

faith in focus

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Contents

Marks of the Church The preaching	3
Marks of the Church The sacraments	5
Marks of the Church Church discipline	8
Books in focus	10
World in focus	12
FACEBOOK: Not for kids	14
A response to "Facebook frenzy" and "Facebook: Not for kids"	15
Feminine focus Horatius Bonar	16
Focus on home Gleanings CBI update	19
Missions in focus An Ordained Missionary in PNG	24

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Editorial

One of the most interesting aspects about putting a magazine together is that things don't always seem to work out the way you plan them. As editor, I plan what articles are going to appear, where they go, and under what theme. That is the easy part. The hard part comes when I have received more articles than will fit in the issue. It's a great problem to have! So far I have no complaints about the abundance of incoming articles etc. Please keep it up.

However, I would like to challenge you all to send high quality images for the cover and/or for the "Gleanings" pages. I am still interested in receiving letters to the editor, poetry, book reviews and articles that would be of interest to the general readership.

If you are thinking of writing an article, here are some good "guidelines" to consider before "putting pen to paper".

1. Style/readability. Is the article reader friendly? Short and to the point. Not more than 1500 words.
2. Does it inform, edify, encourage, comfort, challenge, etc? (motivational aspect of the article)
3. Does its theological emphasis come within the confessional framework that *Faith in Focus* represents and defends?

The theme for this month is "Marks of the Church". The first mark is "Without which there is no church" and addresses the issue of preaching. The second is "Signs and seals of God's covenant", and the proper administration of the sacraments. The final article is "Church discipline: an act of love". All of these articles address the practical implications for the church and the church member alike.

Today there are many claiming themselves to be "church", but how do we identify if they are or not? Do we just accept what they say, or do we test them against what Scripture teaches about the "marks of the church". Our contributors have each written about one mark of the church, which I think you will find interesting and hopefully, challenging reading.

It is also significant that we begin this issue in the 500th year after the birth of Calvin. Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, wrote about the marks of the church. (The marks, as we know them, were formulated by de Bres in the *Belgic Confession*).

Finally, I have changed the font again! Do you find it easy to read? I would be interested to hear some feed-back via email or letters.

Photo Credits:

Cover – Oldest continuous church in New Zealand at Russell.

*Our Lord has little good to say of the
unilluminated mind, but He revels in the mind
that has been renewed and enlightened by grace.*

A W Tozer

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.

Marks of the Church

Without which, there is no church

The preaching

Rev Dr Paul Archbald

The first Mark

James Boice, in his *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, writes about the reasons for the decline of preaching today. He cites three reasons: a shift of attention to counselling, liturgics, small-group dynamics and other aspects of pastoral ministry; a distrust of preaching as manipulative; and a loss of belief in the truth of the Bible. Perhaps we could add to that an increasing focus on entertainment in our TV generation. In many places, therefore, Evangelical – and even Reformed – churches are substituting other things for solid, expository preaching: brief discourses on contemporary topics; personal stories (very Post-Modern); dance, mime or other performances; and so on. How do we evaluate these trends and the churches that endorse them?

The Belgic Confession of Faith, as it reflects the truth of the Scripture, can help us with that evaluation. Chapter 29 speaks of the marks of the true Church. De Brès was concerned about people sitting on the fence, waiting to see how things panned out for the Reformed Churches before they joined. De Brès argues that everyone should separate himself from the false church and join the true Church (chapter 28). But how do we know which Church is true and which false? There are many sects that call themselves “church.” De Brès had in mind organizations and movements like the Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptists. The question is, do they display the *marks* of the true Church – pure preaching of the Gospel, pure administration of the sacraments, and faithful church discipline. In this article, we consider the first of these, the pure preaching.

The nature of Marks

First, however, we must look at what it means to speak of a “mark.” This is a matter that often causes confusion. It is often assumed that a mark is *any* characteristic or feature. For instance, could we not apply to the church the characteristics of *individual Christians*,

such as godliness? Since the Church is an assembly of believers, could not the Church be described by the same marks as for believers? Along these lines, Boice (in the work cited above) refers to six marks of the Church as found in John 17: joy, holiness, truth, mission, unity and love. Even when Boice deals with the mark of truth, he speaks very generally about the believer’s adherence to the truth, rather than focusing on the *Church’s* ministry of the Word. When Boice does deal with preaching, he focuses more on the equipping of the *saints* more than on the details of the Church’s ministry.

When De Brès speaks of marks, however, he means *defining* characteristics or norms regarding the Church’s ministry. Defining characteristics are not just any characteristics. For example, I could ask what are the marks of a true Dutchman. Someone might say, “Well, he is tall, blond, blue-eyed, handsome and intelligent.” The trouble is, there might be others who fit that description, so it’s not enough to help you distinguish a Dutchman from all others.

In the context, De Brès is helping us distinguish the *true* – that is to say, the lawful or legitimate – from the false church. In order to discern that, we must look at the distinctives of the Church’s ministry. We must consider the aspects

of ministry that have to do with the things that the Church, and she alone, is called to administer: the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of Church discipline.

This is also distinct from the question of the true *believer*. The third paragraph of BCF 29 deals with the marks of the true Christian. Boice’s 6 marks really apply to this issue, rather than to the question of the true Church. Individual believers should be marked by joy, holiness, truth, mission, unity and love. Because the Church is an assembly of God’s people, these characteristics will be found in the Church collectively, too. But they do not define this particular Body, the Church, and its unique mission. Any Christian family, school, Bible study group, or organization should also be marked by those general characteristics. They can help us distinguish what is *Christian* from what is not, but they, alone, do not help us distinguish what is *Church* from what is not.

The Mark of pure preaching

When we come to the first mark of BCF 29 – the pure preaching of the Gospel – we are looking, then, at a ministry that pertains to the Church, uniquely. While individual men are called and equipped for preaching the Word, we are talking



here about a ministry that is given only to the Church, not to individuals as such. The Church is given the ministry of the Word in a special way: she is the one who calls, ordains, and oversees preachers. No individual calls, ordains or oversees himself.

Unfortunately, the sects also have a semblance of preaching. Men stand in pulpits – or on stages, as the case may be – they open the Bible and deliver a message with an air of authority. Some of what they say might be correct, and some not. Congregations listen. But is it all true preaching? Is it called of God, ordained and overseen through His true Church? Is it legitimate preaching in a legitimate Church? That is what the word “true” is getting at.

Great care must be taken in making this evaluation: “We ought *diligently* and *circumspectly* to discern.” Both Van Bruggen, in *The Church Says Amen*, and De Jong in *The Church’s Witness to the World*, explain that this language implies

to a church.

What are we looking for, then? A *practice*, a *norm* of faithful preaching. A preacher may make an occasional blunder in exegesis or in the way he expresses himself. But is his church *characterized* by faithfulness in its oversight of what is preached, and the reception of that by the congregation?

It is true that De Brès speaks about the “pure doctrine of the *Gospel*.” Here again, some today might take that in a minimalistic manner. They might argue that so long as the simple Gospel is preached – that Christ died to save sinners – this mark is satisfied. The rest is just “doctrine,” icing on the cake. However, that does not fit with the way the Reformers meant the term, “Gospel.” When they talked about the pure preaching of the Gospel, they were talking about neither adding to, nor taking away from the *Word of God as a whole*. This is evident from the Heidelberg Catechism, LD 8, Q/A 22, which maintains

“This is the desire and the practice of the true Church: to have the whole counsel of God preached without adulteration from man.”

both zeal and precision. The fact that the Church is the beloved Bride of Christ implies that we should seek to distinguish her from counterfeit brides with zeal and precision. To do so we must know our doctrine well and know well what the Lord requires from preaching. To do so we must expend time and energy getting to know what passes for preaching in other “churches.” Yet how many of us really put effort into this? Is it not true that we are rather easy-going about this matter? If a church and its preachers cover some of the fundamentals of the faith, say they accept the Bible and love the Lord Jesus, we might be inclined to leave it at that, call them true Churches with true preachers. When our members move to an area where there is no Reformed Church, that sometimes appears to be the extent of the investigation. But “diligent” and “circumspect” discernment requires more than that. Thorough investigation should be made before we move, certainly before we join ourselves

that the Apostles’ Creed summarizes the *Gospel*. Ursinus, in his commentary on that question, warns against adding to or subtracting from *the Word*. Similarly, Revelation 22:18-19 issues a very solemn warning against any who add to or subtract from the “prophecies of this book” – more than just the Gospel in its simplest summary.

Obviously this has implications for preachers. The apostle Paul warns Timothy to pay close attention to his preaching, because it is a means of grace connected to the salvation of both the preacher and his congregation (1 Timothy 4:13-16). The apostle continues, “Be *diligent* to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, *accurately* handling the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). The first mark requires zeal and precision of the preacher. A preacher must take pains to ensure that he understands the Word and is conveying it with clarity. He must seek to avoid error and sig-

nificant ignorance. He must ensure he is preaching the whole counsel of God, not “hobby-horse” preaching. The elders, too, have a responsibility to ensure that these pitfalls are avoided.

This is the desire and the practice of the true Church: to have the whole counsel of God preached without adulteration from man. As a rule, this attitude will be evident in the pulpit. On occasion, there might be small deviations, what we might call “honest mistakes.” Even these will often be dealt with, because members and elders and preacher alike are committed to the Word of God in its entirety.

It is helpful in this connection to see what BCF 29 has to say about preaching in the false church – the last paragraph. We can understand more about the positive, by way of contrast with the negative. The false church assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God. It does not submit to the yoke of Christ and will therefore not allow itself to be corrected. It persecutes those who seek to correct it. It adds and takes, as it thinks proper. This, too, is a pattern of behaviour arising from an inner attitude to the Word.

Sometimes it is hard to be objective about error from the pulpit. Men refuse to let themselves see a pattern because they do not want trouble. Or, they imagine a pattern because they do want trouble. For some, their preacher or church must be defended at all costs. For others, the slightest deviation is a hanging offense – especially if they are already “off-side” with the preacher or the Session. Calvin warns against undue rigour over non-essentials, petty dissensions, things unharmed to the “sum of religion” (*Institutes*, 4.1.9-10).

Of course, Calvin’s idea of “non-essential” was quite different than, say, the average Evangelical today. His phrase, “the sum of religion,” is helpful. Deviations in preaching in the true Church are, hopefully, on the order of minor exegetical mistakes or sloppy wording. Perhaps occasionally there is a little speculation. Ideally, even these problems should be avoided. But when they are present, hopefully they do not make a significant difference to our system of doctrine as a whole. I do not say we should not bother to question these minor matters at all. However, we should be careful to avoid a constant, pedantic attention to minor details – such as wording – which can be discouraging to a preacher if it is too frequent or widespread.

When things go seriously awry, though, matters must be dealt with. Because the truth is systematic in nature – all the pieces fit together – a significant error will usually, if not always, affect other parts of the truth. When you come across a sermon with those far-reaching errors, matters *must* be followed up. If the preaching leads men into sin when they act upon it, then matters *must* be followed up. If you speak to the preacher about such matters, and he acknowledges his error and resumes the proclamation of the truth as his norm and habit, well and good. If he does not, the Church must take action. If the Church does not want to deal with it, then there is an even more serious problem. Even then, Calvin advised that we should look at the whole situation, with respect to the marks of the church as a whole, before concluding that a church is false.

Pure hearing of the Word

The false church does not generally like to follow things up. It will not submit to the yoke of Christ. The true Church rejects that which is contrary to the Word of God and acknowledges Christ as its only Head. It should therefore

not surprise us to find Calvin defining the mark of the true Church in terms of the “Word of God purely preached *and heard.*” (*Institutes* 4.1.9). Van Bruggen echoes this by observing that the deciding factor is whether the congregation will bow before the Word or harden itself in sin and error.

How can a congregation ensure that it *hears* well? I already mentioned that effort must be put into learning the doctrine of the Scripture. If we do not do so, we will not listen to the preaching of the Word with a discerning ear.

Second, the truth must be heard with approval, and error rejected. True preaching should be encouraged – for the Lord’s glory, not the flattery of men. I have already indicated that we must be prepared to follow up dubious or wrong aspects of a sermon.

Third, the congregation (including the preacher and other office-bearers) must listen with an ear to *applying* what they hear. We are, after all, dealing with a mark of the Church, not just talking about preachers. Pharisaical formalism might insist on sound sermons. But are we still dealing with a true Church if there is no *love* of the Word on the part of elders or members? Submitting to Christ and

His Word involves more than an abstract assent to the truth. The Word must be done, as well as heard.

Since the true reception of the Word is a gift of God, that comes with faith, we can prepare to hear the preaching of the Word each week by prayer. It is important to ask the Lord to help us understand what we hear, to apply it to our lives and to respond in praise, thanksgiving, obedience and other works of service. The benefit we receive from the preaching can be further enhanced by following it up afterwards with personal meditation, discussion of the sermons with others, further effort to apply it, and further prayer. The more of us do such things, the more we will encourage all, young and old alike, to a faithful hearing of the Word. Then we can give thanks to the Lord that He has graciously enabled us to bind ourselves to the true Church, in which there is pure preaching and hearing of the Gospel, to the eternal benefit of our children and us..

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Marks of the Church

Signs and seals of God’s covenant

The sacraments

Pieter van der Wel

The second Mark

The sacraments are not just something we do to little babies, or where adults sit in the front of the church every few months to eat a piece of bread and drink a small glass of wine, and where the service takes a lot longer.

The way we celebrate the sacraments – yes, these are celebrations, times of joy and thanksgiving – shows whether we take God and His Word seriously. The pure administration of the sacraments shows to both the members of the church and the world whether this particular church wants to be known as a church that is true to the Bible, it is a second mark of the true church.

The preaching of the Word, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, gave

birth to the church (Acts 2:4), but with church discipline (Acts 5:1-11), preaching is explicitly referred to as a necessary element (marks) of the life of the church (see also Acts 6:2, 4), while the sacraments of baptism and Lord’s Supper, without specific introduction at this point, are part of the life of the church from its birth at Pentecost. “On that same day about three thousand were **baptised**” (Acts 2:41) and from that day on “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, **to the breaking of bread** and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). The observance of both these ordinances had been commanded by the Lord (Matthew 28:18-20 and Luke 20:22:19-20, cf. 1Cor. 11:23-26) and the church obeyed His Word as a matter of course. Besides, the church at that time consisted largely of Jewish believers and maybe a smaller number



of Gentile believers, for them these were natural extensions of the ordinances of circumcision and the Passover, and the special means by which they celebrated their incorporation in and ongoing unity with Christ and with each other.

Definition

Right from the beginning the church observed these two ordinances, which we now call 'sacraments'. As the church gathers for worship we also pray and we sing, but baptism and the Lord's Supper are specifically instituted by Christ.. He commanded the use of visible signs to show the presence of the invisible grace of salvation. And he commanded that they should be observed perpetually in the church of Christ and so apply to all circumstances and conditions.¹

An early definition by Augustine is as follows: 'The word is added to the element and it becomes a sacrament'. This shows the essential connection of word and sacrament. On its own the sacrament is meaningless and has no power! This brief definition (as well as others) left room however for the true meaning and intent of the sacraments to become obscured and misrepresented, nor did it prevent the addition of man-made ordinances which were deemed to have the same purpose (strengthening the faith of the recipients). This is the reason that the Church of Rome has seven sacraments. Besides baptism and the Lord's Supper they have the ceremonies of penance, confirmation, marriage, holy orders and final unction. They make the unbiblical claim that these five were also instituted by Christ

At the time of the Reformation more detailed definitions were given, but what the Reformed Churches have commonly held is reflected in the definition given by Berkhof, "A Sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ, and the benefits of the covenant of grace, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and these, in turn, give expression to their faith and allegiance to God,"² (*by their participation in these sacraments*).

New Testament history

For those who first believed at Pentecost baptism set them apart from their traditional Jewish faith, as well as from pagan religions, in that now they believed in Jesus Christ alone for their eternal salvation.

The Lord's Supper was a rite that

also separated members of the church – those who belonged to the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9, a.o.) – from Jewish society around them and later also from pagan society (1 Cor.10).

Both pointed ever so clearly to the fact that those who received these signs depended solely on Christ for their salvation. They became new people, they were **born again**. And as soon as the church began to be built these two sacraments became an indispensable part of the life of the church

Baptism is mentioned regularly especially in Acts and though the Lord's Supper is not mentioned as often in the New Testament we may conclude from references in Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 10 & 11 that the Lord's Supper was observed regularly (accord-



ing to Acts 2 even daily) and already quite early needed the critical attention of the apostles that it might continue to be observed properly (1 Cor. 11 and possibly James 2). The church's view of baptism needed early correction too as we can read in 1 Cor.1 and esp. ch.3 where baptism by Paul was regarded as more valuable than e.g. baptism by Apollos. Already the perceived value of the administrator of the sacrament came into play and, as we read there, was strongly denounced by the apostle.

A later development of this error became known as 'sacerdotalism', i.e. the view "that ordination imparts special abilities/powers necessary for the operation of the ministry. Also, the teaching

that (*the*) grace (*of the sacraments*) is administered through the one so ordained"³. The initial development of this view under the church father Cyprian (c.200/10-258), in the 3rd Century, contributed in no small measure to the development of the wrong view of the sacraments referred to below.

Later history

How did the observance of the sacraments fare in the centuries that followed?

From the church fathers and later writings we learn that they continued to be observed regularly and even to this day remain if not an essential, certainly a regular part of the life of the church throughout the world, especially baptism. In certain megachurches the sacraments suffer a measure of neglect and keen observers will also detect traces of sacerdotalism in various churches (besides the Roman Catholic Church), which is a danger all churches everywhere have to guard against.

From the time of the church father Origen (c.185-c.254 AD) the view that the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper were 'visible signs and means of invisible grace' began to be disputed and in a number of places replaced with the view that the grace was actually inherent in the signs. The church father Augustine spoke strongly against this and continued to teach that a sacrament is "**a visible sign of a sacred thing**" or "**a visible form of an invisible grace**"⁴ and the grace received in this way was only effective when received by faith. Yet this very definition, as we saw earlier, was used to assert the very opposite of what was intended.

As time went on, also under the influence of the teaching of sacerdotalism (see above), the view that the sacraments themselves are the instruments of salvation became the doctrine of the church. In the case of baptism this led to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration (i.e. if you are baptised you are saved, unless the recipient blocks this grace!). In the case of the Lord's Supper, which had become known as the Eucharist or Mass, this led eventually to the doctrine of transubstantiation, i.e. the bread and the wine actually become the flesh and the blood of the Lord Jesus, though they still look and taste like bread and wine. The church began to teach that eating the bread and drinking the wine resulted in salvation. However, in each case the sacrament was only effective so long as

the recipient did not consciously block the grace of the sacrament by wilful unbelief or sin.

The church taught that the grace thus passed on by the priest through the sacraments was essential for salvation. It depended on the **priest** and the **sacraments, not** on the faith of the recipient or on the working of the Holy Spirit for that matter. Finally then it became the church, not the Lord, who determined the nature, number and efficacy of the means of grace. The church determined who was being saved

Throughout the history of the church, these abuses, together with many others, were strongly resisted by smaller or greater numbers of faithful members of the church. The degeneration of the sacraments was spoken and written against till about 1100 AD (and also afterwards), but the doctrine of transubstantiation was finally declared church doctrine in 1215.

More and more, faithful believers began to gather outside the confines of the Church of Rome till finally God lit the flame of an enduring and decisive Reformation through the ministry of Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, Martin Luther in Germany and a few decades later through John Calvin in France and Switzerland.

The doctrine of the sacraments was again set on the foundations of the Word of God rather than of the traditions of man, even though the various reformers were not fully united in their understanding of the sacraments. Especially in Germany sacramental controversies were hotly disputed, sometimes descending into physical violence. Government interference in these and other doctrinal matters was not unheard of.

Yet all the Reformers 'shared the conviction that the sacraments are signs and seals attached to the Word, which have no value apart from the Word'. They also concurred that 'not the sacrament itself, but its operation and fruit is dependent on faith in the recipient, and therefore always presupposes saving grace'.⁵

As Reformed Churches we hold to the view that goes back to Augustine given above, which was much more clearly defined by John Calvin and restated by Berkhof as given above.

The benefits for the Church

We were recently in a Presbyterian church where an elder (the minister was on holiday) officiated at the **dedication** of an infant at which he, after dipping

his finger in water, made the sign of the cross on the child's forehead. Whichever way you look at this event, at the very least this church did **not** try to practice the pure administration of the sacrament of baptism and in this respect did not attempt to make itself known as a true church.

I know there are other things that show what a church is, but what happens in a Sunday worship service gives a visitor a fair idea what a church is like, with regard to the purity of its practice, i.e. to what degree things are managed according to the pure word of God

This example shows that the way a church (an individual fellowship or a denomination) administers the sacraments gives a clear indication whether all things are managed according to the pure word of God or even according to its own standards. Though this is not something we necessarily look out for when attending services in other churches a careful observer will certainly notice practices that do not accord with the teaching of

*by God so that by our use of them He might make us understand more clearly the **promise of the gospel**, and might put His seal on that **promise**.*

And this is God's **gospel promise**:

to forgive our sins and give us eternal life by grace alone because of Christ's one sacrifice finished on the cross.

The gospel promises are covenant promises. The sacraments are covenant(al) seals.

Signs

What does God promise in the gospel? The forgiveness of sins and eternal life! To all who believe in Jesus Christ the sacraments are signs of these wonderful promises of the gospel. When these signs are received in faith the Holy Spirit uses them to encourage and strengthen us in our faith. The unbelieving rejection, however, of the signs will contribute to

“Not the sacrament itself, but its operation and fruit is dependent on faith in the recipient.”

Scripture. One would think that at the least a certain church should not use a mixed practice exhibiting the conviction that one can do whatever seems right in ones own eyes in these matters!

The pure administration of the sacraments marks a church as a fellowship or denomination where God's word is taken seriously, where the members recognise the mystery of salvation as beyond human understanding and where due care is taken to do all things with proper order and decorum.

The benefits for the believer

To learn how this may benefit us personally, we have no better place to go to than a document like the Heidelberg Catechism.

Answer 66 of the Heidelberg Catechism to the question, 'What are the Sacraments', is:

Sacraments are holy signs and seals for us to see. They were instituted

our condemnation, just as in the case of the Jews who rejected the gospel though they had seen all the signs Jesus did before their eyes.

Only through faith do the sacraments become signs of salvation.⁶

The signs which God has graciously given to those who believe are baptism and the Lord's Supper:

Baptism is the visible sign of incorporation into Christ, a once for all sign that speaks of the washing away of sin for all who put their **faith** in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin, just like Peter promised in Acts 2:38. There faith comes **before** the sign, so that it was received in faith, which itself was a gift, so that we had nothing to boast about (Eph. 2:8-10).

The Lord's Supper is the sign of growing (up) into Christ. Through the bread and the wine, real food and real drink, Jesus pointed to food and drink that was even more real – his body and his blood (John 6:55-56; Luke 22:19-20)

– and which was sufficient to receive (and maintain) eternal life. The Lord’s Supper is given to refresh and nourish believers.

Seals

The sacraments are also seals, guarantees that the promises they are signs of are true, true for those who accept them in faith.

As Paul explained in Romans 4:11, circumcision was a sign that Abraham was now in a covenant relationship with God, a sign that he belonged to the people of God. But it was also a seal of the righteousness that he had by **faith** while he was still **uncircumcised**. (Circumcision, together with the Passover, have been called the sacraments of the Old Testament.) Our sacraments then are the seals of the covenant in the blood of Jesus. Just as it is true that water washes your skin clean, so it is true that your sins are washed away. Just as you take and eat the bread and drink the wine and so make them one with your body, so it is true that Christ is united with you.

Word and sacraments connected

The Word and the Sacraments are a means of grace and point us in the same direction. A67 of the Catechism summarises it well when it says:

*In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us and through the holy sacraments He assures us that our entire salvation rests on **Christ’s one sacrifice for us on the cross**.*

This is the only ground of and for our salvation. This answer points to the fact that **only** through the Word, the hearing or reading of the gospel can

we be saved, as is clearly explained in Romans 10:14-15.

Not so with the sacraments. They are very important, but they are not necessary for salvation. The sacraments actually presuppose faith. This was the whole argument in the church at large for many centuries.

The sacraments are seals. People can be saved without being baptised or partaking in the Lord’s Supper. Their salvation does not depend on these things; a child of God is a child of God with or without these things. In the same way Abraham received circumcision as the seal of the righteousness he had **already** (Romans 4:11).

Should we then put less emphasis on the sacraments? Not at all, they were instituted by Christ to strengthen our faith. Would we willingly and casually decide that we do not need what God has given for our use? By partaking in them we honour God as our Saviour and Lord, it is part of our obedience!

Each baptism proclaims His faithfulness from one generation to another, and each celebration of the Lord’s Supper done in remembrance of His name, is a proclamation of his death on the cross for us.

As we take part in the sacraments we also proclaim our unity as brothers and sisters in Christ, especially at the Lord’s Supper as we eat and drink together at the table of the Lord.

Not everyone present at the celebration of a sacrament takes part in the actual celebration (esp. not in baptism), the non-participants should not, **must** not switch off. The sacraments are there to remind them of the glorious salvation Christ obtained for us on the cross.

If the pure doctrine of the gospel is not

preached, the pure administration of the sacraments is in grave danger. The process of degeneration may take centuries or only one generation as we can see in our own day. Some very large churches in our own time were not even founded on the pure preaching of the gospel, so what chance do the sacraments have, let alone church discipline.

The sacraments, the water, bread and wine, are not merely material elements; they preach eloquently the cleansing, refreshment and renewal of our lives when God binds them by and to His word.

God chose to use these physical signs to seal to us his saving grace in Christ. We neglect them at our peril.

Footnotes

- 1 *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Volume 2, pp.366-7
- 2 *Systematic Theology*, L Berkhof (Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p.617
- 3 Changes 1611 (<http://www.geocities.com/changes1611/definitionscommonisms.html>) The Vocabulary of Religious “Common-ism”
- 4 *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T McNeill (editor), 1960, p.1277
- 5 *The History of Christian Doctrines*, by Louis Berkhof (Baker Book House 1978, p.246
- 6 But why then do we baptise children? A quote from the Second Form for the Baptism of children must suffice here. As Reformed Churches we teach that children of believing parents should also be baptised for this reason: “God graciously includes our children in his covenant, and all his promises are for them as well as us (*Genesis 17:7, Acts 2:39*). Jesus himself embraced little children, and blessed them (*Mark 10:16*); and the apostle Paul said that children of believers are holy (*1 Corinthians 7:14*). So, just as the children of the old covenant received the sign of circumcision, our children are given the sign of baptism. We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God’s own children”. (*Forms and Confessions of the RCNZ*, p. 9)

Marks of the Church

Church discipline: An act of love

Church discipline

Rev Michael Willemse

The third Mark

In the context of our society’s infatuation with individualism, clamour for human rights, praise of tolerance and intolerance of those who speak in absolute terms of right and wrong, discipline is

fast becoming a dirty word. Many, if not most homes revolve around the wants (“rights”) of children rather than the principles of parents; and “good, old-fashioned discipline” has become a foreign concept. This has been exacerbated by the removal of S59 from the crimes act and the resultant fear we all have of disciplining our children in public. These

changes in our society have also been felt in the church; and, in particular, in the way people view church discipline. It has been well said that “when it rains in the world, it drips in the church.” Where once church discipline was a regular and valued part of church life, it has now become much more rare.

Al Mohler, President of Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary, says “The decline in church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.”¹

So why is church discipline important? And why did the reformers and why do our own confessions regard it as a vital mark of the true church?

To answer these questions, let’s look at the foundation for church discipline, the reasons for church discipline and the goal of church discipline.

The foundation for church discipline

Before creation, God set His love on those that He had chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:4). But in both the Old and the New Testaments, when God saved people, He made them part of a covenant community – a community to which He has bound Himself and which bears His name. God’s purpose is to reveal Himself and His glory through those He has chosen. This is why He set apart Israel in the Old Testament and the Church in the New as His holy people (Ex. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9,10). When His people live as He has commanded, they show the world what God is like. When they don’t, they “bear His name in vain” (3rd commandment).

The church (in continuity with the OT people of Israel) is the centrepiece of God’s work in this world! “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms ...” (Eph 3:10). This means that we cannot have too high a view of the church corporately. There is nowhere else God reveals Himself to the world.

At this point we need to throw off the individualistic mindset of the Western world. God’s Word has little place for God’s people as individuals living in little worlds of their own making. Rather, it almost exclusively addresses them as members of a community in covenant with God. Most of the Bible is addressed to that community and speaks about how we are to live as that community. It is in community that God shapes and refines His people and God’s ultimate purpose is to purify for Himself a redeemed community (Eph. 5:25-27; Titus 2:13-14) with whom He will dwell

forever (Rev. 21:2-4).

But God’s goal is not only to make His people holy at the end of time. He is already at work amongst them through His Spirit so that they might begin to show His holiness *now*. Because we bear God’s name, how we live now will either honour or dishonour Him, even as a child’s actions and attitudes affect how people regard their parents.

All of this forms the foundation for church discipline. God calls His people to be Holy as He is Holy and their conduct in community reflects on Him. Church discipline begins with the holiness of God and the community that He has covenanted with to represent Him in this world. We recognise this when we profess our faith, “affirm[ing] our union with Christ and his church” and committing ourselves to play an active

part in “the life **of the church**, honouring and submitting to its authority;” as well as affirming our part in the church universal.²

Reasons for church discipline

God’s holiness is not only the foundation for church discipline – it is also the prime reason for it. Our first and most important concern in cases of serious sin should be for the glory of God and His name. While we allow such sin to continue unchallenged, God’s name is dishonoured and He is robbed of glory. This does not mean that we have no concern for the person involved, but our prime concern is the fact that the church’s witness to the holiness of God is compromised. This is why, in the Old Testament, God repeatedly accuses His people of profaning His name (Ex. 20:14; Eze. 36:20-23; Am. 2:7) and often acts – even when His people have turned away from Him – for the sake of His own name. As people who profess to love God, we should be zealous for His glory.

A second reason for church discipline is the purity and unity of the church

itself. Sin, whether public or private, is like a cancer which erodes the health of the church body – an unsightly blemish on the bride of Christ. And, like cancer, sin spreads from one member of the body to another. When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he challenged them because they boasted about a member’s incest as a demonstration of their Christian freedom. Paul says “Don’t you know that a little yeast works its way through the whole batch of dough?” (1 Cor. 5:6). He goes on to speak about the need to separate ourselves from the sexually immoral, greedy, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards and swindlers *within the church!* “With such a man do not even eat. ... Expel the wicked man from among you.” (1 Cor. 5:11,13). Likewise Paul warns Titus “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time.

“Church discipline is not only motivated by a passion for the holiness of God and His church but also by love for the offender.”

After that have nothing to do with him.” (Titus 3:10).

When weaker members observe the sins of others going unchallenged (for example, an unmarried couple openly living together), they may well assume that the behaviour is not sinful – or, at least, that they can get away with it. When stronger members observe the same thing, their confidence in the elders is undermined and division results. So, in this way, both the holiness of the church and her unity are undermined.

Conversely, where the church disciplines her members in the case of serious sin, members are encouraged to examine their own conduct and to seek to be holy. This principle is demonstrated in the Old Testament account of Achan’s sin during the battle of Jericho. (Josh. 7). The whole community had to accompany Achan and his family to the valley of Achor and stone them. No doubt many of those who stoned them had coveted the riches of Jericho too.

The goal of church discipline

Church discipline is not only motivated by a passion for the holiness of God

and His church but also by love for the offender. The great goal of church discipline is not the expulsion of the offending member from the church in some tit-for-tat manner – it is the restoration of the sinner themselves. Church discipline is motivated by a deep concern for the offender’s eternal welfare. It recognises that eternal life is more important than comfort in this world and so it seeks to confront the offender with eternal realities. In the same way that Moses called Israel to obedience at the end of his life, church discipline sets before the offender “life and prosperity, death and destruction” and calls them to “choose life.” (Deut. 30:15,19). For these reasons, church discipline should be carried out prayerfully and (often) tearfully (Acts 20:19) – “the Lord disciplines **those he loves.**” (Heb. 12:6)

In the case of the member involved in an incestuous relationship in 1 Cor. 5, Paul urges the Corinthian church to “hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.” (1

Cor. 5:5). It seems that the church did so and that this produced remorse and repentance in the offender so that in 2 Cor. 2:5-11 Paul now urges the church “forgive and comfort him” and to “reaffirm [their] love for him.” This is always the goal in church discipline – that the actions of the church in withdrawing the privileges of membership and finally in expelling the offending member would produce the fruit of repentance in their life so that they might be restored to fellowship with God and His people.

The whole church is involved in church discipline. The process which Christ lays out in Matthew 18:15-20 begins with a private conversation between two members and only escalates to a public matter in the church in the face of continuing lack of repentance. At each step in the process the offender is called to repent. In fact where a church is diligent and loving in exercising discipline at the level of personal relationships, many times God is pleased to bless this so that the matter is resolved and no further action is needed. This,

too, is part of the ministry of reconciliation to which we are all called in 2 Cor. 5:11-6:2.

Conclusion

Church discipline is a good gift of God intended to testify to His holiness, to ensure the holiness of His people, and designed to lead wayward members to repentance and restoration. It rests on love for God, for His people and for the offending member. Without church discipline God would be dishonoured, the church’s purity and witness undermined, and sin allowed to grow unchecked in the life of believers. Church discipline is an act of deep love for God and His people – and a sign of a living and vital church.

Endnotes

- 1 Church Discipline: The Missing Mark, p1
- 2 Public Profession of Faith, Form 2

Rev Michael Willemse is Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Hamilton.

Books in focus

The Truth War – John MacArthur
Published By Thomas Nelson – 224 Pages.

Reviewed – By Graeme Zuidema

Many people within the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia would have read some of John MacArthur’s material or at least heard of him. For those who haven’t here is a brief biography of him.

John MacArthur is the author of over 150 books, ‘Charismatic Chaos’, ‘Reckless Faith’ just to name two. He is the Pastor-Teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, USA. The emphasis of his pulpit ministry is the careful study and verse-by-verse exposition of the Bible, with special attention devoted to the historical and grammatical background behind each passage.

Recently, during a time of holidays and relaxation I had the privilege to read John MacArthur’s book “The Truth War”.

The Truth War is a book mainly directed at the postmodern age and the Emerging Church movement. John

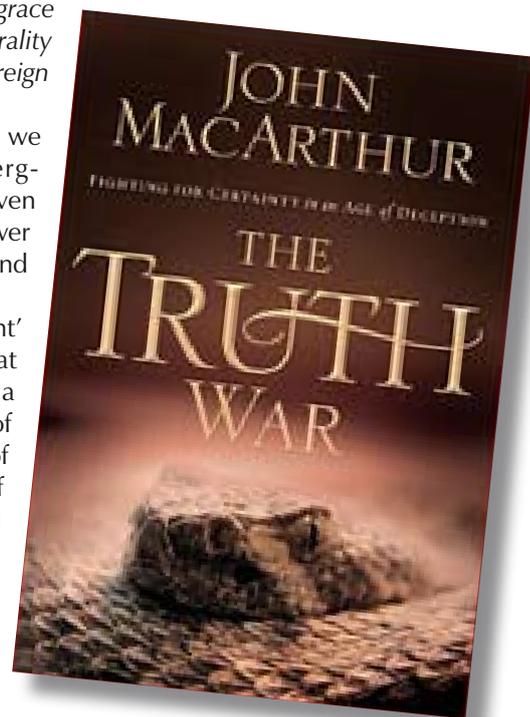
MacArthur selects the book of Jude as his running text, with a special mention to Jude 4 “*For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*” (NIV)

You may be asking, “Why do we need to know about the Emerging Church movement? Has it even reached our shores?” The short answer is, “Yes, we do need to be aware,” and “Yes, it has reached our shores.”

The ‘Emerging Church Movement’ takes the outward shape of what most of us would recognize as a church, but it only has a veneer of Christianity about it. For those of us who love to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed clearly, and the beautiful doctrines contained in Scripture taught faithfully, the Emerging Church would not be the place to find it.

A distinct distance from the gospel is apparent in the Emerging

Church movement. Disturbingly, the biblical message of salvation and the truth of the gospel are treated more like a commodity that needs to be packaged in a way that makes it more appealing to the



world. Anything that is perceived to be offensive is pushed to one side and one could easily believe “that all the rivers (beliefs) run to the sea (eternal life)”, which we know is not the teaching of Scripture.

John MacArthur appeals to his readers to protect, proclaim and instruct God’s people with the truth of His Word rather than to surrender to the temptation of conforming to what itching ears want to hear.

John MacArthur alludes to these dangers in his chapters; “Can the Truth survive this Postmodern Society? How False Teachers sneak in? The Assault on Divine Authority – Christ’s Lordship Denied.” Throughout he uses many biblical references to support his arguments, which are most helpful. He also pays special attention to the Nicene Creed, its development and usefulness in guarding against apostasy, not only in the ages past, but also for the church of today.

John MacArthur also refers to the approach “a hermeneutic of humility” and I quote from the book, “As if it is inherently too prideful for any preacher to think he knows what God said about anything. Of course, such a denial of all certainty has nothing to do with true humility. It is actually an arrogant form of unbelief, rooted in an impudent refusal to acknowledge that God has been sufficiently clear in His self-revelation to His creatures. It is actually a blasphemous form of arrogance, and when it governs even how someone handles the Word of God, it becomes yet another expression of evil rebellion against Christ’s authority.”(pg 156)

This book has given me a greater understanding of the pitfalls that face the church today, which desires to be faithful to God’s word for the benefit of His people and the glory of His Name; it is definitely worth a read.

“A Call to Arms – The Truth War is a good fight (1 Timothy 6:12) so let’s wage a good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18) – for the honor of Christ and the Glory of God.” (pg 184)

***On the First Day of the Week
God, the Christian and the
Sabbath***

Day One Publications
Rev. Jack W. Sawyer

Periodically, pastors picture themselves tilting at the windmills of modernity and secularisation which threaten to in-



update the western world, invade the church, and threaten to undo her. This is particularly true of their efforts to enjoin joyful observance of the Sabbath amongst the Lord’s covenant people.

Dr. Iain Campbell, Pastor of Back Free Church of Scotland on the Isle of Lewis, undoubtedly fights this battle, having seen practice of Sabbath-keeping undergo a marked change in his lifetime. Not only has he witnessed secular culture rejecting the Sabbath, but he has also seen the even more troubling desire of evangelicals “to replace the Sabbath with something different.” Thus his book has come forth – perhaps Quixote-like – with the clearly articulated conviction that “the Puritans did get it right” and that, “one of the blood bought treasures of Calvary is a weekly holy-day, in which we may, and ought to turn aside from other things to live before the face of God.”

Reformed believers will welcome this timely and effective resource. It provides a capable, redemptive historical exposition of the Sabbatarianism of the Westminster Standards. Pastors will find ample seed for sermons in its defence of the traditional, scriptural Sabbath. Surveying the Sabbath from creation, where “Adam and Eve enjoyed pleasing God.... whose “gracious relationship to them was manifested, intimated, and channelled through the word of law and covenant obligation,” the reader is taken through the Old Testament, unto Christ, and to the consummation itself, where “we will dwell in his house forever, resting, worshipping, praising him in the holy clean air of the celestial city.”

Included are helpful chapters on the Puritans, and on Christians in the 21st century, which latter, as another reviewer rightly notes, “is worth the price of the book.”

The author interacts with relevant literature, old and new. His style is popular, his polemic against errant views polite but persuasive. Chapters begin with colourful anecdotes, which grip the attention as they introduce their subject; none better than the computer repeatedly asking if he wanted to “replace the existing Sabbath,” file on his floppy disk.

One indeed feels, upon reading, a desire to “quicken our step to glory, and our resolve to spend our Sundays in anticipation of the greatest Sabbath of all.”

**Interested
in teaching
English as
a Second
Language?**

Expressions of interest are wanted from people interested in teaching English in China or North Korea.

This is a new project and is in the early stages of development. People with a missions outlook are sought.

You must be 18 or over.

You must have a university degree.

You should have an ESOL qualification.

You should have ESOL teaching experience.

You must have good pronunciation.

You must be a member in good standing of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Please email

Paul Goodenough (North Shore)
paul.g@callplus.net.nz

World in focus

March for Life marking the 36th Anniversary of Roe vs. Wade to occur Thursday, 22 January 2009 – two days after U.S. Presidential Inaugural

Up to 200 thousand pro-life advocates will converge on Washington DC Thursday, 22 January 2009 for the March for Life marking the 36th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court Roe vs. Wade decision that legalized abortion throughout the United States and has led to the killing by surgical abortion of almost 50 million unborn children.

Wendy Wright of Concerned Women for America said that new U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama has promised to sign the "Freedom of Choice" act that would "nullify every pro-life law from parental notification laws to bans on federal funding of abortion."

+ *The Christian Post, National Press Building, 529 14th Street Northwest, Suite 420, Washington DC 20045, 202-347-7734, info@christian-post.com*

Reformed Churches in South Africa holds first integrated Synod

The Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA), or Reformed Churches in South Africa annual general synod began 4 January 2009 in Potchefstroom, South Africa, and will conclude on 14 January 2009.

For the first time, representatives from the GKSA's black and white churches are attending the synod together. It is expected that during the general synod that a unification of all GKSA churches into new regional synods of black and white churches will be completed.

Also on the agenda will be a discussion of whether or not to continue singing exclusively from the Psalter during church gatherings, and of whether or not women will be allowed to preach from the pulpit.

+ *Ecumenical News International, Post Office Box 2100, CH - 1211, Geneva 2, Switzerland, 41-22-791-6111, Fax: 41-22-788-7244, eni@eni.ch*

+ *Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika, Posbus 20004, Noordbrug 2522, South Africa, 2718-297-3986, directeur@gksa.co.za*

Creation Museum "expelled" from the Cincinnati Zoo

After working for several months with the Cincinnati (Ohio) Zoo on a special cross-promotion package to elevate local and regional tourism during the Christmas

season, the nearby Creation Museum learned on 2 December 2008 that the zoo had pulled out of the arrangement after two and one-half days because of a high volume of complaints from atheists and other evolutionists about the business relationship, much of it coordinated from outside the Cincinnati, Ohio region.

The arrangement would have saved visitors to both venues \$US9 per person.

The Creation Museum, located near the Cincinnati Airport, is a ministry of Answers in Genesis (AiG), a nonprofit Christian organization dedicated to confirming the validity of the Bible from the very first verse. Since its opening in May 2007, the museum has seen over 600,000 visitors, well above an initial estimate of 250,000 for the first year.

+ *Answers in Genesis, 2800 Bullittsburg Church Road, Petersburg, Kentucky 41080, 859-727-2222*

+ *Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, 3400 Vine Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220, 513-281-4700, comments@cincinnati zoo.org*

Forman Christian College, Pakistan Professor murdered

Khurshid Alam Gill, associate professor of mass communications at the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)'s Forman Christian College (FCC) in Pakistan, was murdered in his home last week, reportedly over a property title dispute.

Gill joined FCC at the time of its de-nationalization several years ago, and "was a tireless worker in his efforts to serve his community, and the greater cause of Forman Christian College," FCC President Peter Armacost said.

More than 1,000 people attended a campus prayer service after the murder, with both Muslim and Christian speakers praising Gill's efforts to promote interfaith harmony.

+ *Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), 100 Wither- spoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202, 888-728-7228, Fax: 502-569-8005*

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary hosts "John Calvin: 500 Years in retrospect" Conference 10-12 March 2009

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (GPTS) is hosting their Spring Theology Conference on 10-12 March 2009 at the Woodruff Road Presbyterian Church in Simpsonville, South Carolina.

The conference theme is "John Calvin: 500 Years in Retrospect – A 21st Century Assessment." Speakers include Dr. Joel Beeke, president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and Dr. Joseph Pipa, president of GPTS.

Information is available at the GPTS website.

+ *Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 200 East Main Street, Post Office Box 690, Taylors, South Carolina, 29687, 864-322-2717, Fax: 864/322-2719, info@gpts.edu*

Robert A. Schuller resigns as Crystal Cathedral Senior Pastor

The Rev. Robert A. Schuller has resigned as senior pastor of the Crystal Cathedral two months after being ousted by his father the Rev. Robert H. Schuller from the cathedral's television show "Hour of Power."

The younger Schuller plans to start his own ministry and plans to make an announcement about the new ministry in the near future.

+ *San Jose Mercury News, 750 Ridder Park Drive, San Jose, California 95190, 408-920-5000, Fax: 408-288-8060, webfeedback@mercurynews.com*

+ *Reformed Church in America, 4500 60th Street Southeast, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49512, 800-968-6065, questions@rca.org*

2009 Banner of Truth United States Ministers' Conference 26-28 May 2009 at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania

The 2009 Banner of Truth Ministers' Conference will be held 26-28 May 2009 at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania.

Featured conference speakers include Sinclair Ferguson, Alistair Begg, Walter Chantry, Mark Johnston and Jonathan Watson.

+ *The Banner of Truth Trust, Post Office Box 621, Carlisle, Pennsylvania 17013, 717-249-5747, info@banneroftruth.org*

Coordinated Muslim attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria leave 400 dead

Ruth Gledhill, The London Times' Religion Correspondent, reports that preplanned and well-coordinated post-election attacks by Muslims upon Christians in the northern city of Jos, Nigeria have left 400 dead, churches burned, and an Augustinian monastery attacked.

Anglican Bishop of Jos, Dr. Benjamin Kwashi, is reported to have said that the

attacks had been long in the planning and were not a spontaneous response to the elections as others have claimed.

The Bishop said too that these attacks were worse than similar riots occurring in 2001, because the earlier attacks were with stones and knives and people could run away. This time, there was no running away. People who tried to flee were gunned down.

The Jos diocesan website has photographs of the death and destruction caused by the recent rioting.

+ *The London Times*, Times House, 1 Pennington Street, London E98 1TT, England, 44-0-20-7782-5971, pressoffice@thetimes.co.uk

+ *Worldwide Anglican Communion*, St Andrew's House, 16 Tavistock Crescent, London W11 1AP, England, 44-0-20-7313-3900, Fax: 44-0-20-7313-3999, aco@anglicancommunion.org

United States President George W. Bush says Creation and Evolution are compatible

In an 8 December 2009 interview with Cynthia McFadden for American Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) Nightline, U.S. President George W. Bush stated that he believes that the concept of evolution does not conflict with a belief that God created the world.

Institute for Creation Research assistant editor Christine Dao responded, "Indeed, evolution, which requires massive amounts of death over millions of years, does not explain the mystery of life at all. Furthermore, creation and evolution are completely antithetical to one another."

Dao continued, "Bush called himself a 'simple president,' implying that he does not feel qualified to speak authoritatively on scientific matters. Few people do, since American science education, under the guise of 'separation of church and state,' has for decades hindered students from understanding even basic science by limiting their studies to the evolutionary worldview and forbidding an open exploration of the evidence."

Dao concluded, "During his presidency, Bush has affirmed his faith in the Christian God a number of times. And like many professing Christians, he errs in placing human wisdom and what some call science over the authority of the living Word of God. He has believed the pervasive, yet fraudulent, claim that evolution is a fact and that the biblical account cannot be literally true. If Christians even in the highest places of governmental authority cannot trust in the accuracy and authority of God's Word, then how can we hope

that they will lead our nation in "a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim 2:2)?"

+ *Institute for Creation Research*, Post Office Box 59029, Dallas, Texas 75229, editor@icr.org

Redesigned website makes Lambeth Palace Library more accessible

The collections of the Lambeth Palace Library, the historic library and record office of the archbishops of Canterbury and the principal repository of the history of the Church of England, have been made more accessible with the launch of a newly redesigned website at www.lambethpalacelibrary.org.

As well as practical details on accessing the library's collections and other services, the website allows potential users to view the full scope of its research resources via its electronic catalogues and outlines of its holdings.

Improved features on the new-look site include downloadable research guides covering a range of topics, from helping people trace their family history where their ancestors include Anglican clergy, through to trends in church architecture and clerical costume through the ages.

+ *Episcopal Church Center* 815 Second Avenue New York, New York 10017, 800-334-7626, cdawkins@episcopalchurch.org

+ *Church of England*, Church House, Great Smith Street, Westminster, SW1P 3AZ, England, +44(0)20-7898-1000

Hope lingers in Sudan but war threatens

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ended the Sudan war between the Arab, Muslim North and the African, mainly Christian South. The CPA provides for elections in 2009 and a referendum on Southern separation in 2011. Southern leader Dr John Garang believed that if all opposition forces united, then the racist, Islamist, Arab-dominated regime in Khartoum could be toppled in the 2009 elections and ALL of Sudan would be liberated. When Dr Garang died mysteriously in 2005 his vision lost its momentum. Tensions have since escalated as Khartoum has flouted the CPA. However, Southern leaders are now working at building opposition unity ahead of the 2009 elections. The regime in Khartoum knows it cannot win against a united opposition and will doubtless seek to scuttle the elections, possibly through fomenting conflict. Please pray for Sudan's liberation.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 508 | Dec 2008

Uzbekistan Church learning to overcome amidst persecution

Throughout 2008, the Christians in Uzbekistan continued to face persecution from the government. This has included police raiding church services, harassment, confiscation and even destruction of Bibles and other Christian material, arrest and detention of church leaders and members, fines and imprisonment, sometimes with beatings. Some large registered churches have been closed down. Mass media continue negative coverage of the Protestant churches, resulting in harsher persecution of Christians by society. However, the persecution has also resulted positively in a growing consolidation, unity and mutual help amongst Christians, as well as stronger prayer and fasting. Christians in Uzbekistan ask us to pray that they may be 100 percent victorious amidst persecution!

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 511 | Jan 2009

Impending law set to restrict religious freedom in Kyrgyzstan

Religious freedom is set to worsen in Kyrgyzstan. On 6 November 2008 the Parliament of this Central Asian country unanimously passed a new Law on Religion and now expects the final approval of the President. The leaders of religious organisations are greatly concerned as the law's restrictive rules require 200 local residents to support the registration of a religious organisation, an impossibility for many village and ethnic churches with far fewer believers. The new law prohibits changing one's religion, which would affect foremost the ethnic Kyrgyz Christians and cause them harsh persecution. Other churches will also suffer under the new law if it is approved by the President. 'God's Love' Church in Bishkek requests prayer for God's protection in a court case attempting to deprive them of their church building.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 512 | Jan 2009

Please pray for the Christians in troubled parts of the world who are suffering for Christ. Pray that the Lord would bring to naught the efforts of the enemies of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Facebook: Not for kids

by Jon Dykstra

There's a lot to like about Facebook. Status updates for example. Through them I've learned when a friend was excited about an upcoming trip to New York, or in need of prayer because of their medical situation, or stressed because both their children had the flu, or happy because they were expecting another little one. One friend's update even helped me save valuable minutes every laundry day:

"Jan has a laundry confession – she doesn't fold underwear. It's true. Try it! C'mon – free yourself from folded underwear tyranny!"

This website is often derided as a timewaster, but if it weren't for Facebook I would have been forever condemned to worrying about wrinkles in items of clothing that no one even sees!

A starting spot

So there's a lot to like about Facebook, but the site does have an unpleasant side. Like the Internet itself, it is not a place teens should be allowed to go unmonitored. And younger children should not be allowed on the site at all.

How young is too young? You have to be at least 13 to get a Facebook account (though many children get around this restriction by simply pretending to be older). If 13 is the standard this secular group sets, that seems a good indicator that Christian parents should consider an older age limit.

Problematic applications

Some of the parents I've talked to have signed up to Facebook specifically to keep track of what their children are up to. But even some of these parents are oblivious to the dark side of Facebook. This is a site that encourages curiosity – the more you explore the more cool

applications, pictures and games you can find. But if children do start exploring they are sure to come across Facebook's sleazy side. A quick perusal of the 20 most popular applications revealed that at least 11 of them had material that was not appropriate for children... or adults for that matter.

- 1) Funwall: Lots of cute posters, but about 10% of the material is pornographic
- 3) Superwall: Users can share videos, half of which seem to be pornographic
- 4) Bumperstickers: Contains a category called "F-you"
- 5) Owned: Allows users to buy and sell friends
- 6) Texas Hold 'Em Poker: A great place to practice gambling
- 7) Friends For Sale: The name says it all
- 13) Super Poke: Loads of street slang sexual references
- 16) My Sexy Friends: Encourages the objectifying and rating of friends
- 17) Mob Wars: For anyone who wants to be the head of a murderous gang
- 19) Zoosk: A dating service
- 20) Likeness: How similar are you to the movie stars you idolize?

Other problems

Pornography is a big problem but applications like Fun Wall, SuperWall and Bumpersticker are also problematic in that they contain clever insults, cutting putdowns and vulgar jokes. This is just the sort of source material that teenage boys use to impress their friends in the schoolyard, and Facebook is an endless source.

The site has also been used by students in our Reformed schools to pass comments to each other about their favorite and least favorite teachers. We all know

that students have always said nasty things about teachers, but doing it on Facebook brings it to a whole new level. The mean words spoken between students in a school hallway are soon forgotten, but the same words posted on a Facebook page encourage friends to add to and expand on these insulting words.

The same thing can also happen between friends – silly insults spoken between friends aren't that significant. But they become far more hurtful when they are posted on Facebook for dozens and even hundreds of others to read.

I've seen some rather horrid material being said by Christian youth. I can only assume that their parents don't know what these children are up to.

Conclusion

And that's the real problem; many parents aren't monitoring their children's use of Facebook. A responsible parent always knows where their children are and it shouldn't be any different with the Internet and with this website.

Like the Internet itself Facebook has some amazing content that makes it very attractive. Facebook allows friends to share photos and news, keep track of birthdays and email addresses, organize events, play games like Scrabble and Boggle together, and even monitor the cheapest plane fares to Europe. Mature users can decide to make use of the good material and ignore the rest.

But younger users may not make the right choices so parents must take steps to know what their offspring are up to. To do that, you'll have to sign up as your child's Facebook friend and check their page regularly. If you don't know how, ask your child or someone in their early twenties and they'll almost certainly be able to help. And if your child is under 13 get him off the website. If the world admits the site is inappropriate for children this young why would we think different?

This is the second article Jon Dykstra has written about Facebook. The original article, "Facebook Frenzy," can be found in the February 2009 issue of Faith in Focus, or online at www.ReformedPerspective.ca

WHAT IS FACEBOOK?

Facebook was created in 2004 as a "social networking" website where members can leave online updates about themselves and read updates written by and about their friends. It is very popular: currently 7 million Canadians are active users and in the US 75% of youth 18-24 have Facebook accounts.

A response to “Facebook frenzy” and “Facebook: Not for kids”

Jeremy Eshelman

Jeremy is a native of Philadelphia, in the United States. He is a recent graduate of Messiah College (a Christian tertiary college in Pennsylvania), and majored in Communication. He has spent 2008 in New Zealand, working with the Daveys and staff on their farm, and being thoroughly involved in all aspects of Dovedale church life. He is very familiar with Facebook, and writes this response as someone who knows the way young people use it.

In 2007 I and most of my good friends graduated from university in the US. Afterwards, all of those friends spread out and found work in different places in the country. We were such a close-knit group of friends that it was a difficult transition from being around each other all the time to only rarely meeting up once a month, if ever. The global phenomenon of Facebook helped me connect with those friends wherever they were, and when I came to New Zealand in 2008, Facebook helped me maintain contact with those friends.

I have sent E-mails to people back home, and I even make the occasional phone call. Facebook, though, gives me the chance to write a quick note to someone, or even just post something to say what I am doing at the time. That is one of the benefits of Facebook. It is very informal, and it provides an easy opportunity for one to contact a bunch of friends all at once. Also, you can create and plan events, send E-mails, join charities and causes, and network with people who have the same interests.

However, as it is part of the internet, there is plenty to be wary about. Here among the churches in New Zealand, I have noticed that there is a lot of emphasis placed on the teaching and building up of children and young people, especially within the family. This is certainly necessary and good, but I encourage you to not be slack in the matter of the internet. Facebook is a good tool, but it has many drawbacks that parents should know. Jon Dykstra’s article “Facebook: Not for Kids” provides a good list of reasons why parents should monitor what their children do on Facebook. I would like to suggest one more.

This is something that is common throughout the internet, but social net-

works like Facebook are prime targets. I am talking about internet predators. This is not something that is too common with Facebook, but it is a danger. Internet predators seek out naive people online with the intention of building a trust with them to do whatever they ask. Sometimes this even leads to the unwise going to meet with these predators. Facebook is not free from these people, and they know the tricks about how to talk to others.

You parents must be aware of who your children are talking to, and there are several good ways to monitor them online. One is to not let them use Facebook or other social networks. Another is to join Facebook yourself. Also, you can set up your children’s facebook for them and make sure to set all the controls and the password beforehand. Facebook does have plenty of security options, so it is not impossible.

Do not be afraid of Facebook. As Christ said when he sent his disciples on their mission, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). We must be aware of what is on the internet, and what children are capable of seeing.

The image is a screenshot of the Facebook homepage from around 2008. At the top left is the Facebook logo. To the right are the login fields: "Remember Me" (checked), "Forgot your password?", an "Email" input field, a password input field, and a "Login" button. Below the login area is a promotional banner that says "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life." To the left of this banner is a world map with several orange person icons connected by dotted lines, representing a global network. To the right of the banner is the "Sign Up" section, which includes the heading "Sign Up" and the sub-heading "It's free and anyone can join". The sign-up form contains fields for "Full Name:", "Your Email:", and "New Password:". Below these are dropdown menus for "I am:" (with a "Select Sex:" label), "Birthday:" (with "Month:", "Day:", and "Year:" dropdowns), and a "Why do I need to provide this?" link. A green "Sign Up" button is at the bottom of the form. Below the button is a disclaimer: "By clicking Sign Up, you are indicating that you have read and agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy."

Historic hymns and their context: Horatius Bonar

Sally Davey

The historic contexts of our great Christian hymns walk the modern New Zealand Christian through many centuries of committed gospel faithfulness – lived out, at times, in the most difficult of circumstances. Writing this short series, for instance, has introduced me to the lives of a Latin-speaking Roman official, a French lawyer and theologian, and a number of English pastors. All of them loved the same Christ; and despite their cultural distance from us (not as great as might seem at first glance), they all spoke the same language of faith when it comes down to essentials. This is why their hymns speak to us as we sing them.

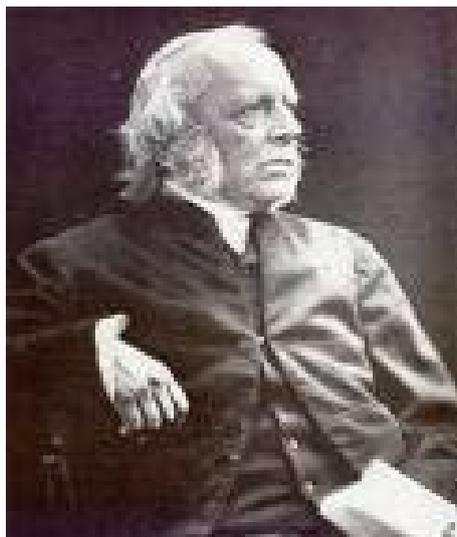
However, Horatius Bonar, our last hymn-writer, has a more direct link to us here in New Zealand. A Scotsman and a minister of the Free Church of Scotland, Bonar was one of the influential leaders of the church that sent many members to found the Otago Settlement in the South Island of New Zealand in 1848. Probably some of them brought Bonar's hymns with them, and sang them in their homes as they encouraged each other in their walk of faith. Certainly, theological as well as cultural heirs of his, New Zealand Christians sing them still.

Presbyterians in Scotland were some of the last Christians in the English-speaking world to sing hymns in public worship. As we have seen (see the February issue), hymns entered the worship of the Church of England in 1820, after which hymn-writing flourished there. However, it was over 40 years before hymns in Scotland were (officially) anything more than poetry for private or family devotions. The Scottish Presbyterians, careful

and cautious Calvinists, were loath to be seen to be overturning the Genevan position on music in worship. For over three hundred years they had faithfully followed Calvin in exclusive metrical psalm-singing. The only exception to this rule was a handful of biblical paraphrases put to song.

Desired for ministry

Bonar, born in 1808, grew up in a large family in Edinburgh. His father, a lawyer, was an elder in one of the churches in the city. Lady Glenorchy's Chapel, as it was known, was served by Dr Thomas Snell Jones, a Welshman trained at the Countess of Huntingdon's College in England. The Countess was a friend of George Whitefield's, and did much to



Horatius Bonar

promote evangelical Christianity in the Church of England. So, the Bonar family had the benefit of sound, biblical preaching that was aimed at the heart. Horatius and two of his brothers were destined to become ministers, but it was not till their late teens that they were clearly converted.

Around the time he professed his faith, and in his early twenties, Horatius enrolled at the Divinity Hall of the University of Edinburgh. He had already spent several years studying English literature and the classics at the University, and had already been writing poetry for some time. While studying theology and preparing for the ministry, Horatius, his brother Andrew, and several keen young

evangelical friends set up a "Visiting Society". They walked around some of the poorest parts of the city, sharing the gospel and doing what they could to help those in distress. It was good preparation for the ministry.

Hymns for teaching

Horatius's first charge was as assistant to the Rev. James Lewis of St John's church in South Leith. He was there for four years, and during this time discovered that hymns were a marvelous means to teach children the truths of the Scriptures. Observing that the same children who did not respond to the metrical psalms of church worship loved singing in the streets, he began to write children's hymns which he then taught them, with great success.

Earnest for people's salvation

In 1837 he was called by the Kelso church in Roxburghshire, and ordained there into the pulpit ministry of the Church of Scotland. Kelso was a beautiful place, and Bonar the poet loved it. However, it was the souls of his congregation that he was interested in, and he gave himself, body and soul, to the work of preaching and visiting. It was his heart's desire that those who heard God's Word from him would repent, believe and be saved. At the same time Bonar continued to write hymns. He did not imagine that they would be used in worship, though they were used in Anglican churches, especially after the publication of the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in 1861. Because Bonar was a private man, and a humble one, being averse in later years to suggestions that someone write his biography, it is his hymns that provide the best glimpse into his thoughts and feelings. The best-known of his hymns, "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say", belongs to this period of Bonar's ministry.

Birth of the Free Church

In 1843 a momentous parting of the ways occurred in the Scottish church. For years the Church of Scotland had been drifting in a more liberal direction theologically, and evangelical men committed to the authority of Scripture, such as the two Bonars and their friend Robert Murray M'Cheyne, were increasingly at odds with the direction of the

church. Ostensibly the split occurred over the issue of patronage of the church by the state, but underneath was the more fundamental issue of how to respond to the thinking of the modern age. Horatus Bonar and over 450 other ministers were willing to sacrifice their homes, stipends and church buildings in order to teach freely the truths they held dear. The result was the formation of the Free Church of Scotland, which exists to this day. Bonar's Kelso church agreed with his stance, and followed him out of the Church of Scotland. He remained its minister for 28 years, leaving in 1866 when he was inducted to the ministry of Chalmers Church in Edinburgh, his home town.

Here Bonar remained until his death in 1889 at the age of 81. Both his life and his pulpit ministry had been long, faithful and productive. He was loved by both his congregations, and was a considered man who had helped provide wise leadership in his denomination. He is still honoured as a father of the Free Church of Scotland.

Much time spent pleading with sinners

All his life he stressed the primary importance of bringing the gospel to the lost. As I have noted, he defended the authority of the Bible vigorously, but he was also a man who gave much time to pleading with sinners, and urging them to come to the cross. He wrote a number of evangelistic tracts which enjoyed a very wide circulation. The best-known of these, *Believe and Live*, was a favourite of Queen Victoria. When famous American evangelist Dwight L. Moody and his song-leader companion Ira Sankey made their lengthy visit to Britain, Bonar was a strong supporter of their efforts. He hosted Sankey in his own home during their month-long Edinburgh stay in November 1873, and defended their work in the face of some opposition to their methods as being "another gospel". It is true that Moody used a number of the popular techniques of earlier 19th century American Presbyterian Charles Finney, such as emotional pressure to make an on-the-spot decision for Christ, the use of "anxious benches", emotional songs and the like, and not all British ministers were happy at these innovations. In fact, Moody records that he was distinctly nervous to lead a meeting in the Scottish setting, knowing the Scots to be a cautious, metrical psalm-singing people. When Sankey began to sing, he

was very apprehensive about the reaction he might receive. To his surprise, the Edinburgh congregation lapped it up, and joined in heartily.¹ In fact, the Scots, somewhat inconsistently with their prior caution regarding what should be sung in worship, took to American revivalistic songs with great enthusiasm.

Instructive for us too!

What happened in Scotland is instructive for us. The Scots hung on to exclusive metrical psalmody longer than many churches in the western world, and perhaps they found security in sticking

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay
down
Thy head upon my breast';
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in him a resting-place,
And he has made me glad.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live';
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul
revived,
And now I live in him.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright';
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till traveling days are done.*

with this fairly rigid external form in order to protect their orthodoxy. However, if Christians – and churches – rely on a form to protect orthodoxy without understanding what makes it faithful, or examining its content, they can quite easily lose their ability to recognise what is unsuitable. Anglicans in England, who introduced hymns much earlier, and who had known Wesley's and Watts's hymns well, had a much better understanding

of what made good hymns good. They had been testing them carefully. But the Scottish churches, as sentimentalism took increasing sway over hymn-writing, fell for it in droves. Inexplicable? Not entirely. We should be careful to learn from the past and preserve our powers of discernment.

Instructive hymns

Bonar's own hymns place him in the crossover period between the more succinct and instructive hymns of earlier Victorian times and the more emotional, florid and revivalistic hymns that characterise the later nineteenth century and beyond. "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" is one of his earlier hymns. Let's take a moment to consider some of its features.

It is a hymn with a most interesting structure. Each verse begins with a statement of Jesus about himself: Verse One with Matthew 11:28, Verse Two with John 4:10-14 and Verse Three with John 8:12. There is a brief reflection on the meaning of the statement; and then in the second part of each verse, a response by the believer. You could say this hymn is instructive, in that it teaches us what coming in faith to Christ will do for us; both in the biblical and the experiential sense. In the fullest meaning of the word, it is an *evangelical* hymn in that it pleads with the reader (and the singer) to make Christ his resting-place, his source of the water of life and his light in this dark world. It has been credited with playing a role in the conversion of hundreds of people over the years since it was first published in Bonar's 1846 *Hymns Original and Selected*.²

The unusual structure of the hymn was recognised by music that was specially written for it by influential Victorian hymn music composer, John Bacchus Dykes. The hymn appeared with Dykes's tune, "Vox Dilecti", in the Appendix of the first edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Dykes emphasised the contrast between the statement of Jesus and the believer's response by means of the tune's plaintive, G minor first half and comfort-inspiring, G major second half. Early in the twentieth century composer Ralph Vaughan Williams matched this hymn with the English folk tune "Kingsfold", as a reaction against the sentimentalism of much later Victorian hymnody, but interestingly, one modern hymnal that uses this latter tune recommends that "the organist might consider changing the accompaniment

at this point [halfway through the verse] to a clearer and slightly more brilliant texture".³ This is at least a nod toward the intent of Bonar's words.

Prolific writer of hymns and poems

Bonar wrote more than 600 hymns; though only a relative few are still sung today. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the sentimentality of hymns written in later Victorian times made them less durable (and some of Bonar's are in this category). They have not stood the test of time because they were too flowery and too emotional: it takes more powerful, truth-centred words to ring true for Christians in other places and times. Others of Bonar's, however, reflect the evangelical, Reformed theology he held so dear, and which he preached and practised for so many years of ministry.

of the century; since by the last years of his ministry the effects of theological liberalism were making themselves felt in preaching, and ultimately in the diminishing respect ordinary people had for the Word of God. By the end of the century, also, many of the more evangelical churches of Britain and the United States had succumbed to a mushy, sentimental approach to the faith – one which emphasised feelings, and which bordered on the tacky and over-emotional at the expense of solid truth and the living of an ordered, committed and consistent life.

These trends were reflected in the hymns that were produced by Christians of the period. You could say that Bonar lived in the period of transition, when solid, truth-based hymns were being replaced by the flowery, sentimental hymns

knew that we should sing solid truth because it is solid truth that edifies, and which truly changes hearts and lives. All it takes is Christian people who understand biblical truth, and who understand the proper role of singing in worship, to use their poetical and musical gifts to write better hymns. We have inherited a great deal of good in the hymns written when the church loved the truth. It's time to take up the challenge, and go and do likewise.

Endnotes

- 1 Ian Bradley, *Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* (GIA Publications, London, 1997), p. 181
- 2 Faith Cook, *Our Hymn Writers and Their Hymns* (Evangelical Press, Darlington, 2005), p. 298
- 3 *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns*, ed. J.R. Watson (Oxford, 2002), p. 276

“In essence, his hymns were some of the last of the reliably theologically-driven hymns of this great century of hymn-writing.”

Among those we know well are “Not what my hands have done”, “Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God” and “Here; O my Lord, I see Thee face to face”.

Bonar kept a small notebook with him always. Whenever an occasion suggested to him the words of a poem or hymn he would jot them down as they came to him. Often, he would compose a complete hymn almost in its final form. He would later polish it somewhat. We know almost nothing of the circumstances of the writing of specific hymns, though one or two hymns/poems marked a significant occasion – such as one he wrote on hearing of the death of one of his little daughters. It was clearly a means of pouring out his heart before God – a way of setting his thoughts straight before a loving Father, much as David wrote some of his psalms.

Diminishing respect for the Word

Horatius Bonar lived and served in a time of much faithful Christian witness: Britain in the nineteenth century was a place thoroughly influenced by the gospel of Christ. But this was most especially true of the early and middle decades

of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In essence, his hymns were some of the last of the reliably theologically-driven hymns of this great century of hymn-writing. It had been a century when many hymns had been written to teach the people of Christ as they sang in worship – just as Colossians 3:16 (NASB) puts it. From the time of the transition onwards, hymns became more and more a vehicle to raise singers' emotions by means of fanciful imagery or flowery phrasing – or simply by constant repetition of a catchy chorus at the end of every verse.

Take up the challenge

The twentieth-century church inherited much mushiness, and continued to add to it as the decades passed by. The confusion about music in worship that has reigned for some years now has providentially, however, led some to re-examine the history of worship, and the history of hymnody. The outcome is a growing recognition that we would do well to take stock of our hymn-writing history, and return to the principles and methods of earlier hymn-writers. They

The Excellency of knowing Christ*

What gift
To have a lucid mind
clearly to know and find
keen to explore
keeping in store
aiming at more
at higher score.....

And yet,
our innate knowledge
has its bounds
as Pascal well propounds

Besides,
living, cool computers, we
failing though profound to be
with living “heart” dimension.

Of all our knowing
simple and profound
What's worthy most
what tops the host
of subjects
objects
great and small?
What's vital above all?

It's doubtlessly
the excellency
of knowing Christ my Lord;
for it surpasses
all sorts of classes
of knowledge I've explored!

Wellington, September, 2007

* *Philippians* 3:8

Focus on home

ANDREW REINDERS

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Wedding Banns: Congregation, Amanda Gjaltema and Piet Wisse have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the wedding ceremony will take place at the Reformed Church of Avondale, on Friday the 23rd of January 2009 at 2pm. We welcome the congregation to witness this beginning of their life together in the name of the Lord.

Bishopdale

Calling Committee: We meet this week. We have identified several men that may be suitable, two in New Zealand, one in Australia, and several in North America. Our normal process is to first listen to several sermons. If we satisfied with them, we will speak further with them and contact their referees. Those in North America are sent out an extensive questionnaire.

Pastoral: We rejoice with Jared and Candis Berends on the birth of Olivia Charlotte last Sunday.

Pastoral: Some words of encouragement....I received an e-mail from Malcolm Anderson regarding the singing in the mall last Saturday: "Today I stopped and listened briefly to the music your church members were playing in Bishopdale mall. I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed it. Unfortunately I couldn't stop for long but just wanted to say how much it was appreciated. It is lovely to be reminded of the real reason for the season. Keep up the good work. Merry Christmas to all!"

Nelson Beach Mission 2008/09: Further to last week's bulletin notice...Twelve of us from Bishopdale Church will be heading up to Nelson for 3-4 days from 27 December to 1 January (DV) to undertake a beach mission with another Christian group from Otago University. We will also be taking the Drug-ARM van for some ministry work in the evenings. Please uphold us in your prayers for travelling mercies and for wisdom in

sharing the Gospel. The Beach Mission Team: Tim Sterne, Natalie Bangma, Anthony Van den Engel, Nicole Huls, Marcus Balchin, Jenny Bosma, Daniel Robertson, Tim Couprie, Jacob and Thelmarie Couprie + little boys!

Bucklands Beach

Wedding Banns. Congregation, Adriaan Hendrik Gerrit Kant and Jolene Miriam Fransen have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. They want to begin their life together in the name of the Lord and in the presence of his people, and continue it to his glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at, St Andrews Church on the Square, Palmerston North on Saturday, 17 January 2009 during a special service commencing at 1.00pm.

Christchurch

Pastoral. Session received a letter from the Rev. John Westendorp in which he passes on his thanks for support, prayer and encouragement. He acknowledges receiving some e-mails from session members and congregation. Recent blood tests are all good, however there is still hardness in some veins in both arm and leg suggesting that the clotting is still in the process of dissipating. A final check will be done in January. At present he has a commitment to be a speaker at the Launceston CRC family camp on the weekend of the 13th – 15th February in Tasmania. The Lord willing he will fly from there to Christchurch which means that he will be in our pulpit on the 22nd of February. We sure look forward to that! He ends his letter with the prayer that the Lord may grant everyone a blessed Christmas.

Wedding banns. Lord willing, Stephen Capill and Danielle Bangma will marry on Saturday, 10 January 2009 at the Reformed Church of Christchurch. The service will commence at 1.30pm. If, however, you have any lawful objection to Stephen and Danielle marrying, please speak to one of the elders of the Reformed Church of Bishopdale.

Pastoral. During the recess of the bulletin due to the annual holidays, the Lord took to be with him our brother John Prins. His departure was very sudden and we shall miss him immensely. No doubt this will be even worse for his

wife Corrie who could stay at Maranatha Homes with him as he took care of her. Maybe some of us did consider what the prophet Isaiah says: "My ways are not your ways." Yet this God is in charge of all His ways and although John's care has come to an end He will continue to show His mercy. Corrie Prins is in Princess Margaret hospital being assessed. Considering the circumstances she is holding her own yet requires constant care. Please remember her in your prayers.

We rejoice with Jason and Rachel de Vries who were blessed with new life. May the Lord give you wisdom as you bring up your children in a relationship with the Creator of heaven and earth. Next Sunday we look forward to celebrating with Jason & Rachel as the sacrament of baptism is administered to their son, Ryan, in the morning service.

Dovedale

Pastoral notes. With thanksgiving to God, we rejoice in the birth of Ali to Terry and Nynke van der Schaaf. Ali was born on Tuesday evening and she and Nynke are both home now. We rejoice with you and your wider families in the answering of our prayers according to the blessing of God and pray that He may aid Nynke and Ali as they recover from the birth. Psalm 48:9

This coming Friday evening and Saturday morning, the Elders hope to spend some time in study and prayer at Brother Roel Dijkstra's place. Often times there are subjects and needs that can't be addressed in the time allowed for by a scheduled meeting and so it is hoped that this will be beneficial to their work and the well-being of the Lord's people. Your prayers for a blessing upon this time are requested.

Dunedin

Session Notes. The Oamaru/Timaru second-minister proposal was reviewed in light of Presbytery advice. It was agreed to offer Rev Jim Klazinga part-time employment for one year with a view to a call at the end of that time. A draft work plan was formulated and the principles for a budget set. Meetings are planned with Rev Klazinga and with both congregations after the holidays once this plan is finalised.

Wedding Banns. William Vaatstra and Emma van der Werff, with their parents' blessing, have signified their desire to be united in marriage on 31 January. Barring any lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at Knox Presbyterian Church, Lower Hutt, at 1:00 pm (DV). The congregation is warmly invited to attend the service and the afternoon tea which will follow. We realise that Wellington is a long distance to travel and are sad because of that hindrance, but we are looking forward to returning to Dunedin as a married couple and seeing you all again with some photos to share. William & Emma

Liberton Christian School. As there is a special collection for the school next

week I would like to take this opportunity to provide an update in my role as a member of the board of trustees. In recent years the school has been running at, or close, to its maximum roll of 62 pupils that was imposed when the school integrated with the state system in 1999. In succeeding years there have been two unsuccessful applications for a maximum roll increase to the Minister of Education. Late last year another application was submitted and this is now being (or will be) considered by the new Minister, Hon. Anne Tolley. If an increase in the roll cap were to be obtained the board would seek to encourage roll growth. With a roll of about 75, resources would need to be provided for a fourth class

including building a new classroom and appointing a new teacher. A fourth classroom would be of great benefit to the school as a whole as it would mean that each teacher would be responsible for just two year levels. (Two teachers currently deal with three year levels in their classes.) Please pray that the application to the Minister of Education will be favourably received, and that the Lord would bless the plans for growth at Liberton. John van Dyk

Hamilton

Survivor Poverty. We've all watched the Survivor shows on TV. Now it's your turn. Survivor Poverty is a twist on the reality show and a chance for you to gain a taste of what it is really like to live in poverty. You will experience just how hard it is living without the many things we take for granted. Survivor Poverty will be held from 5-7 February and is for anyone 15 years and older. Talk to Peter van der Wel for an enrolment form.

Hastings

Church Properties. Many of you will have attended the meeting held before Christmas where the congregation was made aware of the situation regarding the possible sale of our Florence St property and the possible purchase of the Howard St property. If some of you were not able to attend that meeting, or you required a little more time to think through the issues, you may wish to forward suggestions, queries or concerns to your elder, in writing, so that they can be considered. Lord willing, Session plans to conduct a 2009 church year planning meeting on Saturday 31st January. One of the topics up for discussion will be the future of our church property. Session needs to know the congregation's thoughts on this matter so please make your elder aware in writing. Thank you. Session.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: On Thursday, Albert van Dalen came before the elders and declared his desire to publicly profess his faith. He, along with Richard Baird, Othniel Cressy, Natasha Snoeijer, and Abbey van der Laan will, the Lord willing, publicly profess their faith next Sunday morning. If there are any lawful objections please speak with your elder.

Invitation – You are all welcome to join us in rejoicing and giving thanks to the Lord for His faithfulness to us over the past 25 years. We will be enjoying a



William and Emma Vaatstra cutting the cake at their wedding reception on January 31. Emma is the daughter of Egbert and Janny van der Werff of Upper Hutt. William is the son of Rev Hans and Mrs Lisa Vaatstra of Perth, Western Australia.

time of singing and giving thanks to the Lord at Mount Holdsworth on Wednesday from 6:45 pm till dark. Look for the balloons. Just bring along a chair or a blanket to sit on, your hymnal and some insect repellent. Derek and Rosalind

North Shore

News & Announcements. Congratulations to the Brunton family on the birth of a new baby girl. May she bring you much joy and may you, Peter & Michelle, have much wisdom in bringing up this new life for the Lord.

Pukekohe

We give thanks to God for the birth

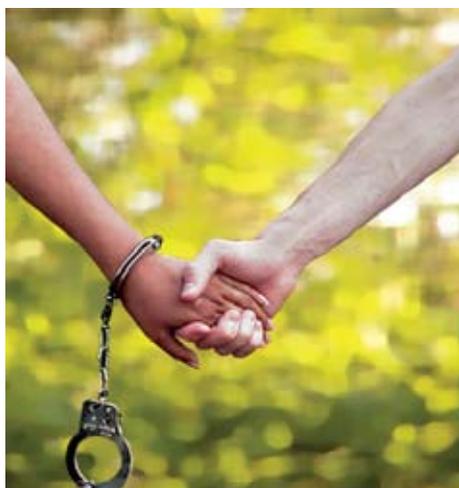
of Roelof John to Roley and Joanna Voschezang last Sunday afternoon. The parents, grandparents (the pastor & his wife – added, AR), and great grandparents are all very excited, as are the uncles and aunts. The baptism of Roelof will take place, Lord willing, in the morning service of Sunday 28 December.

Wainuiomata

Sacrament of Baptism. This afternoon, we plan to witness the baptism of Jamie John Haverland. Baptism is a sign which is like a picture. Just as water washes dirt away, so Christ promises to wash our sins away with His own precious blood. God wants to make His promises even more

sure than He has spoken in His Word. For this reason, baptism is also a seal which comes with God's own authority. May God give Ron and Wendy much wisdom and patience as they raise up Jamie in these covenant promises.

Profession of Faith. With thankfulness to the Lord, the Session announces that Anne Marie de Vos, Sarah de Vries, and Shannon Van Maastricht all desire to publicly confess their faith in Jesus Christ. If there are no lawful objections, this will take place on February 1st during the morning service. We will then hold the Lord's Supper during the afternoon service.



CBI New Zealand – December 2008

It has been a year of growth and consolidation for CBI NZ. The number of students enrolled as at the end of November is 105. Those actively doing the studies number 190. In the last 3 months 75 students enrolled and 280 lessons were processed.

In November we posted over 300 Christmas cards to the students. Many students wrote in their lessons, or in letters or sent us Christmas cards praying all the CBI Instructors would have a blessed Christmas and Happy New Year.

Quite a number asked for extra lessons over the holidays and others inquired about which dates we would be closed. CBI continues to operate during this holiday period when the usual Bible Studies and Church services at the prison stop. Particular programmes organised for prisoners also stop and Chaplains

rotate their annual leave. All this gives the prisoners more time on their own, more time to miss their families, so it is very important to continue to support them in the study of God's Word.

In November I visited the Chaplains at Auckland Remand, Spring Hill and Auckland Women's Prison. Each of these meetings was at least 2 hours where we were able to pray and encourage one another in the ministry, sharing our experiences of the power of the Lord at work in the lives of the prisoners. Visiting the Chaplains on site gives me the opportunity to gain more insight into the lives of the prisoners. As you know all our contact with the students is via correspondence, so even just being where "they live", walking around the site, experiencing security procedures, etc., adds to the picture and helps in understanding their circumstances.

One Chaplain shared the following comment in an email: "My sincere thanks for that student update you sent to me recently. Was talking to _____ today and he was telling me how wonderfully helpful this course is proving to be for him. He just asked me to send you his heartfelt thanks for the wonderful work you are doing. Of all the time he has been in prison he has never felt so peaceful and he attributes it in large part to this course and the care you are showing him. Keep up the good work."

A Chaplain who is doing the CBI Course shared "I am so enjoying this study. It is so good for us to be taken through the 'Great Truths' step by step – and to really look at ourselves as we answer the essay questions. And I must say how much the prisoners appreci-

ate your beautiful writings. They are so encouraged! Please pray for more committed volunteers to join our teams for taking church on Sundays. God Bless you all."

There are now over 50 Instructors marking lessons. Some are waiting to be approved while others were trained a few weeks ago in Hamilton. It was a blessing and a great encouragement to meet with Instructors from Hamilton, Auckland, Rotorua, Wellington and Upper Hutt last month. It was wonderful to meet you all, some for the first time. Thank you all for your support in this ministry and for your work in marking lessons and encouraging the students.

I would like to share some of the many notes of thanks and appreciation received from the students for the work you do:

"Hi, I thank you deeply first for giving me a bible which I treasure very much. Second, for the letters of support which are so nice to receive. They pick me up a lot and help with my journey with our Lord. Knowing I have you all out there encouraging me makes it all the more special. So please pass my thanks on to the Instructors, you are always in my prayers, take care and be well and God Bless."

"I just like to thank CBI for everything they are doing for me and giving me this chance to understand God's Word. Thank you so much CBI for your encouragement. Lots of love and God Bless."

"Dear CBI, Thank you for your prayers. It means a lot to know that people are praying for me and my circumstances. It all helps to defeat the enemy. I'm really

enjoying this Survey Course. It is the best study I have done. I have learnt lots about our Lord and continue to use all advice, to grow in Christ and my relationship with Him. Quite often I sit and hassle the officers if there is mail because I look forward to the CBI studies. I'm sure the officers think I'm obsessed. Shows what the Lord can do. Thanks."

"I believe that if it were not for CBI Instructors and their comments, letters etc, that my faith may have wavered by now. I enjoy their comments and feel they are more personal than other Bible Studies I have attempted in the past. Every letter and comment is different but full of the Holy Spirit. Thank you"

"Thank you friends at CBI for your continued support, prayers and messages of encouragement. What an awesome privilege to get to know God Almighty and Jesus through your wonderful organisation. I am always praying that CBI will reach more of those who are in spiritual darkness and bring them the light of God's Word. Praise be to God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

"I thank the Lord who could see I was struggling on my own and lacking Christian fellowship. The Lord then blessed me with CBI. I am very grateful to CBI and a special thank you to the Instructors. Your letters of encouragement are awesome. Thank you to the team of CBI and I thank the Lord for blessing me to be a part of CBI."

"May God hear my prayers for my Christian brothers and sisters who mark my work. Thanking you for your encouragement, wisdom, strength and direction each of you give me. May the Lord bless you for the wonderful work you do. My faith has grown. Doing the lessons has helped me get where I am today in Christ. Thank you ever so much for your letters and prayers and the time you take in marking my work."

"Thank you for all your encouraging letters, little phrases and the addiction booklet. I appreciate all those little extras. I feel like a child on Christmas day when my Correspondence comes back from CBI. I rush with anticipation and open the envelope and start reading. Thanks."

"I enjoyed this study especially when you trace the genealogies back. I used to think these were boring. But I have learnt to see the plan of God in it. I haven't been too well of late but I am still pressing on the narrow road. I have done 90 pages of A4 paper of notes in relation to CBI, too many to include in the lessons.

I have thoroughly enjoyed it."

"Yes, I have been persecuted for my faith in Jesus from other inmates. They curse and mock saying if He (the Lord) loves you why does he leave you in prison? I respond by stating that it was my sins (not obeying God's ways and not living by them) that placed me in here. When it is time I shall be released."

"Being in jail for the past 11 months and 5 days I've been to the bottom of the pit. Thank God He searched for me, held my hand and brought me up for air. With the Word we share in these lessons it has been my bread, giving me hope, faith, renewing my strength. My hunger for knowing God is growing day by day as I come closer in restoration in the Lord. Thanks Crossroads."

"I am in prison having committed many sinful acts during my long life. I have been a member of a church since my mid 20s but could never ask God's forgiveness for my sins. When I came to prison I had plenty of time on my hands. I would read the Bible. I found that Scripture was telling me all about myself. I heard God's Word. This in turn led me to undertake this correspondence course and learn that Jesus

died on the cross for my sins and for disobeying God all my life. Coming to prison for my crimes (sins) has cost me dearly. I have lost my wife, my home, my family, my/our savings, my friends, my hobbies and interests and my previously good standing in the community. It also has cost me my freedom. But, all this is nothing, just worldly things. I have found Jesus as my personal saviour and now by my confessing my sins to God through Christ and through Christ's sacrifice and blood on the cross my sins are forgiven."

Please continue to pray for:

- Those in prison
- CBI students and their families
- Chaplains
- CBI Instructors
- Ministry of CBI in the prisons and those involved with the work of CBI in NZ.

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

Yours in Christ,
CBI NZ Co-ordinators



Subscriptions to the IN TOUCH magazine are available. This is an opportunity for those interested who do not have access to or have joined a Cadet and Calvinette Club (Cadets and Calvinettes will continue to be supplied through their clubs). The costs is \$15 per year for four issues.

This is a Reformed Churches of New Zealand children's magazine especially written for 8 - 15 year olds.

It is filled with stories, photographs, puzzles, Bibles studies, Cadet & Calvinette Club news, competitions, poetry, crafts, cooking and Camp News.

If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ15 (or \$AU15), with your details, to the **National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 4 Phoenix Lane, Papanui, Christchurch.** (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)



You are invited to the

15th Hamilton Easter Convention

10th-11th April 2009

Theme:

How Well Do You Know Jesus?
Insights from His Emotions in the Gospels

Speaker: Dr. Steve Voorwinde
New Testament lecturer at the RTC in Geelong, Victoria

Convention Venue:
Hamilton Reformed Church
9 Aberdeen Drive
Dinsdale, Hamilton

Inquiries

Pieter van der Wel
Ph. 07-853 3144
E-mail ecap2009@gmail.com

Meeting Times:

Fri 3.00 & 7.00 pm
Sat 10.30 am, 1.00 & 3.00 pm

A bookstall will operate on Friday and Saturday
A crèche will be available for the afternoon sessions

Convention addresses are:

Friday

3.00 pm Does God Have Real Feelings? (Divine Emotions in the Old Testament)

7.00 pm The Compassionate King (Jesus' Emotions in Matthew)

Saturday

10.30 am The Man of Sorrows (Jesus' Emotions in Mark)

1.00 pm The Sympathetic Saviour (Jesus' Emotions in Luke)

3.00 pm The Loving Lord (Jesus' Emotions in John)



Dr. Stephen Voorwinde (b. 1947) is Lecturer in Greek and New Testament at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Victoria.

Dr. Voorwinde pastored churches in the U.S.A. and Australia before joining the faculty at the RTC in 1985. His areas of expertise include the New Testament, Koine Greek and Hermeneutics.

Dr. Voorwinde's doctoral dissertation on the emotions of Jesus in John's Gospel was published in 2005 under the title, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* He also has written *Wisdom for Today's Issues: A Topical Arrangement of the Proverbs* (1996). He also writes articles for Christian magazines and theological journals

Dr. Voorwinde is a regular speaker in academic and church settings around Australia.

Conference attendance is free, but could you please register if you are coming so we know how many people to expect, esp. for catering purposes.

You can register by e-mail at <http://hamilton.rcnz.org.nz> or <http://www.trbc.org.nz>

If your church has received Easter Convention pamphlets, you can use the attached registration form

Afternoon tea and supper will be provided as well as a light evening meal on Friday and lunch on Saturday for those who register for this.



HUTT VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

PO Box 43-127. 106 Mohaka St, Wainuiomata 5014, Lower Hutt

STAFF VACANCY

Teaching Principal

(Starting in 2009, date negotiable)

Hutt Valley Christian School is independently owned and operated by an Association of Reformed/Calvinistic Christian parents through an elected Board of Directors. The school is co-educational catering for students from Years 1-12 and has a current roll of 67 drawn from a range of local Christian churches with the majority being from the Reformed Churches of Silverstream and Wainuiomata.

Our current Principal has been appointed to lead another Christian school. We therefore warmly invite suitably qualified and experienced Reformed or Calvinistic Christian educators to apply for this combination teaching and leadership role.

The school focusses on developing a biblical Christian world view in students and to that end has adopted a classical Christian approach.

The school has adopted the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as interpreted by the confessional standards of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. The foundation is the infallible Word of God believing that the Scriptures are fundamental to a right understanding of the whole of life including education.

The Board is strongly committed to ensuring that the principles and precepts upon which this school was founded are both maintained and actively nurtured. Applicants must demonstrate a willing commitment and ability to uphold these principles and precepts.

Applications will be considered until the position is filled.

For further information and/or an application pack, please contact Mr John Holtslag, Board Member. Phone: 64 4 564 8552, Facsimile: 64 4 564 9305 Email: admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz Website: www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz

thanks and praise

The Reformed Church of Foxton 25 YEARS 1984 - 2009

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.

We will give thanks and praise D.V. on Sunday 29th March in the morning service at 10 a.m. in the St. John's Church.

All past and present members are cordially invited to join with us to give thanks for the many blessing the Lord has bestowed on us through all those years.

Missions in focus

An Ordained Missionary in PNG

For many years the Reformed Churches of New Zealand have wanted to place an ordained missionary on a foreign field. Although the desire has been there, a man who is able and willing to go has not been found. As of Sunday, 7 December 2008, that has changed.

It was with great joy that the Reformed Church of Hastings was able to install and commission Rev. Alan Douma to work with the Reformed Ministries in Papua New Guinea. Alan and Odette, his wife, will be leaving for PNG 21 January 2009 and begin the Summer Institute of Linguistics Pacific Orientation Course in Madang on Monday, 28 January. The course lasts 3 months and when finished Alan and Odette will be based at 14 Mile outside of Port Moresby.

This past year has been a busy one for the Doumas. Odette was able to finish her course in nursing and was awarded her degree. A small house has been purchased for their daughters who are attending university. Alan and Odette spent a week in New Zealand in March when the Wellington Presbytery conducted a colloquium doctum with Alan and Alan met with the OMB and the Hastings Session. Alan also attended the RCNZ Synod which met in Hastings last September. And on the weekend of 5-7 December, Alan participated in a missions seminar with Revs. Hoyt and Waldron. In addition Alan has continued full-time work in the Christian Reformed Church of Tivoli.

We here in Hastings were privileged to meet Alysha and Alana, Alan and Odette's daughters, and at least give them a little flavour of Mum and Dad's new church while they were here in December. Since Alan and Odette are now members of the Reformed Church of Hastings, it was good to be able to have a home visit with them before they leave for the field.

There are many things yet to be sorted out as the Douma's actually begin their work in PNG. A vehicle must be purchased and a house must be built at 14 Mile in the compound of the Reformed Bible College. The



specific work that Alan will be doing in PNG will be discussed and decided with the Reformed Ministries team on the field.

The session and congregation in Hastings specifically ask you to uphold the Doumas in prayer as they take up this new work on our behalf. It is an exciting step forward for us as churches that will present many challenges. We can anticipate that the Enemy will oppose this work in every way possible. But our Lord is greater than the Enemy and He will accomplish His purposes. Of this we may be confident.

Bruce Hoyt

*Above:
Rev Alan Douma being installed and commissioned as a missionary by Rev Bruce Hoyt of the Reformed Church of Hastings.*

*Below:
Rev Alan and Odette's daughters, Alysha and Alana.*
