

faith in
focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 37/11 DECEMBER 2010



向甚麼樣的人，
我就作甚麼樣的人。

CHINA

All things to all
men ...

See the articles on pages 6-8

Contents

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel	3
All things to all men ... (1) Sacrificing our liberty for the sake of the Gospel	6
All things to all men ... (2) "Being relevant"	8
World in focus	11
Sing to the Lord "Why did you change that?"	13
Extract from URC Hymnal Report	14
Feminine focus The view from your room	15
Focus on home Gleanings	17
Bucklands Beach big day out	19
Letter to the editor	20
DVD in focus	21
The grateful Cantabrians	22

All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Ph/Fax: +64 4 527 4379
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.
Church and family notices are free, subject to sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$35.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography
Printed by: Flying Colours

Editorial

"Being all things to all men" is the theme for this last issue of 2010. The subject is an important one, because it directly relates to the advance of the Gospel. Paul the Apostle said "I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22b).

Mr Bruce Hoyt writes about "Sacrificing our liberty for the sake of the Gospel". Mr Andre Holtslag considers the subject of "Being relevant". This is an frank look at what some have done in their misguided quest to "win" souls for the Lord.

Our cover illustration is an application of the principles developed by our two lead articles. You will see from the boxed article on page 7 that George and Jessie Seville (parents of Edith Schaeffer) dressed the way they did on the cover photo in order to be "all things to all men" as missionaries in China in the early twentieth century.

For our Christmas mediation, Dr J V Fesko, a pastor in the OPCUSA writes about the well-known hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel".

Mrs Lois Hoyt reports on behalf of the Hymnal Committee of the RCNZ, which is followed by an Extract from the URC Hymnal Report to the 2010 Synod of the URCNA. I think you will find this quite interesting reading. Mrs Sally Davey writes about "The view from your room". This is a very interesting article about gardening, with stunning pictures from a recent trip to the UK. If you want to see the images in colour, you can do so by logging on to the RCNZ website in January 2011. Mrs Jean Mulholland reviews the DVD series "TULIP" by Dr John Piper on the Five Points of Calvinism. Finally, we have a meditation by Mr Andrew de Vries which was actually preached at a thanksgiving service in Christchurch after the September 4 earthquake.

I believe it has been a pretty successful 37th year for the magazine. Again, success in part must be attributed to our many contributors. Many thanks to all our writers (some of whom are ministers in the RCNZ), for taking the time to write articles according to a designated theme. Your labours have been appreciated. A special thanks to those overseas contributors.

Many thanks to the members of the National Publications Committee who ensure that the administration, finances and distribution of the magazine are taken care of.

Many thanks to our regular columnists, Mrs Sally Davey and Mr Andrew Reinders, who have diligently supplied copy each month. As was announced last issue, Mrs Harriet Haverland will be compiling the "Gleanings" column for 2011.

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

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

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

Photo credits :

Images: p8 Arnold C (Buchanan-Hermit): en.wikipedia.org.
p15&16 Mrs Sally Davey
p23&24 Mr John Holtslag

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.

O COME, O COME, Emmanuel

J V Fesko

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is one of the better-known hymns that is typically sung during the Christmas season. What some may not know is that it originated in the Middle Ages, around A.D. 800, as an antiphon, or anthem, that was restructured into verse form in the 1100s and was eventually published in Latin in 1710. The hymn was later discovered, translated, and published in 1851 by John Mason Neale, an Anglican minister.

As people sing this hymn, they know that they are singing about the birth of Christ. However, what is striking about this hymn is the way in which it unpacks the birth of Christ. It moves from the shadows of the Old Testament into the light of the New Testament with the revelation of God in Christ. This hymn traces the themes of Israel's exodus to the eschatological, or final, exodus that was to begin with the birth of the Messiah.

We can see this progressive unfolding of God's redemptive plan if we turn to the Old Testament and begin with Israel's exile in Babylon.

Mourning in lonely exile

In Israel's earliest days as a nation, God brought his people out of Egypt, made a covenant with them, and began to lead them to the land of promise – the land that he had sworn to give to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 15:18-21). Israel, of course, was a cantankerous nation and lacked the faith to enter the Promised Land, to believe in the gospel promise of God (Heb. 3:18-4:2). When Israel had finished her forty-year wandering and stood at the threshold of the Promised Land, it was undoubtedly a time of excitement and hope. The people of Israel were at last going to enter the land promised to their patriarch, Abraham, so long before.

On the eve of their entry into the land, however, Moses wrote an inspired

prophetic song. This song was filled with praises for their covenant Lord, but at the same time it foretold Israel's future disobedience and sin (Deut. 32:20-24). Israel did fulfill these words and was carried off into exile because of their sin, idolatry, and rebellion. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken away by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C., and the southern kingdom of Judah was taken away into captivity by the Babylonians in the sixth century B.C.

Over the centuries, millions of people have been displaced by war – exiled

Israel were exiled from the presence of God. Israel was carried into exile to Babylon, longing for the presence of God, longing for God to redeem them, to ransom them from their captivity. However, the faithful remnant did not desire merely to return to the land, but ultimately for God to dwell once again in their presence (Ps. 137:1-4). As Israel sat in exile by the waters of Babylon, there was still hope of redemption.

Many undoubtedly looked to the prophetic words of Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

“Israel's exile was unique, because Israel was the only nation on the face of the earth with whom God had made a covenant.”

from their home country. However, Israel's exile in Babylon was unique, because Israel was the only nation on the face of the earth with whom God had made a covenant. Just as God had put Adam, the first man and God's son (Luke 3:38), in the garden-temple of Eden, so he had given Israel, his firstborn son (Ex. 4:22), a fruitful land, one flowing with milk and honey, one that was also marked by God's very own presence. In the same way that God walked in the cool of the day with Adam in the beautiful garden-temple (Gen. 3:8), so too God walked with Israel in the Promised Land by his presence in the tabernacle (Lev. 26:11-12; 2 Sam. 7:6). Yet, like Adam before them, Israel sinned, which caused the prophet Hosea to cry out: "Like Adam they transgressed the covenant" (Hos. 6:7).

As punishment for their disobedience, like Adam before them, the people of

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). There was a coming child, one who would save Israel – the Lord's presence in the flesh. In this regard, we should note that the word *Immanuel* (also spelled *Emmanuel*) means "God with us."

Perhaps now we have a better idea of what lies behind the first two verses of our hymn:

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, O come, thou Lord of might,
who to thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Here the hymn recounts the faithful remnant in exile in Babylon, longing and looking for the birth of their Saviour. Our hymn couches this desire in terms of the biblical theme of the eschatological exodus, evident in the connections between Israel's exile in Babylon and the exodus from Egypt by reference to God's presence on Sinai.

The shoot of Jesse and the key of David

The prophet Isaiah, however, had much more to say about this coming Saviour. Many Old Testament saints knew that the coming Saviour would come from the line of David (2 Sam. 7:12-13). However, the nation was in ruin, and

I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Isa. 22:22).

Yet Eliakim only pointed forward to the greater servant, to the one who would possess the key of the house of David: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens'" (Rev. 3:7). The apostle John in the book of Revelation applies this Isaianic title to Jesus. It was Jesus, of course, the son of David, the son of God, who would come and rule Israel. The faithful Israelites undoubtedly longed and looked for the

great Persian king, had permitted Israel to return to the land and had instructed them to rebuild the temple (Isa. 45; Ezra 1). Israel left Babylon in an Exodus-like journey that brought them back to the land of their forefathers (Isa. 49, esp. vs. 10; cf. 42:16; 48:21; Ex. 13:21-22; 15:13).

Even though the temple was rebuilt, the faithful remnant knew that their return to the land was not the great divine visitation for which they longed, hoped, and prayed. In fact, when the temple was rebuilt, Israel wept, rather than rejoiced. The prophet Haggai laments: "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?" (Hag. 2:3). Yet the prophet also looked to the future: "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts" (2:9). So, then, Israel was still looking for a greater day, one that looked beyond this provisional return to the land. That day would come hundreds of years later.

On the heels of the birth of John the Baptist, John's father, Zechariah, prophesied of the Messiah who would soon appear (Luke 1:67-79). Zechariah likens the coming Messiah, the descendant of David, the one who would deliver Israel from her enemies, the one who would be righteous, the one who would bring forgiveness of sins and light to those who sat in darkness, to the sunrise, or dayspring, from on high (Luke 1:78 kjv). In other words, he likens the coming Messiah to the rising sun shining light upon the dark world (cf. John 1:1-5). It would be through the birth of the Saviour that God's people would be liberated from the powers of Satan, sin, and death.

Hence, we find the following in the fourth verse of our hymn:

*O come, thou Dayspring from on high,
and cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

The birth of Emmanuel, God with us

Emmanuel, God with us, did come to Israel. God fulfilled his promises that he had made long before, not just through the prophet Isaiah, but even as given to our very first parents, Adam and Eve. God promised them that the seed of

“When we contemplate the birth of Christ, we must not do so in terms of some sort of saccharine tale about an infant king born to bring the world some joy – to give some glimmer of hope in an otherwise gloomy place.”

the temple, God's dwelling place, was razed to a pile of rubble. It seemed as though David's line had been cut off. Once again Isaiah prophesied: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit" (Isa. 11:1). Here the prophet likens the Davidic dynasty to a stump – the great oak, if you will, of David's kingdom had been all but destroyed. Yet from this stump, this seemingly dead tree, a shoot would come forth – and this shoot would bear much fruit. Unlike Israel's wicked kings, even unlike King David, this king would be holy and righteous (11:2-5).

Elsewhere in Isaiah's prophecies, there was an oracle of judgment against Jerusalem and especially her king, who relied too much on other nations, rather than on the Lord. Isaiah prophesied that God would raise up an insignificant servant to care for the house of David, namely Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah: "And

birth of this one, the one who would hold the key of David.

This Isaianic connection lies behind the fifth verse of our hymn:

*O come, thou Key of David, come
and open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Notice once again the theme of the Exodus, as it is this descendant of David who will make safe the way that leads on high – the pilgrimage to the New Jerusalem, the fulfillment of the shadow of the Promised Land.

Dayspring from on high

After the days of Isaiah, though, hundreds of years passed, and little seemed to happen to address Israel's mourning. Yes, Israel returned from exile. Cyrus, the

the woman would overcome the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Ever since then, God's faithful people have been looking for the birth of their Saviour (cf. Gen. 4:1).

When Jesus was born, God had finally answered the prayers of his people. He had finally fulfilled his long-awaited promise (see, e.g., Luke 2:4-14). Here was the son of David, the Lord, the one who would deliver his people from their sin. In this regard, it is important to understand that Christ was not born to bring political freedom to the people of God, but rather to bring a freedom of far greater significance. He was to bring freedom from the powers of Satan, sin, and death.

In the third verse of our hymn, given what appears in the first two verses, Christ's redemption is cast in terms of the eschatological, or final, exodus. It is no longer the exodus from the tyranny of Pharaoh, nor is it the exodus from Babylon, that appears. Rather, Jesus brings an exodus from the oppressive rule of Satan, sin, and death:

*O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free
thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell thy people save,
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Conclusion

When we contemplate the birth of Christ, we must not do so in terms of some sort of saccharine tale about an infant king born to bring the world some joy – to give some glimmer of hope in an otherwise gloomy place. When we think of the birth of Christ, we should also not get caught up in seasonal sentimentality, where Jesus is but one of a number of symbols meant to inspire kindness and good cheer: snowflakes, snowmen, sleigh rides, and Jesus.

Rather, the birth of Christ is the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promises to his people, the beginning of the eschatological exodus. Christ was born in a lowly estate, in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he might redeem for his Father a people, that he might redeem for himself a bride, a bride for whom he laid down his very life.

At that time, an aged and devout man named Simeon was waiting in Jerusalem for the consolation of Israel. When he laid his eyes upon Jesus and held the infant, he said: "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according

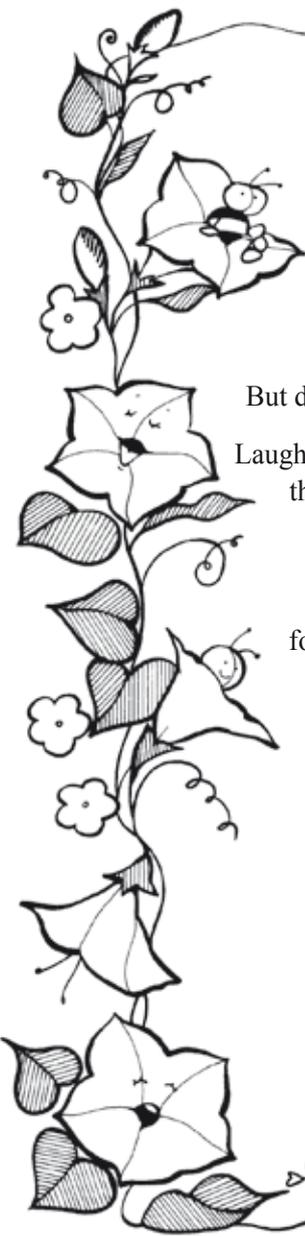
to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

It is this fulfilled promise that the author(s) of our hymn saw running through the pages of Scripture. The author(s) saw a line that began in the earliest portions of the Scriptures in Israel's exodus and was recapitulated in Israel's exodus from Babylon. It was a line that began in those shadows and ultimately came to fulfillment in the advent of Christ. He would lead the Israel of God, the church, in the eschatological exodus – their liberation from the tyranny of Satan, sin, and death.

This hymn, though typically employed to celebrate a man-made "holy day," is grounded in the unfolding drama of God's revelation that culminates in the

advent of Christ. It is certainly a hymn that the church should use to celebrate the birth of Christ. It is also one that should be upon the lips of God's people throughout the year as Christ continues to lead us in our eschatological exodus, which has the new Jerusalem as our destination, the new heavens and earth. Let us therefore celebrate the birth of our Lord on God's appointed day by moving from the shadows of the Old Testament, characterised by promises and types, into the fullness of the light of the revelation of Christ.

John Fesko is the Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in California. Unless otherwise indicated, he quotes the ESV. Reprinted from New Horizons (December 2008) with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.



2011 WELLINGTON LADIES PRESBYTERIAL

We've all heard the saying
'Laughter is good for the soul.'

But did you know that laughter is also good for your health.

Laughter unleashes chemical neurotransmitters and hormones
that contribute to an overall sensation of well-being.

Come and join us at the
2011 Wellington Ladies Presbyterial
for a day of fun, fellowship and most of all laughter.

Mark your calendar now and be sure to be there.

When: 19th March 2011

Where: Foxton
(home of New Zealand's only
full size Dutch Windmill)

"Let us not give up meeting together, ...
but let us encourage one another..."
Heb 10:25

All things to all men ... (1)

Sacrificing our liberty for the sake of the Gospel

Bruce Hoyt

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (NASB: 1 Cor 9:19-23)

The principle

When the Apostle Paul repeats himself, it is for emphasis. In these few verses he repeats the word 'all' six times. Therefore what he wants to emphasise must be very important. So what is it that Paul emphasises?

From the beginning of 1 Corinthians 8 Paul has been addressing the issue of Christian liberty. Specifically, he is responding to a question as to whether it is wrong to eat meat offered to idols (v. 4). Paul's answer to that question is two-pronged. First he says that since there is no real god behind an idol it cannot defile meat offered in sacrifice. So believers who go to the temple and eat meat sacrificed to idols have a right to do so. But secondly and with greater emphasis Paul says that such a right should not be used if it causes a brother to stumble, i.e., to sin against his conscience (v. 9). For in doing so those believers actually sin against Christ (v. 12). Paul emphasises his point by stating the principle by which he lives: "if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."

Although Paul is answering a question about eating meat offered to idols, he draws upon a wide-ranging principle, the **Gospel Principle** that "everything we do should be for the sake of the Gospel." It is for the sake of the Gospel that he is willing never to eat meat again in order not to cause a brother with a weak conscience to stumble (v. 13). There is

no food so important that we may eat it when doing so would hinder the spiritual growth of a brother in Christ, no matter how weak he might be.

We might call this **Sacrificial Principle Part One**. It is: for Christ's sake and for the sake of our brother's spiritual growth we will sacrifice our Christian liberty.

But Paul goes further in 1 Corinthians 9, enlarging this Sacrificial Principle beyond its application to our Christian brothers.

In the first part of the chapter Paul draws the Corinthians into his thinking by referring to his own example. As an apostle he had every right to take along a wife on his missionary journeys (v. 5). And as an apostle he had every right to be supported in his labour in the Gospel (v. 12). After all, a soldier doesn't serve at his own expense. And God teaches in the Law of Moses that an ox is not to be muzzled while it is threshing. And the priests who serve in the temple share in the sacrifices offered on the altar.

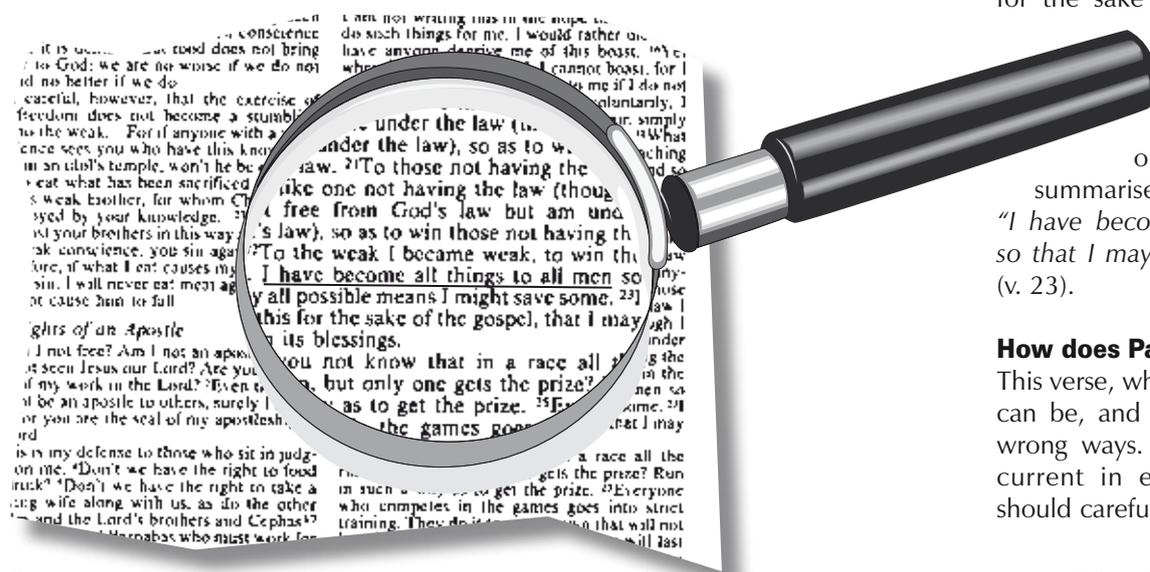
Although Paul had the right to get his living from the Gospel, he consistently refused to do so. Instead, when he preached the Gospel, he offered it without charge. Then in verses 19-23 Paul uses his own example to emphasise **Sacrificial Principle Part Two**, namely, for the sake of God's elect, whoever

they may be, and in order to become a partaker in the Gospel, we will sacrifice our Christian liberty. Paul

summarises what he does this way, "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (v. 23).

How does Paul apply it?

This verse, when lifted out of its context, can be, and is, applied in all kinds of wrong ways. So to avoid many errors current in evangelistic outreach we should carefully consider the wrong and



the right applications of Paul's sweeping statement.

First, when Paul says he becomes "*all things to all men*" he certainly does not mean that he waters down the truth of Scripture in order to make it palatable to unbelievers. For example some say that we shouldn't talk about the "hard" doctrines of God's sovereignty and His electing grace with unbelievers because that will turn them away. And we should not talk about the "negative" doctrines of man's total depravity and Hell or God's wrath with unbelievers because these too will turn them away.

But such an idea would be anathema to Paul. He said to the Galatians, "*even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you he is to be accursed*" (Gal 1:8). The doctrines of the faith, whether considered "hard" or "negative" by men, were consistently preached by Paul. When he says he has become "*all things to all men*" he is certainly not talking about modifying the doctrines he preached to accommodate the religious tastes of unbelievers.

Second, Paul does not mean that we should accept ethical practices that are contrary to God's commands. Some have claimed this is what he means when he says, "*to those who are without law, as without law*" (v. 21). We can see Paul's meaning very clearly since he continues by saying that *he is not "without the law of God, but under the law of Christ"*.

In these words Paul is contrasting his adaptation to the Gentiles with his adaptation to the Jews. In the previous verse he says "*to the Jew I became as a Jew ... to those under the Law, as under the Law*" (v. 20). We know of several examples of what he means. Paul wanted to take Timothy along with him on his second missionary journey and so "*he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek*" (Acts 16:3). So, although Paul vigorously opposed circumcision when it was required as a matter of justification before God, he had no hesitation for other reasons in conforming to this Jewish cultural practice which, because of the work of Christ, no longer had any spiritual significance (cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15). Paul was also willing to go through the purification ritual with some Jews who had taken a vow in order not to cause offence to the Jews (Acts 21:26).

These two examples make it clear that

when Paul says "*to those who are under the Law, [I became] as under the Law, though not myself being under the Law*" (v. 20) he is referring to the ceremonial provisions of the Law which had passed away with the work of Christ. That is confirmed by his statement that he is

not "*without the law of God, but under the law of Christ*".

Third, we can say that in his ministry Paul is willing to accommodate himself to Jewish rituals for the sake of the unbelieving or weak Jews. He is also

The photograph on the cover of this month's issue is of George and Jessie Seville, the parents of Edith Schaeffer. They were American missionaries, serving in China. In 1971 Edith Schaeffer explained, in a chapter on "Clothing" in her book *The Hidden Art of Homemaking*, why her parents adopted Chinese dress:



"My father went to China at the turn of the [twentieth] century, as a missionary under the China Inland Mission (now the Overseas Missionary Fellowship). At that time China could be better reached by missionaries dressing in Chinese dress, looking as much as possible like the Chinese, so that the message would be listened to, rather than the missionary simply being stared at as a curiosity, or being rejected as a 'foreign devil.' So missionaries wore native dress. For my mother this consisted of trousers and a high-collared Chinese robe made of a very lovely blue Chinese damask, frog buttoned down the side and embroidered. It would today be a very handsome evening trouser suit, very fashionable indeed! But at that time it was her way of fitting in with the people in the place where God had sent her to fulfil his purpose for her at that time. My father wore a long gown with very wide long sleeves and a stand-up collar. The frog closings were made of handsome twists of satin. Now some may say that a man should wear *man's* clothing. But a gown was men's clothing in that place, at that time. But there was more than that. Chinese men, at that moment in history, wore plaits. They had very long hair, and braided it in a single braid that hung down their backs. The head was shaven in a circle so that no hair showed around the face. A black silk 'pill box' type of hat was worn, with a hole in the centre out of which the plait could come. Some missionaries bought ready-made plaits, and sewed them to the top of their hats. But my father disliked 'falseness' and grew his own hair. But – long hair for a man? The point was that at that time, and in that place, it 'fitted in' with the people to whom God had sent him. On the other hand, when Hudson Taylor walked down the streets of Victorian London with a plait, did that enhance him to the English of that time? Or, for that matter, if Jesus and the disciples suddenly walked into our churches, would someone mistake them for the 'wrong' sort of persons, simply on the grounds of their clothes and hair-style?"

If God has taken you to a small town to farm, teach, reach, run the bank or even paint pictures, then your choice of clothing, style of your hair and general appearance of person is very important. Is your purpose simply to rebel against the 'stuffiness', or is there some willingness to blend in with the local custom? 'Blending' in this way does not need to be without originality and design, it does not rule out the exercise of taste and your own preference of fabrics and textures. If God has taken you to a very poor community to work among the underprivileged of that place, it is important not to flaunt riches in the form of clothing, in a way that alienates you..."

Edith Schaeffer, The Hidden Art of Homemaking (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, 1971), pp. 189-90.

“If my eating pork hinders my Muslim neighbour from listening to the Gospel, then for the sake of the Gospel I will not eat pork.”

willing to abandon those Jewish rituals (which Jews would normally not do) for the sake of unbelieving Gentiles. And where there are weak Gentile Christians, he is willing to become weak for their sakes as well.

Paul's adaptation, his becoming "all things to all men", relates to cultural practices that do not compromise the Gospel or the truth of God's revelation. For him no cultural practice is so important as the advance of the Gospel. And for that reason he sacrifices his Christian liberty, his rights as an apostle, and even his Jewishness.

How should we apply it?

What does all this mean for us in the communication and furtherance of the Gospel?

It surely means that we must never allow differences of race, culture, language, nationality or religious heritage to become a hindrance to the Gospel. We must be willing to sacrifice any and all of these to win some. For that reason, if people of another language group

cannot understand my language, then I must learn theirs in order to advance the Gospel among them. If my countrymen despise someone because of his race, then I must leave the company of my countrymen and go out of my way to show that person the love of Christ for the sake of the Gospel.

In our situation now in New Zealand if I am tempted to despise someone because of his Muslim heritage and practices, then for the sake of the Gospel and my own salvation I must repent of my arrogance. I should humbly recall that we of western European background were violent pagans not many centuries ago and that our current Western civilisation is thoroughly wicked and sinful. So if my eating pork hinders my Muslim neighbour from listening to the Gospel, then for the sake of the Gospel I will not eat pork.

If my smoking causes my weak brother to sin against his conscience or hinders my anti-smoking workmate from listening to the Gospel, then, although I am free in Christ and subject to no man, I

will sacrifice my freedom in Christ that I may win some.

If my extended family connections keep me from inviting the stranger, the workmate, or the visitor at our church into my home, then I will loosen those family connections for the sake of the Gospel.

I will sacrifice everything for the sake of the Gospel because Jesus, my Lord, sacrificed everything for me. If I don't, then I am in real danger of losing the Gospel myself. This is the final point, and it is a powerful one, that Paul makes in v.23, "so that I may become a fellow partaker of it". Paul knew that if we know the truth and yet refuse to live in accord with the truth, then we are in real danger of losing the truth. Paul knew that Jesus had come as a servant for our sakes and therefore Paul knew that he must become a servant for the sake of God's elect, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether weak or strong, whether slave or freeman. So he made himself "a slave to all" not only to "win more" but so that he might be "a fellow partaker" of the Gospel.

This is the question we should ask ourselves: do I consciously and intentionally adapt to others in cultural and personal practices in order that nothing hinder my witness for the Gospel? If not, then we must seriously ask ourselves whether we are in fact partakers of the Gospel.

Mr Bruce Hoyt is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Oamaru.

All things to all men ... (2)

"Being relevant"

Andre Holtslag

Apparently, worship, and strictly speaking all that we say and do as churches, ought to be adapted to and aimed at the felt needs of Joe and Mary Bloggs and their 2.4 children. In recent times, this notion has been seen, most clearly, in what is known as 'Seeker-sensitive worship.' For

too long, goes the cry, church has been all about us as believers to the point that we cannot connect with the Bloggs. Initially then drama, puppetry, dance, video, story, and testimony became common fare in worship services in the hope that the Bloggs would come along. In recent years, however, as those still claiming to be evangelical have noted

the inability of even mega churches to keep their membership, newer and more racy efforts have been made to attract and keep the Bloggs. Being 'Post-modern and Emergent,' or 'cool' are the new buzz words. As Brett McCracken¹ says, "There are various ways that churches attempt to be cool. For some, it means trying to seem more culturally savvy.

The pastor quotes Stephen Colbert or references Lady Gaga during his sermon, or a church sponsors a screening of the R-rated “No Country For Old Men.” For others, the emphasis is on looking cool, perhaps by giving the pastor a metrosexual makeover, with skinny jeans and an \$80 haircut, or by insisting on trendy eco-friendly paper and Helvetica-only fonts on all printed materials. Then there is the option of holding a worship service in a bar or nightclub (as is the case for L.A.’s Mosaic church, whose downtown location meets at a nightclub called Club Mayan). “Wannabe cool” Christianity also manifests itself as an obsession with being on the technological cutting edge. Churches like Central Christian in Las Vegas and Liquid Church in New Brunswick, N.J., for example, have online church services where people can have a worship experience at an “iCampus.” Many other churches now encourage texting, Twitter and iPhone interaction with the pastor during their services. But one of the most popular – and arguably most unseemly – methods of making Christianity hip is to make it shocking. What better way to appeal to younger generations than to push the envelope and go where no fundamentalist has gone before? Sex is a popular shock tactic. Evangelical-authored books like “Sex God” (by Rob Bell) and “Real Sex” (by Lauren Winner) are par for the course these days. At the same time, many churches are finding creative ways to use sex-themed marketing gimmicks to lure people into church [Sadly, I find myself unable to finish McCracken’s quote as he describes some of the ‘tactics’ that so-called churches are engaging in to attract the Bloggs – they are too despicable to even mention! (Ephesians 5:12)].”²

Jettisoned for comfort

And it almost goes without saying that on the other side of all this, sin, guilt, confession, law-readings, liturgical forms, 30 minute (!!!) sermon monologues, anything like this is jettisoned lest people feel uncomfortable and threatened.

But it is not only in worship that basic presuppositions are being challenged. How we evangelise and defend the faith are also two areas that have been under the spotlight. The idea that we call men and women to repent for homosexual sin, for instance, or the notion that we begin to share the gospel by exposing the sinfulness of sin in people’s lives, or refusing to allow visiting non-married couples to share a bedroom in our homes are

now seen as old-fashioned, judgmental, and out of step with the times.

Dumbing down

Even the language of worship and theology is under threat with the demand for simplicity and variety so everyone can understand what is going on and not grow bored (for example – calling a sermon a ‘talk’). After all, perhaps the worst sin churches can commit today is anything that people might get bored with! So let’s cleanse our vocabulary of things like propitiation, double imputation, justification, and benediction. And at all costs, be sure that thee removest all thy thous from thine songs, lest the Bloggs be left to wondereth what thou meanest!

What is being ignored in all of this, though, is God. 1 Corinthians 10:30 says, “So whether you eat or drink or

whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” And it is precisely because of a verse like this one that the Westminster Shorter Catechism begins by calling our attention to man’s chief end – “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” In contrast to this, and faster than a bullet train with busted brakes, the modern church’s mantra has become ‘whatever you do, do it all to get the Bloggs in the door,’ or ‘man’s chief end is numbers on the floor.’

Failing to learn from God

What is continually ignored is the warnings of God’s Word. When God spoke to Israel about how they were to worship, He said in Deuteronomy 12:8, 29, 32, “You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit ... Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with

“The language of worship and theology is under threat with the demand for simplicity and variety so everyone can understand what is going on and not grow bored.”



20th century megachurches where seeker-sensitive worship was designed to make attendees feel good about themselves. <http://en.wikipedia.org>

you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it." And the lesson of seeking to honour the Lord in worship according to His command, both as we gather on Sunday and in our weekly life of worship, as seen in the stories of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10), and Uzzah (2 Samuel 6) is a lesson that many are still failing to learn.

Borrowing from another to make an appropriate and salutary warning about what exactly is at stake here, McCracken notes, "In his book, "The Courage to be Protestant," David Wells writes: "The born-again, marketing church has calculated that unless it makes deep, serious cultural adaptations, it will go out of business, especially with the younger generations. What it has not considered carefully enough is that it may well be putting itself out of business with God And the further irony is that the younger generations who are less impressed by whiz-bang technology, who often see through what is slick and glitzy, and who have been on the receiving end of enough marketing to nauseate them, are as likely to walk away from these oh-so-relevant churches as to walk into them."³

Living in an ADD culture

The key then, whether it is worship, evangelism, or defending the faith lies not in the direction of catering for the Bloggs, but in one of the verses quoted above. In calling on His people to

worship driven by God's commands, whether they be explicit or by good and necessary deduction (WCF 1:6), God calls us to do "what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord." And this means taking hold of the truth of Romans 1:16, where Paul declares, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." It is being emboldened by the truth of Hebrews 4:12, which says, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." It is resting, content, in the truth that God is pleased "through the foolishness of what [is] preached to save those who believe," and in the power of the Word, *heard* (Romans 10:14), despite the fact that we live in a video-saturated and attention-deficit-disordered culture. It is enabling the Spirit to apply God's Word into the hearts of those whose lives are darkened by sin as we get busy with what these words demand: "Everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you (Ephesians 5:13-14)." And in all of these things, as we engage with neighbours, workmates, visitors to church, and classmates, it is remembering the call to hospitality (Romans 12:13), speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), and being "prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you

have ... with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16)."

Yes, we must proclaim the gospel to people living in the Western world of the 21st century. But that gospel demands an intimate knowledge of man's sin and misery, a knowledge that only Jesus Christ can deliver us from that misery, and a knowledge of how to thank God for such a deliverance, just as it always has done. It is the same gospel that was preached by Paul, Augustine, Calvin, and every other faithful servant of the Lord whose names are long forgotten.

Christ delivers from sin and misery

We have been entrusted with a rich heritage in the Reformed faith. Because it is biblical, it has answers to the problems which vex young and old alike, today. As McCracken says, "Calvinism is about certainty... Calvinism emphasises sin ... Calvinism views God in the highest way possible ... Calvinism has a beautiful picture of grace ... Calvinism fears God ... Calvinism grounds itself in the Bible rather than sugar-coated feel-goodisms ... and Calvinism is less about hugs, Sunday School pink lemonade and 'God loves you' than it is about discipline, deference, and 'God hates you in your sin, you are a wretch who needs God's grace.' It's not for the faint of heart or easily offended. Kids like this."⁴

Let's be bold, then. Let's be faithful and winsome proclaimers. Let's be unapologetic in our apologetics. For a God-ward focus is good and right in the eyes of the Lord and it is what He will use to bring the Bloggs to faith, *in His time*.

Notes

- 1 I do not know Brett McCracken, nor exactly what he believes, but I am indebted to him for some of the ideas and content of this article.
- 2 Brett McCracken, Online Wall Street Journal article, *The Perils of 'Wannabe Cool' Christianity* <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111704575355311122648100.html> August 13, 2010
- 3 Brett McCracken, Online Wall Street Journal article, *The Perils of 'Wannabe Cool' Christianity* <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111704575355311122648100.html> August 13, 2010
- 4 Brett McCracken, Blog posting, <http://stillsearching.wordpress.com/2009/03/22/calvinism-so-hot-right-now/> March 22, 2009

Mr Andre Holtslag is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Dovedale.



PALMERSTON NORTH
Summer School
of
THEOLOGY

WELLINGTON ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND

Open Thursday 20 January 2011
– 7.30pm

Closing Tuesday 25th – midday

SUBJECTS INCLUDE:

Theology; NZ Church History;
RPW; OT Hermeneutics;
Evangelism; OT studies.
(subject to confirmation)

*Plan your weekend and
schedule time to attend!*

Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa outreach group delivers clothing to orphans in Mantabeni, Swaziland

A 27 September 2010 article by Sibonginkosi Mamba in the Swazi Observer titled "Clothes for the Needy from SA" reports that thirty-eight members of an outreach group from the Klipfontein (South Africa) Church of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, on 25 September 2010, delivered donated clothing to 148 orphans in Mantabeni, Swaziland, cared for by Harvest Evangelism Care.

The outreach group plans to continue helping Harvest Evangelism Care with whatever resources are needed to care for the orphans.

+ *Swazi Observer*

Maine Public Schools being pressured by Maine Human Rights Commission to let boys use girls' restrooms

A 23 September 2010 article by Catherine Snow on the CITIZENLink website titled "Maine Public Schools Under Pressure to Let Boys Use Girls' Restrooms" reports that the Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) ruled the week of 26 September 2010 that Orono Middle School in Orono, Maine, discriminated against a sixth-grade male student who wants to live as a female by only offering the student access to a gender-neutral bathroom.

The MHRC said it will work with the state education commissioner to add rules pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity, as it pertains to education, in the Maine Human Rights Act.

+ *Focus on the Family*

Presbyterian Church in Cuba growing through neighborhood emphasis

In a 9 October 2010 entry in the General Assembly Mission Council's Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study, regional liaison for the Caribbean, with special attention to Cuba and the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission, the Rev. Tricia Lloyd-Sidle, writes that churches in the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba (PRCC) attribute their growth to their emphasis on ministry activities within their own neighbourhoods.

Ms. Lloyd-Sidle continues, "these

efforts are labour intensive and require little, if any, money. Neighbours are invited to all church activities; sanctuary doors are open during the week, with members on hand to greet visitors; medicines and food, when available, are generously shared with needy families."

Other PRCC churches provide counselling services, along with home prayer and Bible study meetings where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is presented to neighbours and friends.

+ *Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba*

United Church of Christ joins Communist Party USA and other radical left groups in endorsing 25 September 2010 "One Nation Working Together" rally in Washington DC

The United Church of Christ joined groups including the Communist Party USA, Planned Parenthood, Code Pink, Democratic Socialists of America, the Human Rights Campaign, the National Center for Transgender Equality in endorsing the "One Nation Working Together" rally held on the National Mall in Washington DC on 25 September 2010.

Institute on Religion and Democracy President Mark Tooley commented:

"Why are churches endorsing the 'One Nation Working Together' rally in Washington DC along with the Communist Party USA and other far-left groups, supposedly as a counterpoint to the Tea Party and the Glenn Beck rally of last month? Don't churches have members on both sides of these issues? "The United Methodist Board of Church and Society, with other church bodies that never endorsed the rally in the first place, is to be commended for stepping back from blatant partisanship and association with outlandish groups like the Communist Party USA. "This rally seems mostly to represent the leftist fringe of American politics, which views government as the transcendent supreme power. Church groups, which are called to look to a higher Power, should know better."

+ *Institute on Religion and Democracy*

Crystal Cathedral files for bankruptcy protection

An 18 October 2010 article by Michael Ireland of ASSIST News Service titled

"Crystal Cathedral Files for Bankruptcy Protection" reports that the Crystal Cathedral, the mega-church founded by the Rev. Robert H. Schuller in 1956 in a drive-in theater, has filed for bankruptcy protection.

Mr. Ireland cites a January 2010 Los Angeles Times report saying that church revenues began falling off after the Rev. Robert A. Schuller, son of the church's founding pastor, left the Crystal Cathedral ministry in 2008 after having disagreements with the Rev. Robert H. Schuller, who had earlier made the Rev. Robert A. Schuller senior pastor of the Crystal Cathedral after the senior Schuller's retirement.

Current Crystal Cathedral leader Sheila Schuller Coleman, daughter of the Rev. Robert H. Schuller and sister of the Rev. Robert A. Schuller, said the bankruptcy declaration "is just one more chapter in the book that He is continuing to write – and we know that God's plans are good – we have no doubt His chapter will be good!"

Article "[7] Rev. Robert A. Schuller Removed as Senior Pastor of Crystal Cathedral by Rev. Robert H. Schuller" in the 29 October 2008 issue of *Presbyterians Week* cited a Crystal Cathedral church member who said that she preferred the younger Schuller's Scripture-laden sermons, and quoted the senior Schuller's 27 October 2008 sermon given two days after removing the Rev. Robert A. Schuller from the pulpit:

"I was called to start a mission, not a church. You don't try to preach what is sin and what isn't sin. A mission is a place where you ask nonbelievers to come and find faith and hope and feel love."

+ *Assist USA*

Medical experts demand UN action on maternal health, not "safe" abortion

NEW YORK, September 23 (C-FAM) Medical experts blasted the UN's "abortion-first" approach in a maternal-health presentation to UN delegates last week. Coming on the eve of a UN summit on development issues, the expert panel urged governments to focus on basic medical care rather than abortion to reduce pregnancy-related deaths.

"It is egregious to suggest to mothers that the only way to save their lives is to

kill their babies,” said Dr. Robert Walley, head of MaterCare International. “They have the right to health care. They have no voice when they are dead.”

+ *Samantha Singson*

Amnesty demands abortion decriminalisation in Latin America

NEW YORK, October 7, 2010 (C-FAM)

A leading human rights group last week stepped up its promotion of abortion, targeting Latin America and particularly Nicaragua.

Amnesty International demanded that governments decriminalise abortion immediately in a statement released to coincide with the Sept. 28 “Day for the Decriminalisation of Abortion in Latin America and the Caribbean.”

+ *Seana Cranston, J.D.*

Church attacked by militant Muslims in Pakistan

According to VOM Canada on 18th September 2010 the Nasri Pentecostal Church in Karachi, Pakistan, was attacked and vandalised by militants angered over a threat to burn Qurans in the United States earlier this month. Nine copies of the Bible, three hymn books and three wooden crosses were found burned, together with other damages. The Nasri Pentecostal Church attack was the second church attack within a week.

WEA Religious Liberty – October 2010

Continuing restrictions on religious freedom in Nepal

Compass Direct News report from September 21st informs us that a legislative panel in Nepal has proposed retaining a ban on converting others in the country’s new constitution. The creation of a new constitution in Nepal is part of the country’s transition from a Hindu monarchy to a democracy. The expectation is the ban to be approved as recommended by the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles (CFRDP). Christians fear that Hindu nationalist groups would misuse the ban to further restrict public meetings and social work that could be suspected of being aimed at conversions. *WEA Religious Liberty – October 2010*

Karen Christian refugees welcomed in Japan

BBC News reports that eighteen Burmese refugees have arrived in Japan from the refugee camps in Thailand as part of Japan’s agreement to accept about 90 Burmese under a third country

resettlement plan, promoted by UN. The Karen minority in Burma is traditionally Christian and has suffered and continues to suffer severe persecution in Burma. Many refugees, fleeing the persecution, have been living for 10 years in camps in north-western Thailand, under poor conditions and continuous threat of attacks from Burma.

WEA Religious Liberty – October 2010

Grounds for hope

“Some of the poorest people on Earth are not waiting for their governments or aid agencies to provide them with an education. They’re doing it for themselves – successfully and in vast numbers,” according to Professor James Tooley, who recently delivered Maxim Institute’s Annual John Graham Lecture in Auckland and Christchurch.

Professor Tooley has spent the past decade conducting research into, and then working with, low-cost, private schools that have been initiated, established and maintained by some of the world’s poorest people, without help from aid agencies or government departments. He came across these schools when he was in India, conducting research for the World Bank. He went for a visit to one of the slums of Hyderabad and came across these surprising private schools. He recalls “I spoke to parents who told me why they were spending one or two US dollars a month when the government schools were free, with a free meal at lunchtime, free uniform and free books. Why were they doing that? And they said, ‘In the government schools our children are abandoned. That’s why we spend the money on these private schools.’”

This discovery became the basis of a substantial research project which took Tooley to slums in parts of Africa, China and India. When he first began his research, Tooley found himself head-to-head with enormous opposition. “I went back to Delhi (from the slums of Hyderabad) and then to the World Bank office in Washington DC and said, ‘There’s something extraordinary going on. Did you know there are hundreds and hundreds of these low-cost schools, serving the poor in these slum areas. This is something remarkable that we can harness as part of the solution for education for all.’ And I just met with complete stonewalling from the high officials in the World Bank. They said, ‘Tooley, you’ve found maybe a few, but they’re businessmen ripping off the poor.’

I thought how can they be ripping off the poor when on weekends they’re doing sports fairs, they’re doing arts and science fairs? They are clearly doing more to contribute to their communities than just the business.”

Tooley eventually received funding from charitable organisations, which supported him to conduct his research into the spread and quality of low-cost private schools. Tooley discovered that these low-cost private schools are in poor communities across the globe, and that they usually provide a better education than the free government schools in the areas.

“We tested in a lot of different ways ... One thing we did was test 24,000 students in six different settings. We tested them in maths, English and one other subject – Kiswahili in Kenya, Hindi in Delhi, Urdu in Hyderabad and so on. And we gave them IQ tests for different background variables. We gave the pupils different questionnaires ... we did a really thorough study. And we found more or less the same picture everywhere ... The government schools scored very poorly ... Even after controlling for the background variables, still the government school children were statistically significantly much worse than the private schools, around three quarters to one standard deviation worse.”

According to Tooley, the accountability that comes with parents choosing to pay – even as little as one US dollar a month – for their children’s education, has led to more incentives for teachers to perform well, and to better quality schools. The findings of Tooley’s research present a paradigm shift for how we think about education, particularly private education, which is commonly thought of as the domain of the “elite.”

“The vast majority of private schools on the planet are serving the very poor in very poor countries. Remember that 300,000 of these schools are in India. About 100,000 in Anglo-phone West Africa. These schools are the majority of private schools,” says Tooley.

Maxim Institute, No. 365 | 11 October 2010

Sing to the Lord

“Why did you change that?”

Lois Hoyt

The Hymnal Committee of the RCNZ has received valuable feedback from individuals and churches. Often the response includes a “Why?” – “Why did you *change* this?” “Why did you do *that*?”

I would like to answer some of these queries. We believe you, the singers, are entitled to some explanations.

Change. Yes, change. Why? Why can't we sing the music the way we've always sung it? Most of us are very sensitive to changes in what we sing. Therefore our goal has been to make changes in either music or words only when there was good reason.

Changes in choice of hymn tunes

For some of the hymns we have selected different tunes from those used in the blue *Psalter Hymnal*. One big reason for this is that we want tunes that are more widely used in New Zealand and English churches as compared to American churches. For example, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” is more commonly sung to the tune *Rockingham*, so we have set it to this tune.

Other times we have selected a different tune because we believe the tune in the *Psalter Hymnal* was not the best match for the words; music and words should complement each other. In yet other cases we will have two tunes included for a hymn. For example, we are setting “Jesus, Lover of My Soul” to both *Hollingside* and *Aberystwyth*, believing that either of these tunes is better suited to the words than the tune in the *Psalter Hymnal*. Finally, for some hymns we are simply listing an alternative tune in the footer.

Musical changes

But what about the little changes in a melody or rhythm? Or the not-so-little changes? I'll begin with a discussion of the rhythms in the Genevan tunes. (I know you're just waiting to hear about them!)

Several of the Genevan tunes in the provisional *Sing to the Lord* have a rhythmic pattern that is different from

that in the *Psalter Hymnal*. What we have tried to do is bring the rhythms in line with the way the Genevans are sung in other parts of the world. Some of our New Zealand churches have already been using these rhythmic versions for many years. Of course, there is not total uniformity in the rhythmic versions, so we have still had choices to make; however, where there is uniformity we have attempted to follow that.

In a couple of the Genevan tunes we have made small rhythmic changes from the *Psalter Hymnal*, changes that will at first be disconcerting (*Sing to the Lord* numbers 65 and 105b) and also one note change (Psalm 124). Again, our aim is to be singing these as the Genevans are sung elsewhere in the world, and we believe these corrections are warranted.

We have also removed time signatures from the beginning of the Genevan music, following standard practice. The Genevans cannot so easily be ‘forced’ into the common time signatures, and the result in the blue *Psalter Hymnal* had been some distortion of the rhythms. There are other small musical changes in a few hymns besides Genevans. For example, in line with other books, the fermata (the hold or bird's eye) has been removed in a few tunes such as Ps. 119:145 in *Sing to the Lord* (the tune *Leominster*, which is also the tune of number 389 in the *Psalter Hymnal*). Likewise we are removing the fermata in the last line of 385 in the *Psalter Hymnal*. The use of the fermata can lead to an exaggerated hold, giving a sentimentalising effect to the hymn, which we felt was the case in these two examples.

The committee is optimistic – we think the changes will be appreciated once they are learned. For a few changes that may be more distracting, it can be quite helpful if the accompanist points these out to the minister or elder ahead of time. The minister can then say something like “there is a slight change of rhythm in lines 2 and 4” or “the rhythm is slightly different from what we usually sing” or “there is not a hold in line 4 as we've been used to singing”. If the accompanist then plays the tune

through once, the congregation will be introduced to the change in a more acceptable way.

Overall we've tried to use the more standard presentation of any tune. This will also apply to many of the hymns we've selected from sources outside the *Psalter Hymnal*. Nevertheless, we also give careful thought to what is best musically as well as to a ‘common’ format.

Word changes

Much of what I've said about musical changes would also apply to selection of words. If a hymn has a common set of words that has been known in the English world for centuries – or maybe just a couple of decades – those are the words we've selected unless there are meanings that are unclear or that are theologically questionable. This is in line with the mandate given by the Synod, not to change unnecessarily.

So, for example, we will continue to sing the older words of “And Can It Be That I Should Gain”. But when meaning is not so clear, or also when a hymn is not so well known, the committee has selected an updated version. And in several hymns we have changed a word or phrase to convey the meaning better or to avoid poor theology.

Some of the basic ideas in our selec-



tion of lyrics and/or word changes have been dealt with in previous articles by Rev. John Rogers. The above paragraphs only highlight our approach to word choices.

Just as with making changes in the

music, so in making text selections we have looked at several books – sometimes many books! – before making our final selection of words. But more on that point in the next article: I’ll be writing to elaborate on the process involved in

preparing our new hymnal.

Further feedback to this article or further questions can always be addressed to the Hymnal Committee. Have you visited our website recently? www.hymnal.ws

Extract from URC Hymnal Report

The hymnal committee of the United Reformed Church of North America produced a report for their 2010 Synod. Although they are our newest sister church, they have a similar singing tradition to us because they come out of the Christian Reformed church which published our blue Psalter Hymnal. This extract is provided here for your interest. There may be similar themes discussed at our own upcoming synod. And you may spot a particular mention of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Summary of Activities

Following Synod 2007, our committee has continued the practice of meeting face-to-face twice a year, alternating between Grand Rapids, Michigan and Hamilton, Ontario. Between these meetings we have met at least monthly by way of a “chat room” online...

Hymns

The majority of our time was taken up with applying the approved principles and guidelines to hymns that had been recommended to us and found in various songbooks currently in use among Reformed and Presbyterian churches, ... the 14 hymns of the *Hymns for a Modern Reformation* (James Montgomery Boice and Paul Jones, 2000); and 74 suggested hymns from various sources sent to our committee by members and councils of United Reformed churches. We also evaluated more recently produced hymns written by Stuart Townend, Keith and Kristyn Getty, and others...

We evaluated, either together in committee, or personally by assignment, more than 2000 hymns. Over the years that we’ve been engaged in this task, we amassed a gross list of nearly 800 hymns that we initially deemed suitable for inclusion. In the last two years we have been engaged in the painful task

of paring down that list to a reasonable number [277] that gives adequate representation of the various topics and subjects of our Christian faith and life (e.g. the Trinity, the birth of Christ, the atonement, the sacraments, worship, missions, etc.). We have also digitally formatted each of these songs so that they are uniform in appearance. We have nearly completed this task and intend to make our proposed hymn section available to the churches prior to Synod 2010.

More than half of our hymn proposal includes songs that are not found in the current, blue-covered Psalter Hymnal (BPH). This large number of new songs will require extra attention and will likely produce lengthy debate when it comes time for a synod to approve them.

The vast majority of these songs met with unanimous approval by the members of our committee, past and present. There were some songs, however, which led to much longer debates and some emotional discussions in our meetings. We all have our own personal tastes, musically and poetically. We have different thresholds when it comes to poetic license: some like colorful, flowery language, while others prefer more literal, straight-forward language. We have different thresholds when it comes to precision of doctrine in the words of a song, as well. Thus, it should not be surprising that some songs evoked these mixed emotions among us, and required longer discussion...

Psalms

After completing the hymn section, we will embark on the Psalms. We anticipate that this process will take less time than the hymn selection process. We intend to number the Psalm selections according to their Biblical number, and designate any multiple renditions of a particular Psalm

by letter (e.g. Psalm 103a; Psalm 103b; Psalm 103c). We also intend that at least one rendition of a particular Psalm will be that Psalm in its entirety...

We have also been in contact with the Hymnal Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand who provided us with bound copies of their provisional *Sing To The Lord* hymnal which presently consists of the entire psalter...

Rationale for an official songbook for the URCNA

At Synod Schererville (2007), several delegates raised the question whether our churches actually want an official songbook, that is, a synodically-approved songbook which each church will be expected to purchase and use in their worship services. As a committee we have discussed this matter and prepared this rationale for the adoption of an official songbook...

As a starting point for our rationale, consider the mandate given to our committee when it was appointed... The first ground given for this mandate was, “A common psalter hymnal would promote unity among the churches of our federation” (Minutes of Synod, October 1997, Article LXII.C. [pp.33-34]).

In one respect, this should be sufficient rationale for the URCNA to adopt an official songbook... However, simply citing that decision and that ground may not be sufficient to persuade the churches to actually adopt an official songbook. This is partly due to the fact that so many other songbooks and supplementary collections currently are being used in our churches. In some cases, these supplemental songs and songbooks have been used for more than a decade. And these songs are being used not just in pre-worship “hymn-sings” but in some cases within the worship service itself. Many of our office-bearers

and members are getting used to the idea that each church can sing almost whatever they want, provided it meets the approval of their consistory. It seems that the role of the broader assemblies to regulate our church music is being minimized.

The old Latin expression, "*lex orandi, lex credendi*," illustrates the connection between liturgy and doctrine, between what is sung in the churches and what is believed by the people. The relationship is reciprocal: what we sing is a confession of what we believe, but also, what we sing, we come to believe. That raises the importance of what we sing to a high level, and means that what we sing has a bearing on the confessional unity of the federation.

In this regard, consider the fact that our churches adopted a set of "Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church" at Synod Calgary in 2004. By that decision, the synodical delegates were not only saying, "We agree that these are good principles and guidelines for choosing music to be used in the churches." They were also agreeing that it was for the unity, identity, and well-being of the churches to have those standards *in common*.

Consider also the action of Synod 1996. At that synod the churches adopted "the liturgical forms printed in the Psalter Hymnal, Centennial Edition (1976) for use among the churches" (Acts of Synod 1996, Article 24, point L). The liturgical forms are not, strictly speaking,

confessional documents. They are definitely doctrinal, but they are not, in the narrow sense of the word, confessional. Yet our churches without hesitation committed themselves to using the adopted forms in all of the churches across the federation. We consider the adopting of an "official songbook" consistent with the adopting of "official liturgical forms." If we believe that all the churches should use the same synodically-approved liturgical forms, then it follows that a synodically-approved songbook be used by all the churches.

We think we have provided a good rationale for an official songbook and are recommending that this be Synod's decision.

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

The view from your room

What do you see from your living room window? Or from your kitchen or bedroom? Views are a personal matter, but we all enjoy a beautiful one. In fact, many of us work hard to create one. What do I mean? Your garden. It's that green space between the walls of your house and the Great Beyond. Maybe it's not that big – perhaps you have cows grazing three metres from your bedroom window! Maybe all you have is a concrete walkway separating you from the neighbouring flat or the supermarket car park next door. But perhaps you're blessed with metre upon metre of herbaceous borders, of glorious flowering shrubs; or a sea of daffodils, bluebells and tulips every spring. But whatever it is you look out on – and I agree – some of us face a considerable visual challenge – most of us have a natural urge to make something beautiful of it.

Back when I was a child our mothers used to spend a lot of time gardening. It was an expected part of a housewife's routine, especially if you were a farmer's wife. Many women loved their gardens, and took genuine pleasure in arranging

and maintaining them. Ladies used to meet at each others' places for afternoon tea, then go on a guided tour led by their hostess. She would show them her garden's highlights, and dig out cuttings of herbaceous plants for her guests to take home. This doesn't happen so much any more. (In part, I'm relieved – my garden doesn't stand close-up scrutiny. I don't have time to remove every weed; so I'm all for the "it's all about the view"

approach...) Nowadays people spend heaps of money on "hard landscaping" instead – paths, patios and walls that look good as outdoor spaces but require little maintenance. What plants they have are usually purchased from nurseries following plans drawn up by their landscapers. However, I believe there's still plenty of scope for gardeners at home to learn by experimenting; and to exercise creativity in the way they shape their outdoor



Sunken Garden, Kensington Palace.

spaces with trees, shrubs, flowers and vegetables. Let's consider some of the wider ramifications of this.

A biblical theme

Gardening is as old as the creation. When God made the world in perfect form, he placed his perfect man and woman in a garden, and told them to "cultivate it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15, NASB). This is what interests me. Even before the fall gardening was an activity that required effort. Adam and Eve lived in a garden, and this, not a wilderness, was their perfect, unspoiled, pre-sin world. The back-to-nature thinking that characterised the Romantic movement in the 18th century, and still underlies the green movement in our day, assumes that "natural", uncultivated and untouched-by-man is the ideal. Wild is preferable to farmed or gardened. But that is not the biblical idea. Throughout the Bible we see that a cultivated landscape is every bit as good as an untouched world. Ordered, selected, tended and planned are good. Design and symmetry are good, too. As gardeners living in the light of Bible truth, we can form, select, tend, prune, thin and trim back. We can impose order and be creative in the ways we shape our outdoor spaces – just as God is creative.

However, as we know, creation was marred by the fall. When Adam and Eve chose to eat from the only tree in the garden they were forbidden to eat from, it was not only their hearts and

the hearts of all their descendants which were twisted out of shape. The creation was subjected to death and decay, while they themselves were thrown out of the garden. From now on their work was going to be thwarted by difficulties of every kind. Thorns and thistles would smother the plants Adam tried to grow: gardeners ever since have faced the trials of weeds, pests and diseases. Without sin there would have been no locust plagues, droughts, fungal infestations, nor the creeping stranglehold of twitch. I think of this every morning that I see the damage to my roses from a night-time possum rampage; or watch my daffodils and irises shrivel in the heat of a blistering Canterbury nor'wester. It is hard work, and sometimes discouraging work, gardening in a fallen world.

The writers of biblical literature knew all this; and it's woven into their imagery and symbolism. Droughts and locust plagues were a sign of God's discipline of a stubborn and rebellious people; while fruitful gardens, olive orchards and vineyards indicated his blessing. Gardens in Bible times were also places of beauty and refreshment. In the Middle East, gardens have always been soothing spaces of water, greenness and beauty in a hot, arid climate. People go to a lot of trouble to create them. Some gardens were legendary: the hanging gardens of Babylon were one of the wonders of the ancient world. They made the city quite fabulously attractive. The garden motif extends to the end of the Bible

story, as there is something quite garden-like about the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. It has trees, and a refreshing river running through it. Plants are part of its beauty.

Gardens, you could say, are basic to life. The Bible is full of them. People in all times, all over the world, in almost every culture under the sun, have gardened. They grow things, both to eat and in order to create beautiful outdoor spaces. There are gardens on the grand civic scale, built and maintained by royalty, or by governments on behalf of the citizenry through their taxes. There are gardens created and tended lovingly by families in their own modest backyards. Fashions in gardening come and go – and right now, it is probably waning as a lifestyle pursuit. The less time families have, the less likely they are to want to spend time digging, weeding and tending plants. So it's a reasonable question to ask – is it worthwhile to garden? Why should I bother doing it?

Why garden?

The first reason, as I see it, is that by creating a garden we're making that place our family lives in, and where our guests come to visit us, a lovelier place to be. When the family comes home, or when visitors arrive, they have to walk from their car to our door. What greets their eyes? Do they see colourful flowers, arranged to match the house, and each other? Does the design of the garden draw their eye around corners, offering tantalising glimpses of beauty waiting to be explored? To me, gardening is really exterior decorating. It's an extension of what we do inside the house when we arrange furniture and choose colours for our walls. To be honest, I don't always enjoy gardening. Weeding, dead-heading and trimming off died-back herbaceous growth in the autumn can be a real chore; especially as you know it will all have to be done over again in a few weeks' time! But the results, viewed on a dewy spring or summer morning as the sun is rising, makes it all worth while. The pleasure's repeated when your guests arrive for an evening barbecue. Together with you, they get to enjoy the beauty in the soft light of evening.

It's also good for the soul to watch things grow. Each time you see a small, green shoot emerge from the soil and grow into a mature plant you are watching the Creator at work. It causes us to wonder at the complexity of his design. It is so refreshing to wander among the



Emmanuel College, Cambridge.



John and Sue Rickatson's garden, Bedfordshire.

flowers in the stillness of early morning, watching to see which buds are opening; or to sniff the heady perfume from flowers that have spent a hot afternoon soaking up the sun. Surely such gorgeous scents are a gift from God. We're also reminded of the brevity of life when we see how quickly a beautiful flower is gone. (How glad we should be of God's Word which, in contrast, lasts forever). The constant battle with weeds and drying wind; and pests like opossums, birds and white butterflies, all remind us that sin has distorted the creation, making it creak and groan as it waits to be renewed. We enjoy beautiful things in this life; but we also endure sin and suffering; and we shall all die. Our gardens remind us of these things, daily.

Thirdly, gardens provide food for our families and guests. What we grow in our own gardens has such a short distance to travel to our tables – it is fresher. It tastes better, and it is so satisfying to produce a little of what we eat ourselves. Growing it yourself means you know what has gone into it – and onto it. It's fun to plan and order seeds in the winter, to plant them in spring, watch them grow and then to eat the lettuces, carrots, beetroot, salad greens or whatever else comes from your garden. Studying the needs and growing habits of plants is not only interesting, it's very useful. By training children in growing things, we're teaching them all kinds of useful lessons, biological and otherwise. I remember taking part in the annual school garden

competition run by the Department of Education year after year when I was in primary school. It was a great learning experience. Even the simple matters of having to keep accurate records; having to hoe the garden regularly; being responsible for watering my garden (if I didn't, no one else did – and it would suffer!) taught me disciplines my parents were delighted about ...

Gardening also helps keep you fit – and in a way that is useful and productive. I must admit, I sometimes wonder

about the wisdom of spending a lot of time and money working out in a gym, when one can also keep healthily fit by digging in a garden or by pushing a lawn mower around the lawn. At least one has produced something for the time invested! (Now, I know that not all your individual muscles may have been as beautifully toned as if you went to the gym and used all the specialised equipment, but, think of the vegetables and the flowers...) And as for lawns, I've been in love with them ever since I saw striped, velvety-green perfection at the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Something like that *has* to be worth a little perspiration!

Are there any downsides to gardening? Of course. It's always possible to become obsessed with your garden, and to devote too much time and money to it at the expense of other, more important activities. But I think most gardeners find, in the end, that reality and a sense of perspective return when you face the difficulties of working with nature in a fallen world. Things go wrong, plants die, roses are ruined by fungi and lettuces are eaten by birds. Such things tend to correct an excessive enthusiasm for gardening. The truth of the matter is that gardening, like most other activities, can teach us important spiritual lessons. Consider the positive ones ... Who gives the beauty? Who gives the harvest? God. The lessons are there to be read, every day, as his glory is revealed in his creation, your garden.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Adult Education Classes will begin on October 17th! – The apostle Paul prayed for the church in Philippi that “your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.” The apostle Peter encouraged God's people to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” The

Scriptures assume that we will be growing in our faith, adding to our learning about Christ, and building upon what we have learned before all with the goal of abounding in love towards Christ, each other, and the lost. If you have a desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, join us every Lord's Day morning in the new hall from 9:20-10:10, during the Sunday school hour, as we spend time each term studying the Scriptures, learning from Church History, going deeper into bible doctrines, and enjoying the depths of the Word of God. Beginning October 17th, we will look at the question of what it means to be a member of the church of Jesus

Christ. Is being a member of a church really that important? What do I actually commit myself to as a member of the Reformed Church of Avondale? What are the joys and responsibilities of being a member of the body of Christ? Come study with us as we see that membership in the church of Jesus Christ is an absolutely unique and glorious privilege! Are you ready for answers! – Friday 19 November 2010 at 7.00pm in the church auditorium (flyers are in your mail boxes today). Well known Creation Ministries International speaker Adrian Bates will be addressing us on 'Science, Scripture and the Battle for Truth'. It promises to be a great evening. We would like to offer refreshments afterwards, so we need a few people to volunteer to be in charge of hospitality. Session is looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Bishopdale

Pastoral Notices. Elsie Thomson has been worshipping with us for several years, and it is now our great joy to be able to welcome her as a full member. After the morning service, we will ask Elsie to come up to the front to give you the opportunity to personally welcome her.

Bucklands Beach

Pastoral. There has been a tremendous response to the invitation to join the two 'new members' classes held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. A total of 17 people (a mixture of young people and folks from the LABS classes) are attending at this time. Praise God for his goodness. Pray

also for each of these people as they seek to come to know what belonging to and becoming a living member of the Church of the Lord Jesus means.

LABS games night. LABS will be having another board and table games night on 7pm, this coming Saturday, 30th of October. The purpose of the Games night is to provide an opportunity for the people in the LABS classes to listen and speak English as well as to enjoy good company. If you are interested to volunteer and can join in with LABS classes please let Jabez know. It will be a great fun evening!

Christchurch

Pastoral. We give thanks this week with Br Frans and Sr Aranka Dekker who celebrate 50 years of marriage this Friday.

Pastoral. On Tuesday evening the elders had the privilege of meeting with Annelise Reinders, Jacob Littlejohn and Sam Rasmusen. They have expressed their desire to make a public Profession of Faith. The elders were encouraged with the discussion that was had and, Lord willing, these three young people will make this next Sunday morning. There are also a number of young people who have expressed a desire to do this later in the year. Please remember our young people in prayer, that our Lord will continue to work in their hearts and lives that they may come to a living faith in Him. May the Lord use their lives for His glory. Please also remember those who have or are drifting away from the

things of the Lord. May the Lord work in their lives also. Let us not leave this up to only the elders, but let each one of us remember them in our prayers and look for ways in which we might be the Lord's instrument in this task.

Dovedale

Profession of faith. On Wednesday evening, the elders had the wonderful privilege of hearing Esbe van Heerden and Hendrik Bakker talk about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and their desire to become communicant members of our church. If there are no lawful objections, they will make their profession of faith during the morning service on Sunday 31st.

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. Louise and Aaron Duthie's baby daughter, Evelyn Fay, was safely delivered last Tuesday. Her teratoma, which had been a cause for concern, was successfully removed on Wednesday. Congratulations to Bruce and Maureen on this their seventh grandchild. Praise God for answered prayer.

Pastoral Notes. It was a day for sadness but also for quiet rejoicing as the funeral for Henk Storm was held on Tuesday. We take strength in the promise of eternal life that has been won for us at Christ's death and resurrection. That we can put our hope in God, praising him as our Saviour, even when inwardly downcast and disturbed (Psalm 42), is comfort indeed.

Our warm congratulations to Paul Schinkelshoek who, on Monday at a private ceremony at the Dutch Consulate in Christchurch, was awarded the Star for Order and Peace in recognition of his military service during the Indonesian campaign in 1949. By all accounts Paul was so well feted that the 61-year delay in receiving his medal hardly mattered.

Golden Wedding Anniversary. To celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary, Arthur and Margaret would like to invite all our friends to an "at home" afternoon at 32 Glendale Crescent, on Sunday, 31 October. Please no gifts, just an afternoon for memories and thankfulness. Arthur.

Foxton

Report Session Meeting Monday 27th 2010: Session agreed to the request of Mark van Echten to publicly do his Profession of Faith on Sunday 21st November 2010 in the morning service.

Apology

In the July 2010 issue there was a *faux pas* of monumental proportions. It appeared in the first column of Mr Leo de Vos's article on page 3. The problem arose due to some editing which left the impression that Eve had children before the fall. Now I am sure you will agree, theologically that is not correct. Scripture makes no mention of children before the fall, but rather, children were born after the fall.

The editing inadvertently changed the tense, which altered the meaning of the sentence entirely.

What was published stated: *"We notice that while Adam worked (he tended the garden) and Eve bore children before the fall, thorns and sweat, and pain in childbirth came after the fall."*

What should have been published: **"We notice that while Adam would work (tend the garden) and Eve would bear children before the Fall, thorns and sweat, and pain in child birth came after the Fall."**

I unreservedly apologise to Mr de Vos for any embarrassment it may have caused him and apologise to all our readers for whom it may have caused any unnecessary concern.

NB: It is our policy to edit articles, where necessary to ensure correct grammar, punctuation, word usage and spelling. **(Ed.)**

Fellowship News and Prayer Items: Two members will celebrate their 80th birthdays this week: Harmen Dykstra and Eildert Boekholt. We thank the Lord for His gracious blessings up to this milestone in the lives of these two brothers.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: We rejoice with the de Leeuws in the Lord's blessing of another covenant Child. Claudia Robyn was born last Tuesday. All went well and both mother and child are home.

North Shore

Notes from the Pastoral meeting held, Thursday, 23rd September. We began, as is our usual practice, with a half hour praying for members of the congregation. Pastoral and home visits over the past month were reported. We have had worshipping with us for maybe a year now Johan and Cathy Lewis and their daughter Jony. They come from one of the reformed churches in South Africa (NHK for those who know) and recently requested membership in our congregation. Session was pleased to accept their application and we welcome them into our congregation this morning. To the Lewis family – welcome and we pray you will find this congregation to be a real spiritual family home and look forward to getting to know you and serving the Lord among us as opportunity arises.

Pukekohe

From the Pastor. Congratulations to Mr and Mrs Davy and Lara Roberts on the birth of a daughter last Monday, 4th October. Madison Claire weighed 9lbs 3ozs and is 59cm. Also congratulations to Mr and Mrs Craig and Sharon Roberts on their first grandchild, and Mr and Mrs Roel and Ali Voschezang on the birth of their great granddaughter.

Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. We welcome Ken Stevenson, who is visiting us today from the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia. Ken has been asked by his Presbytery to come here as part of an evaluation of a closer relationship with our churches. We pray that the Lord will give wisdom to the PRCA and the RCNZ as we investigate this matter. We pray that the Lord will also grant Ken travelling mercies as he returns to Sydney via Christchurch.

Choir and Instruments Group. It is planned to develop a choir and instruments group, to meet regularly with the

aim to develop a collection of songs and music that can be used for talent evenings, visiting Rest Homes, or wherever there is an opportunity. The choir and music will be under the directorship of the conductor John Holtslag. We would like you to register your interest with either voice for the choir or instrument (you can be in both). Thanks for the initial good response, 7 Sopranos, 6 Altos, 3 Tenor, 4 Bass. We look forward to more names. Please see or phone Ian van der Meulen. On behalf of the Music Committee, Ian van der Meulen, Convener

Pastoral Notes. We give thanks for the Holiday Bible Club held from Tuesday to Friday. Attendance was similar to the

first time, with up to 44 children joining in the programme – perhaps owing to the fact that we have not been able to hold the Bible Club for a couple of years. Feedback from parents and children was very encouraging – especially the comment that people found it refreshing that we openly referred to the Scriptures and matters of sin and salvation. Several parents from the neighbourhood attended the break-up and BBQ on Friday, so the team had ample opportunity to chat and receive feedback. Thanks to all those who helped plan and run the Holiday Bible Club, also those who donated materials and gave their time to set things up.

Buckland's Beach big day out

Saturday morning 8.00am finally came. This was the day we had planned as a retreat day for the women of our church at Bucklands Beach.

Just imagine us as we walked into our church building and approached the hall. It had been set up by some of the men who had been working on a superb cooked breakfast for us since the crack of dawn.

After a leisurely breakfast we made our way into the church auditorium, leaving the cleaning up and dishes for our servant brothers!

First we sang – and a group as enthu-

siastic as ours makes a beautiful noise to the Lord!

After that we watched a DVD entitled *The Prodigal God*, featuring a sermon by the Rev Timothy Keller. Most challenging! It provided a thought-provoking study, calling us to examine ourselves, especially as potential "older sons". The older son, he who has grown up in the fellowship, and has never strayed like his younger brother, was, in spite of his obedience, as lost as his younger sibling had been! The older brother in the parable needs God's grace too. Keller also pointed out that, unlike the younger brother in the



On the ferry to Devonport



The women enjoying their afternoon tea at the café in Devonport.

parable, we have an older brother who left his Father's house and went searching for us while we were still dead in trespasses and sins.

Because our group is multicultural, the prayer time meant that our petitions were brought to God's throne in a variety of languages. How great is the love of God in breaking down the dividing lines as we kneel before him in prayer!

An early lunch (for the really stalwart amongst us) was followed by a surprise for all except the organizing committee. Delighted "oohs" and "aahs" met the announcement that we were going "overseas"! Convinced that a retreat day should address the whole person, including our physical, emotional and social needs, we herded the "flock" to Half-Moon Bay where the ferry awaited us. We travelled to Auckland city and then boarded another ferry for the second leg to Devonport (North Shore). The ladies loved it, especially those who had never been on the ferry before. It was great for socialising, making lots of noise and just being glad!

On arrival at Devonport we meandered our way to a local café for afternoon tea. The service we received was nothing short of brilliant. We were treated like royalty. After that, "shopping" was on the menu for those with energy to spare at the Emporium. A time had been set to be at the pier in order to board the ferries for the homeward journey. Believe it or not, everyone was on time!

We arrived back at the church at 5.30pm and went home after what turned out to be a memorable day!

I would surely recommend this idea to my sisters. It was a day well spent. Organise such a day for your church!

Gonny van Garderen

Letter to the editor

Dear Sir,

I must say that I am somewhat bemused by the letters by the brothers Fred Braam and John Zuidema regarding the report of the Crisis Conference held in the Box Hill Reformed Church on the 24 and 26 of April earlier this year.

In the first place my bewilderment begins with their assumption that there is something wrong with publishing a report

about the Conference which is based upon what was originally written by a minister who is a minister of neither the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCNA) or the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). Br Zuidema even describes this person as having 0% involvement in either denomination, and thus he is pictured as someone who has no right to write on such things. Well,

one must note it was a report of the Conference. I simply attended it and wrote a review of it for the readers of our denominational magazine, *The Presbyterian Banner* (June 2010, www.pcea.org.au), which I presently serve as Editor. The Rev. Martin Geluk took that review and adapted it for *Faith in Focus* and also for *Trowel & Sword*.

I wrote it for our denominational

magazine because our denomination has always taken a keen interest in the wider Reformed-Presbyterian scene in Australia. It was two of our churches – in Sydney and in Melbourne – who greatly assisted the early Reformed churches in those centres, and there has been much interaction, fellowship and mutual involvement in a number of causes since then between us. (Personally, in the last three months, I have conducted a baptism and a wedding in CRCA churches and led in worship services in that denomination, not to mention in that same period leading a worship service in an RCNZ congregation, attending a bible study, and enjoying fellowship with members and ministers there. Locally I am in contact with CRCA members on a weekly basis.)

If, for instance, someone were to write about anything of concern in the PCEA I would trust that it would not be dismissed as inappropriate because it was written by a non-member. When our church councils receive letters raising serious matters from folk outside our churches, they are considered and responded to.

Secondly, the statement that Dr T Campolo is not a Christian was what was said at the Conference. I simply reported that and the grounds upon which it was based. His theology was examined and seriously found wanting. But to say that one may not question another's faith, or lack thereof, is not in harmony with the Scriptures where the apostles and certainly the Lord Himself make scathing reference to the judgment certain men were facing for their lack of true faith, and pointing out those men while they were doing that.

If you re-read the review of the Conference you will find that same spirit for the biblical faith in the CRCA. They are not being divisive or schismatic. They have committed themselves to raising their concerns through the appropriate courts of the church. They believe they are speaking the truth in love. So, while there must always be a place for caution and graciousness in dealing with sister-churches, there must also be openness.

In the third place, this Conference arose because of the rejection of a number of appeals and overtures at the 2009 Synod. Br Zuidema omits this in speaking about appeals and overtures being drafted for the 2012 Synod (appeals and overtures, by the way, that that Synod could simply wipe off

the table because they are simply old business with no new grounds attached to them, and thus have been dealt with before). To say, in this same vein, as Br Braam says, that nothing should be published that could adversely reflect on any other denomination until it has first been cleared with the respective church courts or committees, is to take away any possible discussion or reflection of current issues.

It is important that there is an open discussion of current issues within the world-wide church. This should involve the whole denomination and not just be contained within the more rarified assemblies of the churches. Otherwise we face the real danger of certain committees and clergy being "in the know" whilst the laity are kept "in the dark".

Besides, the CRCA has already decided negatively on the concerns of the Conference, which is why the Conference was organised. Interestingly, the CRCA doesn't see that it is something to be dealt with first in the appropriate church courts, as their denominational magazine published an abridged version of the same report on the Conference in *Trowel & Sword* (August, 2010).

As a final aspect, I take to heart Br

Zuidema's desire to be faithful to the Great Commission. There is no doubt that the CRCA is seeking, through the Four Fold Task, to be evangelistically minded. But that needs to be put in a bigger picture, the picture of faithfulness to God's Word in every aspect of church life. One only needs to recall the Christian Reformed Churches in North America (CRCNA) who, while implementing the '400,000 by 2000' mission vision, actually lost many members because of their decisions regarding women – first in the office of deacon, then in the eldership and the ministry of the Word. Those departing folk were certainly less proportionately than the 20% of the denomination that Br Zuidema refers to of the churches represented at the Crisis Conference, but it is that small percentage with whom the RCNZ has recently entered into a sister-church relationship (the United Reformed Churches of North America – URCNA).

Yours in our Lord,

Sjirk Bajema.

This is the last correspondence to be published on this subject. The matter is now closed. (Ed.)

DVD in focus

A review

Where have all the Tulips gone?

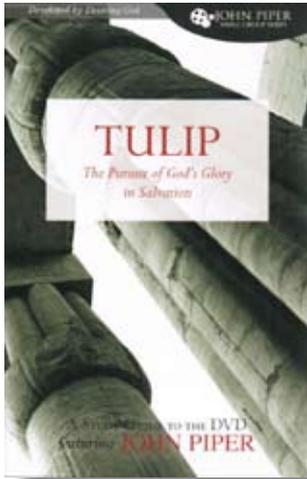
– a point to ponder!

A few weeks ago I had the privilege of viewing the DVD series "TULIP" by Dr John Piper on the Five Points of Calvinism. It was a series of sixteen sessions and was attended every week by a very enthusiastic group of brethren from the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. Each session was eagerly received and one could feel a tremendous sense of blessing as the 'Big' Picture unfolded week by week.

These days we find many people who object to the term 'Calvinist' or 'Calvinism'; they tend to think of it as an outdated, narrow, and restricted view of Christianity and nothing but a series of endless doctrines. For those who are Reformed or Presbyterian we speak of these great truths of Scripture as the 'Doctrines of Grace' or TULIP.

We believe that these doctrines are in absolute harmony with the Word of God from Total Depravity to Perseverance of the Saints.

Dr Piper sets these truths out in a very engaging way, so that the youngest of our true believers will have no problem in understanding the sovereign grace of God in his or her own conversion. They will be duly encouraged to study further the Scriptures with an eagerness and sincerity, so as to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. Is there anything better than that? I think not! Once you have come to understand the Doctrines of Grace you will find that your whole way of thinking changes. The absolute sovereignty of God in all things takes on a new meaning and we can sing "Not What My hands Have Done" with new heart giving God all the glory for His grace and mercy in our lives. The more we understand these foundational truths



of Scripture, the more we will want to know about the great work of God in our lives.

The Apostle Paul gives us a crystal

clear example of these doctrines of grace in *Romans 8: 28-30* "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate them He also called and whom He called them He also justified and whom He justified them He also glorified" (KJV). With Paul, we too can say "If God is for us, who can be against us?" – **No one!**

Therefore, may I take this opportunity to encourage and challenge every Minister and office bearer in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to take up the Doctrines of Grace / TULIP

and teach them, to preach them, define and defend them with a new vigour and a whole hearted trust in the Lord and thus continue to equip God's people for today, tomorrow and for eternity!

"For from Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be the glory forever, Amen" – (*Romans 11:36- KJV*)

Your sister in Christ,

Jean Mulholland – Reformed Church of Bishopdale

The TULIP DVD series / study guide is available from a wide range of sources, one being www.koorong.com.au and the study guide is also downloadable from www.desiringgod.org

The grateful Cantabrians

Luke 17:11-19

Andrew de Vries

On Wednesday 22nd November the three Reformed Churches in Christchurch met for a special thanksgiving service at the Reformed Church of Christchurch at 7:30pm. We wanted to recognise that the Lord had been gracious to our churches and our city – in that there was no loss of life, little injury, and very little damage to property and possessions for the members of our churches. We desired to pray for those who had been affected physically and emotionally by the earthquake; to ask that the Lord would use the earthquake as a means of drawing people to himself; to encourage each other in our faith in the all sovereign God who works everything according to his purposes; and to rejoice in the Lord and adore Him for His greatness and his kindness to us. The following meditation was preached at this thanksgiving service.

If there has been one thing I've been impressed with over the last few weeks, it's been the response to the earthquake. It has been truly remarkable. The immediate mobilisation of the civil defence teams. The round the clock work by emergency services personnel. The in-

stant establishment of accommodation centres. The flow of money from WINZ and government agencies. The armies of volunteers cleaning the streets. The tireless work of builders and engineers checking the structural viability of buildings. The response has been overwhelming in nearly every department. But with all this good and necessary action, there is the danger that one vital aspect of the earthquake response has been missing. Thanksgiving. Generous thanks to God for preserving life and so much of this city. Generous thanks to God for providing so much relief through people and government. And so this evening we gather to give generous thanks to God. And in the passage we're looking at, we have a model presented as to how we should give thanks.

Now it's a strange model of thanksgiving – a leper. You wouldn't wish leprosy on your worst enemy. Because lepers were outcasts. They couldn't be involved in any aspects of social or community life because they were considered unclean (Num 5:2-3, Lev 13:45-46). They were rejected and isolated. They were the living dead! They had to wear torn clothes, have unkempt hair, and cover the lower part of their faces, and yell out unclean so that no one ever got close. And in this account we find

10 such men yelling out – for mercy. They have obviously heard about the ministry of Jesus. And they are perceptive enough to realise that one of the main aspects of Jesus ministry, were his works of mercy. The only question was, would he show the same compassion to them that he did to others?

The answer of course comes very quickly. Jesus tells them to go and present themselves to the priests, meaning that he's willing to heal them. And it's rather remarkable that Jesus even responds at all here. Because at this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus is on a mission. The mission is, he's going to Jerusalem to be betrayed, wrongly convicted, and crucified. He's engaged in the most significant event in the history of the world, he's under tremendous spiritual and physical pressure, and what does he do. He takes the time to show mercy to those who are considered the dregs of society. You could say that this would be like coronation day for the King, and on His way to the palace he stops to help an old person across the street. It's remarkable.

What a compassionate Saviour. Jesus is not too caught up in His own interests, to respond to those who cry to Him for mercy. And for all those in our city in need of mercy, there is no more appropriate place to turn. And it

is our job as Christians to point them to the truest source of mercy. When these lepers turn to Jesus for mercy, Jesus sends them to the priests. Now you might think this a strange instruction, but you've got to remember that the priest functioned like the health board. If you wanted to go back to your normal life, you needed the priest to certify you were healed. So that's why Jesus sends them to the priest. And as they go their way they are healed. And you can hardly imagine what scenes of rejoicing would have been taking place there. There would have been high fiving, quite a few woo-hoos, and all the rest of it. Because the men were cleansed. All 10 were freed from their suffering because of the mercy of Jesus Christ. But only one of the lepers responds appropriately to God's mercy. But it is not so much his response that is the interest of this passage, but what Jesus teaches us. Jesus gives us 3 things to reflect on here.

First he poses a few questions

Were not all 10 cleansed? The answer is obvious. Yes. All had experienced His mercy. Jesus follows up with 'Where are the other 9.' And Jesus is not inquiring about their geographical whereabouts. He's saying they ought to be here too. Why aren't they praising God. Where is their gratitude for the life changing healing? Surely they too are capable of giving him their heartfelt thanks. They should have formed their own little mens choir and been belting out a rendition of Psalm 136. Jesus is indicting the 9 – they had not responded to God's gracious act. They had missed the opportunity to say thank you. This reveals to us that God's graciousness can be ignored and unappreciated. His goodness can be taken for granted. It can be forgotten so quickly as the hustle and bustle of life takes over.

And the relevance for us is obvious. We want to take the opportunity to say thank you. We don't want to miss the moment to thank the Lord for graciously sparing us through the earthquake. Perhaps it's already becoming a distant memory for you. Perhaps it is more out of sight and out of mind. But should it be. God's grace not just to us, but to our entire region has been great. Don't we have so much to give thanks for? To thank the Lord that we still have buildings to worship in. To thank the Lord that we are not meeting under vastly different circumstances – we could have been meeting for yet another funeral for

one of our members who'd been found under the rubble, we could have been meeting to pray for members who'd been missing for two weeks and couldn't be found, we could have been meeting to say farewell to the city of Christchurch because it could have been completely levelled and we all had to be evacuated. But we're meeting to give thanks to God for His tender mercies to us. We haven't missed the moment.

Yet is there not room for growth in this area for us? The best of us are often like the 9 lepers, we can be a thankless people. We find it easy to complain about worship services or how things aren't like they were in the good ol' days. But is our conversation seasoned with generous thanks to God. We can easily fill our prayers with requests and petitions. But is there also generous thanksgiving and praise. Martin Rinkhart was a pastor during the 30yrs war in the 1600's. His duties were difficult, he conducted nearly 40 funerals a day, one of which was His own wife. Yet during this time, in spite of war and plague and sorrow, he wrote these words as a table prayer for his family. "Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices ... Who from our mothers arms, has blessed us on our way, with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today." He had a thankful spirit. Let us pray for a daily thankful spirit. J C Ryle remarks that a thankful spirit is the very atmosphere of heaven. Angels and just men made perfect are ever praising God. And so tonight we add our voices to the heavenly throng. We enjoy the atmosphere of heaven as we meet together to give God our thanks.

The second thing that Jesus does is make an observation

Jesus observes "was no-one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner." The word foreigner can mean pagan or heathen. So what Jesus observes, is that the person expressing the most gratitude, is not the one we'd expect. The 10 lepers were a mixed group of people – some were Jews, and at least one was a foreigner. Yet Jesus is observing that no Jews return to thank Him. Only the lone Samaritan comes with His thanks. The foreigner has more spiritual sensitivity than those who should have known better. And perhaps Jesus uses this word because it was a quite emotive one. The word "foreigner" appeared on the signs that were plastered on the outer wall of the temple to prevent unauthorised access. No foreigners were allowed to enter the temple precincts. They had to stay out of the heart of the religious life of Jews, they could stay in the court of the Gentiles. Yet it is this Gentile, this foreigner, who comes to give his thanks and who comes right into the presence of Jesus.

Those who do not take God's blessings for granted make up an exclusive club of surprising people. Some of the people you least expect, may respond to this earthquake in ways that are very appropriate. Don't think that it will just be Christians who give thanks. Many people are thankful, and we have the opportunity to direct them to the person they should thank. But why are you here this evening? Why do you belong to this exclusive club of surprising people who give thanks? It's not because you



or I have some heightened sense of holiness and so we have responded appropriately. It's because God has opened our eyes to the truth. The truth that we really deserve nothing from Him. We don't deserve His mercy. We don't deserve a moment of His common grace. We don't have a right or entitlement to His patience, kindness, or forbearance. If God were to give us what we deserve, every moment of life would be worse than that 7.1 magnitude earthquake. The non-Christian worldview asks – Why do bad things happen to good people? But the Biblical worldview says “There's no such thing as a good person”. It asks, “Why do good things happen to bad people like us?” So we come this evening not just to give thanks for preservation through the earthquake, but to give thanks for

all of God's gracious acts towards us that can scarcely be counted.

The third thing that Jesus does is offer a commendation

Jesus makes a very positive remark about this thankful Samaritan. He says “Rise and go, your faith has made you well.” But this is not a very good translation, Jesus is talking about more than restoration to health. This leper had *already* been healed. Indeed, all the lepers had been healed, but a special commendation is reserved for just one foreigner. This verse literally reads, ‘your faith has saved you.’ Jesus is talking about more than physical healing, Jesus is saying that this man has had his sins forgiven – he's been spiritually healed (cf 7:50, 8:48). He's received something far greater than physical healing, he's received salvation. The Samaritan's 9 friends were declared clean by the priest, but only this man was declared saved by the son of God!

It's common for people to receive God's kindness. Many people in Samaria and Jerusalem and Galilee enjoyed Jesus' kindness when he walked this earth: his healing touch, his free banquets of bread and fish, his teaching which people would gladly listen to for a full day. Anyone can be a candidate for God's general acts of common grace. But that does not mean you have received the ultimate benefit. We have all received God's common act of grace by being preserved through the earthquake. But the ultimate gift that God has given us is His Son. The ultimate gift of grace is that God sent his son into this world

to lay down his life for sinners on the cross. The Father conceived this bitter cup that would secure salvation for His people, filled the cup, and gave it to the son to drink. And Jesus drank that cup to its bitter dregs. And this ultimate gift can only be received by faith. The kind of faith that this leper had.

And if you have this gift, then whatever your circumstances might be, you can be thankful. Perhaps you have a broken chimney or cracked house. Perhaps you have lost many things of great value. Perhaps you've lost your confidence and your nerves are a bit frayed. But if you have faith in Jesus Christ, you have the ultimate gift. And that gift of eternal life can never be lost.

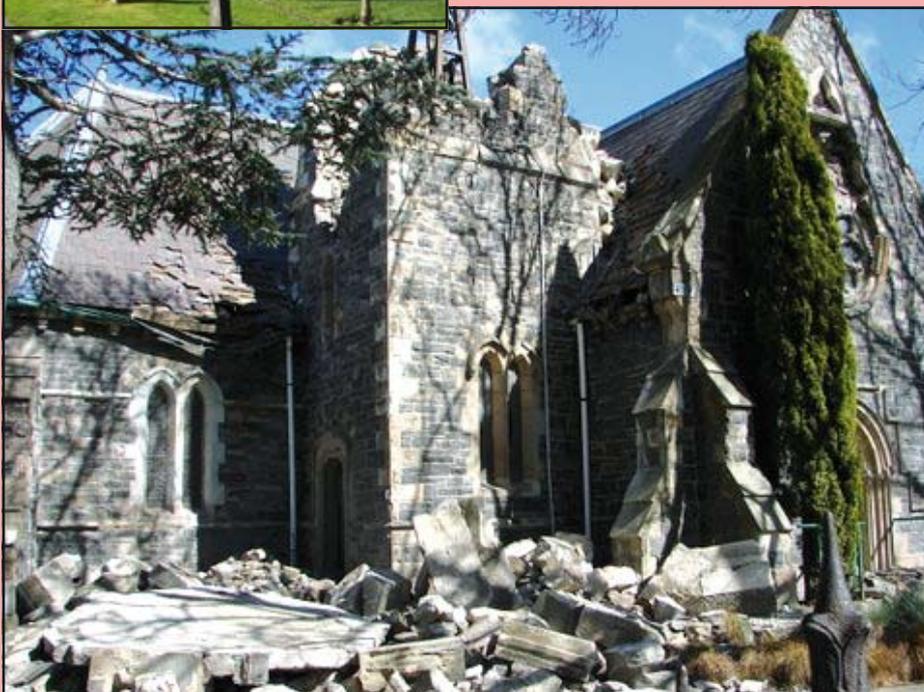
Matthew Henry knew this well. After he was robbed of all his possessions he still gave thanks to God. He said:

“I thank the Lord, first that I was never robbed before, second, because although they took my purse they did not take my life, third, because although they took my all, it wasn't much.”

Could you say that? ‘Thank you Lord, that I've never had an earthquake like that before. Thank you that though my wallet might be affected, you preserved my life. Thank you that whatever I've lost, whether big or small, it really wasn't much. Because I've been given the greatest treasure that cannot be taken from me by an earthquake. I've been given Christ and all the treasures that are found in Him.

There is an interesting movement that occurs in this passage. At the start, the leper stands far off and is not able to come near to Jesus. But at the end of the episode, he is as close as possible to Jesus. Because of His faith, he now comes near and stands in the closest proximity to his healer AND his Saviour. And now instead of yelling out in a loud voice for mercy, he yells something else out. With exuberant, generous, fervent voice, without holding back, he yells out the praises of God. He gives bold, uncompromising thanksgiving. Because that's what the Lord Jesus Christ deserves. May God use this earthquake to draw many to give such praise to the Lord Jesus Christ.

AMEN.



Top left: A sign outside the Reformed Church of Dovedale says: “The Lord reigns ... Let the earth Shake”.

Bottom left: An image of the destruction in Christchurch from the 7.1 earthquake on 4 September.