

faith in **focus**

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“And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.”

2 Corinthians
8:1-3

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Editorial

Have you ever found in your life that the Lord brought a number of seemingly unrelated things together to bring home a specific point? I found something similar as I was working on this issue. The articles and letters in my folder for May appeared to be somewhat of an eclectic mix. They didn't appear to have any connection. But as I looked deeper, and as you will discover too, there was quite a surprise!

But then maybe I shouldn't be so taken aback. They are all about the gospel after all – whether pointing us to it in the first place or back to it. I mean, wouldn't you expect that to be the case in a Christian magazine? There must be Christ at centre or else it fails to be biblical. Sadly, however, many of these magazines, and much of so-called Christian literature and ministry today, believe being Christian is a Christian-centred business and not Christ-centred. So there is a marketing going on because for them it is about what sells. Rather than bringing us the scriptural teaching that disciples are witnesses they promote the idea that disciples are marketers.

Mark Gall in a recent *Christianity Today* noted, *Should it surprise us that in this era, pastors increasingly think of themselves as "managers", "leaders" and "CEOs" of "dynamic and growing congregations", rather than as shepherds, teachers, and servants of people who need to know God? And that preaching has become less an exposition of the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection and more often practical lessons that offer a lot of "take-away value", presented in an efficient, friendly manner, as if we were selling cheeseburgers, fries, and a shake?"*

I am thankful for the articles in this issue which challenge this – whether through going back to past historical eras in church history or dealing with very present situations. Let's be very aware of the devil's attacks. That's why we must fully fit on the armour of God to meet those attacks and win over Satan in the name of the Lord.

*To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder,
a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who will share
in the glory that is to be revealed:
Be shepherds of God's flock that is under you,
serving as overseers – not because you must,
but because you are willing, as God wants you to be;
not greedy for money, but willing to serve;
not lording it over those entrusted to you,
but being examples to the flock.
And when the Chief Shepherd appears,
You will receive the crown of glory that never passes away.
1 Peter 5:1-4*

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Cover – Tombstone of Maori Chief outside the oldest continuous church in New Zealand, in Russell, Bay of Islands.

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.

Don't be 'Jewish' with the Gospel

"Sir, we would see Jesus"

John Zuidema

Many years ago, my Sunday School teacher explained the meaning of the word 'gospel'. She simply said it means 'Good News'. Now I could go into the Greek meaning of this word and its makeup, however, I think my Sunday School teacher's definition will suffice for the purpose of this article.

Now of course that leads to another question, 'What is this 'Good News?' Again, returning to my Sunday School teacher, she answered by reading John 3:16; 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have eternal life'. Again, and hopefully you will agree with me, that's a pretty good definition of the good news.

Using Jesus' name doesn't mean it's Gospel

So why write this article? Well, let me share a concern that I have with the church in general today, and particularly with those who have been given the charge to bring the "good news" of Jesus' coming to the people. My concern is simply this: often I don't hear the Gospel at all and at other times there is a 'Jewish' spin attached!

Allow me to explain. Sometimes I don't hear the good news that God sent His Son to save sinners! Instead I hear a 'talk' or a 'lecture' or some 'nice words' about how to be a better Christian, or a better 'prayer', or to be a more compassionate and loving person, or that I have to do more missions, or even a topical sermon about how God is omniscient or omnipresent. But I don't hear the Gospel.

At other times I think I hear the Gospel but there is a 'Jewish' spin added. It's not that the name of Jesus isn't mentioned, it is. There is often a liberal sprinkling of Jesus' name throughout the sermon, but that doesn't make it a Gospel-centred message. In fact, some of them believe that praying more, or showing more compassion to the down-and-outs or loving my fellow brother or sister more, or feeding the hungry more or visiting those in prison more, or clothing the naked, or even doing missions more, as much as that is the present flavour of the day, is the gospel! But it isn't. All these things are what I call

'Jewish' spin and have nothing to do with the salvation of sinners.

Now, I do not think for a moment that the leaders of worship are deliberately trying to mislead God's people or intentionally placing another yoke on their shoulders. But that is exactly what they are doing by putting this 'Jewish' spin in their sermons. I would agree that to pray more and love more and show more compassion and be more mission-minded has much to do with the outworking of the gospel, but all these things just mentioned are not the Gospel!

The bottom line

Rather, the Gospel, or if you prefer to go with my Sunday School teacher's definition, the good news, is that God sent His Son, that whosoever believes in Him may be assured that their sins are forgiven and they have eternal life to the glory of God! Now does that sound too simplistic? I hope it does, for that is the bottom line of sound Gospel preaching! You don't have to be a rocket scientist to work it out. Allow me to repeat, 'The good news is that God sent His Son, that whoever believes in Him may be assured that their sins are forgiven and they have eternal life to the glory of God!'

Sadly, far too often I hear sermons where a devout Jew or for that matter a devout Muslim or Buddhist would feel

perfectly comfortable, and that is a tragedy. A devout Jew would be pleased to hear a Christian minister of the gospel tell his people they should pray more. A devout Muslim would be pleased to hear a Christian minister say that God is everywhere! A devout Buddhist would be pleased to hear a Christian minister say that they should love their neighbour more! And as important all these things are, it is not the Gospel that we are called to preach! We can pray 24/7; do missions 24/7; love our neighbour 24/7; but none of those things will save any sinner, nor a Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist, or anyone you wish to add.

In fact, all we are doing by emphasising this horizontal message is replacing the yoke that the Jews in Jesus' day had placed upon God's people with a different yoke. The Pharisees' yoke, one of absolute obedience to the laws of circumcision, feast days, and dietary customs of 2000 years ago, is now replaced by a moral yoke that is equally burdening and equally damning to God's people. It does not save and therefore, it is not the good news! In fact, it's all bad news; for it not only is a false teaching and not God's saving word, it robs God's people of the joy and freedom they have in Christ — and therefore it robs God of His glory!

The Apostle Paul addresses this issue when writing to the churches in Galatia. He



writes in Gal 1:9; 'If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than the one you accepted [i.e. Salvation in Christ alone!] let him be eternally condemned.' When writing to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul 'resolved to know nothing while he was amongst them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' Let's have the same resolve about the glorious Gospel.

Surely, God receives the greater glory when people hear the good news about his Son's dying and rising from the dead for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. And in response, let's do all those other things previously mentioned from a heart that is overflowing with thankfulness.

What changed?

This is why I ask, what has caused this shift in emphasis? There are probably many reasons. We live in a culture where people don't like hearing that they are sinners who need to be saved. We live in a church culture where messages are largely horizontal and the vertical is left alone, for it is no longer palatable. However, I suggest that perhaps the main reason for the shift in emphasis is that we come to Scripture with the wrong questions. We come to Scripture asking, 'What can we learn from this passage?' Or, 'What application can we derive from this passage for God's people?'

Now, I don't wish to say for a moment that application isn't important. We certainly don't want the dry dust of orthodox theology coming from our pulpits. However, may I suggest a different approach when we come to Scripture. Let's ask a different question when we come to a passage that we hope to expound, especially by those whose specific charge is to bring the glorious good news of Christ. Let's ask, 'How does this passage magnify my Saviour God?' Or, 'How will this passage help God's redeemed people to glorify God?'

I dare say when we come prayerfully to Scripture with these questions, then God-honouring application will follow. Then the Gospel will again be 'good news' and God's people will be encouraged and filled with joy and will delight in their Saviour God and then He will receive the glory! Then they will not be burdened with some moral yoke that Jesus never intended.

When the Gospel is proclaimed, converted hearts are filled with great thankfulness and will seek to be obedient to the Saviour's call. Then we will feed the hungry, and look after the prisoner and clothe the naked and do missions.

In fact it will be so automatic, and we will do them so gladly that we won't even realise that we have done them (See Mat 25:37-40).

What to pray for the church

So my prayer for the church is three-fold:

First, that those who have been given the express charge to bring the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, may do so in such a way that God's people may delight more and more in their Saviour God and the wonderful completed work of salvation. May God's people rejoice in it, and may their hearts be filled with joy when they leave the worship service. And if the Lord so wills it, may the devout Jew, Muslim or Buddhist, or any other unconverted person feel uncomfortable as they hear the good news of Jesus' coming, dying and resurrection as the only way of salvation.

Second, may we not be guilty of putting a 'Jewish' spin on the Gospel, as if we still have to do something to be saved? And if we have been guilty of that in the past, may the Lord forgive us and change us.

Third, as God's redeemed people, listening in the pew each week, expect to hear the good news of God's saving

work in Christ alone again and again. You have the right. And if your worship leader is inclined to add a 'Jewish' spin to that glorious completed work of Christ, than do what the Apostle Paul did and others: 'do not give into them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you' [Gal 2:5].

The one thing the Apostle Paul was so concerned about when he wrote to the churches in Galatia was these people who said salvation is found in Christ — plus the Jewish laws pertaining to circumcision, feast day observance and dietary rules. In fact Paul was so angry with these people who said that Jesus saves, plus all these additional things, that he 'wished they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves' [Gal 5:12].

In closing, pray for your worship leader that he may be faithful to his charge to preach the good news that salvation is found in Christ alone, and may none of us be tempted to add a 'Jewish' spin.

The Rev. John Zuidema is the minister of the Christian Reformed Church of Dee Why, Australia. He was previously the minister of our Foxtton congregation.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I was disheartened to read your editorial in the February issue of the Faith in Focus. We must be careful not to judge other Christians for their specks whilst ignoring our logs.

Jesus' mission was to preach good news to the poor, free the oppressed and imprisoned, and to bring healing to the sick. John Smith, Tony Campolo and Bono seek to take this mission seriously and yet we highlight their shortcomings. Why? Do we think we compare well to them?

We must not write off as the 'social gospel' seeking the welfare of the communities around us, especially those people who are downtrodden in our society (homeless, prostitutes, beneficiaries...). Yes, we need to verbalise the good news alongside our actions, but the Scriptures clearly teach that our actions are important. James characterises true religion in the sight of God in this way: 'to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself

from being polluted by the world!'

It is true that the Bible speaks about the sin of homosexuality and the role of women in church - we do well to heed these instructions and not ignore them. But neither should we ignore the many exhortations in the epistles, the warnings of the prophets, sayings of the wise and instructions in the Law and most importantly Jesus' example of loving the outcasts, poor, sick and oppressed.

Sin against man, who is the image of God, is sin against God Himself. Proverbs 14:31 warns, 'He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.'

As churches we must be diligent not only to *protect* the truth, but also to *share* the truth - through and alongside deeds of love and compassion to those who are most in need of God's transforming love.

*Kind Regards,
Lynton Baird*

Response to Br Baird's letter

Editor's Note: As I wrote the original article Lynton responds to I thought it appropriate to invite the Rev. Archbald, as one of the theological editorial committee, to reply to this important matter.

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to Br. Lynton Baird's letter regarding the "Social Gospel." Firstly, the Social Gospel of which the editor warned is not to be confused with the church's ministry to the needy. The Social Gospel is actually a *philosophy* that perverts the true Gospel. Historically, it arose in connection with Liberalism. It involved the idea that one could bring in the Kingdom of God by social action. Social action was emphasized because Liberals did not believe in an inerrant, absolutely true, written Word of God. Without such a Word one could not emphasize doctrines that must be believed. The point Rev. Bajema was making, I believe, was that churches that lose their interest in doctrine tend to follow a similar pathway and gravitate towards social action - at the expense of doctrine.

Unfortunately, Br. Baird also seems to play down the importance of Biblical doctrine/ethics. He does acknowledge that issues such as tolerance of homosexuality and women in office are worthy of some attention. But he says this in the

context of warning about judging others for their "specks" and highlighting their shortcomings. He implies that our ignoring of the needy is a "log" compared to these "specks."

In response to that, I would first ask if Br. Baird is aware of our care for the needy through the local diaconate, the National Diaconate and the kindness of our individual members? I have found our people very caring. However, they do not boast about it, so much of this care goes unnoticed. I certainly would not want to judge them as having a "log" in their eyes on this point. Of course, we can always do more. There is no harm in reminding us of that!

The other point I wanted to make is that we must be careful about our priorities. Helping the needy is indeed an important fruit of the Gospel and a Christian duty. But it is not the only one. Nor does it occupy the prime place in Scripture, despite what Br. Baird says. The church's main mandate, its Great Commission, is not to care for the poor as such, but to "disciple." Discipling means reaching those who are not yet disciples, and nurturing those who already are. The lost are reached by proclaiming the Gospel, and disciples are nurtured by instruction and training in the Scripture. To be sure, the proclamation of Word should be backed up by deed, and the instruction of disciples should include Biblical ethics summed up by love of God and of neighbour. But the nurturing of disciples also includes discipline and the

refutation of error. Warning of a philanthropist's errors regarding homosexuality and so on, is not picking out "specks." It is obedience to a mandate from the Lord - a mandate crucial in "discipling," the church's chief mandate.

We find plenty of evidence in Scripture that care for the poor-in-general is also an important mandate, but not the only one and not the chief one. For example, Gal. 6:10 teaches that we are to do good to all men, but *especially to those of the household of faith*. The vast bulk of the comments and commands about the poor, the prisoners, the blind and so on, are set in the context of the needy within the household of faith, the *covenant-poor*. So are most the Lord Jesus' acts of mercy. The pronouncement of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor" is also about the Gospel of salvation to the poor in spirit, the afflicted faithful of the covenant. Similarly, in Matt. 26:11 we find the Lord indicating a higher priority than care for the poor and needy - showing honour to Him. "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."

To sum up our priorities: first, honouring and worshipping Christ/God. Second, discipling. Discipling includes evangelism and the training of disciples. In evangelism, proclamation of the Word comes first, then it is backed by deeds of mercy. Training of disciples includes teaching ethics and administering discipline. In all our doing of good, we must give a priority to the household of faith.

The Scoop'a on NOOMA

Part 1

Greg Gilbert

Here's the scoop on the Rob Bell video series storming through youth rooms and sermon series across the country.

This February, Zondervan Publishers released the nineteenth in a series of videos called NOOMA. No series gets to the *nineteenth* installment unless it is extraordinarily successful, and the NOOMA videos are surely that. In churches and youth groups across the country, they have become something of a phenomenon.

All ten to fourteen minutes in length,

the NOOMA videos feature Rob Bell, pastor of Michigan's Mars Hill Church, one of the fastest-growing churches in America, and a leader in the 'emergent church.' From a production standpoint, the NOOMA videos are excellent. Exceedingly cool staging, great music, understated but engaging drama, and an easy but earnest style from Bell make them undeniably compelling.

But it isn't just technical merit that has catapulted the NOOMA videos to such popularity. Nor is

it simply Bell's natural ability to communicate and tell a story, though that may be part of it. At the end of the day, people are watching these videos because they believe Rob Bell is teaching them about Christianity and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In parts two and three of my review, I'll make some comments on each of the videos, and then comment at length on some of the most theologically important ones. But here in part 1, I want to give you the



NOOMA's author
- Rob Bell.

gist. Watching eighteen of these videos in quick succession gives one a good idea of what Bell and NOOMA are trying to communicate overall. And, popularity aside, the result is not particularly encouraging. I have reviewed some of Rob Bell's work on this site already, and the weaknesses in his understanding of the Gospel noted in those reviews trouble these NOOMA videos as well.

Giving credit where it's due

First, though, we should give credit where it's due: Bell is an extraordinarily gifted communicator. The NOOMA marketing campaign bills him as a 'storyteller,' and that is a spot-on characterisation. But he's not merely a storyteller. He teaches too, and in a way that is far from boring. There's a reason people fill up stadiums across the nation to hear him speak.

On top of that, the videos are pitch-perfect in their production, from camera angles to music to lighting. Part of their appeal is the way the content is woven together with the setting. In one video or another, Bell speaks to his audience from a park bench, a diner booth, an airport waiting area, a concert hall, his own living room — you name it. Every now and then he has to pause for the environment to intrude — a waitress brings coffee, a large group walks for an uncomfortably long time in between him and the camera, a plane screams as it takes off. I'm sure every second of that is scripted, but it's effective scripting. It makes you want to shoo the large group out of the way so you can hear what Bell has to say next.

Sunday school with a dose of cool

Maybe the first thing you'll notice beyond their technical excellence is that the

NOOMA videos are not highly theological. Every now and again, there is one that delves into something that approaches theology proper, but on the whole the messages are relatively simple — Sunday School lessons with an extra dose of cool. There's a video on how to deal with an anger problem; another expounding on the true meaning of sex; another explaining that God wants our hearts and not just our religion; another telling us why God doesn't always give us everything we ask for; another explaining that grief over a loved one's death is not wrong and should point us to hope in God's plan to restore the world.

All this is fine, and will no doubt be helpful to many people.

Preaching the Gospel

But Bell intends to do something more in NOOMA than provide 'life lessons.' He intends to preach the Gospel. In fact, he says so repeatedly, with statements that run something like, 'That's the Gospel, that's the good news that Jesus brought us.' And that's where these videos become more significant than cool youth Sunday School lessons. They become dangerous.

The Gospel as Bell communicates it in NOOMA runs something like this: All of us are broken, sinful, selfish, and prideful people. We carry around the baggage of our hurts, our resentments, and our jealousies. As a result we are just a shell of the kind of people God intends us to be. But our God is a loving God who accepts us and loves us just as we are. He can comfort us, heal us, and make us whole, real, authentic, living, laughing people. Not only that, but Jesus came to show us how to live revolutionary lives of love, compassion, and acceptance. By learning

from his teachings and following him, we can live the full and complete lives that God intended.

And that's about it. That's not just the introduction that leads to an explanation of the cross, atonement, the resurrection and salvation, either. So far, at least, that's what NOOMA holds out as 'The Gospel.' Full stop.

The Cross? The Resurrection?

In the videos I watched, there's almost no exposition of the cross. I only remember it being mentioned twice, once to say that Caesar killed Jesus and once when Bell says, 'The cross is like God saying, 'I don't hold your past against you.' Well, kind of. But that hardly exhausts the meaning of the cross, does it? At the very least, he ought to have continued that sentence by saying something like, 'I don't hold your past against you, because I held it against my Son.' But then I suppose that sort of uncomfortable thought would have destroyed the smoothness of the presentation.

Even the resurrection — which usually plays an enormous role in Emergent theology — doesn't get much emphasis here. NOOMA is all about 'Jesus' teachings,' but only a select few of those. You won't hear Bell talking about the teachings of Jesus that focus on ransom, blood, new covenants, and rebirth — much less judgment, sheep and goats, and 'Depart from me.' For Bell, Jesus' teachings are apparently limited to his ethics, and Bell's gospel is evidently limited to a call for people to embrace those ethics and "live like Jesus."

I have a theory about why Emergent church types seem to be able to communicate so well with 'our generation,' why they're able to relate so well to people who have always been hostile to the Gospel. You can chalk it up to some kind of 'authentic' style if you want, but I'd contend that a big part of their ability to communicate the Gospel without offence to people who have always been offended by it is that they leave out all the offensive parts!

Hey Rob, try this

There's no denying that Rob Bell is a tremendous natural speaker and communicator. He's good at telling stories, using his face to emphasise a point and his eyes to arrest your attention. But before we get too far with the infatuation, somebody should point out that it's actually relatively easy to 'connect' with the world when you're talking about handling anger, or the true meaning



of sex, or how closely God holds you to his chest when you're facing a storm in life, or how disgusted God must be with that guy preaching the sermon about hell.

The harder thing — and the thing that would really test Bell's mettle as a communicator — would be to make a NOOMA video about substitutionary atonement, for example. Not one that re-thinks it and re-casts it for a generation that doesn't like that kind of thing, but one that addresses 'He was crushed for our iniquities' with the same unflinching 'honesty' and 'authenticity' as it addresses 'Love one another.' Would that instalment of NOOMA be received with the same enthusiasm the others have enjoyed? What if he made one about the final judgment, and the fact that 'No one comes to the Father but by me?' How well would that be received among the audience Bell has built?

I don't think every ten-minute video needs to contain a crash course in systematic or biblical theology. Christian life and doctrine is a vast and rich universe of truth, and if Rob Bell wants to do ten minutes on sex, ten on anger, ten on this or that, that's obviously fine. It's always easy to say by way of critique, 'That ten minutes should have said more than it

did.' So that's not where I see a problem with NOOMA.

The problem is that in the videos which aim to present the Christian gospel, the gospel presented is woefully incomplete if not outright wrong in places (which we'll discuss at more length in the second part of this series). Yes, there's sin and even grace in NOOMA; God loves us as we are, with all our junk, as Bell puts it. But beyond that there's little to no cross or resurrection, no atonement, no substitution. Once we're told that God accepts us as we are, all that follows is a call to live as Jesus lived in order to make the world a better place — which if it weren't so hip would just be called 'moralism,' or even 'Pelagianism.'

What's missing; what's needed

I have said in several places on this site that there is much about the Emergent theological storyline that I find compelling. Who wouldn't be excited by the idea of God's people — broken, sinful people accepted by him just as they are — living and working to diffuse God's grace and love throughout the whole of society? So far as it goes, that's a great and biblical vision, and there's a reason it resonates with people. But, in my opinion, where

the Emergent church and these videos go wrong is in telling the world that *that ... is ...* the Gospel.

It's not. Good as that storyline might be, it is finally too small and too colourless. For God to lovingly accept us as we are no matter how ashamed we might be of ourselves is nice and all, but it's a pretty pale grey compared to the Bible's story of a just and loving God sending his Son to take the punishment of a rebellious people so they can live with and for him forever.

If you want to engage a 'new generation' looking for authenticity, honest answers, and a willingness to look unflinchingly at human sin and suffering, that's the Gospel that will do it. Unfortunately, that's also the Gospel that these NOOMA videos, at least so far, seem unwilling to talk about.

In addition to being the official reviewer extraordinaire at 9Marks, Greg Gilbert is the director of research for the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and an elder at Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, United States of America.

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The Council of Chalcedon

Andre Holtslag

Introduction

One of the most concise confessional formulations that address the doctrine concerning the Person of Jesus Christ is found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Q21: Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A21: The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever.

This article, in and of itself, would have been the subject of much discussion during the assembly of the Divines that gathered at Westminster Abbey in 1643. Just as with all the articles of the Catechisms and the

Confession of Faith, the precise wording of this Question and Answer would have received the exacting scrutiny given to all of its work by this gathering.

And yet, the assembled divines had a distinct advantage over another assembly that also gathered to discuss the doctrine of the Person of Jesus. The Westminster discussion was able to draw on the doctrinal formulations of the Council of Chalcedon held in A.D. 451. Although Chalcedon too built upon the reflections, thoughts, and formulations of previous church councils, this council, by virtue of its ecumenical nature, by virtue of its comprehensive declaration on the subject, and by virtue of its faithfulness to the teaching of Holy Scripture, concretized the orthodox understanding of the Person of Christ.

What then, were the events and the theological controversies that led up to

the Council of Chalcedon? Who were the people that occasioned the need for the Council of Chalcedon? For the answers to these questions, we will turn firstly to look at the time between the Council of Nicea and the Council of Chalcedon, secondly, to look at the Council of Chalcedon itself, and thirdly, to look at the immediate and lasting effects of the Council of Chalcedon.

Nicea

Putting oneself at the risk of being charged with over simplification, we may say that the Council of Nicea held in A.D. 325 resolved the controversy about the divinity of Christ. This ecumenical council refuted the claims of the Arian party 'by affirming that Jesus was *homoousios* ('one in being' or 'of one substance') with the Father.'¹ The charge of over simplification may arise in consideration of the fact that the creedal

statement adopted by this council did not end the dispute about the divinity of Jesus, nor did it provide the church with the fullest expression of creedal declaration on the subject. Those distinctions belong more properly to the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381.

Constantinople

Part of the reason for this qualified assessment of Nicea arises from the fact that it was dealing with concepts, words, doctrines, and phrases that the church was endeavouring to concretise for the first time. Added to these explicit concerns, 'implicitly, without their fully adverting to what they were about, they paved the way for the

the divine and human natures of Christ⁵, amongst other things. Over fifty years had passed since Nicea, and this meant that time had allowed the words employed by the assembled delegates to have an explicitly understood meaning; a type of shared theological substantiality. As Constantinople reflected on the Nicene orthodoxy, it developed a creed that is still in widespread use by the Christian church today.

Nestorius and Eutyches

The time between Constantinople and Chalcedon is perhaps best introduced with this summary quote from Philip Schaaf in his great work – *The Creeds of Christendom*.

While the first Council of Nicea had

human. The question that now confronted the church was, how do these two natures relate towards one another? 'What is the relation between these two natures? Do they represent separate persons or agencies? Or have they been fused together to produce a *tertium quid*, neither human nor divine?'⁷ It was exactly these types of questions that first, Nestorius, and then, Eutyches, sought to answer.

Nestorius was appointed Bishop of Constantinople in A.D. 428. He saw himself 'as a defender of the deity of Christ against its Arian detractors and Apollinarian corrupters.'⁸ He took up this defense, initially, by opposing the application of the term *Theotokos* to the Virgin Mary. In line with his Antiochene theology, he opposed the term in the sense of 'Mother of God,' believing it inconceivable to suggest that the creature bore the Creator. He declared instead that 'the Holy Ghost conceived not the Logos, but formed for him, out of the virgin, a temple which he might inhabit.'⁹

Against Arius and Apollinaris, Nestorius was right in perceiving that Christ properly possessed two natures, and he was right in perceiving the need for there to be a continued distinction between these two natures. His failing came about in pressing the distinction of the two natures into a double personality. Nestorius said, 'I separate the natures, but I unite the worship.'¹⁰ Even though an examination of the many extant records of Nestorius' writings reveal that he was desirous of demonstrating that his views were in accord with Nicene orthodoxy, and that he indignantly repudiated this account of his teaching, declarations like that mentioned above have left us with 'the traditional picture of Nestorianism as the heresy which split the God-man into two distinct persons.'¹¹

Nestorius was opposed at first by Cyril of Alexandria. Even though Cyril was not always entirely clear in his own expressions on the issues at hand, he 'stressed the unity of the Person of Christ'¹² against the views of Nestorius. In one of his letters to Nestorius, he demanded Nestorius' assent to twelve anathemas condemning the Antiochene Christology of the 'two-natures,' which included, above all, 'the division of the words and acts of Christ between his divine and human natures...They required Nestorius to admit that 'the Word of God suffered in the flesh.'¹³

Ephesus

Theological and political tension once again



The Council of Chalcedon

development of dogma.'¹² It is precisely because of this swirling environment that immediately after Nicea, 'every academically educated theologian attempted to repudiate this *homoousios* which he, overwhelmed by the special situation, had adopted without thinking too much about it.'¹³ And thus, after the resurgence of the Arian party and the additional concerns raised by the Apollinarians, the ecumenical church gathered for a second time in Constantinople.

Apollinaris defended the true divinity of Christ over against Arius, but on the other hand, he denied the true and full humanity of Jesus Christ. Apollinaris held that 'in the incarnation the Logos, a divine spirit or mind, was united with a human body and soul to form a divine human being Jesus Christ.'¹⁴

The breadth of Constantinople is seen in that its creed specifically addresses

*established the eternal, pre-existent Godhead of Christ, the symbol of the fourth ecumenical Council relates to the incarnate Logos, as he walked upon the earth and sits on the right hand of the Father. It is directed against the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches, who agreed with the Nicene Creed as opposed to Arianism, but put the Godhead of Christ in a false relation to his humanity. It substantially completes the orthodox Christology of the ancient church; for ... the Chalcedonian formula strikes the true mean between Nestorianism and Eutychianism.'*⁶

The names of Nestorius and Eutyches figure prominently in this summary, and this is for good reason. As the fifth century began, and as a result of the various controversies and councils of the fourth century, the church now possessed a doctrine that encompassed a Christ of two distinct natures; one divine and one

swirled around the Christian world. And so it was, that only 3 years after Nestorius achieved his bishopric, and following his own request, the Emperor Theodosius II summoned an ecumenical council to meet at Ephesus in A.D. 431. The proceedings of the council make for difficult reading, as first one group and then the other held their own sessions and condemned each other. Finally, in the fourth and fifth sessions of the council, six canons were issued that dealt with the Nestorian question.¹⁴ The views of Nestorius were roundly condemned as heretical, and all clergymen were warned against promulgating such views at pain of excommunication. Finally, a general warning against the promoting or composing of any faith other than that of Nicea was promulgated.¹⁵

Cyril of Alexandria died in A.D. 444, but his mantle was taken up by a zealous monk named Eutyches. Once again, the various understandings attached to technical words played a part in stirring up the fires of controversy. The nub of this controversy stemmed around the word *physis*. Eutyches and the other followers of Cyril asserted that the Antiocheans held to the heresy that there were two *persons* in the Word Incarnate.¹⁶ The catch-cry of the Alexandrians (one borrowed from Cyril but given a meaning beyond what he intended) came to be 'there is only one *physis*, since the incarnation, of God the Word.'¹⁷ Cyril himself had recognised that when the Antiocheans used the word *physis*, they were referring to *nature* not *person*. Eutyches laid the greatest emphasis on the Divine nature of Christ and stated that 'before the union of the two natures I recognise two natures, but after the union only one. The flesh of the Lord is not like ours.'¹⁸ Thus, the teaching of Eutyches came to be called *Mono-physitism*.

After a Synod called in A.D. 448 deposed Eutyches, he immediately appealed to Pope Leo in Rome. The response of Rome has come to be known as 'the Tome of Leo.' It is a profound analysis of the orthodox doctrine of two natures in one person. It 'condemns Eutyches in uncompromising terms,'¹⁹ endorses the deposition of Eutyches, and was placed in the hands of Flavian as the word of the Apostolic See that should guide the outcome of the synod that met at Ephesus in A.D. 449. However, through the heavy-handed maneuvering of Dioscurus, who presided over the proceedings of what has come to be known as 'the Robber Council,' Eutyches was reinstated, *dyo-physitism*

was condemned as heretical, and Leo and Flavian were excommunicated.

Chalcedon

Above and beyond the disgraceful display of poor ecumenism that was the Council of Ephesus, its other great failing, considering the theological climate, was that it 'had left unfulfilled a task which by this stage of development was long overdue: that of creating a dogmatic formula which made it possible to express the unity and the distinction in Christ in clear terms.'²⁰

A combination of bold and discerning activity on behalf of Pope Leo, and the political ramifications of a change of Emperor to one who favored the *dyo-physite* cause, resulted in the calling of an ecumenical council to meet at Nicea in A.D. 451. But, 'because of their turbulent conduct, [they] were soon summoned to Chalcedon, opposite Constantinople, that the imperial court and senate might attend in person, and repress, as far as possible, the violent outbreaks of the religious fanaticism of the two parties.'²¹

The first session of the council read through the acts of the 'Robber Council' and the synod of A.D. 448. The actions of Dioscurus and other ringleaders in the two synods were roundly condemned. At the second session, the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople, the second letter of Cyril to Nestorius and one to John of Antioch, and 'Leo's Tome,' were read aloud and hailed as orthodox by the assembled bishops. In the third session, Dioscurus was placed on trial, even though he refused to attend. He claimed that 'he was not in doctrine a follower of Eutyches but a staunch Cyrilian.'²² Nevertheless, he was deposed from office and deprived of all priestly dignity. During the fourth session, the Egyptian bishops were questioned as to their position. 'They agreed to condemn Eutyches but begged not to be forced to subscribe to Leo's Tome nor to Dioscurus' disposition,'²³ claiming that they would be killed for doing so on their return to Egypt. Judgment on these bishops was delayed until a new Patriarch of Constantinople could be appointed.

Of most significance to our inquiry is the product of the fifth session, which took place on October 22. This is the session which produced the Chalcedonian symbol. A commission was established that met in the shrine of St. Euphemia in order to prepare a new doctrinal statement for the wider assembly's consideration. The commission reported back to the assembly with a document that drew largely from the

'Tome of Leo,' to a lesser degree from the thinking of Cyril of Alexandria, and which, by its own claims, was grounded in the historic Nicene/Constantinopolitan faith. The great achievement of the Council of Chalcedon, an achievement that enables it to rank alongside Nicea in terms of importance to the historic Christian faith, was that,

*For the first time, alongside of the Athanasian statement of the real divinity of the incarnate Lord was posited something like a corresponding and adequate statement of the reality and actuality of his humanity. The two natures were affirmed to be not only in themselves and before the union but in their union in the one Christ each complete in all the faculties and functions proper to it, so that our Lord is in his human life and activity as complete and perfect man as he is also true and perfect God.'*²⁴

The remarkable breadth of this achievement can best be seen in the exact wording of the Creed adopted by the council.

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It managed with most beautiful, concise, and fearless language, to address all the components of the Christological controversies that had plagued the church since the second and third centuries.

So, following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity (Contra Arius) and perfect in humanity (Contra Apollinarius), the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul (Contra Apollinarius) and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity (Contra Arius), and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity (Contra Apollinarius); like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity (Contra Arius), and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer (Contra Nestorius), as regards his humanity (Contra Apollinarius); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change (Contra Eutyches), no division, no separation (Contra Nestorius); at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union (Contra Eutyches), but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being (Contra Nestorius and Eutyches); he is not parted or divided into two persons (Contra Nestorius), but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.²⁵ (Bracketed sections are my editorial insertions)

The editorial insertions in the quote are an attempt to demonstrate the deliberate effort on behalf of the Council to counter the heretical teachings that had plagued the church in the recent centuries. Specific teachings of Arius, Apollinarius, Nestorius, and Eutyches, were addressed with statements that were drawn from the teaching of Scripture, and the reflections on those teachings of Scripture by the church down through the preceding centuries.

And yet, despite the seeming clarity of the Chalcedonian Creed, other aspects of the Chalcedonian documents, the never-ending political tensions, and the increasingly fractious nature of the theological ties between the Eastern arm of the church and the Western arm, worked against allowing Chalcedon to become the definitive word

on the subject. 'Many, to be sure, yielded to the authority of the council but many others, more consistent and thoroughgoing in their support of the Alexandrian doctrine of the one theanthropic nature in Christ, made war upon the new symbol and did all they could to destroy its credit.'²⁶

Large numbers of those who held to the *Mono-physite* position withdrew from the state churches and formed separatist bodies, most notably in Egypt and Palestine. The *Mono-physites* took issue with Chalcedon not because of the condemnation of Eutyches, but because the Council had, in their eyes at least, failed to fully endorse the theological system of Cyril. Their accusation was that because the Council had only approved 'the letters of Cyril to Nestorius and to the Antiochenes,' and had failed to be any more specific than that, the full orb of Cyril's polemic had not been given its due. Thus, the following century was to be plagued by the contentions between the *Mono-physites* and the Chalcedonians.

Post – Chalcedon

A reconciliation of sorts was achieved by the Emperor Zeno in A.D. 482. He devised a formula of union that came to be known as the *Henoticon*. It 'condemned both Nestorius and Eutyches, explicitly approved Cyril's Twelve Anathemas, declared that 'one of the Trinity was incarnate', avoided any mention of either one nature or two, and concluded by condemning any heresy 'whether advanced at Chalcedon or at any synod whatever'.²⁷ The *Henoticon* was not fully satisfactory to either side, but it brought about a measure of tenuous harmony that was to last into the beginning of the sixth century.

Mono-physitism was once again condemned by the fifth ecumenical council that met in Constantinople in A.D. 553, where Chalcedon was again strongly reaffirmed. A subsequent attempt at reconciliation occurred in the seventh century. It came in the form of a doctrine that suggested that while Christ had two natures, He actually had only one divine will. This doctrine came to be known as *Monothelitism*, and was condemned by the sixth ecumenical council held at Constantinople in A.D. 680-681. From this time forward, the Chalcedonian settlement became the fixed doctrine of both the Eastern and the Western church, with its one person, two nature theology, remaining virtually unchallenged, even by the Protestant Reformation.

In regards to the lasting effects of

Chalcedon, we can rightly say that 'more than any other synod of the early church, it also spurred theological reflection, the work of which is not yet completed even today.'²⁸ Chalcedon provided a framework of orthodoxy that became the background for subsequent reflection on the component parts of Christological reflection. The doctrine of the Atonement, the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone, and many other aspects that relate particularly to the second person of the Trinity, have all developed, both in the Roman Catholic strain and in the Protestant strain, with the ever-present and definitive backdrop of Chalcedon looming large.

Although aspects of Roman Catholic piety may raise certain questions about their adherence to the understanding of Chalcedon, the official dogma of the church is in accord with the formula of Chalcedon. Articles 464 through 469 of section 2, article 3, and Paragraph 3 of the Catholic Catechism attest to this.

In the Protestant world, Chalcedon also reigns supreme. The Augsburg Confession of 1530, in article 3; the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, in article 11; the thirty-nine articles of the Anglican Church of 1572, in article 2; the Belgic Confession of Faith of 1619, in article 19; and the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646, in chapter 8, article 2; all demonstrate allegiance to the Christology of Chalcedon as they set forth the one person, two nature Christology held also by Protestantism.

In conclusion, we should acknowledge, with great humility, these words of Scripture: 'The mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body...' (1 Tim 3:16a). Chalcedon and those other councils before and after it have sought to provide a theological formulary for something that is by its very essence a 'mystery.' Perhaps this is why the exact formulations of the words have always failed to satisfy everyone, and why we should look forward to the day when the God/Man Himself will descend from heaven and once again reveal Himself, in all of His glory, as the Divine and Human Incarnate One.

Footnotes

- 1 Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology*. (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998), 33.
- 2 Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*. (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 71.
- 3 Kurt Aland, *A History of the Church*. Vol I. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 193.
- 4 A. C. McGiffert, *A History of the Christian Church*. (New York: Charles Scribener's Sons, 1932), 277.

- 5 Norman P. Tanner. (Ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. Vol I. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 21.
- 6 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*. Vol I. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1905), 30.
- 7 Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 181.
- 8 Stuart Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 212.
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- 10 Ibid.
- 11 J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*. (Massachusetts: Prince Press, 2004), 311.
- 12 L. Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), 105.
- 13 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 197.
- 14 Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 158.
- 15 Norman P. Tanner. (Ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 38-39.
- 16 P. Hughes, *The Church in Crisis*. (New York: Hanover House, 1961), 71.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 Kurt Aland, *A History of the Church*, 202.
- 19 Stuart Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, 227.
- 20 Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1964), 541.
- 21 Philip Schaaf, *History of the Christian Church*, 742.
- 22 Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 183
- 23 *Ibid.* 184.
- 24 William P. DuBose, *Ten Epochs of the Christian Church*. Vol III. (New York: Charles Scribener's Sons, 1901), 254.
- 25 Norman P. Tanner. (Ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 86.
- 26 A. C. McGiffert, *A History of the Christian Church*, 286.
- 27 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 205.
- 28 Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 541.

World in focus

Jordan deports more Christians, deplores Compass Report

Jordan has continued deporting foreign evangelical pastors, as the government last week admitted to expelling foreigners for 'illegal' missionary activities. Acting Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh told the

Jordanian parliament on 20 February that authorities had expelled missionaries operating 'under the cover of doing charitable work,' suggesting that evangelistic activity is illegal in Jordan.

If such evangelistic work were illegal — with a missionary permit or not — Jordan could be opening itself to accusations of violating Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the country published in its official Gazette in July 2006, giving it the force of law.

Article 18 of the covenant states that everyone has the inherent right publicly or privately to 'manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching' It also states, however, that such

freedom may be subject to limitations prescribed by law to protect public 'order.'

On 29 January Compass Direct reported that Jordan had deported and denied residence permits to at least 27 foreign Christian individuals and families in 2007. On 20 February the acting foreign minister, Judeh, read a statement by the Council of the Church Leaders of Jordan condemning the Compass report.

Following Judeh's statements about foreign groups that 'broke the law and did missionary activities,' the Jordanian parliament on 21 February passed a resolution condemning the Compass article. 'We categorically condemn and reject the

false report which is aimed at damaging Muslim-Christian relations in Jordan,' the lower house of parliament said, according to Agence France-Presse.

+ *Compass Direct News*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250

Global warming may be in doubt but UCC meltdown isn't

Defections from the United Church of Christ are being numbered in the hundreds of congregations. Friedens Reformed Church in Tripp is one of four South Dakota congregations to leave recently. Denominational funding for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender seminarians plays poorly in farming communities.

Friedens Reformed Church called on the South Dakota Conference to support state laws excluding homosexual marriage. The conference did not appreciate the move and countered with a call to remove the national flag from UCC churches.

Soon after the deadlock, the Tripp congregation affiliated with the Evangelical Association of Reformed and Congregational Christian Churches.

In central Pennsylvania the same pattern is emerging among former Reformed churches in the United States congregations. The Heidelberg movement church centred around York now appears in the steadily expanding EARCC roster.

Though the organization is gathering from all wings of the UCC, its leadership strongly represents congregations originating in the former Evangelical Church of North America tradition.

+ *Evangelical Association of Reformed and Congregational Christian Churches*, PO Box 157, York New Salem, PA 17371-0157

Laos arrests 58 Christians, sentences Church leaders

Laotian officials arrested 15 Hmong Christian families in Bokeo district on 22 February, a day before a court sentenced nine area Hmong church leaders to 15 years in prison for conducting Christian ministry and meetings that had grown beyond acceptable levels for Communist officials. The day before the sentencing, Laotian authorities arrived in Ban Sai Jarern village in Bokeo district with six trucks in which they hauled away eight Christian families. Authorities also arrested at least seven families from Fai village three miles away. 'It seems they are rounding up all Hmong Christians from Vietnam to send them back to Vietnam,' said one Christian source. 'What will happen to them is greatly feared and unknown.'

The nine church leaders sentenced for conducting prominent Christian ministry and meetings had been rounded up during a police and military sweep of suspected rebels last July that left at least 13 innocent Christians dead.

+ *Compass Direct News*, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, California 92799-7250

The Heidelberg Catechism was wrong – CRCNA clarifies position on Catholic eucharist

After 10 years of study, dialogue, and debate, the Christian Reformed Church in North America has released its final report that clarifies the CRC's stance on the Lord's Supper as it relates to the Roman Catholic Church. Recently posted and made available on the CRCNA website, 'The Lord's Supper and the Catholic

Mass' is the result of extensive evaluation and discussion between CRC and Catholic educators and theologians.

At issue had been the Question and Answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism. In the answer portion, the catechism says the Catholic Mass 'is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.'

What the final report says is that there remain important differences between how the two denominations view the Lord's Supper. But the report also finds Question and Answer 80 in the catechism did not accurately represent the Catholic Church's beliefs on the topic.

The final three paragraphs in the catechism containing 'condemnable idolatry' have not been deleted from Q and A 80, but the section has been put in brackets. In a footnote, the Synod has added the brackets 'to indicate that they do not accurately reflect the official teaching and practice of today's Roman Catholic Church and are no longer confessionally binding on members of the CRC.'

The report makes it clear that there are extensive differences on how the two denominations view the sacrament. However, it does show as well that there are some important commonalities. 'In summary,' says the report, 'in Reformed teaching the message (of God) is the privileged medium of grace, while in Roman Catholic teaching the Eucharist (as Catholics refer

to communion) is the privileged medium of grace.'

+ *Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560*

No-Pope zone

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia has declared that no office bearer, or any other person, is authorized to represent the GAA at any function or any activity associated with the visit of the Pope to Australia in 2008

+ *The Australian Presbyterian, November 2007*

Justice delayed

The fourth trial hearing yesterday against the murderers of three Christians in south-east Turkey was postponed for another month after court clerks mysteriously failed to file a request to replace judges accused of bias.

Plaintiff lawyers' official demand to replace the presiding judges was filed on March 1, but when the Malatya Third Criminal Court convened yesterday it was confirmed that the request still had not been forwarded to the higher court in Diyarbakir designated to rule on it. Plaintiff lawyers had listed repeated instances of the judges' bias and partiality that they declared were 'obstructing justice.' The failure of the Izmir court to forward the complaint to the higher court in Diyarbakir forced the Malatya court to postpone the hearing until April 14. In doing so, the presiding judges in Malatya issued an accusation of 'criminal offense' against court clerks of the state prosecutor's office in Izmir, declaring that their ineptitude in processing the legal complaint 'within a reasonable time' had brought a 'negative effect' on the case.

+ *Compass Direct News, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250*

Refuge lost in Iraq; Archbishop kidnapped and subsequently murdered

After the US purged al-Qaeda from Iraq's Sunni centre in mid-2006, al-Qaeda made Mosul in northern Iraq its new base. Terrorism there then escalated with a continual stream of church bombings as well as the kidnap and assassination of Christian leaders. On 29 February, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho (65) was leaving Mosul's Holy Spirit Cathedral after celebrating the Way of the Cross when his car was ambushed by terrorists. Archbishop Rahho was kidnapped while his driver and two bodyguards were shot and killed. A

\$1.8 million ransom has been demanded. Mosul is no longer

a refuge for Assyrian Christians and a full-scale war looms. Archbishop Rahho's body was later found on the side of a road. Iraq's Christians desperately need our prayers. (Psalm 118:8)

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 468 | Wed 05 Mar 2008*

Anti-Christian violence suddenly escalates in Sri Lanka

Ethnic and religious tensions have grown again in Sri Lanka over the past two years as hostilities between Tamil separatists and the Sinhalese-dominated government have escalated. The Church bridges the Tamil-Sinhalese divide and is therefore targeted by extremist militants from both sides. The war, which officially resumed mid-January 2008, gives Buddhist nationalists a perfect opportunity to attack the Church under the cover of the prevailing chaos, and even blame the Tamil separatists. Christians have been the targets of several appallingly violent attacks in recent weeks. In Ampara on 17 February, Pastor Neil Edirisinghe (37) was fatally shot in a contract killing, while his wife Shiromi (31) was critically wounded. Please pray for peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 469 | Wed 12 Mar 2008*

Canadians heading south

Despite threats of lawsuits and the firing of their clergy by Bishop Ingraham, whose same-sex blessings have divided the global church, the largest church in the diocese, St. John's Shaugnessey in Vancouver, voted recently to leave the Canadian Anglican Church to join the Southern Cone. Some six additional parishes have reportedly taken the same action. According to published reports an additional 15 congregations are in one stage or another of abandoning the Canadian denomination.

Defections have taken place primarily in conservative western Canada.

+ *The Anglican Church of Canada, 80 Hayden Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 3G2*

Conversion goes to court in Egypt

Christian-born converts to Islam in Egypt wishing to return to their former faith have found their way blocked by an appeal before the country's Supreme Constitutional Court. Judge Muhammad Hussein asked Egypt's top judicial body on 4 March to review the constitutionality of a law granting citizens the right to change religions.

Family Camp 2009

Family Camp is on again this year!

The camp will be held at Finlay Park from Saturday 27th December 2008 – Saturday 3 January 2009.

Lord willing, Rev Kloosterman will lead the morning studies, and Rev Michael Flinn the evening devotions.

Please note there will be an increase in camp fees this year. Watch this space for more details!

Egypt's top administrative court used Article 47 of Egypt's civil law to justify allowing 12 converts to Islam to return to Christianity last month. Hussein has demanded that the constitutional court rule on whether Article 47 conflicts with the Egyptian constitution's second article, which designates Islam as the main source of legislation.

Mainstream interpretations of Islamic

law forbid apostasy, leaving Islam. 'This is a new legal fight that the Supreme Constitutional Court has never dealt with in the past,' said human rights activist Hossam Bahgat. 'We see it as the single most important court case since the [1980] amendment that made Islamic sharia the main source of legislation.'

+ Compass Direct News Service, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana CA 92799

New American Hymnal

Plans are under way for a new hymnal for use in the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. The hymnal's editorial team met for the first time in February. Applications are being taken from all sectors of both denominations to participate in the development process.

+ Reformed Church in America, 475 Riverside Drive, 18th Florida. New York, NY 10115

Feminine focus

The feminine virtue of orderliness

Sally Davey

Let's say someone arrives at your house unexpectedly. What is your first thought? Help! There are dirty dishes all over the kitchen bench, the floor needs vacuuming, the children are fighting in the living room and the dogs have just dug an untidy hole in the front garden: in short, the place is a shambles. What will this visitor think of me, the person responsible for maintaining order around here?

Why do we feel so ashamed, and get so bothered about such situations? You might observe – and rightly – that our pride and fear of man are problems to us, and that we shouldn't be so afraid of appearing disorderly in other people's eyes. (After all, the mess in your household that one chaotic morning may simply have been beyond your power to prevent.) Nevertheless, the fact is that we admire order; we admire and want it, deeply. Tidiness of home, smoothness of household functioning, punctuality of habit, good organization of personal schedule and neatness of dress all suggest that the woman in whom you observe these things has her life in order. She knows what she should be doing, knows how to do it, and gets it done. In short: she's a success; we admire her, and wish we were like her.

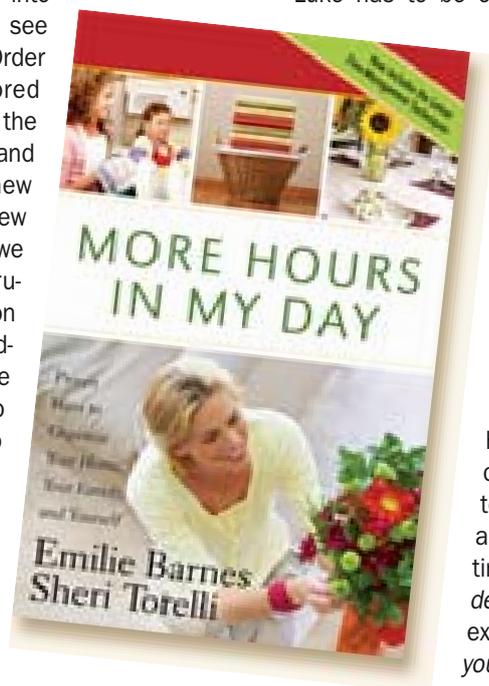
Where it comes from

Why is this, and where does this love of orderliness come from? Is it right or wrong that we should respond so positively to order when we see it? It seems to me that it is generally right, and for some good reasons. First of all, God has created us that way. We are made in his image, and orderliness is part of his character. He is a God of order, not of chaos and confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). When you look at the record of the creation in Genesis, you can see that when God made the world – out of nothing ('the earth was without form and void') – it was a by a series of ordered acts; and they created order where there had been no order. When we set out to create order in our world, we are reflecting God's own character of order. Of course, the Fall disrupted God's ordered creation. Sin has brought strife, confusion, disharmony and disorder into the world; and we see it all around us. Order will not be restored until God winds up the present creation and he creates the new heavens and the new earth. Until then we work as his instruments of redemption in this world, shedding the light of the Gospel, but also doing all we can to bring order as part of our work as his agents.

Where does God want order? In general terms, we can see that

he wants it in every aspect of life. For one thing, he wants it in the church. In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul writes that God wants orderliness in worship. The kind of mess Paul depicts in Corinthian worship needs tidying up: 'let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner' (1 Corinthians 14:40; NASB). Worship should be edifying and orderly, not disorderly. The same is true of church government. When Paul writes to Titus about what needs to be done in the church in Crete, he tells Titus to 'set in order what remains.' (Titus 1:5) One of the first things he tells Titus to do is appoint elders of good character and life. In other words, church government and the management of the church in general should be orderly. We also see order in the way Scripture has been recorded for us by the men the Spirit inspired to write it. If one is allowed favourite Bible authors, then Luke has to be one of mine. Apart from

being a doctor, he was a painstakingly careful historian; and the efforts he made to gather the facts about Jesus' ministry and Paul's missionary journeys give us great confidence that what he wrote down is true, and can be relied upon. At the beginning of his gospel Luke wrote to his learned friend Theophilus: 'it seemed good to me... having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an *orderly account* for you, most excellent Theophilus, *that you may have certainty con-*



cerning the things you have been taught. [italics mine]. Yes, orderliness is a good thing. God values it.

The value of order in society

Does our culture agree? Yes and no. At different times over the centuries there has been some ambivalence about the virtue of order. Sometimes order has been highly esteemed, as it was in the 17th and early 18th centuries, when symmetry, order and harmony characterised the creative works of the age. The certainty of God's existence and his control of man's destiny underpinned writers' and thinkers' and musicians' view of the world. At other times, there has been a cultural reaction against order. Think of the Romantic period of the late 18th century, when poets emphasised feeling and instinct over against the constraints of reason and discipline. Or think of the 1960s slogan of 'free love' which encouraged young people to throw over the perceived constraints of parents, social convention, and in particular, marriage. At times our society has valued order, self-discipline and right priorities; while

at others, spontaneity and freedom have ruled the day.

Shifting focus to the individual and personal level, we can also see these two opposites at work in the people we know. Some by character are more inclined to orderliness than others. They find it comes naturally to tidy things up, to plan, to prioritise, to organise efficiently. Others can't stand to live like that. Cleaning a room is a chore they defer – to the dim, distant never-never. They hate to clean cupboards, they can't bear to throw things away; and when confronted with a pile of old possessions about which to make decisions, they are more likely to spend hours poring over them and enjoying them than they are to rationalise them. They are the people who leave jobs to the last minute and who often run late. BUT – they are also the people who are never too busy for friends, who are always ready to respond positively to spur-of-the-moment invitations, and for whom few things are a bother. Both character types have their endearing features; but both are capable of driving those they live with quite crazy at times. Clearly, the first type has orderliness on her side: she is the

one in whom it shines more often, since it comes easily to her. But she will need to keep some of those tendencies under control if orderliness is not to become her problem. How true that is of all our best qualities: our greatest strengths are usually also our greatest weaknesses.

Being both at the same time

Sometimes people are capable of being both orderly and disorderly at the same time – in different compartments of their lives. It strikes me that this is how many women live today. Over the past twenty years or so I've seen lots of women do exceedingly well at managing their working lives. They plan well, often having remarkably good priorities for their teaching or their business or their path up the corporate ladder. Their dealings with students, colleagues, clients and patients may be exemplary. Their offices and their diaries are models of efficiency and tidiness. If you were able to see the innards of their computers you would find uncluttered email inboxes, tidy Word files and so on. But the surprising thing is that many of these women, while models of efficiency work-wise, have messy private lives. Perhaps their office is tidy – but their home? Often their dress and make-up are impeccable, but things slip when it comes to their eating, drinking and sleeping habits. A busy life, long hours, sedentary habits and too much alcohol and fast food do not do wonders for any body. However, that is not the worst of it. Irresponsible and uncommitted personal relationships with the wrong men – and serially wrong men - so often lead to a sad, disillusioned middle-age. What might seem the good life, the free and spontaneous life, in one's twenties and thirties, has a price tag attached – payable by mid-life. God has given us a pattern for life in his Word. It is an orderly pattern, and we reject it at our peril. We need to be responsible in every area of our lives - in the way we conduct our friendships every bit as much as in the way we manage our time.

The benefits of order

Let us consider some of the advantages of an ordered pattern of life. Obviously, it doesn't take an Einstein to work out that being well-organised and tidy is good for you and for those with whom you live and work. On a practical level you tend to get more done, more quickly. You're also likely to be doing the more important things first, if you're planning well, which is an advantage. If you have a tidy house or office you can



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

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

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



generally find what you need straight away, which saves time and means you are going to get more done in your day. (Let's say you score poorly on the tidiness scale... how many times have you spent half an hour or longer looking for needed items in piles of mess? Waste of time, isn't it? And frustrating.) If you're looking for good advice from Christian authors on how to organise your household and housework more efficiently, try the books of either Emilie Barnes (a kindly efficiency whizz)¹ or Elizabeth George (a lady with good spiritual priorities who has made practical use of time management ideas)².

Secondly, when considering our own state of mind and our relationships with others, orderliness has a lot going for it. There is no doubt that we feel better, think more clearly and generally have more energy to get work done when we plan our day well. This is encouraging, and gives us hope that tomorrow may be even better. Who has not experienced the satisfaction of beginning the day with a prioritised list and ending it with every item crossed off? Tidiness has a similar effect. I don't know about you, but I tend to find it hard to concentrate on a task when I'm in a room (especially one I'm

responsible for) which is cluttered with mess, or that has a floor that needs vacuuming. A clean and tidy room is much more restful to work in. An orderly person is also a lot easier to live with than one whose habits are untidy, unpredictable or downright chaotic. For instance, it requires considerable grace to arrive home with guests, having counted on someone (a wife, husband, child or flatmate) to have tidied the place up, only to open the door and find a) a mess, b) said person in scruffy dress and unprepared or c) the house full of said person's unexpected friends – and not lose your *sang froid*. You can imagine the kind of scenario. To live with someone who's usually late, finishing assignments or jobs at the last minute or later, is to live at high stress, frequently with irritability or angry words, and with an alarming level of uncertainty. Not nice! By observing some simple disciplines of orderliness, we can make life a lot more pleasant for those we love.

Lastly, orderly habits become a rock beneath our feet when times of crisis threaten to sink us. They enable us to keep going, one foot in front of the other, when external circumstances make our eyes swim and we feel sick and shaky. If there

are certain sensible things you always do, every day, to keep your house tidy, your children fed and clothed, or your workplace organised, you'll find you'll still be able to do them 'though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea' (Ps. 46:2, KJV). Wise routines, turned into habits through years of practice, actually keep us going and give us encouragement for the simple reason that we're still able to perform them in time of trial. Think about that, next time you're tempted to slacken off and become careless about the housework!

The other extreme

Now, to turn the table right round and look at the extreme end of the orderliness continuum, I'd like to offer a few observations. As I suggested earlier, our greatest strength may also become our greatest weakness, and this is true with orderly tendencies. A tidy, organised person may also be a control freak. She may have a lovely clean and tidy home, but she may also be an uncomfortable friend. Do you fit this frame, ever so slightly? Here are some indicator questions from the checklist

Continued next page

Letter to the Editor

I would like to thank Sally Davey for her 'plug' for higher education for women. When I was young, my next-door neighbour suggested to my father that I should leave school at the then-leaving age, just raised from 14 to 15, and get a job. 'What's the good of education for a girl? She'll just get married in a few more years!' He was not referring to tertiary education, either, but to continued secondary.

How glad I was that my father was sensible enough to take no notice of this advice. In fact, I did not marry John until I was 33 years of age. During the intervening years, how I thank God for the varied and interesting life in which He led me. This was greatly enhanced by my tertiary education, although this for me did not include a university. Teachers' College (in my day a completely separate institution) gave me training and practice with young people, to say nothing of helping me to overcome an almost overpowering shyness, and gain-

ing confidence in my leadership position with church youth. Later, my education in a Theological College also developed my knowledge of searching the Scriptures deeply, analysing and collating information from the Biblical and historical research of those far more competent than I, of writing essays and summarising Christian books. Without this, I would have been destined to over sixteen years of, to me, an unsatisfying kind of life, and deprived of tools that enabled me to serve God far better. My marriage has also been enriched, by working alongside my husband in business (trained in simple book-keeping by my accountant father, who lived with us) and in specific service with John in youth work such as church camps and clubs.

Some women never marry. Not all parents are able to support unmarried daughters. The Victorian days of the unmarried aunt helping care for a brood of nephews and nieces are long gone, and we cannot turn back the clock. Some women are widowed young, and by their pre-marriage experience are enabled later

to re-enter the work force, rather than depend for the rest of their lives on government benefits or 'unskilled' work.

In no way is this intended to devalue the work of women in their own households. Nor the importance of loving, raising, and training their children, surely the most important work mothers are given. My three daughters will testify to this. All three have had some kind of tertiary training (two at university), and all have married devout Christian men, to carry on the 'tradition'!

Encourage your daughters to train for marriage by your own home life, but also encourage them in the opportunity to train for life, whatever it may bring, marriage or not. This does not necessarily mean university education, on which Mrs Davey in her article was concentrating. Not all, men or women, are intended to nor have the ability to do that (compare Peter and Paul), but trust Him to guide them, keep them, protect them, enable them, sons and daughters alike.

Patricia van Laar

of psychologist John Aiken, who writes a monthly column in *Next* magazine:

- Do you often give out instructions, advice and orders?
- Do you frequently remind people to do things and give them lists?
- Do you find it difficult to delegate and give full responsibility to others?
- Do you expect everyone to agree with you?
- Do you have specific rules for people around you (for example cleaning, punctuality, language, working habits, appearance, daily routines)?³

These are the kinds of things control freaks do. Mr Aiken's solutions to this problem are not what you arrive at if you follow biblical principles, but his depiction is useful. A controlling type of person might be successful and get things done, but she is frequently a difficult person for others to live with. She needs, in short, to step back and take a look at herself in the light of the Scriptures. Honest analysis may suggest she has a higher opinion of herself and her own judgement than she ought. She usually needs to view others as more important than herself, and to consider that others may be able to manage some things better than she does. She might also begin to consider the importance of other virtues than orderliness – virtues like kindness, gentleness and patience. She should learn to leave some things up to God, and to his work in others' hearts.

Trying too hard?

A strong temptation for highly ordered people is to try too hard to control every aspect of their lives. This is somewhat understandable: life success in worldly terms often correlates with good planning and disciplined effort. The Proverbs back this up. However, that is only part of the truth. It is God who determines the big picture of our lives, and our task is to be obedient and disciplined *in the context of that picture*. Our efforts at order always need to be hedged by God's commands; and we have to trust him for the outcome of those efforts. We simply cannot control everything – nor should we try. When we do, we are liable to get ourselves (and others) into trouble. Take, for instance, the anorexia problem – prevalent among young women especially in the 1970s and 80s. (Nowadays, ironically, we have more of an overweight problem among young women). Anorexia, when analysed, is an attempt to control one's size and take mastery over

one's eating habits. As we all know, it's quite satisfying to succeed in dieting, but weight loss can go many steps too far... with seriously bad results. When it comes to this kind of control, our sinful hearts don't always know when enough is enough.

Several months ago, the Christchurch Press reprinted a perceptive article from the British newspaper, the *Sunday Times*. Its author, journalist Shane Watson, makes some useful observations about women's desire for control in their lives. She points to a number of fears that drive some women to extraordinarily selfish behaviour. Allow me to share some excerpts with you:

Here is a modern scenario: you invite a girlfriend to dinner, and before you sit down, she asks if you would mind if she shuts the window, turns up the heating, switches places and opens her own bottle of wine.

Then she tells you she will have to leave before you have finished eating because she has something important to do; and her boyfriend won't be coming after all.

Not long ago, such behaviour would have been thought very rude, but now we live in a world where everyone feels justified in putting their own needs first. It is quite common for guests to ask for a drink that isn't offered, variations on the food being served or alterations to the heating, lighting or music...

You could put all of the above down to a crisis in manners, but these are not just examples of thoughtless behaviour. They are all driven by the same desperate impulse to be the master of our destiny...

Previously, we put our faith in God, in fate or simply in life and the people we knew. Now we believe in exerting our will in every situation.

What is behind this epidemic? Is it the cult of self-determination gone mad? Are we scared of making the wrong choice?...

Heard the one about the woman who sacked her cleaner for not rotating the plates, as in putting the used plates to the bottom of the pile, so that the same ones were not in constant use?

Desperate housewives have always run their houses and families like military academies in an attempt to distract themselves from their unhappiness, but that woman wasn't miserable; she was just an extreme case – the creation of a culture that says perfection is attainable, and all you have to do is eat less, work harder, earn more and leave more instructions scrawled on post-it notes...

Maybe the real reason we leave nothing

to chance is that the world seems a crueler place. It is the reason people push their children academically or leave marriages when the going gets tough...

We have a sense that you get only one chance at life, and no-one gets anywhere without pushing their own agenda. It's quite sad, really.⁴

True wisdom

Yes, it is sad. But we who are Christ's may of all women be free from this treadmill. As bearers of God's image we certainly desire order in our lives. However, we need not become desperate or grasping or controlling in our pursuit of it. We have access to wisdom that points to the safe path between chaotic disorderliness and control-freakery. Let us call it the path of hope, trust and obedience. And let us share it with others.

(Endnotes)

- 1 For example, Emilie Barnes, *More Hours in My Day: Proven Ways to Organize Your Home, Your Family, and Yourself* (Harvest House, 2002).
- 2 Her best-known book is *A Woman After God's Own Heart* (Harvest House, 1997)
- 3 John Aiken, "Are You a Control Freak?", *Next*, April 2008, p. 106
- 4 Shane Watson, "Now Chic to be a Control Freak," reprinted in *The Press*, Tuesday November 13, 2007

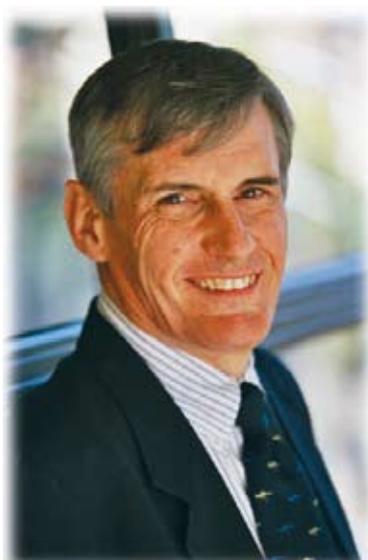


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Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Andre Holtslag: As announced last week, the outcome of André's examination was successful, which means he is available for call. As per synodical decision, André may not accept a call for six weeks after the exam. As well, he will be serving out the term of his vicariate in Pukekohe, which runs to July. Session has arranged to have a meeting with André & Anita on 12 April. As Andre will be visiting a number of churches during March, an earlier meeting was not possible. A congregational meeting has tentatively been planned for Sunday 20 April after the morning service.

Mid week prayer and devotion time. Feel like spending time with others in a time of devotion and prayer to God once a week? Len Van Trigt has kindly opened his home every Wednesday at 6.00am for those of you who might be interested in doing so. Currently Josh and Len are meeting together and would like to encourage others to join them. It is for half an hour and includes a scripture reading (at present we are looking at James) followed by a time of prayer. The duration of the meeting is about half an hour. Look forward to seeing you there.

Bishopdale

Pastoral. Graeme and Amanda Zuidema will present their daughter Sarah Kate for baptism this morning. John Zuidema, her paternal grandfather, will baptise her and lead us in worship. "The LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." (Psalm 100:5)

Praise, prayer and fellowship evening. We will meet together at the church on Wednesday this week at 7:30pm for a time of praise, prayer and fellowship. Robert van Wichen will also introduce the book of Nehemiah. Over the next few months, we will be studying this book together in our fellowship groups. Please bring a plate.

Bucklands Beach

Vicar. As a result of the vote taken at the congregational meeting last Sunday morning (March 9), the session is now proceeding to apply to the denominational vicariate committee to have Mr Daniel Wilson placed here. The Committee has advised that Mr Wilson will be available to start work at the end of September and that they will be deciding where he will go after May 19th.

Clinton Berends. As we heard last Sunday Clinton Berends received the results of his first scan since being diagnosed with terminal cancer. Whereas the scan of 6 months ago showed tumours on the lungs and liver, this scan revealed that the tumours have completely disappeared! There is still some swelling in a lymph node near his lungs but this also had decreased since the last scan and the liver still shows an unknown shadow area. We praise and thank God for this miraculous result. What an answer to prayer! The doctors say it is a real medical miracle. Clinton is now able to resume more of his work as a pastor, although he will continue with his diet and is still in some pain as a result of his arthritis, for which he can take no medication or pain killers. We thank the congregation for their faithful prayer on Clinton and his family's behalf, and ask that prayer may continue until he is restored to full health. Praise be to God. Berends family.

Christchurch

Pastoral. This week, the Lord took home Nicky Huls, a brother of Mrs Vicki Chapman. Nick had been in hospital care for some 29 years because of a severe form of autism – due to which condition he was unable to communicate with anybody. The funeral was celebrated last Thursday and Les and Vicki rejoice in the gospel comfort that was proclaimed then and is their source of sustenance always. Nevertheless it has been a draining time for the Chapmans, so please do offer your support and encouragement as you have opportunity, and pray for them and the wider family that they will continue to experience God's grace through His word and His people.

Golden Oldies big day out. Last Thursday I was privileged to be able to join 34 others for a big day out. We left the church and headed south to Rakaia where we had coffee and food. From there we travelled

further south to Ashburton and visited a worm farm, yes you read it correctly, a worm farm. Very interesting thank you Mr. Verkerk. After learning the process and the value of Vermicast we again boarded the bus and headed north west just past Darfield. Here we were met by a group of anxious ladies waiting by the roadside. We were late for lunch and they were getting worried. We were hosted and fed by the owner of "The Oaks" (no not the retirement complex) but a lovely early Canterbury home owned and renovated by a Dutch lady. We enjoyed a lovely lunch and dessert which was, surprise, surprise, "Appeltaart met slagroom." After a wander through parts of the house and around the garden we headed home. Thank you Mr. Prins for organising such a nice day out. Where are we off to next?? Signed: "A young Golden Oldie"

Dovedale

Pastoral Notes. Mrs Martha de Graaf is eighty this coming week. This wonderful milestone is an occasion for thanksgiving for the kindness the Lord has shown you over the years. With you, we remember gratefully those over 50 years of marriage that you and Jack enjoyed, the ability you have to get around with a good degree of independence, your love of music and the way you are able to use it and the ongoing confidence and faith He has given you. Mrs de Graaf is opening her home to friends and relatives from 9 – 11:30am and from 2:30 pm 'til late! Mrs de Graaf would prefer you visited on Saturday (the 15th), but you are welcome to call by on Sunday afternoon if you can't make it on Saturday, but please call her if this is your intention.

With the planned visit of the Holtslags we are going to be able to meet them and hear Mr Holtslag preach, and address at least one meeting (dv). Please pray that we would be able to use this time well, and that all who wish to speak with him will have opportunity. We are blessed to be able to share the Holtslags for a week with our brethren in the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

Dunedin

Oamaru News. Andrew and Katrina Miller were blessed with a son on Sunday 16 March, in Timaru, whom they have named Thomas Andrew. May God bless these parents as they raise this covenant child in His ways.

Foxton

Fellowship news and prayer items: Congratulations to Albert and Hilje Reitsma on their 50th Wedding Anniversary. Wishing you God's blessing in the years to come.

Fellowship news and prayer items: We rejoice with the Reitsmas that the Lord has granted them so many years together and that He showered them yesterday with the presence of many relatives (near & far) and friends on their 50th wedding anniversary. May the Lord continue to bless you with good time together!

An invitation: The congregation is invited to come and join us to celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of Harry and Wies van Echten. This will be held, DV, on Saturday 5th April from 2pm at the Masonic Café (next to the Masonic village on corner of Araparapae Rd and Queen St), Levin. No gifts please, but do come and help us celebrate this special occasion with our parents.

Hastings

From the Pastor. In our last session meeting we discussed the call Rev. Stephen 't Hart has received from Australia. In view of our plan to send Alan and Odette to PNG in Jan 2009, we decided to write him expressing our desire that he continue his mission work in PNG at least until the end of 2009 in order to provide some continuity as Alan and Odette take up their work. Alan has also informed us that he does not believe it is calling to be the "principal of a college". So we requested that Stephen continue to work in PNG until a suitable replacement can be found who can oversee the college which has been set up to train local church leaders. We have assured Stephen that we will continue to pray for them as they make their decision. Stephen has replied to our letter expressing his appreciation for it and assuring us that he will give full consideration to our request as he and Dorinda decide what they should do. He also indicated that their nine years of work in PNG has been hard on them. Let us be much in prayer for the 't Harts as they make this difficult decision.

Hukanui

A common concern in most people's minds is the desire to eat healthily, to look after our bodies in such a way that we give it all it needs. As such the choice of multi-vitamins and other supplements abounds, so much so that you can have, as one advertisement goes, "every single vitamin and mineral from A to Zinc." Of course it is important to look after our bodies, for

they are a gift of God. But it is even more important to look after our spiritual health, to make sure we receive every vitamin we need for a healthy balanced spiritual diet. Where do we find such an array? In the Word of God, of course! And a summary? In Psalm 119, the A-Z of all our Spiritual vitamins.

Pastoral. Trudy and I have been asked to visit two churches in the South Island and we will be doing so towards the end of April/early May.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: We thank the Lord that this week Jan-Erik Stolte received word of his acceptance to Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

Palmerston North

From the Pastor. Congratulations again to

Albert and Hanneke Couperus (Wanganui) on the safe arrival of Zara Rebekah Couperus. Thank You

The Session had a most pleasant anonymous communication at the last Session meeting consisting of a parcel filled with lovely looking gift-wrapped boxes of chocolate, one for each elder and deacon from both PN and Wanganui, accompanied by a short note expressing thanks for all the hard work done. We were unanimously very encouraged by these kind words and gesture and wish to convey our warmest thanks to our anonymous well-wisher.

Wedding Banns. David Jochem and Simone Bangma extend a warm welcome to all those who are able to attend, to witness their union in marriage at the All Saints

Continued next page

Wellington

Men's Study. In late March or April, we plan to begin a monthly men's study which Richard Schmidt has offered to lead - more details will be available in the next few weeks.

From the Pastor. I've been given an invitation tomorrow night to the Brooklyn Pippins (5-7 year old girls) to explain the meaning of Easter. Please pray for me as I take up this opportunity for outreach in our local community.

What does the Bible say about...As I mentioned in last week's bulletin, in our monthly prayer services I'm going to be commencing a new series called "What does the Bible say about...", and you have the chance to suggest a topic or text. Thank you to those who have already given me suggestions - more are welcome! Please let me know your ideas! Our next prayer service is next Sunday afternoon.



Church, at 1:00pm, on Friday the 4th of April.

From the Pastor. This morning we rejoice with Nathaniel and Sharon Rademaker and the wider family as Marielle receives the sacrament of baptism.

Pukekohe

If you are a member of this Reformed Church then you have stated your agreement with the Reformed Confessions which are Calvinistic statements. To be a Calvinist is simply saying that we believe the Bible and all that it teaches us about God and His sovereign work of salvation. At 7:30pm this Tuesday we will explore this subject together in our combined Bible Study as we look at the second part of this series on "Amazing Grace". Do make an effort to be there.

This morning Katie Smilde, the daughter of Tjeerd and Louise, will be baptised. We rejoice with them and with the Smilde family here in this sign and seal of God's covenant promises.

Silverstream

Pastoral Notes. We give thanks for the birth of two new covenant children last Tuesday. Curtis was born to Richard and Nicola Wharekawa, and Dillon to Ed and Tessa Leenders. Both babies are doing well. Tessa and Nicola are also recovering well. Nicola's platelet levels are up, and she seems to have no more problems with diabetes. The Lord has been gracious in answering our prayers.

Wainuiomata

Church family news . Congratulations to Andy and Natasha Rogers with the birth of their daughter Piper Albertine last Sunday evening. We are thankful that both mother and baby are doing well. May the Lord strengthen our families that we may be able to raise up little covenant children in joy-filled homes.

Short Report Auckland Presbytery 29th February 2008

Auckland Presbytery met on Friday 29th February 2008 at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe. Rev Dirk van Garderen opened the meeting with the singing of hymn 224 and read from Colossians 3:1-17. He wel-

comed all present, including the Synodical Examiners Rev R. Adams from Nelson and Rev L. de Vos from Wainuiomata, and a number of visitors from other churches.

The main item on the agenda was the preliminary examination of Vicar Andre Holtslag. He presented a sermon on the passage in 2 Samuel 16:5-14 entitled 'Curses from Above'. After a time of discussion in closed session Presbytery declared the sermon part of the examination sustained, and moved on to the remainder. Rev R. Noppers examined Andre on Judges 10 for Old Testament exegesis, Rev D. Van Garderen on Colossians 3:1-17 for New Testament exegesis, and Rev J. Rogers examined him with regards to the person and work of Christ for Dogmatics. A further time of discussion was held, again in closed session, and with joy Presbytery, with the concurrence of the Synodical deputies, was able to announce that the examination was sustained and brother Andre Holtslag is now available for call. We gave thanks to God for this positive outcome.

The meeting continued as previous minutes were passed, and the remainder of the agenda was considered. At this stage Hamilton had nothing further to report regarding the annual Presbytery study day. Bucklands Beach presented a proposal to overture Synod to change our denominational name to 'Reformed Presbyterian Church', and after some discussion this proposal was adopted by Presbytery.

Bucklands Beach also asked whether an elder in their congregation, Br Andre Scheepers, who is currently preparing sermons under the supervision of Rev Van Garderen, be made available to preach in the other churches in Auckland Presbytery. Presbytery concurred with this request, as it is quite appropriate for churches to utilise each others' readers; with the understanding that his sermons continue to be supervised.

A proposal to supply one pulpit a month for vacant churches in the South Island was deferred till the next meeting for reassessment.

Rev J. Rogers and Rev D. Van Garderen were reappointed as Synodical examiners for the Presbytery. Br Pieter van der Wel was reappointed as Stated Clerk and Presbytery Treasurer. Church Order Article 47 questions were deferred till the next meeting due to the lateness of the hour. The next meeting will be held DV on the 27th June 2008, once again at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

Reinier Noppers

Short Report of Wellington Presbytery Friday, 7 March 2008 in Palmerston North

The meeting was convened by the minister of the convening church, the Reformed Church of Masterton, who read Ps. 87 and Acts 13:1-3. The delegates sang Psalter Hymnal #166 and Rev. Kloosterman led in prayer.

The credentials of the delegates were received and the meeting was constituted with Rev. P. Kloosterman as Chairman, Elder John Koolaard as Vice Chairman, and L. Vandenberg as Clerk. All delegates stood signifying their agreement with the confessional standards of the RCNZ.

The first item of business was the colloquium doctum of Rev. Alan Douma, who has been called by the Reformed Church of Hastings to be a missionary in Papua New Guinea. Rev. Douma was approved unanimously by the Presbytery with the intention that he be commissioned in December 2008 and take up his work as a missionary mid-January 2009.

The Reformed Churches of Hastings and Masterton answered the questions of Church Order Article 47 following which prayer was made for these congregations.

After approval of the minutes and adoption of the agenda, Presbytery received reports of church visits made to the Reformed Churches of Foxton and Palmerston North.

A report on the work of the Wellington Regional Youth committee was given by Rev. A. Nugteren. David Waldron has agreed to lead the studies for the upcoming Queen's birthday camp.

A report on the work of the OMB was given by Rev. P. Kloosterman. He noted that the OMB is focussing particularly on the work in Papua New Guinea, rather than trying to be involved shotgun-like in several mission works.

Leen Vandenberg was reappointed as Presbytery Clerk and also Treasurer. The presbytery expressed their appreciation for his past years of faithful and valuable service.

Presbytery adopted a proposal from Hastings to appoint Synodical Examiners every even year in the March meeting. This allows for men to be re-appointed but makes clear that the appointment is to be considered every two years.

Presbytery was pleased to appoint a sub-committee consisting of Rev. Michael Flinn and an elder from Silverstream to assess Erik Stolte for theological studies. Erik plans to begin his studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in September 2008.

Lengthy discussion was held on an overture from Masterton to rescind the previous decision of Presbytery to grant a one year license to preach to E. Rademaker. Masterton was not objecting to E. Rade-

maker himself but against the principle of licensing someone to preach who was not an office-bearer; arguing that the authority attached to the proclamation of the Word of God should be recognised by ordination to office and that apart from ordination to office a license should only be granted for a specific and limited purpose, such as licensing a student for the ministry as part of his training.

This overture was deferred until the July

meeting so that the sessions could give further consideration to the implications of licensing a man to preach and Palmerston North could consider whether they want to prepare an overture for synod.

Advice was given in closed session. The meeting was closed with the decision to meet in Hastings on the 5th of July when vicar David Waldron will have his final examination for ordination to the ministry.

Rev. Bruce Hoyt, Reporter

I will pour out My Spirit

A review of NYC 2008, Teapot Valley, Nelson, January 3-10

By Tim Sterne

A National Youth Camp (NYC) always creates special memories. It's a week of new friendships developed and old friendships reignited; late night pranks and early morning wake-up calls; epic sporting bat-

tles and sedate theological discussions; blossoming romances and broken hearts. While NYC08 had all these elements, it was memorable for something else — the Holy Spirit moved there.

And it moved in a way I have never previously experienced at NYC. We're not

talking about speaking in tongues or healings — which is what us Reformed folk sometimes think of when we hear that the Spirit moved — but we're talking about hearts being deeply touched by the powerful preaching of the Gospel and prayer.

The prayer started months before camp.



Those heavily involved in the organisation were obviously focused in prayer, but even those who weren't attending were asking for the Lord's blessing on the camp. And closer to camp the prayer intensified. The final push came from the study leaders as they met the day before camp to pray for their study groups. And God answered those prayers mightily, not least of all through the proclamation of His gospel at camp.

The public preaching came in a variety of ways — Reverend Robert van Wichen's lectures, devotions from campers and a testimony.

The lectures from Joshua on making a stand for Christ were consistently heartfelt, moving and challenging as we pondered how to redeem God's world, trust His promises, obey His commands and enjoy His friendship.

They were supported on Saturday night by what proved to be a provocative devotion by two young men on drunkenness. Campers uncomfortably murmured and muttered as they shuffled out of the marquee that night, but I don't think anybody realised that this was all God's build-up for the Tuesday morning climax.

It was an unusual atmosphere that morning as the rain pelted noisily on the roof of the dining hall during the study leaders' briefing. It soon became a slightly uncomfortable atmosphere when Robert announced that he wasn't entirely sure how the study for that day would end. He was

struggling to find a suitable way to get his point across for the topic, 'Obeying God's Commands'. After months of prayer and study before camp, and hours of prayer and study during camp, he knew that at some stage during his lecture he would ask Tim Nugteren to give his testimony — what would happen from there, God only knew. It was beyond Robert's control.

So when Robert invited Tim to stand in front of 220 campers and give his personal testimony, the stunned silence was deafening. And for the duration of his account of God's work in his life, that silence continued. And when he finished and collapsed into his seat, that silence remained for some time until Robert quietly closed with prayer. For many, including myself, the tears continued to flow as we headed off to our study groups. And it wasn't because we were in awe of Tim, but because God was awesomely using his simple story to touch the hearts of the campers. For some campers, God used Tim's testimony to bring them to Christ right then and there. For others, it was inspiration for them to quietly seek guidance and discipleship from others throughout the remainder of camp. For those in leadership roles, especially Robert, it was a mind-boggling display of God's power to use any situation to achieve His goals. A committee member summed it up nicely when she spoke to me later: 'That morning made me realise that all my stressing about the organisation of camp

was a complete waste of time. The camp runs according to God's plan, not ours.' It was an unforgettable morning.

In fact, it was an unforgettable camp. And quite different to the five other camps I have attended. But why?

The studies were special, for a start. The campers were constantly presented with in-your-face challenges on topics such as drinking and popular music, but it wasn't like they were being preached at. The challenges were accompanied by tears and personal confessions, and those issuing the challenges were the first to admit they had already failed in those areas.

The leaders were well prepared. Rather than addressing the study topic five minutes before each study, many had already spent a day in discussion and prayer about it.

And the committee was unique. Only Nick Alberts, camp president, had any previous experience. The rest were young and fresh — people the campers could easily relate to. And although some of them may not have immediately understood, they all knew by the last day that God is far bigger than logistics.

The second study at NYC08 was about trusting God's promises. In Joel 2:28, God makes a promise to Israel: 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people'. NYC08 was a time when God poured out His Spirit on our people.

Missions in focus

Community development in Papua

by Janice Reid with Hilco de Haan

Br Hilco de Haan is originally from Holland, but he lived in Canada from 1993 until 2001. He spent two years at theological college in Hamilton, Ontario, studying missiology. He then spent 5 years in British Columbia as a mission worker with native Canadians (aboriginals), preaching and

teaching, counselling and related tasks. Hilco has a Masters' degree in international development studies, so in 2001 he and his family went to Indonesia, where Hilco uses his skills in the service of the people of Papua. The de Haan family is supported by an organisation called Commissie van Overleg-Papua (CVO-P; the GKN(L) missions department, *De Verre Naasten* is one member of the board of CVO-P, together with two other Dutch mission boards). Hilco told me about his work when we met at the ICRC missions conference in January this year.

Did you hear what the boy lion said to the girl lion after he missed catching the springbok? "I hate fast food!" This was Hilco's comment as a sat down to

breakfast before venturing up the imposing *Petronas Tower* in Kuala Lumpur, on our final day in Malaysia at the conclusion of the ICRC regional missions conference. I had asked him to give an overview of his work in Papua, and this quip seems a pretty suitable introduction. Why? Because the contrast between 'fast' food and 'real' food is something like the contrast between easy handouts or long-term assistance to those who need it, in developing countries.

Hilco's job description is broad, but it mainly involves community development in the area of southern Papua (north of Merauke) in the flatlands south of the mountains. The area is very isolated, mainly rainforests, and there are no roads. Transportation is by river (dugout canoe)

or walking, so Hilco's family come to their home using the small planes provided by Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF).

Reformed missionaries have been involved in this area since the late 1950s. The first sermon was preached in 1958, so this year is the 50th anniversary of when the Gospel came to the area—and a celebration is planned in remembrance of that great event. Reformed missions grew in the 1960s with church planting, healthcare and education, and some community development in the form of agricultural projects. The height of Reformed mission in the area saw some fifty expatriates (25 missionaries plus their families) resident, ministering to the people of Papua.

Over recent years, though, Reformed mission in the area has declined significantly, to the point that there are now only two expatriate families living in the area. Some people left because their children needed to pursue high-school education, which was not available on-site. Others left for a variety of reasons; one of these was the relationship between the early missionaries and the national church.

The founding missionaries had ruled using a very western hierarchical model,

and this meant the national church did not grow strong and capable of ruling itself. So when the foreign leaders left, national believers were resentful and needy—both spiritually and financially. This led to tension between the local church and remaining missionaries—tension so stressful that even more missionaries felt compelled to leave the field. To make things even more complicated, the missionaries stopped their education and healthcare outreach, and closed the theological college (1997); this caused serious problems in an area where people had no other source of help.

Today, the government is responsible for medical care, and they are simply not doing their job. Healthcare is basic at best, to the extent that life expectancy of Papuans in this area is some 40 years. The educational system is as bad—in many villages there are not even elementary schools; or if they do exist, the quality of education is very low. People finish their schooling without basic literacy and numeracy—without the ability to cope with daily life.

Enter Hilco, who has come to help people gain skills that will help them to survive in this difficult context. Hilco's main job is to work with the national church, setting

up plans together with the community, to provide practical assistance. One area of this is to arrange skills training (mechanical repair, agricultural training, animal healthcare, administration/secretarial training, hand-sewing, budgeting); another is education (including provision of school materials); a third is healthcare (dental, ophthalmic clinics, HIV/AIDS education, and more).

In skill training, Hilco finds people who can teach practical skills to those in the community. This is mainly open to church members, but some people from the local community are also invited. In Papua with all its waterways, it's important that people are able to repair the outboard motors of their canoes—but few have such a skill. Hilco's teachers train people in basic repair: stripping, maintenance and rebuilding outboard engines.

In the same way, repair of chainsaws is an important skill. This part of Papua is rich with rainforests; and while we in the West think that rainforests should never be cut, this is not a matter of large-scale deforestation. People here need wood for their houses, for their cooking fires, and other similar uses. But when a man is out



Br Hilco de Haan with his wife and children

in the jungle and his chainsaw breaks down, he's got a major problem! If he knows simple maintenance and repair techniques, he can complete his work rather than losing days—or weeks—of productivity: there are no repair shops here; they're far away, on the coast.

Practical assistance of this sort may seem worlds away from the traditional concept of 'missions' or 'outreach.' But when church people are trained, they gain skills that provide their daily needs...in turn they can help their pastor or church members out of their newly-acquired surplus. When non-Christians are trained, they gain a new appreciation for the love of God and the fact that they are creatures made in His image. And, of course, the courses are taught with a Christian perspective; they begin and end with prayer, and all participants understand that the training is provided out of Christian love.

Hilco and family are planning to leave this mission field in June because of his children's educational needs; please pray that the work of community development would continue. Hilco is training Yustus Wombaki, a local Reformed Christian who, Hilco hopes, will be able to take over a lot of his work. Pray for the needy people of Papua, who routinely live with far less than we could even imagine! Pray for the effective uptake of the HIV education—if this is not widely accepted, AIDS will soon become a major problem in the area. And above all, pray for their growth in grace; that they may embrace the Lord Who will bring them safe into heavenly mansions free of poverty and suffering, as they put their trust in the blood of His Christ.



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