



faith in
focus

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Editorial

Some things are not negotiable –

A W Tozer, Man the dwelling place of God, <http://awtozer.com/>

This above all others is the age of much talk. Hardly a day passes that the newspapers do not carry one or another of the headlines "Talks to Begin" or "Talks to Continue" or "Talks to Resume." The notion back of this endless official chatter is that all differences between men result from their failure to understand each other; if each can discover exactly what the other thinks they will find to their delight that they are really in full agreement after all.

At the bottom of all this is the glutenous, one-world, all-men-are-brothers philosophy that has taken such hold on the minds of many of our educators and politicians.

Tolerance, charity, understanding, good will, patience and other such words and ideas are lifted from the Bible, misunderstood and applied indiscriminately to every situation.

The big thing now is to "keep in touch." Never let the dialogue die and never accept any decision as final; everything can be negotiated.

This yen to confer has hit the church also, which is not strange since almost everything the church is doing these days has been suggested to her by the world. I observe with pained amusement how many water boys of the pulpit in their effort to be prophets are standing up straight and tall and speaking out boldly in favour of ideas that have been previously fed into their minds by the psychiatrists, the sociologists, the novelists, the scientists and the secular educators.

It is a truism that people agree to disagree only about matters they consider unimportant. No man is tolerant when it concerns his life or the life of his child, and no one will agree to negotiate over any religious matter he considers vital to his eternal welfare. Imagine Moses agreeing to take part in a panel discussion with Israel over the golden calf; or try to picture our Lord Jesus Christ seeking a meeting of minds with the Pharisees to iron out differences; or Luther crawling into the presence of the pope in the name of a broader Christian fellowship.

The desire to be liked even if not respected is a great weakness in any man's character, and in that of a minister of Jesus Christ it is a weakness wholly inexcusable.

The blessing of God is promised to the peacemaker, but the religious negotiator had better watch his step. The ability to settle quarrels between members of God's household is a heavenly gift and one that should be assiduously cultivated. The discerning soul who can reconcile separated friends by prayer and appeal to the Scriptures is worth his weight in diamonds.

That is one thing, but the effort to achieve unity at the expense of truth and righteousness is another. To seek to be friends with those who will not be the friends of Christ is to be a traitor to our Lord. Darkness and light can never be brought together by talk. Some things are not negotiable.

Condensed

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Our witness to the world (1)

Presenting Christ to the Churchless

Rev. Andrew Nugteren

New Zealand is increasingly a churchless society. According to research conducted by the Bible Society last year, even among those who identify themselves as Christians, only 30% attend a church weekly and the majority, less than once a month.¹ Christians are becoming churchless.

The trend isn't limited to Christians alone. Once upon a time, attending church was the socially acceptable thing, even among those only nominally Christian, so there were frequent occasions to hear the gospel and be truly converted. No longer. The same Bible Society research estimated that 92% of non-Christian New Zealanders now either never attend church, or attend only for weddings or funerals. The Christless are churchless, more than ever.

What this means is that it is most unlikely that the people we are trying to reach with the gospel are ever going to present themselves on the doorsteps of our church out of curiosity to hear what we have to say. I'm not pointing the finger, as it isn't as if we haven't tried. Many churches in New Zealand, our own included, have tried door-to-door work and letter box drops, with little or no success. You can usually count the number of people who respond on less than one hand. So it isn't through lack of opportunity or lack of invitation.

Why is nobody listening?

Perhaps the best explanation for the lack of response is that we don't appear to have anything that people are in the market for. It used to be the case that people feared death and what might be on the other side. These days, most people seem to have made up their mind that this life is all we've got. That means that either there isn't a god to face up to, or there's no reason to be afraid of whoever might be there. There will be exceptions of course, especially among older members of society, the

sick, and the terminally ill – we'll have opportunities in addressing their fears and uncertainties to present Christ as a source of hope for the future. But speaking in general terms, a serious discussion of judgement and the afterlife is unlikely to make much of an impression on the average Kiwi.

A prospering local economy in recent years, characterised by a doubling of house prices, hasn't exactly helped the situation. People often turn to God when overwhelmed by troubles. But

when you're doing just fine thank you very much, standing on your own two feet, God isn't exactly #1 on the speed dial. Perhaps the current recession is exactly what many people need – sudden unemployment has the ability to shatter the illusion of control over life, and there may be a greater willingness to think about life's deep questions. Certainly each of us can be looking out for opportunities to steer a conversation in this direction.

I would suggest, however, that we



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have two especially powerful opportunities to present Christ to the churchless: Change and community.

Change

The desire for change is something we can all relate to. Yes, the older we get the less we want things around us to change, but that isn't what I have in mind. I'm thinking of change in terms of the present frustrations and problems each of us are facing in the here and now of our lives. We want the difficulties of our lives to change. You could call this the "sanctification approach" to mission.² What are the issues she is struggling with? What's not working well? What would change look like in his life?

This sort of change is something we can easily and rather naturally talk about over the fence with our next door neighbour who is mowing the lawns, hanging out the washing, over a beer at the student association, working in the

neighbour to speak about how his life works, I'm coming to an understanding of what he believes. You could call that his "functional gospel" – how he makes sense of life, what is important, how change takes place. In essence, he is talking with me about his *faith* (without ever using that word). That helps me to be able to move towards his true need: the forgiveness of sins, and the ability to change. I want to be able to present Christ in a way that makes sense of his life and struggles.

Having entered my neighbour's world and taken his story seriously, I'm also in a good position to question the world in which he is now living. I can help him to reflect on the futility of his life in the here and now, and present Christ in a winsome and attractive way. Perhaps anxiety has been the keynote of his story. In coming through that door, I can explain what anxiety looks like for me as someone who follows Christ. I can talk

opportunity for us to present Christ to the churchless.

Community

A desire for community is a second powerful opportunity for us to present Christ to the churchless. Increasingly, life in modern society is becoming more and more fragmented. Once the extended family provided an anchor, especially during difficult times, but as we have become increasingly mobile, it's less and less common to have strong family networks nearby. And so, by and large, we are on our own. Ever evolving technology is also having a very significant impact. It has always been important for young people to feel accepted and part of the group, and that is still the case today, but technology is now attempting to substitute for spending time with others. And so we have our social-networking Facebooks, Bebos, and Twitters, not to mention the ever-present txt messaging.

And yet – it seems that we are lonelier than ever. We are certainly not happier. And as we accumulate an ever-increasing number of electronic "friends", the number of people who are involved in a meaningful way in our lives seems at an all time low. Many people barely know or have spoken to their neighbours, besides a perfunctory greeting when their paths cross.

Community is important, if for no other reason than it meets the longing we have to belong to something bigger than just me. To have a common purpose. To have people who are committed to us. To enjoy close friendships. To find support when we're going through a tough patch. To motivate us to live for the shared goals and principles that bring us together.

This is where Christian community comes in. Most of us have experienced the benefits of belonging to a Christian community. Christian friends who love us, and show that love in practical ways. Meals for a new mother, a card when we've been struggling, a visit while in hospital, a helping hand when needed work down around the house. Our friends have laughed with us, cried with us, prayed with us and for us, and encouraged us. There's been someone to ask for counsel, for company, and for guidance. We've changed, we've grown, we've matured, and we've contributed into the lives of others. Yes, we've known the struggles of belonging to a community as well. We're not naive and nobody

“People often turn to God when overwhelmed by troubles. But when you're doing just fine ... God isn't exactly #1 on the speed dial.”

garden, or the parents of one of your children's friends. Everyone has problems in their life. Everyone has things they wish were different.

How does this help me in my ultimate aim of presenting Christ to my churchless neighbour? For a start, it helps me to identify with her. I'm showing an interest in her as a person. The old saying "people don't care what you know, until they know you care" is sage advice. I'm genuinely concerned about the anxieties, fears and disappointments she is facing, because they are more than likely similar to many of my own experiences. I can empathise. I can listen. I can offer help. If I'm patient, I may earn an opportunity to speak helpful words in return.

Throughout this extended conversation, I remain concerned for my neighbour also because he doesn't know Christ. But coming to know Christ is not just a "tack-on" – something else I add into my life. In getting my churchless

about how I sometimes still struggle with uncertainties about what tomorrow will bring, but how I am able to find peace and confidence because Jesus assures me that I have a father in heaven who knows me intimately and is interested in the details of my life.

My next door neighbour is probably one of the 92% of non-Christians who wouldn't be seen dead in a church. She probably thinks that church and Christianity has nothing to do with her life. But when I engage her with the here and now problems she is struggling with, I build a bridge across which the gospel can move powerfully. I am demonstrating that Christ has *everything* to do with her life. Through demonstrating change in my own life, I am seeking to be a living example that change is possible and that Christ gives strength for me to cope with the ups and downs of ordinary life. That the gospel is relevant for life now, not just for later. Change. A powerful

is saying that it's all roses and yet, in God's strength, we've worked through our difficulties and come out the other side stronger than before.

An attractive Christian community is, well, attractive! That is important in our goal of presenting Christ to the churchless. What we are attempting to do is to show those around us what *genuine* community looks like. We are not merely inviting our neighbours and friends to perform an individual transaction with Jesus, but we are inviting them to *belong to us!* We invite them to join our faith community and become part of us. To join us in our struggles and our heartaches, to join us in our joys and successes.

A functioning Christian community will contribute much to our witness. One key benefit is that we will have many opportunities to involve our churchless friends and neighbours in the lives of other Christians. And these opportunities don't initially have to involve coming to

a church service. Remember, 92% of our churchless friends have *never* been in a church before in their life, besides weddings and funerals! Inviting them into our Christian community, however, avoids this possible barrier.

They get to see us as real people, perhaps shattering many of their pre-conceptions of what Christians are like. They see our shared joy as we experience good times together. They watch how we cope with adversity and trials. They see us change – that we are not calling them to change, when we are unchanging. They see we are genuine; our faith is not mere words, but faith working itself out in love. They gain an opportunity to desire what we have, what draws us together, which is Christ Jesus himself. Community. A powerful opportunity for us to present Christ to the churchless.

Conclusion

In the twin themes of change and

community, we have two powerful opportunities to invite the churchless to step into our world and explore what Christianity is all about. To take the opportunities that God gives to each of us to build genuine, personal relationships with the people around us who are unlikely to ever wander in to our churches. To understand their struggles, and to show them an alternative way of life by presenting Christ to them in a winsome and powerful way.

So, who have you been talking to across the fence lately?

Endnotes

- 1 <http://biblesociety.org.nz/mediafiles/bible-society-research-2008.pdf>
- 2 I'm borrowing the name, and adapting some of the ideas, which were originally presented by Tim Lane from the Christian Counselling & Educational Foundation (CCEF).

Rev Andrew Nugteren is Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Wellington.

Our witness to the world (2)

What is a Kiwi?

Daniel Wilson

Growing up in the Southern United States, the word "kiwi" instantly brought to mind images of the little furry fruit; *at that time, the little furry bird was still unknown to me.* So, when I first heard the word applied to a person, I was confused to say the least. Now as I write five years later, I am much more familiar with the term.

As a recent immigrant to New Zealand, I find it fascinating to ask members of our churches, "Who is a Kiwi?" Almost instantly, I get a genealogy lesson regarding who is from Holland, South Africa, Wales, etc and who is "from" New Zealand. I believe the term "Kiwi" brings with it a bit of confusion. This time, the confusion is not only in me as an ignorant American, but it is present in *most of us: Kiwis and new-comers.*

We all think certain things about our

native country (some accurate, some quite misinformed).¹ New Zealand, like most nations, has a particular self-image which impacts the way individuals approach daily life. Collectively, Kiwis tend to think of themselves as a successful "cutting-edge" nation. The government has been particularly interested in pushing various agendas to further international recognition of New Zealand as a progressive nation. This national self-image is reflected in the mass participation/interest in sport. It is an incredibly important thing for New Zealand to represent itself well in any and all major sporting events in which it is involved; to fail is to let your country down. Kiwis believe, rather they *know*, that they are the best at rugby and cricket and so when their

¹ For instance, I know that I, as an American, have my own beliefs (both accurate and misinformed) about the USA.



teams fail they want a reason for that failure. People want someone to blame (normally a coach or key player etc). I have been told on numerous occasions that when an Australian sports team loses, people are disappointed... but when a New Zealand sports team loses, the nation goes into mourning. I thought it was a joke until I spent four months here in 2007 and saw it myself. This appears to be evidence that New Zealanders want to be seen as a nation of winners. I even encountered this in witnessing once – the woman wanted to show the validity of her way of life based on the success of New Zealand’s sports teams!

Typical Kiwi know-how

Since the nation is so successful at international sports despite being a small nation, people translate that into a personal self-confidence. They view themselves individually as tough, inventive

their need of a saviour. You see a people struggling in life, trying to uphold an ideal that they (and all Kiwis) are tough and self-sufficient. They have no true hope for change or success in life. Instead, based on this collective identity, they adopt what I call a “spit into the wind” mentality. They hope against all hope that tomorrow will be better than today... that the next relationship will work out better... that their current success will last forever. The next day, when things have not gone as they hoped, they try to wipe the spit from their face and blindly assert that tomorrow will be different.

This national self-image drives the way people live/ruin their lives! As I mentioned earlier, one woman honestly believed that New Zealand’s superiority in sports was evidence that she had no need of God. Some might see this as an isolated event, but I have encountered on more than one occasion the attitude

“Remember the goal is to show your unbelieving friend that you really do have hope!”

and self-sufficient. These complementary ideas are exhibited in statements such as, “typical Kiwi know-how” and related statements involving “#8 wire.” As I just mentioned, these ideas are foundational in the thinking of the typical Kiwi, even to the point of validating their way of life. The rugged individuality results in rampant pragmatism – *if it works, do it*. This is illustrated by the weakening of marriage, because de-facto relationships are so much more convenient for many.

This is where we see that confusion I mentioned earlier. Kiwis are confused in thinking that they are self-sufficient. They aren’t *fine* as they are currently! The fact that New Zealand has provided more rugby stars per capita than Australia is not evidence of a “valid, progressive culture.” If anything, the overwhelming preoccupation with sports demonstrates how shallow this culture has become.

Hope against all hope

When you view Kiwi culture and identity in the light of Scripture, what do you see? You see a people who do not see their sin. You see a people who are blind to

that since New Zealanders are so tough they don’t need the Church. In outreach programs, the RCNZ has often found that people find themselves without a reason to go to Church. The Church doesn’t appear to have anything that people need or desire.

Step into our shoes

So, how do we respond to this confusion regarding what a Kiwi is? One way we should respond is to present the Church more accurately, showing the advantages and blessings of being a part of the Covenant community. (See Andrew Nugteren’s article in this issue.) This is, in a way, asking people to step into our shoes to see the value and glory of salvation through Christ. But that is only one part of a comprehensive response. Cornelius Van Til recommended that the necessary first step is to step into the shoes of your unbelieving friend. Examine the way he lives his life and explain the hopelessness of his condition.

This might seem an impossible task for the average believer, but it is simpler than it sounds. You can do it without words by the way you live, and you can explain

it in personal conversation. ‘Without words’ means you live your life as a clear witness. Show your dependence upon God for all things. You can exhibit that dependence in practical ways: for example, if you plan to do something outside tomorrow, don’t say, “I hope we have nice weather tomorrow” – instead, say, “Lord willing, we will have nice weather tomorrow” or something similar. Show that you have a hope and reason to believe that tomorrow will be better than today – because God is working all things together for good. And then, when the weather is beautiful you must respond by expressing your gratitude to God. However, when the weather is not favourable you must also respond in gratitude, expressing your submission to the Lord’s will. This is where things get practical and hard. We all believe God is sovereign, but we don’t demonstrate it as practically as possible. This is just one of many ways that we can show the hopeless life they live by the hopeful way we live. It is this kind of lifestyle that opens doors for conversations about your faith and invitations to come and see life from your shoes as a believer.

Explaining the hopelessness of the situation of the unbeliever in conversation is probably not as hard as living a consistent Christian life. However, most of us find it more difficult to prepare for such conversations. The biggest hurdle is not the ability to answer every question raised. The key is being willing to admit when you don’t know the answer to the questions. Then you must research those questions and get back to your friend. It is often as easy as asking your pastor or district elder for help, but occasionally it takes the time and energy of reading a book and researching the topic online (in addition to asking a more mature believer for help). The whole endeavour of evangelism is more than handing someone a tract. It is foundationally being firm and consistent in your faith as seen by your actions. Then it is important to be able to verbally present the Gospel to your unbelieving friend or family member. After explaining the Gospel verbally, the door should be open to invite your friend to church to see the consistency and truth of the Christian way of life. It is at that point that we can present the glories and blessings of the Covenant community.

Examine your life

Some might reply, “This sounds nice, but how do you begin?” Start by examining

your life: *How well can your unbelieving family, friends and neighbours see your hope of salvation?* Identify your weak areas, and make a list of ways you can demonstrate that hope practically on a daily basis. Then implement that list over a few weeks. During that same period

of time, it is also important to begin preparing yourself to answer questions regarding your faith. If you are unsure how to do this, ask your district elder or pastor. Remember the goal is to show your unbelieving friend that you really do have hope! And the real glory of

this endeavour is that it drives you to depend upon Christ your hope... which is always a good thing!

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What about Evolution?

Adrian Bates

Historically evolution only became credible after 19th Century society became conditioned to thinking in terms of millions of years. Evolution absolutely needs the 'mists and fogs' of such belief to begin to look half way viable. Obviously, in a 6000 year old world, as indicated by the genealogies in Genesis, evolution is not even going to make first base. Let's take a brief look at the theory of evolution.

Unfortunately, the theory of evolution is not just 'chapter 5 in a school Biology text book'. It actually proposes an alternative explanation to the Bible for the origin of the world. It dogmatically asserts that the development of the whole universe can be explained by physical mechanisms without reference to God. God is therefore rejected as Creator as outlined in the book of Genesis.

The acceptance of evolution by many people has had a widespread and baleful influence over much of society. Whereas a majority once accepted that God has given us morality (eg The Ten Commandments) evolution attacks the basis for such morality by suggesting mankind just evolved by chance and can make up their own rules. The problem is that no ethical basis for any such rules emerges from evolution.

Look at what it teaches as 'fact'

- The Universe is just an accident.
- Your life is just a random event
- When you die you will just die 'like a dog'.
- 'Survival of the fittest' justifies a ruthless approach to getting what you want.
- The ultimate goal is to 'pass on your genes' so any life style or choice of sexual behaviour is possible.

In the last couple of generations history has supplied many examples of individuals who have lived (and died) by this 'ethic' and they are not the people we hold up as good examples. For example Hitler (claiming for 'PC' reasons to be catholic) showed by his book 'Mien Kampf' a total commitment to evolution. His 'master race' is an evolutionary idea – as is its ideas about a class of 'sub humans'. On the basis of his false religion of evolution he

Evolution – The Mechanism

When examining how evolution is supposed to work, be aware that as with all lies, it depends heavily on blurry generalisations – sometimes called the 'Fudge Factor'.

Spontaneous Generation

Evolution is supposed to explain life. That necessitates the 'chance' formation of the first single cell, which is the smallest life form able to replicate itself without assist-

“When examining how evolution is supposed to work, be aware that as with all lies, it depends heavily on blurry generalisations ...”

put 11 million innocent and, helpless victims to death.

Such behaviour is obviously reprehensible, but on what basis do we make that judgement? Actually Hitler acted with total consistency with what evolutionary concepts imply. His actions could only be judged as evil when judged by Judeo / Christian ethics based as we know on the Bible.

In practise, evolutionists are always forced to appropriate the Judeo-Christian ethic to stave off the total collapse of society and ensuing anarchy.

In Darwin's day it seemed credible that a single cell (they called it a simple cell) could emerge from a primordial sea. Today, biology is aware that such a cell is actually more complex than a modern city. The co-discover of DNA, Sir Francis Crick has now renounced the possibility of such a cell forming by chance as Darwin believed. Sir Francis now suggests we believe in 'Panspermia'¹. By this he suggests life arrived on earth from somewhere else in the universe. This just shelves the problem. Such an answer is not a credible evolutionary

explanation for the origin of life – Panspermia is a typical Fudge Factor.

Macro / Micro Evolution

These two terms are bandied about often in a deliberately confusing manner.

Micro evolution is referring to the sort of change a dog breeder can induce by judicious breeding. What emerges is a different dog. But note, it is actually still a dog. Creationists have always accepted such change is God-designed but, as explained in the following, such change has nothing to do with Macro-evolution. Often evolutionists will insist evolution happens (meaning Macro evolution) but then deliberately give as evidence some examples from Micro evolution. Again, this is another example of the Fudge Factor.

Macro Evolution: Macro evolution is the term used for the sort of evolutionary change required to change an amoeba into a horse. When evolutionists suggest that, with time and chance, an amoeba can turn into a horse, their big problem is to explain where the masses of additional genetic information come from. We know that the recipe for the animal is contained in its genome. This is the DNA code that spells out what needs to be made. Now a horse has a multitude of extra bits no amoeba has, like hooves, teeth, lungs and legs. There is no DNA in the amoeba to code for these items, so where do the extra DNA genetic recipes come from? The evolutionist suggests it all arrives by the mechanism of mutation.

Mutations are random mistakes that can appear in DNA in same way spelling mistakes creep into the newspaper. The big problem for evolution is that science knows of no mutations that add information to the Code. There are multitudes of examples where the mistakes (mutations) degrade the code which is what we would expect. Evolutionists are aware of this problem but will often confidently suggest there are plenty of 'beneficial mutations'. Here again we find the Fudge Factor.

'Beneficial mutations' sounds like a



Many of the things written in this article can be read in issues of Creation pictured. Highly recommended. Ed.

good answer but always on closer examination, the so called 'benefit' turns out to involve **not** a gain but a loss of information. A typical example is a beetle with mutated wings that stop it flying. Now, if it lives on a windy island no wings may be beneficial, as it removes the chance of a flying beetle being blown out to sea. The obvious point is that the 'benefit' is not an example of added information. As usual it just turns out to be another example of information (for working wings) degraded and lost.

The Genesis approach to biological change

Genesis One tells us that God created all living things 'after their kinds'. This means that there were 'families' of living things such as the dog kind and the horse kind. This does not perfectly equate to the classifications and divisions with which evolutionary based science divides up living things. What Genesis tells us is that the original 'kinds' were created able to reproduce within the boundaries of that kind – but not across these original boundaries. Today, if we find two distinct creatures or even species that can successfully interbreed and produce fertile offspring – then that is a clear indication they originally sprang from the same original 'kind'.

The indications are that God made the original representatives of the Genesis kinds with lots of possible variation built into the DNA of their genomes. For example the original Dogs may not have looked much like any of today's dogs. But by natural selection and se-

lective breeding all the wolves, coyotes, etc and today's raft of domestic dogs have all sprung from these two original animals. That is a lot of change but it is not macro evolution because it is all within the 'dog kind'. In fact all the many descendants of the original dogs have come about by what is referred to as 'downhill' change. Downhill change only involves reshuffling, sorting and often loss of the already existing genes and DNA. But note, it is a process that does not involve the creation of any additional information. This is precisely what biology has confirmed.

The genetic code could be equated to a pack of cards. It is possible to shuffle the pack, or remove some cards but no card sharp can pull *new information* out of the pack – such as a '15 of Hearts' or a '23 of Spades'.

Yet another fudge factor sometimes invoked is called 'polyploidy'. Polyploidy involves the situation where, for example, a plant has twice the normal number of petals or a lamb maybe born with 5 legs. Evolution suggests that such an occurrence involves the evolving of extra information. But actually this is not true. It is just a case of mistakenly using the existing instructions in the DNA twice over. It is like suggesting if you hand in two copies of your exam paper you deserve twice the marks.

So in conclusion what we find is that the Bible's Genesis account of God's creation of life on this planet is supported by the discoveries of modern biology. Recently, for example in a research project called 'operation encode'² it has been found that most of the claimed 'junk' DNA is not evolutionary leftovers but presently functioning components of essential code. In fact, the more microbiology and bio chemistry are researched the less credible evolution becomes. Should you wish to read further in this area again I would suggest commencing with the **Creation Ministries International** website: <http://Creationontheweb.org>

Endnotes

1. <http://creationontheweb.com/content/view/125>
2. <http://creationontheweb.com/content/view/5158>

Adrian Bates is part of Creation Ministries International in New Zealand

New force in West Australian Politics

Under the heading "Church and state reunited" the Australian Newspaper (April 4, 2009) describes a "new force in West Australian politics".

Abetz and former pastor Ian Britza are at the core of the new religious Right. They nailed their colours to the wall in their inaugural parliamentary speeches in November when Abetz promised to promote and uphold moral laws first and Britza warned of moral decline and linked his victory to divine providence. They are not alone. Other new MPs preach similar themes, just without the religious careers. Former tax accountant Tony Krsticevic used his first speech to thank God for being with him every step of the way in his election, as he warned against a society gone wrong. Church volunteer Albert Jacob, the state's youngest MP at 29, urged integrity and family values as he thanked God for the "divine opportunity" to serve.

Peter Abetz, an ordained minister of the Christian Reformed Church and the brother of right-wing Liberal senator Eric Abetz, makes no bones about his intention to put his Christian values, first, even if it means breaking ranks. Outspoken against abortion, euthanasia and legalised prostitution, which he says legitimises the sexual abuse of women, he claims WA has been under attack from politicians reshaping it in ways that harm the most vulnerable.

Britza, the son of Baptist ministers who were missionaries in Africa, says the prostitution laws being drafted will test the Government's mettle. He believes many prostitutes don't want to be sex workers. The Perth-born former pastor with Faith Ministries spent his early childhood in Africa, returning to Perth speaking Chinyanja, a Zulu tongue, but little English. He has strong views on abortion, families, treatment of the elderly and declining social standards. He worries politicians have lost their way.

"Very soon, as far as morals and ethics are concerned, two plus two will definitely add up to five at the rate we are going," he told parliament in his first speech.

On abortion he is blunt: "Just because something is legal does not make it right."

Jacob is less outspoken. His Christian

ethic was shaped by years as a volunteer at his local church rather than decades as a pastor. He says the views of his electorate come before his personal beliefs, but in parliament, I will endeavour to remain true to my core values and make my decisions because I believe them to be right, whether or not they are popular."

+ *the Australian Newspaper*, April 4, 2009

+ *Una Sancta*, volume 56, number 12, April 2009

Big Oops at BYU

Brigham Young University (BYU) officials on 6 April 2009 pulled 18,000 copies of the student newspaper The Daily Universe off the school newsstands after finding the caption under a picture of the Mormon leadership council read "Quorum of the Twelve Apostates" instead of the correct title for the group "Quorum of the Twelve Apostles."

A BYU spokesman explained that the problem was caused by when an editor using a computer spell-checker chose a wrong replacement word precipitated by a misspelling of "Apostles."

Later in the day, 10,000 The Daily Universe newspapers with a corrected caption were delivered to the BYU newsstands.

+ *WTOP Radio*, 3400 Idaho Avenue Northwest, Washington DC 20016, 202-895-5000

Afrikaner Genocide Archives Blog tells of 16 January 2009 kidnapping of Dutch Reformed pastor in Marble Hall, South Africa

The Afrikaner Genocide Archives blog contains records, links, and other information concerning the 3,045 (as of 13 April 2009) murders and numerous other assaults upon Afrikaner residents of farms and small landholdings occurring since 1994.

One of the more recent incidents catalogued on the blog concerns Dutch Reformed Church pastor Albert Venter who was carjacked by an armed "farm-attack" gang on 16 January 2009 while on the way to the church office in Marble Hall, South Africa. Venter was met at the gate of his farm by five attackers with several handguns, who assaulted, robbed, and placed a tied-up Venter into the trunk of his car.

The gang later returned to the Venter farm and attempted to attack Mrs.

Venter, who locked herself in a room in the house and called the police. The gang then fled in the Venter car with Mr. Venter still in the trunk, then later stopped the car and fled on foot. A police helicopter soon appeared, and Mr. Venter was freed from the trunk of his car. Police reported that a single, large farm-attack gang had been terrorizing the region for at least a year.

The Afrikaner Genocide Archives blog cited a 19 January 2009 original story by journalist Willem Pelsler in News24.

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

+ *Dutch Reformed Church*, Posbus 13528, Hatfield 0028, Pretoria, South Africa, 27-0-12-342-0092, Fax: 27-0-12-342-0380, [algemenesinode@ngkerk.org.za](mailto:algemenesinnode@ngkerk.org.za)

White House compels Georgetown University to cover ancient monogram symbol for Jesus ahead of speech by U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama

The White House compelled Georgetown University to cover up a first-century monogram symbol for Jesus Christ in preparation for a 14 April 2009 speech delivered at the university by U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama. The symbol consists of the Greek alphabet letters iota, eta, and sigma with a line across the top of the letters – an abbreviation of the Greek word for "Jesus."

Reformed Presbyterian minister and president of the Christian Defense Coalition (CDC) the Rev. Pat Mahoney commented: "In 32 years of public ministry, I have never seen a President of the United States show such complete contempt and disrespect for faith. This action by the White House should appal and anger every American who cherishes sacred traditions ... especially Christians. The image that the Obama team portrayed during the campaign of Mr. Obama being a man of deep faith, understanding and tolerance is now completely in tatters. It is stunning and shameful that anyone would ask a Christian institution to cover up a public expression of Jesus just so they could have a better background for a televised speech. This is not a person who respects or cherishes faith."

Additionally, the CDC rhetorically wondered aloud whether or not U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama would

have covered sacred symbols of the Islamic faith.

+ *Christian News Wire*, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington DC 20006, 202-546-0054, newsdesk@christiannewswire.com
+ *Christian Defense Coalition*, 540-538-4741

Abortion protesters win US\$125 thousand federal court judgment for multiple false arrests

Four abortion protesters from the group Rescue the Heartland won US\$125 thousand in attorney fees in a federal lawsuit against city of Bellevue, Nebraska police chief John W. Stacey who had repeatedly ordered the protesters be falsely arrested in 2006 and 2007 under a residential picketing ordinance. After every one of the arrests, the protesters were acquitted of the charges or the charges were dismissed.

Protester and arrestee Larry Donlan of Rescue the Heartland commented: "We were repeatedly arrested and thrown in jail even though the police knew we were not breaking the law. They just didn't care. It is unfortunate that the taxpayers of Bellevue now have to pay for the police chief's irresponsibility."

No information was provided as to how or if Bellevue, Nebraska police chief John W. Stacey was to be personally held accountable for his repeated abuse of authority and the resultant expense to the city.

+ *Christian News Wire*, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington DC 20006, 202-546-0054, newsdesk@christiannewswire.com
+ *Operation Rescue*, PO Box 782888, Wichita, Kansas 67278-2888, 800-705-1175, Fax: 916-244-2636, info@operationrescue.org

Book published on Canada's "Thought Police" Human Rights Commissions

In the 15 April 2009 article "Northern Discomfort: Shame on Canada's Thought Police", in the *National Review Online*, author Mark Hemmingway reviews Ezra Levant's new book *Shakedown: How Our Government Is Undermining Democracy in the Name of Human Rights*.

Hemmingway describes the book as "a chronicle of injustice, with outrage on every page," as the book draws Hemmingway "to the sad realization that Canada no longer has freedom of speech," and the conclusion that Canada's Human Rights Commissions (HRCs) have "morphed into star chambers weighing in on what the press could print, what pastors could say from the pulpit, whether certain Bible verses could be displayed publicly, and so on."

Hemmingway additionally says that the HRCs "have the power to impose financial and legal penalties, and yet they don't adhere to the most basic protections of due process found in a real court of law."

+ *National Review*, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10016, 212-679-7330

Miss California USA Excoriated by homosexual judge after pageant interview defense of biblical marriage

Miss California USA Carrie Prejean was asked by pageant judge and homosexual Perez Hilton about Prejean's views on homosexual marriage during her interview as a finalist for the 2009 Miss USA competition, and Prejean's answer reflected the biblical precepts of marriage that she had been taught growing up in a Christian home.

Hilton's reaction was to threaten to knock the tiara off of Prejean's head if she were to win the pageant, and to call Prejean several obscene names. Hilton additionally condemned Prejean for sharing her "political and religious views," even though Hilton was the one that asked the question.

Prejean's honest answer to judge Hilton likely cost her the Miss USA crown. Prejean said later during a Today Show interview that her answer had been guided by "biblical correctness" rather than "political correctness."

+ *Focus on the Family*, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80995, 800-232-6459

Dominican Republic Legislators amend Constitution affirming right to life from conception to death

Legislators in the Dominican Republic on 21 April 2009 amended their country's constitution by a vote of 167 to 32 to state that "the right to life is inviolable from conception until death." The constitutional amendment was precipitated by international pro-abortion groups seeking to decriminalize abortion in the Dominican Republic.

+ *Christian News Wire*, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest, Washington DC 20006, 202-546-0054, newsdesk@christiannewswire.com
+ *Personhood USA*, Post Office Box 486, Arvada, Colorado 80001, 202-595-3500

Assyrian Genocide Studies Center launches website

The Assyrian Genocide Studies Center has launched a website at <http://www.seyfocenter.com> to assist in the effort for international recognition of the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Muslim Ottoman Turks between 1915 and 1918 during World War One (WWI) in which

1.5 million Christian Armenians and Assyrians were killed.

Prior to 1915 and WWI, thirty-three percent of the inhabitants of Turkey were Christian (Assyrians, Armenian, and Pontus Greeks). Today, only 0.1 percent of the Turkish population are Christians, including several thousand Assyrians.

+ *Assyrian International News Agency*

Muslim Taliban terrorists leave trail of murder, arson, and sexual assault in Taiser Town, Pakistan

Muslim Taliban terrorists on 19 April 2009 invaded Taiser Town, in Karachi, Pakistan, leaving messages on the walls of two churches reading "Long Live the Taliban," "Talibanization is our goal," and "Embrace Islam or Prepare to Die."

On 21 April 2009, Christian residents staged, in vain, a protest in hope of attracting protection from the local government. The same evening, more than 100 masked terrorists invaded Taiser Town with automatic rifles.

The Taliban attackers entered homes, pillaged money and jewelry, abused the women, and burned their property. The Taliban leaders shouted, "You infidels have to convert to Islam or die. Why did you wash up warnings inscribed on walls of church and home doors?"

The terrorists sexually assaulted several women and physically abused dozens more with clubs, iron rods, and whips. Several homes were set on fire by the terrorists. When two Christians resisted, the militants killed them execution-style directly in front of their families.

Jeremy Sewall, Advocacy Director for International Christian Concern, said, "The Pakistani government has created an opening for terrorists to attack Christians indiscriminately by acceding to their demands in the Swat Valley. Formerly, Christians in the major cities of Pakistan experienced discrimination, but up till now they had not had to fear threats of forced conversion or execution on a wide scale. This attack is a harbinger of worse to come if the Pakistani government continues to cower in the face of Muslim radicals."

+ *Assyrian International News Agency*

+ *International Christian Concern*, 2020 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest #941, Washington DC 20006, 800-422-5441, Fax: 301-989-1709, superadmin@persecution.org

The Dark Monster

A parents' struggle with mental illness

This month we look at the second and final part of The Dark Monster

What causes psychosis and/or mental illness? There can be a number of things. Firstly, genetics can play a part. If your family has a history of mental illness, you are likely to be more prone to it. In our extended family, there are two diagnosed cases of bi-polar [disease]. One of my cousins – a Christian with Christian children – had one of his sons commit suicide after suffering from prolonged, severe depression. How can relatives come to terms with something like that? It seems that our families carry genes which could make us more likely than others to develop mental illness at some time in our lives. Then, some people are just more vulnerable – their nervous systems are more highly developed than others. It's no accident that the words "lunacy" and "lunatic" came into being – the full moon can aggravate or overload a sensitive system and pull it down. And for women, the psychiatric nurse told me, hormones can also play their part. The human body is incredibly finely tuned, and if something like hormones get out of balance it can wreak havoc with the nervous system and the brain.

Misuse of drugs and alcohol can also cause psychosis. People are such a complicated mixture of genes, backgrounds, abilities, experiences; and every person is unique. One of the psychiatrists told us that in the early stages of treatment it can very much be "hit and miss" until they find the right drug which works, because every person is different and presents differently. They are barely scratching the surface of how that complex mechanism, the brain, actually works. It is one area of medicine where there is still so much to discover, and it is so important to have Christians working in this area because Christians bring their spiritual understanding to the mind and the person. We are more than blobs of gunk that just happened to come together over time and space.

What about treatment? Quite frankly, I am very thankful for anti-psychotic drugs. Not too far in the past, our daughter

would have progressively worsened and ended being locked up in an asylum. "Bedlam" was one such institution, and the word conjures up a horrific set of associations. As far as I understand, drugs are administered because of the Dopamine theory, in which various receptors in the brain are blocked off to stop the electrical signals being received from neuro-transmitters. The brain usually does this itself naturally but sometimes these signals and receptors can go into overload and connect far more often than normal. Alcohol and drugs like marijuana can also interfere with the normal processes of the neuro-transmitters and their receptors. For a psychotic person, it is like an explosion has gone off in the brain. When confronted with such intense suffering, it is wonderful that there is a way to alleviate it. The scriptures say. "Give strong drink to him who is dying". Drugs alleviate pain, and in the right circumstances we should use them.

However, **all** these drugs have powerful side effects. We have to decide whether the side effects are better to live with than what would happen if we were to come off the drugs. After a psychotic episode, most people are on medication for between 1 – 3 years. It is interesting that with mental illness, a number of people feel so much better on the drugs they try and take themselves off them, possibly because the side effects are unpleasant, but also I think because there is some stigma, some sense of weakness or inferiority associated with mental illness that just isn't there with other diseases. Why would someone with heart disease suddenly decide he feels so well, he'll stop taking his blood

pressure tablets? Or someone with diabetes, stop taking his insulin? Most people with those illnesses take their pills because they know without them, they would be in trouble very soon. The same is true with mental illness. Mental illness is no respecter of persons. Bi-Polar [disease] can strike very talented people (like Stephen Fry). Winston Churchill called his depression, "The Black Dog". Sufferers may need encouragement at times to accept themselves the way they are and even live with the stigma if necessary, if they have to take ongoing medication. Sometimes terrible damage has been done in people's lives through trying to get people off medication when they are not ready for it. **They might never be ready for it.** It is not only the person themselves, but their families who suffer as a result. Jesus knows all about stigmas and do they worry Him? Not at all! If you are struggling with this issue, think about Jesus. That same Person who reached out His hand to touch an

outcast leper, spoke for a considerable time to a Samaritan woman (Jews hated Samaritans



and didn't regard women highly either. This woman, moreover, had had five husbands and was currently living in sin with another man!), ate with the hated tax collectors, accepted the ministry of a prostitute, and welcomed children when the disciples wanted to send them away. I have no doubt at all He would stretch out His hands to those of His children who suffer from mental illness and sur-

times physical problems. "You will never find a psychiatric problem where biblical counsel – counsel directed to the heart – is anything less than essential. At the very least, psychiatric problems usually indicate that the diagnosed person (and the family) is suffering in some way. And on the problem of suffering, Scripture is the expert. Through it, God offers hope, compassion, and the power to grow in

illness will always be vulnerable in the future, because like a cancer in remission, it can come back at a later time. So the sufferer and his or her family need to be alert to possible signs of recurring illness and take steps to deal with it as they arise. With suffering comes intense periods of learning and blessing. Sometimes it is easy to forget that! Yet, having experienced what we have, we have also been richly blessed by the love and caring of those in the church. Every two or three days my sister-in-law would ring and ask, "How's it going?" Offers of help, loving concern, and above all, prayer, kept us going through the dark times. There is nothing like family and church in time of need. I praised and thanked God that people were there for us. What was especially precious was when people shared their own suffering with us, their struggles with depression, their living with the pain, their faith in God. I could see that we were not alone, and in sharing one another's burdens we fulfilled the law of Christ.

Christians are also a witness through their suffering. The nurses said to us that our daughter was "lucky" to have such a family where she was loved and cared for. So many people don't have that these days. Sometimes the affliction is so great and so hard to live with, families may turn their backs and the ill person has nowhere to go and no one to turn to. When illness like this strikes it can be a wonderful opportunity to show the world that we have the love of Christ in our hearts. However imperfectly, it is there and it grows by His grace. Suffering is a sterling means of growth, because we have to rely on His strength, not our own.

God has His hands on our lives, and we can rest in His care knowing that one day this world, with all its suffering and brokenness, is going to be no more. Then our once mentally-ill loved ones will see us in heaven, and they will be whole, perfect, pure, and glorified, along with all others who call upon His name. The tears then, will be tears of joy.

In the meantime, we walk the path in faith.

Name withheld

“Families suffer along with the victim. We have to deal with our anger, despair and a sense of helplessness.”

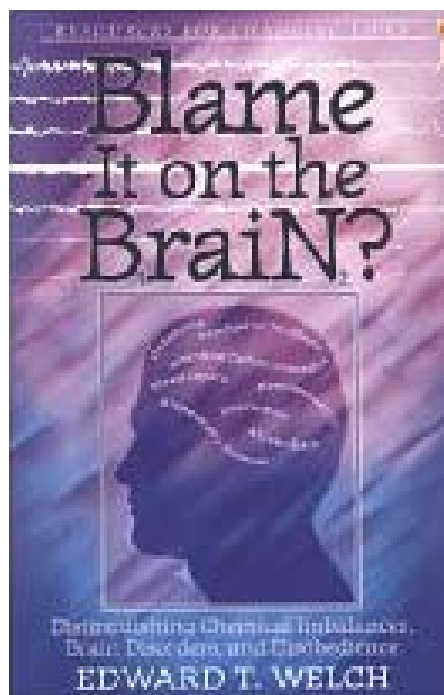
round them with His unconditional love and tenderness. I think they would be special to Him **because** of their vulnerability and helplessness. Jesus came for those who were sick and couldn't save themselves. He **loved** outcasts!

As well as treating the physical symptoms, however, it is vital with psychiatric illness that the spiritual issues are also dealt with. This is where Christian counselling comes into its own. Edward T Welch in his excellent book, **Blame it on the Brain?** says that psychiatric problems are always spiritual problems and some-

faith and obedience in the midst of suffering. For families, it provides practical guidelines on how to love and serve the person who is struggling." (p.106) The psychiatric ward in the hospital is filled with people who have suffered and they have not been able to cope with it – suffering from broken relationships, job loss, bankruptcy, failure, abandonment, loss, guilt. Something traumatic happens and they end up over the edge. Good Christian counselling will help the Christians in this situation understand where God is, His presence in their lives, and His purpose for their future.

Families suffer along with the victim. We have to deal with our anger, despair and a sense of helplessness. The person may well accuse us of terrible things, but we need to constantly remind ourselves that this is NOT the person we know and love. It is the illness speaking. Like blood flowing from a wound, the words are the symptom that there is something dreadfully wrong that needs attention. We need patience. This situation is not going to change overnight. Change it will, but maybe not any time soon. I remember one of the nurses saying to me, "Look. I've been in this business for over 20 years and I can assure you that your daughter WILL get well." How I needed to hear that! But it takes time. Just like a person after a major operation will take time to heal. For some reason the brain takes longer, perhaps because of its complexity.

Someone who experiences mental



Report on the 2009 Synod of the Reformed Churches of South Africa

Part 2

What to sing in worship

This is an old argument arising out of the adoption, in addition to the 1937 Totius Psalms versifications (one could easily think they were inspired), of the newer (mainly) Cloete versifications in 2003. The argument gets very fine at times and quite difficult to follow. It revolves around the following: Cloete has simply tried to versify the Psalms as they were written; he does not believe the Psalms were Christological (as distinguished from how they are now to be interpreted; yet we *confess that Christ speaks through the entire OT*; Report). Some of the exclusive Psalmists believe that not only should the Psalms be rendered in close conformity with Scripture, but also that the NT, Christological interpretation of the Psalms cannot be ignored. That's a very tall order, it seems to me. But added to the mix is the concern that Cloete's versifications are deemed also to be pretty free: the original names for God are not indicated in any way, for instance.

Apart from Psalms, the RCSA has only ever sung rhymed versifications of particular texts of Scripture: Song of Mary, Zacharias, etc; and a versification of the Apostles Creed. A committee appointed by 2006 to consider whether the Church's repertoire be broadened recommended that the CO *not be amended or expanded to include the singing of 'other' songs in the Church*. However, the advisory committee appointed to consider that report, recommended the opposite. (I must say, I find it an odd way of working that you appoint a committee to spend three years studying something, yet an advisory committee on the hoof can completely change the recommendations that finally come to the floor of Synod.)

One brother considered this without doubt the most important issue on the agenda of the Synod and spoke of the fear of error coming in by singing hymns, and raised spontaneous applause. This subject, remember, touches the whole

raison d'être of the RCSA. They arose 150 years ago to a large extent in protest against the introduction of hymns (and, I have been told, also being required to sing them under the threat of discipline), largely as a result of the influence of the Murrays from the 1830s, hymns which, so I have been told by DRC people, would not now be approved by a DRC Synod. In response to this, another speaker reminded the Synod that prayers and preaching were not all synodically approved either. Well, as you can imagine, I felt pretty at home in the midst of all this!

Some think that the Synod of Dordt's Psalms-only position was not intended

sing psalms, hymns & spiritual songs – even though he did not refute the exclusive Psalmist interpretation of that text (but I think that exegesis has been pretty broadly given up in the RCSA quite some years ago).

This was a long and emotional debate which pretty much got summed up by one of the professors who said also that he believes the black brothers are correct in saying that the RCSA's exclusive Psalmody grew out of its historical situation which is not the situation now. (On the other hand, if the "historical situation" refers to Arminianism, then nothing much has changed at all!) There are different

“There are different practices in Afrikaner, Middelande, Soutpansberg Churches that have to be taken into account.”

to be a scriptural principle but a practical article of the CO in the light of the dangers of the time. But then, answers another, *the times are always dangerous*. Another thought that most of the arguments boil down to is that hymns are not part of our heritage. This speaker said that if we prohibit hymns we must be able to demonstrate that from Scripture otherwise we are guilty of synodocracy. Another feared that the Psalms would fall into disuse; to which another responded that they will maintain themselves by their very quality.

The extra fuel tossed into this little fire is the black churches, which have never been exclusive Psalmists, and some have never sung the Psalms at all, even though they are the fruit of RCSA mission work! One man spoke passionately that they needed to show unity with these brothers by allowing this. Finally, one black brother got to the real point and argued that on the basis of Ephesians 5 we **are commanded** to

practices in Afrikaner, Middelande, Soutpansberg Churches that have to be taken into account. The upshot was that the recommendation of the advisory committee was carried, viz, that, *In the churches we sing Scripturally and Confessionally identical, Scripturally and Confessionally rhymed and Scripturally and Confessionally faithful hymns* – in their sometimes rather convoluted way of speaking, not too unlike our own Art.66. And after that long debate, in which they had all really had to listen to one another – for there was some passion, believe me; the one-week old unity was on the line! – that seemed to be accepted with peace. (My guess is that the decision will result in a much wider synodically approved hymnody – which will accumulate over many years – but that congregations will more broadly or narrowly use it. Well, I guess that is only what happens among us and if churches do not go outside it, nobody can complain.)

Church and society

It does seem to an onlooker from outside that the Reformed Churches are still grappling with the new political situation in South Africa and have not quite got used to having less influence. There was a long debate on the church's role in non-ecclesiastical affairs and there are some fundamental differences how to go about this or even what it is. Some think the church should be involved but should stick to specifically ethical matters. One elder spoke for many when he questioned whether they should be involved at all. In the debate whether to join the South African Council of Churches in 2006, one minister said "*our prophetic testimony is to preach the Gospel. Jesus and Paul did not get involved in this sort of political work.*"

At this Synod, there was even a recommendation that, *The Synod encourages members to vote responsibly in the forthcoming election*; which is all very nice, but then many brothers wanted to know what exactly that recommendation meant; should the emphasis be on *responsibly* (and then what did that mean?!) or on *vote*?

In 2006 the RCSA joined the SACC, while making it *clear that the RCSA retain their independence and do not per association accept responsibility for each viewpoint and act of the SACC*. This decision was not happily received on the day, and several Appeals and Petitions of Protest against membership were presented to 2009 on several grounds, including that the SACC *openly endorses and praises homosexuality*, supporting same-sex marriages, and that the SACC participates in interfaith and multi-faith movements. By one vote out of 200 plus delegates! the Synod decided to discontinue its membership in the SACC.

Ecumenical relations

The RCSA is very, very busy ecumenically, as I reported last time. The significant decision this time was the relationship with the **CRCNA**. This relationship had been under suspension for many years, over two decades! and from the side of the CRCNA, because of apartheid, which the RCSA always officially opposed anyway. In the meantime, the CRCNA has opened Church office to women and the RCSA became concerned about other matters in the CRCNA as well.

However, the fraternal delegates to the CRCNA Synod of 2006 reported that they found "the CRC faithfully holds to the Word of God, to the Confessions

and to the Church Order" and the Ecumenical Relations Committee of the RCSA recommended the relationship between the RCSA and the CRCNA be considered as normalised. And it passed with NO debate. I could not believe it, especially considering the good-spirited but direct talking by quite a number of delegates to the fraternal delegates from the CRCNA in 2000, and since which nothing has changed in the CRCNA.

Certainly the women in office issue and the warming of relations with the CRCNA are working together. And there is a definite cooling toward the United Reformed Churches of North America, the Churches which we would consider the continuation of the old CRCNA as we knew her in the past.

Education

As well as continuing to provide and revise synodically approved catechism material for the churches, the RCSA is becoming increasingly vigorous in providing for the Christian general education of their children, and others. This is a very, very encouraging development.

With everything else it is doing, Mukhanyo Theological College is also planning to begin a B.Ed. SA is short of 50,000 teachers because of AIDS and because of the "stupidity" of the government in closing teachers' training colleges and merging them into the universities. Even the humanistic schools will have to accept their teachers, said Dr. Flip Buys, principal. At the same time, another organisation has grown up among RCSA people, AROS (Akademie Reformatoriese Opleiding en Studies), which works mainly in Afrikaans and in general at a higher level. AROS was begun three years ago with three students; it now has 350 students, mainly via distance education, but with instructors meeting students from time to time at strategic, central locations for tutorial-type student-teacher sessions.

The Synod now recognises the work these organisations are doing. It includes providing material for parents to counteract evolutionary teaching in the public schools. AROS has written a complete general education curriculum up to matriculation, and this is available for school teachers in state schools, independent Christian schools which are being established more and more (there are ten fully functioning Christian private schools in Namibia at this time), and for home-schooling, which also is growing in SA. Besides teacher training

work, it is also busy writing textbooks. AROS wants to carry its work to the whole of Southern Africa, Kenya south. When these guys get a vision, it's never small! The churches were encouraged to hold one special collection p.a. for the development of Christian education curricula. This whole report is well worth reading and very encouraging. The work of AROS is a really bright light in the whole situation in SA. And they could, frankly, help us! (And if anybody is interested in making contact with them, just contact me.)

Again there were long discussions on the old Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, now the North West University, Potchefstroom Campus. It used to be 'their' university but many regard it now as a lost cause and the best they can do is have as much input as they can for as long as they can. One chap, a well educated and gifted young elder, said he had seen 1st year Philosophy course notes which state that students must not criticise other religions because that would be against the constitution. Apparently a philosophy professor recently appointed is a confessed atheist. I don't think any of this would be denied but others are not yet ready to throw in the towel, believing they should strengthen the hands of the people in the university who are trying still to teach Christianly.

Conclusion

I can only once again thank the Churches for sending me. It's a pretty exhausting three weeks. The flying takes it out of you for a start and these Afrikaners are mad! Committees sit till the wee hours of the morning and breakfast is at six. They even holiday at 150mph! Yet, Sheryl & I still had some good evenings round the fire in Botswana in the ten days after Synod. I enjoy the opportunity and the fellowship with the many friends I've made over the years, also the opportunity to keep in touch with some missionary contacts in Botswana which the North Shore now supports.

John Rogers, March, 2009

How women started the culture-war

(Part 3)

Previous issues have shown how the industrial revolution forced both men and their work out of the home. In the harsh business world men were to become competitive and aggressive rather than protective. Tied with this, political theory shifted the basic unit of society from the household to the individual.

Taming men

For women, however, the doctrine of separate spheres meant an entirely different story. They were called on to maintain the home as an arena cordoned off from the competitive, dog-eat-dog ethos of economics and politics. Women were to cultivate the softer virtues—of community, morality, religion, self-sacrifice, and affection. They were urged to act as moral guardians of the home, making it a place where men could be renewed, reformed, and refined—a place of “retirement” from the competitive, amoral world outside. As Frances Parkes wrote in 1829, “The world corrupts; home should refine.”

Thus the public/private split was reflected in a sharp contrast between the sexes as well. As Kenneth Keniston of MIT writes: “The family became a special protected place, the repository of tender, pure, and generous feelings (embodied in the mother) and a bulwark and bastion against the raw, competitive, aggressive, and selfish world of commerce (embodied by the father).”

This was a startling reversal. In colonial days, husbands and fathers had been admonished to function as the moral and spiritual leaders of the household. But now men were being told that they were naturally crude and brutish—and that they needed to learn virtue from their wives. And many men acquiesced to the new ethos. For example, during the Civil War, General William Pender wrote to his wife, “Whenever I find my mind wandering upon bad and sinful thoughts I try to think of my good and pure wife and they leave me at once.... You are truly my good Angel.” Women were called upon to be the guardians of morality—to make men virtuous.

This is the origin of the double standard, and on the surface, it may appear to

empower women. After all, it accorded them the status of enforcers of virtue. But the underlying dynamic was actually very troubling: As Rotundo explains, in essence America was releasing men from the requirement to be virtuous. For the first time, moral and spiritual leadership were no longer viewed as masculine attributes. They became women’s work. “Women took men’s place as the custodians of communal virtue,” Rotundo writes, but in doing so, they “were freeing men to pursue self-interest.” In other words, men were being let off the hook.

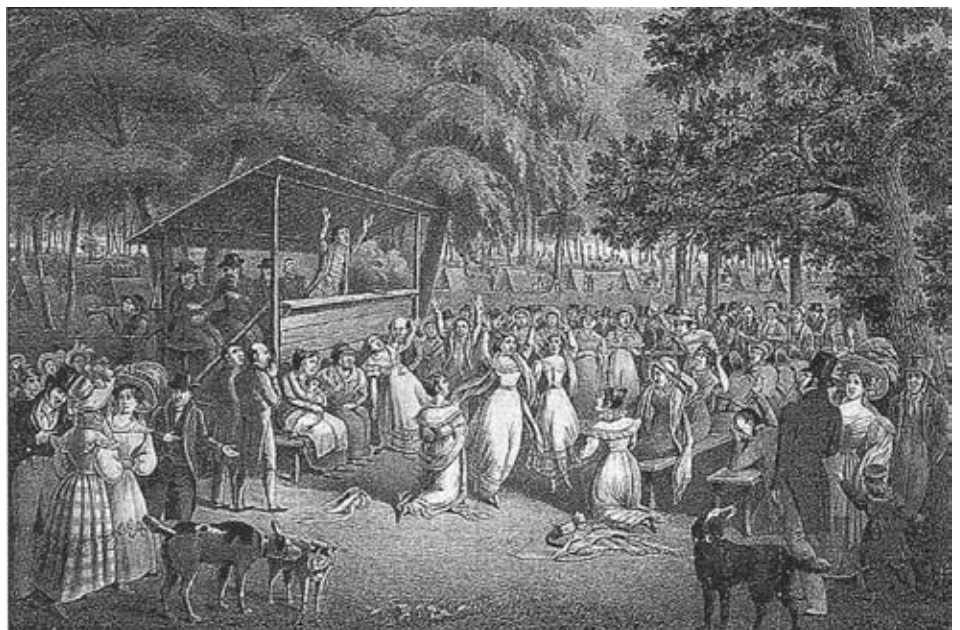
In the long run, this “de-moralizing” of the male character would not be in women’s best interest, as we will see. Nor was it in men’s best interest, either, for they were becoming content with a stunted definition of masculinity as tough, competitive, and pragmatic, which denied their moral and spiritual aspirations.

Feminizing the Church

Where was the Christian church in all this? Did it stand firmly against the “de-moralization” of the male character? Sadly, no. Instead the American church largely acquiesced in the redefinition of masculinity. After centuries of teaching that husbands and fathers were divinely

called to the office of household headship, the church began to pitch its appeal primarily to women. Churchmen began to speak of women as having a special gift for religion and morality. If you look carefully at illustrations of camp meetings, you often see women dominating the front rows, swooning and fainting. In many evangelical churches, women began to outnumber men, often by two to one. When the British novelist Francis Trollope visited America in 1832, she commented that she had never seen a country “where religion had so strong a hold upon the women or a slighter hold upon the men.”

Even the tone of religion became feminized. In a classic book on the subject, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas writes that the ministry lost “a toughness, a sternness, an intellectual rigor which our society then and since has been accustomed to identify with ‘masculinity,’” and instead took on “feminine” traits of care, nurturing, sentimentalism, and retreat from the harsh, competitive ethos of the public arena. The trend was especially typical of liberal churches. “Religion in the old virile sense has disappeared, and been replaced by a feeble Unitarian sensibility,” lamented Henry James, Sr., father of



The “Feminization” of Christianity: The awakenings tended to attract more women than men. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZC4-4554].)

the famous novelist. A Congregationalist minister complained that “the sword of the spirit” has been “muffled up and decked out with flowers and ribbons.”

The underlying dynamic is that the church was adopting a defensive strategy vis-a-vis the culture at large. Many churchmen simply retreated from making cognitive claims for religion that could be defended in the public sphere. Instead, they transferred faith to the private sphere of experience and feelings—which put it squarely into the domain of women. In 1820 the Unitarian minister Joseph Buckminster wrote,

I believe that if Christianity should be compelled to flee from the mansions of the great, the academies of the philosophers, the halls of legislators, or the throng of busy men, we should find her last and purest retreat with women at the fireside; her last altar would be the female heart.

The operative word here is “flee.” There was a presumption that religion was on the run from the public realm of hard-headed men, retreating to the private realm of soft-hearted women.

In short, instead of challenging the growing secularism among men, the church largely acquiesced—by turning to women. Churchmen seemed relieved to find at least one sphere, the home, where religion still held sway. Whereas traditional church teaching had held that fathers were responsible for their children’s education, in the early 1800s, says one historian, “New England ministers fervently reiterated their consensus that mothers were more important than fathers in forming ‘the tastes, sentiments, and habits of children,’ and more ef-

fective in instructing them.” As a result, “mothers increasingly took over the formerly paternal task of conducting family prayers.”

Once again, we detect a disturbing dynamic: The churches were releasing men from the responsibility of being religious leaders. They were turning religion and morality into the domain of women—something soft and comforting, not bracing and demanding. Charles Eliot Norton of Harvard spoke for many at the time when he complained of the intellectual flabbiness—he called it the “unmanliness”—of religion.

Female standards, male resentment

Eventually the double standard created tensions in relationships between men and women. After all, who were the objects of all these reform movements? Who were the scoundrels so debauched that women must take them in hand? They were, well, . . . men. The temperance movement mobilized wives and mothers against hard-drinking husbands and fathers, to drive them out of the tavern and back to the hearth. The rhetoric of female abolitionists focused on male slave masters who took sexual advantage of slave women. The movement to outlaw prostitution and abortion cast fallen women as victims and men as cruel seducers. Historian Mary Ryan sums up the gender dimension to the reform movements: “Almost all the female reform associations were implicit condemnations of males; there was little doubt as to the sex of slave masters, tavern-keepers, drunkards and seducers.”

The message sent by the doctrine

of separate spheres was “that women must control men morally,” explains historian Carl Degler. Women were urged to “work together to control the male tendency toward lasciviousness.” For if the mother was “moral arbiter in the home,” that role “vouchsafed to women the right—nay, obligation—to regulate men’s sexual behavior.”

The ideology of separate spheres was nothing less than “a plan for female government of male passions,” Rotundo agrees. But then he notes that it had a paradoxical effect: “It gave men the freedom to be aggressive, greedy, ambitious, competitive, and self-interested, then it left women with the duty of curbing this behavior.”

These themes were even reflected in the literature of the day. In the early nineteenth century, a full third of all novels published in the United States were written by women (inspiring Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famous outburst that America had been taken over by a “mob of scribbling women”). One of the most common themes in these novels is the triumph of women against evil men. “The major repeated story,” writes an English professor, “is that of the struggle of the good woman against the oppression and cruelties, covert and blatant, of men.” The message was that men are inherently coarse and immoral—and that virtue is a womanly trait, imposed upon men only through great travail. The very concept of virtue, which had once been primarily a masculine trait, defined as courage and disinterested civic duty, was transformed into a feminine trait, focused primarily on sexual purity.

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

The Café Conversation

Sometimes we need a good talk with someone – not a long talk, probably half an hour or an hour is enough. All it requires is a space in a busy day, an appointment between dropping off the

children at school, a lunch break in the middle of the working day, or a stop-off between errands around town. But it needs to be a complete break from the office or home; not a place where the phone will ring or people will interrupt, claiming our time or attention. It does not have to be a completely silent place – just free from people we know or distractions that will render proper conversation impossible. For you, it may

be a walk in some leafy suburb. For others, it may be a seat on a quiet park bench. I find a café the best place – it’s cosy, intimate, and has the advantage of a cheering cup of something to treat my friend while we talk.

Conversations in this setting can be the perfect catch-up with a friend you haven’t seen for a month or two, but with whom you’ve always enjoyed edifying intimacy. They are ideal for regular

accountability-checks between friends who've agreed to help each other deal with besetting sins or a lack of self-discipline in some area of the Christian walk. They may even, if you're stretched for time and the difficulty isn't too serious, be the occasion in which you disciple a Christian friend through a time of need. Perhaps, also, they might be a time to build a friendship with an unbelieving workmate or client. A café conversation is a non-threatening situation; a time-honoured occasion recognized throughout the world. It suggests cosiness and friendship, and includes the concept of hospitality – though in a more relaxed way than conveyed by an entire meal at home or in a restaurant.

Successful conversation

What makes such conversations work successfully? First, they need to be shared by just you and your friend – or two friends – but not a large group. To get serious in the briefish time at hand, you need intimacy. The larger the group you are talking with in such a setting, the more inconsequential the conversation becomes. Secondly, you need to make the appointment specific. Set aside an exact time, and keep the appointment. Making simply vague agreements to meet "sometime soon" results, nine times out of ten, in not meeting at all. Most people are busy, and concrete commitments are the ones we keep. Thirdly, choose your café carefully. Is it cosy, does it provide some degree of privacy (are the tables far enough apart, is there high-backed seating that shields you from your neighbours?) In some cafés the acoustics are most uncondusive – more than a few occupied tables results in a deafening roar of noise. You need to be able to hear each other clearly. Finally, but obviously, you need to turn your cell phones off. No calls, no texting. This conversation is why you are here – it is sacrosanct.

Building friendships

Well then, what are such conversational opportunities useful for? Foremost in my mind is the building and maintaining of friendships. Friendships are one of God's gifts in our lives, and he uses them to build us up in our Christian walk. When I look back, in gratitude, at the many friends he has given me to show me his love and to work on my rough corners, I marvel at his goodness. My friends have taught me a great deal. Frequently, where they are strong, I am weak; and I am inspired by their examples. I treasure

those times I've been able to spend talking with close friends about difficulties one or other of us have been having, or about personal projects that one of us needs encouragement to complete. Such times have often been over a cup of coffee in a café: usually they have been conversations in the middle of a day filled with other activities, but they have "counted", because they have helped re-set priorities and reinvigorated my calling as a sister in Christ. But most of all, on reflection, such conversations have been precious because they have reminded me that the Lord has given me friends to love and be loved by. He has made us as social creatures, not walk-it-alone servants; and he has promised in many places in his Word that he links us into the lives of others to serve and to be served by them. He places the lonely in families, the alien and the stranger in churches, and there will always be someone with whom we can develop the bonds of love.

Many possibilities

Quite often I've used the café setting in a deliberately business-like fashion. There are times when you want to meet someone with a clear-cut Christian purpose, such as setting spiritual goals or assessing each other's progress towards those goals, and over a cup of coffee in a place that suits both of us has often worked well. We can bring our books or notepads and check up on each other quite efficiently, to the mutual

benefit of both. We can pray briefly as well – a quiet corner of a suitable café almost always lends itself these things. How about you? Perhaps you know a younger woman who works full-time in the city, or in a hospital or school. She may not have much spare time in the evenings or weekends (or perhaps you don't!), so perhaps you could ask her to meet you for lunch somewhere, and develop a friendship that helps disciple her in her walk with Christ? I have, from time to time, done a one-to-one Bible study with a friend who wants to grow in her knowledge of God. Once, I even had a short church history course with a young lady who "just wanted the basics" over a period of a few weeks. Sometimes suggestions that might at first seem frivolous actually lend themselves to useful discussion in such a setting. Say, for instance, a friend who struggles with appearance issues asks you to help her choose some new clothes. So off you go together to a shopping mall and start looking. Over a cup of coffee you review what she has tried on so far. Here's a great opportunity to talk about the biblical principles behind good clothes choices and appearance issues – not a tactless lecture, but a friendly interaction ensues. The possibilities are many.

I am convinced we all need to take more opportunities to befriend the many around us who do not yet know the Saviour. We are frequently too caught up in the busy round of church and family activities and don't





Norman Rockwell, "Gossip", 1948 (detail)

take the time to get to know those who – quite seriously – are rushing to destruction. I include myself – I don't spend nearly enough time in heart-level conversation with unbelievers. But this is the best way, in our world, to invite unbelievers into the vicinity of the cross. It was so in the early church: pagans were commonly converted through their contacts with Christians in the course of business, education and travel. Our world is not so different from that of the early church. Unbelievers are most unlikely to make a "cold call" to a church in the first instance. They need a friend to introduce them to Christ and his church. We can do this by taking a workmate to coffee or lunch, and talking openly, kindly and naturally about the impact the gospel makes on marriage, on friendships, on work and life priorities, on workplace problems. She may come to church with you later on, but probably not until you have explained what being a Christian is all about, and not until you have shared your life with her for a while.

There are some dangers!

But there are also some dangers and temptations in coffee-conversations; pitfalls we need to avoid if we are going to use these opportunities wisely. Of these, the first is probably gossip. It is all too easy, once we are cosily ensconced in our corner, latte in hand and relaxing in the warmth of shared confidences, to drop our guard and begin to speak of things we shouldn't. Other people's private affairs, especially if we've been honoured with their trust, mustn't pass our lips. "Be sober-minded; be watchful", the apostle Peter warns. "Your adversary

the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8). If gossiping is your temptation, "watch and pray" (Luke 22:46) before you meet your friends, lest you enter into that temptation. People's reputations are fragile, and I am sure many a reputation has been destroyed over coffee by careless lips. Make sure, too, that your coffee encounters are not opinion-forming sessions with like-minded friends; occasions in which you dissect the problems of your church and come to common agreement as to who is to blame, and what you are going to do to thwart them. This sounds horrible (and it is) – but in essence, it is what sometimes happens. Finally, we

should take care that our conversation does not descend into (or never rise above) the merely frivolous. Clothes and makeup and house design are absorbing subjects; but they are hardly of eternal importance. Your baby's sleeping habits or your husband's eating preferences may loom large in your mind, but your time with your friend may be much better spent by encouraging one another in evangelism, or in discussing a good Christian book together. Redeem the time, for the days are evil!

Café conversations are wonderful opportunities to do good, and to enjoy the gift of friendship that God has given us. Seize such moments, and sanctify them.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Family prayer & praise items: We can rejoice in the gift of new life as Elmer and Bridget Reitsma became the proud parents of Eva on Thursday evening. Congratulations are also extended to the grand parents.

Announcements: A Special Welcome is extended to Andrew & Christina de Vries and their children, Josie and Miriam. An-

drew will be leading both services today. He is currently vicar in Langwarrin, Vic and after passing his presbytery exam recently was declared eligible for call. In the past few, busy days, Andrew has attended the budget meeting, visited the Kindy, Immanuel Christian School and Pinesong. On Friday afternoon, Andrew and Christina met with our Counsellor, Rev Dirk van Garderen and Rev John Haverland and on Saturday afternoon with the Avondale Session. The family also spent an evening in Hamilton where they met with the Hukanui Session. After this morning's service, we will introduce the family formally – there will be further opportunity to speak to them during the shared lunch afterwards. Tomorrow

morning (ie Monday), the family will fly to Christchurch to visit Bishopdale and Cornwall Street congregations before travelling to Nelson.

Family announcements: Wedding Bells: This Saturday (25 April), Lord willing, Dan Hunt and Anna Smilde will be married before the Lord and His people. The ceremony will take place at 1.30 pm at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church, 78 Queen St, Waiuku.

Bishopdale

New bulletin format. We have been trialling a new bulletin format. Our aim is to keep the bulletin to one A4 sheet. This will be supplemented from by Kingdom News (every two or three weeks) and the Bishopdale Classifieds (once a month). The first edition of Kingdom News is available this week. With respect to classifieds, this will include things such as places for rent or board, items for sale, being given away or wanted, and cultural events coming up that may be of general interest.

Please pencil in this date...Lyn Campbell has been a Family Commissioner since 2004. She will be addressing us on Thursday evening on 30 April 2009. She will speak about the issues facing families today, both in the church and in our community, and some of the ways we can help.

Update on Calling a Second Minister. That Session recommends that the congregation vote to call Andrew de Vries as a minister in the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.

Voting will take place after the morning service on Sunday 19 April. Signed written proxy votes will be accepted and are to be given to any elder before voting occurs; e-mail votes will not be accepted. A two-thirds majority will be required for the motion to be passed.

You may be asking yourself, "Should we call another minister when some of our churches have no minister? Aren't their needs greater than ours? So are we being selfish even considering Andrew?" While our situation is far from desperate, we should not under-estimate our own needs or the opportunities that we have:

1. Pastoral needs. We have our fair share of pastoral needs. There is a limit to how much Robert and the Session can manage, particularly with other churches in the Presbytery being vacant.

2. Those who have strayed. We are very concerned about those who have wandered away from the faith, some recently, others a long time ago. The list is disturbingly long. We want to do what we can to encourage them to follow the Lord.

3. Discipling members and would-be members. Our desire is to help the congregation as a whole to grow in Christ likeness.

4. Outreach. We have opportunities to be more involved in the community. For example, through our children's ministries, we have built up a good reputation in our community. While this work does not need to be done by a minister, it does require leadership.

5. Preaching post. It is our hope to establish a preaching post somewhere north of the Waimakariri River or elsewhere. We believe that it is important to work towards establishing another Reformed church.

(This is an excerpt from a larger article which accompanied Bishopdale's bulletin dated 5 Apr 09 – AR)

Christchurch

From Pastor John. Our congratulations are extended to Adrian and Feikje Posthuma who celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary last Friday. We rejoice with you in God's goodness and pray for God's blessing for the years to come.

Sermons by Albert Esselbrugge. This week there will be an opportunity to listen to a sermon of Albert Esselbrugge's and to share in a cuppa in relation to the nomination to call Albert as pastor of this church. Any questions you may have can also be answered there too. The two sessions will be: Wednesday, 7.30 pm at the Church, Thursday, 2.30 pm at the Church (please note the change of date to avoid a clash with the Games Afternoon).

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. Our warmest congratulations to Willem and Hayley Steenkamp on the arrival of a son last Thursday. He was said to weigh in at 9lb 6oz, however other details were sketchy at time of writing.

Pastoral Notes. We praise God for the safe arrival of Michael Timothy John Duthie, born to Tim and Amanda last Sunday morning. He is also very alert; mother and baby are doing well.

Hastings

Congratulations! Congratulations to Roy and Anne Pudney who will be celebrating their 60th Wedding Anniversary D.V. on Thursday the 9th of April. God has richly blessed them with a long life together.

Pacific Island music evening 15th April. A social evening of music is being planned for Wednesday 15th April, 7:30p.m. at 903 Florence Street. The visiting guest workers from the Pacific island of Vanuatu, who have been worshipping with us recently, intend to play some of their local music. All the congregation are warmly invited to attend. We plan to have supper afterwards, so please bring a plate. It would strengthen our ties of friendship and fellowship if we could respond from the Pacific island of New Zealand with some of our music. If you are willing to play and/or sing, please contact Jenny Waldron.

Sycamore tree programme: A model of restorative justice. Dick Nieuwland and I have just been on an amazing journey over the last three weeks at the Hawke's Bay Prison with 4 other members of the community and 6 inmates from the youth unit. It is based on Luke 19:1-10, the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus. The programme deals with restorative justice and how the inmate's crime has affected people in the community. The inmates are made aware that they have not only broken the law of the land but have broken God's law first and foremost. Bible verses are used throughout the time spent with them. We are partnered up with one of the youth and spend one on one time with them and also working with them as a group. It was wonderful to see God's grace in action as Dick worked with a young offender who had committed a violent crime. Their relationship grew over the three weeks and the inmate came to realise how his crime had impacted on others. The inmates are carefully selected and are at a place in their own lives where they see the need for change. One young man did admit that one of the reasons in the first place was because there were biscuits at half time (no bickies in prison!!) but had been changed by what he had learnt. It is all about honesty. Re-offending is very low for the ones that have done the programme. 35 Sycamore Tree programmes have been run here in Hawke's Bay since 2001. Please pray for this programme. It is run under the

umbrella of Prison Fellowship that fully funds it. More programmes would be run but for lack of funds. More members of the community are also needed. If you would like to be involved or would just like to know more, please come and talk to us. Yours in Christ Jesus – Dick Nieuwland and Paula Grant

Congratulations! Craig and Esther Stuart were blessed with a baby daughter on Friday 24th of April. Moana was born at 4.30am at home, weighing 7lb12oz. Esther and Moana will be staying at Esther's mum's place at 102 Prospect

Rd from today for a week or two if you would like to visit.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: We thank the Lord that Natasha Snoeijer came through surgery well. Please pray for her healing and patience as she and the family await the results of the tests.

On the 24th of April at 7:30 there will be a meeting with representatives from Prison Fellowship. This is to inform the congregation about the opportunities available for us to be involved in men-

toring prisoners who are integrating back into society. This should prove to be an informative evening. There is an urgent need for assistance with brothers in the Lord who are getting out of prison and need oversight and assistance with post-prison life.

Nelson

Wanted volunteers for mail drop. Session is planning on distributing around the church neighbourhood flyers advertising the Sunday school with the hope that we may be able to offer this outreach to the neighbourhood children. We are looking for volunteers to deliver these flyers to letterboxes before this Sunday the 26th. This can be done during the day or evening any day of the week. Please indicate when you volunteer if you prefer hills or flat streets and what days you are available. Please see Jake VanderBurg

Pukekohe

Emily Grosscurt and Annice Meyer have expressed the desire to profess their Faith in Christ and join the church as communicant members. Having met with them and heard their testimony and expression of faith the Session is very happy to allow them to do this on Sunday 19th April in the morning service. We thank the Lord for the work of his Holy Spirit in their lives to bring them to this point.

It is with joy that we announce the wedding of Dan Hunt and Anna Smilde. Unless there are lawful objections the wedding will take place at 1:30pm on Saturday 25th April at the Holy Trinity Anglican Church, 78 Queen Street, Waiuku, to be followed by an afternoon tea.

We rejoice with Luke and Natalie Bylsma with the birth of a healthy baby boy last Thursday, Blair Jason Bylsma, who weighed 6lb 9oz. And last Monday Emmaleigh Geraldine was born to Erik and Gina Stolte, weighing 8lbs 3 ozs. We give thanks to God for the births of these babies.

Wainuiomata

Holiday Club. We extend a big THANK YOU to all who worked so hard to make the holiday club happen again this year. We appreciated Caroline's work as well as the willing hands of many others who volunteered. Thanks to Briony for writing a great play. We've had a wonderful time this week. We have had the opportunity to tell the children about how Daniel & his friends trusted and obeyed God.

Dovedale

Combined Christchurch Men's Breakfast At Dovedale Church this Saturday 28TH March 8am. The Deacons of the Reformed Church of Dovedale, 28 Shands Road, Hornby, invite all men (young and old) from the Christchurch Reformed Churches and friends, to breakfast commencing 8:00 am sharp. Having spent a few years in the USA, Pastor Holtslag will offer us some reflections on the Christian life of men in America and examine how Psalm 128 addresses all men. Please make this date available to attend. All are very welcome.

Top 10. Ever wondered what people have been reading this past year? Here is a list of the top 10 adults and children books. Happy reading! Beppy Dijkstra

Title	Author	Category
Genesis Vol 3	Boice, J M	Commentaries
Truths We Confess	Sproul, R C	Theology
Age of Opportunity	Tripp, T	Parenting/Family
Disciplines of a Godly Woman	Hughes, Barbara	Womanhood
Out of the Saltshaker	Pippert, Rebecca	Evangelism
The Intimate Marriage	Sproul, R C	Marriage
The Kids are Gone	Skold, Betty	Womanhood
Prophetic Untimeliness	Guinness, Os	Topical Issues
Tolkien's Ordinary Virtues	Smith, M E	Topical Issues
When People are Big and God is Small	Welch, E T	Topical Issues
Children: Red		
A cup of cold Water	Farenhorst C	
Away from Home	Richardson A	
Beginning with John's Gospel	Harding S	
Dr Oma	Herr Ethel	
In Grandma's Attic	Richardson A	
Kate and the Spies	Grote J A	
Meg Follows a Dream	Lutz N J	
More Stories from Grandma's Attic	Richardson A	
Nellie the Brave	Jones V B	
What Really Happened to Dinosaurs	Ham Ken	
Young Adults :		
Born Again	Charles Colson	
Think Big	Ben Carson	

The sessions were well attended, with just over 60 children coming along each day. Let us pray that the seeds of the gospel may have been planted in hearts that do not know Christ and one day begin to grow and bear fruit.

Local Volunteering Opportunities. Last week you received a sheet in your cubby hole entitled Local Volunteering Opportunities. It contains a list of volunteering opportunities in Wainui that we were made aware of at the Community Seminar held here in February. Please read through this, and consider if there are things you would be interested in finding out more information about. Then fill it out appropriately and return it to the Baird's or Durant's pigeon-hole by 3 May so that we can put you in touch with people from these different organisations. With thanks, the Evangelism Committee

Wellington

Porirua Bible study. Last month Pastor Andrew received a phone call from someone in Porirua enquiring about a Reformed Bible study in the region. A follow-up visit showed that there was enthusiasm for this idea among a number of people, and plans are now on the way to get a regular meeting started after Easter. Pray for this new development!

Session Report. The elders met on Tuesday evening, reporting on a number of home visits and pastoral visits that took place during the last month. With joy, we accepted Natasja Johnson and her son Jayden into membership in our congregation.

A Conversation with Death on Good Friday – by John Piper

CHRISTIAN:

Hello, Death, my old enemy. My old slave-master. Have you come to talk to me again? To frighten me?

I am not the person you think I am. I am not the one you used to talk to. Something has happened. Let me ask you a question, Death.

Where is your sting?

DEATH, sneeringly:

My sting is your sin.

CHRISTIAN:

I know that, Death. But that's not what I asked you. I asked, where is your sting? I know what it is. But tell me where it is.

South Island FAMILY CAMP

JANUARY 2010

**Saturday 2nd till the Saturday 9th
Teapot Valley Camp, Nelson.**

Start preparing to attend.

Volunteers are needed to organise various activities. Let us know the talents and gifts you are willing to share by contacting us; Phone 03 544 5501 or m.slykhuis@xtra.co.nz

Note: This additional camp. And therefore does not replace North Island Camp

Calling all country boys and girls to become

NETWORKERS

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

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

Your counsellor and cadre would be your correspondent friends and leader.

INTERESTED?

Then write to me –

**Eddie van Leeuwen, 40 Victors Road
Hoon Hay, CHRISTCHURCH**

Why are you fidgeting, Death? Why are you looking away? Why are you turning to go? Wait, Death, you have not answered my question. Where is your sting?

Where is, my sin?

What? You have no answer? But, Death, why do you have no answer? How will you terrify me, if you have no answer? O Death, I will tell you the answer. Where is your sting? Where is my sin? It is hanging on that tree. God made Christ to be sin – my sin. When he died, the penalty of my sin was paid. The power of it was broken. I bear it no more.

Farewell, Death. You need not show up here again to frighten me. God will tell you when to come next time. And when you come, you will be his servant. For me, you will have no sting.

Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)

Short report of the special meeting of the Auckland Presbytery

held at Pukekohe beginning at 7.30 pm on Thursday 16th April 2009.

Rev. John Haverland opened the meeting with prayer. He read from John 10:14-18 and 27-30 and reflected on Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gathering his flock. He pointed out that the church of the Lord Jesus consists of many local congregations but is also gathered in the one flock of the universal church. He then led us in reciting together Questions and Answers 54 and 55 of Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism as we confessed together what we believe concerning the church and the communion of the saints, including the assurance, "of this community I am and always will be a living member." After this we sang selection 426 from the Psalter Hymnal and then prayed for the Lord's wisdom and guidance.

Rev. Dirk van Garderen was appointed as the moderator and Rev. Michael Willemse as the vice-moderator. The Moderator welcomed the delegates and a number of visitors from the Mangere

congregation. He explained that this was an open meeting and that visitors may be given the right to speak at their request and with the agreement of the presbytery.

The moderator ruled that the meeting would only deal with that matter for which it was convened i.e. "The request of the Session of the Reformed Church of Mangere for Presbytery's advice and/or concurrence on the matter of its decision a) to disband and de-institute the Reformed Church of Mangere and b) to advise and encourage its members to find new spiritual homes in nearby Reformed Churches."

Various items of correspondence relating to the meeting were accepted, including two letters from members of the Mangere congregation.

Each of the Mangere elders spoke to their request, as did their counselor, Rev John Rogers. There was a lengthy discussion about this matter. Various questions were put to the Mangere elders. Two

members of the Mangere congregation requested the opportunity to speak about their concerns regarding the actions of the Mangere Session and its request and were given permission to do so.

After further general discussion the moderator led in prayer. It was then moved and seconded, "That Presbytery concur with the decision of the Session of the Reformed Church of Mangere to disband and eventually de-institute the Reformed Church of Mangere." This motion was passed without dissension.

The Moderator pointed out to the meeting that this motion did not have a timeline for action and encouraged the Mangere Session to proceed carefully and with pastoral sensitivity. There was some discussion about the legal implications of this decision and the Mangere session was encouraged to pay close attention to the regulations in their Trust Deed with regard to de-institution.

The meeting was closed with prayer at 11.05 pm.

Books in focus

The Eclipse of the Gospel: An Assessment of the Gospel in Today's Church, by Frank Allred
Reviewed by Wim van Noordt, Hastings

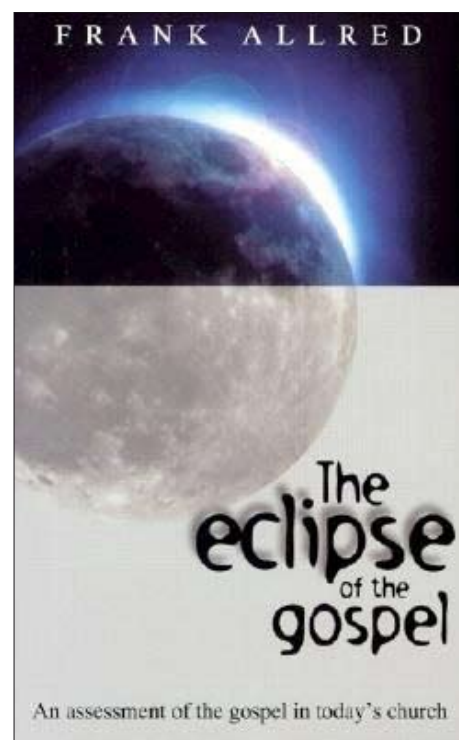
The Rev. Frank Allred was born in South Lancashire, England, in 1923. At the age of 41, after wartime service and secular work, he trained for the ministry of the Church of England and then served in various parishes in England. He is now retired.

In this book of about 200 pages (published by Grace Publications Trust in 2001), the Rev. Allred draws our attention to three essential components of the gospel which are so often neglected today. (They may not be neglected in the RCNZ but it is still important to read what this book has to tell us). Its subjects are, the sovereignty of God, the holiness of God, and the judgement of God.

When Christians fail to proclaim the sovereignty of God, they cannot avoid giving the false impression that sinful men and women are masters of their own destiny. When Christians fail to proclaim the holiness of God, they cannot avoid

masking the seriousness of human sin.

And when Christians fail to proclaim the judgement of God, they cannot avoid trivializing His love. The aim of this book is to challenge those who have



departed from the Bible; to encourage those who believe the Bible to be much more serious in their study of it; and to help those who teach others to come to a better understanding of it.

This book is a great encouragement and a challenge to read. It is well set out and the author has a good understanding of his subject. As an appendix to his book the Rev. Allred gives a short explanation of the Calvinist/Arminian Controversy, with a summary of the Canons of Dort. The Rev. Allred concludes his book with the following words: "No doubt some readers will complain that nothing is to be gained by raising old controversies. Calvinists and Arminians should work together for the sake of the gospel. Indeed they should, wherever possible. But if those who complain are suggesting that Calvinists should remain silent about their evangelical beliefs, it betrays their ignorance of the importance of the issue at stake. Calvinists believe that the defence of the five points is nothing less than the defence of the Gospel itself.

The reviewer recommends this book for your Church Library and/or or your own bookshelf. If you have difficulty obtaining a copy from your usual supplier I suggest amazon.com.uk. They have new and often used copies available.

***Rediscovering God's Love*, by Frank Allred
Reviewed by Wim van Noordt**

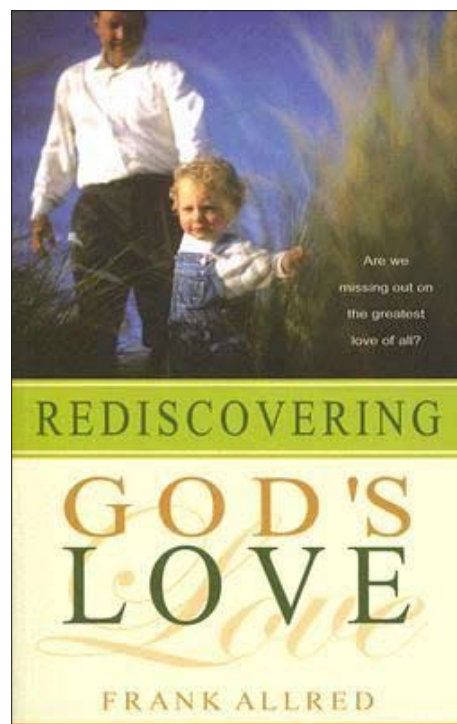
In this book of some 250 pages, published by Grace Publications Trust in 2005, the Rev. Allred explores what the Bible teaches about the amazing love of God. He compares biblical teaching with what is taught in many churches today, showing how far short it falls short of the teaching of Scripture. He does not shirk difficult issues, such as how the wrath of God relates to His love for sinners.

This book is in two parts. In the first, and larger part, Frank Allred explores what God's love is and how it needs to be discovered afresh in today's church in all its fullness. In the second part he draws out what loving God means in practice for Christians who seek to follow the teaching of Scripture in every aspect of their lives.

In the preface of this book the Rev. Allred starts by saying that traders who falsely describe their wares in an attempt to increase sales are guilty of an offence. The church too has a solemn

responsibility to ensure that the message she proclaims is genuine. To build a healthy church, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth must be proclaimed. The practice of telling the unconverted that God loves them without explaining how and why is a grossly irresponsible thing to do. The overwhelming majority of people out there who believe in the existence of God have already convinced themselves that God will condemn no one and that judgement is foreign to His character. Heaven, for them, is a place for everyone; and hell is just another name for the bad times we have to endure in this world. They believe this because they want to believe it. Anyone who has listened to conversations at funerals will need no convincing of this.

The Rev. Allred concludes his preface with the warning that readers who are looking for something novel will not find it in this book. What you will find here is a restatement of some precious truths that have been treasured by the Church for centuries but which are now being forgotten. This book certainly does not go "softly, softly". In the opening chapter you will read: "The widespread assumption now seems to be that by playing down the gravity of sin, God's love is magnified. The idea is thoroughly worldly. Once the gravity of sin is muted,



then also must be the demand for repentance (Acts 17:30). And if the demand for repentance is hushed, then the call to believe the Gospel is without meaning (Mark 1:15)".

Again, may I encourage you (as I did in my review of *The Eclipse of the Gospel*, another book by the same author), to read and reread this work. Highly recommended!



Missions in focus

Janice Reid

The gospel, training and the airwaves

Gerrit Bril

It's April 2009, and we are in Bali with 24 students from all over Indonesia. The event is a two-week training course for radio producers from more than 10 local Christian stations.

Subjects of the course are: communication and the Bible, listener research, types of radio programmes, announcing, getting ideas for programmes, using music on air and interviews. There is also a lot of focus on the technical skills required for radio work: including maintaining the transmitter, soldering microphone cables, and using software for production and making programmes.

I'm here with three trainers from Janice Reid's regional mission office in Singapore, and of course with Janice herself. How did I come to this place? Here's the story...

Janice attended the Regional Missions Conference of the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches) in Malaysia in January 2007, and there she met a friend of mine, a Dutchman work-



Gerrit Bril



Janice Reid with trainees learning the ropes of Christian broadcasting.

ing in Papua. Hilco has since moved back to Canada (his adopted country), but in the meantime he introduced Janice and I by email. One thing led to another...and here I am!

I am from the Netherlands, and a member of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in Hilversum. I have worked for more than 25 years with Dutch Public Broadcasting, producing radio and television programmes on the subject of Christianity. My government department has provided funds for me to join this training.

I'm happy to attend this course. Until now I have believed that it was easy to make Christian radio and television programmes. But that's in the Netherlands. Here, I see the difficulties in such a big country like Indonesia. So many people have to struggle for airtime, frequencies and licences. But the people I met in this course are all eager to learn: they want to know how to record, how to edit, how to produce a radio programme to reach out to their communities.

For me it's the first time doing voluntary work for this mission, and the preparation I had from Janice and all her activities and the work she does gives a professional impression. It was a great privilege to give my contribution and I've seen that God is doing great things, also through this radio work. I hope that the members of the course

when they are back at their home-place, are well-equipped and prepared to make good radio. During the course, they all were talented and passionate for radio work and to spread out the gospel through radio.

The course lasted 11 days, and at the end there was time to listen to a live broadcast from each team, aired over the local radio station of the mission's national partner. The 24 participants all left Bali with a certificate; some of them left with prizes for their good work; and all of them with the promise of prayer support and further practical assistance from the mission office as resources permit. Please pray for the ongoing work of Christian radio in developing nations.

Planning a mission trip? Let us pray for you!

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