

faith in
focus

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Suffering – how can I help?

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Editorial

Suffering is not a popular subject! It's not popular for the Christian or for the unbeliever. No one likes to suffer, and yet that is what man will experience in this "vale of tears". Ever since our first parents Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, suffering has been an ever-present reality for mankind. Whether you are young or old, there will come a time when you will experience suffering in one form or another. It is all part of the "curse" for sin, and it takes on many forms.

However, the Christian does not suffer without hope. In Paul's letter to the Romans (Chapt 8:19-25) he says:

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it."

Mr Leo de Vos writes on "Our present suffering, our future glory", and looks at the "where, why, how and when" of this subject. Mr John Goris asks "What can I do to help my suffering friend?", and looks at some very important issues that we all need to be aware of if we are to help someone who is suffering.

Mr Dirk van Garderen gives us more news from India – "Face to face with persecution and helplessness in Kandhamal District, Orissa, India".

Sally Davey writes about "Emily Dickenson – the almost Christian poet".

Mrs Liana Havelaar reviews D A Carson's book *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. Mrs Veronica Hoyt writes on *Treasures of Encouragement: Women Helping Women in the Church* by Sharon Betters, and Mr Leo de Vos gives some insight into Paul D Wolfe's book *My God is True: Lessons Learned Along Cancer's Dark Road*, a review to support his lead article on page 3.

Janice Reid presents a report from Megan van Leeuwen (Christchurch) about her trip to Indonesia. A very interesting article.

Many thanks to all our contributors. I hope you enjoy this issue.

Cover and page 6 photo – Mrs Sally Davey.

Apology

In the May issue of Faith in Focus, the following book reviews were reproduced: *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life*, reviewed by Ben Westerveld; and *The Piety of John Calvin: A Collection of His Spiritual Prose, Poems, and Hymns*, reviewed by Bryan D. Estelle. We omitted to note that the source of these reviews was *New Horizons*, October 2009.

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

Suffering – how can I help? (1)

Our present suffering, our future glory

Leo de Vos

As I write the article, I am aware of much suffering. Whether one pastors a large or a small congregation, the pastor soon learns that many of the sheep have difficult burdens to bear. I recently visited someone who is having surgery, though I have never yet had surgery. Thirteen years ago, however, we lost a baby boy carried to full term – but still-born. We experience suffering in our lives in many different ways.

From where does suffering come?

Suffering is as universal as the lost sock in Fisher and Paykel's clever advertisement. So where does suffering come from? We will not understand suffering unless we see its origin. Suffering came as a consequence of the fall of our first parents into sin. 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. This theological truth is important for our perspective on life. Many people are trying to experience heaven in this sad world. They long for the day when all of their physical pain and financial worry will disappear. Just imagine what winning Lotto would mean! The Christian, however, soon learns that suffering will be found in this world and in his life until Christ returns to make all things new. To put it simply, if you are making an idol out of health and wealth, and are longing for a problem-free life, you are going to be disappointed.

When our aches and pains remind us that the exuberance of youth is over, when we reach the middle-aged years, God often smashes our illusionary idol of a painless life in this world. Our bodies groan and complain so that we are reminded that we are not what we once were. Wise people then begin to think about their mortality. So don't waste that

mid-life crisis, instead think carefully. At mid-life God often destroys our idols so that we trust more fully in Him.

When we say that suffering is a consequence of the fall, we must be careful how we apply this theology. Sometimes Christians are quick to interpret someone's personal suffering as God's personal punishment for their sin. We are not God and can never fully understand God's mysterious providence in the lives of his people. If we begin to play God by interpreting his providence, we may have learned from Job's friends, but we have learned little from Job or from the Bible. It is presumptuous and judgemental to pretend to know how and why God is using suffering in another person's life.

Why do Christians have to suffer?

While we are cautioned about interpreting the sufferings of others, the Bible does say a great deal about why Christians suffer. First, the Bible teaches Christians that suffering confirms their identity as being united to Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul says, *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church ...* (Colossians 1:24). What does Paul mean when he speaks of filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions? (I recall preaching through Colossians as a very young minister and skipping this verse, which I found very difficult to understand!) He cannot mean that there is anything lacking in Christ's sufferings. When our Saviour, dying on the cross, said "It is finished", he meant that by his sufferings he paid the full price for our sins. Paul means that because the believer is united to Christ by faith, he will be called to suffer. Suffering is our badge of identity with Christ! This is why the Bible says that we share in Christ's sufferings (1 Peter 4:13). To be a Christian without suffering would be as strange as to follow a Saviour who had no cross to carry.

Second, the Bible teaches us that Christians grow through suffering. Some

“To be a Christian without suffering would be as strange as to follow a Saviour who had no cross to carry.”



kinds of flowers only bloom after they have been subjected to cold conditions. God often sends his children trials so that they grow more and even blossom! Often when we are cruising through life with few problems, we do not feel the need of God as much as when we are facing trials. In our deep trials, we learn to pray and depend upon God. In a recent article, Andree Seu, who writes a regular column in *World* magazine, spoke of a severe trial with insomnia for the last several years. She and her

mature believers, until God sends us a trial. The Puritans used to say that we are often on too good terms with ourselves. Rather than allowing this truth of God's chastisement to alarm us, the author of Hebrews teaches that it should comfort us. After all, who receives discipline in a household? The answer is only legitimate sons. In the same way, God disciplines the sons of His love. *And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,*

pastor I must confess to getting annoyed when parishioners do not want things like major surgery mentioned in the bulletin or in the congregational prayer. The communion of the saints means that we share and bear our mutual woes.

We need to look to Christ in all of our trials. The Heidelberg Catechism instructs us on just how we are to do this. Notice that the reformed church does not teach that Christ literally descended into hell, but teaches that he bore the suffering of hell in our place. *Why does the creed add: "He descended into hell"? To assure me in times of personal crisis and temptation that Christ my Lord, by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul, especially on the cross but also earlier, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell* (QA.44). The comfort here is that, although I may have severe trials, none will ever be as terrible as that of my Saviour who suffered anguish of his soul in tasting hell, to deliver me from the torment of hell.

“So when trials come our way, it is a good thing to lay our hearts open before the Lord and see if the trial is a wake-up call to holier living.”

church prayed for deliverance from this trial, but she also developed the habit of reading the Bible for one hour each day (in place of sleep). Perhaps God has used insomnia to help you grow closer to his Word? If Joseph had not suffered ten years of misery and disappointment in Egypt, he would not have been prepared to be a leader. Our sufferings teach us humility and build character. So fellow believer, rejoice in your sufferings! *Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us* (Romans 5:3-5). Think about it this way: when have you grown more as a Christian? When life was easy or when sorrows like sea billows roared? So don't waste your suffering but study to see how you can grow through it.

Third, suffering is God's gymnasium to exercise and chastise us. While I stated earlier that we must be so careful not to make a direct correlation between the sin and suffering of others, the Bible does speak of God sending difficulties into our lives to chastise us. Let's think of it this way. A person may think he is a good driver, until the speed or red-light camera ticket comes in the mail. Sometimes we are cruising through life thinking we are

and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

So when trials come our way, it is a good thing to lay our hearts open before the Lord and see if the trial is a wake-up call to holier living. The Westminster Confession, teaching on God's providence, states: *The most wise, righteous, and gracious God, doth oftentimes leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends* (Chapter 5 paragraph 5).

How can we endure suffering?

We must not be stoic regarding our sufferings. Perhaps we are too influenced by the stiff, upper-lip mentality of the British – never open up about trouble, but just plod along. To cope with our trials, we need the support of friends and our church family. Do we share our burdens at Bible Study when we ask for prayer requests before communal prayer? As a

When will our suffering be over?

Our sufferings will be over after we die. In fact, our dying is our last trial. John Bunyan, well-acquainted with suffering himself, teaches us this in *Pilgrim's Progress*. When summoned, each pilgrim crosses the river to be welcomed by the joyful bells of the Celestial City. As a wise pastor Bunyan describes this last crossing as more difficult for some pilgrims than for others.

The book of Revelation has many lovely descriptions of heaven; where there is no death or crying, and where God Himself shall wipe every tear from our eyes. The Bible urges us in our trials to remember the glory that awaits us: *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all* (2 Corinthians 4:17). *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18).

If we had heaven here we would not long for heaven. Our suffering makes us long for heaven.

Recently I preached on Joseph in prison, his school of adversity. I ended with this prayer which teaches us a great deal about our trials:

*Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,
Thou hast brought me to the valley of vision,
Where I live in the depths but see thee in heights*

Let me learn by paradox
That the way down is the way up,
That to be low is to be high,
That the broken heart is the healed
heart,
That the contrite spirit is the
rejoicing spirit ...
That to have nothing is to possess
all,
That to bear the cross is to wear
the crown.
Lord, in the daytime stars can be
seen from deepest wells, and the
deeper the wells the brighter thy
stars shine;

Let me find thy light in my
darkness,
Thy life in my death,
Thy joy in my sorrow,
Thy grace in my sin,
Thy riches in my poverty
Thy glory in my valley.

(From *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, published by the Banner of Truth.)

On the subject of suffering I highly recommend a little booklet entitled *Behind a Frowning Providence*, by John J. Murray, published by the Banner of Truth.
The volume of sermons entitled *Spiritual Depres-*

sion, by Martin Lloyd-Jones, contains some excellent sermons on suffering. Your church library should have this book. On the subject of mid-life crisis referred to in this article I highly recommend the book *Lost in the Middle: Mid-life and the Grace of God*, by Paul David Tripp. For those who are interested in reading Andree Seu's article, you can google this in *World* magazine. The article is called, "Delayed, Not Denied", in *World Magazine*, May 8, 2010. <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/16644>

Mr Leo de Vos is a Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata.

Suffering – how can I help? (2)

What can I do to help my suffering friend?

John Goris

What can I do?

If I am ever going to be of any use to people, it is important that I have a genuine concern for them. But there is more! I need to understand what human nature is like, and I especially need to know the Scriptures as my First Aid kit.

During my student years at the RTC I became aware of the wonderful introduction of the key to Jesus' ministry to people around Him. Dr. George Campbell Morgan spoke of our Lord as the Great Physician who not only knew each individual but also knew what made them tick (John 2:24, 25).

That key to ministering to people and their needs helped me to seek to know the heart and mind of Christ. And Christ as the Living Word helped me to focus on the written Word for guidance. In exploring the Scriptures I discovered that the book of **Job** gave insights as to **how** to counsel people, and that the book of **Psalms** gave insights as to **what** to say in comforting them. These are the books right in the middle of the Bible.

What causes suffering?

We know that we live in a world of sin. The Heidelberg Catechism calls it "*this vale of tears*". (And, by the way, there is some valuable biblical teaching to be found in Lord's Days 9 and 10.)

The consequences of sin are tragic no matter how you look at them. Sometimes sin is self-inflicted, and at other times it is people and situations around us that cause pain. But we should never forget the fact that we are caught in a great cosmic conflict between God and Satan. The Bible gives us glimpses of this everywhere, e.g. Job 1, Revelation 12, etc.

What lies behind the suffering of every single individual may be hard to

pinpoint. Bear in mind what Jesus said in regard to the man born blind: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3).

How can we help a suffering friend?

Let's look at the story of Job. Job does not know what lies behind it all. He is quite bewildered. Three friends come to comfort him. Step 1: they **sympathise** and sit with him for seven days, speechless! Step 2: they **listen** to Job as he tries to cope with his frustrations and pain. Step 3: they begin to **judge** Job's situation, and that is where they fail.

What can we learn from that? It is

“We should never forget the fact that we are caught in a great cosmic conflict between God and Satan.”

important to sympathise genuinely. Listening before speaking is also proper. Job views his problem from where he sits in his grief, and his friends spout their theological knowledge. We must beware of putting everything into a black and white scheme! Life is not like that. Look carefully how Jesus deals with each individual. We do well to take note of a comment made by Dr K. Sietsma in his exposition of Job, “When Job faced his suffering before God alone, he was strong in the comfort of his faith, but when his friends try to “sort out Job” with their theology, Job’s faith began to shake!” That should caution us too.

In our approach to help we may want to start with Scripture. That is good, but we need to use great care: beware! Suppose you speak to fellow-Christians who have just lost a small child in a tragic accident. **Do not start** with Romans 8:28: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him ...”. Even though that is a great Scripture truth, it would be wrong to start your words of comfort with that verse. Better conclude with it.

“In our approach to help we may want to start with Scripture. That is good, but we need to use great care: beware!”



Rather start with the fact that Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:35). Pause, and then read on in that chapter. After that you could turn to Psalm 23:4.

Eventually we may come to Psalm 46:10,11, “Be still, and know that I am God ...”. We can’t argue with God about this world and our own perplexities, we must let God be God. That’s when we find peace. He is our refuge, and a very present help in trouble. We don’t need to know all the answers, we need to know Him!

The Psalms are a really wonderful gift. In them God teaches us to pray as well as praise Him in all circumstances. We are allowed to utter our frustrations, and say, “Why, o God?” (Ps 42:9) or “How long, O LORD?” (Ps 13). But we should not do so in a rebellious, demanding tone, rather in a pleading way while asking for His mercy. And mercy = pity plus action!

Let me stress another thing we should bear in mind. We need to be conscious of the **community** to which we belong. Theodore J. Jansma wrote

a helpful little booklet years ago. It was entitled, “*There is a balm in Gilead*” (Mack Publishing, 1974). We had the privilege of hearing him speak in Auckland in the seventies. This balm for woe is the Lord expressing His healing care and love **through a caring covenant community**. We are to reach out in love, in practical ways, to those who suffer. Even when they face perplexing circumstances the Lord does not abandon His own, even in the darkest hours. Read that great hymn by William Cowper, “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform ...”. And when you use Scripture, use it with care, in small doses, with prayerful spoons. It can be very effective. I recall a very sick young man texting me Bible texts which he found helpful. That’s what I call original “texting”!

And of course we can come back to Romans 8, notably verse 18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us ...” (literally, revealed *into* us).

Grief, how do we handle that?

Grief not only occurs when a loved one dies, but also when a relationship dies! The pain of grief is felt acutely when a loved one dies or decides to leave a marriage relationship. All that has been shared is suddenly or slowly broken off. It is an enormous adjustment. It creates a gap!

We should be careful in what we say. To respond by saying, “I understand” is very foolish. Even if you have gone through a *similar* situation yourself remember that scripture in Proverbs 14:10, “Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy”.

So how can we cope?

Our refuge is the Lord. When everything is in turmoil within us, we need to run to the Lord for our refuge (Psalm 46).

A total stranger knocked on my door years ago. He asked for prayer. He was in deep turmoil because of a broken marriage. It was fruitless to fill the “gap” that had come about in his life (just as it does in the case of death). He was shocked to hear that I had faced a similar problem. Then he asked, How did you cope? I said, I could not fill the “gap”, but I could put my “burden” on one side of the scales, and put a counter-weight on the other side. What was my counter-weight? It was the unspeakable love of God for a sinner. It was the

remembrance of God's mercy for me: it outweighed my burden! Meanwhile we prayed, and God did a miracle. The man came back to say that his wife had returned home.

Not every case ends like that, but it was good to learn how to deal with that pain. Also in such instances a caring covenant community can be a great encouragement.

Depression ...

A difficult area of helping a hurting friend is that of depression. Depression does not always have a spiritual cause. There are illnesses that are of a purely physical nature which cause depression, e.g. those related to one's hormone system. It is a pain that is not easy to deal with. Medication can only do so much. A spiritual source of encouragement is vital in this area. Some very godly people have experienced depression. The gifted Christian poet and hymn-writer William Cowper suffered from depression. He found his consolation in the providence of God (see Lord's Days 9 and 10 again). The important thing is to see the whole picture of reality. A 24 hour day consists of night and day (darkness and light). Only God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). We need to hold on to Him, even in our darkness. Isaiah 50:10 is a great encouragement.

The pain of "sniper" tongues!

They shoot at you from the dark bushes, or confront you with careless comfort.

Our little tongue can be a wonderful tool for comfort in ministering to those who are suffering. It can also cause unspeakable pain and wounds. It is a "striking" instrument that strikes home to alleviate or to aggravate pain. You can read all about it in the whole of chapter 3 in James's epistle. How to help a person who has been hurt by someone's tongue, even that of a fellow – believer?

Let them take it to the Lord in prayer. Do not make it worse by gossip.

The Psalms are full of prayers by people who have been hurt by "sniper" tongues. Consider these Psalms, 129, 52, 55 (esp vss 9-14, 20,21), 56, 57. Look at the advice given, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you" (55:22). Or take the last part of Psalm 57 which focuses on the Lord and praises Him, even on the harp, instead of harping on the hurt. What healthy counter-weight!

Yes, and sing!!

They had been smarting under the rod of the magistrates in Philippi, and now they were hurting in a dark prison cell. There Paul and Silas sat in shock in the stocks. They must have been baffled and in extreme pain. But then at midnight, they prayed and sang! (Acts 16:25) After all, God was still there and they took hold of Him, for He had held unto them! You see, there was both the reality of the pain, and the reality of the presence of God.

And that's the way it is.

Remember, David? David was deeply hurting. "You are the man!" Nathan had said on God's behalf (2 Samuel 12). And so David began to cry out and pour out his heart to the Lord (Psalm 51). And notice these words, "a broken and a contrite heart, o God, you will not despise ...". It was like the soil that had been ploughed and broken up, ready for the seed of the Word to grow and bear fruit!

Many years ago, on reading Psalm 66, the grace of God took hold of me,

and filled my heart with great comfort after unspeakable sorrow. Read these words which the Psalmist says in verses 10 to 12 ...

"For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.

You brought us into prison, and laid burdens on our backs.

You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water,

But ... you brought us to a place of abundance."

This calls for the testimony of grace:

"Come and listen, all of you who fear God;

Let me tell you what He has done for me." (Psalm 66:16)

Mr John Goris is Minister Emeritus, and has served in several churches in the RCNZ.

World in focus

Free Church of Scotland considers adding hymns and instrumental music to current exclusive psalmody

A 5 May 2010 article by Cameron Brooks in the Press and Journal titled "Free Church of Scotland Considers Lifting 110-Year Ban" reports on a proposal by several Free Church of Scotland (FCS) ministers to give individual congregations the option of adding hymns and instrumental music to the current requirements for exclusive psalmody. The potential changes could make it easier for Church of Scotland congregations disagreeing with the Kirk's appointment of a homosexual minister to Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen, Scotland, to change their denominational affiliation to the FCS.

A 6 May 2010 press release from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCSC) reports on "dramatic increase in interest in Psalm-singing within the [FCSC]," and explains a twelve-year cycle program for FCSC churches for instruction in singing the metrical psalms, which has had a twenty-eight percent increase in participation during the past year.

+ Free Church of Scotland

Church of Scotland Ecumenical Committee recommends joint baptismal renewal liturgy with Roman Catholics

An 11 May 2010 article in Ekklesia titled "Scottish Presbyterians Encourage Joint Reaffirmation of Baptism Vows with Catholics" reports that the Ecumenical Committee of the Church of Scotland (COS)'s report to the 2010 COS General Assembly (GA) will recommend adoption of a special liturgy for baptismal renewal to be celebrated jointly with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), which was devised by the COS Joint Committee on Doctrine that consists of both COS and RCC representatives.

An 11 May 2010 Press and Journal article titled "Closer Inter-Church Links Urged" reports on another COS Ecumenical Committee report to the COS GA lauding the joint talks between the COS and the Church of England, which may soon include the Scottish Episcopal Church, which are designed to improve cooperation between the denominations and allow three-way working on doctrine and theological matters.

Another report to the COS GA rec-

ommends support for creating artificial living organisms in the laboratory as long as the research is done in an ethical manner.

+ *Church of Scotland*

Internet Archive publishes The Book of Common Prayer as amended by the Westminster Divines, A.D. 1661

The Internet Archive has published The Book of Common Prayer as Amended by the Westminster Divines, A.D. 1661, edited by Charles W. Shields, D.D., with a historical and liturgical treatise, originally published by James S. Claxton of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1867.

The book is from the library collection of Princeton Theological Seminary.

+ *Princeton Theological Seminary*

Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba adds tenth church and expands outreach ministries

A 7 May 2010 article by Jerry L. Van Marter of the Presbyterian News Service titled "More with Less" reports that in 2009, the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba's Havana Presbytery chartered a tenth church and expanded outreach ministries including feeding programs, gardening projects, tutoring children, visiting the elderly, and ministry to victims and families of those with HIV/AIDS.

The nine existing churches are all thriving and experiencing growth. At least twenty-four Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) churches have relationships with Havana Presbytery churches, and each Havana Presbytery church has at least one PCUSA partner church.

+ *Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)*

First RPCNA church organized in Georgia

On 24 April 2010, church dignitaries and other guests from ten states—Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois—gathered for the formal organization of the first congregation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) in the state of Georgia. The new congregation, Northminster Reformed Presbyterian Church, is one of a handful of RPCNA churches in the South.

One of the oldest denominations in this country, the RPCNA first organized churches in America in the 1700s. This year, its institution for training ministers, the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is celebrating its bicentennial. RPCNA

members trace their heritage to the Scottish Covenanters, who were tyrannized during the "Killing Time" in the late 1600s. Thousands of Covenanters became martyrs for the principle that the civil government should not interfere in the affairs of the church. Today, the RPCNA continues the same testimony as did their forebears for the crown rights of King Jesus and for His mediatorial kingship over the coordinate spheres of church and state. The RPCNA also maintains the historic practice of singing exclusively the Biblical Psalms in worship, without musical accompaniment.

Installed as pastor was the Rev. Dr. Frank J. Smith. Other officers ordained and installed were Mr. Bob Shapiro as a ruling elder and Mr. Keith Ling as a deacon. Greetings were read to the congregation from Dr. Rich Holdeman, Moderator of Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery; the Honorable Sonny Perdue (R), Governor of Georgia; and U.S. Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-Georgia).

+ *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)*

Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) General Assembly Begins Meeting on 17 May 2010 at Liberton Kirk in Edinburgh, Scotland

In his opening address on 18 May 2010, newly-inducted Moderator the Rev. David Fraser argued that the problems which individuals, the nation, and the Church face have a common source—an approach to life which is not based on the Bible.

In a keynote address on the subject of "Scotland's Reformation—a Blueprint for the Progress Today," marking the 450th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation, the Rev. Tim McGlynn, who himself came from a Roman Catholic background, argued: "The nation was changed not simply by the preaching of Knox, but with the help and support of the Lords of the Congregation. His return to Scotland and the opportunities afforded him came from godly men in places of influence and importance. We need a generation of godly men and women who will bring the convictions of a Biblical and Reformed faith back into the councils, institutions and parliament of the nation once again."

+ *Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)*

Presbyterian Church of Liberia celebrates 177th Anniversary

A 27 April 2010 article by Leroy M. Sonpon, III, in the Daily Observer titled

"Presbyterian Church Observes 177th Anniversary in Liberia" reports that a celebration was held 22-25 April 2010 at the First Presbyterian Church—Monrovia, Liberia, celebrating the 177th anniversary of the Presbyterian Church of Liberia (PCL) in its oldest church building.

The PCL was established following the arrival in Liberia from the United States on 16 February 1833 of its founder and first moderator John Brooke Pinney, as an agent of the American Colonization Society and Missionary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

+ *Liberian Observer Corporation*

Asante Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana to make possible sacrament of the Lord's Supper for tribal royalty

A 24 April 2010 Ghana News Agency article titled "Asante Presbytery to serve Holy Communion to Chiefs" reports that the Asante Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) is introducing reforms that will allow traditional tribal Chiefs and Queens to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and otherwise encourage the royals to practice their Christian faith.

The reforms would allow the royals to be fully accepted as members of the PCG, may possibly set aside special seating in the church for the royals, and an Association of Presbyterian Chiefs and Queens would be formed to partner with the Asante Presbytery in its outreach and evangelism programs.

+ *Presbyterian Church of Ghana*

Malawi Presbyterians endorse fourteen-year jail sentence for homosexual couple

A 23 May 2010 article on the One News Page website titled "Malawi Church Welcomes Sentence for Gay Couple" reports that two homosexual men in Malawi held a traditional wedding engagement ceremony, and were subsequently arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment for sodomy and gross indecency.

General Secretary of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Livingstonia Synod, the Rev. Levi Nyondo expressed approval of the jail sentences, saying: "As a church, we don't support homosexuality or same-sex marriages. That is both un-African and un-Christian."

Nyondo urged the government of Malawi, which is one of the world's poorest countries, not to be bullied by foreign donors into legalizing homosexuality, com-

menting: "The donors can stay with their money, we have our morals to protect. The government should stand firm, we are supporting it. They should not be bullied into submission by donor money."

A 23 May 2010 article by Scott Brown in *The Scotsman* titled "Church of Scotland Hits Out at Jailing of Gay Couple in Malawi" reports that the Rev. Ian Galloway, convener of the Church of Scotland (COS)'s Church and Society Council spoke out against the jailing of the two Malawian men, saying: "This is not a just decision and it is one that we hope will be quickly reversed. These men have harmed no-one. They are a danger to no-one and they should not be in prison."

"It is not right to imprison people on the grounds of their sexuality, even in a place where attitudes to human sexuality are different from here, and those differences should not stop us saying so."

+ *One News Page*

UNFPA and abortion advocates to push "reproductive rights" on UN treaty bodies

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) This week, abortion advocates the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR) and Amnesty International (AI) are teaming up with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to host the "first-ever" briefings on "reproductive rights" for the committees responsible for monitoring compliance with the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

According to the CRR website, the briefing with the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) will focus on "reproductive rights violations" such "denial of reproductive healthcare services, including abortion and post-abortion care."

By *Samantha Singson*

Portugal legalizes homosexual marriage, visiting Pope condemns it

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) This week, the president of Portugal announced his decision to ratify a law allowing gay marriage in the small European country. The same-sex marriage bill first passed in the Portuguese parliament in January, but was subject to a presidential veto. The president's decision to sign the bill into law makes Portugal the sixth European country allowing same-sex couples to wed.

The ratification by President Anibal Cavaco Silva, described as a practicing

Catholic, comes just days after a papal visit to the predominantly Catholic country where Pope Benedict spoke out against the legislation.

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

Controversial blasphemy law in Indonesia

Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Hong Kong reported that a coalition of rights groups and civil society organizations in Indonesia challenged the controversial 1965 law, allowing criminal penalties and bans for "distorting" the core beliefs of the six officially-recognized religions in the country – Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. The law is vague which permits arbitrary interpretations by authorities and has been largely used against those seen as offending mainstream Islam. Indonesia's Constitutional Court rejected the coalition's arguments in an 8 to 1 decision. It is widely considered that the upholding of the controversial blasphemy law is a strong blow to religious freedom in Indonesia.

WEA Religious Liberty – May 2010

The court case of Maryam and Marzieh in Iran

During the last several months the Christian community worldwide has been concerned about the case of the two Iranian ladies, Maryam and Marzieh, arrested for their Christian faith and conditionally released in November 2010 after 259 days in Iran's Evin Prison. Jubilee Campaign USA report that the ladies have been receiving medical treatment for the past five months, but both remain unwell, weak and suffer from various illnesses. Maryam and Marzieh's recent court hearing was set for 13th April, 2010. Elam Ministries, Jubilee Campaign's partners, report that the ladies have not been detained after the court hearing, but their court procedure still continues.

WEA Religious Liberty – May 2010

Christians expelled from their homes in LAOS

In our edition from February 2010 we reflected the news from Human Rights Watch for Lao Religious Freedom (HR-WLRF) on Lao Christians, expelled from Katin village of Ta-Oyl district, Saravan Province, by local officials, police and villagers. In spite of international pressure and the assurance of local official adherence to religious freedom, the 48 expelled Christians are still out of their village and possessions, placed in

temporary shelters at the edge of the jungle, suffering from a prolonged lack of adequate food and clean water. There is already one dead and two hospitalized due to the bad living conditions. Katin's village chief recently warned other residents that their personal possessions would be confiscated if they had any contact with the expelled Christians. Compass Direct News report that the district head said publicly "he would not tolerate the existence of Christianity in areas under his control."

WEA Religious Liberty – May 2010

Pastor and others assaulted by a mob in Sri Lanka

According to a Sri Lanka Incident Report – April/May 2010 of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), a mob of about 500 people led by a Buddhist monk assaulted, beat and intimidated a group of 12 Christians in the village of Edurampolawatta. The Christians were distributing leaflets for a Christian film that was to be screened in the village. After interference from the police the mob was dispersed. NCEASL has reported on similar incidents in other areas of the country as well.

WEA Religious Liberty – May 2010

Two Christian Journalists Killed In Nigeria

More Christians are reported murdered in Jos, Plateau state in Nigeria. Several news releases of Compass Direct during last months reported that Jos, located between Nigeria's mainly Muslim North and Christian South, has become a flash-point for ethnic and religious tensions in Plateau State, Nigeria. On 24th April 2010 at Gado-Bako in Jos North Local Government Area Nathan, S. Dabak, the assistant editor of the newspaper of the Church of Christ in Nigeria and Sunday Gyang Bwede, a reporter at the church newspaper, were stabbed to death by Hausa Muslim youths, who boldly answered calls which came to the cellular phones of the deceased journalists. Police are still to investigate the unfortunate incident. The incident happened while the church was still mourning the death of its pastor and his wife killed in Boto, Bauchi state on 13th April 2010. Compass Direct News Services reports that four other Christians also were killed on 24th April 2010 in the Dutse Uku district of Jos' Nasarawa Gwom area. The events described above follow a series of other brutal mass killings of Christians in the area.

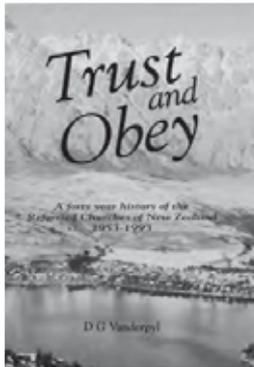
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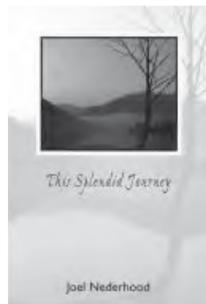
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Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) – *the almost-Christian poet*

It is quite an extraordinary experience to read any of the modern biographies of Emily Dickinson, the mid-nineteenth century American poet. She lived the quietest life imaginable – leaving her Massachusetts village only a handful of times. Her social world comprised her immediate family, her brother and sister-in-law who lived next door, and those friends she corresponded with. In actual fact, she was a strange recluse who almost never ventured outside her own garden after her mid-thirties. And yet – she is the subject of the most intense interest; and the smallest details of her life have attracted scholarly debate. Why this fascination?

There are two main reasons, I believe. The first is that Emily Dickinson's poetic gifts were of phenomenal proportions. Despite the fact that she lived such a secluded life; and that her poems lay undiscovered in her room until after her death, she is widely celebrated by literary scholars today. Her compressed, enigmatic style displays an impressive mastery of language. She was also extraordinarily modern for her time. Growing up in the literary world of romanticism – the world shaped by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Ralph Waldo Emerson, it was surprising that she should have anticipated twentieth-century thinking so much. For these reasons she has become the darling of modern literary critics; and is even regarded as America's greatest poet.

But there is another important reason Emily is so beloved of the critics: it is her apparent rejection of the evangelical Calvinism of her parents and her culture. This, to them, was a bold gesture of independence that anticipated the rebellious free-thinking of the twentieth century. It is not difficult to understand their admiration: inherently hostile to biblical Christianity, they despise Emily's Calvinistic New England heritage. The fact that Emily alone in her family resisted the pressure to conform – inwardly or outwardly – to New England spiritual norms – is to them a victory of the mind and heart.

New England spiritual inheritance

The Dickinson family had a long and noteworthy lineage in Massachusetts. Their original forebear, Nathanael Dickinson, was one of the party to emigrate with John Winthrop (and Anne Bradstreet) in 1630. As the years passed by, various Dickinsons moved to the Amherst area in the Connecticut River valley, not far from Northampton, famous for Jonathan Edwards's ministry in the 1730s and 40s. By 1830, the year of Emily's birth, the area was well-populated with numerous Dickinson relatives. Amherst itself was no more than a simple village; but it contained a number of promising residents about to make themselves distinguished in professional and business life.

Church (Congregational) in Amherst. Samuel Dickinson had grown up in it; and received his education at the college founded by his father, as well as at Yale. Yale supplied most of the ministers of First Church during Emily's lifetime; and its Calvinism had softened considerably since the mid-eighteenth century. Its theology might be called "New School"; which meant a blurring of the doctrines of God's sovereignty, human depravity, and man's inability to do anything to save himself. As the nineteenth century got underway this theology was mixed with strands of what is usually called Romanticism – optimistic ideas about the human heart, the primacy of feeling, and the endless possibilities of finding the truth about life by looking inward, into one's own soul. Emily did not grow up hearing the most solid of biblical preaching. Nevertheless, the Bible sank into her deepest consciousness; and biblical language and imagery coloured

“She had long wished for the kind of faith that would give her assurance of Christ; but never felt sure she was converted.”

Emily's father, Samuel Dickinson, was one. Samuel's father, Edward, was a lawyer and a public-spirited man. He took a leading part in the foundation of Amherst College – planned, like most New England colleges, for training ministers for the Church. But Edward over-reached himself in his generosity, burdening himself with so much debt that he eventually had to sell the house he, his son Samuel and both their families lived in on Main Street and move west to Cincinnati, Ohio – taking a humble position as supervisor of a college building programme. One of Samuel's early driving goals was to restore the family's fortunes and position in Amherst. Significantly, he was to re-purchase the family home in Main Street and renovate it handsomely in the 1850s.

The family were pillars of the First



Emily Dickinson at age 17.

her conversation, her letters and all of her poetry.

Emily's parents' thinking was that of most Congregationalist New Englanders. They were church members who took their church's teaching seriously. Their view of family life was shaped by evangelical writers like Hannah More. Samuel, in particular, held the idea that women's God-given role was in the home, as the centre of family life; but that they should be prepared for this by an excellent education. Emily Norcross was probably never as well-educated or as interested in literary or scientific things as Samuel would have liked; but his daughters certainly became so. While the Amherst church's theology may not have been rigorously Calvinistic – the need to be converted was certainly emphasised. Periodic "harvests" added men and women to the church by conversion. There was a lot of stress on examining one's heart to detect conviction for sin, and an inner desire to close with Christ in faith. This is how Emily became a professing member soon after her marriage to Samuel; and it is how Edward, Lavinia and Austin, did around 1850. Many New Englanders in those days would not profess faith and become full communicant members until they were well into their adult years – and only after they truly believed they had subjectively experienced conversion. Nevertheless, most adults continued to attend church, and even actively served in church affairs – though neither voting nor receiving the sacraments.

Childhood and education

This was the background into which young Emily Dickinson was born. Given this cultural setting, and the various forces at work in her parents' lives, some of the peculiarities of her own story begin to seem a little less extraordinary. For the first sixteen years of her life, Emily lived at home in Amherst with her parents, brother Austin and younger sister Lavinia. She was a precociously intelligent child, and read voraciously. All her early education was at Amherst Academy, which provided a very good schooling, despite a rapid turnover of teachers during the years Emily was enrolled. Her teachers whetted her interest in both the more literary subjects and in science. (The scientific language often used in her poetry is a striking feature). Friends she enjoyed in abundance – Emily was a vivacious girl – though because of her literary talent and obvious academic abilities she was a source of some envy to her classmates.

One of her friends later commented on her passionate desire to love and be loved: it was almost too much for some friends, and Emily was frequently disappointed in her friends' failure to return her intense affection.

She lost several friends to tuberculosis during her teenage years, and this affected her deeply. Consciousness of death and decay is everywhere in her poetry: it is fair to say that, despite her best efforts, it proved impossible to arrive at an intellectual answer to the problem of death without embracing the gospel fully. For years the family lived next door to the cemetery, and from her bedroom window she saw many funeral processions. But her Sunday sermons and daily family Bible readings did not seem to help her – as one biographer has noted, Emily came to reject the tie between sin and death, and thus between suffering and truth.¹

At the age of sixteen Emily began an academic year at Mt Holyoke Seminary, a distinguished girls' school established a few years earlier by its principal, Mary Lyon – a lady distinguished for her fervent evangelical piety as well as for her academic rigour. This year was probably the tipping-point for Emily, spiritually speaking. She had long wished for the kind of faith that would give her assurance of Christ; but never felt sure she was converted. At Mt Holyoke all students who could not profess Christ were singled out for special care by the teaching staff, particularly by Mary Lyon herself. They met with these students individually, and considerable pressure was exerted on them to repent and believe. Emily never seemed particularly resentful of this; and in letters home spoke warmly of the kindness of all the staff. But she was stiffening in her resistance, and once or twice asserted her independence of the school's evangelical position, publicly.

Domestic, poetic seclusion

On her return home to Amherst Emily slipped into a quiet, regular domestic routine. At first somewhat of a social butterfly, she retired, by stages, into her home on Main Street. Her father's emphasis on the woman's proper place played a role; as did her mother's illnesses, which required her daughters' domestic assistance. I suspect that her slowly-hardening resistance to the gospel played a large part. She ceased to attend church, and bit by bit, turned inward, attempting to resolve the big questions of life as she sat writing in her bedroom.

Though no longer going out in the village, she was not completely isolated from the world. She had her immediate family; and there were a large number of literary and political periodicals that came regularly to the house. Her father bought her books as well. But above all she had her voluminous correspondence. It was as if she wanted to live life still – but at a safely-preserved distance; as an observer who responded only when – and to the people – she wanted to. Like her brother, Austin, and many other people who love solitude, she wanted the kind of interaction that did not demand more of her than she wanted to give. Facebook, the internet, and the virtual world accessed through screen and keyboard, would have suited her perfectly.

From the late 1850s to the mid-1860s Emily's poetic output was astonishing. Copied in her neat handwriting, she stitched her poems together in manuscript books. She shared quite a number with friends in her letters, but almost none was published in her lifetime: publication she strenuously resisted, despite the pleas of one publisher friend with whom she corresponded. But the depth and perspicuity of her thinking astonished those who read her poetry after she died. The great majority of all her 1800 poems are very short – perfectly composed – and contain quick, light, but almost alarming intensity of insight. Take this one, for example, commenting on life's brevity:

*Apparently with no surprise
To any happy Flower
The Frost beheads it at its play –
In accidental power –
The blonde Assassin passes on –
The Sun proceeds unmoved
To measure off another Day
For an Approving God. (#1624)²*

Did you note the doubt expressed in the irony of the last two lines? And what do you think of these compressed few lines, containing a most expansive thought?

*There are two Mays
And then a Must
And after that a Shall.
How infinite the compromise
That indicates I will! (#1618)*

But the sad fact is that Emily's insight remained imprisoned within the walls of doubt. Inevitably, modern readers read doubt as freedom, but Christians can only view the following words, coming

from the pen of a woman grown up in a Christian home, as tragic:

*Those – dying then,
Knew where they went –
They went to God’s Right Hand –
That hand is amputated now
And God cannot be found –*

And yet – there are hesitations and uncertainties, even about unbelief. It seems Emily did not entirely lose her respect for the Christian faith. There remain small sparks of fire and light in the poem’s second stanza:

*The abdication of Belief
Makes the Behaviour small –*

*Better an ignis fatuus
Than no illume at all – (#1551)*

Of the great deal about Emily Dickinson’s life and thought that remains mystery, her spiritual state is the most vital part. Because her poetry contains conflicting signals – both of belief and of unbelief – it is impossible to state, with certainty, what conclusions she reached about Christ while thinking and writing alone in her bedroom all those years³. Yet the usual fruit of faith – the peace of assurance, love of Christian company, conviction of what is not yet seen – did not characterise this extraordinary writer’s life. She eloquently asked the great

questions – but hesitated before the great answers.

Notes

- 1 Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief* (Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 29-30. I am indebted to Lundin’s biography, and also to Alfred Habegger’s *My Wars are Laid Away in Books: A Life of Emily Dickinson* (The Modern Library, New York, 2001) for my understanding of Dickinson’s life, beliefs and writing.
- 2 Poem numbers are from Thomas Johnson’s *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Faber and Faber, London, 1970). This is the standard edition of Dickinson’s poems.
- 3 Lundin (a Christian literary scholar) seems fairly certain, on balance, that Emily had Christian faith – though the evidence he offers is not abundant.

Face to face with persecution and helplessness in Kandhamal District, Orissa, India

Whatever else, my visit to India (Mar 1-16, 2010) on behalf of the National Diaconate Committee was ‘full on’. The itinerary had been prepared beforehand by the Rev Bert Kuipers (World Diaconate Relief, CRCA) who is an ‘old hand’ with about 15 visits to the sub-continent under his belt!

Upon arriving at Kolkata (Calcutta) in West Bengal at 10.30pm, local time, I was immensely relieved to have successfully negotiated some 26 hours of travel. Upon being released from India customs officials, I walked straight into the arms of Bert who, as he embraced me, said, ‘Up at 5.00am tomorrow Dirk. We’re off to the Kandhamal District in Orissa to visit a number of villages that recently experienced severe persecution.’

I’m afraid that what Bert was saying by-passed my travel-frazzled brain. I heard only about having to get up at 5.00am the next morning. A sense of ‘poor-fellar-me’ was very real. Little did I know what I would come to see, hear and experience the next day.

At 5.00am there was a firm knock on my (YWCA) hotel door. ‘Rise and shine!’ We were shuttled back to the airport to fly to Bhubaneswar, the major city of the state of Orissa. From there, a 4X4 hire car, complete with necessary driver (a very religious Hindu who genuflected at

every Hindu shrine and temple we passed – there were hundreds!) and A/C. The trip to Kandhamal district took six turbulent, sweltering hours, most of it on secondary roads noted for the most amazing variety of transport and ubiquitous, unavoidable potholes. We were running late, a normal pattern in all our travels, and therefore forever in a screeching hurry. This was demonstrated enthusiastically by our driver, who made sure his car-horn blared at least four times per minute during the entire journey to and from our destination. Not exactly restful travel!

En route Bert kindly filled me in on

some of the details of what had happened in this district.

In 2008, an important Hindu leader (swami) in Orissa was murdered together with some of his followers, supposedly by Maoist extremists. The event was reported in India newspapers, but attracted little media attention internationally. This changed somewhat when Christians in Orissa were accused of being the real murderers. The result was a wave of Hindu violence against the Christian minority in Orissa.¹ In a few days in August of 2008, 300 mainly Christian villages in the Kandhamal district were



Making our way to the village. Everyone was waiting for us and wanted to welcome us.



This is one of the severely damaged houses at the village we visited in Orissa.

ransacked and in many cases torched. Hundreds of churches were burned to the ground and, officially at least, 98 people were murdered, many horribly and publicly. During those days the local police, aware of what was going on, did little or nothing.

In March 2009, after the World Diaconate Relief Committee of the CRCA had become involved in relief work using local contacts associated with other work WDC is involved with, Bert Kuipers first visited there. The journey into Kandhamal was considered dangerous at the time and Bert recalls travelling with armed police protection. This year, on 2 March 2010, he was going to visit the villagers once more. They wanted to show what had happened in the previous year and, above all, to express their heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

Government support for the victims

While on our way to Kandhamal, the local man who is in charge of the distribution of diaconal aid on behalf of WDC, travelled with us. It was through him that I heard about the initial lack of official and police response to the horror of what had happened. Eventually, when the damage was already done and over, the authorities finally began to act, albeit reluctantly. The government made available a financial handout to all the victims to enable them to rebuild their burned-down homes. As I heard it, something like 60,000 rupees² was to be given to each family. Sounds reasonable, even generous. But, given the way things are in bureaucratic India, these funds pass through many hands before reaching the affected villager. A lucky villager could expect about 10,000 rupees! That, system, which, as a rule,

operates everywhere all the time, leaves the powerless ever more so.

In a recent publication, Pavan K. Varma, 'one of India's most admired and widely-read writers of non-fiction, candidly exposes truth about the nation's mindset:

Their spiritualism, although lofty in its metaphysics, is in religious practice mostly a means to harness divine support for power and pelf³. ... Most Indians are 'other-worldly' only in their indifference to anything in the external milieu that is not of direct benefit to their immediate and personal world.

This complete self-absorption is truly evident in their remarkable tolerance of inequity, filth and human suffering. They are a pragmatic people, naturally amoral in their outlook. There is no notion of ultimate sin in Hinduism. Any action is justified in certain contexts, and gods are routinely bribed. Corruption has grown endemically because it is not really considered wrong, so long as it yields the desired result. If discovered, it provokes great moral outrage, in inverse proportion to the degree to which it is accepted. The concept of morality, and of high-minded principle, is dear to Indians as a theoretical construct, but largely ignored in real life as impractical.⁴

Those on top of the heap in India prosper, but those who aren't continue to experience grinding helplessness. This is what I was soon to see and experience when meeting the villagers in Kandhamal.

'We need FOOD!'

It is one thing to collect funds for these victims of persecution, but something

else to decide *which* villages and individuals to prioritise, and *what* they need before all else.

Those who had distributed the funds received from the CRCA's WDR committee, had done exacting research and kept meticulous records of every rupee spent. I received statements of exactly how many folks in what villages had received what and when. Medical provisions, cloth for making saris and clothes for children, cycles, sewing machines, goats, fertilizers, seeds, temporary tents were listed according to numbers, dates and names of villages.

But what was most striking was the incessant cry for food as the number one priority. Rice and cooking oils head the distribution lists over and over again. I asked, 'Why? Surely these people are most in need of housing?' We were travelling through lush country and jungle. The soils here can produce just about anything. Why basic food? Rice? Even the government has programmes providing very, very cheap rice for as little as one rupee per kilo in some states!

Meeting with the villagers.

We went through some magnificent forests as we neared the Kandhamal region. Excitement and diversion for me was seeing several troupes of spider monkeys scampering along the roadside.

Then came visual shock. We drove past a fire-blackened area and next to it a village of tents! The tents were drab, black and reeking of poverty. I suspect that the open cooking fires would have been responsible for their colour.

'Is that the village?' I asked?

No, there were some 300 villages destroyed. We're going to see much more.

Then, some three hours late, we arrived at our destination. The villagers, dressed in their absolute best clothes, had been waiting as only India's poor know how to. They began to 'worship' immediately. Several village leaders stepped forward to introduce themselves. We were taken on a tour to see the damage caused two years previously. The burnt-out houses were exactly as they had been when first torched. Nothing much except some basic cleaning, had taken place. What's going on here? Why no rebuilding?

A special tent to accommodate us had been erected. Several hundred people were in attendance. This was to be a special thanksgiving celebration directed at the Australian sponsors. People sang,

clapped their hands and women covered their faces with their scarves as they stared at us. Well-rehearsed somewhat wooden speeches, followed.

The village and church leaders had also drawn up two appeals, signed by every villager. Many of these signatures, especially those of the women were thumb-prints. One was for funding to rebuild their church.

Here is the other. Read it carefully!

Respected Sir,

1) Women⁵ greetings and Happy New Year 2010 in the name of Mighty Lord Jesus Christ to you and to all brothers and sisters.

2) On behalf of villagers at Telingia under Phulbani Dioceses, Kandhamal Odisha (Orissa) an appeal to you for some help.

3) Sir, you know that, in August 2008 there was a riot known as Kandhamal Riot 2008 in Odisha, during the riot they have persecuted us. They have murdered some of our Christian fellow brothers & sisters, they have demolished our dwelling houses, and set fire to all our belongings. Till today the victimized Christian fellow brothers and sisters are residing in the tent houses which were supplied by Government Officials. Government has provided some relief which were not sufficient for construction and renovation of the damaged houses. And also some of our Christian Organizations they provided fooding and clothing at that time.

4) Now a day all the help from Govt. and other NGO's have since been stopped, till today they are not allowing us for cultivation of our lands. From

last 2008 we are depending on others for our fooding and clothings. During these hard days pricings of essential commodities are hiking day by day⁶, from this little bit of help from Govt. it is quite impossible for construction of dwelling houses.

5) So, with hope and pray we request your honour to be kind enough please pray for us and extend your helping hand support for contraction of the said dwelling houses in remote hilly area. We request you Sir, in the name of mighty Lord, Please give us fooding and clothing at least for the period of one year for survival in this world. Lastly with hope full prayer and regards.

Yours faithfully,
Villagers of Telingia.

When I first read this appeal, I was sceptical! It can't be *that* bad! To quote what I once heard at an international conference, 'The natives are putting all their begs in one giant ask it!'

I tucked this appeal away and kept it for myself. It can't be *that* desperate, can it?

I've since changed my mind, and have done so for several reasons..First, during the public 'thanksgiving' meeting with the villagers, we sponsors were asked if we had any questions. Bert Kuipers, experienced in this kind of situation, randomly pointed to one of the villagers sitting in the crowd. The poor man was clearly terrified at being picked out, but the village elders insisted he stand up and answer the questions. Was he married? Yes.

Children? *Four.*

Did he own land? *No.*

Did he have a job? Yes.

Where? On various (invariably Hindu owned) farms.

How much did he earn? *50 rupees for one day's work.*⁷

Why was he not working today? A puzzled look!

When did he last work? A week ago.

How many days he work last week? One day.

Was that normal? He hung his head in shame and embarrassment!

It struck me like a bombshell. This Christian villager, and most like him, is a landless, unskilled day labourer. He will take any work at all, whether on the local farms or in the forest. But, how is he selected? The local Hindu farmers will pick fellow Hindus first. Christians, because they are Christians and often come from the lowest of the low caste groups, are only in line for leftovers and dregs! Talk about feeling powerless and helpless. Many of these villagers have, since the riots, moved out to the cities of Orissa. Believe you me, that is flight from the frying pan into an even worse fire – life in the worst slum areas. I saw that in Cuttack when visiting an orphanage housing 17 little girls from Kandhamal villagers who had moved into these sticking, festering places.

Secondly, the enormity of the problem failure/unwillingness/inability of government agencies and even Indian Christians to address these needs seems incomprehensible to us. If, as we continue to hear, India is prospering, why don't the powers that be act? It is the sheer overwhelming size of the problem that we in this part of the world just cannot begin to comprehend. This one community is typical of at least a million others!

Consider what *Time Magazine* noted in its May 3rd, 2010 issue:

**The Moment:
4/18/10 New Delhi:**

Visit an Indian slum and you'll often find spotless floors, gleaming pots and clean school uniforms hanging from the wall. The inhabitants have food, a roof and the means to educate their children. Those are the indicators India has often used to distinguish the merely hard up from the truly poor – an underclass that was reckoned at 27.5% of the 1.1 billion population. Activists have long ridiculed this figure as a gross underestimate, and indeed it was. A revision by India's Planning Commission has just added 100 million to the ranks of the impoverished,



Inside one of the burnt out homes. Please note that after 18 months no restoration has been done. No funds are available or forthcoming.

pushing the proportion to 37%. Because of inflation largely driven by surging food prices, rural poverty is now defined as the ability to spend 447 rupees (about \$(US)10.00) on basic goods every month.⁸

Think 400,000,000 chronically poor. Think 100 times the population of New Zealand.

Thirdly, there is the testimony of members of the local Indian community associated with our church at Bucklands Beach. They recently saw video clips of what happened in Kandhamal during the August 2008. They saw people being clubbed and hacked to death in front of their own families. They saw and were horrified, all the more so because until they saw this footage, they were virtually unaware of what had happened! 'Pastor, it was absolute sickening! We didn't know there was such persecution in our own homeland.'

So what?

What I saw and have subsequently gleaned from further investigation and reflection makes me experience a real sense of helplessness.

I saw, heard and felt something of the suffering of these impoverished brothers and sisters in Christ.

I felt overwhelmed and even guilty.

What can be done? I don't really know.

All I do know is God is driving me to plead to him for I realise that the suffering of the impoverished Christian communities in Kandhamal is real.

Will you join me in bringing these things before God's throne of grace?

**Dirk J van Garderen,
May 2010**

Notes

- 1 P.A. Bergwerff, *Christians and the media: About a visiting pope and a murdered Hindu leader*, **Lux Mundi**, No 1, March 2010, p8
- 2 \$(NZ)1.00 = approx 30 rupees
- 3 'pelf' (slang) money; wealth or money in a contemptuous sense; 'filthy lucre' (Collins dictionary)
- 4 Pavan K Varma, *Being Indian*. (London, Wm Heinemann,,2005) p 7
- 5 I think it means 'warm'.
- 6 Basic food prices in India have skyrocketed recently. In country areas the increase has been between 20 & 50%. In this area those figures are probably an underestimation.
- 7 Official minimum wage for these labourers is 150 rupees, but who controls that? 50 rupees is \$(NZ)1.70
- 8 Jyoti Thottam, *Time Vol 175 – 17*. May 3, 2010 p5.

Books in focus

How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil

D A Carson (IVP, 2nd edition, 2006).

Reviewed by Liana Havelaar

Suffering of one form or another will hit each of us at some point. Some time in our lives we will all need to confront questions about suffering and evil – either our own questions, or the questions of friends and family.

How Long, O Lord? is a book that will certainly help you develop a biblical perspective on the issues surrounding suffering, such as: the origin of evil and suffering; why we as Christians suffer; how God can allow suffering and what he does about it; and what we as Christians should do about suffering. Carson calls his book preventative medicine. He writes, "I shall be satisfied if it helps some Christians establish patterns and habits of thought that are so strong that when the hardest questions batter the soul there is less wavering and more faith, joy, and hope." (p 12)

I appreciated the biblical foundation of this book. Carson is careful to let Scripture speak, rather than to construct his own philosophy and then find Scripture to support it.

The book is not light reading, but Carson does seek to avoid technical discussions. He is aiming the book at the ordinary person in the pew, rather than at academics or theologians. Carson has a way of stating things really well, so that often I found myself thinking, "Yes, that's really good!" He packs a lot into his chapters, so I found reading the book through a second time to be quite helpful. The book contains a set of questions at the end of each chapter, which could be used in a study group.

In the early chapters, one could get dismayed by the number of times Carson says, "We'll deal with that later." But don't let that put you off! He's very aware of the large size of his topic, and he's concerned to deal with the different strands in an orderly fashion. The final chapters of the book

are some of the best, but you need to have the framework of the earlier chapters to make them the best.

The book has three main parts. Part I (two chapters) has an introductory chapter and a chapter dealing with how *not* to respond to suffering.

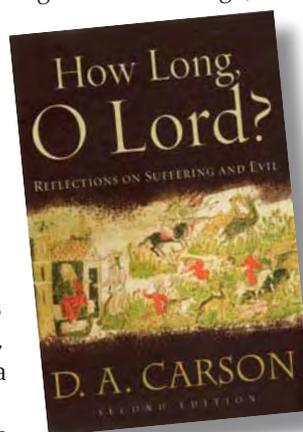
Part II contains eight chapters on a variety of suffering-related topics. Some of the chapters are almost stand-alone essays, dealing with such topics as poverty, war, and death. In this section Carson also looks at:

- how to interpret the book of Job, and what bearing this book has on our perspective on suffering (an excellent chapter);
- the special meaning and purpose of the suffering of God's people;
- how we as Christians need to learn to "take the long view" of suffering and evil. Carson writes, "The God Christians know is a just God; he will ensure that justice is done, and seen to be done ... God will have the last word; we dare to wait for that." (p133-134)
- the suffering of God on the cross. "One of the paramount reasons we are so sure that God is to be trusted is because he sent his Son to suffer cruelly on our behalf." (p 159)

Finally, Part III seeks to draw together many of the strands that have been mentioned in the book. Carson addresses the central question: "If God is sovereign, all-knowing, and good, then whence evil?" To do this, he takes us back several steps, and looks at the Bible's teaching on 1) God's sovereignty and human responsibility, and 2) the nature of God, that he is both transcendent and personal (i.e. relating to humans in a personal way). There is much that we can be certain of from Scripture, but having explained all we can, humans still find that there is *mystery* in the nature of

God and his providence. Carson says, "I do not mean it is illogical; I mean that we do not know enough to be able to unpack it and domesticate it." (p 201)

It wouldn't be right to end this review with mystery. Providence is not only mysterious; it is also comforting. This is



what Carson deals with in the final two chapters of the book. This is a book that will deepen your assurance that, in the midst of the mysteries of suffering and evil, God relates to us in a personal and loving way, and is unfailingly good!

Mrs Liana Havelar is a member of the Reformed Church of Christchurch

Treasures of Encouragement: Women Helping Women in the Church

Sharon Betters (P&R Publishing, 1996)

Suffering is inevitable on this side of Eden. Indeed, according to James 1 it is a necessary aspect of the Christian life; it tests our faith so that we may become "mature and complete" (James 1:2,4). Without suffering, we remain immature, weak members of the Lord's Kingdom. Painful circumstances, then – such as illness, infertility, miscarriage and death, financial pain, relationship difficulties – are unavoidable in this life.

Whilst there are various excellent books on this subject of suffering and how we are to respond to it, some of which receive attention elsewhere in this edition of *Faith in Focus*, the focus of this review is the question of what to do when we see **someone else** suffering. There are times when we would much rather be in the shoes of the sufferer than be the onlooker. At other times, there are events in others' lives to which we do not know how to respond.

A helpful guide in knowing how to encourage someone who is suffering is Sharon Betters's book, *Treasures of Encouragement*. Although it is written primarily for women, it has many gems of wisdom that are applicable for everyone. Its basic premise is "that when Christ is in us, we have the treasures of His encouragement at our fingertips" (p10). Betters writes that

Biblical encouragement is soul work. God unleashes its mysterious power every time a child of God follows the Holy Spirit's direction and steps into the suffering of another person. Individuals, families, and churches need it regularly to maintain spiritual health. And both the encouraged and the encourager are changed through its application (p10).

The book makes the helpful point at its outset that encouragement is fuelled by our identity in Christ, and should always aim at spiritually strengthening the person who is suffering, prompting them to look up to the Lord. Further, to encourage with His Word in our hearts and on our lips, we ourselves need to be constantly growing through the study and application of Scripture, which, in turn, we are passing on to others. "True encouragement pumps hope into the receiver" (p19) and this is perhaps best done when our own relationship with the Lord is growing. This book, then, first calls us to faithfulness towards our Lord, the ability to encourage flowing out of this relationship.

Betters stresses that encouragement takes place within community (chapter 6), frequently by weak people who need to trust in their Lord (chapter 7), and often in relationships between older and younger members of the Church (spiritual mothering, chapter 8). Prayer is a very important aspect of encouragement (chapter 9). Further, encouragement involves being a good listener and a wise and gracious speaker (chapter 10), and requires the courage to get involved in someone else's pain (chapter 11). Regarding this latter point, Betters writes, "If you have a hurting friend, don't avoid her pain. Doing nothing makes her burden heavier" (p191). Basically, an encourager steps in and does what needs to be done (chapter 12).

A very helpful inclusion in this book is its Appendix, entitled "A treasury of encouragement ideas" and containing fifty suggestions (starting points) for encouraging others. As this list indicates, encouragement can be a short term commitment (sending a card or flowers, making a meal, babysitting) or of a long-term nature where we daily walk alongside someone in their suffering. Betters writes that, "God calls us to encourage those caught in the daily grind of life as well as those in crisis" (p21). Encouragement comes in different forms, depending on the circumstances of the giver and the receiver.

Whilst the overall tone of this book is helpful, I have two small criticisms. At times Betters can be somewhat intimidating, discouraging those who are less sure of themselves, and prompting



guilt feelings of not doing enough. While self examination and being stretched in these matters is a good thing, it is wise to remember that not all have the same gifts, such as abilities and time. This in turn should encourage us to be realistic about what we can do, and not to be discouraged when we cannot be all things to all people. A further criticism is Betters's uncritical recounting of the

anger she felt towards God in her own loss of her seventeen-year-old son in a car accident (p189).

A final comment about a book such as this is that, while the body of Christ is called to look out for the needs of suffering brothers and sisters, the sufferer should not lean on this encouragement to the exclusion of Christ. A card in the mail, for example, should not be a "quick fix"; neither should clumsy efforts of encouragement be nursed as a grudge. Ultimately it is not "the faithfulness of other believers [who sooth my] hurting heart" (p20), but a deep and living relationship with the Lord, who alone is able to perfectly carry our sorrows. We will only gain lasting benefit from the encouragement of others if we find rest in the wisdom of God and His Word.

Mrs Veronica Hoyt is a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

My God is True: Lessons Learned Along Cancer's Dark Road

Paul D. Wolfe (Banner of Truth, 2009), 150 pages.

Reviewed by the Rev. Leo de Vos, Minister of the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata

If you are looking for a good book to give to a family member or a friend struggling with cancer, this is it. It is also a good book to remind any believer of what our perspective on living and dying should be. I had recently purchased this book, and then received news that a good friend was suddenly diagnosed with cancer. (Two more friends my age or younger have been diagnosed just recently.) I read the book over a couple days and nights; it was hard to put down. Here are just a few reasons why:

The author is describing his own dark

path through cancer. When he was diagnosed he was studying for the ministry at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He wrote the book nearly ten years later as a seasoned pastor of a Presbyterian congregation. The book is worth reading just for its solid description of God's sovereignty in our sufferings. The author is fond of the hymn by Samuel Rodigast:

*Whate'er my God ordains is right:
His holy will abideth.
I will be still whate'er He doth;
And follow where He guideth.
He is my God; though dark my
road,
He holds me that I shall not fall;
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.*

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir

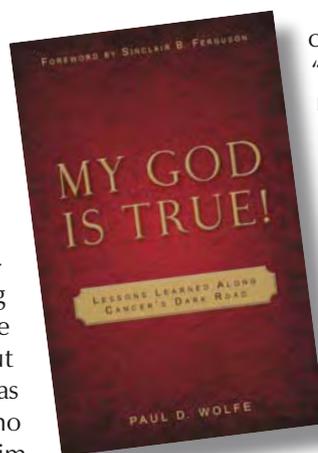
As I read the report in the *Faith in Focus* of April 2010, "Sing to the Lord – our choices of hymns", I felt sorry for the committee, who have spent much time in producing a Psalter in print. The texts of these psalms are no doubt very close to Scripture, but the tunes of many are not fitting to the psalm in many cases.

But, my bone of contention is the committee's drive to burden the church with twice as many uninspired songs as we have now. We are a "Reformed Church" and we claim to have our roots in Geneva, where Calvin restored the inspired song of Scripture to the church. Brethren that is our heritage – the inspired songs of the Bible – the songs of Jesus. These are the songs Jesus sang in worship, and conducting the first Lords Supper with His disciples – these were the songs Paul and Silas sang in prison in Phillipi., The Apostolic church knew no other song for centuries, till men decided they knew better and wanted to put "better" songs in the church – which no one could understand because they were sung in Latin.

Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox brought change too, that gave us the 150 psalms in rhyme so that God's people could take part in worship by singing in the songs of the Holy Spirit. They are used exclusively in many congregations around the world today, because they desire to "worship the Lord our God in Spirit and truth". Do we want that? Well, abstain from doing our things that are

In our world of soft theology his comfort in God's total, sovereign control of all the details of our lives is refreshing.

Further, the author confronts the confused theology of God's having to answer our prayers for healing positively and also to give absolute revelation about healing. When the author was being treated, a nurse who read the grim MRI told him that she had received a special word of assurance that God would heal him. While he had no doubt that the woman was a genuine sister in Christ and well-intentioned in her desire to



comfort, the author says: "It was one of those moments....when I was reminded of the tremendous importance of believing in the sufficiency of Scripture – that truth that the Scriptures are sufficient to guide us, so that there is no need for personalised divine whispers to tell us what to do today and what to expect tomorrow. That is a truth with profound

practical implications, and the denial of it often creates confusion and heart-break. When Christians start listening for whispers from God that go beyond the Bible, and then believe they have actually heard some, the stage is set for profound disappointment and discouragement. How often those 'promises' end up dashed against the hard rocks of reality." (p. 41)

The author shares his world view that all sickness and death are from the fall and the resulting curse. In fact, there is nothing we experience in this life that is not tinged with some of the sadness of that curse. Before I picked this book up I had just finished reading the autobiography of the American cycling champion, Lance Armstrong. He had also battled with serious cancer, and won the Tour de France two years after his diagnosis! In fact, he claims that it was the cancer that gave him the fortitude to win. But Armstrong's world view has no answers or comfort whatsoever for those who lose the battle with cancer. He has no answers for death; his only comfort is that he stoically tried to beat cancer and won....for now. Our author affirms that it is only in the new heavens and new earth that the curse will be removed. Our death brings us into the fullest enjoyment of eternal life with Christ.

One thought the author shared near the beginning of the book has gripped me. He said that in this life we too often regard our families, incomes, homes, jobs with absolute certainty. At the same time we are often more uncertain about heaven and eternal realities. He reminds us to turn this around: we cannot be certain about tomorrow, but we can be absolutely certain about eternal truths.

I appreciated the author's high regard for the preaching of God's Word and the ministry of the church. He said that he had been attending a church for six years, where he was consistently fed a solid diet of teaching by a godly

"our choices". Three of our four Confessions are rebuking us HC, LD 35 Q/A96, BC Art 32, WC Ch 20:1,5.

Our church order requires the churches to sing the Psalms and gives freedom to sing uninspired songs to the conductor of the worship service. On our travels we find often that the uninspired songs are sung more than the inspired Psalms.

Now, by doubling the amount of uninspired songs, my heart is trembling to see our churches going the same way as our past sister churches. The GKN, who many claimed to be our "mother church", the CRCNA and others (having great doctrinal errors to put it mildly), even sister churches with whom we have great doctrinal differences, once were staunchly reformed in worship practices, but then started feeding the congregations with stuff they liked.

So my dear brother John and your Committee, give the church plenty of those sentimental Jesus songs of Charles Wesley and the like, and you will in due time reap the benefits of your produce.

My advice is, if you must have songs in the church outside the 150 psalms, have a look at the first psalter that the Synod of Dort approved, and you will find you could contain all our liturgical forms, catechisms even the Form of Subscription in one book which we could comfortably carry to church every Lord's Day, twice!

Yours in His service.

Gary Heersping

pastor. Then he was diagnosed with cancer. He states that pastors who are out to woo audiences with attention-getting sermons have it all wrong. Rather, preaching must build and strengthen God's people for the long haul. For it was precisely this kind of preaching and teaching that sustained the author and his wife during his illness. He reminds us that solid, doctrinal preaching will never be wasted on our people. Who knows how God will use this in the future?

The book is also likeable because the author is not afraid to display his humanity. One of his disappointments in his treatment while hospitalised was that he could not drink the European beer his friend gave him! He shares his own fears and doubts; he is certainly one of us. But he directs us to the Saviour in whom we find our certain hope.

He also stated that when we see a family dealing with the suffering of cancer, offering to help is not quite

enough. He encourages brothers and sisters in Christ to roll up their sleeves and serve – mow the lawn, bring meals. Don't ask first, but just do it!

So don't ask first, but just buy the book, read it and meditate on it yourself and then give it to a friend in need.

The book can easily be purchased online in Australia: <http://reformers.org/>

Or in the USA: <http://www.heritage-books.org/>

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Bishopdale

Pastoral Notices. Praise God that we can witness this morning the profession of faith of Annelise Vannoort. We rejoice together in His grace to Annelise and His faithfulness to all His promises. Let us warmly welcome Annelise into all the privileges and responsibilities of church membership.

Report on Special Congregational Meeting. On Wednesday, we had a special meeting to discuss our building plans. Andrew de Vries opened the meeting with a devotion based on Ephesians 2:10, and then explained why the Session felt that we should have a meeting before sending out a letter. Fred Braam then gave an overview of our history as a congregation. This helped us put the building plans into a much broader perspective. The third address dealt with our mission and vision, and why the Session believes that Plan A would be the best tool to help us fulfil our God-given mission and carry out our vision. Peter Mahoney then discussed other options that the Session had considered and discounted. Peter also mentioned other Reformed Churches that had either completed building work or were considering it. In each case, a significant amount of money was involved, comparable to what we are thinking about spending. There was then opportunity for questions to be asked. So thank you to those who came;

it was an encouraging evening.

Bucklands Beach

Special Session Meeting. It was most encouraging to have a number of members of our fellowship join us at the special session meeting last Thursday evening. There was only one item on the agenda: the what, where, who and how of the life of our fellowship at Bucklands Beach. The Lord has blessed us in the past few years in providing a number of key areas for outreach and growth. Doors have opened especially in the area of ministry to new migrants – especially South African and Asian. The other area where we have been blessed is in and through the young people who are now at the heart of our church's life and activities. The challenge facing us is how to follow this through, strengthen and make more effective use of these openings for the glory of God. Furthermore, with the numerical growth we have been experiencing, what direction should we pursue? Is our present facility adequate? A church plant? When? Where? Who? Why? Leadership: should we consider calling a second pastor sooner rather than later? Is our priority a focus on 'manpower' rather than developing/expanding the property on Bucklands Beach Road? What about 'word and deed' ministry – diaconal work? The discussion was most helpful. It is now up to the session to begin to give shape to some of these ideas and then present them to the congregation.

Wedding Banns. Congregation, Luke John Scheepers and Danae Elizabeth Brooks have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. They want to begin their life together in the name

of the Lord and in the presence of His people, and to continue it to His glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at St Aidan's Anglican Church, 5 Ascot Ave., Remeura on Saturday, 15th May during a service commencing at 10.00am.

Pastoral. Warmest congratulations to Helgard and Yvette Oosthuysen! They received a second son as a gracious gift of God this past Wednesday. Both mother and baby are doing well. Yvette expects to be at the Botany Maternity Unit for a couple of days. Now Helgard jr has a little brother to look after!

Christchurch

Pastoral. Last week Saturday afternoon the Lord took to be with Him Joop de Bruijne. He and his wife, Bert, were members of our church during the late fifties and early sixties. He found it difficult to find work in his profession and so decided to shift to South Africa. He worked for IBM as an auditor in Johannesburg. We pass on our sympathy to his wife and our prayer is that the Lord may strengthen Bert as she will have to face life on her own.

Rev. Barry and Ann James will be coming to us on Saturday 29 June. Rev James has offered to minister to us for a couple of months. They come from Canberra and we look forward to them coming. He was the minister of the Silverstream congregation from 1990-1998. Since his retirement he has spent a number of times in Uganda, lecturing at the Bible College in Mbale. Please pray for health and strength in their preparations.

It is with pleasure that we welcome Br. Ben Post to membership this morning.

Ben will affirm his faith in this morning's service. He has worshipped with us for over 10 years and has served as Session Clerk for the past year. We are thankful for his contribution to the life of this congregation over the past years and pray that the Lord may continue to bless and use him in service amongst us.

Pastoral. Last weekend the elders were able to have a video call to Dr. Tim Rott. This was very helpful. Please pray for Session as we meet this Wednesday evening to consider the matter of calling.

Dovedale

Pastoral Notes. I have recently come across a helpful website located at www.reformation21.org. According to its 'homepage,' "Reformation 21 is an online magazine (ezine) created to serve, edify, and educate Christians by

presenting an authoritative reformed perspective, while embracing various denominational positions, on a variety of relevant historic matters, current issues, and thoughtful positions that inform, inspire, and challenge Christians to think and grow biblically. It is a ministry of The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (www.alliancenet.org), an organisation established in order to call the church to a reformation that recovers clarity and conviction about the great evangelical truths of the gospel and to encourage their proclamation in our contemporary context." The Editor-in-chief is Rev. Derek Thomas, and bloggers include himself, Prof. Carl Trueman, Rev. Phil Ryken, Rev. Rick Phillips, and Rev. Ligon Duncan, amongst others. A current blog topic is a summary of a conference that has just been held called Together for

the Gospel. I have just finished listening to the freely downloadable audio of the 2008 conference, which was stunning. 5000 attendees (mainly pastors), the singing of 'traditional hymns' (sadly not included on the recording!!), and eight 1 hour addresses by Br's Duncan, Anyabwile, Mohler, Sproul, MacArthur, Piper, Dever, and Mahaney. The audio of the recently completed conference is now also available as is the audio from 2006 (www.t4g.org).

The elders (current and non-serving) are planning to spend some time together this Friday evening and Saturday morning to discuss some topics that there never seems to be enough time to discuss, at length, in our regular meetings. Your prayers that this may be a profitable time would be appreciated.

Dunedin

General Notices. Ascension Day Service. The ascension of our Lord was the culmination of his work here on earth. The purpose of his earthly life, his death and resurrection had been fulfilled and he ascended into heaven to reign as King, victorious over sin and death. Come and celebrate this glorious event with the people of God on Thursday 13 May at 7:00 pm.

Hamilton

Care group ministry. Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as part of extending the ministry of this Church within the congregation and the local community we would like to start a Care group in our Church. The basic plan is to have a co-ordinator organise a team of people who are able to provide various forms of more practical help as required. The co-ordinator, an Elder, or Deacon can be contacted when help is needed and the co-ordinator would then contact a team member or members to provide this. The sorts of help we are looking at are: visiting, help with transport, provision of meals where there is illness or other situations, repairs and maintenance, gardening, domestic help etc. To be able to provide this help we would like to make a list of people willing to help in any of these areas. A questionnaire will be handed out for you to complete and place in the box in the foyer. More forms will be available in the foyer if required (e.g. for another family member). Please prayerfully consider in which areas you can give your time and talents, tick the appropriate boxes and return the form by the end of May. Thank you. Caroline



"Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth. Prov 8:25

Photo: Nathan Borger

van't Wout and Mary-Ann Hoekstra.

From the Pastor: On Friday morning, we gave thanks for Janny van den Bos's life and rejoiced in her promotion to glory. Please remember the family as they begin to come to terms with life without her.

Reformed Website – A very good Reformed web site can be found at: "<http://urclearning.org/>". This site is run by pastors of four United Reformed Churches. On it you will find lots of clear answers to questions, challenging sermons from God's Word, and thought provoking discussions of topics and doctrines that are important for our Christian life. You will find audio sermons, a series of talk shows on various topics, study lessons and even the Reformed creeds and confessions in audio format.

Hastings

THANKS! We would like to thank you for the visits, meals and gifts surrounding the birth of our son, Jasper Wocky Swain, born on 27th April. Jasper is doing well and growing like a bean and we feel very blessed to be given a healthy baby boy. Thank you for all your love, support and prayers towards us as a couple and now a family. We look forward to having Jasper baptised on the 23rd May and you are all welcome to share with us in this special occasion. Love from Chris, Saskia and Jasper.

Hukanui

For those who have not been contacted Brother Chris Dorlas passed away suddenly on Tuesday. His funeral service will be held here at Hukanui on Monday at 10.30am. This will be followed by a shared lunch followed by a private family burial. Could ladies please bring a plate for the lunch. Please remember the Dorlas, and van Dalen family in your prayers at this time.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: We give thanks to the Lord for the healthy birth of Charlie Bill to Clarence and Elise Stolte. He was born last Tuesday and both mother and son are doing well.

Nelson

Wow It's a GIRL!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We rejoice with Ewout and Louise and boys with the birth of their daughter and sister Annelise Katharina Aarsen. May God grant you His blessing and may He watch over her as she grows.

North Shore

News & Announcements. This morning we have the privilege of witnessing Letritia Spies and David Bilton profess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Praise the Lord for His goodness to our own children and also using us to bring others to know him too. Letritia and David, we are thankful to God for the evidence we see in you of the Lord's saving grace. May He continue to be with you all your days and use you greatly in the service of His Church and kingdom. A special welcome this morning to family members who have come to share in this occasion. We hope you enjoy worshipping with us but even more, that you go away knowing you have met God this morning.

It's our birthday! – 30 years ago, on 27th April 1980 our church was instituted. Up to that stage we were a home mission group from Mangere Reformed Church. Finally we were in a position to ask the Auckland Presbytery to allow us to become instituted as a Church in its own right. On Sunday 27th, 31 communicant members signed the protocol for the foundation of the Church. There are 5 who are still members, Dirk and Hanny Hoek, John Posthuma and Don and Jenny Petchell, and also five baptised members, Richard, Michael, Jacqui, Priscilla and Rebecca. There are 8 who attend other Reformed Churches. We do give thanks to our Lord for all His blessings over that time. There have been good times and difficult times and throughout our Lord has faithfully watched over us. Let us all give praise to God for His goodness and His mercy

Auckland Women's Presbyterial 2010

When Saturday, March 20th dawned to a cloudy day in Hamilton, the ladies from Aberdeen (Hamilton) Church were ready to host the annual Women's Presbyterial. This annual meeting has a long history, and we were hosting the 45th meeting! We had been praying and planning for a wonderful day of encouragement and fellowship, creating a memory to look back on.

The day started off cloudy, but that soon changed as the clouds gave way to a beautiful clear blue sky. The ladies began arriving from 9:30 am and after registering, moved into the dining hall for

toward us. May we seek to be faithful to His Word and ask for His continued blessings during the next 30 years, that we may be a shining light in this part of our country.

Palmerston North

From the Pastor. Today we warmly welcome into membership in our congregation Alan and Loraine Simpson and their children Daniel and Naomi. It is great to have you join with us.

Senior Social Afternoon: Thursday May 27th at 2.00 pm at Harmony House. Come and share memories of your favourite work place when you were a younger person, and some amusing incident involved with it. See you there for a time of fellowship.

Pukekohe

Wedding. The wedding of Alanna Grul & Benji Alexander will take place on 29th May, 1:30pm, the Lord willing, at Franklin Baptist Church, Victoria St West. All are welcome to attend. We look forward to seeing you there.

Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. Please remember in prayer before the Lord, the Eldershaw and extended family after the funeral of their mother and grandmother Sr Martha Vandenengel.

Wellington

From the Pastor. A very warm welcome to family and friends who are gathered with us this morning on the joyful occasion of our brother Bill Boere's readmission to the church.

a cuppa, and many yummy cakes.

At 10:15 we were gathered into the church auditorium and were formally welcomed. After some housekeeping matters, we prayed, had our roll call, and then sang our ladies hymn 'Sing with Jubilation', followed by 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness', which tied in beautifully with our speaker's address.

We were then led in two Bible readings from Psalm 8:3-4 and Lam 3:22-23. Then our guest speaker was introduced to us. She was Rosie Boom, an accomplished speaker with an extraordinary heart for families and missions. She has spoken at various CWCI meetings throughout NZ, over the years. Rosie plays the acoustic guitar in various styles ranging from folk, to ballad, to blues.

Rosie's topic was entitled 'Starry, Starry Night'. Rosie shared her journey with us through song and speaking. Her message of encouragement to us was that no matter how grey or dark the night sky, there are always stars, even though we can't always see them. She pointed us to Christ and His faithfulness, and protection over our lives. We were encouraged and challenged to stay close to God and His Word and even though our lives may seem very dark at times, He will always be there as our Morning Star.

Rosie was thanked and presented with a number of thank-you gifts and then we collected our offering for the New Hope Counselling Centre in West Timor.

This is part of the outreach provided by one of the radio stations which Janice Reid has assisted with. The donations collected came to \$567.60 and will be used to help complete the construction of the centre.

We then moved onto the business matters. The minutes of the 2009 Auckland Ladies Presbyterial held in Bucklands Beach were read and approved. Reports from the churches were received together with a confirmation of the roll call:

- Aberdeen 44 present
- Avondale 7 present
- Bucklands Beach 20 present
- Hukanui 15 present

North Shore 2 present
Pukekohe 15 present

And Rosie Boom, bringing our total roll call to 104 ladies. Each congregation in the presbytery presented a report on what the women in their church have been doing as a group. It's always good to hear each church's stories. Arrangements for next years' host were also made. Just before lunch the ladies were each presented with a bookmark as a small memento of the day. The verses on the bookmark were from Ps 8:3-4.

By 12:15 we were ready for lunch. We enjoyed a delicious lunch, some sitting in the dining hall, while others enjoyed the sun and blue skies outside.

After lunch we were invited to stroll around Ben and Mary van den Engel's beautiful gardens on the outskirts of Hamilton. It was a wonderful privilege and a beautiful way to share the Lord's creation together. Some strolled, some sat, and some dabbled their feet in the pool. We concluded the day with singing a few hymns and closing in prayer. We then enjoyed afternoon tea which provided us with yet another opportunity to chat to old and new friends.

The day ended all too quickly. We rejoiced and thanked the Lord for blessing us with a wonderful day, shared with the ladies from the Auckland Presbytery.

Gea Willemse

On behalf of the ladies of Aberdeen (Hamilton) Reformed Church



The gathering of women from the Auckland Presbytery.



Rosie Boom, our guest speaker.



Lovely setting for our women's presbyterial.

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Megan van Leeuwen (23) recently spent some time in Indonesia working as a teacher-aid at a Christian school where some of her relatives work. Her experience there has inspired her to pursue teacher-training when she returns to New Zealand ... one good example of how intercultural experience can help us to see how the Lord can use us! Megan recently visited some Tear Fund children in Indonesia – children that her home church (Reformed Church of Christchurch) sponsors. Megan's mother says, "How she ended up there was for her and us an incredible example of how God works all things together for the good of those who love Him." Here is a copy of Megan's report to her home congregation; we hope you will be encouraged by it ... especially if your local church also sponsors children in developing nations.

Selamat Pagi (Good morning)

I am currently spending 3 months working at a school in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. I am here at the invitation of my Uncle and Auntie who have been teaching here for three years. When I made the decision to come here I realised that this was an opportunity for me to visit the 10 children our church (Reformed Church of Christchurch) sponsors through Tear Fund (Compassion International). I

made some enquiries through Tear Fund New Zealand and discovered that our children were in fact in Soe (pronounced SAW-eh) West Timor, Indonesia. This was not so easy to get to and I had almost given up on the idea when my uncle informed me that the school I was coming to just (providentially) happened to be going to West Timor on a mission trip to Kupang and he had arranged for me to go along.

In Kupang we were hosted by a local church. We worked in the surrounding community on projects such as building, healthcare, and teaching English. On the second day, I went to Soe with Dori, (one of the other girls on the trip who is American has lived in Indonesia for the past seven years). We were accompanied by one of the supervisors from Compassion International, named Yofly. Compassion International (CI) is the child development partner of TEAR Fund New Zealand. CI sets up projects for child sponsorship in countries all around the world. All of the projects work in partnership with a local church. The church essentially 'owns' the local project and hires staff, overseas spending and works with the project.

Soe is about 2.5 hours' drive (or two hours if you have a crazy driver) north-east of Kupang and is in the mountains, so it is a much nicer temperature. The trip to Soe was really scenic, the area looks a bit like the Lewis Pass in New Zealand, very green with lots of trees and wide rivers. There are houses called 'gewangs'

scattered along the road where one or two families or more live, they are quite basic and have thatch roofs. There are also lots of little stalls called 'warungs' where people sell local produce, mainly bananas and coconuts, along with petrol as well as a few other things.

We arrived in Soe around 11.30 am and went and had lunch (rice, of course) at a small shop before going to the project.

The project is located on a large area of land and has a big church at the front (Presbyterian), with a hall at the back, an office building, classrooms, kindergarten and playground. There is also a garden area where vegetables are grown and sold to pay for transportation of children to and from the project. The garden also teaches the children how to grow and harvest crops. The children come to the project three times a week after school. At the project they get a meal, Bible and English lessons and lessons in other things like computers and farming. At this project, the children are really good at singing and have won quite a few competitions. The children are also educated about health care and hygiene.



Children that my church sponsors, dressed in traditional costume.



A gewang – a house where one, two or more families live.



One of the girls that we sponsor with her parents.

Two hundred and fifty children are sponsored at this particular project.

There are 6 staff who manage the project and help out with teaching, administration, maintenance etc. Inside the office area on the wall are written all the names of the children that are sponsored through this project. There is



Project sign.



One of the book cases with books donated by our church.

also a photo of each child next to the name, and information on the child's birth date and who the sponsors are.

In the office area there are also four cabinets of books that have been purchased with the extra money that we sent over. The staff were very thankful that they could buy books as this gives the children an opportunity to read books and borrow them to take home. Children from poorer families rarely get to read or look at books because resources at public schools are very, very limited and parents can't afford to buy children their own books. The money also enabled the project to purchase books in English also - which are typically more expensive and can be harder to come by.

After we had been shown around the project site we were welcomed by the sponsor children with a traditional dance and singing. I was the first visitor of sponsored children this centre has ever had in the 10 years it has been operating. All the children were dressed in traditional Timorese costumes. Each island in Indonesia has its own traditional costume, language and songs. Dori and I were then presented with traditional hand-woven costumes which



One of the classrooms.

was very special. They also gave me cards that they had made to pass on to the church and Sunday school children. I talked with the children and asked them questions which Dori and the project supervisor translated. They told me about their hobbies and what they liked about school and the like.

Most of the children can understand some English but are a little shy to talk back although one girl was confident enough to. Dori and I taught them the song "My God is so big" along with the actions, which they thought was quite fun. We also taught them a couple of English phrases and 'hello' in Maori as well as some things about New Zealand. They asked questions about our church, our hobbies, New Zealand, families and the like. It was really great to be able to hang out with them and get to know them. We see their faces in church on the screen when we have TEAR Fund collections but seeing these children face to face was so amazing. They are not 'just another photo of a child' but have become more real to us and we know that our small financial contribution is enabling them to be part of a programme where they hear the gospel and are given the opportunity of a better education and future.

Later I had an opportunity to meet with the children's parents and talk to them. They offered their heartfelt thanks to our church for sponsoring their children; it really was quite touching to meet these people: they were just so thankful to our church. By our church sponsoring the children we are not only helping the child to have a better life and a relationship with Jesus, but we are also helping the parents to be able to better provide for their other children.

Families are often quite big over here which puts a lot of pressure on the parents to provide for them. West Timor is a 'Christian' island but there are many untouched people groups, especially in Soe. So by the children being involved in the project, their parents and siblings also get to hear about God.

The children farewelled us with another song, and I had the opportunity to pray for them and their parents. Then we said goodbye. This was an amazing experience and I am very thankful that God provided this opportunity for me and that I can share it with our congregation and with you.



Project staff.

Terima Kasih, (Thank you)
Megan van Leeuwen