

faith in
focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 37/2 MARCH 2010



Sharing the Good News –
“Go and make disciples”

Contents

Editorial	2
Sharing the Good News (1) By His authority	3
Sharing the Good News (2) Evangelism in the first and twenty-first centuries	5
Book in focus Feed My Sheep	7
ST. PATRICK'S DAY	8
"Sunday best"?	9
The submergent church	11
World in focus	14
Sing to the Lord – back to the future	16
Feminine focus Anne Bradstreet and the poetry of domestic life	17
Focus on home Gleanings	20
Missions focus	22
Greetings from USA	24

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Copy Deadline:

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

All correspondence regarding distribution and
payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

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Subscription per volume:

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

Production Staff:

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

Editorial

I think one of the biggest challenges for the Reformed Churches of New Zealand is the proclamation of the Gospel to unchurched "Kiwis". It is quite common when beginning a conversation with someone that they will be offended and respond by saying something like "what gives you the right to tell me?" And there are probably many other responses that we could add to that. How do we go about proclaiming the Gospel to the unbelieving? This is a question for the church as the body of Christ, as well as for the individual believer. There is both corporate and individual responsibility, and we must face up to the fact that evangelism isn't easy.

There are so many "churches" that seem to have people flocking to their worship services. They have programmes that seem to help attract people to their particular denomination. There is a big emphasis on numerical growth, and with that comes the danger, that people "go out the back door as quickly as they come in".

Our two contributors, the Rev Daniel Wilson and the Rev John Haverland, look at some aspects of "Sharing the Good News" in a postmodern society, where the Gospel of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ is not popular. There is also a book review on the Rev Haverland's book *Feed My Sheep*, which deals with this same subject.

On March 17 many countries celebrate Saint Patrick's Day. It seems there is more to know about this servant of the Lord than what the commercial world and the Roman Church will tell you. So let's dispense with the myths and false dogma, as the Rev Leo de Vos gives us some insight into who "Saint Patrick" was.

Again, we look at the topic "Sunday best", which gives good biblical reason for "dressing up", rather than the modern trend of "dressing down" for worship.

Following on from the article "Why We're Not Emergent", in the December issue, it seemed like a good idea to have a look at "The submergent church", in an article that examines the opposite side of the coin, and will run over two issues.

Dr Sally Davey writes about Puritan wife and mother Anne Bradstreet and her poetry, and Janice Reid writes a thought-provoking article about "The question of culture, technology and missionaries adapting to working overseas".

Photo Credits:

Cover and page 3 – Dr Sally Davey

Page 6 – Rachel Walraven

The Thought of God – Maurice Roberts – p51

Our great spiritual forefathers were pre-eminently men of one Book. They were not content till they could quote the Bible extensively and accurately, sing its Psalms, expound its theology, apply its laws to daily life and solace themselves with it on their deathbeds.

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.

Sharing the Good News (1)

By His authority

How the authority of the God of the universe leads us to evangelise others.¹

Rev Daniel Wilson

You finally got your courage up to speak to your neighbour about Christ. You prayed for weeks, even months in advance and asked your pastor for advice ... you even studied a couple of those popular programmes for evangelism. You finished the explanation of your faith by telling him about the reality of God's grace in Christ – "He came to save sinners just like you and me, and He calls us to repent of our sins and turn to Him in faith..." And then it happens! The question you hadn't anticipated... "WHAT RIGHT DO YOU HAVE TO TELL ME THAT I AM A SINNER!?" And you stumble for words, "Be... because I care about you?" "WELL, IF you really cared about me you wouldn't be so judgmental and offensive!" *Really?! I tried so hard not to be either. How could they... Did I ... What did I say wrong?!* The questions flood your mind as you dejectedly and apologetically trace your steps back home. *Is he right? Who am I to tell him what he should think or believe?*

Our right to witness

Has this been your experience? This sort of response to the Gospel is widespread, and it forces us to turn to God's Word for the answer to these and other questions. What right do we have to evangelise others? The focus of this issue is God's instructions on "how" to evangelise others, but an important part of "how" we witness is our right to witness. In fact, the primary instruction of the Bible regarding evangelism is that the message we preach/teach/share is authoritative and true! Sadly, one of the primary characteristics of evangelism in the modern church is that it is apologetic and tentative (when I say "apologetic" I don't mean it in the good sense of defending the faith). Christians often want to apologise or make excuses for telling

someone about the Gospel. We treat the truth of sin, the reality of Hell, and the offer of salvation by faith as personal beliefs that merely improve life (they give purpose, comfort, hope... etc) instead of realities that affect all of life.

From the very beginning of the Bible we are confronted with the truth that God created the heavens and the earth, and He made man in His image. We belong to Him by right of creation, as does every living and non-living thing that exists in all of time and space. Our Owner has commanded us to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in

order to be saved from the consequences of our sins. Furthermore, He has given the assembled people who believe (the church) the responsibility to go and tell the world of this command. Therefore, your speaking of the Gospel to unbelievers should be done with confidence. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been adopted as a son of the Almighty God – the Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth.² You have been called to represent your heavenly Father, by passing on His command to those whom He made and owns but who don't know and believe in Him!

“We need to look at the Bible to see how our heavenly Father pursues and directs evangelism.”



What a radically different way of looking at evangelism! What right do you have? Every right of your heavenly Father!

Biblical directive

We can't just stop there. We need to look at the Bible to see how our heavenly Father pursues and directs evangelism. What has He done and said to direct our work of evangelism? Evangelism began in the Garden of Eden. God Himself was the first evangelist to give the hope of salvation to sinners when He declared that one day the offspring/seed of the woman would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15). From that first note of hope,

“Sadly the modern church's evangelism is known for an over-emphasis on “closing the deal.””

God slowly but deliberately expanded on and explained that hope, which was to be found through the divine Messiah, Jesus Christ. Heidelberg Catechism #19 points this out well: *“God Himself began to reveal the Gospel already in Paradise; later He proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets, and portrayed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; finally, He fulfilled it through His own dear Son.”* We see a certain kind of patience in God's dealing with man. He demonstrates patience with our sin, but even more so, patience in not rushing to reveal the Messiah in the lifetime of Adam and Eve. God has His own timeline for redemption and salvation. As Paul points out in Galatians 4:4-5: *“In the fullness of time God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”* I have already said that God's authority as Creator gives us every right and confidence to evangelise. Through God's deliberate patience and dealings with man we see that we must not be hasty or brash in forcing conversions. Again, sadly the modern church's evangelism is known for an over-emphasis on “closing the deal.” But God's dealings with His people (indeed with the whole world) show us that He is not in a rush. As

believers, we can take time to witness properly without scaring people away with aggressive sales tactics because God is the one who gives the increase. God is the one who is building the Church. God is the one who converts and regenerates people – not you and not me!

Beyond being patient and confident, what else can we learn from God's Word regarding how we go about evangelism? Where do we go? To whom do we speak? What do we actually say and do when we speak to unbelievers? You could write whole books on each of these questions, but we can answer them all briefly by examining Matthew 28:18-20.

In this passage Jesus declares His authority over heaven and earth as the basis for His command to the apostles. Everyone in the church knows these verses, but that doesn't necessarily mean you know what they mean. Take a fresh look at them. To whom is Jesus speaking? He is addressing the eleven apostles. These apostles were Jesus' special messengers: chosen, commissioned and empowered to build the church. Since the command that God gave to these men was certainly beyond their ability (make disciples of **all** nations), we understand that God intended this command to be the mission of the church which the apostles were tasked to build. Another part of evangelism that we see here is that we are not to make converts or believers – we are to make disciples. That is what Paul explains in Ephesians 4:11-16. There we learn that the apostles (along with other church leaders) were given *“...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...”* In combination, these passages teach us that the apostles and church leaders were given to the church (to believers) in order to equip them to do “works of service.” Those works are defined in the next phrase by their result: the body of

Christ will be built up in size and maturity in the knowledge of Christ! Therefore, evangelism is a part of the work of the church of which all believers are a part. So, all believers have some part to play in making disciples.

Not just one method

Believers must participate in obedience to the command given to the apostles. But you ask, **“How** do I do this?” First, don't fall into the trap of believing there is only one way to evangelise. Don't buy into the model of evangelism where one “canned” method is what everyone must do. There are some wonderful evangelism tools out there which use different approaches from Scripture for witnessing. However, the Bible doesn't give us just one method... it describes HOW we evangelise without prescribing the exact actions, words, phrases and anecdotes! Some of the best biblical examples of methods are explained in Pastor Haverland's article in this issue. Second, remember that evangelism is about making disciples which are brought into the covenant community. Evangelism is not primarily concerned with converts – it is concerned with bringing people into union with Christ and building them up in the faith until they are mature! Third, regardless of what method you find helpful, be confident and patient in teaching others about Christ. Nothing is more powerful (humanly speaking) to an unbeliever than a Christian who is both confidently passionate about the Gospel and yet deliberately patient in explaining the faith. Remember: the primary teaching of the Bible regarding evangelism is that this is all true! Therefore, treat the Bible and the Gospel message as reality – for it is!

- 1 I want to state right from the outset that I am very much indebted to Dr. Anthony Curto for this material on evangelism. If you want a much more comprehensive biblical warrant, methodology and incentive for evangelism, please look for his book on evangelism to be published late next year.
- 2 *“But, what about women and girls? Didn't you intend to say “sons and daughters of God.”* No! I say “son” because even though a large percentage of readers are women, they are nonetheless “sons of God” in the sense that they are heirs of God the Father and co-heirs with Christ. Regardless of gender, all believers are “sons” with all the subsequent rights as sons (authority, inheritance...etc).

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Sharing the Good News (2)

Evangelism in the first and twenty-first centuries

Rev John Haverland

A number of Christian writers have noted the similarities between the position of the Christian faith in the 1st and 21st centuries. Some have claimed that our situation now is the closest parallel to the position of the early church in 20 centuries. If this is so – and I believe they are right – there is much we can learn from the work and witness of those early believers as we seek to communicate our faith in what has become known as this postmodern era.

An historical overview

In the first century the Christian faith was a minority religion in a pagan world. When Jesus ascended to heaven the number of believers was about 120 (Acts 1:15) That number increased rapidly with 3000 converted on the day of Pentecost and another 2000 added shortly after (Acts 2:41; 4:4) At first the believers remained in Jerusalem but an outbreak of persecution forced them out; “All except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went”. (Acts 8:1,4) In addition to this personal evangelism of ordinary believers there was the witness of deacons, such as Phillip, and the missionary work of the Apostles, such as Paul. The Lord blessed this evangelistic activity and Christianity spread rapidly through the Roman Empire. By the end of the third century the number of Christians had reached an estimated 10-12 million, about a tenth of the total population of the empire.

The religious world of the 1st century was *polytheistic*, meaning that there were many gods. This struck the apostle Paul when he visited Athens; while looking around that ancient city “he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.” (Acts 17:16) The religious climate was also *pluralistic*, meaning that this

diversity of gods was welcomed and promoted.

All of this changed dramatically in 313 AD when Constantine, ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, gave formal recognition to the Christian faith, so ending this long period of persecution. After this it became popular to be a Christian and the number of “believers” increased dramatically. This, however, was a mixed blessing for the church as many of those who professed faith were merely nominal in their belief.¹

The period from the fourth century to the mid 20th century has been described as the era of Christendom – literally “the domain of Christ”. During these 1600 years the Christian world view was challenged by movements such as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and there were many who did not believe in Christ and opposed Christianity. Yet throughout these 16 centuries most people accepted the Christian view of the world and accepted the influential role of the church.

However, the chickens of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment came home to roost in the 1960s. The Christian

world view was quickly discarded and was replaced with ideas and philosophies that had been building in strength for the past 300 years.

Today, in the 21st century, the Christians in the Western world are facing a similar situation to the one that faced believers in the first century. Again we are a minority religion in a pagan world. The dominant world view is *humanistic* – believing that man is the center of all things; *relativistic* – believing that there are no absolute God-given standards; *polytheistic* – believing that there are many gods; and *pluralistic* – believing that religious diversity is to be accepted and even welcomed.

One significant difference between the situation then and now is that in the 1st century Christianity was new – the good news about Jesus was heard for the first time. By contrast, people in the 21st century western world think they have heard the gospel, and have rejected it. Leslie Newbigin points out that the paganism of our western culture, “having been born out of the rejection of Christianity, is far more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism



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“Today evangelism among New Zealanders is difficult and the ‘average’ Kiwi seems unresponsive to the gospel.”

with which cross-cultural missions have been familiar. Here, surely, is the most challenging missionary frontier of our time.”² Peter Jones, a Christian analyst of neo-paganism, maintains that our present world is in a worse state than even the 1st century; “the ongoing sexual revolution represent the deconstruction of Western civilization on a radically different basis... what we have seen in the last generation is unprecedented.”³

In this situation how should we witness about the Lord Jesus and what can we learn from how the early Christians shared the gospel?

Present the gospel in words

Believers in the early church spoke about Jesus to others and preached about him. The good news was not communicated in drama, mime, puppets, dance or music but *in words*! These other means were available to them but they chose not to use them. For example, elaborate dramatic festivals were very popular in the Roman and Greek culture. They were well known to the apostle Paul but he

did not make use of them nor did he advocate this method to others. On the contrary, to the believers in the Greek city of Corinth he wrote that Christ had sent him “to preach the gospel” and that God had chosen “through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” (1 Cor 1:17,21) Let’s follow the evangelistic method of the early church by presenting the written and spoken Word of God.

Practice a word and deed ministry

The early Christians were known for their acts of kindness to other believers and to those outside the church, and these made a deep impression on pagan unbelievers. A combined word and deed ministry is a well-known and effective practice of Christians on the mission field. All over the world missionaries have reinforced the message about Christ by building hospitals, schools, training centers and rehabilitation units. The love of Christ taught in the Scriptures has been demonstrated in caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, teaching children, helping

the disabled and feeding the hungry. This is a biblical emphasis. “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26) “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18) Let’s also practice a word and deed ministry.

Build personal relationships

Studies have shown that by far the majority of people who come to faith (85% to 95% depending on the survey) do so through a personal relationship with a family member or friend. This high percentage is unlikely to diminish in the foreseeable future because postmodern people place a high value on personal relationships. Your ‘typical’ postmodernist wants to experience the reality of faith in a personal relationship with a Christian and wants to see evidence of that faith worked out in the practical realities of life. This is our challenge in this postmodern era.

The nations are coming to us

The early church came to see that the good news about Jesus was for all the nations. It took the Jewish Christians a while to realize this; they were accustomed to thinking that God was only interested in the people of Israel. Through a vision of clean and unclean animals the Lord taught Peter that he was not to call any man unclean. (Acts 10) The Lord specifically commissioned Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. (Acts 9:15; 13:2,46f) As the Christian faith spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire it reached both Jews and Gentiles.

Today evangelism among New Zealanders is difficult and the ‘average’ Kiwi seems unresponsive to the gospel. In this field we need to be cultivating the ground and sowing the seed. Yet other peoples of the world are coming to us and are more responsive to the gospel. Some of our congregations have seen a number of conversions among Asian immigrants.⁴ We still need to send missionaries and workers out to the nations, as we are doing, but let’s make good use of the opportunities presented by the people coming to us from other countries and cultures.

Give it time

Further studies in our current day and age reveal that on average conversions to the Christian faith take a number of years. Dramatic conversions like that of the apostle Paul are rare. Usually unbelievers come to faith slowly. A young



man professed his faith in our congregation in January. He first met a Christian friend three years prior to this. During these years he kept coming to church fairly regularly, sat in on an "Introducing God" course, met up with members of the congregation and with me. Gradually his questions were answered and he came to a sound and saving faith in Christ. Let's not be in a hurry to 'gain a convert'; rather let's give a person time to ask his questions, listen to the Word, observe the lives of believers and experience the fellowship of the church. This is a work of the Holy Spirit and he will bring the elect to faith in his time.

Make disciples

Jesus commanded us to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matt 28:19-20) The work of evangelism does not consist of

merely bringing someone to the point of conversion but also incorporating him into the worship and fellowship of the church and then discipling him to maturity in the faith. I have just come home after leading the morning studies at the Family Camp. At the camp I met two couples who had come to the Reformed Church of Hastings from outside of the church. They told me that for a year every Sunday evening Rev Bruce Hoyt had taken them through the Heidelberg Catechism to answer their questions and instruct them in the faith. That is a good example of the work of discipling. No doubt you can cite examples known to you of that same process. Let's be sure we look after new Christians and those new to our churches and take the time to teach them everything Jesus has commanded us.

Conclusion

There is much we can learn from the evangelistic witness of the early church.

They proclaimed the good news about Christ in an environment that was remarkably similar to our own. As we proclaim the same message and imitate their methods let's pray the Lord will bless what we do for the conversion of all those he has chosen to salvation.

Notes

- 1 For more on this period of history and the relationship between church and state see the article by Dr Sally Davey in the November 2009 issue of *Faith in Focus*, pg7.
- 2 L Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1986, p.20.
- 3 *Australian Presbyterian*, October 2009; quoted in *Trowel and Sword*, December 2009, p. 35. For more by Peter Jones see www.truthX-change.com
- 4 See the article by Rev Dirk van Garderen about LABS in the August 2007 issue of *Faith in Focus* pg 19.

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Book in focus

Feed My Sheep

A review article by Chris Good

The church scene in New Zealand in recent decades is one that displays increasing desperation. Census and other statistics show an ongoing persistent decline in adherence and attendance, especially amongst the young. In response to this, many churches grasp at the scores of straws offered as the key to revival to reverse the trend: Alpha Courses; seeker services; market analyses; Emergent church movement; new perspective; Purpose Driven Life; entertainment evangelism; 'alternative' worship: etc, etc, etc. None seem to work – and the young continue to go, now often followed by older members disillusioned with the changes and feeling spiritually starved and neglected in the new youth oriented approach. Never have the churches worked so hard at being relevant and 'seeker-focused'. Never before have churches been so marginalized, or the disillusionment with them been so widespread – many of our fellow Kiwis viewing them as irrelevant institutions of a bygone era. As the situ-

ation worsens, churches become more vulnerable to the next trend promoted as the key to revival, all the time failing to turn to the one true, great hope for revival – the proclamation of the Gospel, which "...is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1: 16)

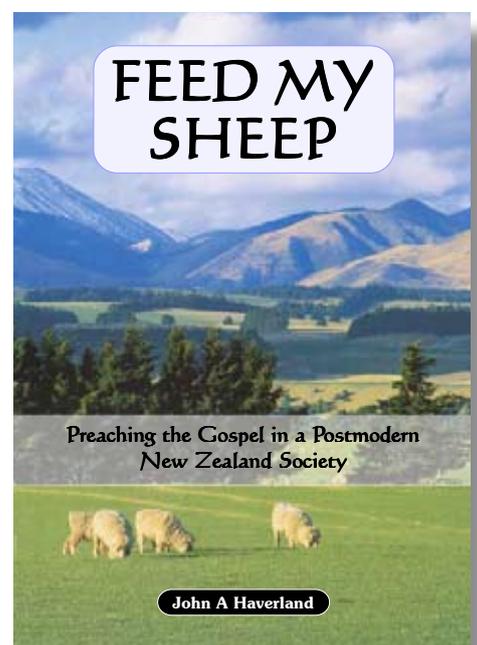
It is into this context that John Haverland writes with what is in effect a call to a new Reformation – a recovery of confidence in clear, expository, relevant and heart-felt proclamation of the Word of God.

The book has three major parts:

Part 1: The necessity of preaching

A defence of preaching against the many criticisms levelled against it (such as that it is irrelevant and ineffective in a multimedia age, etc.). Haverland responds with a biblical and historical case for the priority and effectiveness of preaching, showing that the church has been at her best when preaching has been central. He is careful to distinguish between shallow sermonets and topical

ramblings that many today mistake for true biblical preaching that seeks to proclaim the message of the text itself. Preaching is relevant because it deals with eternal issues that affect people's lives. It is effective because God has promised to use it, and its authority



challenges all cultures and philosophies to submit to it. A challenge is also issued for preachers to preach with their lives as well as their words.

Part 2: Understanding our New Zealand context

This section consists of a historical survey of church history, with a special emphasis on the impact of rationalistic modernism, and then anti-rational post-modernism on New Zealand churches. Haverland shows that New Zealand at best was a largely nominally 'Christian' society, then increasingly overtly secular. The latter has led to the abandonment of historically recognised Judeo-Christian values and the result is the social and moral decay we see today as the ethical centre uniting society has disappeared. Replacing it is a plurality of competing values and 'truths', leading to scepticism about any claims concerning ultimate

Truth, increasing fragmentation and tribalizing of society, consumerism, etc.

Part 3: Preaching the Gospel in our postmodern New Zealand situation

Haverland's solution is for churches to prophetically proclaim a counter-cultural approach to Postmodernism. Over against the view that all religions are valid – preach the uniqueness of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Against all truths being equal and subjective – preach the reality of God and the Truth of the Bible. Against relativism in morals – preach the absolutes of God's unchanging moral Law. Against the pessimism and meaninglessness of Postmodernism, proclaim the living contentment and everlasting hope of Biblical Christianity. Against tribalism preach the unity of all races, classes and sexes in Christ and His Church. Along with all this is to be the practical and positive witness of selfless mutual love

expressed through the church.

This book is a timely wake up call to churches in New Zealand. If we are to see genuine culture-changing revival – we first must see the recovery of the priority of the proclamation of the gospel as the central mission of our churches.

This book is **highly** recommended for **all** church leaders, and for all Christians concerned about the future of Christianity in New Zealand.

Feed My Sheep by John Haverland
Grace & Truth Publications
Paperback 314 pages
ISBN 0-9582145-1-4
E-mail: sales@graceandtruth.rbc.org.nz

Feed My Sheep is available from Grace & Truth Publications.

St. Patrick's Day

Rev Leo de Vos

I am sure that many of us remember Saint Patrick's Day at school when we all knew that we had to wear green. We vaguely remembered that Patrick was some Roman Catholic fellow who supposedly drove the poisonous snakes of Ireland into the Sea (those of us who believe that God gave man dominion over the animal world say "Good Job Patrick!"). Irish people wear a Shamrock on Saint Patrick's Day because tradition has it that Patrick imported and planted this three leafed herb to represent the Trinity. It is too bad that most of what we know about this good man is myth if not outright nonsense. And even our good Christian School teachers held us in the dark about what we as Protestant, professing Christians should know. So who was Saint Patrick? Do we know much about him? We sure do. Come along and listen to the fascinating story of his life.

Saint Patrick was born in England in 385 A. D. to a British family in the west coast village of Bannavern (historians are

not sure where this is today). These were dark, wild times, when Druids offered sacrifices, when wolves were so thick in the dark forests that you could not walk down forest paths in safety. But the British Isles had recently been arising from pagan darkness because of the influence of traders who sailed from Asia Minor, Greece, Alexandria or the Greek colonies in Gaul. Not only did these merchants bring precious goods, but some also brought the priceless pearl, the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is likely that some Roman soldiers also brought the good news of the gospel to their distant outposts of the Roman frontier, the Hadrian wall. In about 200 A.D. Tertullian wrote: "Parts of Britain were inaccessible to the Romans but have yielded to Christ." D' Aubigne in his magisterial *The Reformation in England* writes: "In those mountains, forests, and western isles, which for centuries past the Druids filled with their mysteries and sacrifices, and on which the Roman eagles had never swooped, even there the Name of Christ was known and honoured." (p. 25).

In this way the gospel had come

to Bannavern and to Patrick's father, Calpurnius, a deacon of the church, "a simple-hearted pious man." Saint Patrick was born and baptized with the name Succat, an heir of God's promise to Abraham. Succat was an energetic boy who did not naturally walk in the way of the covenant. He was full of mischief, choosing ways of pleasure and folly, rather than fearing God. He was a natural leader and led other boys to sin with him. One day he was playing with his two sisters near the seashore when they were surprised and captured by Irish pirates, commanded by a notorious O'Neal. Succat and his sisters were taken to Ireland where they were sold into slavery. Now, like the prodigal, Succat was sent into the fields to herd the swine of his pagan owner. It was here in his weeks of solitude that he came to himself, remembering the gospel truths which his godly parents had taught him. D'Aubigne writes:

The faults which he had committed pressed heavily night and day upon his soul: he groaned in heart, and

wept. He turned repenting towards that meek Saviour of whom his parents had so often spoken; he fell at His knees in that heathen land, and imagined he felt the arms of a father uplifting the prodigal son. Succat was then born on high, but by an agent so spiritual and unseen that he knew not 'whence it cometh or whither it goeth'. The gospel was written with the finger of God on the tablets of his heart. "I was sixteen years old," said he, "and knew not the true God; but in that strange land the Lord opened my unbelieving eyes, and, although late, I called my sins to mind, and was converted with my whole heart to the Lord my God, who regarded my low estate, had pity on youth and ignorance, consoled me as a father consoles his children." (p. 27).

Why do we not hear about this marvelous conversion on Saint Patrick's Day instead of all the myths? Because people love darkness rather than light. The story of his conversion would not be popular with secular men who are in bondage to traditions, rather than to the living God. Listen to Succat as he narrates his evangelical experience: "The love of God increased more and more in me with faith and fear of His

name. The Spirit urged me to such a degree that I poured forth as many as a hundred prayers in one day. And even during the night, in the forests and on the mountains where I kept my herd, the rain, and snow, and frost, and sufferings which I endured, excited me to seek after God. At that time I felt not the indifference that I now feel. The Spirit fermented in my heart."

God was faithful who gave Succat a chance to escape his physical captivity. Imagine the joy of his family when he finally crossed the sea to return home! Yet he did not stay home long. Despite the pleas of his parents and friends, the love of Christ increasingly constrained him to return to Ireland. He dreamed that he heard voices calling him from the dark forests of Erin: "Come, holy child, and walk once more among us." He awoke in tears, his breast filled with the keenest emotion. He tore himself from the arms of his parents, and rushed forth – not as heretofore with his playfellows, when he would climb the summit of some lofty hill – but with a heart full of charity in Christ (D'Aubigne, p. 28).

Now our Saint Patrick took on his missionary labour with a love and zeal from the Lord. He gathered pagan tribes together in the fields by the beat of a drum. Then he would tell them in their own language the history of the Son of

God. As a result of his diligent preaching, many came to know their sin and came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A son of a chieftain named Benignus was converted and succeeded Patrick. A court bard, Dubrach Mac Valubair no longer sang druidical hymns, but praises to His Lord and Saviour. Only the last great Day will show how many cruel Druids and dark pagans were converted to the glorious gospel.

Church history tells us the sad story of how Britain and Ireland were later forced to bow under the yoke of pope Gregory. Many evangelical churches held out and the Irish ones were the last to be subdued under the Roman papacy! Yet what a sad irony of history that while Britain has experienced the reformation and a return to Protestantism and the gospel of Saint Patrick, Ireland remains in bondage to the darkness of Roman tradition and myth. The story of Saint Patrick holds out hope that the gospel may once again penetrate the darkness of this country. Is God calling and sending you with a burning passion to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to distant lands?

Rev Leo de Vos is Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Wainuimata.

"Sunday best"?

C. Van Dam

How should one dress for church? A fair question is it not? Yet, it's not a topic many like to talk about, for today's trend is to dress in what's most comfortable and casual, regardless of the occasion.

Indeed, even in worship services one can detect a slow erosion of "Sunday best." Because of the culture we live in, merely hinting at the topic of dress and worship can raise some hackles. A typical response is that God doesn't care what clothes you wear. He looks

into the heart and what's in the heart is important. The latter point is of course true (Ps 24:4), but the statement that God does not care about dress for official worship can be challenged. The current growing trend of dressing down for church is not a good one.

Bear with me for I would like to address this issue from Scripture. First let's note the fact that it is a tremendous privilege of divine grace that we may begin each week by going to church to worship our God and King. What an awesome prerogative to be able to come into his presence as his people and sing our praises, articulate our thanks, and

“The current growing trend of dressing down for church is not a good one.”

listen to Him speaking to us through the Word read and proclaimed.

In order to appreciate our worship properly, however, it helps to know a little of its background and history. So let's take a very brief look at some relevant aspects of Old and New Testament worship so we can better appreciate some of what we do and where we are heading with our worship.

“He expects us, who by nature are but miserable sinners, to approach Him with awe, reverence, and in our best attire.”

From Old to New

After God had set his people free from their Egyptian bondage, Israel had the excitement of meeting God at Mount Sinai. However, before they could come into his presence and hear Him, God ordered that they consecrate themselves, wash their clothes, and stay away from the mountain. To touch it would mean death (Exod 19:10-12). God was indicating that He was holy and therefore to be respected and feared. He also indicated that it mattered to Him how his people appeared before Him. He demanded consecration, that is setting themselves apart to the Lord. This consecration broke their pattern of daily living, for it was to take place over two days. We do not read much detail as to precisely how this consecration was to be done; but,

the clothes are mentioned. They must be washed. You are appearing before the Holy One! God demanded holiness and respect and that had to be evident also in the clothing.

This divine concern for how one appeared before God was also evident with the worship at the tabernacle and temple. There were graded levels of holiness surrounding these sanctuaries.

The people were not allowed inside. The priests could enter the Holy Place and only the High Priest could go once a year into the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place. In order to approach God, they had to dress according to his dress code. This was very elaborate for the high priest (Exod 28:1-39). The ordinary priests had to have linen clothes that were, just as the high priest's, designed for "dignity and honour" (Exod 28:2, 40). The original can also be translated as "for glory and splendour." The words used also convey the ideas of finery, luxury, and splendid beauty. The point is that the clothes were to reflect something of the fact that the priests were in God's presence, for this apparel was to be worn when the priests worked at the tabernacle or temple (cf. Deut 12:7,

18). The importance of proper dress is underlined by the fact that even if a priest was doing something as menial as cleaning out the ashes of the whole burnt offering, he had to wear the clothes which the Lord had specified for this task (Lev 6:10-11).

All this has relevance for today when we realise the new context we are in. God has now set his people free from the Egypt of sin and satanic domination through "Christ, our Passover Lamb" (1 Cor 5:7). This means that instead of approaching Mount Sinai, we may now come near in worship to Mount Zion! As we read in Hebrews 12, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:22-24). We may worship in the face of heaven, so to speak. But, it gets even better. Because of the sprinkled blood of Christ, we may "have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb 10:19-22). As priests to God (cf. 1 Pet 2:5), we are allowed to do what only the high priest in the Old Testament could do once a year. As we worship and call on the name of the Lord, we may enter into the Most Holy Place! Who can fully fathom and appreciate what this means?

This momentous truth has implications for the clothes we choose to wear when going to church to worship in God's very presence. If God was concerned how the priests approached Him in the Old Testament, would He be any less concerned today when the priestly privileges of drawing near to God in the Most Holy Place are open to all believers? Our God is still the same. He is holy and majestic. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords who comes to judge this world. He expects us, who by nature are but miserable sinners, to approach Him with awe, reverence, and in our best attire, reflecting the principle of the priestly dress that our clothes are for "dignity and beauty" in God's presence (Exod



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28:2, 40; Heb 12:28-29).

In keeping with the age in which we live, the age of the Holy Spirit, God leaves the details of our dress to us. We should not need to draft rules for how to dress for worship. The Lord our God has enabled us to make such decisions since we have both the relevant principles spelled out in his Word, as well as the gift of his Spirit who is able to guide us by means of the Word. But, we in turn need to make sure that the Spirit has the necessary room to work in our lives so that he can mould us and our thinking in accord with God's will. We need to consciously continue to work on developing a counter-culture that challenges the norms of a neo-pagan world around us, also in the area of dress, and certainly when it pertains to worship.

The way ahead

It is very easy to become unwittingly influenced by the culture around us. People dress down and turn their noses at authority, including God's. The lack of respect is widespread in our current society. In that kind of a culture, we need to prepare very deliberately for the Sunday and heed the admonition of Ecclesiastes which can be paraphrased: "Guard your steps when you go to church!" (Eccl 5:1). When we enter church, we are entering space specifically reserved for worship where as congregation we officially enter into the presence of God and where our worship and prayers take us into the

“It is very easy to become unwittingly influenced by the culture around us.”

Most Holy Place. The clothes we wear must reflect this awesome reality.

It is one thing for an unchurched person coming to church out of curiosity or because of hunger for spiritual food. He may not have had a chance to prepare himself properly or may not know what worship involves. That cannot be said of those raised in the church. When one considers that even our current worldly culture honours dress codes to ensure proper apparel for all kinds of occasions, even for playing golf at upscale courses, is it not dishonouring to the most high God when people approach Him in official worship in clothes that are less than Sunday best?

There is also something else to note. Not only is the congregation a holy priestly people, but it is also bride of Christ. As bride of the Saviour, living in the expectation of the great marriage feast, believers prepare for Christ's coming and for the day on which He will clothe them in the white robes of redemption (Rev 19:7-8). In anticipation of that day, should we not honour our

Lord and Master by now already dressing in our best when we appear before him in grateful worship?

A well-known Old Testament scholar noted that "the way in which one appears physically before God frequently betrays one's attitude of mind (cf. Matt 22:11-14)" (R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, p. 75). Let us not lose our sense of awe and wonder at being in God's presence. It is a privilege we cannot take for granted. As Scripture exhorts us: "Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29).

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This article first appeared in the Clarion (Volume 58, no. 18 August 28, 2009). The Clarion is the magazine of the Canadian Reformed Churches with whom we have a reciprocal agreement.

The submergent church

(Part one)

Rev. Derrick J. Vander Meulen

Three miles from where I live is Mars Hill Bible Church, a mega-emergent church in Grandville, Michigan. The church's pastor is the popular Rev. Rob Bell, author of the books "Velvet Elvis," "Sex God," and most recently "Jesus Wants to Save Christians." My purpose in this article is not to critique what Mars Hill is doing or what Rob Bell is saying – others have already done that very well.¹ But, as the saying goes, "when you point a finger at others, three are pointing back at you."

With church buildings on nearly every corner, the Grand Rapids area can hardly be described as "unchurched." Several NAPARC churches exist in this area, including 10 percent of all the URCNA churches. So why is Mars Hill attracting such crowds while many of our churches are struggling? Depending on your perspective, answers will vary widely. Rob Bell is a gifted speaker with a certain charm and charisma. True. Our entertainment-saturated culture makes their worship style attractive to many. True. People today lack discernment. True. People can worship there with-

out feeling as though they are being judged. True. People can worship there "anonymously" without oversight. True. True. True. And we can give many more reasons why people flock to this church, or others like it.

Here's one other possibility: might it be that some go emergent because our churches are submergent?

A submerged church is a church that exists under the radar. For all its internal activity, it is virtually invisible to the community. Outreach, evangelism, and missions are budget items, but nothing more. A submerged church is lethargic,

apathetic, self-focused, with a “we’ve arrived” attitude that refuses to evaluate itself or its ministry. It is a church satisfied with the answer, “that’s the way we’ve always done it before.” It is a church that takes “negotiable” things (*adiaphora*) and makes them non-negotiable, or refuses to deal with deficiencies in those things that are non-negotiable. It is a church that wears the cloak of “conservatism,” but underneath is the corpse of traditionalism.

I would suggest that the real threat to non-emergent, conservative reformed churches is not the “emergent-church-movement” but the “submergent-church’s-lack-of-movement.”

I see this playing out in the following areas: the church and worship, the church and one another, and the church and the world.

The Church and worship

To state it positively, our worship must be passionately God-honoring and Christ-centered in which we meet in covenantal, dialogue with our Creator and Redeemer. We, God’s people, gather corporately before Him to bring praise, petitions, confession, and offerings while God speaks words of pardon and salvation, calling us to a life of faith and obedience. Negatively, our worship must avoid what God described in Isaiah 29:13 and repeated by Jesus in Matthew 15:8, 9: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching

as doctrines the commandments of men.” These things are non-negotiable.

Jesus responded to the Samaritan woman’s question about worship with these words: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24).

To worship “in spirit and truth” is, for Jesus, non-negotiable. What does this mean? William Hendriksen rightly explains it this way: “In such a setting, it would seem to us, worshiping in *spirit* and *truth* can only mean a) rendering such homage to God that the entire heart enters into the act, and b) doing this in full harmony with the truth of God as revealed in His Word. Such worship, therefore, will not only be spiritual instead of physical, inward instead of outward, but it will also be directed to the true God as set forth in Scripture and as displayed in the work of redemption.”²

This means worship is *not* entertainment. It is not tailored to draw a crowd. Nor is worship primarily evangelism. The purpose of worship is not to recruit unbelievers, but for believers sincerely to offer to God what is due Him, and to be instructed and fed by Him through word and sacrament. This was the practice of the New Testament church. They came together for worship and edification (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:24,25), then, in obedience to Jesus’ Great Commission, went

out to evangelize the world. Worship was the “fuel” for evangelism.

If these things describe a vibrant, healthy worshiping church, then how is your church doing? Sincere worship (in spirit) is a difficult thing to evaluate. I do wonder at times what is happening in a person’s heart when we begin worship by singing “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” and it looks as though he is singing about his next dentist appointment. I cannot judge such a thing, but it *appears* as though there’s little praise going on. And, of course, with others the opposite might be the case. A person can *appear* to be very engaged when inside he is not. The elders can regulate worship so that it is done in truth, but they cannot make a hypocrite sincere.

Though only God can change hearts, the elders are responsible to ensure that our worship is done in truth. “Our preachers are faithfully preaching the whole counsel of God!” we say. “We have catechism sermons.” “The law is read each Lord’s Day.” As important as these things are in worship, there is more. What about your music? This ought to be a matter of real concern. The URC Church Order states in Article 39: “The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. Hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity may be sung, provided they are approved by the Consistory.” What songs are being sung from your second hymnal, or “floppy” book? Do they meet this criteria?

Too often elders are unwilling biblically and confessionally to evaluate the songs being sung, while being equally unwilling biblically and confessionally to evaluate new songs being written. The conviction seems to be: old hymns must be good (some aren’t), and anything contemporary must be bad (some aren’t). If, in your church, C. Austin Miles’ *In the Garden* has greater appeal than Stuart Townsend’s *In Christ Alone*, you have problems. The former, written in 1912, makes allusions to the scene of Mary meeting the resurrected Jesus at the empty tomb, though this can be easily missed by the singer.³ Beyond that allusive imagery, the song can hardly be said to “faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity.” In comparison, the latter, written in 2001, does much better reflecting biblical and confessional truth.

This refusal to do the hard work



of evaluation is either due to laziness, stubbornly clinging to personal taste, or a fear of man that is greater than a fear of God. Whatever the case, it is a mark of a submergent church.

In some circles, one gets the impression that the only God-sanctioned instrument for worship is the organ. Any effort to integrate other instruments to accompany the singing of God's people is, at best, met with suspicion, and, at worst, fiercely opposed. By demanding organ only, we raise taste and tradition to the level of commandment, making what is negotiable non-negotiable.

When we will not discuss these matters, when we are unwilling biblically and confessionally to evaluate the various aspects of worship, the church has submerged into tired, worn-out traditionalism.

The Church and one another

Scripture speaks clearly, and obviously God takes seriously, how we relate to one another in the body of Christ. Notice the following passages:

Hebrews 10:24–25: "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together."

Romans 12:9–10: "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

Galatians 6:1–2: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Galatians 6:10: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus instructs us how to deal in a godly way with someone who sins against us. Added to this, Peter says, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.'" (1 Pet 4:8)

Our relationships with one another must be characterized with love, encouragement, building up, restoring, forgiving, warning, and admonishing. Does this describe you and your church? In some "conservative" reformed churches there appears to be an undercurrent of anger, bitterness, and possibly even hatred – a condition that will negatively

“Our relationships with one another must be characterised with love, encouragement, building up, restoring, forgiving, warning, and admonishing. Does this describe you and your church?”

affect your fellowship, your worship, and your witness.

This is contrary to the will of God for His church:

Ephesians 4:31: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you."

Hebrews 12:15: "... looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;"

Galatians 5:15: "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

Where these things exist in the body of Christ, they must be dealt with. Believers need to love one another enough humbly to admonish one another. Elders need to love Christ enough to deal firmly with those who would ravage His bride. Where such ungodliness remains unchecked, people will inevitably go somewhere else while that church submerges into irrelevance.

Another issue in submergent churches is the congregation's attitude toward the leadership of the church, toward its pastors and elders. Christ gave the church pastors and elders "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12) And Paul instructs elders to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

These verses, and many others, are indictments against the all-too-pervasive distrust of leadership today. The individualistic, anti-authority mindset of the world is alive and well in the church. "Who are they to equip me?

I don't need shepherding."

These attitudes are often focused on the minister who becomes the target. "Pastors come and go, but the congregation remains." With that attitude, one has no reason to listen to the pastor. He is seen as the hired hand rather than Christ's ambassador to the flock (2 Corinthians 5:20). That sinful attitude allows one to ignore Paul's instruction: "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17).

Where these unbiblical attitudes toward office-bearers exist in Christ's church, the leaders will not be able to lead with any effectiveness, and the church will submerge into irrelevance.

To be finalized in the next issue

Endnotes

1. For critiques on Bell's "Velvet Elvis," I recommend "Postmodern Liberalism; Repainting a Non-Christian Faith" by Rev. Casey Freswick (Reformed Fellowship, 2005); and Rev. Dale Van Dyke's online article entitled, *Jumping off the Mark: A Review of Rob Bell's "Velvet Elvis"* <http://harvestopc.org/index.php?page=articles>.
2. Hendriksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Volume I. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) p. 167.
3. Miles' account of the writing of this hymn can be found in *101 Hymn Stories* by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1982). p. 124.

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Reformation Heritage Books publishes “Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English translation, Volume 1: 1523-1552”

Reformation Heritage Books has published “Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Volume 1: 1523-1552,” the first of a projected three volume set, which compiles numerous Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries translated into English. For many of these texts, this is their debut in the Anglo-Saxon vernacular. It provides the English-speaking world a richer and more comprehensive view of the emergence and maturation of Reformed theology in these foundational centuries for Reformed thought and foundational summaries of Reformed doctrine for these centuries. Each confessional statement is preceded by a brief introduction containing necessary historical and bibliographical background. The confessions are arranged chronologically, with this first volume presenting thirty-three documents covering the years 1523-1552.

+ *Reformation Heritage Books*

Church of Scotland minister and council convener lauds Sabbath business closings

Church of Scotland (COS) minister and Convener of the COS Church and Society Council the Rev. Ian Galloway, in an 11 January 2009 blog article titled “The Sabbath,” lauds automobile dealer Peter Vardy for closing all of his six auto showrooms on Sundays so that employees can spend more time with their families.

Galloway defines one manifestation of poverty as being “the lack of time spent with friends, family, and others you could be with,” and concludes: “It’s time to be with those we care about and reclaim the Sabbath for what it is.”

In a reminder of Olympics runner Eric Liddell’s refusal to run in the 100 meter race scheduled on a Sunday in 1924, in December 2009, Scots rugby player Euan Murray announced that he would not play in the Sunday, 7 February 2010, Six Nations match against France nor in any subsequent rugby matches scheduled on Sundays because of Murray’s religious view of the Sabbath.

The answer to Question Sixty of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is:

“The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days [Leviticus 23:3, Exodus 16:25-29, Jeremiah 17:21-22]; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship [Psalm 92:1-2, Luke 4:16, Isaiah 58:13, Acts 20:7], except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy [Matthew 12:11-12].”

+ *Church of Scotland*

Christ URC of Santee, California, ordains Italian Reformed Church Pastor to establish a URCNA-like Reformed Church Federation in Italy

Christ United Reformed Church (CURC) (United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)) of Santee, California, on 24 January 2010, ordained and installed the Rev. Andrea Ferrari as a missionary-pastor in the URCNA with the specific calling of establishing a federation of Reformed churches in Italy modeled after the URCNA.

Pastor Ferrari, a former Assemblies of God then Reformed Baptist minister, sustained a colloquium doctum on 19 January 2010, and is now an associate pastor of CURC with the specific calling of a missionary to the Filadelfia church in Milan, Italy, and to establish a federation of Reformed Churches in Italy.

Pastor Ferrari is additionally a writer of scholarly and pastoral articles, and is the author of John Diodoti’s *Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, published by Reformation Heritage Books, which examines the doctrine of John Diodoti, an Italian delegate to the Synod of Dort.

+ *Christ United Reformed Church*

Poverty drives 225,000 Haitian children into slavery

Mission Network News in a 4 January 2010 article titled “Poverty Forces Kids into Slavery,” describes how 225,000 children in Haiti from families suffering from poverty and starvation are being sold by parents to wealthier families that take the children into their home where they perform unpaid domestic work in exchange for being raised in the wealthier circumstances. Most of the sold children, called “restaveks” are girls, and many of them are subjected to physical and sexual abuse in their new homes.

In the article, Eva DeHart of the ministry For Haiti With Love (FHWL) describes how several hurricanes and a cycle of floods and draughts have exacerbated poverty in the normally-impooverished nation of Haiti, and how FHWL seeks to provide for the physical needs of the poorest people and to bring to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which provides an alternative to the culturally-entrenched voodoo that the Haitians so readily turn towards in times of trouble.

Voodoo reflects French and African cultural influences, and is a religion that is a satanic amalgam of African animist tradition and Roman Catholic tradition, practiced in Haiti for the past three centuries that became an official religion in Haiti in 2003, just ahead of Haiti’s bicentennial as an independent nation.

+ *Mission Network News*

South African Christian Democratic Party Leader expresses disappointment at wedding of polygamist President Jacob Zuma to 5th wife

A 5 January 2010 statement by African Christian Democratic Party leader the Rev. Kenneth R J Meshoe titled: “The President has Set a Bad Example for Men,” was posted in reaction to poly-gamist South African President Jacob Zuma being married to his 5th wife, and said:

“The ACDP is very disappointed by the President’s marriage to [a] 5th wife, particularly because this act is against Biblical teaching and also against [the] government’s AIDS Programme that encourages peoples to sleep with only one partner. We believe [the president] has set a bad example for men in the country who might want to emulate what the Head of State is doing.

While polygamy has been practiced widely in African culture for centuries, it is now [no] longer relevant in democratic societies. Polygamy promotes manipulation, jealousy, strife, and unhealthy competition among wives to attract the attention of their husband. It causes unhappiness among some because of neglect and unmet needs.

We question why some who claim to believe in democratic rights to equality can at the same time talk about the right of a man to marry more than one wife, while they will not agree when a woman

wants to marry more than one husband. This, we believe, is nothing but an attempt to legitimise the lust of men.

The ACDP calls on men throughout the country not to follow the President's bad example and choose to remain faithful and committed to one wife."

+ *African Christian Democratic Party*

Top abortion provider cashes in on Haiti crisis, pro-life medics respond

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) Immediately after the earthquake that devastated Haiti, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) used the crisis to solicit funds for its family planning clinics in the country. At the same time, a pro-life medical team arrived in Port au Prince to provide emergency medical services and skilled birth attendants. The responses highlight a rising dispute over the current United Nations (UN) program for reducing maternal mortality which puts fertility control first, a program in which Haiti has been a main target but has nonetheless maintained one of the world's highest rates of maternal death.

+ *Susan Yoshihara, Ph.D.*

Secretary Clinton announces 5-year funding push, including abortion

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) In Washington last week, United States (U.S.) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the United States would engage in a massive funding push over the next five years to promote "reproductive health care and family planning" as a "basic right" around the world. Clinton has previously stated for the record that this includes abortion. The plan includes potentially siphoning off funds currently directed towards fighting HIV/AIDs, tuberculosis and malaria. Commemorating the fifteenth anniversary of the controversial International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Clinton said there were only five years left to achieve ICPD's goal that "all governments will make access to reproductive healthcare and family planning services a basic right."

+ *Susan Yoshihara, Ph.D.*

General Assembly "sexual orientation" vote reveals defection by Catholic nations

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) An analysis of how countries voted with respect to novel non-discrimination categories based on "sexual orientation and gender identity" in a United Nations (UN) General Assembly (GA) resolution last month reveals an emerging global line-up on contentious social issues that has traditionally-Catholic

nations aligned with social "progressives." Voting to delete reference to a treaty body "General Comment" was a victorious coalition of socially-conservative nations centered in Africa, the Islamic world and parts of the English-speaking Caribbean. The losing side was led by Global North nations – European Union states, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States

+ *Piero A. Tozzi, JD*

New IPPF document pushes adolescent "sexual rights"

(NEW YORK – C-FAM) In its new report "Stand and Deliver," the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is demanding that governments, religious institutions and society at large provide "comprehensive sexuality education" for children as young as ten years old. In a foreword, Bert Koenders of the Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, which helped fund the publication, asserts that, "Young people have the right to be fully informed about sexuality and to have access to contraceptives and other services. These rights are enshrined in various internationally agreed human rights convention and treaties, but – unfortunately – they are still not universally respected."

+ *Samantha Singson*

Deadly violence in Jos, Nigeria

The Voice of the Martyrs, Canada, as well as several other sources, provide the striking report about the mob violence between Muslims and Christians that erupted in Jos, Nigeria on January 17, resulting with at least 100 people killed, hundreds injured and homes and religious sites burned. The violence started at the St. Michael's Catholic Church in the nearby city of Nasarawa Gwong and continued with attacks of churches in the area. The Nigerian army has been summoned to restore the order. In spite of that the tension in the region is still strong and people are full of fear and grief.

+ *WEA Religious Liberty – February, 2010*

Two church buildings under construction burned in Indonesia

Compass Direct News reported that on January 22nd the partially constructed buildings of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan Church and the Pentecostal Church in Sibuhuan village, Padang Lawas Residency, Indonesia, were burned by hundreds of attackers on motorcycles. Local church leaders said they had never had problems with local citizens and the attackers were supposed to be

Muslim extremists from outside the area. Fortunately, no people were hurt in the fires, but many have been traumatized and fled from the region. Christians have waited for years for building permits for the churches and in spite of the incident they will not give up their rights of receiving building permits.

+ *WEA Religious Liberty – February, 2010*

Christians detained again in Iran

Maryam Jalili, Mitra Zahmati and Farzan Matin, three Iranian Christians, remain still in Evin prison, after the authorities arrested them together with 12 other Christians in Pakdasht, Iran, on December 24. The believers gathered at a house church to celebrate Christmas when they were arrested. 12 of the detained were released on January 4th. Sources report that security officials have raided the imprisoned Christians' residences and confiscated their books, computers, phone directories, CDs, DVDs and Christian literature.

According to Compass Direct News report at least 14 Christians have been detained in Iranian prisons for weeks without legal counsel in the past few months. The repressive government treatment of Christians in Iran continues, in spite of the international condemnation of the recent treatment of the two Christian ladies - Maryam and Marzieh, arrested on 5 March 2009 for their faith.

+ *WEA Religious Liberty – February, 2010*

Mugabe government deploys army to begin evicting remaining 300 white Zimbabwean farmers from their property

Voice of America reporter Blessing Zulu reports in a 31 December 2009 article titled "Zimbabwe Military Deploys to Remove Country's Remaining White Farmers" that the government of communist dictator Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe has deployed the Zimbabwe National Army to immediately evict 152 of the remaining 300 white commercial farmers in Zimbabwe from their property so that the farms can be turned over to politicians of the former ruling Zanu-PF party. Zulu's sources report that all remaining white Zimbabwean commercial farmers are to eventually be evicted.

A Christian Observer correspondent reports that the affected Zimbabwean farm families are packing whatever belongings can be fit into their vehicles in preparation for vacating their farms, and requests prayer for the families.

+ *Voice of America*

Sing to the Lord – back to the future

No doubt it is a pretty over-worked phrase – back to the future – but, well, yours truly’s imagination has its limits. It seemed to us useful to take a step back for a moment, for all of us on the committee still get the question put to us from time to time: why are we engaged in this project? I offer the following to refresh your memory, in case it needs it.

In 1992 the Synod gave the Australian *Book of Worship* provisional approval for use in the churches while a committee was appointed to evaluate it as a possible replacement for the 1976 CRC *Psalter Hymnal* (the blue book we presently use). In 1998 the CRCNA’s brand new 1987 *Psalter Hymnal* (the grey book) was “accepted for evaluation and possible adoption by the RCNZ at following Synods.” Both books had a good deal to recommend them in their own ways. However, the Committee appointed to review them could not, in the end, unitedly recommend either to the Synod as a permanent replacement for the blue book.

The blue book and its 1957 predecessor have served the denomination well from pretty much our beginnings as churches. But, as nothing on this earth, it is not perfect. Some felt not all of its musical settings to be so good; at points

the language is becoming difficult as the years go by; and the selection of hymns is not good and not large. So we found ourselves in the situation of a growing sense of need for a new book but none available being deemed acceptable. Some felt that unless progress were made on the matter, we risked the possibility that some may become impatient and the risk would arise that churches may begin to go their own way, the result being that we would become less united in our worship. In 1 Corinthians 11:16, the apostle Paul says, “If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such

man is changed to people or some such; although, to their credit, God is still spoken of in masculine terms, as Scripture does.

The NS session also believed that the Grey book had two points against it culturally. Firstly, it uses many Genevan tunes in its Psalm selection (43). Genevans are variably received in our churches. But as well as not being so appreciated even by many among us with a strong cultural connection to them, Genevans are not a familiar part of NZ church music, apart from a few that came down through the Scots stream

“Paul seemed to expect the churches to have a fairly united approach to worship and church life.”

custom, nor do the churches of God.” Paul seemed to expect the churches to have a fairly united approach to worship and church life.

We in the North Shore also believed that the unity we have in our churches is very precious and something few other denominations in NZ have to the extent we do, something, therefore, worth seeking to preserve. So the North Shore session overtured the Synod of 2002 to “appoint a committee to prepare our own selection of Psalms & hymns for worship in our churches,” which the Synod decided to do by an overwhelming majority.

The North Shore Session agreed with those who had concerns about the BoW and the grey book. The difficulties with the BoW focused around the quality of the production, changes in the wording of some hymns (unnecessary modernization), and the versifications of some of the Psalms (if I recall rightly). With respect to the grey book, some had principal theological objections centring around ‘gender-neutering’ – viz., in a pretty thorough-going manner, the generic

– Old 100th, Old 124th, for example. Secondly, the book is American (which is not, in itself, bad). This shows in its hymn selection. NZ tends to have a more British/Anglican hymnal tradition, and many excellent hymns that are familiar to other NZ Christians and that reformed Christians can sing are not there. The question has been asked in regard to producing our own *Psalter Hymnal*: are we so unique? The truth is, a Reformed Church in NZ is somewhat unique; we are not just alternative Presbyterians, yet we insist on singing Psalms. But to get the Psalms in a form we are all reasonably happy to sing and a reformed selection of hymns making some connection with NZ’s tradition of hymnody are not available. (On this score, the BoW did a pretty good job, reflecting a more similar cultural connection to NZ’s.)

Hence the North Shore overture and hence the project. Some plead with Synod not to embark upon it, claiming it to be a huge task, beyond our resources. I confess to being one who charged in where angels fear to tread and having a great deal more respect



for that viewpoint now than I did eight years ago. There have been a couple of times when I wondered whether we would prove them right. However, we have tried to be humble in the way we have gone about it, seeing it really to be a gathering exercise and not trying to be original. The final decision of Synod 2002 was as follows:

Synod 2002 appointed a Study Committee to prepare our (RCNZ) "own selection of psalms and hymns for worship in our churches" (Art.83), the mandate being more closely specified as follows (Art.93):

1. Select Psalm versions that are as faithful as possible in content and form of expression to Scripture, granting proper room for poetical necessity.

2. Psalm and Bible song selections are to be evaluated for the soundness of their paraphrasing against the relevant

sections in the synodically approved Bible versions (NIV and NASB).

3. Provide a reasonably large selection of hymns and songs to take into account the various preferences in our churches, namely, those resulting from our cultural mix, age differences, etc. In this regard, the committee should note the following:

a. Where Genevan tunes are presented, the committee is to consider providing a non-Genevan alternative.

b. The committee is to solicit contributions from a wide cross-section of our membership. (This is to help the committee in its selection task and to gain a better feel for the preferences of our members. However, while all contributions will receive due consideration, the committee is not bound by the act of contribution.)

c. In respect of updating language, the

committee is to leave well alone by and large and change only when necessary for meaning.

d. The committee will not attempt any writing of its own.

e. As far as possible, Psalm, hymn and song selections are to be taken from our present approved and provisionally approved sources.

A couple of months ago, in response to sending out the first batch of hymns we are proposing for the hymn section, we received a letter from the session of Palmerston North asking us some thoughtful questions about our approach to hymn selection. I want to knock our reply into an article for next month, for I think they may be questions others have in mind and I trust our answers may alleviate concerns some may have.

John Rogers

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) *and the poetry of domestic life*

We do not tend to think of domestic life as a subject for poetry: still less do we imagine the rigours endured by pioneering homemakers to be a stimulus for the poetic imagination. Yet one of America's earliest, respected poets was a woman – a wife, and a mother of eight children. Anne Bradstreet, the daughter of one Massachusetts governor and wife of another, left England in 1630 as one of an intrepid party intent on establishing a faithful Christian community in the wilderness. They endured many hardships; and their life saw many grim realities.

Neither do many people regard the Puritans as likely poets. Anne Bradstreet was a Puritan – an English, Calvinist Christian who tried to live what she believed with whole-hearted rigour. Unbelieving historians, literary critics and social commentators have generally viewed the Puritans as unimaginative strangers to the arts. Poetry? Art? Sensitivity to beauty and the subtleties of emotion? These they deemed inimical to

the Puritan mindset. It was thought the Puritan way of living ruled out genuine happiness in marriage or warm bonds of affection between parent and child. But, as we who share their view of the world know well, people who think this of the Puritans are wrong.

Anne was born in Northampton in 1612, the second child of Thomas Dudley, steward of the Earl of Lincoln. By the time Anne was born, Thomas had become convinced of the truth of the Scriptures, and determined to follow Christ according to the teachings of Luther, Calvin, Knox, and like-minded leaders in the English church. This meant that he devoted serious effort to teaching his children the Christian faith; and to seeing that they enjoyed the benefits of biblical preaching. Anne and her brothers and sisters were all instructed in Sunday afternoon catechism classes.

Educated and cultured

But the Dudley household was also a cultured one, where the fruits of a



Stained glass representation of Anne Bradstreet (there is no known portrait of her) in St Botolph's church in Boston, England. The eight chicks in the nest she carries are inspired by the opening words of her poem on her children.

good education were valued. Not only did Anne have the benefits of her father's example of reading and his library of books; she was part of the wider household of the Earl of Lincoln. This meant that books, learned discussion and the arts were all part of her everyday life. She was also a distant relative on her mother's side of the famous 16th century poet, Sir Philip Sidney. She was well-accustomed to reading and enjoying poetry from a young age. She knew it as a familiar medium for the expression of thoughts and convictions, as well as of insights and emotion. She also learned the proper conventions for the construction of poetry – its differ-

Bradstreet, the son of a Puritan clergyman, and steward of the Countess of Warwick. Bradstreet had almost certainly adopted Calvinist convictions himself at a young age. He had been educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge – at this time known as a “nursery” of Puritanism, so many were the Puritan clergy who were trained there. He became part of the Earl of Lincoln's staff in the early 1620s, meeting Anne as a young child. They met again as plans for the Massachusetts settlement took shape. Their marriage, when Anne was sixteen, would in every way have been a logical and happy arrangement, pleasing to both the couple and their parents. Theirs was

roofed with timber or thatch. Even so, the place became totally overcrowded, and Governor Winthrop and the other settlers quickly realised they should establish their own settlements on completely new land, or in the vicinity of Salem.

A hard life

This they did; and Simon and Anne, and her parents, the Dudleys, joined the group establishing the town that shortly became known as Boston, after its namesake in Lincolnshire. It was a dreadful year in many ways. A large number of the settlers died, of illness and the general hardships experienced in transplantation to the new environment. The old, familiar, civil ways simply could not be kept up – at least at first. Anne wrote in her private memoirs, “I came... into this Country, where I found a new world and new manners, at which my heart rose. But after I was convinced it was the way of God, I submitted to it and joined to the church at Boston.” It was hard to adjust; and her natural response of disgust and dismay (the “rising” of her heart) was understandable. As one of her biographers notes: “... the Puritan's code of good manners was an integral part of his standard of Christian conduct, and for those devout colonists, especially those among them who had been privileged to live gently in England, it must have been disheartening to see the formality of every-day communication, the respect for individual privacy, the quick concern for a troubled neighbour, and the dignity of innate self-possession, too often falter and fail under the weight of outrageous circumstances.”¹

But the young Anne Bradstreet overcame her dismay, did what she could to preserve standards in this new environment, and became a loved and honoured wife and mother. She and Simon had eight children, and most unusually in those days and circumstances, all of them grew up to adulthood. Simon Bradstreet quickly became a leader in the Colony, serving as a permanent member of the Court of Assistants (judging disputes), and once taking the hazardous trip back to England to represent the Colony before Charles II. In his old age he served three years as Governor.

A busy life

Given the education Anne had, it is not surprising that her early poetry was of the formal, classically-modelled style. She wrote a graceful elegy in memory of Sir Philip Sidney, and began work

“It was hard to adjust; and her natural response of disgust and dismay (the “rising” of her heart) was understandable.”

ent meters and rhyming schemes – and read much of the best English poetry of the time, as well as that of the French Huguenot poet, Du Bartas. In all this she received encouragement from her father, who during the course of his life wrote poetry himself.

Reason for a new colony

During the 1620s prominent landowners like the Earl of Lincoln came under pressure from Charles I, who was short of funds and tried to levy a forced loan on them. Quite a number of Puritan-leaning gentry and noblemen, suspicious of the King's attempts to bypass Parliament's authority, refused to loan the sum required. The Earl of Lincoln was among those imprisoned for their refusal; and without doubt this strengthened Thomas Dudley's Puritan convictions. He was among those who began to plan for the establishment of a new colony in America, where Englishmen would be able to worship according to what they believed to be right, free from the harassment of Charles's Archbishop, William Laud. It was thus that the Massachusetts Bay Company had its beginning.

One of the young men assisting in the work of the Company was Simon

to be a very loving marriage, its peace and happiness starkly contrasting the turbulence of their times.

Married and moving

Within two years the young couple were on board the *Arbella*, among the company consisting of John Winthrop, first governor of Massachusetts, and Anne's parents. The *Arbella* was the flagship of a fleet of eleven vessels carrying some 700 colonists across the Atlantic. This was very early days for colonising ventures; and little was known of the needs of such a number of people for such a long – up to twelve weeks – voyage. Everything for the journey, and necessities for establishing life in the New World, had to be carried on the ships. Many became ill during the voyage, and some died; as did some of their valuable livestock.

Arriving in Salem in the early summer of 1630, the weary travellers must have found little to lift their spirits. It was a tiny settlement of some forty dwellings. What had been called “the faire house for the Governor” was four rooms and an attic. The other houses, for leading families, were thatched-roof cabins of two rooms. All others lived in cave-like dugouts burrowed into hillsides and



Simon Bradstreet in his older years

on four series of four connected poems each: *The Four Ages of Man*, *the Four Elements*, *The Four Monarchies* and *The Four Seasons*. These longer poems, in a format familiar in the seventeenth century, are remarkable in that she wrote them in probably the busiest period of a mother's life – when her children were very small. She certainly had servants to help, and her children, as was the norm in her day and circle, went to school for their education. But hers was no ordinary household. Because her husband was active in colonial affairs, there were frequent visitors, and Anne was called on to entertain often. As hostess she was personally involved in dinner-table discussion of political matters; and because her father regularly served as Governor, she was caught up in social occasions related to his service as well. Certainly, this activity was stimulating to her, but it also made for a busy life. The fact is that Anne was able to achieve her remarkable poetic output because she had the full encouragement first of her father, then of her husband. They valued her writing, they were proud of it, and they doubtless made sure she had the necessary time and mental “space” for it.

Most of Anne's best-loved poems were written in her middle years. They were less imitative in style, and exhibit a fresh simplicity that make them especially appealing to later readers. Most concerned domestic subjects, and her best were written to or about her husband and children. Because Simon was frequently away from home on business – and sometimes for long periods – she would write poems and send them to him. One such (and her most often-quoted) is this:

To My Dear and Loving Husband

If ever two were one, then surely we.
 If ever man were lov'd by wife,
 then thee;
 If ever wife were happy in a man,
 Compare with me ye women if you can.
 I prize thy love more than whole
 Mines of gold,
 Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
 My love is such that Rivers cannot
 quench,
 Nor ought but love from thee, give
 recompence.
 Thy love is such that I can no way
 repay,
 The heavens reward thee manifold
 I pray.
 Then while we live, in love lets so
 persever,
 That when we live no more, we
 may live ever.

She also wrote of her children, in a ninety-four line poem - as a mother-bird anxious for the well-being of her eight chicks - all raised in her nest and now mostly flown:

I had eight birds hatcht in one nest,
 Four Cocks there were, and Hens
 the rest,
 I nurst them up with pain and care,
 Nor cost, nor labour did I spare...
 Chief of the brood then took his
 flight,
 To regions far, and left me quite;
 My mournful chirps I after send,
 Till he return, or I do end...

[her oldest, Samuel, had sailed for England to study medicine]

My second bird did take her flight,
 And with her mate flew out of
 sight...

[daughter Dorothy had recently married Seaborn Cotton, who began his pastoral ministry in Connecticut]

Anne spoke in her poetry of her walk with God. Many of her poems deal with spiritual truth; and reflect the Reformed theology she held dear. One such, “The Flesh and the Spirit”, personifies her two natures – flesh and spirit – as two sisters. Here is “Spirit” answering “Flesh's” jibes at her disregard for the things of this world:

Be still thou unregenerate part,
 Disturb no more my settled heart,
 For I have vow'd (and so will doe)
 Thee as a foe, still to pursue.
 And combate with thee will and
 must,
 Until I see thee laid in th' dust.
 Sisters we are, yea twins we be,
 Yet deadly feud 'twixt thee and
 me...

My greatest honour it shall be
 When I am victor over thee,
 And triumph shall, with laurel head,
 When thou my Captive shall be led.

Perhaps most poignant of all are her reflections, echoing Job's, on the loss of her house and all her precious possessions, gathered over thirty-eight years of married life, when they were destroyed by fire in 1666:

I waken'd was with thundering noise
 And piteous shrieks of dreadful noise...

I starting up ye light did spye,
 And to my God my heart did cry
 To Strengthen me in my Distresse
 And not to leave me succourlesse.
 Then coming out beheld a space
 The flame consume my dwelling
 place,
 And when I could no longer look,
 I blest his Name yet gave and took,
 That layd my goods now in ye dust
 Yea so it was, and so 'twas just
 It was his own it was not mine
 Far be it yet I should repine,
 He might of All justly bereft
 But yet sufficient for us left.

Such a woman, living life with such a remarkably loose hold on this world's goods, was surely ready to meet her Saviour in heaven at any time. And it was only six years later, in her sixty-first year, that God did take her home, of what seems to have been a tubercular disease. She was sorely missed by her husband, her children, and the many who loved her dearly. She had run her earthly race with distinction; rejoicing in her domestic calling. Her poetry is her witness.

Notes

- 1 Elizabeth Wade White, *Anne Bradstreet: The Tenth Muse* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1971), p.16

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Bishopdale

Carols in the Park. This coming Friday, we will be having *Carols in the Park*, on the corner of Highsted and Sawyers Arms Roads. Roughly 1,500 flyers will be delivered to the surrounding area inviting people to come along. We will start at 7:30pm and finish by 8:15pm, followed by supper at the church. This is an opportunity for us to share the joy and hope of Christmas with our community. It would be wonderful if the

50th Wedding Anniversary

of

LUURT and INA BOS (Hoving)

On the 6th February 2010

With thanks to the Lord for His goodness in giving us children and grand-children and His faithfulness to us.

Our wedding text was John 14:27a

"I give you peace the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give."

Ety and Nick Willemse
Nicolas, Reuben, Ruth and Benjamin.

Murray Bos

Peter and Nicole Bos
Catherine, Ryan, Jordan, Brodie, Nathaniel.

Janice and Walter van den Engel
Bernardus, Zachary, Grace

**107/4 Admiral Cr. Flagstaff,
Hamilton 3210**

park was packed and if young and old were present. We will not be singing in the mall as in previous years; we are keen to focus our efforts on just a few things and do them as well as possible. So please come if you are able. Let us pray for God's blessing on the evening. If you are able to deliver pamphlets this week, please take one of the stacks in the foyer (with the map). The pamphlets need to be delivered no later than Wednesday afternoon.

Pastoral. Lord willing, Tim Sterne and Natalie Bangma will marry on 9 January 2010. The service will be held at 1:00pm at St Andrews Chapel at St Andrews College.

Pastoral. Nathan Winkelman met with the elders this week and expressed his desire to publicly profess his faith. We were delighted to be able to say "Yes" to his request. Lord willing, Nathan will profess his faith in April.

Hamilton

Pastoral and matters for prayer. On Thursday afternoon around 3pm, the Lord took Bep Mes to Himself. Recently Bep's health had been steadily declining and it is a comfort to know that she died peacefully and is now with her Saviour. Please pray for the family as they grieve. The funeral will take place here at 10.30am on Tuesday morning.

Pastoral and matters for prayer. Congratulations to Johan and Ria Rengelink who celebrate 40 years of marriage this Wednesday and to Hugo & Doortje van Woerden who celebrate 55 years the following Wednesday. We praise God that He has enabled you to remain faithful to the vows you made and so to bear clear witness to Him.

Nelson

FROM SESSION: Session has approved the purchase of new Sunday school material, produced by Great Commission Publications. This material is not cheap but as session we felt the soundness of the material would be of great benefit to our young Children. This material is being used by a number of other Reformed Churches in New Zealand. It does however place a greater burden on our teachers as there will be more preparation required, and also new material to become accustomed to. We

would then urge all parents to assist the teachers by ensuring that the children arrive on time, in order for the teachers to be able to have time to complete the lessons. There will also be some material that the children will take home to work on during the week. We would encourage you to help your children to complete this work as it will reinforce what was learned on Sunday. There will also be an additional Sunday School class and also an additional Catechism class. We would encourage all congregational members to uphold the teachers in your prayers.

92 Year Old Preacher !

While watching a little TV on Sunday instead of going to church, I watched a church in Atlanta honoring one of its senior pastors who had been retired many years. He was 92 at that time and I wondered why the church even bothered to ask the old gentleman to preach at that age. After a warm welcome, introduction of this speaker, and as the applause quieted down, he rose from his high back chair and walked slowly, with great effort and a sliding gait to the podium. Without a note or written paper of any kind he placed both hands on the pulpit to steady himself and then quietly and slowly he began to speak.... "When I was asked to come here today and talk to you, your pastor asked me to tell you what was the greatest lesson ever learned in my 50-odd years of preaching. I thought about it for a few days and boiled it down to just one thing that made the most difference in my life and sustained me through all my trials... The one thing that I could always rely on when tears and heartbreak and pain and fear and sorrow paralyzed me... the only thing that would comfort was this verse..... .."

"Jesus loves me this I know.

For the Bible tells me so.

*Little ones to Him belong,
we are weak but He is strong.....*

Yes, Jesus loves me....

The Bible tells me so."

When he finished, the church was quiet. You actually could hear his foot steps as he shuffled back to his chair. I don't believe I will ever forget it.

A pastor once stated, "I always noticed

that it was the adults who chose the children's hymn 'Jesus Loves Me' (for the children of course) during a hymn sing, and it was the adults who sang the loudest because I could see they knew it the best."

"Senior version of Jesus Loves Me"

Here is a new version just for us who have white hair or no hair at all. For us over middle age (or even those almost there) and all you others, check out this newest version of Jesus Loves Me.

JESUS LOVES ME

*Jesus loves me, this I know,
Though my hair is white as snow
Though my sight is growing dim,
Still He bids me trust in Him.
(CHORUS)*

YES, JESUS LOVES ME.. YES, JESUS LOVES ME..

YES, JESUS LOVES ME, FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO.

*Though my steps are oh, so slow,
With my hand in His I'll go
On through life, let come what may,
He'll be there to lead the way.
(CHORUS)*

*When the nights are dark and long,
In my heart He puts a song..
Telling me in words so clear,
"Have no fear, for I am near."
(CHORUS)*

*When my work on earth is done,
And life's victories have been won.
He will take me home above,
Then I'll understand His love.
(CHORUS)*

*I love Jesus, does He know?
Have I ever told Him so?
Jesus loves to hear me say,
That I love Him every day.
(CHORUS)*

North Shore

Wedding. Lord willing, on Saturday, 12th December at 10.30am, Laurel Flinn will be married to James Kuzner in this church. Laurel grew up in this congregation and is well known to the old-timers among us, so we rejoice in this news and wish Laurel & James the Lord's blessing and much happiness in the years ahead. The wedding will be conducted by the Rev. Michael Flinn. All are invited and to the refreshments afterwards.

Pukekohe

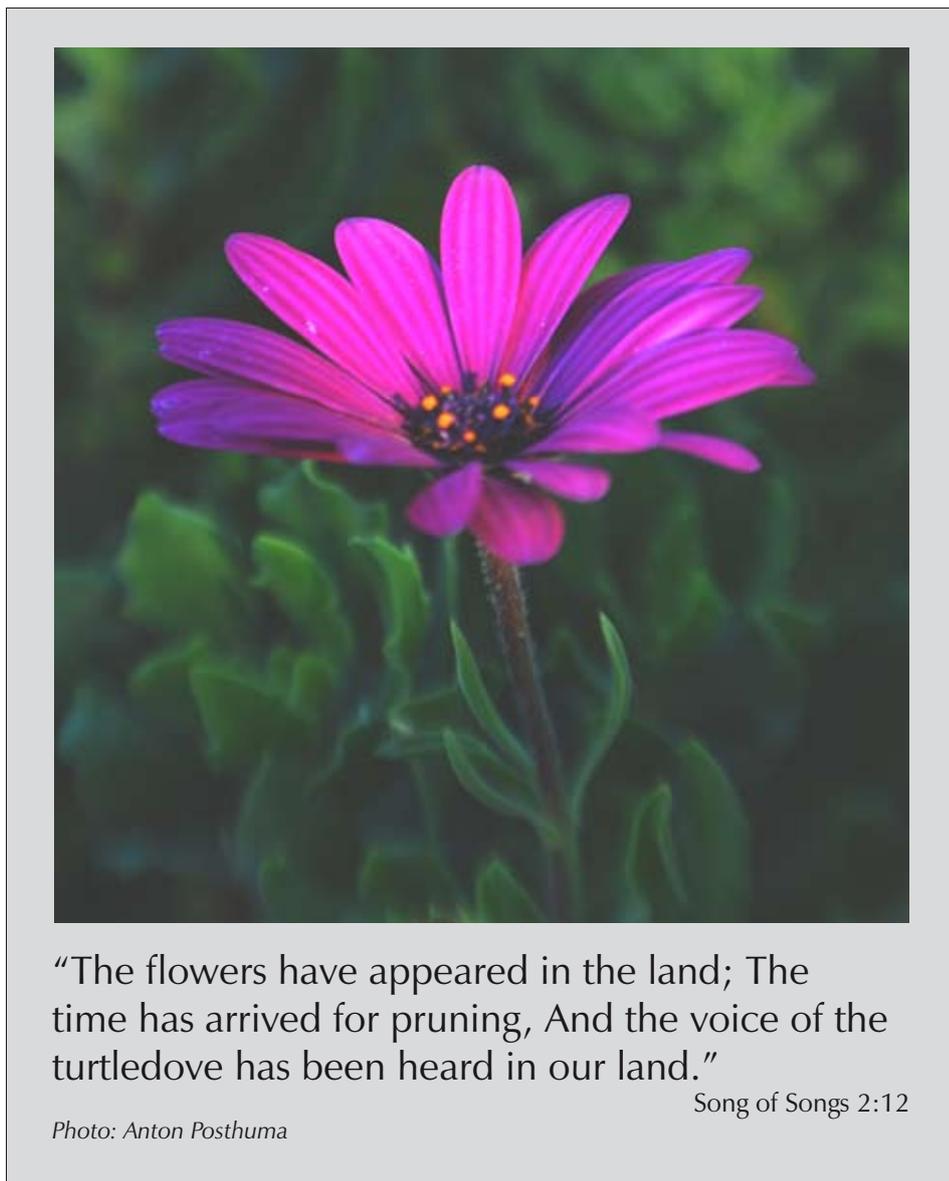
Professions of Faith: Last Tuesday the Pukekohe Session joyfully gave approval to Leah Phillips and Tom Norman to profess their faith and to join the church as communicant members. We are grateful for Leah's response to her Baptism and for the conversion having taken place in Tom's life over the last three years. Their Profession of Faith and Tom's Baptism will take place on Sunday 17th January in the morning service.

Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. We give thanks for the birth of Jake Andre Koster, to Andre and Shaline. We give thanks to the Lord that Jake is doing well, as is Shaline- after some post-natal problems and a blood-transfusion.



Pictured above, the Rev Bruce and Mrs Lois Hoyt. Rev Hoyt was installed as Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Oamaru on Saturday, February 27th.



"The flowers have appeared in the land; The time has arrived for pruning, And the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land."

Song of Songs 2:12

Photo: Anton Posthuma

Missions focus

Janice Reid

Did you know ...

Facebook has more than 300 million active users; more than 65 million of these access the site through their mobile phone¹. Each month, more than 2 billion photos are uploaded to the site ... and each day, more than 8 billion minutes are spent on the site, by members around the world². One worker out of 33 in Singapore built their entire Facebook site during work time, and 60% access Facebook while they are at work³.

Also in Singapore, studies show that 90% of teens report feeling hurt by comments another person made to them online; while 75% report 'bashing' another person online⁴. Singapore is a more 'connected' country than most in Asia, but the more I think about all this, the more it raises questions in my mind about our strategies for outreach in the modern world. And, um ... I don't have any answers ... just questions!

In our Reformed churches, the traditional concept of 'missionary' is a person who goes to another country and physically, verbally, preaches the Gospel. But in those other countries, an

increasing number of people are living in contexts where they have no occasion to encounter that missionary. So how do we reach out to them?

Trust in God's sovereignty, you may be saying. True enough. He is the One Who alone changes hearts, Who brings people from darkness into light, and into a saving knowledge of His grace. But He has also sent *us* into all the world on His behalf, in His Name, to share the Good News of Christ (Matt 28:18-20). And to me, that implies two things: first, that we have to go (not stay still, either physically or in thought or strategy) ... and second, where we have to go is where 'the world' is (those who don't know Him). And where are they? They're on Facebook. And Twitter. And YouTube. The list goes on

AC Nielsen report that social networking in developed nations is up some 82%, with the United States ranking first (over Japan) by more than a million users. Average time per person in the U.S. using social networking media, was over 6 hours per session⁵. 51% of teens who use social networking media check their sites more than once a day; 22 percent check their sites more than ten times a day. Twenty-five percent have created a profile with a false identify; 24% have hacked into somebody else's social networking account, and 13% have

posted nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves or others online⁶.

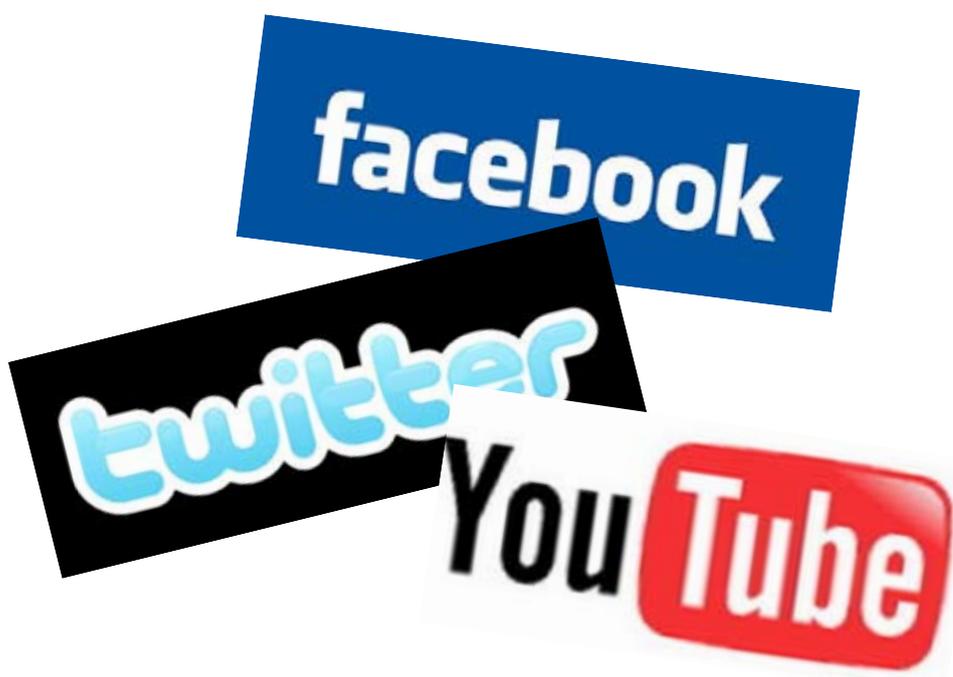
A Kaiser Generation survey of children in the US aged between 8 and 18 indicates that media use on a typical day is up from 6 hours, 19 minutes in 1999 to 7:38 in 2009, with almost four and a half hours of this time spent in front of the television.

Does this make you worry for the youth of western society? Well go ahead: worry. But worry for adults, too; we watch even more television than teenagers. *The New York Times*, on November 16, 2009, reported that young people aged 18-34 watched an average of 3:30 hours of television each day, whereas Americans aged 65+ watched an average of 6:41 hours per day.

Yes, these figures are from America. But that country is often regarded as a model, or ideal, for others to follow. And admit it ... toys are fun to play with! If we enjoy our 'virtual age' toys, then so do people in developing nations (when they can afford it). So, how do we connect with such people? How do we bring the Gospel of Jesus into their worlds?

Radio continues to play a large part in all of this. According to one research organisation, "Radio is the top source of music consumption for 16% of teens globally and the secondary source for another 21%"⁷. Music draws them, and music keeps them listening. But in between the music there's a world of opportunity for short, recorded drop-ins or personal comments, things that won't be so b-o-r-i-n-g they tune out and go to another station ... things that open their eyes to the possibility that something else exists; another reality that truly is soul-satisfying.

And allied with radio, other technologies can work to bring us into contact with those who need to hear the Word. In South-East Asia, over 80% of radio listener response is by text message⁸. Non-literates are subscribing to cellphone technology at an extraordinary rate. Many of them can text⁹. So how can we use mobile phone technology to extend the reach of the Message? In Ghana they're sending daily devotional text messages all across the country (not to every phone ... that would be junk mail! Only



to those who subscribe). In Thailand, HCJB is hoping to use downloads to mobile phones to help people learn English ... and through the programme content, to bring the Word to many who would not otherwise have any contact with Christians.

And then there's the internet. Arabic websites that ask people to consider Jesus are averaging around a million hits per month¹⁰. That's pretty impressive! But what other technologies can we use to spread the Gospel message? And who will do it? And how can they join together with others to learn and practice strategically-sound outreach that will draw people in, not push them away? And with such indirect means of outreach, how direct should we be?

So as you can see ... I have lots of questions. I don't actually like fiddling around with the internet, surfing pages endlessly, waiting for boring or irrelevant YouTube videos to download. And learning new software is a pain. But for thousands – millions – of people in the world who have no other contact with believers, these burgeoning new technologies are captivating, to the extent that they spend all their free time with their electronic toys and never get near any traditional missionaries or national believers who can speak Truth to them. Yet those same toys can put them right in the path of those who are thinking strategically, and using the tools God has made available to us (the same way we used printing when that was first invented!) to get the Word out, to show people the Way. Whether they set foot on the path is between the Lord and them. But us? We're still called to go.

Notes

- 1 Singapore *Straits Times*, Wednesday December 30, 2009. pp.12-13.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Digital Media. <http://www.digital-media.net.au/article/time-spent-social-networking-up-82/509915.aspx>
- 6 San Francisco Chronicle. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/08/10/MN9T1954T7.DTL#ixzz0NndVVmO4>
- 7 Econsultancy Digital Marketers United. <http://econsultancy.com/blog/4098-teens-media-and-why-you-shouldn-t-believe-the-hype>
- 8 Jim Allen, HCJB Global VP, personal comm, January 2010.
- 9 Phill Butler, video: *Proliferation of media; integration for ministry*, viewed January 2010.
- 10 Ibid.

WELLINGTON LADIES PRESBYTERIAL

SATURDAY, 20 MARCH 2010, DV

at the Silverstream Reformed Church

Guest Speaker: Pastor Andre Holtslag

Please mark your calendars!

You are invited to the

16th Hamilton Easter Convention

2nd-3rd April 2010

Theme:

Deep workers in a Shallow World

Speaker:

REV. SIMON MANCHESTER

Convention Venue:

Hamilton Reformed Church
9 Aberdeen Drive
Dinsdale, Hamilton

Meeting Times:

Fri 3.00 & 7.00 pm
Sat 10.00 & 11.15 am, 2.00 pm
(Please note the slightly different times for the Saturday talks)

A bookstall will operate
on Friday and Saturday

A crèche will not be available

Convention addresses:

Friday

3.00pm Triumph and Trouble
(2 Corinthians 2:12-3:18)

7.00pm We do not lose heart
(2 Corinthians 4:1-18))

Saturday

10.00am Resurrection and Reconciliation
(2 Corinthians 5:1-21))

11.15am A Deep Worker in a Shallow World –
Charles Simeon (1759-1836)

2.00pm Behind the Scenes
(2 Corinthians 6-7:4)

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.

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. There is a small charge for the meals.



REV. SIMON MANCHESTER is the senior minister at St Thomas' Anglican Church North Sydney where he has served for twenty years. He is married to Kathy and they have three children in their mid and late twenties.

He was a school teacher before studying at Moore Theological College and trained at Wollongong and London before taking up his first church in Sydney.

He was chaplain for the North Sydney Rugby League Bears for seven seasons and also ran the ministry to the North Sydney business community for ten years.

He has been privileged to speak at various conventions in Australia (including Katoomba conventions) and in the UK (including the London Men's Convention and the Evangelical Ministers' Assemblies).

He also speaks weekly on Sydney radio. His aim is to listen to Scripture till its meaning and implications are clear and then speak to interest the visitor as well as the long-timer — engaging the professor and the plumber.

This is — he's ashamed to say — his first visit to New Zealand!

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

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

Inquiries

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Greetings from the USA

For those of you who read and remembered last years Faith in Focus introducing us, any new introductions are unnecessary. However, for those who do not, let us introduce ourselves. We are Erik and Georgina Stolte, members of the Reformed Church of Masterton. We came to the USA in 2008, with our six children, so that Erik could study at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. We are now half way through our stay, having been here for one and a half years.

Over the past year we have had many experiences of the Lord's dealings with us. Throughout the transition and stay the Lord has upheld and been good to us. His love has been our constant guide through difficult times but also through the joyful times. His care is the anchor of not only our souls, but our whole life, as we seek to live for His glory and follow His will.

The greatest highlight of this past year would have to be the birth of our seventh child, Emmaleigh Geraldine. We were here but for a short time and realised we had taken a little 'stow-away' with us. When we first found out that Georgina was pregnant we spent many hours in anxiety wondering

how this was all going to work out. We had heard many 'scary' stories about the American health system, so we really didn't know what to expect. With much prayer, fellow believers, and very helpful people in the medical system, the Lord allowed all things to fall into place, enabling Emmaleigh to be born in a local hospital on April 13th. As many of you have no doubt experienced, it is during those days of difficult decisions and trials that we learn so much about the Lord and his wonderful care and love for us. Hence, through this experience, we not only have the joy of our 'little American', but also having grown in our walk with Him.

At the end of May we were involved in a summer assignment (a 'mini vicariate') which lasted 10 weeks. Emmaleigh had just been born and another move would have been a bit stressful on the whole family, so we were very thankful that a local church was willing to have us over this period. On this assignment, Erik had to lead worship at least once a Sunday, as well as do pastoral calls and any other pastorally related work. It was a great time of learning, both spiritually and mentally in the demands needed for the pastorate.

Throughout the year we have been blessed with visitors from New Zealand. Some of Georgina's sisters have been (all on the way through to Europe) as

well as Georgina's mum soon after the birth of Emmaleigh. Erik's parents, sister, and brothers also came for a visit on their way through to the Netherlands. These times have been real blessings, especially for the children, who have thoroughly enjoyed their grandparents, aunts and uncles coming over.

Having completed one and a half years of study has also been an experience. God has been gracious giving Erik much needed grace to be able to complete the studies thus far. The study of both God's Word, preaching, history, doctrine and life in the Lord, has been challenging and stimulating. Not only has he learned so much, but has also come to the realisation that there is much more to learn. By the time the 3 years of study are over he will barely have plumed the depths of what needs to be learned.

Being half-way is also a nice feeling because the end is in sight. We very much look forward to coming back to our native land and being able to serve the Lord in whatever capacity he has in store for us. This is not to say that we are not enjoying our time while we are here. We have seen some of this vast country as well as enjoy some of the American life and traditions. We've enjoyed learning about American farming, the Amish, native wildlife, Thanksgiving, downtown Chicago and much more.

We have also been blessed by God's people in America. The people in the local churches have been extremely loving, open and going out of their way to make us feel welcome and at home. Once one is in God's family, it makes no difference in what nation you come; once you connect with God's people, you are among family. This has been our experience and we trust that this has been the experience for all of you who have been overseas and fellowshipped with God's people.

We continue to thank-you for your prayers and support. May God continue to bless you in our churches as we seek to be God's light in our country!

In Christ's Service
Erik and Georgina,
Juliette, Johanna, Jacob,
Rebekkah, Georgia, Phillip
and Emmaleigh Stolte.

