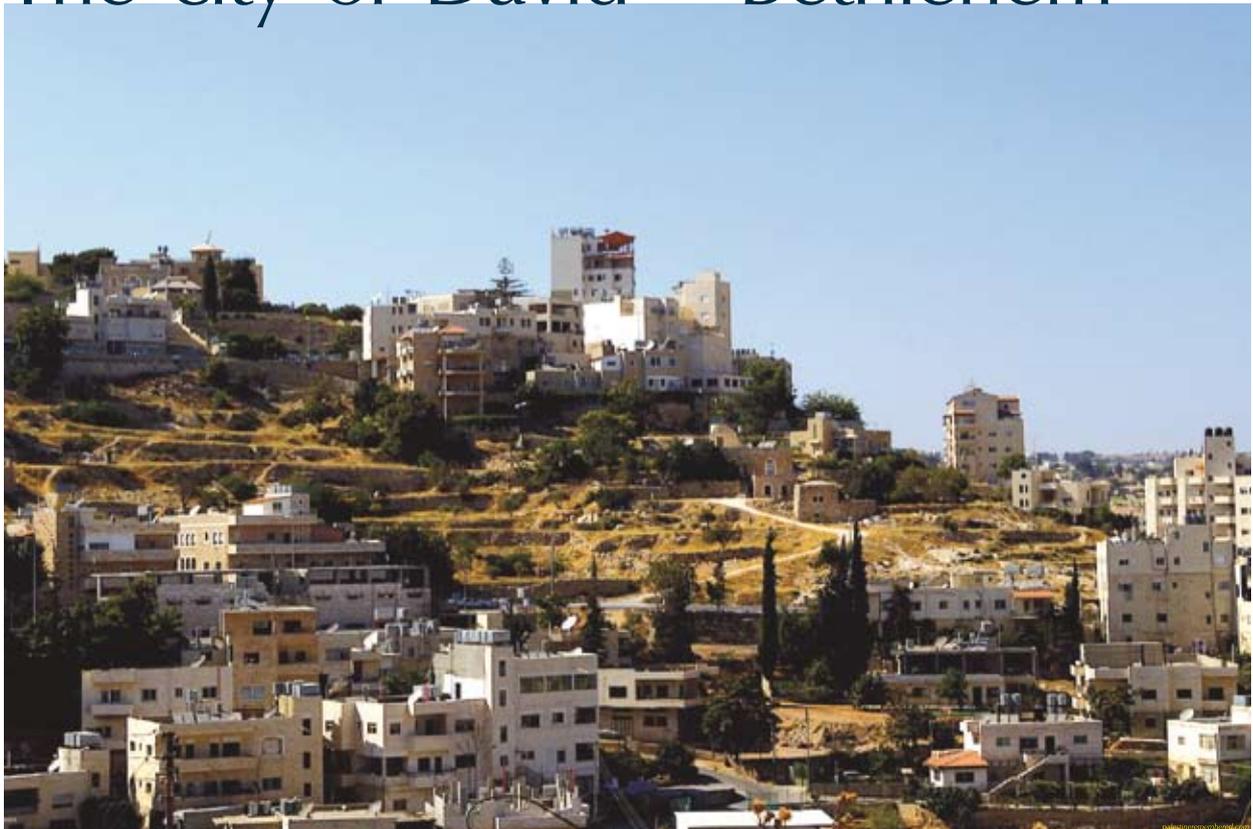


faith in focus

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The city of David – Bethlehem



“And the angel said to them, today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace” When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” So they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was called Jesus”

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Editorial

Salutations to all our readers. This is the 11th and final issue for 2009, and I believe that it has been a pretty successful year for the magazine. That success in part must be attributed to the articles submitted by all our contributors during the past 12 months. Many thanks to all our writers (some of whom are ministers in the RCNZ), for taking the time to write articles according to a chosen theme, and helping to keep the content as "Kiwi" as possible.

Many thanks to all the people behind the scene who ensure that the administration, finances distribution of the magazine are taken care of – they are the members of the National Publications Committee.

Many thanks to our regular columnists Mrs Sally Davey and Mr Andrew Reinders who diligently supply copy each month.

Many thanks to Flying Laser Colours for their expert technical support and printing a high quality magazine, and on time.

I also want to acknowledge (with thanks) the amazing work that Mrs Sally Davey does as sub-editor for each issue. I depend heavily on her abilities, suggestions, practical help and appreciate the diligence with which she applies herself to the task. Many thanks Sally.

This issue looks at a few aspects of the "The character of God", which of course is an inexhaustible subject. We look at "He was called Jesus" by Dr Nelson D Kloosterman; "The wonderful wrath of God", by Rev David Waldron; "God's righteousness in Romans 5:1, by Vicar Andre Scheepers; and "God's mercy", by Rev Pieter van Huyssteen.

"Sunday Best" addresses the issue of why we dress the way we do for worship. It's ideal for the young and the not-so-young. "Christmas conundrum" offers something to think about before the festive season. "Why we are not emergent", looks at a highly recommended book on the subject of the "emergent church" and the problems associated with this movement; and finally, there are a couple of articles about the recent meeting of the ICRC in Christchurch. All-in-all, a pretty interesting issue.

On behalf of the Faith in Focus team, we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season.

The Thought of God – Maurice Roberts

Pgs.144-145

If we are to maintain and preserve the spirituality of our homes and churches we must act decisively and purposefully. This we shall not be prepared to do unless we are first convinced of the fact that godliness is the greatest blessing we can wish for our children and for all others over whom God gives us influence. We ought therefore to begin with the conviction that neither health nor happiness, wealth nor education, nor any other thing is comparable in importance to knowledge of God. If our children, our families and our congregation are poor in all else, yet rich in their love to God, they are rich indeed. But if they are rich in all else and poor in love to Christ, they are miserably poor indeed. There can be no doubt that this is God's view of the matter and that it ought therefore to be ours also.

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

The character of God (1)

“He was called Jesus”

Nelson D Kloosterman

“And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” – Luke 2:21

We tend to view the events of our Lord’s life through the lens of our own experience. Children singing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus are learning to project their experiences upon his. In ways like this, we encrust singular events of God’s saving work with emotional and intellectual speculations that allow us to sympathise with him.

But it is not we who sympathise with Christ; it is *he* who sympathises with us. Human experiences cannot decode the truth for us. Rather, the *gospel* unlocks the secrets of humanness (created, fallen, and restored) by proclaiming Christ’s self-revelation as the unique Son of God who was born under the law to redeem sinners. Notice that this verse speaks about something done *to* the Son of God; he was named.

The time of His Naming

Contrary to the uninspired headings printed in many Bibles, the focus of this verse is not Jesus’ circumcision, but his naming. To be sure, his circumcision is mentioned, but only to indicate the context within which we are to understand his naming. Scripture’s point is to tell us that he was named Jesus when he was eight days old and it was time to circumcise him. Why is this timing so important?

The Old Testament sacrament of circumcision was a bloody ritual symbolising the cutting away of sin. But why did this child of the covenant need to be circumcised? As the very Son of God, he had no sin requiring the shedding of blood, either his own or that of animals. Here we see, already, the Savior’s *passive obedience*, enduring the wrath of God against sin!

Circumcision also represented the

Lord’s claim upon his people, a perpetual and visible reminder pressing upon Israel the demands of covenant obedience. At *this* circumcision, these demands were similarly laid upon Bethlehem’s child – the only one, in fact, who could (and would) shoulder them. Here we see, already, the Savior’s *active obedience*, placing upon himself the responsibilities of the covenant!

Astonishing, isn’t it? He was only eight days old, and yet in the timing of his naming we meet the Saviour suffering redemptively. His redemptive suffering consisted in this, that though his painful circumcision was not related to his personal sin, yet he willingly submitted to the sacrament in order to fulfill all righteousness *for us*. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). He was born under the law – including the law of circumcision!

We’re tempted to shrug and say, “That’s just like what happened to every baby boy in Israel – he was named at his circumcision.” True enough. But let’s remember that Jesus was not “just like” every other boy in Israel. He was the perfect Son of God.

The source of His naming

“He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” Not only the timing, but also the *source* of his naming reveals redemption. Luke 1:31 tells us that before her child’s conception, Mary was commanded by the angel Gabriel to name her son Jesus.

We have nothing in our human experience with which to compare this. We were named not by God, but by our parents; and we, not God, name our children – *after* their conception and *after* consideration of the choices. But Jesus’ naming prior to conception was a heaven-sent revelation of his uniquely conceived *person* and his

“... the unique Son of God was born under the law to redeem sinners.”



A representation of the angel Gabriel.
fp.thebeers.f9.co.uk

uniquely continuing *work*.

This uniqueness is wonderful, for in it lies our salvation! Jesus' parents didn't name him because they recognised something special in their firstborn son. It was not their assignment that he was going to fulfill. Rather, our Saviour was given his name as a prophecy spanning his birth, resurrection, ascension, and glorification! His name fit him not only at his birth, but also at his ascension: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil.

2:9-10; see also Eph. 1:21 and Heb. 1:4).

Divine prophecy, not parental decision, accounts for the kind of Saviour we worship – Jesus: "the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." The Author of *this* word of prophecy – "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21) – volunteered to live and die under the authority of his own word!

Praise God, faith sees that we are saved by the uniqueness of his naming! Named at his circumcision in accord

with God's prophetic word, this Jesus began taking our place in the covenant, to bear its punishments, to perform its requirements, all in fulfillment of the word of prophecy which spans the time from conception to glorification: "He will save his people from their sins"!

The author is a minister in the United Reformed Churches and a professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He quotes the ESV. Reprinted from New Horizons, with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.

The character of God (2)

The wonderful wrath of God

Rev David Waldron

The words "wrath of God" may well bring to your mind unpleasant mental images from Scripture of fire and brimstone, the outer darkness and gnashing of teeth. Did you know that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness? It is only as we carefully reflect on what God tells us about His perfect wrath that we, who are in Christ, are profoundly comforted and richly edified. That is why this article is titled the WONDERFUL wrath of God. Let me explain...

None of us need to live very many years on this earth before we start saying or thinking "that's not fair" or "that's not right". Another child plays with your toy car and then breaks the wheels off. Some other student at your school 'borrows' a friend's notebook and copies the answers to an assignment. A fellow worker is promoted ahead of you because his family is good friends with the boss. How do you respond to inequity like the deliberate blinding or crippling of defenseless young children in order to make them more lucrative beggars on the streets of India? What do you think about the rape of an elderly woman in her home in your own town? Do you

not want the score to be settled? Do you not desire justice?

An imperfect reflection

Few things bring grief to the human soul more bitterly than injustice (e.g. Hab 1:2-4). This is because we are all made in God's image. We reflect, incompletely and imperfectly, the justice of God when we are troubled or angry over unfairness.

Anger can be defined as the response of a person's heart against provocation. When we think of wrath we immediately tend to think of our own anger. However, this is seldom righteous and never finds perfect expression in us. Even at best, our anger is always tainted by our fallen nature and therefore can never achieve the righteousness of God (Jam 1:20).

The wrath of God is not like human anger. God is slow to anger (e.g. Ps 103:8), and doesn't lose His temper. The wrath of God is not capricious, arbitrary, wayward or fitful. His anger is always perfectly righteous, deliberate and is expressed after repeated calls for repentance and offers of forgiveness (e.g. Exo 34:6-7), demonstrating the merciful patience of God (e.g. Isa 48:9).

Righteous response to sin

Some of the essential attributes of God's character are described in other articles

in this edition of *Faith in Focus* (His righteousness and His mercy), but the wrath of God is not one of these. God's anger is His righteous **response** to sin from His holy person in order to bring about justice. If there were no unholiness in the world, there would be no injustice and therefore no wrath of God. This is how things were before the first sin in the Garden of Eden.

God is provoked to anger because there is injustice in His creation. The primary injustice, from which all other unlawfulness flows, is that everyone, apart from Christ, has disobeyed the Creator. All people have rejected the God who made them and gives them life (Rom 3:10-12). The wrath of God was first revealed when Adam and Eve unjustly took what was not theirs to rightfully have. As a result the whole creation became subject to the curse of God. Where before there had been close fellowship between God and man, now there was separation (Gen 3:24).

Therefore, it is not surprising to find that expressions of God's anger are a recurrent theme in the Scriptures from Genesis chapter 3 to Revelation chapter 20. We read of the flood (Gen 6:5ff), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24), and the many judgements of God on disobedient covenant Israel

(e.g. Amos 3:2). God's anger comes on Israel's neighbours, including those nations whom the Lord used as instruments of His wrath against His own people (e.g. Isa 10:5).

God's wrath is revealed against Ananias and Sapphira when their greed and deceit in a real estate deal comes to light (Act 5:1-11). God's wrath continues to be poured out on those who deny His truth (Rom 1:18). The punishment is the crime itself; God gives those who reject Him over to lives of greed, envy, strife, deceit, violence and faithlessness. J.I. Packer has said that *"The essence of God's action in wrath is to give to men what they choose, in all its implications: nothing more and equally nothing less"*.²

Fearful reality of God's wrath

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luk 16:19-31), Jesus makes plain the fearful reality of the wrath of God in hell. The separation from God, which comes to those who do not heed God's warning to turn in repentance and faith, is so great that not even a relieving drop of cold water can be conceded. Those who believe in the Son have eternal life, but the wrath of God remains on those who do not obey Him (John 3:36). When Christ brings the full justice of God at the end of this age, He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God (Rev 19:15). God's anger continues throughout eternity against those who are not in Christ (Mat 25:41, 46; Rev 14:11).

Only those who don't read the Bible for themselves can believe that the wrath of God is somehow restricted to the Old Testament. Yet many Christians are reluctant to speak about this central teaching of the Bible and, if pressed, will only do so with considerable embarrassment. The wrath of God is a subject which has become largely taboo in modern society, and many people try to deny that God is even angry against sin at all.

Some say that divine anger is incompatible with the love of God³. However this view misunderstands love and wrath. Indifference is the opposite of wrath, not love. Do you express love when you don't care about justice, when you sit back to let evil happen? If I witness a murder but do not report this to the police, so that the civil authorities can take action, am I being loving to the murderer? Love does not remain unconcerned by oppression, but cares

enough about people to want to see justice done.

God's wrath is personal

Some see the word "wrath" in the Bible as referring to an impersonal force: the inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe. This error denies the revealed character of God whose anger (like His holiness, love and justice) is very personal. As we have seen, God's wrath is His response to sin, without which He would not be righteous and his love would be mere sentimentality.

We are not to be ashamed, as Christians, to speak clearly about the wrath of God. It is not incompatible with God's love, nor is it unjust or impersonal. God's righteous anger is, in reality, wonderful.

The 19th century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote *"If God does not exist, then all things are permissible"*.

“The wrath of God is a subject which has become largely taboo in modern society, and many people try to deny that God is even angry against sin at all.”

He understood that apart from God, as the only absolute judge, there could be no justice. Justice only exists on earth at all because it is derived from, and then reflects, the perfect justice of God. The wrath of God is therefore wonderful because it points us to the reality of His justice. God's perfect anger reveals His righteousness in action.

God's wrath wonderful

If God did not act to vindicate the victims of sin and to judge those who perpetrate evil, He would not be a moral being. His creation would then be devoid of moral foundation, and any hope for future justice. The universe would then have no meaning. The wrath of God is therefore wonderful because God's perfect response to evil gives meaning to our existence.

Whilst we are to strive for justice on this earth (e.g. Mic 6:8), the verdicts

reached in the courts of men seldom, if ever, bring exactly the right punishment for the crime nor adequate restitution for the victim. How many times have you been wronged and have not seen perfect justice executed? How often have you been tempted to be unforgiving of the offender? Have you ever remained unforgiving and suffered from the toxic effects of a growing root of bitterness in your heart?

When we know God and trust Him, we can gratefully leave perfect justice in His hands. He then enables us to forgive one another and to pursue peace. True knowledge of the wrath of God is wonderful because it sets us free from the tyranny of trying (often through the expression of our own unrighteous anger) to precisely settle the score in the myriad of injustices, great and small, which we encounter in life. God's word says *'Never take your own revenge, beloved,*

but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," (Rom 12:19). God's vengeance is the perfect expression of His perfect justice.

The wrath of God is wonderful because it is held back, reflecting the longsuffering patience of God, who is slow to anger. He takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked (Eze 18:23,32), but desires that all would come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

God's wrath points us to Christ

The wrath of God is most wonderful because it points us to Christ who willingly bore that wrath for us. Salvation comes to us in Christ, because the fearful anger of God against our sin fell on His Son (Rom 5:9), thereby rescuing us from the coming wrath of God on the final day of judgement (1 Thes 1:10). There are insufficient words in any language

to adequately describe the unfathomable riches of our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered the pain of God's wrath for His people.

At the end of this age, the perfect judgement of God will be seen by all people and God will be praised (Rom 14:11). The wrath of God is not infinite; it is bounded by the equity of His justice. He will take everything into

account on the final day of judgement. No soul will be in hell who does not deserve to be there.

There will be great rejoicing over the final overthrow of evil (Rev 12:12) and the coming of the new heaven and new earth. There will be no wrath of God in this new creation, for there will be no sin and therefore no cause for our just God to respond in righteous anger against

rebellion. This too will be wonderful.

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" {Gen 18:25}

Endnotes

- 1 A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p75.
- 2 J. I. Packer, "Knowing God" p139.
- 3 e.g. C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p47.

The character of God (3)

God's righteousness in Romans 5:1

Andre Scheepers

My aim is to consider our righteousness before God. The thought of guilty man standing justified in the presence of God through faith in Christ is central to Paul's argument in the Epistle to the Romans

In Romans 5:1 Paul says, 'therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Paul begins the verse with 'therefore,' for what he is about to say flows logically from what he has already said in the first four chapters of the epistle. In these chapters Paul basically

set forth two major propositions. First, that everyone stands guilty before God and because of their guilt are under the sentence of death. Thus Paul is only asserting the Old Testament truth, *In Thy sight shall no man living be justified Ps 148:2*. Second, it is fallacious to think that we can change our status before God in any way apart from identifying by faith with Christ's work of death and resurrection.

Because of God's absolute moral perfection, He requires spotless and perfect righteousness from His people. In Rom 5:1 Paul is saying that this perfection is provided by God for His people, in that Christ's righteousness is imputed to them so that when God looks upon the redeemed He sees them clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ.

In this verse Paul is describing the act by which we are acquitted in the words "having been justified", using the aorist passive participle of the verb rendered to justify. The verb may also be translated, 'to apply justice to someone,' 'to treat someone justly' and 'to pronounce judgement'. It is important to notice that this aorist participle means that for once and for all, the Christian has been pronounced 'righteous,' rather than 'made righteous'.

Righteousness through faith and not works

The verb always has a judicial or forensic flavour about it and we need to think ourselves into the atmosphere that this verb engenders – that of the divine law

court, where God demands that we have perfect righteousness if we are to be acquitted, and then declares and accepts that we have the perfect righteousness of Christ, through faith. This means that God in the act of justification declares that the sinner has a new status of righteousness before Him (Rom 8:33). We know from Rom 4:24 that this declaration is 'a free gift of grace.' Therefore none of us deserve this legal status, none of us can earn it.

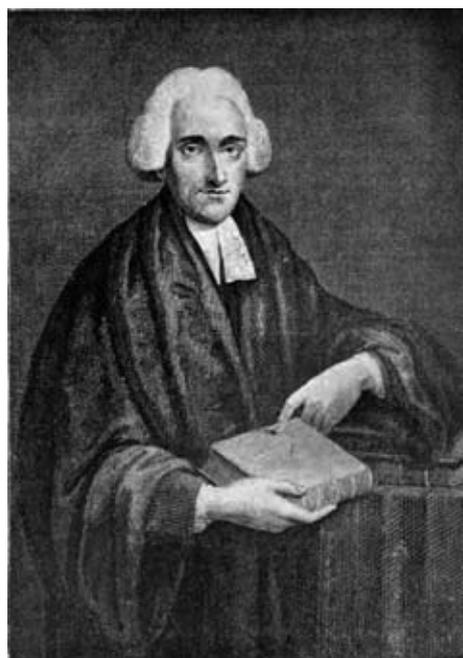
The Bible often asserts that salvation is of grace because it knows the difficulty that the fallen heart has in coming to the truth that salvation cannot be earned through our own works. Augustus Toplady in his hymn 'Rock of Ages,' expresses the same thought:

*Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling
Naked come to Thee for dress
Helpless look to Thee for grace
Foul I to the fountain fly
Wash me Saviour or I die.*

Augustine, too, reflected on the grace of God in this declaration on justification when he prayed

*O Lord, demand what you will
But supply what you demand.*

The basis of this justification is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 5:9). God is just, He has set the sentence of death for our sin (Rom 6:23); yet One who is sinless (Heb 4:15) has paid the penalty of death for us that was not His own (2 Cor 5:21). Because



Augustus Toplady, writer of the well-known hymn Rock of Ages. www.toplady.org.uk/

it was not for the penalty of His own sin that He died, the penalty of death did not have any power to hold Jesus (Acts 2:24), and so Paul makes it clear that it is the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the basis of our justification (Rom 4:25).

Thus God is both just and the justifier of sinners because 'He is just and the One who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus' Rom 3:26, because we are linked by faith to Christ, who has paid the penalty for sin, and His once and for all payment appeases God's wrath against sin.

Rome and Protestants differ

If we are to understand justification correctly we must have a very firm hold on its juridical meaning – *i.e.* that it is a declaration of innocence, it is a declaration of righteousness. The great difference between Rome and Protestants is precisely in this area, as to whether justification is merely a legal act or an ethical act.

The Roman Church asserts that justification consists of Christ's righteousness being poured into man. Man is therefore made just and he sanctifies himself by doing good works. In this view a person is made righteous and then declared righteous. But Scripture sees justification as the deliverance from the penalty of sin and sanctification as deliverance from the power of sin – these terms are synonymous to the Church of Rome. The Council of Trent made these two terms inseparable.

Justification in Scripture is a judicial process which Rome has made an infusion of the quality of righteousness. Thus for Rome the external judicial acquittal is used to signify an earlier internal reality. According to this ethical doctrine of justification man is ultimately acquitted by virtue of what he is and what he does and not through what Christ has done. According to this erroneous view God grants justification to man, but man must do something about it first before he can be justified.

Against the judicial view of justification Rome argues that God would be false to proclaim the guilty guiltless; but this is to neglect the grace of God by which the wicked receive acquittal. Over against the ethical view of justification we have to cling to the juridical significance of the concept, whereby God the Judge absolves the guilty of their guilt and punishment.

But in Rom 5:1 Paul also shows us

the means by which the individual is to appropriate this justification or the declaration of righteousness. It is, Paul says, through or by faith. Even this faith itself is a gift of God (Eph 2:9) coming to the individual by divine grace. WCF 11 states ... 'faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification...'

Depending on Christ alone

This simply means that if the individual is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ then he must wholeheartedly rely on what Christ has done and place all his trust in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus on his behalf (Rom 3:22). The truth of faith alone cannot be overstated. It means that salvation is not something I do. Salvation does not depend on my strength in holding onto God. Rather, the

events of salvation history, namely the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, are something which God has done; and to be right before God I must simply rely in a dynamic, ongoing way on those events and see them accomplished on my behalf.

This means that every other man-made means of salvation must be abandoned: baptism, church membership, philanthropy, holding outward religious office. These are all good things of themselves and perfectly appropriate for Christian participation – yet as a means of personal salvation, totally useless.

The ground of our acceptance with God is the death and resurrection of Christ. God gives us the righteousness of Christ which comes to us as faith is exercised in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Rom 4:5).

But the apostle goes on in the verse and shows us the fruit of 'having been justified' – we have 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' This peace is not the fruit of the Spirit to which Paul refers elsewhere (Gal 5:22). This peace which we have means that we are no longer to objects of God's displeasure and we are no longer to live in dread of divine wrath, for we have been reconciled to God or made His friends, through the death of His Son (Rom 5:10).

Peace with God

The phrase means we have peace with regard to God, that more literally, God is at peace with us and His wrath towards us is removed through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Paul's main thought here is that we are at peace with God and as a corollary of this peace we have peace within, and so inward peace is also the fruit of justification by faith.

The peace we have with God comes to us only on His terms. Relying on your own good works will not appease the righteous wrath of God. True peace can only be realised when we recognise that our sin has been justly punished through the death of the sinless Christ, that the justice of God has been satisfied and that God's law has been honoured and vindicated in Christ.

It is only as the believer sees God's

“Our acceptance with God is the death and resurrection of Christ.”

mercy and peace kissing each other in this manner that we experience true peace. As Calvin says, 'now if we ask in what way the conscience can be made quiet before God, we shall find the only way to be that unmerited righteousness be conferred upon us as a gift of God (*Institutes*, 13.3).

The heart of Paul's teaching

The truth of Rom 5:1, of an imputed righteousness coming to us by God's grace appropriated by faith, based on the finished work of Christ, is the heart of Paul's teaching on our righteousness and right standing before God.

Especially in this month in which we celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation, Christians need to rediscover and understand afresh these great truths of Scripture which are the great truths of the Reformation. They are the great truths which alone can satisfy the heart that hungers after God; the truths which when appropriated give us peace with God.

Salvation by grace alone
Through faith alone
In Christ alone
So that to God alone be all the glory.

The character of God (4)

God's mercy

Rev Pieter van Huyssteen

To describe God's mercy the Bible mainly uses two words, often in parallel: *lovingkindness* (Hebrew: *chesed*) and *compassion* (Hebrew: *rachamim*).

The word *lovingkindness*, is so rich in meaning that Bible scholars have tried to do justice to its meaning by translating it as *mercy* (KJV), *love* (NIV, NRSV), *faithful love* (NLT), and *steadfast love* (NRSV). But really, if one looks for a single word to encapsulate them all, *lovingkindness* is the one that best expresses this "big-heartedness" (German: *Großherzigkeit*) of God. A Dutch word

not enjoy singing Ps 89, "I will sing of the *mercies* of the LORD forever ..."?

Some saints have even given *descriptions* of God's mercy: Solomon (describing God's lovingkindness to David) says God's mercy is *great* (1 Kings 3:6); in Psalm 86:5 David says God's mercy is *abounding*, and in Ps 103:17 he says it is *from everlasting to everlasting*; John the Baptist's father, describing the imminent coming of the Christ, says God's mercy is *tender* (Lk 1:78a). Thus, it's clear; believers in Bible days have sought, loved and praised God for His mercy – His lovingkindness and compassion. And, by God's grace, I have seen how believ-

– plants, insects, animals, birds, fish, and human beings – find sunlight and oxygen, food and shelter!

God's mercy narrower

Apart from all *creatures*, God's mercy comes to the *human race* – those creatures through whom sin entered this world. Yes, despite their sins, God's providing care is over all humans! Is that not why our Lord Jesus said "... He (God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45b)? And, says the Apostle Paul to the Greeks in Athens, "... He Himself gives *all men* life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25b). I'm sure we can all attest to it: once, when we were coming out of the worship service, and standing on the pavement in front of the church, a noisy car filled with young men drove past while one of them shouted out loudly, "Church sucks! God sucks!" Well, as I watched their car speeding away, I was waiting for some instant disaster to befall them. Yet nothing of the sort happened. God's mercy remained on these arrogant blasphemers – at least as far as I could see for *that* moment; *that* day! They went safely through the next traffic light; the sun kept shining on them; they still had oxygen to breathe, food to eat, etc! Truly, it is as our Lord Jesus said, God's mercy "is on the righteous and the unrighteous."

God's mercy narrowest

But then God's mercy covers the narrowest possible circle – God's elect. It is here that the Bible often exchanges the words *mercy* and *grace*, so e.g. in the NIV's rendering of Ex 33:19 (Rm 9:15) "I will have mercy (actually "grace") on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Now this verse reveals something about the narrowest meaning of God's mercy, i.e. that it comes by His *sovereign* choice! Peter confirms this when, in one breath, he mentions God's *elect*, His *foreknowledge* and His

“What God, in Christ, did for His loved ones is mercy without end.”

which says the same as *lovingkindness*, and which some of the senior members in the RCNZ have uttered with tears of joy, is "goedertierenheid," i.e. our Lord's *goodwill* – His inherent desire to care for His creatures. So, this is the first word by which the Bible describes our heavenly Father's mercy – the word *lovingkindness*!

The second word, the one that is usually translated as *compassion*, overlaps in meaning with *lovingkindness* in that it describes a *stirring* or *moving* or even *pity* in God's heart for all that He has created! So, *lovingkindness* and *compassion* are the two words the Bible uses when it talks of God's *mercy* – an inherent characteristic of God.

Believers who have tasted God's mercy have been prompted by His Spirit to praise Him for it: Ps 136 mentions God's mercy 26 times in its 26 verses of praise, "Give thanks to the LORD for He is good; His *mercy* (lovingkindness) lasts forever" – words my father used to always pray as a fixed table prayer before meals. And which believer does

ers in the RCNZ, when tested through unemployment, illness or the loss of a loved-one, did the same: tears of joy filled their eyes as one clear refrain rang from their lips, "God's lovingkindness is great!" (Dutch: "Gods goedertierenheid is groot").

Now God's mercy covers THREE areas: a wide area; a narrower area; a narrowest area!

God's mercy is wide

In its widest sense, God's mercy stretches over *all* His creatures. Is that not why the psalmist says: "The LORD is good to *all*; he has compassion on *all he has made*" (Ps 145:9)? In this sense, God's mercy differs from His grace, for whereas God's *grace* looks to God's *loved-ones* only, and freely grants them forgiveness, His *mercy* looks to *all* His creatures with care and compassion! God's mercy is the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of *all* fallen creatures by supplying them with suitable provision. And do we not see this daily: how in the most wonderful and mind-boggling way all creatures

mercy: "To God's elect ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father ... In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ..." (1 Pt 1:1-3).

At this point, the believer stands in awe! Here is no place for boasting, because the believer knows that whereas God's mercy over all creation is solely of a temporal nature, His mercy over His loved ones lasts beyond the grave: "... from everlasting to everlasting is the LORD's mercy with those who fear Him!" (Ps 103:17). By grace the believer also knows it is not the wretchedness of the creature, nor the merits of the creature which caused God to show mercy, for there is no such thing as meriting mercy – why Paul writes to Titus, "... He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Tit 3:5).

It is this mercy of God which brought Him right into our world when God took upon Himself a human body and soul and entered our world. Now this is very important, for God did not *have* to come into our world! He could have left the whole human race in sin and disaster. Or He could, at best, have exercised a remote-control salvation of human beings staying well clear of our world polluted by sin and misery. But He did not!

It was exactly this point that my family and I, in God's providence, tried to explain to a Muslim insurance broker who recently came to our house. After 3 hours of frank discussion he still seemed unable to comprehend the fact that God, in His mercy (lovingkindness and compassion) decided to enter our polluted world in the face of Jesus Christ. And I don't blame this Muslim for being baffled, for is this fact not too marvellous even for the Christian to comprehend? What an unexpected thing: God humbled Himself to our level – actually the lowest possible level even a human being could go, the level of a criminal's death! But that's exactly how our God is: He does things in ways that human beings would not even have dreamed of! Ironically, that's exactly proof that He is God!

Now it is this coming-into-our-world of God that John the Baptist's father described as not just mercy, but *tender* mercy! (Lk 1:78a). Thus, what God, in Christ, did for His loved ones is mercy without end – proof that our heavenly Father never ceases to be merciful – mercy is an inherent characteristic of His: "The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God

is full of compassion" (Ps 116:5).

His mercy punishes the wicked

Here is something quite significant – and how could one even consider this without awe? You see, although mercy is an inherent characteristic of our God, we should not get the idea that God is a compromiser, just filled with blind lovingkindness – blind to all evil! No, with God it is not mercy at all cost, for note: not only is God's mercy seen when He, in love, disciplines His own (Hb 12:5-6), but also one day when He will cast the wicked into the lake of fire!

"How does that rhyme?" you may ask! Well, from the standpoint of God's redeemed, the punishment of the wicked is an act of unspeakable mercy, for how

“Mercy is an inherent characteristic of His: The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.”

could heaven ever house the wicked? You see, in the *present* order – this life on earth – the children of God are obliged to live in the midst of the children of the devil. But how dreadful would it be if heaven would be a mere continuation of this order; how dreadful if the saints in heaven would still have to hear the blasphemous and filthy language of the wicked! What mercy of our heavenly Father that "Nothing impure will ever enter it (heaven), nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rv 21:27)!

So, by God's mercy, heaven will be spared wickedness, which really shows us the flipside of God's mercy – His justice! And the Bible is full of that: mercy to God's redeemed means justice to the wicked, e.g. David prays, "In your *unfailing* love (i.e. mercy), silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant" (Ps 143:12, NIV); also Ps 136:15 connects God's mercy with the destruction of the wicked: God's mercy endures forever because He swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea. And the same will happen at the end of time when our Lord Jesus returns! Is that not why Rev. 19:1b-2 says that

the redeemed will shout: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants"?

How vain will be the hope of the presumptuous wicked, those who continue unrepentantly while saying persistently, "God is merciful! He will never cast me into hell!" (cf. Rm 3:8). If any such one reads this article, may God's Spirit convince him that such attitude is like a snake that one cherishes in one's jacket – it will cause your death! Instead, fall on your knees before the Saviour of God's mercy! In the language of the psalmist: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you

be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him" (Ps 2:12).

What reaction would fit?

If no-one else, should not at least God's loved-ones give Him the glory – yes sing of His mercy which is so great, abundant, and tender? Ps 59:16 says, "... in the morning I will sing of your love (mercy); for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble." If Jeremiah, staring over ransacked Jerusalem (dead bodies everywhere, and the temple destroyed) could sing of God's unchanging mercy, then all of us, even the lonely and the sick, should add our voices to this prophet's hymn of praise: "The LORD's lovingkindnesses (plural!) indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him." The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him" (Lm 3:22-25).

(Pieter van Huyssteen is making good use of, among other books, the work of Arthur W Pink: The Attributes of God.)

Israel Government partnering with ultra-orthodox anti-assimilation organization to keep Messianic Jews from living in Israel

The Times, in a 2 October 2009 article, quote an unnamed official of the Israeli Interior Ministry who reports that the ministry is working with an ultra-Orthodox Jewish anti-assimilation group called Yad L'Achim to prevent Messianic Jews from being allowed to live in Israel.

Some ultra-Orthodox Jews consider Messianic Jews a threat to the Jewish identity. The US State Department has accused Yad L'Achim of using violence against those who go to Israel and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Israeli Jews.

+ *The Times*

Dutch Christians fight against festival including Hindu idolatry

Christians in Amstelveen, Netherlands, are fighting plans by local authorities to support a Hindu festival called the 'India Diwali Festival' that includes prayer to the Hindu goddess Lakshmi in the town center.

Former Amstelveen, Netherlands, resident and BosNewsLife founder Stefan J. Bos, put the proposed festival in context, writing, "While Amstelveen wants to honour a Hindu goddess, Indian Christians are jailed, tortured, and even murdered for honoring their God and Lord Jesus Christ."

Another writer commented that Amstelveen, Netherlands, a European gateway for international companies due to its location near Schiphol Airport and key highways, is using the festival as another way "to attract Indians with their big wallets."

The Dutch capital of Amsterdam and Amstelveen-based KPMG, one of the world's largest professional services providers, are additionally funding the Amstelveen Hindu festival.

+ *Religion News Blog*

Maine censors Christian Action Network and imposes US\$4,000 fine for fundraising letter with anti-Muslim message

The Christian Action Network (CAN) has been an organisation in good standing with the state of Maine for several years, and in March 2009 filed for a renewal of

CAN's state license, including a license fee check that was cashed by the state government.

In April 2009, CAN mailed a letter exposing how some Maine public schools were promoting Islam by providing instruction on the Five Pillars of Islam and the Koran. The letter pointed out that some schools have provided a "prayer room" for Muslims and one textbook that told seventh grade students they "will become Muslim." The letter listed Maine Governor John Baldacci as a person who is over the public schools and someone to whom the recipients of the letter should voice their opinion.

In May 2009, CAN was informed by Maine that its application was now being denied, and a US\$4,000 fine was imposed for three reasons: (1) the state alleged CAN's letter contained "an inflammatory anti-Muslim message;" (2) the letter used Governor John Baldacci's name without his approval; and (3) the registration was allegedly "incomplete."

CAN, represented by the Liberty Counsel, filed a lawsuit against the state of Maine challenging the state statute regarding use of a person's name, which the state has interpreted to mean that the governor's name cannot be used in a direct mail piece without his permission, and raising a free speech challenge to the state for censoring the letter for its alleged "anti-Muslim message."

Mathew D. Staver of Liberty Counsel commented: "The chief purpose of the First Amendment was to prevent the government from licensing the press. Citizens do not need permission to petition government officials or to protest government policies. The state of Maine has no business licensing one viewpoint on controversial issues and cannot deny speech because some bureaucrat deems it 'anti-Muslim.'"

+ *Liberty Counsel*

Pro-Life groups setup 100 foot-tall number seventy-one on U.S. Capital lawn to represent seventy-one percent of Americans opposed to taxpayer-funded abortion

The Christian Defense Coalition (CDC), Generation Life, and Operation Rescue as part of the "Abortion is Not Health Care" campaign, have begun an online campaign called "I am 71," to represent

the seventy-one percent of Americans opposed to taxpayer funded abortion. On 2 October 2009, "I am 71" displayed a 100 foot-tall number seventy-one on the lawn of the U.S. Capital in order to encourage members of the U.S. Congress to listen to the wisdom of the American people and ensure that not a single penny of public money will be used to pay for or to subsidise abortions.

Reformed Presbyterian pastor and Director of the CDC, the Rev. Patrick Mahoney stated, "Americans intuitively know that abortion is not health care. They understand that health care should bring compassion, mercy and healing to those in need not violence and despair. We are displaying this large seventy-one on the lawn of the Capital to remind lawmakers to listen to the voice and wisdom of the American people and embrace human rights and social justice. It would be tragic for Congress to force the American faith community to pay for the killing of innocent children through their tax dollars. The pro-life community will continue to be a loud and prophetic voice speaking out against abortion in health care during this entire debate."

+ *Christian News Wire*

Fellowship of Confessing Churches receives 100+ applications following Church of Scotland's appointment and ordination of homosexual minister

The forty-six member Fellowship of Confessing Churches (FCC) has received more than 100 applications from Church of Scotland (COS) congregations since the appointment and installation of a practicing homosexual as the minister of Queen's Cross Church in Glasgow, Scotland, and the subsequent COS General Assembly (GA) decision to form a study commission on the subject to report back to the 2011 COS GA.

The FCC requires member churches to prominently display the following covenant: "We recognise God's creation of humankind as male and female and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage between one man and one woman as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis of the family."

We acknowledge the great harm that has come from our failures to maintain this standard, and we repent and call

for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage and abstinence for those who are not married.

We reject the authority of those who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed."

+ *The Christian Institute*

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Professor Dr. Robert Gagnon pens "What Should Faithful Lutherans in the ELCA Do?"

In response to "the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)]'s hard-left departure from normative Christian faith and practice," as evidenced by "[the ELCA] Churchwide Assembly in August 2009 vot[ing] to allow for the blessing of homosexual unions and the rostering of pastors in homosexual relationships," Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Associate Professor of New Testament Dr. Robert Gagnon has written an essay titled "What Should Faithful Lutherans in the ELCA Do?," in order to give Lutherans that adhere to biblical standards on human sexuality guidance to "deal with these new heretical and immoral actions..."

After presenting a syllogism about denominational legitimacy, then thoroughly and methodically analysing the relevant scriptural principles concerned with human sexuality and the family including the issue of incest dealt with by Paul in I Corinthians, Gagnon concludes: "The ELCA has gone beyond the Corinthian community. It has allowed for sexual immorality that Paul (and Jesus) would have regarded as even more extreme than the specific case of incest at Corinth. Furthermore, it has not only tolerated such immorality but also allowed for its blessing and the rostering as active leaders of the church the very persons engaging in the immorality. Moreover, unlike Corinth, this outcome is not just a recent development but part of an orchestrated effort for promoting homosexual behavior over the past decade. The faithful in the ELCA have been more than patient.

At some point-perhaps not immediately but surely down the line-those who remain in the ELCA run the risk of becoming enabling accomplices to a regime that has betrayed the illustrious heritage of the Lutheran communion, to say nothing of the worldwide church, Scripture, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. No doubt there is pain ahead, but also the joy that comes from dying to self and living for God. May God grant them wisdom and courage in

their future decisions, which only they can make."

+ *Robert A. Gagnon*

Scotland's chief prosecutor refuses to issue guidelines for legal assisted suicide

Scotland's chief prosecutor, Lord Advocate Elish Angiolini QC, has refused to follow her counterpart, Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for England and Wales, Keir Starmer QC, who the week of 21 September 2009, issued guidelines explaining the circumstances under which Starmer is likely to prosecute a case of assisted suicide.

The same day that the DPP issued the guidelines, Angiolini issued a statement saying:

"The guidance issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions for England and Wales will only apply to cases where an offence of assisting suicide takes place within England and Wales. It will not apply to Scotland.

The DPP's guidance follows the decision of the House of Lords in the English case of Purdy. This case applies only to England and Wales and to the statutory offence of assisting the suicide of another under section 2 of the Suicide Act 1961.

This offence does not apply in Scotland, where, depending on the particular facts and circumstances of the case, the law of homicide may apply.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service will give careful consideration to the implications of the DPP's interim guidance, the outcome of his public consultation and developments in other jurisdictions.

The Crown recognises the importance of this issue, but any change in the current law related to homicide is properly a matter for the Scottish Parliament."

The vice-convenor of the Church of Scotland's Church and Society Council, the Rev. Sandy Horsburgh commented: "We hope the present legal situation in Scotland will not be changed, and that the guidance in England and Wales is not seen as setting a precedent."

+ *The Christian Institute*

Ulster Assemblyman speaks out against possible January 2010 visit of Roman Catholic Pontiff

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Mid Ulster, Ian McCrea, on 25 September 2009 responding to the possible visit of the Roman Catholic Pontiff to Ulster

in January 2010, in an article titled "No Pope Here!" Says McCrea," stated:

"I am opposed to any possibility of a visit to Northern Ireland by the Pope of Rome and I believe a visit from the Pope should be vigorously opposed for a number of reasons, first of all the majority of people in Northern Ireland are Protestant and belong to denominations that hold to the belief that the Pope is the Antichrist and by his titles and claims he blasphemes Almighty God.

A visit from the Pope should also be opposed as many Roman Catholic people feel that the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church have been complicit in abuse cases over many years and in light of the recent inquiry into child abuse in Roman Catholic institutions, such a visit would be very insensitive not only on the part of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State who arrogantly issued an invitation for a Papal visit to Northern Ireland, but also on the part of the Pope himself.

I have been made aware, that should there be a visit from the Pope to Northern Ireland it will face the vent of Protestant opposition and therefore I believe that it would be detrimental to community relations and, on those grounds alone, I would urge the Pope of Rome not to come to Northern Ireland."

Former First Minister Ian Paisley on 12 October 1988 interrupted a speech being given to the European Parliament by then-Roman Catholic Pontiff Pope John-Paul II, by holding up a sign reading "Pope John-Paul II - Antichrist," and shouting, "I renounce you as the Antichrist!" Paisley was then ordered out of the proceedings.

+ *Ian McCrea*

U.S. Presidential appointment for School Safety Czar was thirteen-year leader of largest activist group in U.S. promoting homosexuality to children

U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama's Safe Schools Czar appointee Kevin Jennings was for thirteen years the leader of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), which is the largest homosexual advocacy group in the U.S., devoted entirely to promoting homosexuality to children. Under the guise of "safe schools," GLSEN promotes classroom activities that give biased portrayals of Christian and socially conservative viewpoints, and additionally works to turn students into lobbyists for its extreme left causes, including the suggestion that students ask for a "queer-friendly prom"

and to “launch a campaign to create a gender-neutral, all-genders or multi-gendered bathroom at their school.”

Jennings is also under fire for, when a school teacher, failing to report the statutory rape of a fifteen-year-old male student who confided to Jennings that an adult male had picked the student up in a bus station men’s room, then engaged in sexual activity with the student at the adult’s home. Jennings encouraged the student in the student’s continuing sexual relationship with the adult, and threatened to sue another teacher who called his failure to report the statutory rape “unethical.”

+ *Focus on the Family*

2009 Nobel Peace Prize award to U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama seen as affirmation of socialism and denial of God’s Law

Richard A. Viguerie of ConservativeHQ.com commented on 9 October 2009 concerning the award by the Norwegian Parliament of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize to U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama by stating:

“The announcement from the Nobel Peace Prize Committee says as much about the Norwegian voters and their parliament as it does President Obama. All involved should be embarrassed and ashamed for using this Prize to advance a radical, leftist agenda. It’s clear that the Marxist leaders in Europe know what most Americans don’t know – that the American president is a kindred spirit who they recognise as one of their own. Freedom-loving people should no longer respect or take seriously the Nobel Peace Prize Committee, as they have become an arm of the worldwide Marxist cause, evidenced by their previous selections of Yassar Arafat and Le Duc Tho and now Barack Obama. The award has been cheapened beyond repair and the Nobel Committee has insulted all who labour and sacrifice for true peace and freedom under God’s laws.”

+ *ConservativeHQ.com*

ABC News compares and contrasts evolutionary and creationist views of ‘Ardi’ fossil

An ABC News article dated 7 October 2009 by reporter Russell Goldman titled “Creationists Say Science and Bible Disprove ‘Ardi’ Fossil Is Evidence of Evolution: Discovery of 4.4 Million-Year-Old Fossil Does Not Shake Creationists’ Faith,” provides an objective contrast of the differing views of evolutionary

scientists and creationist scientists about the recent discovery in Ethiopia of the ‘Ardi’ fossil.

Goldman describes evolutionary scientists who are hailing the Ardi discovery as “being celebrated as the oldest found relative of modern human beings... named *Ardipithecus ramidus*, or “Ardi” for short, who made Ethiopia her home nearly 5 million years ago.”

Goldman then describes the vastly differing view of creationist scientists described as, “many...with advanced degrees in science, [which] are unimpressed by Ardi, who they believe is just another ape – an ape of indeterminate age, they add, and an ape who cannot be an ancestor of modern man for a range of reasons, including one of singular importance: God created man in one day, and evolution is a fallacy.”

Goldman quotes acclaimed anatomist and scientist David Menton as saying: “What creationists believe about human origins we get from the Bible. The creation of the world takes place on page one of the Bible. If you throw out the first page of the Bible you might as well throw out the whole thing. If you can’t live with the first page then pitch out the remaining thousand pages.”

+ *ABC News*

United Nations “Defamation of Religions” Resolution undermines Christians and religions other than Islam, says Open Doors USA President

Open Doors USA President and CEO Carl Moeller is warning that the Islam-inspired Defamation of Religions Resolution that may soon be before the United Nations (UN), is designed to undermine the religious liberty and personal safety of Christians and other faith groups worldwide.

Moeller explains: “Many Christians living in these countries are already severely impacted by restrictive laws -- especially those living under strict Sharia law,” says Moeller. “From the right to worship freely to the ability to share the gospel, the Defamation of Religions Resolution threatens to justify local laws that already marginalise Christians. As Americans, we have enjoyed a long tradition of religious liberty. The Defamation of Religions Resolution is a blow against religious freedom.”

The Defamation of Religions Resolution seeks to criminalise words or actions that are deemed to be against a particular religion, namely Islam. The Organization

of Islamic Conference, an inter-governmental organization of fifty-seven countries with majority or significant Muslim populations, has been the driving force behind this resolution, and is expected to introduce another such resolution to the UN General Assembly this fall.

+ *Religion News Service*

Somali Christian woman killed for refusing to wear a veil

Compass Direct report from October 27 informs about the murder of Amina Muse Ali, 45 years old Somali Christian, suspected by members of the militant Islamic group Suna Waljameca to be a Christian for not wearing a veil. Ali was shot dead by three masked members of Suna Waljameca in her home in Galkayo, Puntland region, Somalia on the evening of October 19. Ali has been an active member of the underground church in the Lower Juba region since 1997, as part of the Somali Christian Brothers’ Organization.

WEA Religious Liberty

Threats against pastors in Colombia

Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports about the brutal murder of Pastor Rafael Velasquez in the Colombian region of Córdoba. The assassination of Pastor Rafael is part of serial of threats against a number of Protestant pastors in the region, done by illegal armed groups operating in the area. Christian Solidarity Worldwide states that at least three pastors have been forcibly displaced with their families, after being told by the armed groups that they and their families would be killed if they did not leave the area.

WEA Religious Liberty

Persecution continues in Uzbekistan

Forum 18 News Service keep informing the world about continuous violations of religious freedom in Uzbekistan, which list the country among those with still repressive and not-democratic regimes of governance. Pavel Peichev, the head of Uzbekistan’s Baptist Union, together with two of his colleagues went on trial on 24 September accused of “teaching religion illegally to children at church-run summer camps and evading tax on profits from the camp.” The punishment for these charges is of up to three years’ imprisonment. Pavel Peichev and his colleagues deny all charges.

WEA Religious Liberty

“Sunday Best”

Why do we dress up for church services?

Jim Fluit

[Hamilton, Ontario, Canada]

I’ve thought about this question before. I’ve looked up Bible passages that could shed light on the issue, and I’ve discussed it in Bible study groups. There was always some debate, but I was confident about the answer. The reason we dress up on Sunday is to show honour and respect for God.

But here’s a confession. To be totally honest, I don’t think I’ve ever woken up on a Sunday morning, opened the closet, and asked myself, “How can I show honour and respect to God through what I wear to church today?”

Since I was a kid, I was taught to wear certain types of clothes for Sunday services. And I always dressed more or less as I was expected. Even now, what I wear to church is mostly shaped by my peer groups and what *they* wear. If every adult male in my congregation wore a suit to church, I would probably do the same. But if the guys never wore anything more formal than polo shirts and khakis, you can be sure that I *wouldn’t* show up in a suit.

I’ve always been content telling myself that I dress up for church to honour God, but the genuine attitude is never really there on Sunday mornings. So why *do* I dress up? “To show respect and honour for God” would be a great answer, but I can’t honestly say that is my motive. Of course, I can only speak for myself. But maybe you feel the same way.

It’s a terrible attitude, I know. But ... I think it can be a good starting-point. And I hope that our church communities will always welcome people with this kind of attitude. We need members who recognize that they *don’t* have the right attitude, and who want to change.

I think that a sincere desire to show respect to God would be a great motive for dressing up for church services. That kind of desire to honour God may be the motivation of the leaders in your congregation, and it may be the motivation of the guy sitting in the pew in front of you. But if it isn’t *your* motivation, then you’ll only be fooling yourself if you simply “follow suit”. It

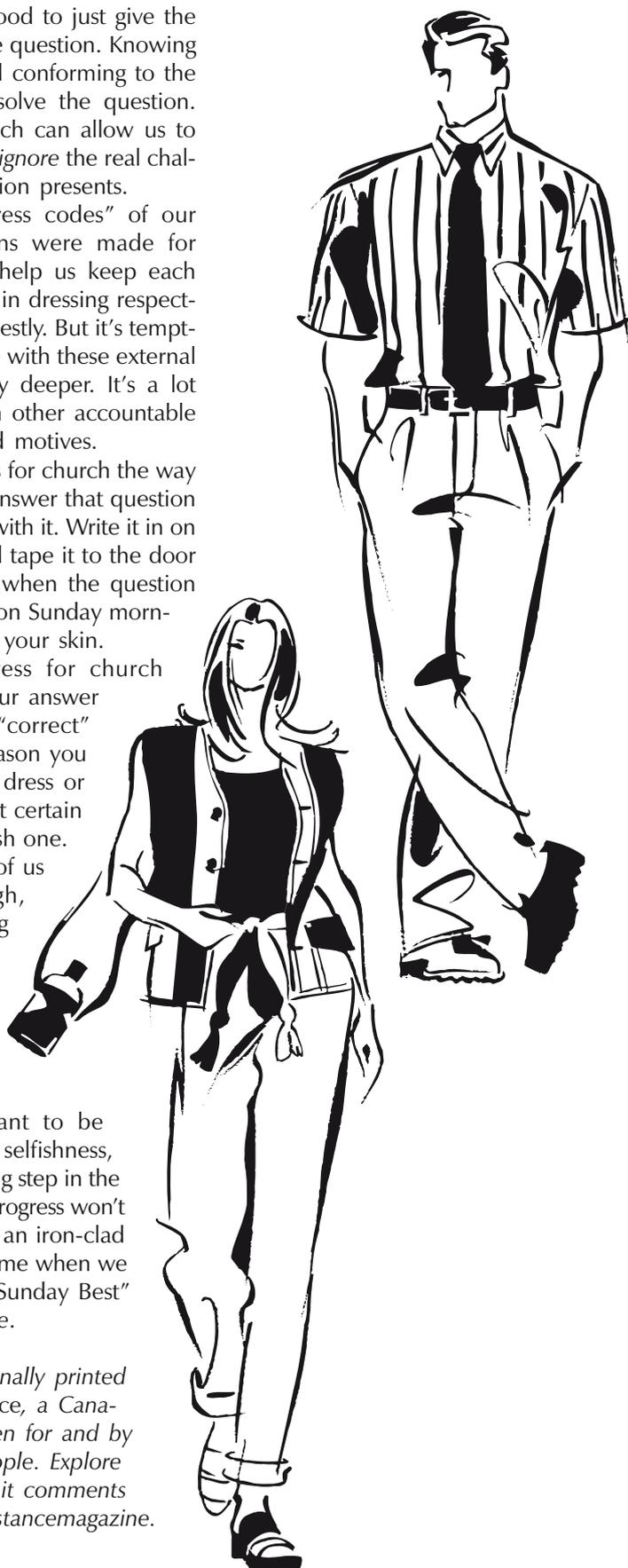
doesn’t do us any good to just give the correct answer to the question. Knowing the right answer and conforming to the status quo doesn’t solve the question. Actually, this approach can allow us to do the opposite – to *ignore* the real challenge that the question presents.

The informal “dress codes” of our church congregations were made for good reason. They help us keep each other accountable – in dressing respectfully, neatly and modestly. But it’s tempting to only fall in line with these external rules and to not pry deeper. It’s a lot harder to keep each other accountable for our attitudes and motives.

Why do you dress for church the way that you do? Don’t answer that question too quickly. Wrestle with it. Write it in on a piece of paper and tape it to the door of your closet. And when the question confronts you again on Sunday morning, let it get under your skin.

Why do you dress for church the way you do? Your answer might not be the “correct” answer. Your real reason you wear that cute new dress or style your hair in that certain way might be a selfish one. I’m sure that if any of us probe deep enough, we’ll find something dirty in our motives – maybe conceit, maybe apathy. But if we can make an honest, gritty self-assessment, and if we genuinely want to be cleaned up from our selfishness, then we’ve taken a big step in the right direction. This progress won’t come in the form of an iron-clad dress code. It will come when we recognise that our “Sunday Best” has to be an *attitude*.

This article was originally printed in Roadside Assistance, a Canadian magazine written for and by Reformed young people. Explore the website or submit comments at www.roadsideassistancemagazine.com



Sally Davey

The Christmas conundrum

Every December I end up asking myself the same question: Why do we do it? And yet I have never thought of a properly satisfying answer... Christmas is a problem yet to be solved.

It is a good thing to remember Christ's birth. Without the incarnation there would have been no salvation for us. Being Christians, we rejoice that He was born in this world to save us. Our problem, though, is that Christmas involves so many other things. We get busy beyond imagination – but with things that seem to have little to do with Christ. Some of them have some value; but every year I experience the same urge to reinvent the whole occasion and make it more honouring to God.

I am quite aware that some Christians have no time for Christmas, seeing it as an unnecessary addition to the Lord's day; and worse still, something that originated in the pagan Roman festival, Saturnalia. I'm somewhat sympathetic to this point of view; but I think it's better to find ways to redeem the occasion rather than abolish it. We live in a world that still vaguely remembers that Christmas

is associated with Christ, and therefore it's an opportunity to use. How can we build on it?

The Christmas rat-race

Let's begin with the difficulties. Part of the problem is that we live in the southern hemisphere. In the northern hemisphere it's winter, and Christmas presents itself as a cosy family-and-friends kind of time – a welcome break in the bleak midwinter. The school and work year is a third-way through, and so Christmas can just be Christmas by itself. There is a short winter holiday for a couple of weeks, then back you go to school or work. Down here, the problems of Christmas are compounded by the great complication of the end of the year and summer holidays. I'm sure you know what I mean. Businesses, offices and all other workplaces must have some kind of obligatory end of year function. Then there are all the other little "breakups" that every group, club, or activity you're involved with seems obliged to have. It's saddening (or maddening?) that we emulate the rat-race in the church with our breakups for everything. The pressure is added too if your children are at school. There are sports events, end of year exams, concerts, prize-givings and all manner of leavers' occasions. No wonder it's called the "silly season".

This exhausting rush of end of year functions is followed by the long summer holiday. When I was a child it seemed as though the whole nation went to sleep – we had what I used to call the "Great New Zealand Shutdown" until mid or even late January. With the advent of the free-market reforms of the mid-1980s we became a lot sharper, and more prepared to keep the wheels of business on the road. Firms re-opened much more quickly after New Year; and seldom did you have to wait for more than a week or so to get supplies for your home or business. That was a healthy sign. Life needs to go on, and seldom are huge long breaks from normal working life good for us. Shouldn't we also think about this in church life? We don't need to "wind up" every single church activity. Why do we close up the Bible study, saying "that was a great year – see you all again in two and a half months' time"? Because that is what it means if

we stop meeting in mid-November ("the school year is nearly over"); and don't start again until school goes back at the end of January. If we opted out of the rat-race for a minute, we might consider how important Bible study is, and ask ourselves whether quitting for nearly a quarter of the year is the best thing to do. We could also ask ourselves whether we really need to have a breakup or end of year barbecue – or dessert evening, or whatever – for every facet of church life. It gives the impression that the church itself shuts down for a couple of months of every year. The single, the lonely, the sad and discouraged still need us during those two months. Not all of us are happy, busy, family people!

Christmas cards

I love doing Christmas cards. To be honest, they are probably my favourite part of Christmas. It is so nice to make contact with all our far-flung friends and relatives; sending greetings in Christian love and filling them in on the blessings, trials and lessons of the past year. Sometimes, as we all experience, it's the one time in the year we get to make contact with some friends; and Christmas cards are a great tradition that actually gets us to do it. I also love the actual cards, carefully chosen and with handwritten notes inside – the your-hand-to-my-hand personal touch of them; and I still feel guilty about being too busy to hand-write my news to everyone. Nowadays we compose a Christmas letter that everyone gets. The Christmas rat-race has made the old card custom almost impossible to keep up.

But while those end-of-year letters that we write can be a convenient way to reach more friends, they can also be a source of discouragement to those who are struggling; whose year has not been a success like the one you yourself have written about. Here is the reaction of one young Christian husband, whose longing for children has sharpened his irony:

It's December, which means it's holiday letter time. I hate holiday letter time. You know the time of year – it's the time when successful Christian couples send you the glossy photo of themselves in the yuppie uniform of the year



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surrounded by a passel of lovely children... The letter tells you what you already know, which is, of course, that things are going Really Well. These letters follow a well-known pattern. There is the anecdote about the vacation, and how they came back feeling really refreshed. And then the paragraph about Hubby's promotion, and how he has been working really hard in between leading the praise team at church and sitting on such-and-such committee. Mom is working really hard home-schooling – maybe even harder than Dad! (But she has retained her sense of humour!) She's also having fun selling ----- (go ahead, fill the blank.....) on the side and making a little bit of extra money. Yay! The kids are excelling in sports and school. And then the conscience kicks in – and results in the paragraph about how we were praying about doing a short-term missions trip or adopting internationally, and then – Shazzam – God blessed us with another pregnancy! Yay again!...¹

We need to beware of the ways our careless crowing can open others' wounds. There is no sadder time than Christmas for people who feel the loss of those rosy, cosy family times the season is supposed to bring us. What, after all, is Christmas really about?

Those Christmas presents

We all dislike the commercial pressure that begins in October each year. "The spirit of Christmas" for retailers means nothing more than the hope that we will boost their sales. Christmas is their critical time. If they do not "make it" during the Christmas season, they probably never will. Those Christmas-week announcements of EFTPOS transactions seem designed to spur us to ever greater heights of gift-giving. Can we, will we, break last year's spending record??

Between you and me, I'd love to banish presents; but who ever wants to be first to stop giving them? It makes you look terribly mean, doesn't it? But besides the pleasure that accompanies giving people things – they do detract from the fact that at Christmas we remember Jesus' birth, not "the spirit of giving". I've always found it particularly worrying when people say "Christmas is for children"; by that meaning it's an occasion to lavish children with presents

and attention. One of the saddest sights I think I've ever seen on Christmas Day was a small child sitting gazing at an enormous pile of presents – all for him. He was being given the idea that Christmas is a time when you get lots of things.

Christmas dinner

I grew up in the era of "proper" Christmas dinners, when New Zealand was still trying to keep in step with wintry, hearty English fare. Consequently, as a family we had our Christmas dinner in the evening, when the temperature was cooler and we felt more capable of eating roast turkey, hot vegetables and steamed plum pudding. In recent decades we have all relaxed into barbecue-salad-and-cold desserts mode – which suits the antipodean December climate much better. But it's worth asking what we are doing any kind of special meal for, isn't it? We have to ask



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what we are celebrating and why we are together; both of which determine the kind of meal and the setting we create for it. I have to confess here that American and British glossy magazines, with their ideas for organising the perfect Christmas dinner, have me a bit awestruck. Those pictures of decorated tables and those wonderful recipes... But I've come to the conclusion that such Christmas perfection really isn't feasible in our situation. It may even be out of the question for Christians to do it appropriately. If we're putting our priority on including the lonely, worshipping God and having sanctified

conversation, elaborate festivities probably drop off the list. (I'll just have to save it for some other occasion!)

A re-created Christmas?

I know that most of the above is a list of negative observations about the problems Christmas involves for Christians in New Zealand today. And it would be singularly unhelpful to leave the subject there. I have no excuse for simply lamenting the difficulties this time of the year involves. So what do we do?

I realise that none of us are islands, as John Donne once famously remarked. We all belong to families, and we live in a social network that expects certain things of us. We can't suddenly abolish Christmas Day traditions and do something radically different without upsetting parents, great-aunts, grandparents and the like. They expect us to spend the day with them, and eat certain food, and so on. If they are unbelievers, we especially need to accommodate them, and look after them. But there are ways we can introduce discussion of Jesus' birth into the conversation. There are ways we can show them Christ's love in action, too. I'm thinking in particular of whom we include – along with Granddad and Auntie – in our day of festivity. Christmas is the time of year when anyone who is bereaved feels the loss of their loved one deeply. It's when divorced or separated people feel the sharp edges of splintered family life. It's when the lonely are doubly or triply lonely. We make so much of Christmas being a family time that those without family feel like hungry children locked out in the cold, watching through the window while others feast in a warm house. Surely we can do more to gather in the cold, the hungry, the lonely and the spiritually homeless. What was Jesus' attitude? "I did not come to be served but to serve, and to give my life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). And "when you give a feast," he told his disciples, "invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14:14). As Psalm 68:6 tells us, "God sets the solitary in families". Could it be your family or mine? And could Christmas be the time He uses to do it?

(Endnotes)

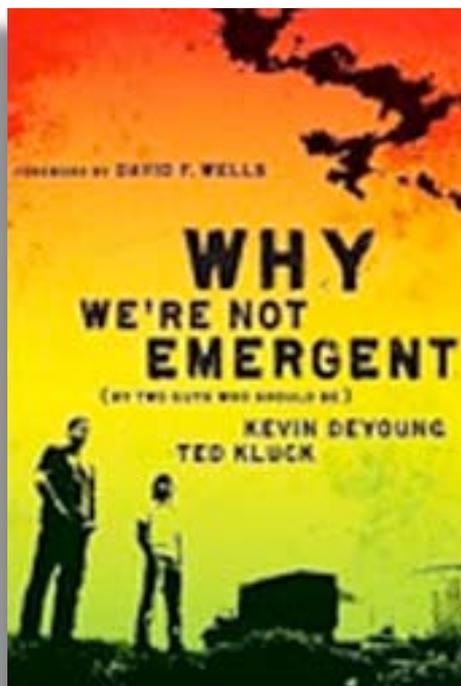
¹ Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2008), pp. 174-5

Why we are not emergent

Dale A. Van Dyke

Have you ever wished you knew more about the so-called emergent church? Maybe you were listening to a fellow believer rave about the latest emergent book and, though your inner theological warning light was blinking madly, you just didn't know how to enter the fray in a thoughtful, helpful way. So you smiled weakly and wished there was something you could read!

Well, your wish has come true. Put *Why We're Not Emergent (by Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Moody Publishers, 2008) on your reading list. The two guys are Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck. DeYoung, a good friend of mine and the pastor of University Reformed Church in Lansing, Michigan, tackles the theological issues with chapters on the knowability of God, the authority of Scripture, the importance of doctrine, modernism, and the real Jesus – one who brings peace, but also promises wrath. Kluck, a member of DeYoung's church and a sports writer by trade, writes with a "man in the street" style, interviewing various pastors, scholars, and friends, while thoughtfully questioning the underlying dogmas of the emergent crowd: dialogue, story, community, and hip pastors.



Strengths of the Book

The authors know what they are talking about! They understand the emergent church culturally. They "should be" emergent because they are young, come from conservative backgrounds, and are culturally savvy. DeYoung explains:

I grew up in the evangelical ghetto of conservative West Michigan. I should be joining many of my peers in decrying the evangelical "bubble" and its closed-minded, doctrinally rigid accounting of the Christian faith. After having my evangelical faith deconstructed by many of the faculty at the middle-of-the-road denominational college I attended, I should have tried to make peace with my conservative upbringing and the more liberal Christianity of my professors by veering off into the emergent world of mystery, journey, and uncertainty – the perfect porridge of not quite fundamentalist, not quite liberal. (p. 14)

They "get" what makes the emergent movement move, socially as well as theologically:

You might be an emergent Christian if you listen to U2, Moby and Johnny Cash's *Hurt* (sometimes in church), use sermon illustrations from *The Sopranos*, drink lattes in the afternoon and Guinness in the evenings, and always use a Mac; ... if you don't like George W. Bush or institutions or big business or capitalism or *Left Behind* Christianity;... if you want to be the church and not just go to church; if you long for a community that is relational, tribal, and primal like a river or a garden ... (pp. 20-21)

I have to confess that I don't get the emergent church. As a sheltered and hopelessly modern (that is, linear and rational) baby boomer, I find that dialogue, mystery, and paradox give me indigestion. I enjoy red meat and answers. I have never seen a single episode of *The Sopranos*, don't know who Moby is, have never tried a Guinness, and am stuck with a PC. I could easily just write off the thousands of people in my town who flock to listen to emergent rock star Rob Bell (at Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan) tell them we can't know what the Bible means. But I want to understand this movement because I

want to reach the *churched* culture here in Grand Rapids that is rapidly embracing its own demise.

DeYoung and Kluck understand the movement because they have done their homework. After reading many emergent books and articles, they know who's who and engage the leading authors accurately and pointedly. In the blizzard of all the outrageous things emergent writers say, they have honed in on the most significant and pervasive outrages and have exposed those errors clearly and biblically.

Indicting

This book is the most thorough and helpful response to the emergent church that I've seen, because it understands and then has the courage to clearly indict the emergent errors. Without being inflammatory, DeYoung and Kluck boldly call the emergents to account. For example:

Because of the emergent church's implied doctrine of God's unknowability, the word *mystery*, a perfectly good word in it's own right, has become downright annoying.... It's some combination of pious confusion and intellectual laziness to claim that living in mystery is at the heart of Christianity....

Mystery as an expression of our finitude is one thing. Mystery as a way of jettisoning responsibility for our beliefs is another. Mystery as radical unknowing of God and His revealed truth is not Christian, and it will not sustain the church. (pp. 37-39)

The central chapter of the book may well be chapter 5, "Doctrine: The Drama Is in the Dogma." DeYoung deals with the emergents' confusing of the core elements of the Christian faith. For instance, they refuse to draw theological/ethical lines in the sand. They detest confessional statements. Tony Jones, formerly the national coordinator of Emergent Village, is quoted as saying, "Statements of faith are about drawing borders, which means you have to load your weapons and place soldiers at those borders.... That is simply not the ministry of Jesus.... [Statements of faith are] a modernistic endeavor that I'm not the least bit in-

terested in." And when Jones was asked whether lesbian pastors were welcome in the emergent church, he answered, "We haven't yet found that there's anything that justifies us breaking fellowship with somebody else who loves and is trying to follow Jesus" (pp. 117-18).

Spencer Burke, in *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity* (with a forward by Brian McLaren), denies not only faith statements, but the necessity of faith itself: "Faith is many things, but it is not a requirement. It is faithfulness, the giving of oneself, trust in God, and belief that something greater than the material world exists for all of us.... In reality, nothing stands between us and God's grace" (p. 120).

DeYoung wisely applies Machen's insight – "When men talk thus about propagating Christianity without defending it, the thing that we are propagating is pretty sure not to be Christianity at all" (p. 107). He accurately notes:

This is maybe the biggest difference between emergent Christianity and historic evangelical Christianity. Being a Christian – for Burke, for McLaren, for Bell, for Jones, and for many others in the emerging conversation – is less about faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ as the only access to God the Father and the only atonement for sins before a wrathful God, and more about living the life that Jesus lived. (p. 120)

That is exactly right, and it is precisely why we need to understand and oppose this movement. The leading authors of the emergent church get the Bible wrong, the gospel wrong, Jesus wrong, and the Christian life wrong. Let's have the courage to mark these false prophets and the love to challenge professing believers who are in the movement! Emergent theology is sending people to hell. Are we willing to say that?

Weakness in the book?

There is very little not to like about this book or its authors. They write alternating chapters, with very different but complementary styles. However, while I enjoyed Kluck's chapters, I eagerly underlined and devoured DeYoung's – probably a sign of my addiction to propositional "meat." I found Kluck a bit less sustaining, but I did appreciate his insights and I'm sure his chapters make the book accessible to a younger, hipper, postmodern readership.

Summary

This would be a great book to study

with a young people's or college group. It addresses the issues they are facing in a relevant, clear, and engaging manner. Both writers have a great sense of humor and use it well, so that I found myself chuckling heartily as I was being taught.

This book would greatly benefit anyone concerned with the future of the American church. I don't believe the emergent movement is just a passing fad; it is too closely wed to the spirit of the age. Like their liberal forebearers,

these men are well on their way to gutting an already impoverished American evangelicalism. For the sake of Christ's glory and men's souls, we need to be ready to answer the heresies of our time and to express the hope that is in our hearts.

The author is pastor of Harvest OPC in Grand Rapids, Mich. Reprinted from New Horizons, with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Profession of Faith: It's going to be a very special and precious moment in the life and experience of our fellowship as Josiah Ploeg publicly professes his faith this morning before the Lord and us as his people. Josiah seeks to serve and glorify Jesus as Lord of his life. Praise God.

Family Prayer & Praise items: Last week Sunday, Tjeerd & Louise received the gift of new life with the birth of their daughter Saskia Ella-Marie, a sister for Katie. May God grant you grace and wisdom to nurture these covenant children He has entrusted to your care.

Announcements: Niuean Ekalesia celebrates 30th anniversary You are all warmly invited to celebrate this milestone by attending the worship service this afternoon, at 1 pm. Note: there will be refreshments available in the basement lounge for those who intend to stay for the Niuean service.

Christchurch

Notes from Session Meeting. At 9.15 pm, our counsellor, Rev R van Wichen joined us as we discussed Andre Scheepers. We will attempt to meet with Andre and his wife in November and have him preach on 25th of November if possible. There was also discussion on Rev K Davis and

Rev H Thole, and what session's next move would be regarding these men. We will seek to have a conference call with Rev K Davis, and send Rev H Thole a questionnaire.

Dovedale

Pastoral Notes. We extend our deepest Christian sympathies to Sr. Corrie and the Vannoort family with the passing into glory of our brother, Henry Vannoort. Even though his death was expected we acknowledge the loss of a much loved husband, father, Opa, and brother in Christ. Even as we were able to gather with the family on Friday and commit our brother's body to the ground and his soul to the care of His Saviour, we give thanks to the Lord for the end of earthly suffering and the beginning of heavenly glory. It is an added joy that we will be able to sing hymn 469 as our doxology this morning and look forward, ourselves, to gathering with that uncountable host beside the sea of crystal.

Pastoral Notes. Late on Thursday evening, the long struggle with illness of our Sister, Helen van der Meulen, ended as she passed from this life into glory. She died with her family beside her, having spent conscious time with her parents and sisters that day also. We give thanks to God for not prolonging her suffering, and we extend our deepest Christian sympathies to Br. Raymond and the van der Meulen family as they now grieve the loss of a dearly loved wife and mother. May you be greatly comforted in knowing that "precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints (Psalm 116:15)." On Tuesday, God willing, we will have the opportunity to join with

the family as her body is laid to rest at Avonhead Park cemetery at 11am, and to celebrate the hope of the resurrection in a Thanksgiving service at Cornwall St at 2pm. As we did last week, though, we will also sing hymn 469 as our doxology this morning and be reminded that Sr. Helen has joined that uncountable host beside the sea of crystal who live now in the presence of "God Almighty ... and the Lamb victorious."

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. It is a joy, too, to witness the baptism of Willem Johannes Stefanus Steenkamp Jnr. We rejoice with Willem and Hayley that they are able to present their son for baptism today and we commend them as parents as they bring up this little one in the fear of the Lord. We warmly welcome family and friends who have come for the baptism. We need to show our love to Hayley this morning by avoiding physical contact with her. This is of the utmost importance as Hayley is about to receive a bone marrow transplant as part of her treatment for leukaemia and she needs to stay absolutely free of infection. The Steenkamp family, together with Hayley's mother, Shirley Curtis, travel to Christchurch today to prepare for Hayley's admission to hospital on Tuesday. It is likely the family will be away for two to five months depending on complications or lack thereof. We are thankful that Willem has been able to secure a temporary transfer of employment for the stay in Christchurch. We do pray that the Great Physician will bless the treatment and sustain you all during this time.

Our hearty congratulations to Tony and Jean Tromop who on Friday celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. May the Lord bless and keep you both in time to come. Welcome to family members who have come to join in the celebrations.

Session Notes. It was agreed to invite Vicar Andre Scheepers to visit Dunedin on 18 October. Other calling prospects were also discussed.

Pastoral Notes. Our hearty congratulations to Joshua and Susan Duthie on the birth last Sunday of a daughter, Holly. Mother and baby are both well, thanks be to God. A few weeks premature, and weighing in at 4lb 7oz, Holly is spending her first days in an incubator to keep warm. Congratulations also to Bruce and Maureen Duthie, proud grandparents both.

Hamilton

Wedding bans – James Button and Zani van der Merwe have signified their desire to be united in marriage in this church on Saturday 31 October 2009, DV. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on that date.

Hastings

Practical Evangelism. We often find it difficult to know how to start a conversation about our Lord. The two-ways-to-live gospel presentation (which approximately 30 people in our congregation have studied) provides a flexible framework within which to present a Christian view of the world; past, present and future. Often, the main difficulty with study courses is making the change from theory to practice. Street evangelism provides an opportunity both to actively proclaim the truth of God's word and to gain confidence in "always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15). Pastor Waldron intends to make himself available over the next couple of months to take people out on the streets of Hastings to proclaim the gospel. Whether or not you have taken the two-ways-to-live course you are most welcome to come out on Saturday mornings with us. We meet at Pastor Waldron's office at 10:30a.m., pray together and then go into town for 1-1.5 hours. If you would like to come, please contact Pastor Waldron by Friday evening to confirm your place. We have found that this work is much less effective if the group is too large, or if it is raining.

Hukanui

65th Wedding Anniversary! It is with gratitude to our Lord that Mr Maurice Thomas and Mrs June Thomas are hoping to celebrate their 65th Wedding Anniversary on Wednesday 30th September 2009 D.V. All praise and honour to Him who has sustained them and kept them close to Him.

What to Do with Those Shoeboxes. Thanks to everyone who has taken an Operation Christmas Child shoebox home so far. Instructions are on the leaflet in your box: briefly, please fill the box with gifts, put a donation to help with shipping on top of the contents, and bring the box back to church by next Sunday. Boxes can also be collected or dropped off at Manna Christian Store on Bryce St. The boxes will be sent to Christian organisations to distribute to

needy children (NZ boxes mostly go to Pacific islands). Each box blesses a child and his family, and opens doors for Christians to serve the community in other ways.

Notices. Calling of Andre Scheepers. The session has agreed to put Andre Scheepers to the congregation for a vote to call him to serve in Hukanui as our minister. This vote will take place after the morning worship service on the 1st of November. As a single nomination is put forward a 66% vote would be required to pass this vote. Proxy votes are allowed which should be passed on to an elder before this date in a signed envelope. If you have any questions please speak to one of the elders.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: We thank the Lord for the healthy birth of another covenant child. Levi Robert Martin was born last Sunday to Chris and Sunny. They have come home and Sunny is recuperating there following a difficult birth. May God strengthen her in her recuperation.

Pastoral Notes: The Session has appointed a committee to develop the possibility of our congregation working with released prisoners in a program called Target Community run by Prison Fellowship. The committee wants to direct your attention to an article in the September issue of Faith in Focus by Walter Walraven. It relates the opportunities that are presented to us to follow the Lord's command to care for those imprisoned (Mt. 25:43-45).

North Shore

We are pleased to post Wedding Bans with regard to the forthcoming wedding of Naomi Milne & Frans Steenkamp. It was a joy for Session some time ago to concur with this request and failing any lawful objections Frans & Naomi will be married in this Church on Saturday, 24th October, at 3pm (DV). May the Lord bless you richly in the years ahead.

Have you ever had a friend come to you with a problem? or even someone who you might meet casually, and you are not quite sure what advice or help to give them? Then come and hear Peter Reynolds give a seminar on practical ways on how to listen, speak and to encourage one another. Here at Church on Saturday 7th November. Any queries see Don or Hannah Bredemeijer.

Palmerston North

Reformation Day Evening will be on October 30! (Lord Willing). The Reformation Day Committee would like you all to learn more about heroes and heroines of the faith during the time of the Protestant Reformation. We invite families and/or individuals to study up on a particular other family/individual of the Reformation. Then late in October we aim to gather together for a shared meal, dress up as those we

have been studying, and share some of the key facts and conspicuous stories of these heroes. Let us be encouraged and spurred on in Christ's service by the "great cloud of witnesses surrounding us" Suggestions of REFORMERS to study:

John Calvin: 1509-1564. Married Idelette D'Bures (a widow with several children).

Martin Luther: 1483-1546. Married Kath-

erina deBora (also called Catherine). 6 children and brought up 4 orphans.

John Knox: 1505-1572. Married Margaret. A great Scottish writer and reformer.

William I of Orange: 1533-1584. Married 4 times (Charlotte De Bourbon, Louise deColigny) Leader of the Dutch revolt against Spain. Allied with the Huguenots.

Gaspard deColigny: 1519-1572. Twice a

Nelsons' new minister

The Rev Daniel Wilson was ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Nelson on October 31, 2009. The Rev Andre Holtslag was the counsellor for Nelson and led the worship service.

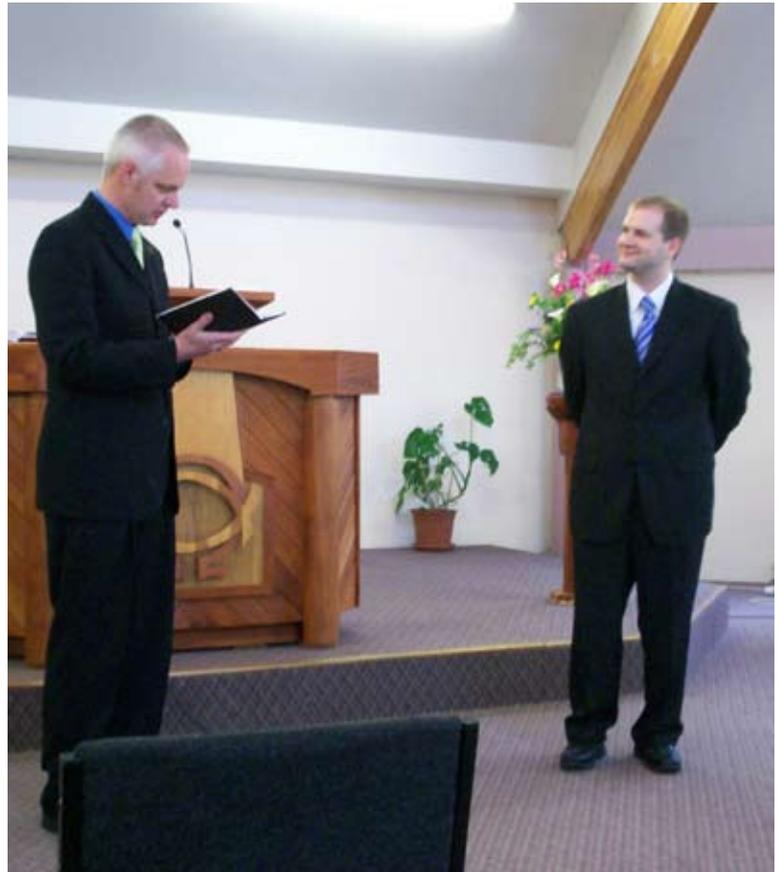
It was a joyous occasion for all present, especially the Nelson congregation. Present were delegates from the Reformed Churches of Hastings, Silverstream and Dovedale, and many letters were sent by the churches expressing their well wishes. Also present were Mrs Raewyn Wilsons parents from the Reformed Church of Hastings.

There was a time for further fellowship over lunch. (Ed.)

Right: The Rev Andre Holtslag and the Mr Daniel Wilson, during the reading of the form for ordination

Below left: The Nelson Session together with their new minister the Rev Daniel Wilson (third from left) and the Rev Andre Holtslag.

Below right: The Rev Daniel Wilson and Mrs Raewyn Wilson with their two sons.



widower (Charlotte deLaval – 3 children, then Jacqueline deMontbel – 1 daughter) Huguenot leader.

Charlotte De Bourbon: from a Catholic family, sent to a convent at age 13, taught doctrines of the reformation to the other nuns, eventually married William I of Orange.

John Wycliffe: 1324-1384. Reformer and translator. Called the "Morning Star of the Reformation". Married Anne Rokeby, they had 2 children.

William Tyndale: 1494-1536. Bible translator, Martyr.

Queen Jeanne d'Albret: 1528-1572. Married Antoine deBourbon, 5 children including Henry IV of France. Eased protestant persecution. Huguenot supporter.

Lady Jane Grey: 1536-1554. Protestant cousin of King Edward VI. Queen for 9 days. Beheaded for "Treason" by order of her Catholic cousin "Bloody Mary".

Sir Walter Raleigh: 1552-1618. Married Elizabeth Throckmorton. Persecuted under Queen Mary I, mostly favoured by Queen Elizabeth I, executed under King James.

Oliver Cromwell: 1599-1658. Married Elizabeth Bourchier, had 9 children. Was a Member of Parliament, was a soldier, became Lord Protector of England.

Samuel Marsden: 1765-1838. Preached the first Christian sermon in New Zealand, December 25 1814. Also introduced wine-growing to New Zealand.

Abraham Kuyper: 1837-1920. Home-schooled, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, influential in the formation of the Reformed Church out of the Dutch Reformed.

And others ... (have a look for example, in Foxe's Book of Martyrs for more).

Jordan van der Wel & Paula Dykstra along with their families warmly invite the congregation to witness their marriage at 2pm this coming Saturday on the 17th of October at the Reformed Church of Palmerston North DV. Please join us for afternoon tea following the wedding ceremony.

Announcements. On Sunday 15th November, DV Sarah de Jonge, Maria Minnee and Lydia Koolaard will be professing their faith during the morning worship service.

Wainuiomata

Wedding Banns. David Durant and Azaria Vlaanderen have signified their

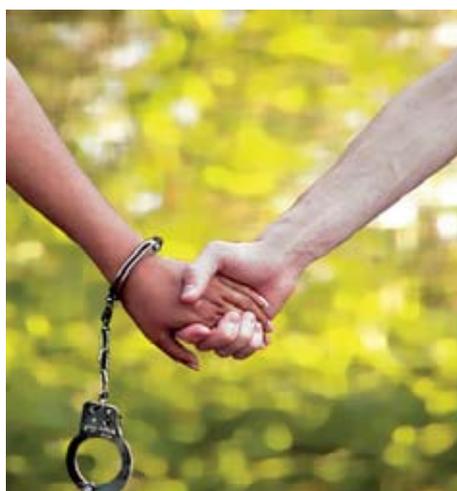
desire to be united in marriage in this church on October 31, 2009. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place on that date.

Wellington

Grace@Wellington Women's Conference. All ladies of the church have been invited to attend a seminar on 'Remember the Stranger' at Thistle Community Hall on Saturday 7 November commencing

at 9am. The theme is sharing with God's people who are in need and how to practice hospitality. Jackie has more details and personal invitations, so please see her if you are interested.

From the Pastor. Congratulations to Nic & Elisa Vorster, on the safe arrival of a son – Nicolaas Thomas Vorster on Monday morning. We rejoice with you in the gift of new life!



CBI NEW ZEALAND – SEPTEMBER 2009

While I was putting this newsletter together I received the following email from a Chaplain:

"I have just had an inquiry from a Corrections Officer if he could enrol in the Crossroad Correspondence Course. Is he able to do the Course with you?"

Our response: "Yes, we welcome him to take the Course."

This was so encouraging to hear as it meant that this Officer was witnessing first hand how the CBI studies were changing the hearts of one or more prisoners. The power of the Lord at work! This Officer is now enrolled and is doing the studies.

I am also very thankful to the Lord that CBI NZ is now able to receive NIV Bibles free from the Bible Society. This is a considerable saving to us as in the last three months alone over 70 students have enrolled.

In August I travelled to Palmerston North, Wanganui and New Plymouth. I thank the Lord for strength, guidance and safety that during those five days I was able to lead eight meetings.

It is always a joy to meet with Instructors and hear them share their en-

thusiasm for the CBI ministry. It is very encouraging to see their dedication and efforts to help and guide the students in the study of God's Word.

We watched the DVD of Karla Faye Tucker, a woman in the USA who was converted while on death row. She was on death row for 15 years and died in February 1998 by lethal injection. I am in the process of providing this DVD to the Chaplains in each of the prisons hoping they may use it in the form of a Bible Study, as Karla touches on issues of anger, past abuse, forgiveness and how to live your faith behind the walls. So far I have received very positive responses from the Chaplains who have seen it.

As well as meeting with Instructors I was also especially thankful for the opportunity to meet with the Chaplain at New Plymouth Prison. I had never been there before and there are no CBI students there. I pray the Lord may bless the visit and I look forward to seeing the Lord at work there.

It was an encouragement and blessing to see the enthusiasm for the CBI material expressed by the Chaplains at Manawatu. As I arrived there for my meeting I was surprised to see fire engines in the car park, responding to a fire alarm and I wondered if our meeting would take place at all, as the whole prison was on lockdown. I was finally taken through with a group of Christians who were there for the Sycamore Tree Program. As we were walking through with keys and doors clanging loudly the 'bigger picture' of the Lord at work in the prisons struck me. No matter what the circumstances, God is using so many people in different capacities and each with their own gifts to reach out to the last, the least and the lost in prison. If the Lord cares so deeply for many in prison who are mostly forgotten by us how can we do any less? I thanked the Lord for His amazing grace for all of us.

In Wanganui it was a pleasure not only to meet and speak with people

about the CBI ministry, but then also a few days later to train some of these people as Instructors. Thank you for your keen interest and willingness to serve the Lord in this ministry.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those people who graciously offered us accommodation, meals and their homes to conduct meetings during this trip. I appreciate your support and very much enjoyed your fellowship.

It was also wonderful to meet with Steve, the Regional Manager of PARS, in Wanganui and receive some insights into his work with prisoners and supporting them after their release.

I now begin to organise my trip for Hamilton/Auckland and look forward to meeting you all there.

I would also like to thank the many people who have supported this ministry with their donations either directly or through special collections at church. You are part of the team of bringing God's Word to prisoners.

We now have sufficient funding to look at airing the CBI FM programs on a community radio station in the South Island. Just a reminder to you all the CBI FM programs are currently broadcast on Radio Kidnappers every second Thursday at 5 pm and repeated on Sunday evenings at 10 pm.

Many of you have shared how much you enjoy reading the feedback from the students doing the studies. May you be encouraged by the following responses.

"Dear CBI. My name is ... In October 2008 I signed up to your CBI Correspondence Course. I am ashamed to say I turned my back on your generous help and went back to my old ways of drugs, alcohol and adultery. I am back in prison for violent offences. I feel like I have gone backwards in life. Guilt, shame and fear burn inside me, guilt for hurting an innocent person, shame for my actions and fear for my future. I am currently remanded in custody waiting upon my sentence. I wish to keep in contact. Please forgive me for my selfish ways. Thank you for your time. God bless."

"At the end of a mediocre life highlighted with some spectacular failures (both personal and business) I was well and truly brought to my knees with my arrest. The reality of prison and a life behind bars was a disaster of epic proportions. I believed I would die in prison (not of natural causes). I found myself at the very end of self and was terrified. I opted

for one last selfish act and pleaded with God to save me from this bleak future. I confessed my sins and repented. When being sentenced I was due another blow. Preparing myself for a seven year sentence God had one more blow to bring about my full submission. I received 12 years to the shock of both prosecution and defence. It took a revelation from God to bring me to understand His plan for me. My initial selfish act and plea for rescue turned into the wonderful job/ministry He has given me."

"Dear CBI. This course (GTB) has been very rewarding and I would like to thank you guys and gals at CBI for devoting some of your time to reach out to us in prison. The Lord is doing such a marvelous job through you. May He continue working with you in helping to reach out to others with His divine love for us! God is truly amazing. Amen."

"To Crossroads. By the time you receive this lesson I will be released from prison. You have my outside address so I'll be looking forward to my next lesson. Praise and thanks to you all. I just pray that everything falls into place on my release from jail. I pray my children forgive me for being selfish and all those people I have hurt. God bless you all."

"I was on drugs, alcohol, adultery etc . . . and I beat up my lovely wife and I end up in prison for eight years. When I came here I got the Bible and started reading and praying asking God to help me understand what I was reading. I wanted Him to help me and my family. After two months in prison I received a letter from my wife saying it is all over, finished. The following week I applied for the CBI Course and started studying His Word. I kept praying for my family. In nine months I had not heard from my wife and son. I kept praying and asking God for His help. I asked CBI to pray for me and my family. Today I received a letter from my wife and son. I see how awesome of God. I believe God sent me to prison to change my life. I trust Him for everything. I thank God for His Spirit helping me. I keep praying and trusting having faith that I can come together with my family. Thank you."

"I always blamed everyone and everything else for my misfortunes. But now after reading and studying the Word I know it was myself doing deceitful and wrong things to other people. Understanding this

has made me a stronger person."

"I would like to say may God bless all the people who help with these Courses and the people that write the hand written letters. When I received a hand written letter it brought tears to my eyes knowing that someone went out of their way to personally write a letter to me. Thank you. May God bless you all."

"Coming to prison was a bitter cup to drink from. However never even close to the Lord's cup He had to drink from. I was always working and couldn't stop drinking. I was always away from my children for which I was angry with myself and felt guilty about. However God was protecting them because He knew that if I ever hurt them, it would be too much for me to bear. Although I have lost them now. I haven't because I've let them go and given them back to their rightful Father God. If He sees fit to bless me in the future then He may return them to me. But I trust in His judgement for their betterment."

In trying to explain to someone who doesn't understand why you are studying the Bible and asks 'What's so special about the Bible?' How would you respond?

"If they asked that I would say, hold your breath until you die. They would try to hold their breath but their body would force them to breathe again. It's almost impossible to hold your breath until you die. God loves us so much He won't let that happen. Well my life was like holding my breath. Then I turned to God and it was like breathing properly – knowing the truth is like that wonderful feeling of breathing again, life. The truth will set you free."

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

If you would like further information about CBI ministry you can contact us on CBI.NZ@clear.net.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, P.O. Box 11005 HASTINGS 4158.

A pew sitter's perspective

of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) – Christchurch 2009

An 'ICRC' skeptic

In 2008 we received notification that Christchurch would be a suitable venue for the ICRC. I personally, was unaware of what was the purpose for such an event. Nevertheless, we were encouraged that we could have an opportunity to host many delegates from various countries and denominations.

October 2009 came around very quickly, and with a small committee formed from the Christchurch Presbytery the conference was wonderfully organised and raring to go.

Having an amount of skepticism about the purpose of the conference, I hesitantly attended the opening Prayer service. Rev Goris lead the Prayer service and Rev van Garderen preached a sterling message from **Matthew 5:4 'Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted'**. We sang various Psalms and Hymns and prayed the Lord's Prayer in our own language and version, which was a unique individual experience in itself.

Skepticism waning

Having attended the Prayer service,

He made Himself nothing!

As Servant He came
who is Master of all
in weak human frame
reversing the Fall

What glory was hid
what wisdom revealed
when asleep in the manger
when aslain on the cross
earth's owner a stranger
what gain by His loss!

He made Himself nothing
that we might be all
He ever intended
despite our great fall.

John Goris
Wellington, December 2006
Philippians 2:6-8

and being able to engage in conversation over a cupper with the delegates, my skepticism started to wane. I felt tremendous encouragement from them as their passion and love for the Lord was very evident.

The next four evenings I was able to attend all of the sessions and also some of the morning sessions. The theme for the conference was the 'The Vitality of the Reformed Faith' particularly dealing with the challenge of the Charismatic Movement, Individualism in Church Life, Islam and the challenges facing an Asian context. The presentations were of rich content and gave helpful insights to facing these challenges.

Further to the presentations, many of the delegates were able to spend time on the Saturday with families from the Christchurch churches on various outings. We personally had the privilege with another family from Bishopdale Reformed Church to take a group of five delegates to the beautiful Southern Alps via Arthurs Pass. What a delight it was for these delegates and us to see God's wonderful creation that we can 'show off' here in New Zealand. During this outing we were able to take them on a short tramp, and from a safe distance we experienced an avalanche from beginning to end. As one delegate expressed "the sound was like thunder!" We stood in awe of our Lord's wonderful handiwork, and looked forward to preparing ourselves for the day of worship that was nearly upon us.

On Sunday the delegates were distributed to the three Christchurch Churches for worship. After the morning worship service, it was again our delight to take various delegates out for lunch and fellowship at different congregational members' homes. Many from the various churches were involved, as we desired to show them good kiwi hospitality and retrieve the benefits of mingling with our unique guests. Following on from a great time of fellowship and up-building we returned for the evening worship service.

Skepticism diminished

By Monday evening my skepticism had diminished nearly completely for the reason for such a conference as this. I

was seeing in particular, smaller churches being encouraged and blessed by the up-building of other likeminded believers.

There were many encouraging instances, but for me, the question time after the specific papers had been presented in the evening and the discussion groups during the morning sessions (of not all I attended) was always a time of deep thought and discussion over these current issues.

However, the striking observation from my perspective was that the different denominations were not clones. There were some differences arising through general discussion, yet these differences were not about the most crucial part of our faith and doctrine, that being the Gospel – Christ crucified, risen and reigning today and Him being our only way for salvation, for the Glory of God. But these differences were on lesser issues, such as clarification of view points or styles of worship or edification in worship. This warmed my heart as the delegates were certain on the fundamentals, yet most of the delegates were willing to discuss and dialogue their differences, which showed great patience and humility from all who were present.

These words rung continually in my mind as the conference was in progress *'There is no such thing as true unity without diversity; hence, unity is essentially different from uniformity. A human body consists of many different members, whose differences do not contradict the essential unity of the body. Note that the body is Christ himself – He is the Head of the church and the church is the body of Christ.'* (Dr. N D Kloosterman)

Where to from here for ICRC delegates

It would be my prayer that the delegates report back to their individual denominations and churches that their time in New Zealand was one of great encouragement. Firstly from our hospitality and kindness, but more importantly that it was challenging. May they take into their various denominations and congregations a spirit of revival and passion for the true Gospel and bring it across with an urgent sense of 'Vitality'. May we not be bogged down with the

minor diversities that were apparent at the conference and in our own churches, but may we rejoice in the unity we share and get on with the Gospel work, to the Glory of God.

As we remember these words from Romans 12 *'Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in*

zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.'

May we also all be encouraged and enriched with these words. Thank you ICRC delegates for visiting Christchurch, New Zealand and may the Lord bless your work.

By Graeme Zuidema – Member of Bishopdale Reformed Church.

Press release

Christchurch meeting of the ICRC – by Mr. Mark Bube and Rev Dr J Visscher

The Seventh meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) was held in Christchurch, New Zealand, from October 15 to 22, 2009. A prayer service held at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale preceded the official meeting. This service was under the leadership of the Rev. John Goris. The Rev. Dirk van Garderen delivered a fitting sermon on the second beatitude (Matthew 5:4). Several brothers from different parts of the world thanked the Lord for the preparations, the upcoming sessions and the results of the gathering.

The Conference was held during the day at the Holiday Inn in the center of the city and in the evening at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. This church is one of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand and the denomination and its members in the Christchurch area took exemplary care of the needs of the delegates. Their keen organizational skills, their appetising meals and their warm hospitality will long be remembered with fondness.

The Conference opened with words of greeting from the host denomination, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Upon the recommendation of the Interim Committee, the Executive was appointed. It was composed of the Rev. Bruce Hoyt (RCNZ) as Chairman, the Rev. Richard Holst (EPCEW) as Vice-chairman, the Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen (CanRC) as Corresponding Secretary, the Rev. Dr Peter Naylor (EPCEW) as Recording Secretary and Mr. Henk Berends (CanRC) as Treasurer. The Rev. Bort de Graaf (CRCN), the retiring Chairman, was thanked for his services to the Conference over the past four years.

Member Churches

When the Conference opened it consisted of the following members:

- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, North America (ARPC)
- Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis di Indonesia NTT) (CRCI)
- Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)
- Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) (CRCN)
- Confessing Reformed Church in Congo (Église Réformée Confessant au Congo) (CRCC)
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW)
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPCI)
- Free Church of Scotland (FCS)
- Free Church in Southern Africa (FCSA)
- Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)
- Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerken in Suid Afrika) (FRCSA)
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA (OPC)
- Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)
- Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) (PCKK)
- Presbyterian Free Church of India (PFCI)
- Reformed Churches in Indonesia NTT (Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia NTT) (RCI)
- Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) (RCN)

- Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)
- Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA)
- Reformed Churches of Spain (Iglesias Reformadas de Espana) (RCS)
- Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCIre)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (RPCNEI)
- United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

New Member Churches

During the Conference the following churches were received as new members:

- Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCSC)
- Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK)
- Heritage Reformed Congregations, USA (HRC)
- Reformed Churches of Brazil (Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil) (RCB)
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCInd)

Papers

The theme of the Conference was "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith." This theme was explored by means of four papers. Each paper was delivered in the evening at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale so that the members of the local churches could also be present. Discussion followed and the next day it continued at the Holiday Inn in a number of workshops and a plenary session.



The new executive composed of the Rev. Bruce Hoyt (RCNZ), the Rev. Richard Holst (EPCEW), the Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen (CanRC), the Rev. Dr Peter Naylor (EPCEW) and Mr. Henk Berends (CanRC).

The first paper was delivered by Dr George W. Knight III (OPC) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of the Charismatic Movement." Dr Knight began by analysing four episodes in the book of Acts (Acts 2:1-41; 8:4-25; 10:1-11:18; 19:1-7) related to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He went on to deal with the filling and fulfilment of the Spirit, paying special attention to the gifts of prophecy, signs and wonders, speaking in tongues and healing. He also made some suggestions about how to interact with those deemed to be "charismatics".

The second paper was delivered by Dr Nelson D. Kloosterman (URCNA) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of Individualism in Church Life." Dr Kloosterman first described the nature of the challenge that individualism poses for the church and the Christian faith. He then moved on to a diagnosis of the matter, identifying a number of causes relating to 1) a loss of transcendence, 2) evangelicalism and 3) the psychologising of the self. Finally, he outlined a response to the problem that related to the church's worship and confession.

The third paper was delivered by the Rev. Frank van Dalen (ARPC) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge from Islam." The Rev. Van Dalen gave an update on the work that the ARPC is doing in Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. He spoke about Muslim distinctives and also gave numerous suggestions as to how to reach Muslims with the Gospel.

The fourth paper was delivered by Dr Mohan Chacko (RPCInd) and had as title: "The Vitality of the Reformed Faith: Facing the Challenge of the Asian Context." Dr Chacko opened his address by identifying three challenges facing the churches in the Asian-Pacific region: the charismatic movement, individualism, and Islam. He then proceeded to delineate four paradigms in relation to the charismatic movement. This in turn was followed by an examination of individualism. It was concluded by a number of observations on Asian missions.

Introductions

A number of churches applied for membership in the ICRC. They introduced themselves during the meeting. Other churches sent observers or visitors to the Conference, several of which introduced themselves or updated the meeting on current work, including: the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand and the Reformed Church in Japan.

Missions

The missionary mandate of the church has had the attention of the member churches of the ICRC since its inception. The 2009 meeting was no different.

The Mission Committee presented its report and it highlighted the fact that regional mission conferences are growing in number. These conferences were held in Europe (2007 and 2008), Africa (2008), and Asia-Pacific (2008). A newsletter has been published on a more or less regular basis. Contact was also made with the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) and more contact will be pursued.

Furthermore, it was decided to arrange a meeting of representatives of the mission sending agencies of the ICRC member churches to exchange information and explore ways for possible multilateral co-operation. Information (names, qualifications, areas of expertise and contact details) will be compiled on short-term theological teachers in order that member churches may be made aware of existing resources and be able to make use of them. Protocols on how members may respond to major disasters and persecuted Christians were adopted.

Other significant actions

Since the Conference has been functioning for 25 years, it was decided to accept a proposal from one of the member churches to appoint a Committee to review all aspects of the Conference. A proposed amendment to the Constitution was also passed along to this Review Committee for its study and evaluation.

Budgetary matters

An income and expense statement was received and adopted. It showed that the Conference spent \$136,638.09 (USD) from 2006 to 2009. A four year budget for 2010-2013 in the amount of \$140,000.00 (USD), or \$35,000.00 (USD) per annum, was adopted.

Next meeting of the Conference

The next meeting is scheduled, the Lord willing, for September of 2013 in Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom, hosted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW). <http://www.toplady.org.uk/images/engraving%20small.jpg>



Attendees at the ICRC Conference