt as to the message your flirtatious glance gives!

Purity of behaviour is a very lovely thing in a woman. It encourages godly responses in all around her – and this, surely, is our goal. It is true the world around us shrieks with all manner of ungodly and impure examples of womanhood, but we have not been left without guidance for living otherwise. The Scriptures contain both instruction and example: think of Ruth, or of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both exhibited purity. Purity of life is so critically important in the years between childhood and marriage, since so many terrible consequences can come from young women making the wrong choices and keeping the wrong company. But sometimes the terrible consequences come from too much intimacy, too young, with even

the “right” person. It doesn’t for that reason seem wise for young women to be spending large amounts of time on their own with any man they are not married to – be he ever so “responsible.” We must really watch out for our young people; and *not* encourage them to experiment with intimacy, or laugh at it or treat it as normal, fun, or to be expected “at their age.” But while there is much that could be said on this subject, it has been said so well already by Josh Harris, the man who wisely kissed dating goodbye.

I know that much of what I have written seems to apply to younger women – and yet, in many ways Scripture gives much of the responsibility to older women. If older women live lives of purity, and are wise and loving guides as mothers and friends, then they will have opportunity to teach the younger women how to be self-controlled and pure. Turning this around, it must surely be the case that if we have troubles with our younger women, then we older women have not been doing our work well. We should really be in earnest about this, for God’s honour and the high repute of His church are at stake. It is part of our witness for Christ. Truly, our crooked and twisted generation needs us to shine like stars in its midst.

Calling all country boys and girls to become

NETWORKERS



If you have always wanted to be a Cadet or Calvinette but live too far away from a club, we would love to hear from you!

NETWORKERS is for children aged 9-15 years old, and you would be a correspondence member with the closest club, able to attend camps and any club functions that you could make.

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Cr Rob Wierenga, 35 Humber Street
Island Bay, Wellington

“Each one of you is a part of it”

The criterion for obtaining and maintaining communicant church membership

Gary Milne

It stands to reason that the conditions that need to be fulfilled for a person to become a communicant church member are the same criteria needed for a person to remain a member. If certain standards need to be met in order for one to be received into membership, continued membership must also require the maintenance of those standards. This principle is recognised in other human societies. One of the conditions for an MP to become a member of the cabinet is a willingness to submit to cabinet decisions. If he or she becomes a minister of the Crown, that willingness to submit continues to be a requirement. This matter has been debated widely in the media in these past few weeks with respect to Tania

Turia, who has opposed the collective cabinet decision on the foreshore bill. What then are the requirements for membership in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? It is perhaps more accurate to say that there is essentially one main criterion that qualifies one for communicant church membership but which, nonetheless, can be broken down into several subdivisions.

The main criterion is a convincing or credible profession of faith. While it is not possible for the elders of the church to infallibly discern whether an individual has been born again, they must be convinced that the applicant is making a credible profession of faith. This profession admits of several elements:

1. A convincing profession of faith must give evidence of a knowledge of and subscription to doctrinal orthodoxy. Philip required of the Ethiopian eunuch “*If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptised]*”, and granted the initiatory rite of entrance into the church upon the confession: “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 8:37).*” Paul, on the other hand, advised Titus: “*A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject*” (Titus 3:10). Therefore the unorthodox and the uninformed cannot become members of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. A certain

knowledge is required and it has to be an orthodox knowledge of the truths of God’s Word.

2. A second prerequisite for a credible profession of faith is a hearty submission to the order Christ has established in his Church. Christ’s great commission included the imperative “*[teach] them to observe all that I commanded you (Mt 28:20)*”. He has commanded us to obey the elders; to attend the Lord’s Supper; to attend the public worship of the church; and to pray and study the Scriptures. Anyone who wants to pick and choose just what commands of Christ he will obey forfeits any right to membership in His church. A true disciple is to observe all Christ has commanded. Since the elders are to be obeyed, it is assumed that a member obeys in the context of faithful attendance to that local church where those elders rule.
3. A third quality of a credible profession is evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. In other words, there must be evidence that the candidate is walking worthily of the gospel. The apostle urges the Ephesian Christians: “*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called (Eph 4:1)*”. Few would argue that a prospective church member should show evidence of a godly life in speech and every other way, for “*O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart (Ps. 15:1-2)*”. (1)

Perhaps other elements of a credible profession could be added, but these three at least need to be satisfied if an individual is to be admitted into communicant church membership. As we have already observed, it is plain that the criterion of a credible profession is also a qualification for continuing membership. If a credible profession is necessary in order to obtain the benefits of church life, the maintenance of such a profession is equally necessary for retaining that membership. Our Lord has instituted church discipline precisely on this principle. Such discipline is certainly required for unrepentant heretics (2 Tim. 2:17-18 and 1 Tim. 1: 20), but it is equally necessary for those who will not walk according to second table of the Law (1 Cor. 5). If continuing church membership, once obtained, no longer rested upon the same



conditions of entry, there could be no discipline to exclude a person from the visible Church. Obviously these examples are extreme ones, but any sin not repented of becomes extreme and will inevitably lead to excommunication (Matt. 18: 15-17). A "minor" sin, therefore, becomes a major sin if an individual is wilfully unrepentant.

Church consumerism

Today one of the common practices among Christians is to take a supermarket, consumer approach to church attendance. Although a believer makes a commitment to submit to the authority of the elders in his local church, many give little thought to their vows and, for less than adequate reasons, go "shopping" for other churches. Plainly to leave the local body of Christ to which you have committed yourself, and to neglect the gathered worship of the people of God, is inconsistent with a membership vow that includes a commitment to submit to the authority of the elders, for the Scriptures also instruct us that we are not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is (Heb 10:25)". This is not a general call to worship anywhere, but a specific instruction to assemble together in actual congregations. To walk away from such an assembly for inadequate reasons is a profoundly serious sin. We do not deny that there can be good reasons for changing congregations. When a person's employment takes them to a new town; or even when a person's conscience compels him to reject some aspect of the teaching of his church, there may be cause to transfer one's membership to another congregation; but where there is a belief that the church in which one is a member does teach the truth of the Scriptures, there can be no justification for leaving that congregation in order to attend a church which teaches much contrary to the beliefs of one's former church and one's own conscience. Such a move is inconsistent with membership vows which acknowledged that the church one did join teaches the whole counsel of God according to the Scriptures. If one is still convinced that the truth is more accurately taught in the church wherein the individual holds his actual membership, then worship styles or the absence of people one's own age cannot justify desertion of a faithful church for an unfaithful one. The body and temple metaphors in Scripture are, by definition, concepts that find their fulfilment in the local church. If a member of the body walks away from the body, the body is weakened. If a stone removes itself from the temple, the building is potentially less stable. To forsake the true teaching of Scripture and to attend another church where the truth is, at the very least, obscured or, more likely, preached against, is to lend support to the error; to

undermine reformation; and to be a party to the weakening of the church that does teach the truth.

If an individual leaves the church in which he has committed himself to membership either for another church or for no church at all, it is plain that he forfeits his claim to continued membership in the church he left. How could it be otherwise? If his membership relied upon a credible profession of faith which included a commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy and spiritual knowledge; a willingness to walk in obedience to the order Christ has established in the church; and evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in one's life; then to walk away from such orthodoxy and submission to the order of the church is to undermine that previously credible profession. For that credible profession requires each of these elements and if any is missing, membership must surely be in jeopardy.

There are, no doubt, exceptions to these arguments. Where people live a long way from church and cannot physically attend regularly, their "country" membership can still be maintained. This would also apply to people who, in a sense, have no fixed abode such as members of the armed services, more especially the navy. Another exception

would apply in the case of a female member who marries someone from another church and who therefore must obey her husband and attend with him. She may still, nonetheless, want to retain membership in her original church for theological reasons.

What should the response of the church be to an inconsistent member whose credible profession of faith no longer exists? Different churches take different approaches, but some disciplinary action should be taken for the health of the congregation, for the well-being of the order in the church and as a warning to the individual concerned. Some would argue for excommunication while others, such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA, suggest erasure from the roll. But either way, plainly some administrative discipline must be applied if the individual has no desire to return to his local church in which he is a member. (2)

Footnotes:

- 1 See William Symington, *Messiah the Prince* (Edmonton: SWRB, 1990) for a more complete discussion on the criteria for church membership. My comments are indebted to Symington's insights.
- 2 Consider, for example, the RCNZ membership question: "Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?"

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SHINE

A heavenly trust account

Here is an article on the significance of Infant Baptism. It was prepared by Margaret Hockett [nee Ramsay]. She says: "I wrote it for my own use many years back. It has helped adults as well as children in understanding the significance of Infant Baptism."

Bobby: It's raining harder still now, isn't it Mum?

Mother: Yes, Dear.

Bobby: When will you buy me a new raincoat?

Mum: As soon as Dad draws the money out of the bank.

Bobby: When can I have a Bank Account of my own?

Mum: You have a Bank Account of your own now, Bobby.

Bobby: Where?

Mum: In the Savings Bank.

Bobby: Then why can't I get the money for my coat?

Mum: Because it is in what is called a "Trust Account".

Bobby: What does "Trust Account" mean, Mum?

Mum: Well, long ago, when you were a tiny baby, Dad and I put some money in the bank for you. It was your money, but Dad and I had charge of it, and no-one else could draw it out.

Bobby: And when will it be really and truly my very own?

Mum: As soon as you are old enough to take charge of it yourself. But you will have to be sure to claim it then, or it will be of no use to you.

Bobby: When will that be?

Mum: When you are a man.

Bobby: [Dejectedly] That will be a long time yet.

Mum: Yes, Bobby that will be a few years yet. But there is another much more valuable "Trust Account" which Dad and I took out for you long ago also, when you were just a tiny baby, too young to know anything about it.

Bobby: [Disinterestedly]. And I suppose I'll have to wait till I'm a man before I can claim that too!

Mum: No, That's the wonderful part.

Bobby: [Brightly]. When can I get it then, Mum?

Mum: As soon as you claim it.

Bobby: Could I have it - today?

Mum: If you really want it.

Mum: It is in the Bank of Heaven.

Bobby: That is God's Bank, isn't it Mum?

Mum: Yes, Dear.

Bobby: And is there a Trust Account, there, for me?

Mum: Yes, for you. And it is called Salvation, or eternal life.

Bobby: How did God know that you wanted that for me?

Mum: Because we told Him, and because we brought you to Him as a little baby in Baptism.

Bobby: Oh, is that why Minister's baptise little babies?

Mum: Yes, and next time you see a little baby being baptised, you will know that the little one's parents are taking out a trust Account with God on its behalf. But you know dear, that you must claim that money in the Savings Bank when you are old enough in order for it to be of any use to you. In the same way, you must claim this Trust account with God, for it to become really yours, your very own.

Bobby: How can I do that, Mum?

Mum: Tell God that you really want it. Ask Him to forgive your sins for Jesus' sake, and tell Him that you want the Lord Jesus to be your very own Saviour, and your friend for always.

Bobby: Oh, Mum, that's wonderful. I'll tell Him now, because I know that He will hear me, for He said so.

Taken from 'The Presbyterian Banner', the denominational magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, with whom we have a reciprocal arrangement



Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

Marriage Bans: Tjeerd Smilde and Louise Ploeg have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. They want to begin their life together in the name of the Lord and in the presence of His people, and continue it to His glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at the Reformed Church of Avondale on Saturday, the 9th of October at 1pm.

A Special Invitation: We have received a special invitation from our Niuean brothers and sisters in Christ. They would like us to join them on October 16, at 1pm in a worship of thanksgiving. They are celebrating twenty five years of worship with us. Please contact the following if you are coming.

This Evening: We have invited the youth from Presbytery Auckland to our evening service. We have organised a B-B-Q for before the service, as some of them will not have eaten. After the service we are inviting the whole congregation to coffee and sweets in the hall. To assist us with that we are asking the congregation to please bring a plate. Last year's service went well and we trust that again this year the Lord will be praised by us together.

Bishopdale

Congratulations to Laura & Chris Giddy on the birth of their son, Caleb Thomas. Caleb was born on Saturday 25 September and he weighed 10lb 4oz.

Pastoral. Yesterday Angela & Steven Macdonald were united in marriage and on the same day 50 years ago Bert & Fo Van Ameyde were married. Congratulations to you both and may the Lord continue to bless you and may you continue to honour him in your marriages.

Christchurch

Cadets And Calvinettes. On behalf of the Cadets, Calvinettes and Counsellors we

welcome you to our special service. The Cadet movement is this year celebrating 40 years of work in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. I can only speak for the last 20 but it has been a wonderful time of helping boys and girls grow in their relationship with God, teaching them many new skills and enjoying many camps, tramps and activities together. Many people have been involved over the years and we thank all of them for their efforts which have helped keep the Cadet and Calvinette movement strong and active. Please join us after this mornings service for Coffee and Cake to celebrate. Around the hall are many photos, some old and some new. See who you can identify... We are trying to put together an album of photos, so if you have any we can borrow to copy, especially ones from the earlier years, please see me.

Eddy Van Leeuwen

Dovedale

Do you have children between the ages 5 - 13? And do you want to have Saturday the 2nd of October without them? Youth Group is offering to take your children to Orana Wildlife Park for the day. Keep watching this place for more information. (or see Melinda Watson).

Reformation Sunday: (31st October) is coming up again soon in connection with this, we want to show a film about one of the great Reformers at one of the catechism classes. Equipment permitting, we will do this on Tuesday 26th, but please stay tuned for further notices, because we may have to schedule this for the following week if the equipment is unavailable.

Dunedin

Hearty congratulations to Paul and Bep Schinkelshoek on the occasion of your golden wedding anniversary. Paul and Bep began married life together with the words of Psalm 121, "My help comes from the Lord." Fifty years later we rejoice with them in the knowledge that the Lord has indeed watched over their coming and going and will continue to do so "forevermore"! May we all be reassured of God's faithfulness as we revisit Psalm 121 in this morning's service.

Foxton

Wellington Reformed Church invitation: The Wellington Reformed Church are inviting the Foxton Reformed Church ladies to join them for a time of fun and fellowship on Friday

26th November at 7:30pm. If you would like to attend, please see Rose before the 10th November so that numbers can be passed on. Wellington is also hosting the next Ladies Presbyterial and the tentative date is the 12th March 2005. Please pencil that date in on your calendars and get ready for a great day.

Hamilton

Ben MacDonald and Maria van der Wel have signified their desire to be united in marriage in the Reformed Church of Hamilton. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on Saturday 2nd October 2004.

Afrikaans Church Service. The monthly Afrikaans service will be held at the Hukanui church building next Sunday, starting at 4pm. Ds. Johan Hendricks will lead this service, catering especially for South Africans who are part of an English church. Everyone is welcome.

Help for Halloween-alternative needed. Halloween is this year on a Sunday, so it is not very useful to organise a party on the Saturday before. We decided to do something different. We are hoping to make 1000 packs for families. The pack consists of a plastic bag containing: a leaflet explaining Halloween and its dangers, a pen with inscription: No Tricks- God's treat is Jesus, a 'Word for Today' booklet (500 kindly donated by Radio Rhema), lollies, balloons, colouring pictures and a few encouraging stories and a card with contact addresses. If you have any other suggestions for items, please contact us. We hope our church families will help distribute these packets all over Hamilton on Sunday afternoon 31 October. Just hand them out to children and families you meet when you go for a walk. We need: Helpers to pack on Saturday 30 October from 2 pm at Aberdeen; Donations of packets of lollies/sweets (before 30 October or we will have to buy); Families willing to go for a walk on Sunday afternoon to donate the packets.

Hastings

It's just 8 days away! Of course Jonny and Glenys have been counting down for many more. On Monday, the 25th of October, Jonny Watson and Glenys Nugteren will be joined in marriage, D.V. If you wish to send greetings to the couple, you may do so via Nathan Watson, the best man. Nathan's email address is "[_ HYPERLINK](#)

"mailto:nathwatson@hotmail.com"
nathwatson@hotmail.com".

Hukanui

F.L.A.M.E. Reformed Youth: .pirt wons eht rof ffuts yedils/sebut renni gnitcelloc trats ot emit doog a si sihT .ecivres htuoy looc yrev s'eladnovA ot og ot tnaw uoy fi rebotC0 71 dna ,ynnub wons a era uoy fi rebotC0 61 ,lrig a er'uoy fi rebotC0 51 kooB :ecitoN ecnavdA .htnom tsal yrgrnuh yterp saw ehS !egnahc eraps ruoy nit s'uhdniS deef ot rebmemeR .tneve gnisiardnuf txeht ni trap ekat ot erus ekam ,thgie rehto eht fo eno er'uoy fi os ,.E.M.A.L.F htiw gnillevert era elpoeP 42 tuoba .pmaC lanoitaN rof 0072\$~ desiar evah raf os depleh evah ohw elpoeP 61 eht :gnisiardnuf tuoba swen giB luoy yeH

Congratulations to Maurice and June Thomas on 60 years of wedded bliss! May God continue to grant you His blessing and be your strength in the future.

Next Sunday little Hayley Roux will receive the sign and seal of the covenant in the sacrament of baptism. Let us pray for Paul and Sharon as they seek to guide and instruct Hayley in the ways of the Lord: and that we as a congregation may also receive much wisdom in making this church a wonderful place for both old and young. For we are God's covenant family.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: It's a boy! Jack Albert Fisher, a healthy 8lb 6oz baby was born on Wednesday. We rejoice with the Fisher family in the Lord's blessing and that another healthy child has been born in the congregation.

Rev Tuinstra has received the call extended to him from our session. Please be in prayer for him that the Lord would direct him as he considers the call extended to him by us and the existing call he has to serve the Lord where he currently is.

North Shore

Cadets and Calvinettes Camp Waitekauri: This will be held from 8-15 January 2005. Cadets and Calvinettes aged 9-15 are welcome to attend. Cost is \$60. Parent helpers are also appreciated and welcome too. You can get an enrolment form from Rachel den Hartigh or from the notice board downstairs. Please note the early enrolment due date of 18 October.

From the Hamilton youth group: Courtesy of Jess, Jair and F.L.A.M.E. Reformed Youth,

we are pleased to announce a combined event for late Spring. What is it? A Raft Race! The date: 13 Nov. Details: Meet at Hukanui Church at 9am, where we'll build our rafts. Then it's lunch and down to the Mighty Waikato to launch off and prepare for war! Only the best team will win! We should be off the river by about 4ish/4:30. If you have life jackets, bring them, no-one will go on the river without one. We'll also have a safety boat cruising along with us, in case anyone decides to get into distress.

Pukekohe

Stop Press: Yesterday's soccer challenge between the youngies and oldies was enjoyed by all who participated and ended in a 3 to 2 win to the oldies. A special thank you to the spectators who braved the weather to impartially cheer on the oldies. It was good to see that the vanquished were humble in DEFEAT! We must do it again sometime!!!

Host families for the youth: The Youth Group is looking for families who would like to have the youth over after the morning or evening service for a potluck lunch/dinner in order to get to know them better and encourage each other. Any family/couple keen to do this, please see Joanna Haverland.

Bonfire: The congregation is invited to the Loef's place on Saturday 6 November for a BYO barbecue and bonfire. Barbecues will be provided. You are also welcome to bring along your own fireworks or to just sit back and enjoy the view of the other ones. We will start firing the barbecues at about 5:30pm and there will be opportunity to play some volleyball, touch or any other sport. See you all there.

Silverstream

We rejoice with the van der Zwaag family on the safe delivery of Rebecca Grace born to Br. Mark and Sr. Dorothea on Friday morning. Mother and daughter are resting well at home. We thank the Lord for his mercies.

We give thanks for the safe delivery of Ashley Anneke to Br. Andre and Sr. Shaline Koster. Mother and child are at home and are both doing well.

Wainuiomata

Hearty congratulations to Warren Milne and Leone Dittich (from Dunedin) who became engaged last weekend (we were wondering about all those "business" trips to Dunedin Warren – seems a lot more pleasure than business went on!). We look forward to meeting Leone and pray that the Lord will bless and guide you both as you prepare for the wedding in January.

Wellington

Things are picking up again in the Koops family, after everyone except the newborn babe had the 'flu. We omitted the baby's name in the bulletin last week: Danique Francesca.

Combined reformed church trounces the street: A Combined Reformed Church rugby team thrashed The Street 66-15 last Saturday afternoon. Thank you to all who came and supported. Your were an inspiration to the team. Played in good spirits, it is hoped the game will be the start of a number of inter church activities like this. A game of soccer or cricket is in the works. If anybody is interested in partaking in either of these sports please see Tim Sterne. All ages are welcome.

Women's indoor netball tournament: A group of us are trying to organise a women's indoor netball tournament for Saturday February 12th 2005. It is open to all women in the church over the age of 16 at the time of the tournament. There will be a team from Silverstream, Masterton, Wainui (& Waikanae combined??) and Wellington. Anyone interested please see, or get in contact with Casey.

A Kiwi family's experience of coming to the RTC

Michael Willemse

Michael Willemse is married to Gea. They have five children: Hannah, Abigail, Yvette, Michael Jr and Josiah, who was born in Geelong. Originally qualified as a fitter / turner, Michael spent 14 years in various management roles in the medical and general insurance industry prior to going to college. He has also served two four-year terms as an elder, one in Christchurch and the other in Bucklands Beach. Michael has just completed his 3rd year of study towards a B.Th.

As you read this article, we will have been in Australia for nearly three years. It seems a long time since we arrived but we still remember the drive from Melbourne airport to Geelong through the flat brown countryside dotted with bare trees. We were told that the countryside was looking quite lush... having moved from Auckland and being used to the lush green countryside of

the upper North Island, we didn't think so!

Moving to Australia was harder than we thought. There were many arrangements to make when we arrived: tax file numbers, bank account, driver's licences, phone, electricity, gas, internet connection, Medicare. We had also chosen to bring our van with us from New Zealand, which caused an extra wrinkle or two! However we were blessed in that friends had organised a rental home for us while we were still in NZ, and also we did not have to find a school for our children because Gea home schools them. God's timing when we left New Zealand was immaculate – our house sold on the last possible day and on the day we had to be moved out a friend was leaving on holiday. We were able to stay at her place, leaving a couple of weeks later in the wee small hours of the day on which she returned. Everything dovetailed beautifully – God is good!

As well as these arrangements, there were all the other day-to-day things such as finding out where to shop, finding a doctor, dentist, and so on. It is often these things that most make you feel displaced. Things don't work the way that you are used to, shops don't stock the same kinds of things, there is no Pak 'n' Save and "The Warehouse" consists of one tiny, pokey

store! Of course, in the middle of all this you are getting to know a new church family. It is a real blessing, to have a "family" to link up with in a new city/country! (It has also struck us while we have been here that the Geelong churches have had to adjust to absorbing students into church life and then "losing" them again on a fairly constant basis, which can be quite unsettling for them too.)

Adjustment to life at college has been interesting. In one sense, you are never quite able to adjust. The student life is one of constantly changing routines. Once the semester starts the pace is demanding, but just when you are getting used to the timetable there is a week off for assignments or mid-term holidays (read "essay writing",) then it's back into study, and next thing it is exam preparation week, followed by exams. Each of these changes means a change in focus and routine. Having worked for quite a number of years and being used to a more consistent pattern of life throughout the year, I find this "stop / start" kind of life challenging.

We don't write any of these things to grumble – God has been very good to us – but we thought that it might be helpful to give a snapshot of what student families go through in heading

to Geelong, and of student life.

I enjoy studying at the college (it's just exams and assignments I am not that keen on!), particularly the original languages, and have learnt a great deal. The lecturers all know their course material very well and aim to present it in a way that will be useful in practical pastoral ministry. The fact that they all have a background in ministry is a real plus. In addition to academics, a real effort is made to provide for students' spiritual growth by way of cell groups, prayer triplets and discipling. This is important to ensure that the college doesn't produce academic giants who are spiritual pygmies! Wives and female students are also catered for through the SLA (Student Ladies' Association).

We are very thankful to God for bringing us here at this time to train for pastoral ministry. He has provided for us in so many ways, not least, the support of our home church of Bucklands Beach. We are thankful too for the college and the way that God is continuing to use it to equip people for a variety of ministries. We look forward (if God so wills) to returning to NZ at the end of next year and taking up a vicariate somewhere in NZ. Although it will be sad to leave friends in Geelong, it will be great to catch up with family and friends after our four years here!



Michael and Gea Willemse and their five children: Hannah, Abigail, Yvette, Michael Jr and Josiah, who was born in Geelong.

Annual Auckland Seniors' Fellowship

After the encouraging time of fellowship the seniors of our Auckland churches had last year at the time of Auckland's 50th Anniversary, the Mangere church organised a combined fellowship for October 5th 2004, with the Hamilton folk invited also (thus we opened with morning tea at 10am, had the guest speaker speak to us for an hour from 11am and had a luncheon at 12 noon).

It was a good time of catching up with old friends, and hearing of the work of the Maxim Institute through Mr Scott McMurray, one of their researchers and speakers. It was encouraging to hear of the valuable work they do in informing and challenging New Zealanders as to what a civil government should be. A cause worthy of our support.

The Mangere younger ladies did an excellent job in catering for us. We look forward to when we can get together again next year.



RTC Preaching workshop for 2004

The workshop was held over two days (30th September and 1st October 2004) at the RTC campus in Geelong. The theme of the workshop was preaching Christ from the Psalms. It was attended by some 80 participants, about half of whom came from the Reformed churches. There were four of us from New Zealand: Revs. John Zuidema, Hans Vaatstra, myself and Jim Klazinga, and Trudy Zuidema also, as well as New Zealand students attending the College. Others came from as far afield as South Australia, Queensland, and Sydney.

Some of the presentations at the conference were on the Psalms as differing types of literature, given by Alastair McEwen, and preaching from the Psalms, by Murray Capill. Both Alastair and Murray preached a sermon on a Psalm: Alastair on Psalm 20, and Murray on Psalm 77. Matthew Jacoby, a graduate of the RTC and member of the "Sons of Korah" singing group, gave some thoughts on the use of Psalms in worship. Steve Voorwinde presented a talk on the Psalms in the New Testament, making the case that the way Christ is spoken of in the Psalms is a key to understanding the New Testament.

We were all very ably looked after by the College staff, and especially on the catering front by the resident caterers and caretakers, Angie and Mark Almond. All the participants enjoyed the good fellowship. One major theme that has stuck in my mind was the need to preach the particular emphasis, or passion, of the Psalm, rather than its theology (though of course, the Psalms do contain theology). The conference was appreciated by all who attended, not just the ministers. Many thanks to our sessions for sending us.

Chris Kavanagh, Reformed Church of Palmerston North.



Throughout all generations

Seeing in the new year

Hans Voschezang

Uren, dagen, maanden, jaren vliegen als een schaduw heen. (Freely translated, "Hours, days, months, years passes like a fleeting shadow.")

Remember this old Dutch hymn? We used to sing this as a family around the organ on New Year's Eve, the fire roaring to keep the winter cold at bay. Old stories from the past would surface, about the good times and the hardships my parents had experienced.

December is usually a time when we reflect on the year gone by and we look forward to a new year with hope and anticipation of how we can do things better. We make new year's resolutions. Whether we keep them or not is a different matter. We reflect on how fast the years are passing.

Psalm 90 is all about time. You could almost say this ancient psalm is about the relativity of time, because the author was quite obviously struggling to make sense out of the temporal side of the human existence. Each person must face not just the reality of death, but how fleetingly swift life seems as we rush towards the final conclusion. The psalmist compares life to the 24-hour cycle of a certain kind of grass: here in the morning, gone at night. When you listen to the more senior people in our midst, who look back 70 or 80 years of life, they say that all things considered, that grassy image is pretty much how they sum up life and how it feels in retrospect. They tell us: "It seems just like yesterday. I was 18 years old. It was ahead of me then, let me tell you, but now I just don't know where the time went." We know all about it. "Time flies," they say, "and it gets worse when you grow older." Time goes faster precisely in the season of life when you are slowing down! So we can identify with that part of Psalm 90.

God's time

The psalmist is not only telling us that this is so, but putting it in the wider context of God's eternity. From generation to generation God is the same. He existed even before anything else, from everlasting to everlasting. God's longevity, if you want to put it that way, makes time a fleeting phenomenon, but in a different way. "A thousand years in Your sight are like a day gone by." Compared with eternity, the largest span of time we can imagine isn't much.

Or, you can take this part of Psalm 90 and turn it in to a piece of doom and gloom. After all, if a thousand years is nothing to God, then how can those of us who are trying

their hardest to make a living out of even a century's worth of life possibly matter to Him? If centuries and millenia of time are to God nothing but a passing blip, then how could you and I or any other person matter? Are we even noticed? The psalmist wants us to find comfort in looking to God, but it may make us feel feeble and insignificant.

Psalm 90 is not trying to do that. The vastness of time and space is not highlighted to make us conclude we don't matter. Instead, seeing ourselves in such wide open spaces is designed to make us marvel anew that we do matter to God in spite of all the odds stacked against us. He is a God of infinite detail.

They say that the Milky Way galaxy, our solar system, contains a billion stars, of which the sun is just one of the more impressive. They now also think that in addition to our "home" galaxy there may be another billion galaxies, each of which may also contain a billion stars. The incredible vastness of it all, and the 15-billion-year cosmic history that appears to have brought the universe this far, makes it very easy to conclude that despite all we humans have achieved and despite the most excellent and finest aspirations, we have no choice but to accept the humbling fact that we humans just don't matter. The vastness of the space-time continuum and the fleeting nature of our lives forces us to conclude that it is all vapour, dust and cloud. We should live for the moment, for that is all we ever will have anyway. Just live it up. Take away my faith, my Bible, my God in Christ, and I don't know what would prevent me from embracing that view too.

God's hope

But it is precisely **because** the Word of God **does not ignore** the fleetingness of life that we **find hope**. God **has** zeroed in on us and He has gone so far as to send His Son to become one of us. When we place our times of our lives in His everlasting hands, we get God's attention and we receive His lovingkindness, His unending love by faith, we find our lives, our times and that annoying fleetingness of life placed in an everlasting context.

And somehow, we can relax and find peace. We don't have to cram all the meaning we yearn for into a span of 70 or maybe 80 years. If there are things we have never done, emotions we have never experienced, a level of existence we always wanted to achieve but never had the time for in this life, it's alright because death is not the end – not if

God who has been our dwelling place, our home. Our God is indeed throughout all generations. "Teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom." What kind of wisdom would that be? The conventional wisdom that concludes that we are just a cosmic blip or a hiccup? No, the psalmist is talking of the wisdom that discerns that if we matter at all in the grander scheme of things, it is only because of God's grace and unending love. A grace that comes anew every morning as lives continue to unfold.

Time is relative, Dr Einstein taught us. Motion affects it. The speed and direction we are travelling in makes a difference. In God's presence, we experience this too. By faith we travel back in time to be with our Lord at Golgotha, dying with Him. But by faith we launch ourselves into the everlasting arms of our loving God and Father, who is our cosmic home throughout all generations.

It is a holy theory of relativity as we realise how relative God is. The times of our lives matter a great deal to Him. If you have any doubt about that, remember that the hands into which you place the times of your lives, are pierced hands. That should be convincing enough. It convinced the doubting disciple, Thomas.

*My times are in Thy hand;
My God, I wish them there;
My life, my friends, my soul I leave
Entirely to Thy care.*

*My times are in Thy hand;
Whatever they may be;
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright,
As best may seem to Thee.*

*My times are in Thy hand;
Why should I doubt or fear?
My Father's hand will never cause
His child a needless tear.*

*My times are in Thy hand,
Jesus, the crucified!
Those hands my cruel sins had pierced
Are now my guard and guide.*

*My times are in Thy hand,
I'll always trust in Thee;
And, after death, at Thy right hand
I shall forever be.*

*Adapted and condensed from a message
on Psalm 90 by Dr Scott Hoezee*