

faith in **focus**

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Reading spiritual biography

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Editorial

Have you read a good book lately? Was it theological, biographical, auto-biographical, fictional, technical, artistic, historical, spiritual or secular?

One thing I am certain about is this – we are not great readers like our fathers before us. Most people these days will read a newspaper, magazine or novel, but not much else. Yes, I know, it's an over-generalisation. But, most of the reading that many of us do is of no spiritual benefit to us whatsoever. Many Christians read novels that are printed by this or that Christian publishing house. Yes, I suppose they are "Christian" books. However, not all these publishing houses are very discerning. They are in the market of printing books and making money – that is their priority. Many of the books that they print are what we might call "nice" stories, with a Christian flavour sprinkled on them. The characters are fictitious Christians with a whole story written around them and the time they live in. To be sure, some are well researched books with accurate historical data which adds a feeling of realism to the story. However, the majority contain historical errors, are rather poorly written and are of little or no spiritual value.

This issue focuses on the value of reading spiritual biographies. Many of our church libraries have biographies about real, notable Christian people, which are well researched and written and offer real benefit – spiritual benefit.

Mrs Joanna Voschezang gives us a worthwhile "how to guide" for reading biographies. Mr John Haverland writes on the spiritual benefits of reading biographies and provides a list of recommended books. Mrs Sally Davey reviews *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, by George M. Marsden. We conclude "Ethics – Brave new world", with part two in this issue. There is another instalment or report on the Summer School of Theology. Mr Peter Moelker introduces himself in "Ministers in focus". Missions in focus is presented by Mr Henk Velvis (OMB representative) who is a member of the Hastings Reformed Church.

Cover images from left to right: (row one) Jonathan Edwards; Corrie ten Boom; Elisabeth Elliott; William Wilberforce; Bishop John Charles Ryle; (row two) Augustine, Bishop of Hippo; Selina, Countess of Huntingdon; Hannah More; William Williams (of CMS NZ fame); Henry Frances Lyte (author of "Abide with Me"); (row three) Herman Bavinck; John Stott; Martyn Lloyd Jones; J. Gresham Machen (founder of the OPC); Robert Murray M'Cheyne; (row four) Horatius Bonar; Prince William III of Orange; Abraham Kuyper; Thomas Cranmer; William Tyndale (translated Bible into English; martyred); (row five) Dorothy L. Sayers; C.S. Lewis; Hudson Taylor; John Calvin; Martin Luther.

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Knots Untied – J.C.Ryle – p20

Let us steadfastly resolve to stand fast in the old paths, the good way of our Protestant Reformers. The nearer we draw to the great realities of death, judgement, and eternity, the more excellent will that way appear. When I go down the valley of the shadow of death, and my feet touch the cold waters, put no mand or form between me and Christ. I must know distinctly whom I believe, what I believe, and why I believe. Nothing, nothing will answer these questions satisfactorily, but thorough, downright Evangelical Religion. Let us make sure that this religion is our own.

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

Reading spiritual biography (1)

Biography – a ‘how to’ guide

Joanna Voschezang

I have been asked to open this issue of *Faith in Focus* with an article on biography as a literary genre. Now before you start thinking “oh no, how boring”, please let me explain. I am hoping in this article to give you a few pointers on *how* to read biography in general, and to help you gain a better understanding of things to look out for while reading. As Christians we need to exercise discernment when reading and it is my aim to help prepare you to do so with this article. Later in this issue you will also read about *why* it is good to read Christian biography.

The *Collins Concise Dictionary* defines a **biography** as an account of a person’s life by another. This can mean any book written about anyone’s life, no matter where or when in the history of the world they lived. A biography can be written by anyone from any walk of life, no matter how qualified they are (or are not).

Before you start

Now that you understand what a biography is, there are a few important questions to ask before you start reading. The first of these is: *Who wrote the book?* Are they relatives or friends of the person they are writing about? Do they like or dislike the subject? Do they live at the same time or are they writing many years after the events they are describing? Do they have any qualifications? A book written about Adolf Hitler, for example, will sound very different if it was written by an associate or friend of his, a survivor of one of the concentration camps or a historian fifty years later. Try to find out a little bit about the author before you begin reading.

Another important question to ask is: *What is the author’s purpose?* Every author has their own particular bias towards their subject and their own particular world view. It is helpful to ask *who* wrote the book, but also *what* was their purpose in writing? Do they want

to present a factual account of events; or show their subject in a positive light as a force for good; or prove to the world what an evil person the subject was? Even when trying to present a factual account of events the author will be inherently biased towards either a positive or negative viewpoint of the person they are writing about and it is important to keep this in mind as you read.

As you read

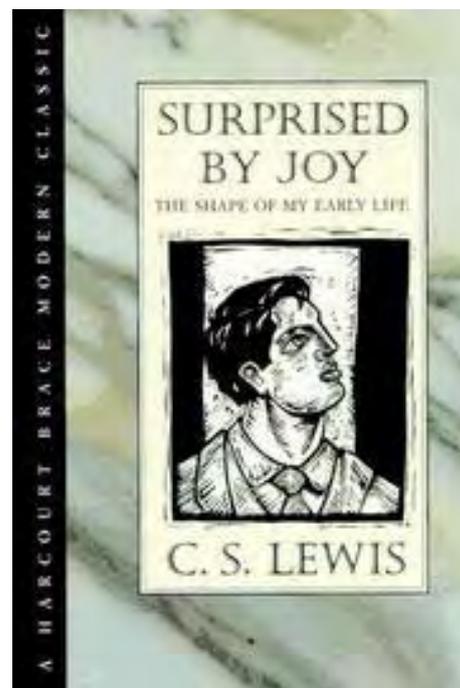
As you read, bear in mind what you have learnt about the author and their purpose and keep a few more questions in mind.

How much is known fact and how much is embellished? This may be a harder question to answer but there are a few easy tests that can help you with this. If there are conversations recorded in the book in their entirety then there are only three options: Either the author knew the subject personally and has an excellent memory; or the conversation was transcribed/recorded as it was taking place; or it is mostly/entirely made up. The same is true for speeches: If the author does not have a footnote or citation for where they obtained the speech transcript then it is safe to assume that it is partially or entirely fictional, although it may retain the sense or purpose of what the subject was trying to say. (Ancient historians such as Suetonius and Thucydides thought nothing of making up entire speeches and conversations in order to bring their subjects to life. If this is the case the biography may begin to stray into the realm of fiction.) Another easy way to check the fact to embellishment ratio is to look at the author’s sources. Have a look in the bibliography at the back of the book and see where the information for the book came from. If you are really keen you could cross check the information against another book written about the same person. If there are vast disparities your biographical writer may be severely biased.

What style is the biography written

in? Another test to try while reading is whether the biography reads like history or a novel. If it reads like a thriller or an action adventure or a romantic love story the author may have gotten a little carried away with the embellishment! This is not to say that it is a bad thing to read biographies that are written like this; they will no doubt be very enjoyable and an easy read. However, if the biography does read more like a novel then remember to take what is written with a grain of salt and not as proven fact. Even if the biography reads like a history book and you think the author is doing a good job at staying impartial about their subject, remember to keep in mind their purpose for writing the book.

Is it a ‘life story’ or merely ‘cameos’? Not all biographies give the full life history of their subject. Depending on their purpose in writing they may skip over all or part of the subject’s childhood, or pick and choose the areas of the person’s life that portray them in the most (or least) favourable light. If large portions of the subject’s life are skipped over with no explanation you may want



to be careful about the author's trustworthiness.

The *Collins Concise Dictionary* defines an **autobiography** as an account of a person's life written or otherwise recorded by that person. The basic difference between biography and autobiography is obviously the author – an autobiography is written by the person themselves. This can have some positive results and also some potential drawbacks. I would like to look at the possible drawbacks first – of which one particularly stands out.

Is the author being honest? When I say 'honest' I mean that in both senses – honest with themselves and honest with the reader. If an author is in denial about certain things that he has done, or feels

most of it! Therefore unless the book is enormous the author will have left out certain parts of their life. If they are honest they will hopefully tell you what parts they have skipped over and why. C.S. Lewis in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, skips over a holiday in Normandy "as a thing of no account". However he mentions the fact that it is being passed over and gives a good reason as to why – it is authors like this that you may trust as being honest with you.

There are a couple of very good reasons to read autobiographies. No one knows a person's life better than the one who has lived it. If you are reading an autobiography by a Christian author and they appear to be honest in their reasons

be immensely beneficial and may have a lasting impact on your child's life. I still remember the simplified and abridged version of Corrie ten Boom's life that I read as a child. Her astounding faith in such difficult times made an immense impression on me. Biographies written for children tend to be more novel-like in style and are more likely to be embellished. If the novel format helps your child to read a story about a man or woman of faith that they would not otherwise read, then encourage them to do so. Better yet, read it with them and talk them through the application to their own life. Real examples are better than fictional ones!

Biblical biography

Another sub-genre within that of biography is a section which could just as well be entitled "Biblical Novels". There are a number of books that have been written about people in the Bible such as Rahab, Joshua, Moses and Tamar. These books are written with very little factual, biblical information to go on and yet an entire story has been made around it. The danger of these books is that they can colour your view of that biblical character for the rest of your life and yet 95 percent of it will be conjecture on the part of the author. When it comes to the lives of those in the Bible it is best to stick with the original source – God's holy Word!

Conclusion

To sum up briefly – when reading biographies check up on the author, their purpose for writing and any possible bias they may have. Keep an eye on the style of the writing and potential embellishment as you read. Try to pick up on how honest the author is being with you (particularly if autobiographical). Reading biographies, (particularly Christian ones,) can be both helpful and enlightening and I hope that this article will help you to read with understanding and discernment.

Mrs Joanna Voschezang is a member of the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

“C.S. Lewis in his autobiography, skips over a holiday in Normandy “as a thing of no account”. However he mentions the fact that it is being passed over and gives a good reason as to why – it is authors like this that you may trust as being honest with you.”

the need to continually justify his actions to the reader, he may not be honest with himself and therefore with you. A more subtle (and possibly more dangerous) branch of dishonesty is putting in actions that are clearly wrong as simply a normal occurrence. If the author writes about a debauched, cruel and self-indulgent lifestyle as though there were nothing wrong with it, you should probably be having second thoughts about reading the book. Hopefully of course this would not be a problem in Christian biographies!

How much is left out? An author of an autobiographical work has much more scope than an author of an ordinary biography, as it is their own life they are writing about and they no doubt recall

for their actions and what they choose to write about, it can be a very helpful book indeed. You gain insight into the emotional and spiritual reasons for the choices that they made in childhood and through into adulthood. You may gain a better understanding of how a person came to faith (depending on the book); and an appreciation of another's Christian world and life view and its impact on those around them. The facts in an autobiography may be more trustworthy, the tone more personal and the application to the reader more practical.

Children's biography

There is another whole sub-genre of biographies that are written entirely for children to understand. These can also

Reading spiritual biography (2)

The value of spiritual biography

John Haverland

All of us enjoy hearing about the lives of other people. We experience this when we sit around the table for the evening meal and hear stories from family members about what they did during the day; what happened at school, at home, at work, at polytech or at university; who they met and the conversations they had. Or, if we have guests for dinner, we appreciate hearing about their lives and the interesting things that they have experienced and done. Such accounts are all the more valuable when we can see how *God* has worked in our lives, and the lives of others, through various people, circumstances and events. As we look back we can see his hand of providence guiding and directing our path. Not only can we *hear* the stories of others around the dinner table or in our lounge; we can also *read them in books*. Spiritual biographies are the *written* record of what has happened in the lives of others.

The Bible

The first book to mention is the Bible. The books of the Bible were not written as biographies; rather the Bible is the record of what God has done in history through the lives of men and women to save his people and to build his church and kingdom. When reading the Bible we must always remember that God is the hero and that the central person in the entire book is the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, who became a man. Jesus told the Jews; "These are the Scriptures that testify about me"¹

Yet God also worked through the lives of ordinary people and there is much to learn from how he used men such as Moses, Gideon and David; and women such as Rahab, Hannah and Mary. Hebrews 11 provides us with a long list of men and women who "through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped

the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies."²

The biblical writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded what God did in the lives of these people for our learning and instruction and to give us examples to take note of. Some of these are examples to imitate; others are examples to avoid. The apostle Paul gave an account of some of the sins of Israel and concluded; "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."³ The Scriptures describe how God used individual people to work out his plan and to achieve his purpose.

Biographies

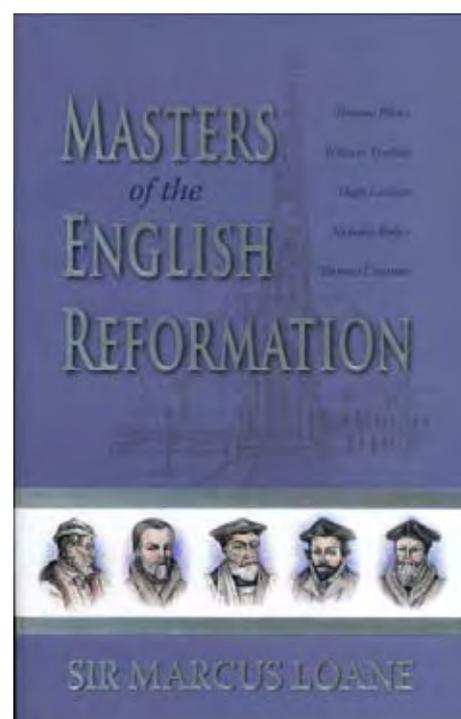
Many, many other books have been written about the lives of believers. As Joanna explains in the previous article, these are biographies. Some of you reading this will have read Christian novels about the lives of men and women. (Women tend to read more of these than men). Such novels may be based on real events but they are fictional or made-up stories. Spiritual biographies are *true* stories about the lives of believers. If you (women) have been used to reading mainly novels then you will find great benefit in reading such biographies; and if you (men) don't read novels then you will also find great benefit in reading biographies! These true accounts of people provide a good transition between Christian novels and reading more solid books about the Christian faith and theology. Biographies are one of the most accessible forms of Christian reading as the story line holds our interest and gives us insight into what went on in their lives.

The benefits of biographies

Reading spiritual biographies enables us to learn valuable lessons from what God did in the lives of others. These Christians had highs and lows as we do; they

faced temptations similar to ours; they went through sickness and pain without the benefits of modern medicine and surgery. The Lord was with them in all these circumstances. With God's help they went through these struggles and came out the other side. God sustained and strengthened them and he will do the same for us. Reading about these people can encourage us to continue in the faith through our trials and give us insight as to how they coped with similar troubles.

In one of her articles for *Faith in Focus* Dr Sally Davey wrote about the value of these *Living Pictures of Faith* in these words: "When I think of Hebrews 11 and its list of biblical portraits, the thing that strikes me is that pictures of people motivate us. When we see someone trusting God in time of trial, showing love when ridiculed, patience when provoked or saying "no" when sorely tempted, we are helped to see Christian living at the level of our own lives. We are confronted, challenged, encouraged to believe that obedience is within our sights. God has provided



“Reading about such Christians provides us with valuable spiritual lessons and can inspire us to spend more time in prayer, read the Bible more diligently....”

us with a living, credible role model of what he would like us to be. True godliness is always inspiring; and I am glad whenever someone shows me – by their reaction, their choice of words, even by the expression on their face – what Christlikeness means.”⁴

Reading about such Christians provides us with valuable spiritual lessons and can inspire us to work harder, spend more time in prayer, read the Bible more diligently, exercise a greater faith, trust God and believe his promises. Some of us are lazy; reading a biography of a hardworking Christian can motivate us to do more. Others of us are weak; the life of another Christian can strengthen us. Others of us are despondent; a spiritual biography can lift us up.

Reflecting on the lives of other believers can help us understand our own lives. In his book on middle age Paul Tripp observes that we are meaning makers; we are always trying to understand our story and to interpret our lives. We are like archeologists digging into our lives, or like historians looking back over what we have done, or like detectives examining what has happened to us, or like philosophers sitting back and reflecting on what God is doing in us, for us and through us.⁵ Reading about what God did in the lives of other Christians helps

us to make sense of who we are and what we are doing.

Yet another benefit of such reading is that it teaches us much about the history of the church and about theology. Books on history and theology may not appeal to you but reading biographies allows you to pick up a lot of information about these subjects along the way as part of the story of the lives of others.

For those of us in the western world biographies give us insight into the persecution Christians have faced in previous centuries, and are facing now, and what it might be like for us to live under such conditions. Paul warned Timothy; “... everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Tim 3:12) Reading the accounts of Christians who have suffered can help prepare us for the persecution that may come to our country one day.

Some of you may sense a call to be a missionary or a minister of the gospel. Reading the biographies of other missionaries and pastors can provide insight into what these callings involve and how you can best prepare to serve the Lord in them.

Many of us have favourite Christian writers such as Jonathan Edwards, John Calvin, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, C.S. Lewis or Charles Colson. Biographies are available on each of these men (more than one on some of them!). Reading about your favourite author provides valuable insight into how he came to faith and his theological persuasion. You might learn something of the circumstances that prompted the writing of some of his books; this makes them even more interesting and readable.

The danger of biographies

Biographies are usually written about people who were unusually gifted. God blessed some of them with great talents. Some had extraordinary energy and drive. Many achieved great things for the Lord and were used in remarkable ways in the church and kingdom of Christ. That is why someone wrote about them. They were extraordinary. They were remarkable in some way. No one will write about you and me like this (well, maybe about you!) When reading these books there is a danger we will compare ourselves with them and come off the worse for wear! Read these books to be encouraged, not discouraged. Read them to be inspired, not depressed. Read them to be challenged, not defeated.

Types of biographies

I have already alluded to the great variety of Christian biographies available. If you want to read about the life of another believer there is something for everyone, including children and young people, as Joanna has noted in her article. Here are some titles that may interest you.

On martyrs: *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*; J.C. Ryle, *Light From Old Times* (a book about the martyrs of the English Reformation); also check out the newsletters and website of “Voice of the Martyrs”.

On ministers: Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon*; Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield* (2 vols) (an exciting biography describing amazing times); J.C. Ryle, *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century* (includes biographies of George Whitefield, John Wesley); Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*; Don Carson, *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson* (a very moving biography of Don Carson’s father. This is encouraging because it is about an ordinary but faithful Christian who persevered in discouraging times).

On missionaries: Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore* (on Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma); Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Slendour*; Mrs Howard Taylor, *The Triumph of John and Betty Stamm* (missionaries who were martyred in China); Jim Cromarty, *King of the Cannibals: The Story of John Paton*.

On famous conversions: Augustine, *Confessions*; Charles Colson, *Born Again* (the conversion of Colson who founded Prison Fellowship).

On the reformers: Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (on Martin Luther); Robert L Reymond, *John Calvin: His Life and Influence*; Marcus Loane, *Masters of the English Reformation*.

Others: Edith Schaeffer, *The Tapestry*; Faith Cook, *Hymn-Writers and their Hymns*.

I am sure you will find these interesting, informative and inspiring!

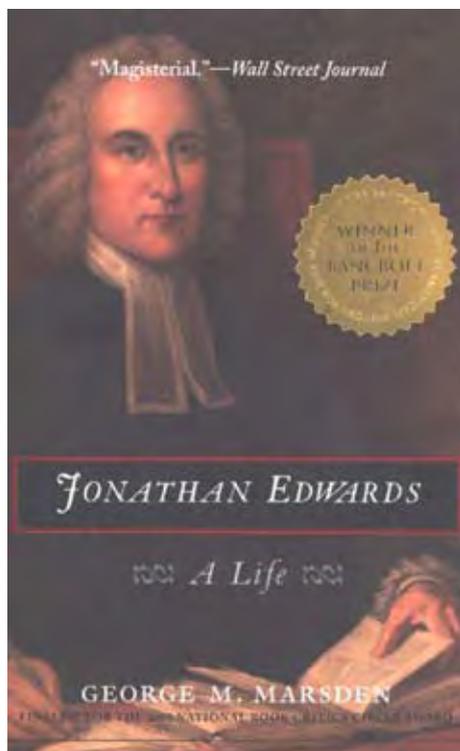
Notes

- 1 John 6:39
- 2 Hebrews 11:33-34
- 3 1 Corinthians 10:11
- 4 Dr Sally Davey, “Living Pictures of Faith – Some thoughts on the blessings of role models”, *Faith in Focus*, Volume 33/1, February 2006, p14.
- 5 Paul David Tripp, *Lost in the Middle – Midlife and the grace of God*, Shepherd Press, 2004, p33.

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Book in focus

Jonathan Edwards: A Life, by
George M. Marsden
(Yale University Press, 2003)
Reviewed by Sally Davey



When I first laid my hands on this book, I was excited. It was the kind of biography I had been waiting for. It was thirty years since I'd begun studying Jonathan Edwards – and back in the 1980s I'd spent three years doing my PhD dissertation on him. He is *the* star of American religious and intellectual history – numerous PhD theses, books and articles have been written on him. So why the excitement about this book of George Marsden's?

There are a number of good reasons. Marsden is an evangelical Christian historian; brought up in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and sharing Edwards's Calvinistic, evangelical convictions. He is writing about what he believes – or largely so. He is sympathetic to his subject – many biographies of Edwards have not been. Secondly, this book was written by Marsden in the latter years of a long, distinguished career in historical research and teaching. It is his *magnum opus*. He has put all of his considerable talents, training and experience into it. Thirdly, the literary and scholarly world has recognised this book as a triumph.

The *Wall Street Journal* pronounced it “magisterial”. The *Washington Post* called it “superb and engrossing”. The *Atlantic Monthly* hailed it as “The finest biography of this towering figure.” It received many prestigious prizes and awards. But that may not be enough to convince you, the ordinary Christian reader, to pick it up and read it. Why, you might ask, should I read such a high-brow book? I think you should simply because it is the best, most thorough, and most interesting biography I know of this godly man. That is the fourth reason for being excited about this book: it is a spiritually edifying read. You will benefit from it.

That last reason was actually why a kind and helpful Westminster Seminary professor suggested back in 1980 that I spend my three years of dissertation-writing on Jonathan Edwards. “You have to devote a lot of time and energy to this project”, Sam Logan warned me. “Choose something that will be of spiritual benefit to you.” He was right – I was helped enormously. Coming from a charismatic background (though uncomfortable with its experience-based approach) I found wise guidance in Edwards's life and writings. Those three years grounded me firmly in evangelical, Calvinistic thinking. Edwards rooted me in a heritage of faith and practice that links Christians today with God's people right back to Abraham. Sharing Edwards's theology, we also share the theology of Calvin, Luther, Augustine and the apostle Paul. It's as simple – and as exhilarating – as that. We can claim a faithful heritage. That was revolutionary – yet reassuring to that young 23 year-old!

Well, what are *you* going to find when you open this book? Firstly, you will find a sympathetic, but not uncritical account of Edwards's spiritual walk. Marsden, remember, shares Edwards's central Christian convictions – thus he (unlike many of his biographers) understands what Edwards believed and the means by which he sought to live out his faith. The story of Edwards's early spiritual development and conversion is reasonably well-known, but Marsden has researched and understood it like no other biographer I know. He has particular insight into the kinds of sins a man like Edwards struggled with. Here was an

exceedingly gifted boy, brought up in a solid, Calvinistic home by parents from a long lineage of New England ministers, and destined for a life in the ministry himself. His birth and upbringing gave him great spiritual privileges – but there were enormous expectations, too. Pride, and a certain priggish disdain of foolish behaviour were particular sins he battled with. You will find that Edwards, like all of us, battled with these propensities all his life. They plagued him during his student days and even during his ministry – but ultimately these battles were the means of growth in pastoral wisdom. Marsden deals with all this superbly.

Secondly, you will find an excellent depiction of the many issues Edwards had to deal with as a minister. This biography is not only the story of a brilliantly gifted intellectual who defended reformed truth against the errors of his day. It is also a faithful account of the ordinary trials of a local church minister. Edwards encountered bad theology, which had to be dealt with in the local ministers' association. He had to deal with the promiscuous behaviour of the youth of his congregation. He endured pressure from several large family networks that threatened to undo his entire ministry – and in fact led to his dismissal by the congregation. This was followed by a challenging post as a missionary to the Indians on the dangerous western frontier. But at the height of his ministry he saw the most thrilling spiritual revival in American history – and was able to provide wise counsel at a time when many were losing their heads. He was also entrusted with the training of some of the leading ministers of the next generation while they lived in his home with his family.

Thirdly, this is a book that sets Edwards in his times. In my view, it is unsurpassed as an introduction to life in the churches of New England in the eighteenth century. That is exciting. This world was a community of faithful churches. It was a culture deeply imbued with biblical teaching; where people were expected to live in accordance with the Scriptures. If you want to understand it from the viewpoint of a man who was one of its respected leaders, this is the book to read. Marsden does a brilliant job of portraying this world – the fabric

of its society, its cultural relationship with England, the very real dangers posed by both the Indians and the French, and the sources of its later spiritual decline. Reading this book gives you a fascinating window into the world of the Great Awakening, the generation before the American Revolution.

But let's say you don't feel inclined to read such a book. Let's say you're ready with a few pretexts for giving it a miss. So let me anticipate your pretexts – and address them. The first thing you might say is this: this book is about a man who lived so long ago (three centuries), and in such a different culture than ours (it was overwhelmingly Christian) that it simply doesn't speak to me. I find it irrelevant, in other words. Well, let me ask you: do the following sound familiar? We have, in Edwards's time, Reformed churches, three or four generations from their founding. We see complacency setting in – the younger

generations are rather slow to profess their faith, but they still want all the privileges of church membership. There is faithful preaching, but little spiritual zeal. Everyone in the church knows each other, because they have grown up together. There is a tight network of family relationships, because much in-church marrying has occurred. In some congregations, large family groupings dominate the church, especially its leadership. That makes it difficult to resolve disputes at times. This is the sort of situation any reformational church can find itself in. Reading this book can help you see the causes of some of these problems – and the solutions.

Secondly, you might protest that this is a book about a scholar – a man acclaimed as America's greatest philosopher; an intellectual giant. Yes, true: but did you know that almost everything he wrote originated as sermons, aimed at resolving very practical church problems

or refuting false doctrine? You know, this book may even stimulate you to read some of his writings! I can testify to the usefulness of one book, *Charity and its Fruits*, which I recently read as a practical commentary on 1 Corinthians 13. You can't read it without perceiving that Edwards knew human nature extremely well. Many an insight leaves you squirming in vain for excuses to keep sinning. We all need to read books like that.

The third thing you might raise as an off-putter is the length: at 505 pages it is hardly a quick read. But if a book is *this* good, why would you want it short? How often have you sighed with disappointment that a book you love is finished all too soon? (Believe me, the panels that gave this book all those awards were not stupid. Boring books do not win prizes.)

So if you want a tip-off for a gripping spiritual biography to read this winter, look no further.

World in focus

U.S. Foreign Aid being given to refurbish Muslim mosques overseas

A WSBTV.com video report by Justin Farmer titled "Muslim Mosque Makeovers with Your Tax Dollars" reports that the U.S. Department of State has spent hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars overseas in countries including Egypt, Cyprus, Tajikistan, and Mali to refurbish Islamic mosques. The U.S. Department of State sent an email to WSBTV.com saying that the mosque makeover money is being used to fight Islamic extremism by building relationships with Muslim leaders.

Former Muslim and now Christian Nani Darwish, an Egyptian-American human rights activist, says that trying to buy respect in the Middle East just shows American weakness and appeasement. Darwish says the Muslims are "laughing all the way to the bank". Darwish is a former Muslim from Egypt, where she says most of the mosques are run by radical Islamists that have ordered those like her that speak out against radical Islam to be killed.

U.S. foreign aid has additionally been used by radical Islamists to buy computers and Internet access in some mosques, which Darwish believes are being used by the radical Muslims to fight

against what the mosque members call the "Great Satan", the United States.
+ WSBTV.com

Iranian Shiite Muslim documentary film exposed that announces the imminent arrival of the "Twelfth Imam" Islamic messiah and the coming apocalyptic war with Israel and the West

Joel C. Rosenberg, founder of The Joshua Fund and author of eight New York Times best-sellers, published a 12 April 2011 blog article titled "Exposure of Iranian Film about the Coming of the Messiah Causing Turmoil in Tehran", which reports on a Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRG)-funded documentary film titled "The Coming Is Near" that has been exposed to the West contrary to the desire of Iran's Shiite Muslim-dominated government.

The documentary film is about the imminent arrival of the Islamic messiah, a.k.a. the "Twelfth Imam", and a quickly subsequent apocalyptic war with Israel and the West. Former IRG Corps officer Reza Kahlili, who became a double-agent for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and is the author of *A Time To Betray*, said of the documentary that the IRG "intended to distribute it en masse

throughout the Middle East to incite further uprisings, while calling for the unification of Arabs to overthrow U.S.-backed governments and promising the destruction of Israel and the imminent coming of the Shiite messiah."

Kahlili writes of the documentary: "It is important to note that in the video, Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, is quoted as saying that he had three goals for Iran 1. Overthrowing the Shah; 2. Establishing an Islamic State; 3. Creating the situation for the return of the last Imam. Then it goes on to say that the one after him will be the one to pass the flag of Islam to Imam Mahdi for the conquest of the world by Islam. There is also a quote that Khomeini personally told Ayatollah Khamenei that he will be the one to bring about the End of Times and the final glorification of Allah."

+ *The Joshua Fund*

Time Magazine World (Rulers of Darkness – ed.) editor declares Koran "directly the word of God" and Bible "written by men"

A 5 April 2011 article by Warner Todd Huston in the Big Journalism blog titled "Time Mag Editor: Koran Is 'Directly The

Word of God,' Bible Just a Book 'Written By Man'" reports on a recent episode of MSNBC's 'Hardball' discussing the burning of a Koran by a Florida pastor that was followed by the murder by Islamists of twelve United Nations (UN) workers in Afghanistan. Time Magazine World (Rulers of Darkness – ed.) Editor Bobby Ghosh characterised the Muslim Koran as being the "direct word of God" while characterising the Bible as being "written by men," and thus posited that it is understandable that the Islamists in Afghanistan murdered twelve UN workers in retaliation.

+ *Breitbart.com*

U.S. Presidential candidate Donald Trump professes to be a Presbyterian

An 11 April 2011 article by Lawrence D. Jones in *The Christian Post* titled "Donald Trump on Faith: I am Christian, Sunday Church Person" reports that presumptive Republican Party U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump, on the 12 April 2011 broadcast of *The 700 Club*, professed to be a Christian, a "Sunday church person", "a Protestant", and a "Presbyterian". Trump said that he used to attend the First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica (Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)), Borough of Queens, New York City, New York.

+ *The Christian Post*

Utah's largest PCUSA congregation distributing copies of the Koran

A 21 April 2011 article by Kristen Moulton in the *Salt Lake City Tribune* titled "SLC Church Distributes Free Copies of Quran" reports that Wasatch Presbyterian Church (WPC) (Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)) in Salt Lake City, Utah, in response to Florida pastor Terry Jones burning a copy of the Koran, has begun distributing free copies of the Koran through a Salt Lake City bookstore. The church has placed a statement in each Koran reading: "This book was donated by the leaders of Wasatch Presbyterian Church, who are not afraid of truth wherever it can be found."

WPC ruling elder Russell Fericks is quoted as saying: "Sometimes, it's hard to know how to push back against the lunatic fringe. You don't have to let the nincompoops of the world control all the message."

The WPC website includes the warning: "If you take the Bible literally you may be disappointed here. We hope not, but we think you should know that we don't take all of scripture liter-

ally (any more than Jesus did), but we DO take it seriously."

+ *Salt Lake City Tribune*

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary announces seminary degrees for Ruling Elders and Deacons

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (GPTS) now offer the Master of Ministry for Ruling Elders and the Master of Ministry for Deacons programs, which include training in personal piety, knowledge of the Bible, understanding of the Presbyterian form of church government, and the role of the elder and deacon in the church. The M.M.R.E. program is designed to help the Ruling Elder function not at the local church level and at the presbytery and General Assembly level. The M.M.D. program is designed to help the Deacon see his role not only in terms of the local church, but in the wider church as well.

The requirements of the M.M.R.E. and M.M.D. program may be completed in as little as two years of full-time study at GPTS. The degree may also be completed under GPTS's Mentor-supervised Distance Education program.

+ *Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

Wakefield, England, electrician under investigation for now-eight year display of eight-inch palm cross in work van

Colin Atkinson, a fifteen year employee of the private, non-profit Wakefield District Housing (WDH) in Yorkshire, England, had for eight years discretely displayed an eight-inch palm cross on the dashboard of his work van, until a complaint was lodged by a tenant that the cross might cause offense to those of other faiths. WDH management then told Mr. Atkinson to remove the cross because allowing display of the cross favours Christianity and may be offensive to others.

Mr. Atkinson refused to remove the cross, citing the fact that the WDH allows members of other faiths to wear the head-dresses, beards, and turbans, which are distinctives of their faith. He is now under investigation for alleged failure to comply, and will soon find out whether or not he will face disciplinary action.

Andrea Minichiello Williams, CEO of the Christian Legal Centre, said: "Colin Atkinson is a decent and hardworking man, yet after many years of service he has been told that he cannot continue to have a small palm cross in his van. This smacks of something deeply illiberal and

remarkably intolerant. Freedom of expression now needs to be robustly defended. When a man can't display a palm cross in his van in a historically Christian country, it should give people serious pause for thought. Is this the kind of society that the British public want to live in?"

"The cross is a profound symbol of God's love for all of us. We should not be embarrassed about it, and the historic Christian character of this nation should be retained for the benefit of all."

+ *Assist USA*

Yorkshire, England, Christian driver exonerated and allowed to continue displaying palm cross in work van

Christian Concern announced 23 April 2011 that Wakefield District Housing (WDH) employee Colin Atkinson, who had refused to remove an eight inch palm cross from the dashboard of his work van after being ordered to do so after a tenant lodged a complaint that the cross might offend those of other faiths, will be allowed to keep the palm cross displayed in his work van and will not be disciplined by his employer for failure to comply.

Atkinson has worked for WDH for fifteen years and has displayed the palm cross in his van for the past eight years.

+ *Christian Concern*

New Jersey PCUSA church offers dietetic communion elements

A 21 April 2011 announcement on *NorthJersey.com* reports that First Presbyterian Church of Rutherford (Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)), in Rutherford, New Jersey, now offers gluten-free bread and sugar-free grape juice as alternative communion elements for those with dietary restrictions.

+ *North Jersey Media Group*

Muslims rioting, burning, and murdering Christians after Nigeria elects Christian President

Open Doors USA reported 19 April 2011 that in the wake of Nigeria's election of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian politician of the ruling People's Democratic Party, that Muslims across the northern states of Nigeria have burned down sixty Christian churches, torched the homes of Christians, and have murdered pastors and church workers.

Muslims in northern Nigeria murdered approximately 2000 Christians in 2010.

+ *Open Doors USA*

Ethics

Brave new world

Continued from previous issue

Scott Rae talks to Peter Hastie

What is going to be the affect on the care of the elderly if euthanasia is legalised? What do you see happening in terms of current health care?

I am not optimistic about what would happen in society if euthanasia becomes an accepted means of dealing with chronically or acutely sick people. I don't think people fully understand that one of the reasons why we have such good hospice care and pain management is because assisted suicide is off-limits. At the moment it seems that in Oregon the practice of assisted-suicide and the proper care of the elderly are coexisting. However, I am just not sure what will happen during the next twenty years as very large numbers of elderly people require a high level of health and hospital care. Frankly, I am not optimistic about maintaining good care.

I don't think our legislators appreciate how dangerous it will be in the future to have assisted suicide on the table as one of the options. Those in favour of assisted suicide argue, "Why would you possibly object to that?" The answer to their question is that with the projected demographic changes the pressure to make greater use of assisted suicide will be almost irresistible. I realise that I am speculating here but so are those who are advocating assisted suicide. In general, I think the jury is still out on what the future holds but I find no encouragement at all in the fact that I will be one of the elderly in the next thirty years. I'm certainly glad that I don't live in parts of Europe like the Netherlands where assisted suicide has been legalised.

Is there a possibility that medical staff might conspire to euthanise certain patients who are very sick?

It's a possibility. Say you and I are part of a medical team and we are having a

conversation about a patient lying in a bed. Who is ever going to find out that we have coerced him? No one is likely to find out. These laws which are supposed to afford some sort of protection are simply not enforceable; breaches of them are also undetectable. While it would be a felony under the Oregon and Washington statutes to coerce a person to commit suicide, there are really no significant safeguards against abuse. These laws don't have any teeth at all.

When does an embryo become human? Are there theological and physiological factors that you think are decisive in answering this question?

Well, I think the issue is really only physiological. There is really no theological dispute that embryos are human or that they are alive. An embryo is human as soon as it has finished the process of fertilisation, which is a 6-12 hour process. Once that has finished, then an embryo is human. I would argue that from the first hour an embryo has all the capacities necessary to mature into a foetus and newborn, and then an adult. So, after the embryonic stages there are no capacities added; they are just actualised.

If an embryo was not human, then we would not be nearly as interested in stem cells.

Given all the modern forms of contraception available, is abortion still being practiced at significant rates?

You know, it is. It's absolutely tragic. The number of abortions in the USA is currently running around a million each year. It is still used as the birth control of last resort. I don't know if that is because woman can't afford the pill or guys don't want to do birth control, but it's widely available.

Tell me, are live births still occurring as a result of abortions of fetuses in the second trimester?

Yes.

So there are little babies who are five months old that are being born alive after an abortion?

Yes. There were, at one particular neo-

“We face new challenges that only a Christian worldview can truly negotiate.”



natal ICU ward, children as old as 23 weeks. That is four and a half months.

If an abortion takes place and a child is born live, what happens?

You mean what should happen, or what does happen?

What should happen?

What should happen is that all measures should be taken to rescue the child. However, what often happens is that the child is killed when they are out of the womb, or they are abandoned and allowed to die on their own so that the charge of infanticide can be avoided. The law in the United States prescribes very clearly that when abortion fails and the child is born alive, then they have to be given all the treatment necessary for them to be stabilised.

So you are saying that there are instances when that is not happening?

Oh, yes. I think that it's more common than we would want to believe. Then norm is probably that the children are abandoned.

When you say abandoned, do you mean that they are just put somewhere out of the way and left?

Yes, they are just put in an out-of-the-way place and left to die on their own.

Does this amount to a conspiracy on the part of staff working there?

It certainly requires their cooperation in not rescuing the child. You need to remember that most of these places where newborns survive abortions are not in neonatal ICU's or high quality care clinics; they are in abortion clinics. The abortion clinic doesn't have neonatal intensive care facilities on hand – after all, why would they? This means that to obey the law they have to rush the baby to a neonatal ICU which may be all the way across town. Of course, that would be a public relations nightmare for them so there are significant incentives to abandon the child in an abortion clinic or for an abortion physician to commit infanticide and finish off the botched procedure. That is probably more the norm today, but the law was written specifically to prevent both those events.

Do people ever get apprehended for those sorts of things or not?

There may be some states where it happens occasionally, but I think it's very

rare. I can't remember the last time I read about some physician being prosecuted for something like that. In the next few days we have a guest speaker at Biola University called Gianna Jessen. She is part of our 'Sanctity of Life' week celebrations. She is now in her late 20's and she survived a botched abortion. It's a really remarkable story. She was badly burned with saline solution for 17 hours as part of the abortion process. And, by God's grace, she survived!

What are the after-effects of abortion?

The post-abortion syndrome is very real and most women feel a significant sense of loss. This is particularly true if an abortion is done for reasons of genetic abnormality or birth defect. Women who don't want their child still recognise that they have done something deliberate to end their child's life. The abortion stops

one of those tests then it cannot be classed as human. What is your response to that?

Well, if we are going to be consistent with this standard then it seems to me that we have a lot of adults that we need to put to death. There are also a lot of severely disabled and handicapped adults that don't deserve to live either.

So, what they are advocating is really a form of genocide?

Yes, it's a form of genocide. It is genocide against the disabled. Actually, I wonder whether these people have really thought through the social consequences of what they are advocating. For example, it's popular today to talk a lot about value and diversity. Well, here's a classic case of rubbing it out. To say that the disabled and the handicapped do not have valuable contributions to make and ought to be valued really flies

“Society's acceptance of abortion has coarsened our view of the sanctity of life.”

a beating heart. That's the truth. I think women are usually told that “you can come in on Friday and you get this ‘taken care of’ and then go back to your life on Monday and are done with it.” It's very rare that it works that way.

What are some of the social consequences of wide-spread acceptance of abortion?

I think society's acceptance of abortion has generally coarsened our view of the sanctity of life. What I find interesting is that modern technology is allowing us to view the wonder of a developing child within its mother's uterus while at the same time we have a progressive hardening in our view of the unborn. Thirty years ago it would have been almost unthinkable for a woman to have a baby in the ladies room and then throw it in a trash can.

Two former Nobel laureates, James Watson and Francis Crick, say that a newborn child should not be called human until it has passed a number of tests with respect to its genetic endowment. They say that if it fails

in the face of our emphasis on diversity. I am glad to hear these people say it straight out because it is good that they are not just using euphemisms to mask their real intentions.

Some ethicists today are saying that we must take seriously the notions of meaningful life and wrongful life in determining who should live. How would they handle people like Helen Keller and Stephen Hawking?

On their criteria, if they were to be consistent, they would have to dispatch them. If people had known that Stephen Hawking was going to be born with the disabilities he now has, he would never have been allowed to be born. And the world of physics would have been poorer because of it. The same goes for Beethoven, incidentally. He suffered profound deafness.

I would love to take an anecdotal survey of the disabled and ask them if they would have been better off if they had never been born. It would be interesting to see what they say. I suspect that they would look at us like we had come from another planet and rightly so.

“There are significant incentives for an abortion physician to commit infanticide and finish off the botched procedure.”

I think that the question of meaningful life is a silly question to ask someone who is living and flourishing, albeit in a limited capacity.

If doctors make a decision to allow a baby to die because it is suffering from, say, cardiopulmonary problems, is there any reason why they shouldn't make the same decision in an adult? If they decide to assist the adult then what is the basis of making that decision?

That's a good question. See, I don't have an objection to newborns or adults being allowed to die if further treatments are futile. The same is true if additional treatment is more burdensome than beneficial. If you say, "Stop. I'm done. I don't want to live out the rest of my days with tubes down my throat", then you ought to be able to say that. It may actually hasten your death, but so be it.

However, it's different if somebody else starts making those choices for you. I would have a real problem about somebody else saying that for me unless they were representing my wishes and speaking on my behalf.

But I think a person ought to be able to say, "enough", where it is obvious that further procedures are only going to prolong the suffering with no prospects of recovery. I think it's right and deeply Christian to say "enough" when our position is terminal. If our view of eternity is correct, then what business do you have delaying a loved one's homecoming by hooking him/her up to technologies and tubes that the physicians have deemed are futile?" Again, we can put it like this: "What business do we have in increasing another person's net suffering at the end of his life if the burdens far outweigh the benefits?"

I really think people should be able to say "enough". I don't think 'sanctity of life' means that we have to treat everybody at all costs and at all times. That's making an idol out of earthly life. Theologically, earthly life is not the highest

good. If we define the sanctity of life as meaning that we support life even when it is futile to do so over the longer term, then we are obligated to do everything possible at all times and at any cost. When death is inevitable there is nothing wrong with allowing it to take its natural course. Christian families need to hear that because sometimes they think they are violating the sanctity of life unless they take every measure possible even when it is futile to do so.

How should Christians be viewing developments in stem cell research?

For the most part, very enthusiastically, because the vast majority of clinical applications are coming from stem cells harvested from non-embryonic sources, which is entirely non-controversial. Incidentally, this is where all the action is.

So are you concerned at some of the current decisions that are being made at a political level to promote embryonic stem-cell research?

Yes, I am. There are a couple of reasons for my concern. First, I don't believe that it is ever justifiable to kill one person to benefit another. I don't think that we should agree with that under any circumstances. A second reason is because so much of the promise of embryonic stem cells lies off in the distant future. In these circumstances I think we are giving people with debilitating diseases false hope that their cure is right around the corner. The simple fact is that it isn't. If the cures were right around the corner then the venture capitalists would be funding this, not the taxpayers.

Is it true that it's far more effective to use stem cells that come from relatives rather than stem cells from the wider population?

That is right, and the reason is that the donor is a match to the recipient. Using stem cells from left-over embryos is virtually useless for treatments because it's like doing a bone marrow transplant

from some guy off the street. He may not be compatible. The good news on embryonic stem cells is that we will be having new discussions on this subject sometime soon because both in Japan and in two places in the United States researchers have reprogrammed adult cells back to a stage where they can harvest stem cells. It happened last year and it was done without using embryos. This discussion about using embryos will be irrelevant in five years.

How important is it for the Church to endorse the historicity and integrity of the Genesis record as a means of articulating a defence for the sanctity of life?

That's a good question. Can you sustain the traditional doctrine that man is made in the image of God and also allow for an evolutionary reading of the text of Genesis? Frankly, I am really reluctant to let the camel get his nose in the tent on this issue. I find it very difficult to see where random selection and providence could coexist. It hard to imagine why, in the providence of God, man, who evinces evidence of the most amazing indications of design, would have been the result of an entirely random process. If it did occur in this way, as William Lane Craig recently said in a debate with Christopher Hitchens, then it would be the most amazing miracle.

As I see it, adopting an evolutionary interpretation of Genesis is an attempt to make two mutually contradictory systems – theism and naturalism – co-exist. I know some Christians, especially scientists, are comfortable with this approach. However, as a philosopher I am not sure that it is possible to be entirely consistent in being a theist and also believing in the process of random selection. Of course, I am always open to any new arguments on the subject, but I'm not holding my breath while I'm waiting.

Mr Peter Hastie is issues editor of Australian Presbyterian and minister of Ashfield Presbyterian Church, New South Wales.

This article originally appeared in Australian Presbyterian (June 2009), with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.

Summer School of Theology

Part two

The School of Theology held in Palmerston North over Wellington Anniversary Weekend of 20 to 24 January offered a wide range of topics to a depth not normally encountered outside of seminary settings. Yet without the burden of textbooks or the urgency of exams, the attendees were able to drink in the lecture content in a relaxed way, looking more for personal applications than for details to be repeated in assignments.

Evangelism, Hermeneutics, Church History, The Covenant, the Regulative Principle of Worship – it was all there for the 80 or so attendees to take in at the lecture times, to read again in the copious notes handed out, to ask questions at any time and to discuss at meal times. The other lecturers were often also in attendance, lending their insights to the subject either during the lecture or at question time.

The Rev. David Waldron stated his aim to make us uncomfortable as he took two lectures on Evangelism. What a privilege and responsibility we have, and how exciting it can be, were all conveyed to us. Iwan Baaman gave some great insights into the historical Protestant background of elders as part of the congregation; rather than the Roman Catholic idea of seeing them as part of the professional clergy.

The Rev. Hans Vaatstra's two lectures on the RPW (Regulative Principle of Worship) not only brought the importance of this to the fore, but demonstrated how these topics are all intertwined, related and dependent upon each other. The RPW is a result in part of our Hermeneutics (Rev Flinn's topic) and understood today in light of past Church History (Sally Davey's topic). The Rev. Archbald presented five sessions, one on the Kingdom, two on the Covenant and two on the Church.

As a result of these lectures just mentioned, a number of members of the Palmerston North congregation, members who came into the Reformed Church as adults and who were not catechised, determined to possibly re-organise their mid-week Bible study to take them systematically through all of these wonderful concepts so well understood by life-long Reformed believers: TULIP, the RPW, the Covenant, Church membership. This is very exciting; to see members of our Church becoming enthusiastic about the distinctive doctrines of our Church!

Dr Sally Davey presented five talks on Church History, a truly remarkable review of God's Providence in the Early Church, the Reformation, the Age of Revival, Modern times and the Life of Jonathan Edwards. And the Rev. Michael Flinn de-mystified the area of Old Testament Hermeneutics over five lecture slots, helping the attendees come to grips with Narrative, Poetry, Prophecy, Law and Wisdom Literature. The talks and the notes are available from the Reformed Church in Palmerston North, so don't hesitate to order your copy. Watch this space for our next School of Theology in 2012, Lord Willing!



Geneva Books stall at the Summer School of Theology.



Morning tea for participants in the Summer School of Theology.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE "QUOTES"

"He values not Christ at all who does not value Christ above all." *Augustine*

"A Christian is not a person who has made a new start in life, but a person who has received a new life to start with." – *John Blanchard*

"We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians." – *Francis Schaeffer*

"Let not our prayers and praises be the flashes of a hot and hasty brain, but the steady burning of a well-kindled fire." – *Charles H. Spurgeon*

BIRTHS

Jochem, Sadie Marie – a daughter born to Tim and Jodie – 22 March (Pukekohe)

Nepia, Florence – a daughter born to Darrel and Jo – 29 March (Palmerston North)

Perniskie, Alexander – a son born to Emmaleigh Perniskie – 28 March (Oamaru)

Rademaker, Rachel – a daughter born to Nathaniel and Sharon – 26 March (Palmerston North)

Nieuwoudt, Caleb – a son born to Paul and Ansie – 31 March (Hamilton)

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Avondale: Marcia Lee, Elu and Ruth Mailata, Eila McKenzie

Bishopdale: Miriam Capill

WEDDINGS

16 April – Matt McKellar and Catharine Bos married in Hamilton

16 April – Glenn Jefferies and Sarah de Vries married in Wainuiomata

23 April – Jonathan Lougher and Yvonne ter Veen married in Avondale

23 April – Jason den Harder and Laura

Vosslander married in Auckland

30 April – Jeremy Kaijser and Katrina Huysdens married in Avondale

DEATHS

Vanderpyl, Marjory – Many of us will know and remember Dr Marjory Vanderpyl, the eldest daughter of Dick and Adie Vanderpyl (both deceased). Marjory has been fighting acute leukaemia for the past few years. Marjory wrote, *'I am in pain and not well, so it will be a release from the suffering. God is good, glory and praise to him.'* We can give thanks to God for Marjory's steadfast witness of trust and hope in Christ which has been unwavering over the past year. She declined very rapidly. Indeed her prayer was that she would not have to suffer long. God answered her prayer and took her home quickly. Her last days were difficult but happy. She was surrounded by family and looked forward to heaven with eagerness. We grieve for Marjory, who will be missed, but we are not without hope for we know that she is now in glory. (Bishopdale)

Voschezang, Roelof Snr died peacefully from cancer, at home, with his wife Ali and other members of the family at his bedside. He was 77 years old and has served the Lord faithfully in this church as a member and an elder, in the Pukekohe Christian School as a member of the Trust Board, and in the Christian Heritage Party. Roel and Ali were founding members of the Pukekohe Reformed Church and Roel has often represented our Session as a delegate at Presbytery meetings and Synods, a part of the work he really enjoyed. He was a keen reader of Theology and Church History and had an impressive library. We express our sympathies to Ali and all the family and pray each of you may know God's comfort and peace. We are thankful that Roel did not suffer long and that he is now in heaven with the Lord, which was his great desire. So we do not grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

FROM THE PASTOR

Hamilton: Most of us have watched the unfolding of world events with a sense of disbelief. Flooding, earthquakes, tsu-

namis and wars show us the folly of putting our hopes in any security this world has to offer. They are a gracious reminder that we live in a world under God's judgement and that "unless [we] repent, [we] too will all perish." (Luke 13:3, 5). Let us pray that Christians may be to the fore in bringing aid and ministering to those whose lives have been turned upside down and that the Lord may be pleased to save many through these events. Let's pray, too, that God would enable us to use the many conversation opportunities He gives us to call people to turn to Him so that their hope for this life and for all of eternity may be in Him alone.

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Dunedin: We say farewell to Dick and Mary Wynja as they head home for Denver. We have certainly appreciated their second stint with us. Thank you Dick for proclaiming the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to us week by week and also for the work you've done with our profession of faith candidates. Thank you Mary for helping out with catechism too and for the encouragement you've been with the music and in all sorts of other ways. May God bless you both as you continue to serve him in more familiar surroundings.

Palmerston North: We can give thanks to God that both congregations voted by an overwhelming majority to call Nathan Ketchen to serve the Palmerston North congregation as their second minister. Do pray for Nathan and his wife Melissa as they weigh up whether or not they should accept the call to serve in New Zealand or stay and serve the Lord's people where they are.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

The Engineers' report that the Committee of Management has received regarding the damage to the church building complex was tabled and discussed. It is likely that the hall and adjacent rooms will need to be brought down, while the auditorium can be repaired to make it safe. COM is recommending that the congregation continues to worship off-site until the entire building complex is restored.

EVANGELISM

Avondale: Evangelism Team – Are you keen to declare Jesus Christ to strangers? Are you thinking about evangelism but would like some help in getting started? Perhaps you don't feel like doing this at all but you think it would be a good idea to see how others do it? Then you should probably meet with the evangelism team at 7:30pm. We start with prayer then head into town.

Hukanui: Youth Evangelistic Evening – Andre Scheepers will share his military testimony, present the Gospel and allow a time for questions and answers. The aim of the evening is to get the youth to love and serve Jesus and not to waste their time on worldly pursuits such as TV, play-station, war games, etc. We are inviting home school students and students from the local schools in Hamilton and expect over 300 young people to attend. This is an opportunity for our youth to reach out to other youth in the Hamilton area. Pray that souls be saved during this meeting.

Pukekohe: We have had the final evening seminar in this series on Evangelism. The purpose was to encourage us to talk freely and naturally to others about our faith in God and about the Lord Jesus. Of course, it is one thing to study these matters and another to put them into practice! Pray regularly for specific people that the Lord might bring them to faith. Pray for opportunities to speak to others about God and for courage to do so. Introduce non-Christians to your family and to others in the church. Invite them to worship to hear the Word of God read and preached. Let's *Just Start Talking* and introduce our faith into our conversation.

Wainuiomata: The Holiday Bible club will be running during the holidays, and we would like to get as many flyers into letterboxes as possible. This year I thought I would ask each able bodied Wainuiomata family to deliver to a couple of streets within Wainui to help share the load of distribution (last year 6000 were distributed). These can be delivered anytime during the week.

MISSIONS

Hamilton: Jair and Lauretta Duinkerke, along with their little girl, Theresa are back from the Solomon Islands and will be spending time with family and have several speaking engagements in the Reformed Churches.

Palmerston North: You are invited to an evening hosted by your Cadets and Calvinettes. The central theme will be based on the Mission work surrounding the Bible College in Papua New Guinea. It will include a presentation by the Cadets and Calvinettes as well as a DVD about the work in PNG. As this is a fundraising evening, entry is by gold coin donation, and we will also have some PNG-made products for sale. Supper, tea and coffee will be served. We look forward to seeing you there!

DENOMINATIONAL

CCC Executive – The Cadet and Calvinette counsellors would like to give a big thank you to all who helped in the organisation of the recent CCC Executive held here in Silverstream. The delegates and other visitors all spoke very highly of the event and made particular comment on the quality of the food, and the activities on Saturday. So a big thank you to those who helped running the event, but a special thank you to Danny den Harder for organising this meeting and weekend.

Men's Presbytery Day – This will be held on Saturday 6th August at the Pukekohe Reformed Church. Peter Reynolds will be addressing us from the book of Proverbs on 'Wisdom in Relationships'. Please keep this day free and plan to come!

NIV Bible: The text of the NIV translation is currently being updated. Within a few weeks, any NIV Bibles you purchase or order from a Christian bookstore are likely to differ from our current 1984 edition. The new text is likely to be discussed at our Synod later this year, so it may be prudent to postpone any non-urgent Bible purchases until there has been an opportunity for an evaluation to take place.

Synod 2011 – At the request of the Reformed Church of Bishopdale, endorsed by the Reformed Churches of Christchurch and Dovedale, the 2011 Synod of the RCNZ will now not be held at Bishopdale but in Bucklands Beach. The dates for the Synod remain the same: Saturday 3rd September till Friday 9th September 2011.

Wellington Ladies Presbyterial – On Saturday, 19 March, about 90 ladies gathered in Foxton for the annual Ladies Presbyterial of the churches in our Presbytery. The guest speaker was Allison Mooney, a Christian motivational speaker

and her talk was all about 'pushing the right buttons'. If one was to put in a nutshell all that she said, it would be that all of us are created with different personalities, all of us are different and no two of us are alike. Despite all those different personalities we are all created in the image of God and are all part of the body of Christ and therefore we need to accept each other despite our differences. After a lovely lunch, served by the men of the congregation, we broke into three different groups, some ladies went to visit the windmill, some ladies learnt hand massage and others learnt to make flowers out of flax. It was a great day of fellowship and enjoyed by all. We thank and praise God for these opportunities of fellowship and the opportunity to strengthen our bonds in Christ.

ACTIVITIES

Bucklands Beach: Church Camp – What stood out was that, for all the difference in ages, cultural backgrounds and even expectations, there was a real sense of oneness, peace and joy evident at all times and in all things. Thank you campers! Thank you organisers.

Dovedale: We are doing some wood chopping and baking at the Davey's farm. The merchandise will then be distributed in hard-hit sections of the town.

HOVING HARMEN LAMBERT (Harry)

Passed away peacefully on February 28th, 2011 at 'Highercombe' in Hope Valley Sth. Australia into the fuller presence of his Lord, aged 86 years.

Dearly loved by his wife Ann, much loved by his family in the Netherlands and New Zealand and affectionately remembered by his friends in Australia and New Zealand.

Harry and Ann's wedding text on 28/2/1958 was:

"I will be with you always, even until the end of the world."

Dovedale: Community Meeting – We have invited the Community Constable, representatives from Hornby Presbyterian Church, South Hornby school, the Salvation Army, and WINZ to come and speak to us about the work they are doing in the Hornby/Hei Hei area. We are doing this in order to help us think about activities we might be able to take up or join in with. Please pray for this meeting and plan to attend so that many of us may benefit from the willingness and effort of these community leaders.

Dunedin's April Fool's Day Tradition: Out with the old, in with the new – Now that the Clean Air (Public and Religious Buildings) Act has been passed into law, the church's unventilated gas heating system will, from 1 April, no longer meet statutory requirements. It is a cause for concern and regret that we have been forced to replace our reliable and efficient heating system with an electrical one, and at very short notice. However the news is not all bad. Under the Emissions Trading Scheme we are able to enter into an agreement with a counterpart in a country that has a surplus of carbon credits. Accordingly, we have negotiated with our field representatives in Papua New Guinea and will exchange our redundant gas heaters for alternative equipment at no cost to either party. In future, in the unlikely event of the temperature falling below 25 degrees in the PNG lowlands, the folks there can bask in the glow of our well-used gas appliances. And for us, in the equally unlikely event of the temperature rising above 25 degrees, we can be cooled by a collection of exotic, long-handled, feathered fans.

Dunedin: The Great Congregational Talent Show – Come one come all. Bring your flute, bring your pipe organ, share your oratory excellence or just do something silly. Take a pew, take the stage, take a bow and receive applause.

Palmerston North: The Youth Group are planning to hold a formal dinner for the 60ish plus members of our congregation.

Short Report of the Wellington Presbytery 5 March

The meeting was convened by the Rev Leo de Vos, minister of the convening church, the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata. He opened the meeting with the singing of Hymn 377 (Blue Ps/H), read from Col 1:24-29, and then led in prayer.

The credentials of the delegates were received and the meeting was constituted. All delegates stood to signify their agreement with the confessional standards of the RCNZ.

The Reformed Churches of Hastings and Masterton answered the questions of church Order Art. 47; after which was a time of intercessory prayer for these congregations.

After approval of the minutes, adoption of the agenda, receiving the incoming correspondence and approving of the outgoing correspondence, the Presbytery received the minutes of church visitations made to the Reformed Churches of Hastings and Silverstream.

Under "General Business" the following items were dealt with:

1. The Reformed Church of Wellington's request re the acceptance of 4 hymns was postponed until the next Presbytery meeting.
2. By oral vote the Presbytery endorsed an overture by the Palmerston North Session to the 2011 Synod, i.e. to appoint a study committee to assess the suitability of the English Standard Version for use as a pulpit Bible.
3. An appeal against the Wainuiomata Session came before Presbytery. After the appeal was heard and a lengthy discussion had taken place in closed session, judgement was rendered in writing.

The meeting was closed with the decision to meet in Palmerston North on the 11th of June, 2011.

Pieter van Huyssteen

Short Report of the Christchurch Presbytery 12 March

The moderator, Rev Daniel Wilson, welcomed the delegates with a Bible reading and prayer. A special welcome was given

to Rev Tim Rott who was representing the Reformed Church of Christchurch for the first time.

A comprehensive review of the Presbytery rules was presented and agreed on. We will now be known as the South Island Presbytery.

Article 47 Questions were answered by the Reformed Church of Dunedin/Oamaru and the Reformed Church of Christchurch. Ongoing prayer for a minister for the Dunedin congregation was requested. Christchurch gave thanks that they had been able to secure the local Seventh Day Adventist Church buildings to use while reports on the earthquake damage to their buildings is sought.

The church visitation schedule for 2011 was agreed to and the following appointments were made: OMB Liaison – Rev B Hoyt, National Diaconate – Brother A Geerlofs, Mainland Regional Youth Committee – Rev R van Wichen, Synodical Examiners – Rev B Hoyt and Rev A Holtslag and the Church Counsellor for Dunedin – Rev B Hoyt.

As the 'calling' church, Bishopdale expressed a desire to ask another NZ church to host synod, which was agreed to by the gathered churches.

A revised version of 'O Holy Night' was returned to Bishopdale for further consideration.

The new presbytery rules has set the regular meeting dates as the second Saturday of March and July with the November meeting being on the first Saturday.

The next meeting has been changed from the set day to the second Saturday of June to allow for Synod preparation.

Fred Braam

Short Report of the OMB meeting held 11-12 March 2011 in Masterton

Short reports of the Overseas Mission Board will appear regularly, to keep our members informed about the OMB's activities. Please remember to intercede for the work of the OMB in your daily prayers. **ed.**

The two Presbytery liaisons, the Reverends Dirk van Garderen and Bruce Hoyt, were also present. To better make use of the time (since they generally just attend the March meeting) the Board met over

Friday night and Saturday morning. This gave opportunity for strategic planning.

Changes to the Missions Policy Handbook to incorporate the rules for Overseas Missions of the Office-Bearers Handbook were discussed and approved. These will form part of the recommendations in the OMB report to the 2011 Synod.

The Board approved the revised MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the OMB and the Hukanui church (which details the arrangements between OMB and Hukanui for the support of the Hagoorts in Papua New Guinea).

Work reports from the Rev. Alan Douma, Janice Reid and the Hagoorts were received and discussed.

The budget for the next four years was discussed. It was decided to present a four-year budget to the Synod rather than a three-year one as the financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March and the Synod meets half-way through the financial year in September.

Among recommendations included in the report to the Synod is a proposal to set up a denominational trust fund for members to bequeath money to missions.

Several requests from the On Field

Missions Conference in PNG were considered.

In response to a request from the churches for regular updates from the OMB on its work, it was decided to include a short report in *Faith in Focus* after each meeting, the first of which you are now reading.

The meeting continued on Saturday morning to discuss future planning. The Board also heard a report from the Rev van Garderen on various projects the National Diaconate Committee is supporting.

The next meeting was set for 6 May in Masterton.

Ministers in focus

Mr Peter Moelker

Having recently arrived in New Zealand on July 8th 2011 and taken up the call as the pastor of the Reformed Church of Avondale, it is a joy for me to introduce myself and my family to our brothers and sisters in the denomination. We look forward to meeting you all(!) in the Lord's time. I was born Peter John Adriaan Moelker on July 23, 1972 in Trenton, Ontario, Canada. My father came to Canada in 1952 and my mother in 1953 from the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands. I was born the 12th and last child in our family. For the first 13 years of my life, I grew up on a fruit farm (apple orchards) in Ontario; which never turned into the prosperous work that my father had envisioned when he first arrived in Canada. My mother and father worked hard to bring us up in the fear of the Lord. Though we were probably "poor" by worldly standards, as children, we never had the sense that we ever lacked anything needful.

I grew up as a covenant child in the Christian Reformed Churches of North America. My father served as an elder in the church and passed away when I was 10 years old. He suffered from lung cancer and eventually went to be with the Lord on September 25th, 1982. It goes without saying that his death had a profound effect upon my life. I will always remember that time when we stood beside his bed in the final moments of his earthly life. He never doubted where he was going. He never doubted who his Saviour was.

As I look back upon my teenage years,

I recognise now that they were years lived far apart from the Lord. For several years, I tried to find joy and peace in many things. After high school, I attended a community college with the intention of entering the sports broadcasting field. I actually worked at a radio station for two years as a news, weather, and sports announcer. After I completed my 2nd and final year of the program, the emptiness in my life and heart started to weigh more heavily upon me. It was in the spring of 1992 that the Lord began to work powerfully in my heart and open my eyes to the truth of His Word. Sud-

denly, everything I had put my hope in and thought could bring love and joy and peace into my life was taken away. As the Lord opened my heart to the truth of His Word, I was convicted of my need of the Saviour. The Lord searched my mind and heart and showed me His blessed promise in Psalm 50:15 – "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you will honor me." On July 5, 1992, I professed my faith in Jesus Christ and that Fall, after encouragement from family members, I enrolled at Redeemer Christian University in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada, wondering where the



Lord might be leading me.

It was in my first month or two at Redeemer that the Lord began to impress upon my heart the desire for the gospel ministry. And it was near the end of that first year of College that I would meet my future wife, Melissa Dawn Numan (of Frisian descent, for those of you who keep track of such things!), on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic and we were married 2 years later in May of 1995. Lisa was also blessed with the joy of growing up in a covenant home, her father being involved in directing a male choir for many years.

After much thought and prayer and upon completion of our College degrees, my wife and I decided that I should attend Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, being drawn to this seminary which required that its professors subscribe to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, a resounding statement upholding the authority of Scripture. After transferring to Mid-America Reformed Seminary in February of 1997 and moving on to Calvin Theological Seminary (the denominational seminary of the Christian Reformed Church) in the Spring of 1999 to finish my theological studies, I graduated from Calvin Seminary in May of 2000 and was ordained

to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the Christian Reformed Church on December 3, 2000.

In the Fall of 2003, having served in the Christian Reformed Church for a number of years, I was compelled to seek a call out of the denomination in which we had been nurtured. Due to synodical decisions to stand alongside other denominations in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, an alliance which includes several denominations which allow for the denial of the heart of the gospel (the divinity of Christ and his bodily resurrection), we were compelled to seek a place of service where we could faithfully serve the Lord and unite with others who cherished the truth of the gospel. In the Lord's time, I was called to serve the congregation of Grace Presbyterian Church in Lisbon, New York, a congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. We were blessed with many good years in the OPC, before needing to return to our birth country of Canada after 4 years in New York, when our temporary visa was due to expire. It was while serving an OPC mission work in Canada that we became increasingly aware of the possibility of service in a far off land called New Zealand! After many months

of prayerful consideration and visiting the Avondale congregation in February, when we received the call to take up the work, the Lord had prepared us to say yes, we will come.

The Lord has blessed us with four sons and two daughters. Nathan is 13 and taller than his father, Benjamin is 11 and can't wait to visit "Hobbiton," David is 8 and loves to play chess, Hannah is 6 and enjoys drawing pictures, Josiah is 3 and wants to do everything his brothers do, and Abigail is 1 and loves to entertain everyone at meal times. In the Lord's time, we hope to meet many of you and introduce ourselves personally. Over these past several years, it has been a wonderful blessing to look back and see how the Lord has truly been faithful to us as He has provided for us in so many ways every step of the way. The events that have brought us to this point have taken several turns, but in all of them we see the gracious hand of the Lord directing us. We are thankful to be serving the Lord in New Zealand and we look forward to praying for and seeing His Kingdom come and will be done here in New Zealand as it is in heaven.

Avondale Hosts the Annual Auckland Women's Presbyterial



Judith Popping giving her talk on "Soul Food".

A fantastic day was enjoyed by the 98 ladies who attended our presbyterial on Saturday, 12 March. We had great weather and a wonderful atmosphere – and Avondale enjoyed being able to host this event using the new church hall. Mrs Lisa Moelker welcomed everyone and we began the day with prayer and singing.

Judith Popping (nee vanTrigt) was invited to come over from Australia for this 'Get Together' and she spoke on John 6:25-59. Calling her talk '**Soul Food**' she encouraged us to consider our relationship with Jesus –

- Are we feeding on His Word? •
- Our faith is not about 'faith related tasks' like reading our Bible, praying every day and going to church, as important as those things are. Our faith is about a relationship with Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus is a fact and is not dependant on what we do.
- Are all our prayers bullet point prayers or do we take the time to have good communion with God? How would our marriages survive if we only had bullet point conversations? So, if it isn't

good enough in our human relationships it is definitely not good enough in our relationship with God.

- The Christian life is a moment by moment relying on Jesus. The more capable you are the harder it is to stop relying on yourself. You need to come to Jesus, empty-handed, and be still.
- Active passivity is called for, like Mary's response to the angel: "I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." This promise would be fulfilled through her not by her.
- Think about the circumstances you are currently in – there are probably some areas that aren't going so well and where you feel you could do better. If you try this in your own strength, in the end all you have is your longing to change and your own efforts to change. You get convicted about things in your life and try to change in your own strength – this is so weak and will only yield short term results. The alternative is the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives – being actively passive.

- We were encouraged to put our full weight on the promises of Christ. Jesus is inviting us into a deeper relationship with Him. Moment by moment ask for more belief, trust and faith in Him. Then Get On, believing He will do what he has said. "Come all you who are thirsty"

After the business part of the day was concluded, eg. minutes of the last meeting, reports from the various churches, and the collection, Judith, who became a Christian in her early thirties, finished the morning by giving her testimony. She encouraged those with unbelieving family members or friends to continue to uphold these people in prayer before the throne of God.

We raised \$900.00 for the Tabitha Charitable Foundation, which has been established by Marjorie vanderPyl, and will assist the poor and needy in Christchurch who are struggling after the earthquake.

Mrs Meinsma led the workers (male and female) in the kitchen and together they provided a wonderful morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea.

The afternoon was spent working on a few different crafts and as the ladies left they were presented with a lovely little gift made by a couple of the senior ladies from Avondale.

We thank God for these opportunities to come together to worship and fellowship.

Helen Wassenaar

– on behalf of the Avondale Women's Fellowship

P.S. – a 'thank you note' was received from Marjory – "Thank you very much for your kind donation. It is much appreciated. In Christ's service, Marjory Vanderpyl, Tabitha Charitable Foundation."



Images from the the Annual Auckland Women's Presbyterial at Avondale Reformed Church.





CBI NZ Newsletter – March 2011

We give praise and thanks to the Lord for upholding and leading this ministry in N.Z. which began in February 2006 with just a few students in Hawkes Bay Prison. In the last five years:

- We have reached more than 1000 prisoners in NZ Prisons bearing in mind our total prison population is approximately 8500.
- There are more than 400 active and enrolled students doing the CBI studies.
- There are more than 80 trained Instructors in NZ marking the lessons.
- We processed 1283 lessons in NZ from March 2010 to February 2011.
- In the same period there were 239 new enrolments.

In November last year we held two Instructor meetings in the Wellington area. As well as some interactive discussion about the ministry of CBI we listened to a CD of Prison Chaplain John Lamsma presenting a seminar held in the U.S. in 2009 for CBI Instructors. Part of his presentation highlighted the reality of prison life focusing on 4 key areas where prisoners are deprived and how this affects their lives in prison in regard to their behaviour, their attitude and mindset. He explained how this flows on in their lives upon re-entry into society. He emphasised how the study of God's Word can make a significant impact to change these areas of attitude, behaviour etc in a positive way.

In February, I was in contact with a Chaplain who shared how the Lord had worked with a particular prisoner using the CBI Studies. It has encouraged and

motivated him to endeavour to distribute the CBI enrolment forms in the prison. After further contact he replied; "Thank you for the CBI Information and material for distribution. I appreciated your explanation for me. The concept of walking with/beside students is very encouraging. I do like this concept! Your team does a first rate job. I am grateful to each of you. I do hope we can see a pick up in the studies and impact from the current group of inmates. May God bless and use this ministry."

In our trip to Wellington in November I also had several informal meetings with people interested in the CBI ministry. These are wonderful opportunities to share what the Lord is doing in the prisons of NZ as men and women study the Word of God.

As well, I had a very positive and encouraging two hour meeting with Stephen Opie at the Bible Society office which concluded with a look at their warehouse of biblical literature (wow!) This meeting was a blessed opportunity to share with him the work of the CBI ministry in NZ prisons. We discussed how the Bible Society can support us in this work.

We held an instructor training seminar in the Wairarapa. It is always a real encouragement to meet with people who are keen to reach prisoners with the Word of God and who appreciate the enormous potential in this mission field for the positive change this has in men and women's lives.

Thank you to all those who helped in sending out well over 400 Christmas cards to CBI students in December. They are very appreciative and thankful to know that we are praying for them and thinking of them at this time.

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the ongoing financial support from churches and individuals. It is a blessed encouragement to think there are so many people in our church communities who are willing to support this ministry. CBI is registered with the Charities Commission so your donations are tax deductible.

May the following responses from CBI students encourage us all as we begin to plan the year ahead trusting in the Lord to guide and lead us, acknowledging that it is in His strength that we serve Him in this prison ministry.

"I hope and pray that one day I will have the knowledge and wisdom to preach His Word to others and bring them closer to

our Lord. I pray for His strength to walk with Him in faith. I wear His armour every day to protect me from my old ways. I have made that 180 degree turn from my evil desires and have spent the last year killing my past so that my future can live. Giving my life to Christ is the best thing I have done in my life. He has changed my life so much it's a miracle. I have been set free. Praise our Lord Christ Jesus. Amen."

Thank you CBI Instructors for taking the time to help us and lead us into a good life. I can feel and see myself changing with the way I am doing things and it feels good. I was a man without integrity. I did not even know the meaning of the word but now I do thank God and God's children. God bless you all at CBI."

"When I came to prison and once I was drug free I saw more clearly the hurt I had caused my family and community also. I felt so bad about myself and I called on God who helped me forgive myself through His forgiveness in me. I now work toward a more positive, loving and caring future. I have learnt from my mistakes. Thank you God."

"Dear CBI, doing these Bible Study lessons has really become a blessing in my life. The changes that I've been experiencing since I've been doing our Crossroads lessons has really been mind blowing to say the least. I will confess to saying that I did struggle somewhat in this Course (SB), which is why it has taken me sometime to complete. But the knowledge that I'm gaining is massive and awesome. I always thought that on my own powers of observation that I could keep myself out of trouble. But hello that just wasn't the case. Jesus Christ has truly opened up my eyes. Thank you for your letters of support. God bless you wonderful people."

"Some of my earliest memories as a child were stealing, lying and being violent – 5 and 6 years old. I have regular battles against the evil in my heart. But following God's Word helps to go against it. It's a good thing to realise for a long time I always blamed outside sources for my anger and evil. Now I know it comes from inside me."

"Honestly, my Christian friend, I've done some terrible things in the eyes of our Lord and because of it I got nine-and-a-half years. I'm 33 and never thought God would want me to become a child of His because of the disgusting things I've done and never been caught for. This time the Lord came into my life because He is the only one who can save my life."

"Speaking from my own up bringing and life experiences – sometimes being neglected, spoiled, abused and left to my own devices. I was confused as to what my role in my relationships entailed. My values and ethics often changed with my emotions, others opinions or the environment or circumstances. Being inconsistent was something I was consistent about. What I think and believe is God's teachings through the Bible are very relevant for today, tomorrow even yesterday. His way is the best way. I have no doubts! Discipline brings intimacy with God."

"I prayed to God and asked Him to do things for me and I waited for a result. But nothing ever happened. And as I do more lessons I understand why. I thought I was a Christian because I read the Bible – how wrong I was!"

"Yes, I find it hard to believe in a God I cannot see but only when I forget to centre myself in Him. When I'm not centred in the Lord and don't include the Lord in what I'm doing, I lose Him. Then a gap forms and before I know it I'm not seeing the Lord and my heart hardens. Then I remember I have forgotten to include the Lord and as soon as I do I can see again that the Lord God is everywhere. I'm always going to need to keep myself focused."

"This Course has been valuable in so many ways. I am beginning to understand more in depth. Thanks to God our Father for the precious gift of the Holy Spirit. I feel the Spirit at work in me. He guides my study and all guilt and the vices of the evil one fade as the Holy Spirit's presence within awakens me to his deceptions and lies."

"I would like to continue to grow to know Christ more and more. It's a wonderful Course (GTB) and I really enjoy working my way through the lessons. Thank you."

"Yes, I used to think that if I did this or that then eventually God would accept me. If I experienced problems in my life then I must have done something wrong. I would try to discover what it was. If I couldn't identify what it was then I would have to work harder to gain God's favour. Thank God I now know there is no way I could gain His approval through works. I gain acceptance from God by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. I am made righteous through faith in Christ. He is God's Son. He died to redeem me and He rose to life and sits at the right hand of God interceding for me."

"Thank you for Crossroads and the

access to studies of God's Word. Bless all staff/volunteers of Crossroads for helpful comments and encouragement."

"I enjoy the lessons so much! They have given me knowledge and understanding of our Lord and Saviour. How important it is to follow and obey, to have Jesus in my life and in my heart. What a true blessing He is. It helps also to build my relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ and look at my own life to reflect on my past and to build a better future with Him. Also to prepare me for His work, His glory, His will and what He created me to be. I thank you all so much for this free Bible Study. May God's love and blessing shower each and every one of you."

"Thank you all at CBI for your encouragement, thoughtfulness and diligence with all of us students. Your feedback, comments and guidance are of great value to me. I am grateful for your explanations where I have difficulty. Your love for others is heartfelt in the wonderful teaching of our Lord's work. Blessings to you all."

"Jesus laid down His life for me, giving me a chance to be put right in the eyes of God. He put in place the new covenant. This has enabled me to have eternal life and true forgiveness for my sins if I truly repent and follow Jesus teaching. Jesus teachings from the Bible show me how to live. They have also helped me to re-align my morals and attitudes to life and other people."

"Jesus has changed my life. Since I have become a believer it has opened my eyes to the life I was leading and what that sinful life will lead to. His wisdom and knowledge have changed my attitude to a positive outlook on life which will have a huge impact on my life when I leave prison. I feel like I can be a good father to my children now because Jesus has helped me step out of the darkness and on to the right path. "

"I now show kindness to others and have a positive attitude. I try to help and not judge people that are still on the wrong path because I once walked that path that leads to destruction. I have been drug free for a year now and my family have noticed the change in me. My mother is happy that I have turned to God. She has been praying for me a long time."

"Many thanks for your time and understanding. Prison can be a lonely, hopeless place but knowing people like you can still believe in us gives us faith

to move forward in a positive way. May God bless you all."

"I now see how my past led me towards destruction and pain (also for my family as well) and now God has shown me a better way of life. God has a plan for me. He has given me abilities and I am going to make sure I will use them to fulfil God's plans. God has saved me from myself."

Please continue to pray for the ministry of CBI in the prisons and for those involved with the work of CBI in NZ.

If you would like further information about the CBI ministry you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, P.O. Box 11005 HASTINGS 4158.

In the headlines

Al Shabaab Muslim militants in Somalia murder new Christian convert

Algerian Christians arrested for sharing faith with neighbors; face possible five year prison sentence

Logos Bible software taking pre-orders for English translation of Reformed Dogmatics (Gereformeerde Dogmatiek) by Geerhardus Vos

CRCNA and RCA launch joint church-planting movement

New Hungarian Constitution affirms personhood of the unborn

Grace in the trenches: chaplains on the front lines of the repeal of "don't ask, don't tell"

Missions in focus

Henk Velvis

Greetings from Papua New Guinea

During September and October 2010 I had the privilege of visiting Alan and Odette Douma in PNG. It was great to see that Alan and Odette were in good health and in great spirits. We felt at home straight away, and a nice home it is.

The building teams that went in 2009 to build Kiwi Hause have done a fantastic job. It is always good to read news about the work done on the mission fields, but to actually go and see the work first hand is another matter entirely.

It became clear during the visit, the vehicle that all the congregations in the RCNZ donated money towards is no luxury. It is an essential tool for the work. The roads that are travelled in town or out to the villages are nothing like our roads and the versatility of the ute is put to good use, like dropping off the students at the market with the veg-

etables, harvested from the garden plot next to the College.

I was able to visit all the different fellowship groups, 9 Mile Church, Vanagi, Beregoro, Ekoru, East Boroko and Veifa'a. It was great to be able to worship with East Boroko and Veifa'a. There is a big difference between the city groups and the country side groups. How amazing to drive into the mountains and suddenly, in the middle of nowhere see a Reformed Church standing on the top of a hill surrounded by jungle scenery.

Then on the other side are the fellowship groups in the city where there is a lot of rubbish and noise everywhere. But no matter where we came together, the hunger for God's Word was showing and you can see that the people are there because they want to be there.

Jesus Christ is the only hope these people have, just like you and me.

We were treated as royalty by the people at every visit. Really a time to remember.

While we were driving around it also became clear that it is not the safest place to live/work. Alan always locked the car

doors, in case some one wanted to rip open the doors and get in. You had to be on your guard all the time. Even the nights at the compound are not free of disturbances.

People of the neighbouring villages were trying regularly to get in the compound.

The two nice guard dogs kept a good watch, but it does mean a broken sleep. Too many of those nights make you tired, especially if you have to get up to see what's going on, like Alan does, as he is responsible for security.

The addiction of the people to beetle-nut is also a menace to society, a lot of bright red smiles greet you while walking through town and you never know what they are going to do next.

It was great to meet the students and their families. They all live inside the compound and are growing vegetables, greens they call them, which they sell at the market. The income of the sales subsidises the costs of their living, like electricity or food.

The college is trying to become as self sufficient as possible. The students together with Wally Hagoort run an egg



Mission team of Reformed Church of PNG. Alan and Odette Douma, Wally and Jeanette Hagoort, Henry and Rita Versteeg, Cheronne and Wayne van der Heide with children, Nadia and Ian Wildeboer with children.

farm. When I was there they had 40 chickens laying eggs, so you can do the maths on that. People in PNG do not think conceptually, which make things we take for granted difficult at times.

When they have an abundance of food, they will not put some aside for a rainy day. No, they will eat till it is finished and then go hungry until they have food again. It is a difficult concept to teach as well, and takes a lot of patience.

During the visit there was a three day On Field Conference at the college.

The whole mission team was present, Alan and Odette Douma, Wally and

Jeanette Hagoort, Henry and Rita Versteeg, Wayne and Cheronne van der Heide and Ian and Nadia Wildeboer from Lae.

Other representatives were Mr. and Mrs. de Vos and Keith Bruning from the FRCA, Mr. and Mrs. Boots from the CRC and Anton Wassenaar from Hukanui, Bernard Donk and Henk Velvis (OMB representative) from Hastings and members of the RCNZ.

The conference was well organised and during the discussions it showed that even though we come from different backgrounds church-wise, we all have a common goal and that is, that

the Word of God is preached to the people in PNG.

It was good to be able to meet like this on the field and have personal contact.

It is now April 2011 and a new study year is truly underway. One of the main things that come to mind is the importance of the RCBC (Reformed Church Bible College). Students come from the villages, being supported by their congregations, and they go back to their villages to put into action what they have learnt.

One day, local pastors trained at the RCBC will preach the Word of God to



Joel and Jonah collecting eggs for Mapang



Ekoro congregation presenting the armor of God



Congregation of Veifa'a

their own people. What a great day that will be. What a privilege it is to be involved, one way or another, in this great mission work.

Glory be to God.

Mr Henk Velvis is a member of the Reformed Church of Hastings



Village life in Beregoro



Village life in Veifa'a



Reformed Church in Beregoro



Children Sunday school Veifa'a



Stalls at road side in Port Moresby



Members of 9 Mile Church (photo taken at property on 8 Mile block, which is now bulldozed)



Getting ready to go to market to sell greens.



Market



Congregation of East Boroko