

faith in focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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*“Where there is no
revelation, the people
cast off restraint;
but blessed is he who
keeps the law.”*

Proverbs 29:18



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Editorial

The news is all bad. Well, that's what you will often hear. All over the world stock markets have been taking a tumble as a result of various financial institutions collapsing. It really does look like a very difficult time is upon us. Or is it? That may well be the outlook fiscally but how about the prospects spiritually? Could it be that this is exactly the time for the gospel to make a great impact? After generations of Christians being cosseted by the earthly comforts, could it be that now they will be stirred to look a lot more to the heavenly ones? Let's pray for this. And let's work for this, showing that hope which looks beyond anything here below. However attractive a retirement package you have, you are focused on what lies on the other side. In fact, have you planned that your life after retirement may mean even more service for the Lord?

Some things must pass in the meantime, however. We are, on occasion, called to other service elsewhere by the Lord. Thus this is my last Editorial – it is also my 88th issue as Editor. I have been tremendously blessed through this particularly ministry. It has challenged and strengthened and developed me in a unique way. And I also had the opportunity to work with a wonderful team – whether in the Committee or the regular contributors and corrector!

But we have prayed that you have been blessed too. Every month as you took *Faith in Focus* home on Sunday from church with you, or received it by mail or email, may it have been a blessing to you. I certainly know that many of you have said this. The feedback and appreciation is a great encouragement for our team. You say that you read it from cover to cover. Would you please continue to pray for this humble magazine and whoever is involved in it? Pray also for the work of Christian publication through all its various forms. It is a vital work. (Please refer to page 18 for details of the next Faith in Focus team, who are actually part of the present team! Pray for them, too.)

*When I came to believe in Christ's teaching,
I ceased desiring what I had wished for before.
The direction of my life, my desires,
became different.
What was good and bad changed places.*

Leo Tolstoy

Photo Credits:

Cover – Sjirk Bajema (he's able to visit many pulpits!) The pulpits on the cover are, commencing clockwise from top left hand corner, from the North Shore, Avondale, Nelson, and Hastings churches. The pews are Mangere's, which I have had the blessing of looking down upon for close on ten years.

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.

Angels help us to adore Him

God's ministering spirits

Sjirk Bajema

The imagery of Christmas is around us everywhere. Much of it, though, has nothing to do with the One whom Christmas is named after! Indeed, someone visiting our planet would probably think Christmas was about an obese man having no dress sense whatsoever, with a most limited vocabulary! We even hear of cities that have taken the religion out of this holiday and made it nothing more than a seasonal celebration.

Mind you, in amongst this increasing secularisation, there is something of the original Christmas scene that is figuring much more prominently. In fact, not just at Christmas but the whole year through you will hear and see this thing almost everywhere — right down to car bumper stickers. This is all because more and more people are convinced that there is an angel looking after them personally! They're certain those ethereal beings are 'out there.'

We will come back to this common belief of today in a moment. But it is interesting to see this happening when those same people believe no other part of the gospel message. And that's because their focus on angels comes from a totally different perspective!

Who angels come from

So what we consider first, then, is the true background to these spiritual beings — the reason why they have ended up in God's painting. In other words, where angels come from.

This is what part of Psalm 148 speaks of. After describing the angels as part of the heavenly hosts praising the LORD, the psalmist says that angels are a part of God's creation. Like the heavens and the sun and the moon and all the shining stars, angels were created by the word of the LORD, as we also were.

In the New Testament, Colossians chapter 1 confirms this as the apostle there identifies Jesus Christ as **the** LORD who is this Creator. The apostle Paul says in verse 16 that it was by Christ that all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all** things were created by Him and

for Him. As much as there is a physical world created by the Lord, so there's also a spiritual world made by Him.

But notice, **by Him**. Even though angels have great power and can be anywhere at any time, they are as limited spiritually as we are restricted physically. That's the way God planned it.

We have to be clear about this, especially since so many people today feel they can do whatever they like since there are angels about. While there are promises in scripture about angels looking after us, that doesn't take away from our own



Angel painting from Caravaggio

responsibility. In the end no angel can help us if we don't believe in Jesus Christ as our only Saviour and Lord.

For an angel, as the name means, is only a messenger. They have nothing in themselves — they are only who they are when they do as they're told. They're not so different from us — are they? Like us, when angels go off the rails, they are really going right against what God wants.

The old devil — Satan — is, after all, a fallen angel. And a whole bunch of angels tumbled along with him. All because of their pride, they set themselves up against the Lord.

But those evil angels are also just as much under God's control. As much as Satan carries on and makes out as if he's something big in himself, his time is very much limited! He is only another detail

in the picture painted by the Lord. This is shown by an angel described by the apostle John in Revelation 19 telling about **Who** he comes from. In that chapter there is the glorious scene of the tremendous 'Hallelujah' chorus in heaven, because of Christ's victory, being loudly sounded. Then as that angel instructs John to write the words of blessing that belong to the saints, John falls at his feet to worship him. He is impressed by this angel. But the angel's not having any of that. 'Don't do it!' he cries out in verse 9.

Then he explains why: 'I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' This means that if you know of any angel that doesn't tell you about Jesus Christ and bring you to Him only, don't have anything to do with him! Another apostle even said that if an angel from heaven were to do that he's eternally damned! (Gal.1:8)

So which angels are out there today? Well, we have noted that there are only two kinds.

One kind won't want you looking at Who angels come from. They would want you to believe what Hollywood preaches about angels today. They want you to think that angels are really your own personal possession and you can find your own guardian angel if you go deep enough within yourself. Whether that's in movies like 'Michael' or 'City of Angels', or television series like 'Touched By An Angel' and 'Angels in America', the New Age deception is to get your focus looking inwardly; not to an objective, almighty and all holy God above us all.

The other angels couldn't be more different, because you won't be wondering about **them** — you'll be looking straight to **Jesus!** They're truly His messengers, not ours. They bring us everything there is in Him, not into the emptiness within!

Is that indeed what's happening in your life right now? Are the angels in your life helping you on Christ's way — are you realising now **who** they come from? Will this be a real **Christ**-mas?

Why angels sometimes appear

Therefore, if angels are a bit like the Holy

Spirit — a spirit creature whose purpose is to focus us on Christ — and busy carrying out the Lord's will, how come there are certain times when they figure so prominently? And comparing the scenes in which scripture describes the angelic hosts, why is the birth of Christ Jesus the one event they so publicly surround?

Imagine being one of those shepherds described in Luke chapter 2. Shepherds — the men who were doing a job no-one else wanted to do — like rubbish men today. Shepherds — those who could sometimes get no job but this because their criminal class connections weren't promising elsewhere else. Suddenly they were meeting angels — bright, clean, pure! The heavenly host that sang so celestially. And they were singing down to them — of all people! But their message was definitely brought. Off those shepherds went, to see the Christ-child. It was true — just as those angels had said!

Why did those angels appear there? How come it doesn't happen the same way here? In fact, why don't angels meet us physically this way, or any other visible way? This is a good question. The answer will answer not only why the angels **don't** appear now — in these times — but how the Lord uses them on very special occasions.

You see, that's what these appearances are — very special. And special not because the angels make a surprise entry, but super special because of the message they bring with them about Jesus and the coming of His Kingdom. For right throughout salvation history, at great turning points in the Bible, angelic activity goes into top gear. We only need to read through the account of the Patriarchs— Abraham, Jacob and so on until the time of the Exodus and giving of the Law; the period of the exile and restoration; and the birth, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. And when Christ comes back, so will they! Jesus Himself foretold this in Matthew 25 verse 31: 'When the Son of Man comes back in his glory, and all his angels with him, he will sit on his heavenly throne.'

Mind you, the angels won't necessarily be bringing good news. The angels who warned of judgment, who destroyed the Assyrian army, who almost destroyed Jerusalem, who struck Herod Agrippa, who destroyed the Egyptian first-born, who stopped Abraham, are coming also to carry out God's punishment against all those who reject Jesus Christ. Angels are there to fulfil God's will, not to somehow be our own 24-hour personal bodyguards.

And when they do come to keep us safe, as an angel did with the apostle Peter in Acts 12, it's not because of who we are but instead, of how we might yet serve God.

Is that a thought that has struck you, when somehow you were preserved through a terrible danger? Perhaps it was a dangerous car crash or life-threatening operation; you could've been seriously or permanently hurt. In fact, they say you were lucky to get out alive at all! Maybe it was another time when you weren't where you normally were, and you missed death because of that.

Now, of course you're naturally thank-



Angel painting by Rembrandt.

ful. But do you think a bit further than that? Why did the Lord send His angel to direct you that way on that day? It's actually because you **don't** have your own guardian angel! People like to believe in guardian angels because it makes them feel good, and because it makes them think they are their own gods, but it has no basis in the Bible. The Lord looked after you in that crisis so that you would do something for **Him**.

But are you open to that? Are you listening to God's Word so that you can take up your bat and make those runs **for Him**? When we hear at Christmas time about those angels singing glory to the new-born King, we're especially challenged to let Him be the King in our lives right now!

Where angels will always be

And now we have the third aspect about

'angels'. In our last point we saw that angels sometimes appear because a particular stage in history is reached. We noted that this appearance is limited to certain special occasions. But we have also begun to hear of the place where angels will always be.

Hebrews chapter 1 says this too. In dealing with an error in the Church at that time, we read in verse 14, 'Are not all angels **ministering spirits** sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.'

It's interesting that the writer to the Hebrews was actually tackling a situation similar to what many people believe today. This was because in the period of time just before the coming of Christ, much of Jewish religion had become apocryphal and very mystical. They had even started to worship the angels themselves, and give them a divine character. Michael and Gabriel and any other angel they had a name to give, became a lot more to them than mere messengers.

This error was slipping in amongst early Jewish Christians as well. So in Hebrews it is challenged and Christ is proclaimed. The bottom line is what we heard in verse 14, 'Aren't all angels **ministering spirits** sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.'

It definitely puts angels on a lower level, a lower level even than us, saved sinners as we are! The Bible tells us elsewhere that the things we have come to know as believers are things that angels long to look into (1 Pet.1:12). But they can't!

We need to be reminded about this, as those early Christians were. Angels have no power of their own. They certainly don't fly to and fro over the earth seeing that Christians are praying enough before they rush down and help them, as Frank Peretti writes in his popular novels. If that were the case we would never be helped, because we are far from doing anything good enough to get help that way!

The truth is that angels are bringing God's help to us especially when we feel far from Him. It's angels who are constantly guarding believers, especially the little ones, those least able to help themselves (Matt.18:10). Angels are always looking at what happens in the Church. While the world watches us as Christians to see if we tumble and fall, the angels watch us in the hope that grace will win in our lives.

So just as we have seen how angels execute God's judgment on those who reject Jesus, there is also a totally different judgment they're bringing to His people. For, dear saints, they are delivering

the good and wonderful judgment of life forevermore! Even now they are working to bring **you** into heaven and give you a royal welcome as you come into the eternal presence of God.

Each of us who trust Christ will witness the mighty rejoicing of angelic hosts around the throne of God. Then the great company of the heavenly host that sang the first Christmas Eve will bear no comparison with what is yet to come. As marvellous as that was — 'you ain't seen nothin' yet'!

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus told of a beggar who died in the faith. He had never owned much in this world, but he was rich with faith that counts for eternity. When he died 'the angels carried him to Abraham's side'. What a beautiful picture — for just as we may have physical pall-bearers accompanying our physical remains to an earthly grave, so there are angelic pall-bearers taking our immortal spirits to the place of glory to be forever with God — the place the Bible calls 'heaven'.

Oh, dear believer, may this Christmas story about the first coming of Jesus Christ remind us especially that He is coming again — and oh, so soon! May we continue to hope sincerely for the time the angelic hosts will come again — on the clouds of glory, accompanied by none other than the new-born King Himself! Only then He won't be a babe in a stable, laid out on some straw in the poorest of circumstances. He will come with the greatest and most splendid display!

As shocked as those shepherds were at Christ's first coming, that reaction was nothing compared to the shock the world will have at His second coming! If they haven't come to faith in Jesus by then, no angel can save them — no matter how much they believe in angels. You need to look beyond the singer to the song; and especially you need to look beyond the messenger to the message he brings.

That's why the apostle Paul got so upset when people tried to worship him when he brought God's Word. That's why the angel in Revelation 19 reprimanded John so sharply. Angels help us to adore **Him!**

At this Christmas time may we do the same. Look past all that's around the Christ-child. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the One who had to come and who in His coming endured the sin which we deserved, dying on a cursed cross. Look up to where He is now — at God's right hand! Know that, as surely as night becomes day, He will return. Perhaps even today!



HUTT VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

PO Box 43-127. 106 Mohaka St, Wainuiomata
5014, Lower Hutt

STAFF VACANCY

Teaching Principal

(Starting in 2009, date negotiable)

Hutt Valley Christian School is independently owned and operated by an Association of Reformed/Calvinistic Christian parents through an elected Board of Directors. The school is co-educational catering for students from Years 1-12 and has a current roll of 67 drawn from a range of local Christian churches with the majority being from the Reformed Churches of Silverstream and Wainuiomata.

Our current Principal has been appointed to lead another Christian school. We therefore warmly invite suitably qualified and experienced Reformed or Calvinistic Christian educators to apply for this combination teaching and leadership role.

The school focusses on developing a biblical Christian world view in students and to that end has adopted a classical Christian approach.

The school has adopted the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as interpreted by the confessional standards of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. The foundation is the infallible Word of God believing that the Scriptures are fundamental to a right understanding of the whole of life including education.

The Board is strongly committed to ensuring that the principles and precepts upon which this school was founded are both maintained and actively nurtured. Applicants must demonstrate a willing commitment and ability to uphold these principles and precepts.

Applications will be considered until the position is filled.

*For further information and/or an application pack, please contact Mr John Holtslag, Board Member.
Phone: 64 4 564 8552, Facsimile: 64 4 564 9305
Email: admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz
Website: www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz*

The necessity of the Virgin Birth

An Advent/Christmas meditation – Part 2

Patricia van Laar

Part 1 of this topic brought attention to the necessity of the Virgin birth of the Lord Jesus prophetically — in fulfillment of the promises given to King David over a thousand years earlier. By the time of the Christian era, although the genealogical family tree of the royal line was preserved in the Jewish records, for practical purposes the royal family had all but disappeared from national life. No king had sat on the throne for hundreds of years, and it was highly unlikely that the kingship and prominence of the House of David could be revived in the natural course of events. Somehow, though, the knowledge of the family still existed, as the New Testament tells us that Jesus was not infrequently referred to as ‘the Son of David’. Even blind men knew of this. (See, e.g. Matt. 9: 27.) He was rightly entitled to Herod’s mockery on the cross, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

If we study Scripture closely, however, it reveals to us that even Jesus, if it had not been for the virgin birth, would have been precluded from becoming king. To find out why, it is needful to go back to the history of the last days of the Kingdom of Israel, as that nation was taken into exile in Babylon. There we find another reason why the Virgin Birth was necessary.

Physically — in the line of David

The covenant made by God with King David, promised him a throne that would be everlasting, with a King to sit on his throne who would reign eternally. The line of David from father to son was unbroken in the Southern Kingdom, the Kingdom of Judaea, until 598 BC. [This was not so in the Northern kingdom of Israel. There, the line from father to son was broken several times by warfare and conquerors of different dynasties.]

The last King of Judaea by father-to-son descent named in the Old Testament was Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah and Coniah). [His uncle Mattaniah/Zedekiah replaced him by the unlawful order of Nebuchadnezzar.] Jeconiah began his reign at the age of 18, and ruled for only three months, doing evil in God’s sight. Being taken captive to Babylon, II Kings 24:8 - 20 recounts his replacement by Nebuchadnezzar with Zedekiah, but the rebellion of

this last king in the ninth year of his reign caused the siege of Jerusalem. Zedekiah’s sons were all killed in front of him, then his eyes were put out. (Chapter 25)

Jehoiachin, however, survived in captivity, and after 36 years was released by Evil-Merodach, successor to Nebuchadnezzar, and lived his remaining years in a life of normality, peace and in favour with the king, treated with the honour due to royalty. (25: 27-30.) He was the grandfather of Zerubbabel, one of the exiles who returned from Babylon to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem in 539 BC, as is told in the book of Ezra. Nevertheless, Shealtiel the son of Jeconiah and Zerubbabel his



The Holy Family by Rembrandt.

grandson, (see Matt. 1: 11,12,) although descended from the Kings of Judah, were never given the title of King. Why was this, when the royal line of David was so important to the Jews, and Zerubbabel was obviously the effective leader of the community in Jerusalem, and would have been the focus of any national hopes of a restored monarchy? In Haggai 2: 23 he is spoken of as being like God’s signet ring, and that he was God’s chosen one. Humanly speaking he would have been the logical choice as the next royal ruler.

It is well possible that from a political point of view, the Jews would not dare give this title to him. They were still under subjection, changed from Babylon to Persia, and only returning to Judaea with

the express permission of Cyrus, King of Persia, now conqueror and over-all ruler. But if this was the case, it may be seen as happening under the sovereign hand of God. In Jeremiah 22: 28,30 we read a proclamation of God concerning his unfaithful and evil servant King Jehoiachin, which declared that no one descended from him would sit again on the throne of David. This applied to anyone of Coniah’s bloodline, and even though it was centuries later, this proclamation of the Lord also applied to Joseph, husband of Mary, who traced his ancestry back to that very King. Joseph, by God’s decree, could never become King. Nor could his birth-sons; they were effectively debarred by God forever from taking up the throne.

Yet, in the very next chapter, Jer. 23:5-6, a promise is given that there would arise a King in David’s line. How could this paradox be resolved?

Only by the virgin birth. Joseph as the offspring of Jeconiah could not become king. Neither could any of Joseph and Mary’s sons by birth. Jesus, however, not being the blood offspring, but legally the adopted son of Joseph, was the first and only one who could claim the throne of David. He was the only one not ruled out by the ‘curse’ on the line of Kings. His legal right came from Joseph.

But his blood right came from Mary. Scripture makes it quite clear that she too was descended from David. (Luke 1: 32.) She was not yet married to Joseph, so this statement is concerning her own lineage. This is, to many minds, a confirmation of the suggested solution to that puzzling difference between the line of David given in Matthew and that of Luke. They do not coincide until they have reached back to David himself. Luke, who gives the birth story from Mary’s view, traces Mary’s line to David through his son Nathan, while the line in Matthew goes back through Solomon. Not all Christians are agreed on this, and there are still some difficulties to be resolved, such as the mention of a Shealtiel and a Zerubbabel in both lines, but many are convinced, and point out that the Talmud calls Mary the daughter of Heli. (For an imaginary debate on this, possibly based on a real debate, see W. Hendriksen’s Commentary on Luke, pp.222–225.) Personally, I follow Hendriksen’s obvious

conclusions, and cannot understand why there should be any difficulties over this interpretation.

So Jesus' claim was double: legally through the kingly descent of his foster father, physically through the royal blood-line of his mother. Only through the Virgin Birth could this be accomplished.

And yet he has a treble claim, a divine claim. Luke tells us God gave him this throne. Only Jesus could be King. This is crystal clear in Luke 1: 32 – 'the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.' Could anything be clearer than that?

Why else was the Virgin Birth Necessary?

Spiritually — in the line of Adam

As there was a prohibition curse from the time of Jeconiah on the kingly line, so there was a curse on the whole of mankind at the time of Adam. Read 1 Cor. 15 verses 45-47. The first Adam, head (source) of the human race, passed the taint of sin to all born in his family. All mankind took the sinful nature passed on from their forefather Adam. The virgin birth broke this line to sinful man, and gave a new start. Jesus, who broke the curse on the royal line, was the virgin-born sinless Son of God. As the head and source of the new people of God, He gave forgiveness and everlasting life. Paul calls him the last Adam, born without sin and by his death and resurrection, making alive all who belong to him.

Any doubt cast on the truth of this doctrine, any suggestion that he was the son of a human father, renders impossible his position as Saviour of mankind. It makes him a sinner, just like the rest of us, 'For all have sinned.' How could a sinner possibly save us, other sinners, from sin? But Scripture assures us that Jesus was like us in every way 'except without sin.' Only He broke the line. Only He can save us. The Virgin Birth is necessary, no, essential, to the Christian faith.

And it is also a necessity.

Doctrinally – in the assurance of the Trinity

In the coming of Christ, *the three Persons of the Trinity were involved.* The Father gave His Son, by the action of the Holy Spirit. 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you (Mary),' explained Gabriel, 'and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.' (Luke 1: 35)

If the Virgin Birth were not true, then the

whole basis of Christianity is undermined. We might as well live as those without God – and without hope. The Bible is clear that Jesus did not come as an example of a human, compassionate man. Oh yes, he is that. But that was not the purpose of his coming. He came, as Joseph was told in a dream, to save His people from their sins.

'For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.' This is the basis of our faith.

The word doctrine is in some Christian circles looked upon almost as a distrusted word. Others look upon doctrine as unnecessary, all that we need is to love Jesus. But do not be deceived about that. Do not be afraid of the word 'doctrine'. It is so essential in our growth and faith. The teaching of the Bible strengthens us against heresy. It sets a wall of protection around us. It prevents us from being tossed about by the wind of human opinion, by anybody's ideas. Paul commended the Bereans for testing what he proclaimed against the Scriptures. We must do the same to the best of our ability. (This is 'loving God with our minds'. Take time and effort for it.)

If the virgin birth is not true, we may as well say we have no hope in this world and the next, for our Hope is nothing but a big fraud. Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, said, 'Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.' Blessed are we, too, if we look into these things, and believe what the Lord has said.

*That He should leave His home on High
And come for sinful men to die,*

*You count it strange? So once did I
Before I knew my Saviour.*

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**Saturday 27th December
– Saturday 3rd January**

*Come along and
enjoy sweet fellowship
with others from our
denomination.*

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led by Rev Peter Kloosterman

*Meditation –
'The Theology of the
Psalms'*

led by Rev Michael Flinn

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trips – Kayaking – Canoeing
– Swimming – Volleyball – Touch
Rugby –
Soccer – Chess – Table Tennis
– Kids Club – Settlers of Catan
– Concert – Fishing – Rest!

Updates:

Great news – we have managed to keep the fees the same as last year! This is fantastic value for money for a week away in a beautiful setting with great food.

The Kids Club is being run this year by the Cressy family.

The National Youth camp runs from Friday 2nd – 9th January and we hope to arrange transport to Ngaruawahia for those attending both camps.

The National Cadet camp starts at Finlay Park the same day Family camp ends, so this is a great opportunity to attend both this year!

**Check out your local Church
for registration forms and
more information or e-mail
van7ter@ihug.co.nz**

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa Moderator resigns

The Rev. Dr. Allan Boesak, Moderator of and a minister in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), former president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and former Chairman of the African National Congress Western Cape Region, on 6 June 2008 announced his resignation from all church positions due to his conclusions that URCSA Synod delegates' Bible reading is 'deeply fundamentalist' and that 'the Synod has a deep hatred and disgust for gay people.'

Rev. Dr. Boesak had expressed to the URCSA Synod that, based on the Belhar Confession, the church should fully accept homosexual members, should perform same-sex marriages, and should allow ministers in homosexual relationships to serve in the church.

Rev. Dr. Boesak's resignations were precipitated when he was accused of abusing the Belhar Confession during a Synod debate on homosexuality.

+ News24, Post Office Box 2271, Cape Town 8000, South Africa, 27-21-468-8000, Fax: 27-1-468-8200

+ Uniting Reformed Churches, Private Bag X1, Belhar, Cape Town, Western Cape 7507, South Africa, 021-952-2151 Fax: 021-952-8638, pjadams@polka.co.za

Cruel persecution escalating in Laos

Christians in Communist-ruled Laos report escalating persecution with hundreds of families experiencing horrendous tribulation.

Christianity is labelled a 'foreign religion' there and embracing it is akin to sedition. The authorities violently intimidate Christians to sign papers renouncing their faith and when that fails they expel them from their homes and villages. When that fails they arrest and torture them. So Pastor Sompong Supatto (32) and Boot and Khamvan Chanthaleuxay (both 18) have been handcuffed and in stocks since 3 August for refusing to renounce their faith.

Pastor Supatto faces a life sentence and the teenagers, whose health is in a very bad way, will only be bailed if they renounce their faith. Interference from Hanoi, Vietnam, is possibly contributing to the persecution. Please pray.

+ Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 498 | Wed 01 Oct 2008

Presbyterian Church of Australia declares Camberwell Church cult teachings to be heretical

The Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA) on 30 September 2008 declared six teachings of a cult calling themselves the Fellowship that dominates the Trinity Presbyterian Church, Camberwell, near Melbourne in Victoria, Australia, to be heretical, calling the six teachings contrary to the Bible, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the beliefs of the PCA.

The six rejected teachings are the acceptance of 'feelings' as revelation from God equal to the Bible, that contact with non-Fellowship members leads to defilement, that the cult Fellowship claims higher loyalty than cult members' families, that Christians can be controlled by 'generational curses' or evil spirits, and that God's forgiveness depends on confessing to other people or on personal holiness.

The Victorian PCA assembly in 2006 excommunicated all the Camberwell church elders, but last year a special commission of the PCA's national Australian Assembly Commission (AAC) reinstated them on appeal and set up its own investigation.

The AAC's May 2008 report suggested that the Presbytery of Melbourne East was also guilty of shunning, said that the Fellowship should be moved to the jurisdiction of a different presbytery, and that a booklet critical of the Fellowship should be removed. The Victorian PCA assembly rejected most of the report.

The subsequent AAC declaration instructs that the subject heretical beliefs must not be taught in any congregation or by any Presbyterian office bearer and that the declaration must be read in every PCA congregation by 31 October 2008.

+ The Age, Post Office Box 257C, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia, 61-3-9600-4211, Fax: 61-3-9601-2332, feedback@theage.com.au

+ Presbyterian Church of Australia, Post Office Box 2196, Strawberry Hills, New South Wales 2012, Australia, 02-9690-9333, Fax: 02-9310-2148, general@pcnsw.org.au

Muslim-Christian tensions escalate in Egypt

Islamic intolerance of Christianity has multiplied in Egypt with the rise of hard-line Islam. Violence against Christians, especially Egypt's indigenous Copts, has soared. The government is reluctant to prosecute Muslims who persecute Christians, so it

sponsors 'reconciliation sessions' instead to intimidate the Christians into dropping all charges and surrendering all rights to gain 'peace'. So Muslim belligerence and Christian vulnerability grows. When the Abu Fana monastery was attacked in May, three monks were kidnapped and tortured in vain, trying to make them spit on the cross and convert to Islam. The government called it a 'land dispute' and brokered a totally unjust 'reconciliation'. Terror threats have closed six other monasteries. Please pray for Egypt and for God to sustain and protect his people.

+ Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 499 | Wed 08 Oct 2008

Nearly 1000 Christian families flee Mosul, Iraq after recent attacks

Nearly 1000 Christian families have been forced to flee Mosul, Iraq, to the northern and eastern fringes of the Nineveh province after attacks there since 28 September have killed at least eleven Christians.

At least three Christian homes in the Sukkar district of Mosul were blown up by unidentified attackers. This area is regarded by US and Iraqi security forces of one of the last urban bastions of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako says that more than 200 Christians had been killed and numerous Christian churches attacked since the US-led invasion in 2003, and added that one-third of the 800,000 Christians living in Iraq at the time of the invasion have fled the country.

Osama Al Najifi, a member of Iraq's parliament, a Sunni Muslim from Mosul, and a longtime defender of Iraqi minorities, claimed 12 October 2008 that the Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Kurdish Asayesh intelligence service are carrying out the attacks under the cover of the Iraqi military in order to Kurdify the city and change its demographic balance to serve Kurdish interests.

+ Assyrian International News Agency

Scottish Island Presbyterians evangelise Polish Roman Catholic migrant workers

Columnist Allan Brown's 12 October 2008 commentary concerns the recent influx of Polish Roman Catholic migrant workers into the Scottish islands, and how the Free

Church, the Free Church (Continuing) and the Free Presbyterian Church are actively evangelising among them.

The Rev John MacLeod, assembly clerk of the Free Church (Continuing), is quoted as saying of the Poles, '[They have become] a natural constituency for us. They have social and spiritual needs that are not being met.'

Brown illustrates several aspects of what he calls "extreme" Scottish Presbyterianism by writing, 'For those accustomed to the spiritual kindergarten that is the Church of Scotland, a Free Church (Continuing) service is formidable, perhaps even a little scary. The psalms are led by the Presenter, a man at the front who wails in a curious keening voice until the psalm gets to a catchy bit and everyone else joins in. The pews are filled by people with long, anxious Alastair Sim faces. The mournful sound almost makes you smell the seaweed on the beaches of the Minch.'

Brown closes his column by citing the predictable dismissal of these evangelisation efforts by Scottish Roman Catholic prelates, and quotes cartoon character Bart Simpson during an episode where he switched faiths as saying, 'Why focus on the stupid little things that divide us when we can concentrate on the stupid big things that unite us?' Brown then adds his own 'Amen' to Bart's philosophical discourse.

+ *The Sunday Times*, 1 Virginia Street, London E98 1XY, England, 020-7782-5000, comment@thetimes.co.uk

+ Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Rev John MacLeod, Free Church Manse, Portmahomack, Ross-shire, Scotland, principalclerk@fccontinuing.org

Another Christian aid worker assassinated in Afghanistan

On Monday 20 October Taliban 'mujahideen' shot and killed Gayle Williams (34, from London) as she walked to work in Kabul. Miss Williams becomes the 29th aid worker to be murdered in Afghanistan by the Taliban this year. In August, three women working with the New York-based International Rescue Committee were ambushed and murdered by the Taliban for being part of 'the foreign invader forces'. The Taliban claimed responsibility for Gayle Williams' murder saying that their investigations revealed that 'this woman came to Afghanistan to teach Christianity to the people of Afghanistan', so the Taliban leadership 'issued a decree to kill this woman'. Miss Williams had been in Afghanistan for two years assisting mentally disabled Afghans with the British-registered charity 'Serving Emergency Relief and Vocational Enter-

prises' (SERVE) which has been working with Afghan refugees since 1980.

SERVE's chairman, Mike Lyth, dismissed the Taliban's claims to have targeted Miss Williams for religious revenge as 'opportunistic'. He said that while the charity is motivated by Christianity, it does not actively proselytise. Pray for a witness to be preserved in Afghanistan that the Church may grow.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | No. 501 | Tue 21 Oct 2008

Christian Observer Magazine moves to the Web

On Reformation Day, 31 October 2008, the monthly *Christian Observer* magazine will

return to publication as an Internet website at www.christianobserver.org.

In addition to many of the monthly articles and features familiar to readers of the printed *Christian Observer*, a rich body of biblically solid Presbyterian, Reformed, and other applicable resources will be accessible on the website, beginning with commentaries and sermon notes on the Reformed Confessions and Catechisms.

Please check out the November 2008 *Christian Observer* on the 491st anniversary of Martin Luther posting his influential debate syllabus.

+ *Christian Observer*, 9400 Fairview Avenue, Manassas, Virginia 20110, 703-335-2844, christianobserver@christianobserver.org



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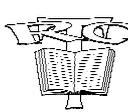
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Scottish Government denies plan to establish Sharia Law courts

Scottish government ministers on 9 October 2008 denied claims that there are plans to introduce Sharia law in Scotland, the day after an 8 October report that the organisation behind five Sharia courts in England, the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal, was hoping to establish similar entities in Scotland. The Scottish ministers said that Islamic law has 'no jurisdiction' in Scotland, and rejected the prospect of a dual legal system.

Sharia courts in the United Kingdom were invested with legal powers by the Arbitration Act of 1996. Under the legislation, which applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland only, the Sharia courts are classified as arbitration tribunals whose rulings are binding in law as long as both parties involved agree to be directed by the court.

+ *The London Times, Times House, 1 Pennington Street, London E98 1TT, England, 44-0-20-7782-5971, pressoffice@thetimes.co.uk*

Trinity Reformed Church of Visalia, California joins URCNA

On 14 October 2008, Trinity Christian Reformed Church (formerly CRC) of Visalia, California was welcomed into Classis Pacific Northwest of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Classis conducted and sustained a colloquium doctum of Trinity's minister Adrian

Dieleman, approving Rev Dieleman as a minister of the Word in the federation.

+ *United Reformed Churches in North America, C/O Mr. Bill Konyonenbelt, 5824 Bowwater Circle Northwest, Calgary, Alberta T3B 2E2, Canada, 403-286-0521, Fax: 403-286-0759, urcna@shaw.ca*

Rev. Robert A. Schuller removed as Senior Pastor of Crystal Cathedral

Former 'Hour of Power' preacher the Rev Robert H. Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral (RCA) in Garden Grove, California on 25 October 2008 announced that he was removing his son the Rev Robert A. Schuller as the current 'Hour of Power' preacher, a position to which the elder Schuller appointed his son three years ago.

The elder Schuller built his ministry on the psychology of positive thinking and appealing to people who, in his view, were turned off by the formality of traditional faiths. In contrast, the younger Schuller's sermons have been full of direct scriptural references.

In his message Sunday 27 October, the elder Schuller illustrated his and the younger Schuller's theological differences by saying, 'I was called to start a mission, not a church. You don't try to preach what is sin and what isn't sin. A mission is a place where you ask nonbelievers to come and find faith and hope and feel love.'

One church member said that she preferred the younger Schuller's Scripture-laden sermons, but because she felt called

of God to attend the Crystal Cathedral, that she would go along with whatever the church decides.

+ *Los Angeles Times, 202 West First Street, Los Angeles, California 90012, 213-237-5000, Fax: 213-237-7679, readers.rep@latimes.com*

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

Edinburgh's Grassmarket and Covenanters Memorial

Edinburgh, Scotland's Grassmarket, in the shadow of Edinburgh Castle, was the site of hundreds of executions until 1784; including those of 100 Covenanters killed between 1661 and 1688 because of their religious convictions.

The Edinburgh City Council is planning a restoration of this historic place to better reflect the history of the executions that took place there. One of the restoration goals is to improve the visibility of the Covenanters' Memorial.

The Covenanters were Scots who signed the National Covenant in 1638, confirming their opposition to the Stuart kings' claims of divinely appointed authority over the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The Covenanters recognised only Jesus Christ as head of the church.

Ministers with Covenanting sympathies were 'outed' from their churches by the authorities and had to leave their parishes. Many of these ministers continued to preach and received the death penalty for doing so.

+ *The Scotsman, Barclay House, 108 Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, Scotland EH8 8AS, 0131-620-8620*

+ *BBC, 201 Wood Lane, London W12 7TS, England*

+ *Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh, Scotland EH2 4YN, 0131-225-5722*

Note of clarification

The article 'New King James Version (NKJV) Warnings' that was in the 20 August 2008 *Presbyterians Week* (presweek.blogspot.com) and subsequently in the recent issue of *Faith in Focus* was summarised from an article published in another publication called *The Banner of Truth* (11 Split Rock Road, Boonton Township, New Jersey 07005, USA, ncbannersubscriptions@yahoo.com) that is published by Netherlands Reformed Congregations of the United States and Canada (www.nrcrws.org). This denominational source information was included in the original *Presbyterians Week* article.



Lecturer in Missions

The Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Australia, is seeking to appoint a full-time lecturer in Missions and one other key teaching area (Theology, Ethics, Church History or Practical Theology). The expected starting date is January 2010.

The position is suited to someone who has a research degree in one of these fields and who has extensive experience in missions, evangelism, church planting or a significant discipleship/mentoring ministry. Proven ability in teaching, communication and interpersonal skills and a strong commitment to reformed theology are essential.

Written applications should address all aspects of the job description, which is available on request. A full CV and contact details for three referees should also be included.

For further information email principal@rtc.vic.edu.au or write to:

The Principal
Reformed Theological College
125 Pigdons Rd
Waurin Ponds 3216
Australia

Applications close 16 January 2009

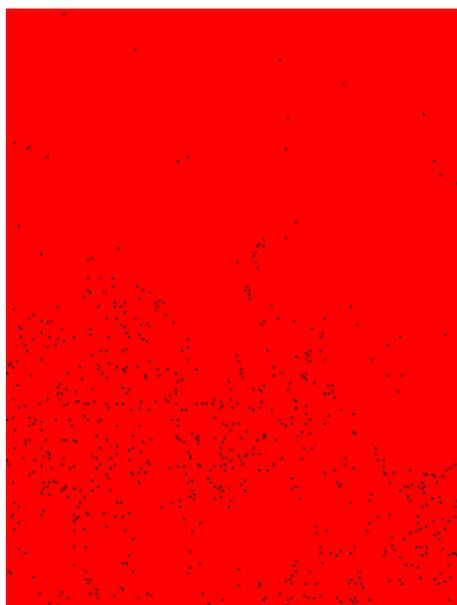
Historic Hymns and their context: Charles Wesley

Sally Davey

Almost every book you can read on English hymnody, almost every person who has studied the subject, will tell you that among writers of hymns in the English language, Charles Wesley was the greatest. It is not just because he wrote so many (somewhere between six and nine thousand), or because he and his brother were famous, or because the hymns had considerable literary merit (many did). It was because his talents as a poet coincided with his own intense spiritual vitality, in a time of extraordinary revival of the Christian faith in England and America. As John Tyson, Wesley's recent biographer, remarks, 'His hymns were born in his own spiritual pilgrimage, life experiences, and personal study of the Bible. They were loaded with biblical phrases and doctrines, as well as vibrant emotion. Set in first-person form, they placed biblical words and experiences upon the singer's lips... Wesley was able to make the singers of his hymns participants in the experiences they sang about.'¹ And as Wesley wrote late in his life to his fellow-Methodists, 'I was always a lover of music; so was my brother, and you ought to thank God for this very thing. He has been pleased to make good use of vocal music among us. Our hymns have helped to spread the Gospel. God himself has own'd and applied them to many of your hearts.'² Wesley was defending the value of music to those Methodists who had been attacking it in an anti-intellectual way as irrelevant to the gospel. He himself knew how much God had used his hymns to teach the faith. He shared this conviction with Martin Luther, another minister of the gospel who had used his considerable musical gifts to impart the truth to people's hearts.

The time of the Great Awakening

The mid-eighteenth century, the middle years of the Wesley brothers' long lives, was a truly remarkable time. The early decades of the century had seen the Church of England (the state-established church, to which the vast majority of Englishmen belonged) in a low condition. Local clergymen were supported by a variety of ancient land-endowment systems, and only the conscientious and spiritually-minded cared much about the souls of their people. Absentee clergy had responsibility over (sometimes) several parishes at a time. At the end of the 17th century it was calculated that out of 11,000 clergy, 7000 did not live in their parishes.³ Men were generally trained at either Oxford or Cambridge, then examined by a bishop before



Charles Wesley

ordination. Much depended on the rigour of the examining bishop. And many did not apply the highest biblical standards to those seeking ordination. Although weekly church services were held, following the Prayer Book services written by faithful Archbishop Cranmer at the high point of the Reformation, spiritual ignorance abounded because the people were seldom taught. Preaching was perfunctory, seldom more than simple, brief homilies.

English society, not surprisingly, was also at a low ebb. Among the labouring classes in the countryside life was hard, but not disastrous except at times when

food prices were high and work was scarce. Their housing was often appalling, but families survived. However, in the cities there were much uglier scenes of poverty. They have been famously depicted in engravings such as William Hogarth's 'Gin Lane.' Gin was cheap, and drunkenness abounded. In Hogarth's engraving a squalid London street scene has a drunken mother dropping her young baby over the edge of a stairway, and various other characters slumped in a range of inebriated postures. It was a brutal and hopeless life for such people. They were often without work and seldom had the money to feed, clothe or educate their poor children. Those who did work seldom had a good work ethic or thrifty habits. It was unlikely such people would ever rise above their situation in life.

A Christian upbringing

John and Charles Wesley were born into the large family of Samuel and Susannah Wesley in Epworth. Nineteen children were born, though only 9 lived beyond two years. Both parents were firmly-convinced Anglicans, though both had come from dissenting backgrounds. Samuel, a clergyman, was also endowed with considerable poetic gifts. Among other projects, he converted almost the entire book of Job into poetic form. Susannah, who conducted the greater part of the education of her large family, was a rigorous disciplinarian. She trained all her children to exercise a serious and detailed examination of their daily habits. Hard-working and earnest, John and Charles took their mother's approach to life with them to Oxford University.

Charles began his studies at Oxford in 1727 when 20 years old. He enjoyed his first year and worked hard; but it was in his second year that he began taking particular pains with his manner of life. The disciplined approach of his mother, and the kinds of books he was reading, both inclined him towards spiritual self-examination and toward exercising the spiritual disciplines. He kept a diary, monitored the use of his time, studied the Bible, prayed and fasted with determination. Young George Whitefield had by this time begun his studies at Oxford, and joined Charles Wesley and a number of other young men in what was called the 'Holy Club', an informal society for mutual encouragement towards progress in the faith. They would also visit

the poor, rescue debtors from prison and practice other good works to please God. All this time, however, they were (as they all recognised later) attempting to achieve salvation by their own efforts. And no matter how hard they tried, they were failing to find spiritual peace.

Across the Atlantic

John and Charles and George Whitefield were all ordained to the Anglican ministry, and all decided to go to the new American colony of Georgia in order to find useful service among the rag-tag colonists who had ventured there from England. On the voyage across the Atlantic, Charles encountered the Moravians, a group of German evangelicals (part of the Pietist movement in continental Europe). Their strong personal faith and their habit of hymn-singing impressed him greatly. The Moravians were to have a great influence on both Wesleys in their early years. It was largely because of this contact that John translated many German hymns into English – some of which are still sung today. But their time in Georgia was not a success. John's stay was particularly disastrous. In his rather overbearing fashion he managed to offend many people. In particular, the colonists resented his attempts to end their passion for rum by taking to their supply with an axe. Charles's ill-health, and the draining frustrations of back-biting among the women of his small congregation finally wore him down. He returned to England. John followed some time later.

John's domination

If it had not been for his missionary zeal, Charles would probably have stayed all his life at Oxford. He had been a tutor after graduating, and was academically very gifted. Of a quiet disposition, though a very congenial man and having the gift of close friendship, such a life would have suited him well. However, Charles was talked into America by his older brother: John had a dominating influence over Charles for much of their lives. But it was Charles who was converted to Christ first – though only by a day. After John had returned from Georgia as well, the two brothers were in London, and were visiting congregations of the Moravian brethren in London. In May, 1738, Charles was ill for some weeks and was taken in by a simple Christian family, the Brays. He began to read Luther on Galatians, and this, in conjunction with visits from his Moravian friends, led to his conversion on Pentecost Sunday.

The greatest joy

Charles Wesley was a greatly changed man. For years he had been seeking peace with God; an assurance that he was indeed a child of the Father. Now he had it. He had been enabled, by faith, to apply Christ's death for sinners to himself. Wesley knew now, utterly beyond doubt, that he was saved by faith, through Christ alone. His joy was all-surpassing. As was natural to him throughout his adult life, he wrote hymns to express the truths he was experiencing. 'And Can It Be?' belongs to the first few days after Charles Wesley first believed. It overflows with amazement and delight, and is filled with questions that superbly convey his wonder at receiving all the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. We can see the results of his reading of Luther; but more than that, his thirty years of saturation in Scripture. Biblical expressions flowed from Wesley's pen as a natural manner of speaking.

It is true of all Wesley's hymns that we sing and know so well today, that they are filled to bursting with Scripture – somewhat in the way that Cranmer's wording of the Prayer Book is filled with Scripture. It is not that Wesley paraphrased a particular passage of Scripture – as did Watts or Doddridge, for instance. He tended to write on a theme by expressing himself, naturally and eloquently, using the language of an enormous number of biblical phrases from the entire reach of Scripture. He did it with intelligence and an obvious understanding of the major themes of the Bible, using first one passage and then another that teach about that theme. He did not pluck verses out of context, as is sadly the habit in some modern Scripture choruses, but linked perfectly-chosen expressions together with poetic skill. He was able to do this because he understood the Bible.

Taking it to the people

Wesley had been preaching since his ordination, but never, of course, with the conviction or passion of a truly converted man. Both he and his brother, John, now began to preach whenever they could. They joined their friend, George Whitefield, in travelling far and wide throughout England – and to enormous crowds. Whitefield had begun the controversial practice of preaching in the open air – after Church of England pulpits had been closed to him, and when the crowds became so large that they could not gather under a roof. He had a voice that carried extremely well, and was able to preach effectively to 10,000 or more at a time. The Wesleys began this with

*Hark, the herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
GOD and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the Angelic host proclaim,
"CHRIST is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

*CHRIST, by highest Heav'n adored,
CHRIST, the everlasting LORD,
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a Virgin's womb.
Veil'd in flesh the GODHEAD see!
Hail, the Incarnate Deity!
Pleased as Man with man to dwell
JESUS, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

*Hail, the heaven-born Prince of
peace!
Hail, the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

*Come, Desire of Nations, come,
Fix in us Thy humble home;
Rise, the woman's conquering
Seed,
Bruise in us the serpent's head.
Now display Thy saving power,
Ruin'd nature now restore,
Now in Mystic Union join
Thine to Ours, and Ours to Thine.
Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

*Adam's likeness, Lord, efface,
Stamp thy Image in its Place,
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in thy Love.
Let us Thee, tho' lost, regain,
Thee, the Life, the Inner Man:
O! to All Thyself impart,
Form'd in each believing heart.
Hark! The herald-angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

some misgivings, especially in the case of Charles. All his life he remained deeply committed to the Anglican church, and was uncomfortable with any move that seemed disloyal to his church, or which seemed to be edging towards separation. He was far more at ease preaching in Westminster Abbey, or in the university church of St Mary's at Oxford. He became a close friend of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, and spoke most effectively to her dinner guests. Charles Wesley was a passionate Christian minister who longed to see the salvation of souls, but he was not a man who craved innovation.

The Methodist movement, as led by the Wesleys and by George Whitefield, always aimed to revive the Church of England from within. Like the Pietist movement in continental Europe, whose Moravian branch they consciously followed, they wanted to be a force for renewal rather than create a new denomination. Through evangelism and discipleship they tried to reach the unconverted, untaught, those whose lives were a mess without the gospel. Always careful to preach with permission when granted, they tried their best to avoid interference with the normal work of the parishes they visited. They preached at times that did not clash with Church of England services, and did much of their ongoing discipleship in small mid-week meetings where members gathered for prayer, bible study and examination of their lives. This is not to say that the visits of Methodist ministers were always appreciated. Sometimes they were denounced – even scurrilously – from Anglican pulpits. At other times they were pelted with stones by angry mobs. They were called rabble rousers and “enthusiasts” (quite a term of abuse in the 18th century). But due to the superb organising skills of John Wesley, the Methodist movement grew and flourished in the eighteenth century. Many tens of thousands who did not know Christ came to be saved; and began lives of honesty, hard work and thriftiness. English society was transformed.

A happy marriage

Charles Wesley travelled faithfully right through his 30s. But after his marriage, at the age of 40, to Sally Gwynne, a young Welsh lady from a noble family, he became increasingly reluctant to leave his young wife and growing family. John kept up the pressure on his younger brother, and eventually this added to a growing friction between John and the happily-married

Charles. The Wesleys were an extraordinary, disciplined, and talented family; but only Charles, of all the surviving nine siblings, enjoyed the blessing of a happy marriage. He and Sally set up house in Bristol, and he based his work there until 1771, when the family moved to London.

A difference in theology

But it was not only the difference in their domestic circumstances, and Charles's reluctance to travel as relentlessly as John, that divided the brothers. Charles opposed John's teaching on 'perfection' which, he believed, was a perversion of the biblical doctrine of sanctification. What John and increasingly, other Methodist lay preachers, were teaching was that a Christian may be instantaneously and completely be freed of sin in this life. In later years this teaching created big problems in many evangelical churches in both Britain and the United States. But Charles understood its error, and believed it contributed to a concerning carelessness about sin in the lives of some of the Methodists.⁴

He also opposed John over the increasing tendency of the lay preachers to take careless liberties in their teaching. Over the years many became increasingly insubordinate, unwilling to accept rebuke, and unwilling to accept correction in their teaching. Many of them wanted to administer the sacraments; but not being ordained clergymen, could not. Some went ahead anyway, and called themselves dissenters. As a logical conclusion, they wanted to separate from the Church of England and form a new denomination. Charles resisted this with all his powers, and urged them to prepare themselves to seek proper ordination. He gave them all the help he could; but eventually, separation became an inevitability and after the John Wesley's death the Methodist church began. John contributed to this inevitability by ordaining a bishop for America, who later ordained men in the colonies. But Charles earned himself unpopularity with the lay preachers and, perhaps because of this, he has never been as famous or as revered among the Methodists as his older brother.

The heritage in his hymns

However, Charles Wesley's witness has endured in his hymns. Centuries after his death the Methodist church — in fact all Protestant churches — love them still. Every time Christians open their hymn books they sing Wesley's words after him. They have endured because they are so

good. They made a great contribution to the Methodist movement right from the time Wesley wrote them. Charles had a fine singing voice, and would often begin a meeting by leading the gathered crowd in a hymn. He would sing a line, then the people would sing it — and so on until he had taught the entire hymn to them. Frequently he composed a hymn to prepare his congregation for the sermon he was about to preach. At other times he concluded his sermon with a hymn that was an invitation to sinners to repent. His hymns certainly helped, as he observed, to spread the gospel.

They also taught the people theology. Some have regarded Charles Wesley as the practical theologian of Methodism, others as the 'Poet Laureate' of the movement. In his famous preface to the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* John Wesley described the hymnal in this way:

'It is large enough to contain all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason. And this is done in regular order. The hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully arranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is, in effect, a little body of experimental and practical divinity.'

One writer on the theology of hymns values Wesley's hymns as theological statements in the form of first-order language. She believes them to be best understood in terms of 'theology as doxology'. In part this means that singing these hymns is making theological affirmations (in the form of acts of praise) by singing them to God. Put another way, when we sing such hymns we are praising God by singing his truth back to him.

A personal favourite

One of my personal favourites among Charles Wesley's hymns is 'Lo, He Comes With Clouds Descending'. A commentary on Revelation 1:7, it speaks of Christ's second coming in power, majesty and judgment. Helmsley, the tune to which it is almost always sung, aptly conveys the stirring truths of Wesley's imagery. In the hymn's first verse we see a conquering king returning after victory, thousands upon thousands of his followers bringing up his train. It is an awe-inspiring sight. And as John warns in Revelation 1, 'every eye will see him', and those who despised him,

betrayed him and crucified him will now see him with eyes of anguish. They will be judged. But for those who love him, seeing the wounds in his body will be a moment of joy and praise. He bore this bodily suffering for us, they will shout! As verse 4 has singers addressing Christ,

‘Yea, Amen, let all adore Thee,
High on Thine eternal Throne;
Saviour, take the power and glory;
Claim the kingdom for Thine own:
Alleluia!
Thou shalt reign, and Thou alone.’

It is encouraging to reflect on these words in a time when the world around us so frequently despises Christ and his followers. He is mocked and reviled, his truth is ridiculed. And we are called bigots and fools. We need to remember that there is a day of judgment, that Christ is coming again, in power and glory; and that all who have despised him will see him for who he is – to their own eternal regret. Dear followers of Christ, we should take heart, and remember that Christ is King. He will come again, and we will return, in his wake, with the thousands upon thousands who have loved him too.

The most famous hymn?

Possibly the most famous, most-sung of all Wesley’s hymns is ‘Hark, the Herald Angels Sing’. I have included it here, along with two concluding verses that are not now included in most hymnals, partly because you will be reading this in December, and will no doubt be singing the hymn on Christmas Day. It is one of Charles Wesley’s earliest hymns, appearing in the 1739 *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, the year after his conversion. It was the Christmas hymn in a series of five hymns in this collection celebrating Christmas Day, the Epiphany, Easter Day, Ascension Day and Whit-Sunday (the English name for Pentecost). The deep grasp of biblical theology that it demonstrates tells us that this 32-year-old man was someone who had been studying the Scriptures for some considerable time. He was not a new convert simply merely gushing about his own personal experience. He was, after all, a serious Oxford scholar and a student of the Bible since his infancy. All this had been recently illuminated by the Spirit’s work in his heart.

Take another look at these familiar words. They represent a whole series of announcements of important truths about this Christ who has come. Imagine them as a series of trumpet blasts making glorious pronouncements. Consider some of

the important things we sing. There are the truths of the virgin birth, of Christ’s incarnation as ‘Emmanuel’ (God with us – Verse 2, see Isaiah 7:14). He is the light of the world; he rises to bring us life – and with ‘healing in his wings’(Malachi 4:8); yet in his incarnation he voluntarily gave up his heavenly glory (verse 3, see Philippians 2:5-8). In Verse 4 as printed here, we find reference to Genesis 3 and the seed of the woman who will bruise the serpent’s head. And in Verse 5 Wesley takes us to passages such as Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 to show us the ways in which Christ’s obedience has removed the sin of Adam and restored us to God. These are tremendous pronouncements, bringing life and hope to each believing heart.

The tune we know so well was originally written by Mendelssohn to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press, and somewhat adapted to fit the hymn by the then organist of Waltham Abbey. It was printed with ‘Hark the Herald’ in the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and has been inseparably linked with our hymn ever since. Can you imagine Christmas without ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing’ and the tune Mendelssohn?

Our debt of gratitude

We owe a debt of gratitude to Charles

Wesley for the hymns that came from his pen. His words have been used by God in the life of the Church for more than 250 years. Who, even today, cannot name at least one or two that enables him to sing of the faith that we all share? But there are many more that we would profit from if we knew them well. Why not take time to read and sing more of Wesley’s hymns – either in our own *Psalter Hymnal* or in some other well-used hymnal, such as *Hymns Ancient and Modern*? There are CD productions specifically devoted to Charles Wesley’s hymns. You can listen to them in your home or while driving in your car. Reflect carefully on the words. Consider the ways he has woven biblical language into powerful, truth-filled poetry for our lasting spiritual blessing.

(Endnotes)

- 1 John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2007), p. 67. I highly recommend this biography (written by a Christian) to any who wish to know a lot more about Wesley’s life.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 210
- 3 R.W. Harris, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (London, Blandford Press, 1966), p.217
- 4 It should also be noted that Charles Wesley, like his brother John and many Anglicans at the time, opposed the doctrine of predestination as taught by their friend, George Whitefield. However, Charles continued to love Whitefield dearly, and continued to believe that only God could change a sinful heart.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

What is worship and why do we worship? Do we do it simply because it’s part of a church service, or does it come from a heart of genuine praise and thanksgiving for what God has done and continues to do? The Bible gives us a clear picture of what worship is – and isn’t – about. If you are interested in learning more; come

along this Wed 7:30pm to the Henderson home group at Tjeerd & Louise house as we begin this new eight part study on worship. For more information please see Rex Meijering.

Hospitality Group: With an increase in visitors to our church lately the session thought it would be a good idea to put some measures in place to ensure that they are spoken to by someone from the church and do not end up leaving without having been welcomed and invited to someone’s place for a cuppa. The session are looking for volunteers who feel they have a gifting in the area of hospitality to help out with this. The finer details are yet to be determined with a suggestion that it could work on a roster basis, at

the end of the day the more volunteers we have the more we can spread the load around! Please see Josh Meinsma if you are interested in being involved in this.

Profession of Faith: Amanda Gjaltema has indicated a desire to publicly profess her faith before God and his people. To that end she met with the Session and, after examination, Session accepted her request with joy. Henry Boidya indicated a desire to become a member of the church and met with the elders who accepted his application with joy. Lord willing, both Amanda and Henry will be given the opportunity to express their faith in the morning service on Sunday 26 October.

Bishopdale

Marriage Banns: Bevan Hoyt and Elrike Bakker have signified their desire to be united in Christian marriage. If there are no lawful objections, this ceremony will take place at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale on Saturday, October 11.

Pastoral. Next Sunday morning, Lord willing, the Sterne family will become members. They have been worshipping with us for many years and so it is wonderful to be able to welcome them into full membership. It will also be our privilege to witness the profession of faith and baptism of Katie and the baptisms of Sara and Luke.

Jacob Couprie has expressed a strong desire to study for the ministry, and Session has wholeheartedly given its endorsement. At this time, Jacob is keen to work evangelistically in the community. This may mean that he will work as a second minister in one of the larger churches in our denomination, preaching from time to time, doing a certain amount of pastoral work, but otherwise working with people in the community. While this has not been the norm in our churches, it is consistent with the way that the Bible speaks about the role of a minister (cf. 2 Tim 4:1-5). Subject to the approval of Presbytery, Jacob and Thelmarie will move to Geelong in February next year to study at the RTC. Please uphold the Couprie family in your prayers; there is much to be done over the next few months.

Talk on 'Grief': you are all encouraged to attend a talk on 'Grief' led by David Capill on Thursday 30th October, 7.30pm at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. This is something we will all have to deal with at some stage, whether it be family or friends, so we encourage you to attend. Supper will be provided.

Christchurch

From Pastor John. Next Sunday is set to be an exciting Sunday for us as a congregation. The morning worship service will be a special Family and Friends Service as families that have joined us for the Children's Holiday Bible Club will be invited to join us also for this special occasion. It will be a great opportunity to invite along a friend or neighbour. Furthermore, on that occasion we will (D.V.) also have an added blessing. Titus and Esther Smith have asked to be accepted into communicant membership and to have the sacrament of Holy Baptism administered to their children, Nathan and Tamara. We look forward to again witnessing the sign and seal of God's Covenant of Grace with His people.

Dovedale

Church Visitation: The Reformed Church of Christchurch is scheduled to conduct our annual church visitation on Thursday, October 2nd, God willing. The Session met this past Thursday in order to prepare for this visit. Church visitation is undertaken in order to establish whether the minister and the session faithfully perform the duties of their office, adhere to sound doctrine, observe in all things the adopted order, and properly promote as much as lies in them, through word and deed, the upbuilding of the congregation, in particular of the youth, to the end that they may in time fraternally admonish those who have in anything been negligent, and may by their advice and assistance help direct all things unto peace, upbuilding, and greatest profit of the churches. (Dort Church Order A.D. 1619)

Office Bearer Training. On Wednesday October 15, at 7:00pm, we plan to hold our next office-bearer training evening. Elder Paul Davey will present a survey of the history of the Church in North America, with a particular view towards those denominations that we have or have had connections with by virtue of a shared heritage or sister church relationships. We warmly encourage you to attend what should be a very informative evening. And, even though this evening is aimed at office-bearer training, because of the general usefulness of the subject, the women of the congregation are very much welcome also.

Membership. Erik Loots, who has been worshipping with us for some time, has asked to be admitted to full communicant membership in our church. The Elders have met with Erik and give thanks to the Lord

for his testimony of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his desire to actively participate in the life of our congregation. Erik comes to us from the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk (NHK) of South Africa, a denomination that we do not have a sister church relationship with. If there are no lawful objections, Erik will re-affirm his faith before the church on Sunday, Oct 26th.

Pastoral Notes. During the week, I attended my first Hornby Minister's Association meeting. I was able to meet with ministers from Hornby Presbyterian, Oasis Baptist, and the Seventh Day Adventist. Please pray that these meetings might be useful for mutual encouragement and matters of common interest.

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. We can be thankful that both congregations have now voted in favour of calling Rev Jim Klazinga to work in Oamaru and Timaru. We need to remember the ongoing work there and the proposal that will be brought to Presbytery.

Pastoral Notes. Although she was officially welcomed last week, through these pages also we welcome Hayley Steenkamp as a member in full communion. As was said then, "we already know you as a sister in Christ, we now welcome you as a sister in our church fellowship. As we grow together

The Census

A Roman Emperor
Caesar Augustus
decreed a common census

Long, long before creation
the God of all the earth
decreed our Saviour's birth

His august presence
hallowed
the cattle stable mean
This famous Roman census
but called HIM
on the scene

And heaven sang His praises
poor shepherds spread the word
the marvel of His coming:
Creation's wondrous Lord!

*John Goris
Wellington, August 2008
Luke 2, John 1, Eph 1:3*

in knowledge and love for the Lord, may we also grow to know one another better in the bonds of Christian love.”

Session Notes. A request from the Wainuiomata Session to release Rev Leo de Vos to preach in our congregations has been approved for February 2009.

Progress on calling was reported and discussed. It was agreed to approach Rev Dick & Mrs Mary Wynja (US) for short-term pastoral assistance from February 2009 and to approach Rev Ken & Mrs Heather Campbell (NZ) for preaching in January.

Foxton

Reformed Church Of Foxton's 25th Anniversary: On the 1st April 2009, DV, the Reformed Church of Foxton will be 25 years old. A committee has been formed to organise this event. In the meantime you can help by looking for photos and any other information relating to the Church so that some sort of display can be made. More info to come.

Wedding invitation: We invite you to join us on Saturday 11th October at 1.30pm at St John's Union Church, Foxton to witness the marriage of Aimee to Richard Waite. Afternoon tea will be served after the ceremony. Roy and Jolanda Nugteren

Hamilton

Invitation. We extend an open invitation to a celebration of Dicky Poot's 80th birthday, on Saturday the 4th October, at 2:30 p.m. in the Aberdeen Church hall. No presents just your presence, would be appreciated.

Fellowship lunches – From next Sunday, we plan to try something new to build up our fellowship together. We've made up lists of members by geographical area with an elder allocated to each. Each Sunday a shared lunch (potluck) will be held in one of these areas, which means each group will have lunch together approximately every two months. The first of these lunches will take place next Sunday (12 October) at Charles & Linda ten Hove's place (12 Claymore Place). Charles' area group is listed below. If you're on this list please bring some food to share (enough for you (and your family, if applicable)). Although the lunch is hosted by Charles' group, anyone is welcome. So if you are a visitor or you're simply at a loose end, please feel free to come along.

Hukanui

Session met a little over a week ago, and were privileged to spend some time on the Thursday and again this past Tuesday interviewing some of our younger members regarding their faith. Salomie Theron, Sam Illing, Stefan van Woerden, Jason Voschezang and Jody Bosgra have all expressed their desire to publicly profess their faith, and session is delighted to be able to acquiesce to their request. The public profession of faith of these five young members will take place, Lord willing, next Sunday 21st September in the morning service.

Jason and Maria Farmer have requested that Kayden Grace be given the sign and seal of the covenant in baptism. This will take place, Lord willing, in the morning service on Sunday 26th October.

Wedding Banns: Daniel Voogt and Juliet Wisse have indicated their desire to be united in holy marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on Saturday the 1st of November at 2:30 pm, at the Reformed Church of Hamilton

Mangere

PASTORAL. At Session's meeting this last Thursday night, we were able to meet with

Amy Posthuma in relation to her request to publicly profess her faith. We could hear Amy give a good account of what she has learned in the Confession of Faith course and her own personal testimony. We were pleased to grant Amy Posthuma's request to publicly profess her faith. This will take place, Lord willing, on the 2nd of November, in the morning worship service. We rejoice with her and with the family at the Lord's leading her to this point. May He continue to keep and bless her and us all.

From the Relocation Committee. Dear fellow members, our Committee would just like to introduce themselves. The four members are: Andrew Giddy, Michael Posthuma, Johnny Ryan, and Jacco Verheij. To date we have met three times as a Committee. The latest meeting was to view a suitable property in Alfriston. Initial impressions were very good, however, there are some practical aspects that need addressing. Two of our members plan to meet early next week with a Council official to see if the site could be used as a church. In regards to our present location, we have met with Destiny church who seem keen and are forwarding a proposal which we are yet to receive. The manse has also been given a market evaluation by two local Real Estate agents, with early indications looking promising. We thank you for your ongoing support and prayer. We look to presenting a suitable proposal once all aspects have been considered and all possible consultation has been done.

North Shore

Weddings Banns: Next Saturday, 4th October, Richard Hoek and Bai Qing Li will be married in this Church, failing any lawful objections. If anyone has any objection, "speak now or forever hold your peace." We rejoice with the Hoek family and congratulate Richard and Qing Li and look forward to the day.

Palmerston North

From the Pastor. The Minister has had talks with Grace Theological College about setting up a branch here in Palmerston North and taking some of the lectures. This is a significant development due to the closing of the PN branch of the Bible College of NZ and the desire of local churches to see some kind of recognised higher Bible Training Centre maintained here in town. It could be a great opportunity to explain the fully orb'd Reformed Doctrines of Grace to a wider audience.

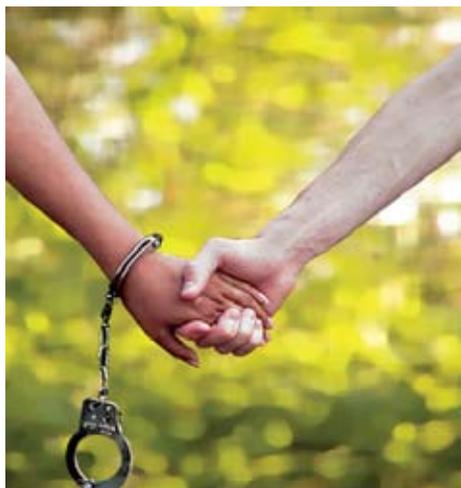
Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. Rev. and Mrs. Archbald will be in Nelson for the next 2 weeks. This will be partly holiday, and partly assisting the Nelson congregation in their vacancy. Rev. Archbald will be leading worship services and assisting in other duties as requested by the Session there. Our Session has offered this time as a way of helping a vacant congregation. Please pray for Nelson, and the other vacant churches.

Wainuiomata

Church family news. We extend our heartfelt sympathy to the Schuitema family regarding the loss of Maarten last Monday. While we mourn the loss of a loved one, we do so in the confidence that Maarten is now in the comfort of Christ's presence. Let us pray for Engeltje, Sylvia, and the whole family during this time. Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Announcements. Sermon's Available. Sermon's are available for download on our website: Reformed Church of Wainuiomata www.sermonaudio.com/rcwainui Sermon Audio is currently broadcasting a total of 82 sermons for our church 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Also, have a look at the albums (scroll to the bottom of the page) and there may be a photo of you! Thanks to Eileen for all the photos!



CBI New Zealand – September, 2008

Beginning on a rather sad note, it was on August 25th that Bob Bruinsma, the co-founder of CBI Australia went to be with his Lord after battling with cancer and

medication for 10 months. Bob and his wife Anne came to NZ in February 2006 to bring CBI to the prisons here with the aim of establishing a CBI Distribution Centre in NZ. On August 15th Bob even took part in our regular conference call with CBI in America. Bob never tired of sharing his passion to reach out to the prison inmates, the least, the last and the lost' as he often quoted. Our thoughts and prayers are and have been with Anne and the family.

Continued increase

In the past three months there has been a significant increase each month in the number of lessons received from students – a total of 312. This trend seems set to continue. It is very encouraging to see so many prisoners enthusiastic to study the Word of God.

There are now 50 Instructors able to mark lessons with 4 waiting for their approval from CBI in America. We would like to thank all those Instructors who are marking extra lessons. It is a great help and much appreciated.

During September Instructor Training sessions were held in Hawkes Bay and Wellington. Lord willing in October there will be one in the Hamilton area.

As at the end of August there were 170 active students, 9 of these working with a mentor at Tier 2 level and one student doing Advanced Studies with a mentor.

Lord willing we hope to meet with Instructors in the Wellington area in October and in the Hamilton/Auckland areas in November. At this time we also plan to meet with the Chaplains at Spring Hill, Auckland Women's Prison and Auckland Remand Prison.

CBI NZ has received its Certificate of Registration from the Charities Commission. We are now registered with them as a charitable organisation and as such your donations will continue to be tax deductible.

Responses in letters

Once again we have received some amazing responses from CBI students in the last few months. In one of the Tier 2 lessons the student is asked to write, in their own words, (using examples from a real life scenario today) their own parable using the same main message of Jesus from the passage in Luke 7:36ff, in particular vs. 41–42. The student shares: 'There once was a drug addict who abused the life she had been given. Every one in the community frowned upon her. There was a

police officer who did what was right and took care of his community. They both went to the bank to ask for a loan. When the police officer saw the drug addict he thought 'surely she won't get it' and the drug addict went to the bank in faith that she would borrow the money instead of selling drugs. When they were both given the loan who do you think was more grateful?'

A student sentenced to life in prison worked very hard to complete his second Bible Study Course and writes: 'Well what can I say. The words I get from all of you at CBI in letters have helped me so much and have kept me going on in life. The power of our Lord that is with you is strong and great. So thank you all.'

A student waiting to go back to the Parole Board shortly, hoping to get Home Detention shares: 'I just pray I get my date to return home to my loving family. I've accepted my time here and my punishment. It made me find Christ and made me grow in maturity and spirituality. I will only take away the positives from here and will give strong testimonies in Church and Youth Rallies praying that I will hopefully reach out to somebody who may be in need of help in life. All my hard times in here have only brought me closer to God.'

A student at Auckland Women's Prison writes: 'Hello, just want to let you know that I have been praying for you. Also thank you for guiding me through my Bible Studies and for your encouragement. It has been awesome. God has just been so uplifting in my life, without Him I don't know what would have become of me. But now that He is in my life it's just been so amazing. I am more confident and positive. I am happier and in self-control, even though I am in prison. A lot of things are starting to change in me. My anger has gone, my depression has gone and well I'm not the person I was when I came in here. I'm telling you I've changed heaps and that's the Lord working inside of me. I am going from strength to strength. Thank you.'

Specific answers

Another student at Auckland Prison has just started with CBI. In lesson 1, when asked 'Why do you believe or do not believe in the God of the Bible?' he answered: "January 14th 2008 Jesus came and bashed through all my barriers and took me from the darkness to the light. I've never felt anything as powerful as Him in my life and since that day I've walked with Him in my heart experiencing many wonderful things. But also being able to keep my faith

in Him when Satan has tried many times to claim me back but being with God is where I want to stay. The natural high is greater than any drug. I am a sinner that Jesus came to save.'

Another student answered this same question (Why do you believe in the God of the Bible): 'I believe in God but I don't know much about Him or the Bible. I have faith but yet I don't know why I do. I know God is love because I feel it every time I read His Word. I guess I believe in God because who else directed me to take this Course? Why do I feel a connection every time I pick up the Bible? Why have I just burst into tears thinking about this question? It is God working, that's why I believe?'

The following comments are from students in different prisons, expressing their responses to the CBI Studies.

'I am amazed with the lessons given. It's

telling me I need to learn to crawl again before I can walk – knowing I don't know a lot at all. Verses I have read before and not understanding the words now have a purpose and give strength to carry on. It's so much like craving pure spiritual milk, like new born babies.'

'Thanks again to your wonderful team of faithful servants of our Lord Jesus. In the past month alone I have learned more about Jesus and trusted all I have read. Compared to other studies this study (CBI) outweighs the others. Praise, glory, honour to our Lord Jesus who reigns over all the earth.'

'Nothing compares to God. There is no one like Him. Never has been and never will be.

Scriptures now have a meaning for me, every reason to grow, every reason to trust and obey. My prayer is to stand firm, grow in faith and to be humble in all

I say and do.'

'Praise our Saviour Jesus Christ for all the brothers and sister in Christ who are doing such a fantastic job as you guys are doing in helping me in my Bible Study Courses. Please keep up the wonderful work you are doing daily. Praise the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.'

'Hello, and thank you once again. I've much enjoyed this lesson and beginning to know where to go now in the Bible for different books (Mark, John, Psalms etc) without going to the contents page at the start.'

When asked, 'How you can now see how God worked through difficulties in your past?', one student shared: 'At the age of 9 I was awoken at 2:00 am by my parents arguing. My mother had packed her gear and was leaving the family. All my older sisters and my younger brother were going with Mum. I stood silent and bewildered as to what was happening. Then my father asked me 'well are you going with your mother or what?' That was the hardest decision I have had to make at 2:00 am half asleep, being torn apart with that choice. God spoke to me to stay with my father. After some time my sisters and brother returned to live with Dad and I. I was blessed by staying with my father. The person who my mother left with was very evil and mistreated us all even my mother while she was on her death bed with cancer. She died at 45yrs.'

Prayer needed

Please continue to pray for:

- Those in prison
- CBI students and their families
- Chaplains
- CBI Instructors
- Ministry of CBI in the prisons and those involved with the work of CBI in NZ.

Let us also give praise and thanks to our Lord for the love and grace He has shown to many in the prisons.

Yours in Christ.

CBI NZ Co-ordinators

Editor's replacement

For some months now the National Publishing Committee has been aware that our present Editor, Rev. Sjirk Bajema, is due to leave us for Australia. Rev. Bajema has accepted a Call to serve in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, our sister church. The last magazine to be edited by him is this December issue. Rev. Bajema has been our editor for the last 8 years and under his tenure the magazine has seen a number of changes in presentation and content and now has a total circulation of 1000 issues per month. This was no mean feat as a monthly production of a magazine of this calibre requires some dedication and commitment. This Rev. Bajema gave with great enthusiasm.

The NPC expresses its sincerest thanks to Rev. Bajema and now wish him and his family God's blessings in their preparations for the shift across the ditch and the settling into a new community of the saints.

Meanwhile there has been a frantic search for a replacement culminating in a request to Synod 2008

As we have traditionally found men from the ministerial workforce of our denomination to serve in the capacity of editor this became rather difficult for a number of reasons, e.g. the number of serving ministers is reduced, with some being in their first pastorate and sessions reluctant to allow the extra load.

All this culminated in the NPC, in agreement with the Synodical Interim Committee, appointing Mr Walter Walraven as editor for 2009. This will be a one year appointment as we evaluate the appointing of a non-ministerial person to the task. He will be assisted by Dr Sally Davey, who has kindly consented to act as sub-editor.

Br Walraven has served as elder in the Reformed Church of Silverstream for some years and has also been responsible for the lay-out of the magazine and thus is very familiar with it.

We pray that the Lord may bless Br Walraven as he takes up this work in His Kingdom

*John Holtslag
Convener/Chairman
National Publishing Committee*

Doumas to PNG – The Journey

On the 20th January, 2009, Lord Willing, Odette and I (Alan Douma) will be on the plane to Papua New Guinea entering into a new phase of life and ministry! It will be living and working in other country and culture, in another denomination and, without our children. So, how did we get a guy from the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia to be called and sent by the Reformed Church of Hastings (New Zealand) to work as a minister/missionary in Papua New Guinea? It has been a long journey, under God's providence, but also an exciting one!

Odette and I met a mutual friend's 21st Birthday, and we just knew that we were going to get married. But we also felt that it was not going to be a white picket fence in suburbia either! One Pentecost Sunday our Minister¹ gave us a pamphlet from a Theological Seminary in the United States; which was the catalyst for us to consider further what the Lord was calling us to be and do in His Church and kingdom.

In 1981 having completed a Fitting and Turning apprenticeship, I participated in a week long Orientation Course with Wycliffe Bible Translators. As Odette had completed her training as an Enrolled Nurse, we presented ourselves to Wycliffe to be possible candidates as support workers. However, we were advised to do at least two years of study at Bible College and then to try applying again: this led to theological studies at the Reformed Theological College.

As part of the course requirements,

Planning a mission trip? Let us pray for you!

If you or somebody you know is planning a mission trip—short or long—please let us know. We want to pray for those on mission trips overseas, but we cannot pray if we don't know that you're going! Deadline for submission of articles to Faith in Focus is 6 weeks before the month the magazine comes to your church. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at reid4radio@gmail.com

theological students had to attend the Synod, where (in 1985) I met an Overseas Mission Board² (OMB) member and expressed interest in being involved in missions. The OMB representative's remark was something like, 'Don't call us, we will call you – you have to have at least 5 years pastoral experience under your belt before we will even look at you!' Feeling somewhat chastened, I completed (by God's grace and my wife's encouragement who had some time previously completed first year BD at the Reformed Theological College) the Bachelor of Divinity Degree. After that was a Vicariate with the Canberra Congregation with Rev Barry James as mentor.

The next step in our journey was to be called and serve the Reformed Church of Foxton (in New Zealand) for 5 years. During this time, the Lord gave me the opportunity to be involved with SPROUT (the youth arm of Missions in the RCNZ)³. In 1991, I was called to serve the Reformed Church of Christchurch where I stayed for some 7 years. At that time I was also appointed Christchurch Presbytery Liaison to the OMB. I remember at a Synod Rev Dirk van Garderen reporting for the OMB mentioning that they could get the money for OMB work but not the personnel; I remarked to him that no one had ever asked me! In 2000, the OMB sent Revs John Goris and myself to the Asia Pacific Missions Conference in Seoul, South Korea.

While there, we met Rev Stephen t'Hart (we got lost in Seoul together – great for bonding!), who was enthusiastic at the possibility of the RCNZ sending people to help in Port Moresby and Central Province where he was working as a missionary. A report on the matter was written to the New Zealand Overseas Mission Board, including an outline of the work in Port Moresby. This coincided with Synod's encouragement to develop mission work in the Pacific Rim – our own back yard – as a priority for OMB.

The OMB began to explore the work in Port Moresby, and although I had expressed an interest in mission work in PNG to the OMB, it was the Lord's calling to go to Tivoli, Queensland, to serve in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, in February 2001. Wally and Jeannette Haagoort headed up the New Zealand mission work in Port Moresby beginning in 2004. However, the OMB was still looking to

send an ordained man to the mission field and after investigating the possibility with Rev Hans Vaatstra, they eventually came back and asked: 'Are you still interested in mission work?' In October 2005, Odette and I had the opportunity to go to Port Moresby for a month on an orientation trip and formulated a report for the OMB in which we concluded that if our children released us, we thought we could work in PNG long term on the condition that our youngest would be finished her final year of high school.

The next step was to extend a Call

Under our church polity, only a local church has the authority to call and send a missionary, even though the OMB supervises the work. In God's providence the Reformed Church of Hastings considered calling the Doumas but most of the congregation had no idea who Rev Alan Douma was! So we were invited to come and address the Hastings congregation and it was found that in fact I was no stranger to the New Zealand scene at all, having ministered in the New Zealand churches for 12 years and being involved at the time our denomination's work in Papua New Guinea was first begun. Putting a 'face' to our names was a big help, and the Hastings congregation formally extended a call for us to be minister/missionary to Papua New Guinea. This call was enthusiastically accepted and now preparations are underway for the installation on Sunday 6th December, 2008, with us leaving (Lord willing) for Papua New Guinea in late January to begin a three-month cultural immersion course.

Why Papua New Guinea?

When we visited Port Moresby in October 2005, I had the privilege of meeting with each Reformed church group, including their leadership. Their main message was, 'Please come and help us!' The idea was that we partner with the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea to help train and equip leaders, and to help local fellowships move to become fully instituted congregations. This includes the whole facet of pastoral ministry as we know it in our churches: one of the tasks is assisting the PNG churches to establish a church order. Also we are helping with training leaders in setting up the Reformed Churches Bible College at 14 mile⁴. Here a curriculum that



The Church in E Bokoro

is culturally appropriate has been established and it is now in its second year of running⁵.

What will the Doumas be doing in Papua New Guinea?

Odette has just graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing Degree in July this year. She feels this will further equip her in the area of health, which is her passion. We will have to find our feet and become familiar with the cultural norms and the country's environment, and with that Odette hopes to be involved in health, hygiene and first aid. Otherwise it will be using her gifts and talents wherever there is a need.

Alan will be involved in such things as preaching and teaching in the churches, pastoring and encouraging, lecturing at the Bible College, helping to build bridges into the community, and encouraging church groups to institution. It needs to be borne in mind that the mission field is very fluid and so a fixed job description is not possible. For example, Rev Stephen t`Hart has recently accepted a call back to a local congregation in Perth, Australia; this may change the dynamic of the team of missionaries and their tasks as he leaves and two new missionaries come onto the field. The overall intent of working in PNG is to partnership with the Reformed Churches there to help them become established: to be self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. In other words: Lord willing, eventually to work ourselves out of a job!

Who will the Doumas be responsible to?

Ultimately, they will be responsible to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the church through His Word. Locally, we will be working in **PARTNERSHIP** with the Reformed Churches of Papua New Guinea, as we will be there at their invitation. We will also be working in **COOPERATION** with the Reformed Ministries PNG⁶ which is made up of the missionaries from the Canadian Reformed Churches, Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, through which we coordinate tasks and resources in partnership with the PNG church. We will be **ACCOUNTABLE** to the Overseas Mission Board for our fieldwork and be under the **SPIRITUAL SUPERVISION** of the Reformed Church of Hastings as the Calling church. It may seem complicated, but it works!

How will it all work?

Currently I am a minister/missionary elect to the Reformed Church of Hastings (RCNZ) while still serving the Christian Reformed Church of Tivoli (CRCA). It is planned to have the farewell service at Tivoli on Sunday 30th November, the installation service in Hastings on Sunday 7th December 2008, leaving



Alan & Odette Douma.

for Papua New Guinea 20th January to enter the Cultural Immersion Course on 28th January. That will last three months, then it's back to Port Moresby in early May 2009 to begin fulltime work.

What about family?

The Lord has blessed us with three children: Alysha (22), Scott (19) and Alana (almost 17). Alysha is in her last year of a university degree in a Bachelor of Applied Science majoring in Equine (horses) studies. Scott is serving an apprenticeship in Fitting and Turning and Alana is finishing the last year of her school and plans to study at university next year. At these ages none of the three children want to come to PNG with Mum and Dad! We have a little house in the Brisbane area where the children will be living.

So what now?

We will be moving select household goods to PNG by container to set up home there.

We are pretty excited about this new season in ministry! In many ways it will be very different (culture) and yet also the same (saints) as we minister in and by God's grace to God's people in Papua New Guinea. We will need your prayers and encouragement and God's grace as there is a lot learn, organise and do. We pray that the Lord may be pleased to use us to bring His grace and blessing to His church in PNG.

Warm Regards

Alan & Odette Douma.



Odette Douma at her graduation

Notes

- 1 Rev Clarence van Ens on loan from CRCNA to the Reformed Church of Box Hill in 1982
- 2 The CRCA no longer functions with an Overseas Mission Board
- 3 This has since been disbanded
- 4 Which actually is 14 miles out from the city centre of Port Moresby
- 5 If we think that our forefathers established the Reformed Theological College straight away after setting up the denomination in the 50's - it is a very helpful tool in the life of the churches. At the present there are 15 students attending in years one and two. It is hoped to next year to begin the Pastor Training Programme, i.e. third and fourth year of studies.
- 6 The Reformed Ministries is an umbrella organisation where the missionaries work together in a coordinated way with the PNG church and is a legal identity to deal with government matters (work permits, taxes, etc)