

faith in
focus

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Quotation in focus

The following quotation is taken from *E. J. Young's Isaiah Fifty-Three: A Devotional and Expository Study*, pages 54-55.

We are today living in an age when doctrine is not popular. One reason for this lack of popularity is probably to be found in the fact that so few people know what doctrine is. It is very rare that one hears a sermon that can be called doctrinal. And that valuable institution, the catechism class, has almost entirely vanished from the churches. If people knew something about doctrine they might make the astonishing discovery that, far from being dry and uninteresting and irrelevant, doctrine is the most interesting and relevant subject of all.

The fact is, nevertheless, that we are living in a day of doctrinal declension. In the churches men are much more interested in a program, and anything, such as doctrine, which might tend to interfere with the smooth working of that program, is looked askance. Yet there is nothing more important than doctrine. The word simply means teaching, and surely it is important to know what teaching the Word of God contains. The greatest need of the day is a revival of doctrinal teaching and preaching. Surely the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is doctrinal through and through, and as we consider its words, we may well come to understand how important doctrine truly is. When once men have this understanding, there may come a revulsion from the shallowness of so much of our modern religious life and a genuine return to the Word of the living God. May God hasten the coming of that day!.

I am sure that many of you read quality biblical books from time to time. If you come across a quotation or meditation that you think would be good to share with the readers of Faith in Focus, please email them to the editor.

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*For a small reward, a man will hurry away on
a long journey; while for eternal life, many will
hardly take a single step.*

Thomas a' Kempis (1380-1471)

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.

Understanding the Word

Interpreting Old Testament prophecy

Dr. Michael Flinn

"They [the prophets] have an odd way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at" (Martin Luther).

1. The nature of prophecy

Hopefully, by the end of this article, you won't have as bleak a view of the Old Testament prophets as Luther apparently had! There is a great deal of wonderful material in them that is very relevant for us as Christians today. But we do need to understand who the prophets were, what their role was, and how their ministries apply.

A common misconception about "prophecy" is that it is always "foretelling the future". While there is certainly a fair amount of prediction in the ministries of the Old Testament prophets, they are more accurately described as "forth-tellers" rather than "foretellers". In Deuteronomy 18:14-22, God made clear to his people that they were not to practise sorcery or divination like the nations that they would dispossess. So then, how would they know what God required of them when Moses was no longer with them? At Mount Horeb, they had made it clear that they could not bear to hear the voice of God directly on fear of death (vs. 16). As a concession to them, the Lord decided to raise up a prophet like Moses from among the Israelites as an intermediary figure. He promised to put his own words in the prophet's mouth and announced that the prophet would convey them to the people (vss. 17,18). Clearly this was a serious matter. God made it clear that he would hold to account those who refused to listen to the words spoken by the prophet in God's name (vs. 19). Furthermore, false or presumptuous

prophecy, or prophecy that claimed to speak on behalf of other gods, was punishable by death (vs.20).

Since prophecy involved bringing the very words of God to the people, all later prophecy had to be consistent with divine revelation that had been delivered earlier and recorded in Scripture. Indeed, one of the prophet's crucial roles was reminding the people of their covenant obligations that had already been revealed in the days of Moses, and of the certainty of divine judgment if they persisted in rebelling against Yahweh (cf. Deuteronomy 28). That being the case, much of what the prophets said was conditional upon the response of the people. This is the principle set forth in Jeremiah 18:5-12 (cf. Ezekiel 33:13-15 and Jonah 3:4-10). Notice: There was always a possibility of disaster being averted if the people repented, but all too frequently in Israel's history the response was further hardness of heart followed by the arrival of the announced judgment.¹

Geerhardus Vos sums up our considerations so far:

"From these [passages, i.e. Ex. 4:16; 7:1; Jer. 1:5,6] we learn that 'nabhi' (i.e. 'prophet') was understood as an appointed regular speaker for a divine superior, whose speech carries the authority of the latter...Whatever the etymology of the name in its origin, to the O.T. mind the prophet stood from beginning to end as the authoritative speaker for Jehovah."²

Vos goes on to point out that in Old Testament prophecy "not the mysteries of the background, but the issue in the open, where it reaches the mind of man, is the main consideration. The term [nabhi] is practical through and through, and so is the religion of the O.T. which it largely colours".³

It follows that the Old Testament prophets should *not* be as baffling as Luther apparently thought they were. Prophecy is all about communication – God's communication to his people. It was something that was intended to instruct and to challenge, to clarify matters rather than confuse.



2. Interpretive principles

Against this background, we can now proceed to look at some of the principles that are important for interpreting Old Testament prophecy.

2.1 Immediacy

It is important to note that, first and foremost, the prophets interacted with events pertaining to their own period. As one would expect, if they were indeed *preachers*, they would be interested in proclaiming God's Word in their immediate context rather than speaking of events that were thousands of years in the future.

Note the following:

- Hosea 4:1,2 (speaking of the 'state of the nation' in the 8th century B.C.)
- Amos 5:11-13 (speaking of his contemporary leaders, also in the 8th century B.C.)
- Jeremiah 4:6 (announcing the looming judgment of the Babylonian Captivity, which took place in 586 B.C.)

This is actually a blessing for us as modern readers. As Klein et al. point out:

*The fact that most prophecy spoke about the present or immediate future rather than the distant future should encourage Bible students today. No one should avoid studying prophecy out of fear of its obscurity. That the prophets spoke of their own day makes it easier for us to understand their message for our day. Indeed, sometimes they sound so painfully contemporary that readers may wish they did not understand them!*⁴

There is also a salient warning here against "newspaper exegesis", i.e. an interpretive method which reads back into Scripture events of the modern period as if that was what the prophet was speaking of originally.

2.2 The importance of history

Following on from 2.1, an understanding of the history of Israel and where the prophets fit in relation to it is vital if we are to interpret them correctly. Such crucial events as the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C., the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C., the subsequent restoration period and where the prophets stood in relation to these events is critical for understanding their messages. This raises a very important

interpretive principle in relation to all of Scripture, but especially in relation to prophecy:

- The interpreter must first answer the question: For whom was this prophecy intended and what did it mean to them? – before going on to answer the question: What does it mean for us today?

“The teacher/preacher should clarify the historical context first so that the congregation can see clearly what the prophet was saying to his generation and why he was saying it.”

This is also the case in Bible studies, and in sermons. The teacher/preacher should clarify the historical context first so that the congregation can see clearly *what the prophet was saying to his generation and why he was saying it*. From there, it is a case of finding parallel situations today and applying the truth of God's Word contextually. We can do this legitimately because God's character does not change (Malachi 3:6). He is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Therefore we can expect him to say similar things to us when the conditions are the same.

2.3 Partial and greater fulfillment

Sometimes this is referred to as the so-called "sensus plenior" or "fuller meaning" of a prophecy or a prophetic portion of Scripture. The idea here is that

prophecies can have an immediate fulfillment and yet also speak of events that come much further into the future.

Klein et al. explain:

We know of these multiple fulfillments because the NT reapplies an already-fulfilled prophecy to a later event. For example, God promises David that his son, Solomon, will succeed him as king and he will be my son" When Solomon later became king (1Kings 1-2), this prophecy found its fulfillment. But Hebrews 1:5 also applies 2 Samuel 7:14 to Jesus, not just as son of David, but as son of God. Sound theology undergirds the idea of such multiple fulfillments – belief that God rules all human history and can bring about both "sons".⁵

Another example of this is Isaiah 7:14. The immediate historical context of this prophecy was the threat of the Arameans and the northern kingdom of Israel joining forces and invading Judah in the south during the 8th century B.C. (vs. 1,2). Instead of trusting in God to help him meet this threat, King Ahaz relied on other means of assistance. Consequently, the prophet Isaiah rebukes Ahaz and announces that the Lord would give him a sign: "The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Then we have verses 16 and 17:

But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah – he will bring the king of Assyria.

Sure enough, the threat was removed. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Ahaz reigned from 735 – 715 B.C., so he clearly lived to see the fulfillment of this prophecy. But the New Testament makes clear that Isaiah's words had a greater fulfillment in the virgin birth of Christ (cf. Matthew 1:22,23). Again, this should not surprise or confuse us. The Lord was completely sovereign over the history of his people in Old Testament times, and was always working out his saving plan for the world, a plan which converges and focuses on the person and work of Christ. Because of this, a number of important events

and prophecies in the Old Testament times prefigured or pointed towards their ultimate fulfillment in the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord.

2.4 Prophecies within a Prophecy

Finally, Klein et al. offer a helpful principle, which might go some way towards answering Luther's complaint.

We recommend that longer prophetic books be read in small sections (i.e., a context of verses, a whole chapter, or several chapters, etc.). God did not intend the prophets to be read through at one sitting. The goal is to understand the major point(s) that each section stresses.⁶

3. Conclusion

The Old Testament prophets, because of their role and the nature of their work, present some of the most powerful and

compelling material in Scripture which, as the Lord's people, we simply cannot afford to miss. They expounded and applied our Lord's commandments to the people around them, reminding them of what it means to live in covenant with him. They reminded their hearers of God's character, his faithfulness, and of the certainty of his judgment on persistent rebellion and hardness of heart. But they also spoke compellingly and frequently about our Lord's mercy and love, his patience and his willingness to forgive upon repentance and a genuine turning towards him. And all of this saving work of our Lord came to ultimate fruition in the person and work of Christ, to whom so much of the ministries of the prophets tellingly pointed. Luther's comment, quoted at the beginning of this article, was no doubt spoken with characteristic boldness and most likely tongue in cheek. Don't let it put you off immersing yourselves in the goldmine of the Old Testament prophets.

Endnotes

- 1 In this respect, much of the prophetic message was preaching: An appeal to the heart of God's people – warning them if they do not listen, but assuring them of grace and forgiveness if they do. This is the kind of thing that happens regularly from our pulpits and underscores the important prophetic role that preachers have. The significant difference lies in the fact that the message of the biblical prophets was given to them directly by God, often in dreams and visions. Modern preachers expound and apply God's truth that has already been revealed in Scripture. They do not add to it with new revelations.
- 2 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, pp.192-193.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.194.
- 4 Klein, W. et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, p.304.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.305.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 311.

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Corporate responsibility

G I Williamson

The Bible itself says *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable"* (2 Tim. 3:16). So there is a reason for everything contained in the Bible, including the Old Testament (O.T.). As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come"* (1 Cor. 10:11). When we only cast a careless glance at the O.T. we can easily feel that the events recorded in the historical books have little to teach us. But when we take a closer look we discover that they are not merely records of the history of these Kings! No, they are history of God's Kingdom. So we begin to see that we're reading about the relationship between men and their Lord. A good example is found in the story of Jeroboam.

Trained in government

Jeroboam's life began in the time of Israel's greatest outward glory as a na-

tion. He was born into the family of a certain Ephrathite named Nebat, who was employed by Solomon. This gave Jeroboam an advantage in that he was trained from his youth in government. The Bible says *"Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor: and Solomon seeing... that he was industrious...made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph"* (1 Ki. 11:18). He used his opportunities well and merited advancement, and Solomon took notice. To his credit also is the fact that he began to defend the down-trodden and oppressed. When Solomon *"built the Millo and repaired the damages to the city of David his father"* (11:27) Jeroboam thought Solomon was demanding too much from his people. It appears that this was a courageous act, for its hard to believe Jeroboam could have dreamed of a successful revolt against Solomon, then at the height of his power. It would rather appear that Jeroboam acted sincerely, out of regard for his fellow men, without thought for personal consequences. Scripture also says Jeroboam only had one wife, a

notable virtue in that day and age. These are the facts scripture records, and they point to one conclusion. In terms of his relations with the people Jeroboam very likely seemed a better man than either Solomon, or his son Rehoboam! Yet when Jeroboam's son was very sick and he sent his wife to inquire of the prophet Ahijah, the prophet was instructed to pronounce doom upon his house and nation. The prophet's message may be summed up in the words of verse 16 *"He [God] shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam who did sin, and who made Israel to sin."*

Jeroboam's sin

The question which therefore arises is this: *what was the great sin of Jeroboam?* It was not adultery or murder – such as we find in the life of David. It was not tyranny or oppression – such as we find in Solomon, and even more in Rehoboam. So, what was it? The answer, of course was his lack of concern for the honor of God and the spiritual welfare of his people. In his supposed

concern for his *people* he completely disregarded *God*. He took seriously the second table of the law, but cared nothing for the first table. He broke the first table of the law because of his desire to serve his fellow men, and strengthen his kingdom. When Solomon died, and his son Rehoboam inherited his father's the throne, he threatened to increase the peoples' burden. It was then that Jeroboam boldly acted to form a new (Northern) Kingdom. For the sake of what he considered to be the *physical* welfare of the people he sacrificed their *spiritual* heritage. And he not only did it without divine approval – but even worse, against the solemn protest of God's prophet. His sin, then, was the sin of changing the kingdom of God into a kingdom of

that their son would die – that their entire 'house' would be cut off – and that the northern Kingdom would be destroyed "because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned **and who made Israel to sin**" (1 Ki. 14:16). For a long time nothing seemed to happen as a consequence of this sin. As Solomon once said: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11). Men sin and for the moment suffer nothing. So they begin to say, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most high?" (Ps. 73:11) When the first shock of Jeroboam's sin had worn off, and many Levites (and others) had departed for the southern Kingdom, everything seemed to go on

the fact that when Jeroboam corrupted the true religion he made "all Israel to sin." From the day Jeroboam instituted a corrupted worship, every single man, woman and child who stayed in Israel was thereby made to sin.

Made Israel to sin

This doctrine is despised and rejected of men. In Jeroboam's day, too, there were those who despised such teaching. They thought they could remain in Israel without being guilty – that they could be free of guilt by the mere fact that they did not agree with these wrong things. Yet the Bible – God's inspired word – says Jeroboam "made Israel to sin." That's the way it was whether they liked it or not. And the Bible tells us why: "For as the body is one, and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:12,13). And "the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of you: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (12:21). The members of a corporate body cannot separate themselves from the sin of that body. What we have here, in other words, is the scriptural doctrine of corporate responsibility – the doctrine which teaches that none of us are merely individuals. God has created us so that we *must* – and *do* – belong to corporate bodies. (1) This is obviously true with reference to the created order of our existence. Like it or not we are members of the human race. The human race is a corporate entity. God did not create each of us separately (as he evidently did the angels). Rather he created our first parents and gave them the power and command to be fruitful and multiply. We are all therefore related to our first parents as branches are related to a tree – members of the corporate body called the human race. Because our first parents were constituted representative and natural heads of that body, when they sinned we sinned, and when they fell we fell. We may not like this – we may not agree with it – but whether we agree with it or not it is a fact that Adam *made* us sinners. (2) And similar things can be said of corporate relationships in the spiritual realm. We do not say that God could not have dealt with sinners in a wholly individualistic manner. But at any rate he did not. And similarly the Bible clearly teaches that God appointed Christ as the second Adam – as head of a new (redeemed) race. He saved

“This doctrine is despised and rejected of men. In Jeroboam's day, too, there were those who despised such teaching.”

man! Whatever appeared to advance the physical welfare of his subjects – as he saw it – therefore had his approval. In place of the religion commanded by God, and worship regulated by his word, Jeroboam put a religion dictated by changing circumstances, and a worship regulated by mere human wisdom. And the thing that made his sin so unpardonable was the fact that he knew better. This is proved beyond all doubt in the 14th chapter, where we read of what he did when his son fell seriously ill. When this happened Jeroboam turned away from his own false religion to seek one of the Lord's true prophets, sending his wife, in disguise, so that no one would find out he really did not believe in the religion that he himself had invented.

Space for repentance

When we read such things we may be inclined to say: "Well, what is that to me?" There were probably many in Israel in Jeroboam's day who said the same thing. But we only begin to learn the lesson intended by God when we grasp the significance of the words of the Lord spoken to Jeroboam by the prophet. The prophet announced to Jeroboam's wife

as before. The King was a good man, it was said. And in spite of the dire warnings of the prophets, nothing bad seemed to happen. And again, we may be inclined to say, "so what?" Well, its right here that we need to grasp the solemn lesson. For the Bible not only says Jeroboam "sinned" but also says he "made Israel sin." (This statement is repeated 20 times in the two books of Kings). There were undoubtedly some remaining in the northern Kingdom who still believed in the true God. Indeed, even as the Lord pronounced these dreadful words against Jeroboam and his people, he still had not yet cast them away from himself completely. No, that did not happen for another two hundred years, long after Jeroboam's death. God still gave them space for repentance, in other words, pleading with them to repent that he might heal them. In the midst of judgment the Lord remembers mercy. We see this even in the death of Jeroboam's own son, for the Lord said, "he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam" (1 Ki. 14:13). But this does not change

them by representing them in both his obedience to the law, and his suffering of damnation. Therefore all who are saved become members of his body which is the Church that he purchased with his own blood. We might wish it was not this way. But it is. It pleased God to save his people as a body. And for those willing to receive it this is a blessed thing indeed. For among other precious blessings, there is also this, namely, that just as God visited Adam's children with Adam's curse, so he also visits believers blessings upon believers children. *"This promise is to you and your children, even to them that are afar off – as many as the Lord our God shall call"* (Acts 2:38).

Come out of her ...

And this brings us to the solemn lesson of our text. Jeroboam *"made Israel sin."* Because he represented all Israel in his sin, so the consequences were promised to all Israel. When church leaders depart from the word of God – corrupting true religion and inventing false worship – making it clear that its doctrine and practice are no longer according to God's revealed will, every man, woman and child sins by belonging to that church. And this is not altered in the least by their personal opinion. They may detest corrupt worship – they may wish something could be done about it – they may even detest their own 'Jeroboams' – yes, they may even be true believers in which God can see some good things toward himself. But that does not change the fact that they are guilty of the sin of that church body, and subject to God's promised consequences. For no matter what they may say, or think – the Bible says Jeroboam *made* Israel to sin and that God therefore said he would take away their inheritance. This is the doctrine of the N.T. too. In the book of Revelation we read of the church that departs from the Word of God under leaders like Jeroboam. And then Christ says *"Come out of her, my people..."* (Rev. 18:4). Yes, he recognizes that there are true believers in corrupt and disobedient churches. But what does he say to them? *"Come out of her...lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."* So it is clear that even if one is a true believer he still partakes of her sins and the consequences of them, if he remains in such a church. By the mere fact of belonging to such a church he is *made* a partaker of her sins and also her plagues. It was so with those who stayed



Rev. Gl and Doris Williamson

in Israel – even true believers – they lost the promise of the covenant line continuing in their children's children.

Adherence to the Word

When we warn people against belonging to such a church we are sometimes accused of trying to judge whether or not they are believers. Let us say quite clearly once more: we do nothing of the sort. It is not our place to say who is, and who is not, a true believer – *"The Lord knows them that are his"* (2 Tim. 2:19). But it is our place to say its wrong to remain in unfaithful churches. In saying this we are only saying what the prophet Ahijah said so long ago. And who can argue that Ahijah was wrong? Jeroboam's son *did* die. Jeroboam's whole 'house' (or dynasty) was utterly destroyed. The kingdom that he corrupted was carried into captivity never to return to God's covenant blessings. And such will surely be the portion of all who forget that faithful adherence to the word of God is the one thing that truly matters in this short earthly life that God has given us.

We (Doris and I) are thankful to be associate members of Cornerstone U.R.C. for three reasons related to this article: (1) This church has freed itself from such unscriptural doctrines as that of women pastors, elders and deacons along with the whole U.R.C. federation; (2) The U.R.C. (of which we are a part) belongs to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) a fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches which have also been liberated from these false teachings; (3) The U.R.C. also belongs to the International

Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC), an international fellowship of Church federations which are also free from the sin of Jeroboam.

Rev. Gl and Doris Williamson have been married for 64 years, and are members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and "associate members" of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Sanborn, Iowa. He has served as pastor in two congregations of the RCNZ.

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Interested in teaching English as a Second Language?

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

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

You must be 18 or over.

You must have a university degree.

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

Sing to the Lord

Many of you have had *Sing to the Lord*, the provisional Psalter of what will hopefully become the RCNZ's new Psalter-hymnal, in your hands for some months now – or electronically on your walls. Gradually a good number of churches are beginning to use it. That is very gratifying to us as a committee and we hope and pray that our work will really be a blessing to us all in bringing glory to God in our singing.

Synod 2002 charged us to “select Psalm versions that are as faithful as possible in content and form of expression to Scripture, granting proper room for poetical necessity.” Music is rather like beauty, in the eye of the beholder. The same applies to poetry, as to any art. That means there will be much to criticise in our work. For this reason also, the present selection as currently made available is provisional. It is there for the churches to ‘road test’ as it were and critique and feed that critique back to us. I can think of a few Psalms about which I am sure the whole committee would acknowledge we could not say,

“Yes, that’s exactly the tune for that Psalm!” So if you can spot them and have a better choice, do get back to us. We have already received quite an extensive Critical Review and will be studying that carefully.

We have taken our mandate seriously and, while there will always be room to differ in regard to tune choices and perhaps word choices, I do believe you have a very faithful versification of the Psalms for singing in *Sing to the Lord*. Every selection is quite recognisably the Psalm in question and of a length proportionate to the biblical Psalm. I don’t want to merely criticise the old 1957 Psalter-Hymnal, which has served us well, but there are instances in that book of there being maybe three or four selections dealing with one Psalm and yet still the whole Psalm is not versified. In this regard I believe I can say the committee has fulfilled its mandate. All the Psalms are done; they are done fully;

but they are not overdone.

There are some downsides to this attempt to “select Psalm versions that are as faithful as possible in content and form of expression to Scripture” even “granting proper room for poetical necessity.” The poetry of the old Blue Book was very good poetry. Our poetry is not as good. Besides the fact that proficiency in language is almost certainly somewhat short in our age, that ‘lesser’ poetry is a function not only of our charge to be Scripturally faithful, with which we are in full agreement; it is also a function of our intention to be as clear in meaning as possible. Therefore we have tended to go for straightforward language, a subject-verb-object type of sentence structure by and large. Furthermore, in any new versifications we have used modern language and it is a simple fact that modern verb endings (no seekeths, for example) and modern pronouns (you, your as opposed to ye, thou, thee and

PSALM 150
Praise God in his holy temple
 Capo 1: G (C)

C (D) G D C D Em (B)

his ho - ly tem - ple; praise the LORD in
 the sound - ing trum - pet; praise him with the
 the clash of cym - bals; with loud cym - bals

PSALM 93
Jehovah sits enthroned
 Capo 1: A

A E A E A D A

1 Je - ho - vah sits en - throned in maj - es - ty most bright,
 2 The world es - tab - lished stands on its foun - da - tions broad;
 3 The floods have lift - ed up their voice in maj - es - ty,

F#m E A D E A F#m E A E7 A

ap - par - elled in om - nip - o - tence, and gird - ed round with might.
 his throne is fixed, he reigns su - preme, the ev - er - last - ing GOD.
 but might - y is the LORD our God a - bove the rag - ing sea.

D7 G (Bm7 Em A) D

him for his acts of pow - er;
 with tam - bou - rine and danc - ing;
 him, ev - ery thing that's breath - ing!

thine, for instance) yield far fewer homonyms; hence far fewer available rhyming words. I cannot remember my sources now, but someone did the work and demonstrated it *so to be* – ah, there's an example, you see; if I tried that word order, the committee would jump on me and say it must be *to be so*. So you'd have to find a word to rhyme with *so* but not either *so* or *be*. (Have you ever tried writing poetry by committee, by the way? Ask the Rev. John Goris. I think he will agree with me it is a most discouraging business. It feels as though you designed this beautiful horse and you show it to the committee and they turn it into a giraffe or a camel.)

In terms of procedure, we studied the Blue Book first, our thinking being that if the Psalm were perfectly well done, familiar, to a liked tune, then leave well alone. Hence you will find 24 selections in *Sing to the Lord* as they were in the PH.

In principle, we considered our job done when we had found a good, faithful versification of the whole Psalm to a good, singable tune. One reason behind this is that it would be wonderful to have a generation of young people grow up associating each Psalm with a particular tune. It's too late for me but not for my grandchildren, and tune association is a wonderful memory aid. But real life is a bit more complicated. For a start, a completely new book would probably be a bit daunting for all of us to learn. As well as that, while in certain respects we must keep up with the times, we must not make newness an idol either. So newness has not been a controlling factor in our work. And this is where b versions come in; we have ended up with 28 b versions and one c.

There are generally two reasons for these. For a start, our mandate charged us that "where Genevan tunes are presented, the committee is to consider providing a non-Genevan alternative." Some people love Genevans; some people like some of them. Wherever you fall on that score, they do strike an unusual note to an Anglo-Saxon ear and the RCNZ have always had as their stated intention to be a NZ Reformed Church. And as a Kiwi of recent English descent, I honour the Dutch who founded these Churches for their sincere intention to be that. But we of English descent are really only familiar with Old 100th and Old 134th. There are thirteen Genevans in the book.

The other main reason for a b version

would be that over the years they have become favourites. Most times they will be versifications of parts of the Psalms only, and to tunes we have all come to love. We figured we would all miss them too much – or you would miss them too much for us to get away with leaving them out! On Psalm 73 we even get a c: *In sweet communion, Lord, with thee*. And, as with that one, any kept because they are favourites, for the same reason have been left with old pronouns, verb endings, etc. (But more on that subject next month.) On the other hand, Ps.1b is a modern and nicely done versification from Jubilate Hymns that has become quite well known among our young people particularly.

Occasionally a b version will be a summary of a longer Psalm, for example, 25b (as well as providing us with another Genevan), or 78b (*Let children hear the mighty deeds.*), which summarises the thrust if not the content of 78). In the case of Ps.139, we give a new versification to a beautiful modern tune as our main version. In case that doesn't take off so well with some we provide a full b version also, straight out of the PH. Then there are numbers 151 – 156. These also are favourites but are more hymns based on certain Psalms rather than versifications per sé. They will eventually appear in the hymn section under their respective subject classification, Lord willing.

A note on numbering. As explained above, b versions will generally not be a versification of the complete Psalm but some part thereof. The full Psalm will be completely versified simply under its number: 1, 5, 73, and so forth. There are three exceptions to this: Pss 89, 118 and 119. These are all very long Psalms. Ps.119 we have treated exactly as the PH did – a different tune

for each biblical paragraph, for musical interest. And, for my brothers conducting worship, just announce them as Ps.119, verse 137, as the case may be. And then I also say, "We'll sing all four stanzas." (At least those short sections of Ps.119 should all be sung!) We have found that works perfectly well here on the North Shore. Ps.89 is broken into Parts 1, 2 and 3 and 118 into Parts 1 and 2 with stanza numbering following straight through. We treated these two Psalms like this because while they are single Psalms, there is a different note, or a movement in subject matter between the Parts that permits or even warrants a different tune. And if you can suggest to us another, more upbeat 88 88 88 tune for the last five stanzas of Ps.22, we'd like to hear from you.

I will make that do for this month – with one last comment. Don't forget to read and study Mrs Lieda Brook's excellent *Introduction to Sing to the Lord*. Lieda, organist in the Hamilton Reformed Church, has really done us all a wonderful service here. She has tried to do two things with it. Firstly, she has given a nice introduction to the use and singing of Psalms including quite a section on "guidelines on specific Psalms." Lieda has a fine spiritual and liturgical discernment and while this is brief, it is very helpful. Secondly, she has sought to give ministers (and elders leading Worship Services) and musicians 'hints,' as she says, on musical accompaniment for congregational singing. She has given a good deal more than hints. **Please, my colleagues, fellow elders and musicians, read this little booklet to your own profit and for a more considered conduct of our worship.**

And on that emphatic note, I will sign off until next month.

John Rogers

A postscript on feedback from Berwyn Hoyt, our administrator:

"Road testing," as mentioned in the article, is part of the purpose of the provisional publication of the Psalms in *Sing to the Lord*. We've tried to make giving feedback very easy to do on the website at <http://hymnal.ws/feedback> or by post:

Berwyn Hoyt,
82 Crofton Rd,
Harewood,
Christchurch 8051

If you use a data projector, please refer to the website where you will find projector slides and also a list of restricted songs: <http://hymnal.ws/projection>

Illinois Christian Schools told to silence prayers before sporting events

The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) has banned Christian schools from broadcasting prayers or any religious announcements over their public address systems on days they host state sports tournaments, because the IHSA considers such prayers and announcements to be illegal.

Senior legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund David Cortman comments, "Not only does it not violate the Establishment Clause, but it violates the free-speech rights of private schools."

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

+ *Alliance Defense Fund, 15100 North 90th Street, Scottsdale, Arizona 85260, 800-835-5233, Fax: 480-444-0025*

Christian-themed movie 'Fireproof' out-grosses Oscar-winning movies 'Slumdog Millionaire' and 'Milk'

Several hours before the 22 February 2009 Academy Awards presentation was aired on television, National Public Radio (NPR) broadcast a seven-minute feature story about the January 2009 San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival (SAICFF), and SAICFF's efforts to showcase and reward hopeful films that honour Jesus Christ.

NPR Religion correspondent Barbara Bradley Hagerty opened her story, entitled "Christian Filmmakers Creating an Industry of Faith," with this probing question: "What was the biggest grossing independent film in 2008? No, not 'Slumdog Millionaire.' Not 'Milk.' It was a movie you've probably never heard of." ['Fireproof' starring Kirk Cameron].

SAICFF founder Doug Phillips commented, "The distinction between Hollywood's toxic culture of death and the burgeoning Christian film movement of life was highlighted in bold this weekend. On the one hand, the world watched as Sean Penn accepted the 'Best Male Actor' award by the Academy for his portrayal of homosexual activist Harvey Milk, even as Kate Winslet received the 'Best Female Actor' trophy for her performance in 'The Reader,' a pornographic story about a female Nazi war criminal seducing a fifteen-year-old boy."

Phillips added, "Those who attended our recent festival saw films rewarded

that build up rather than tear down the family – independent films such as 'Fireproof' that outsold 'Milk' in theaters by a wide margin. Even as Hollywood fails, Christian filmmaking is prevailing in exalting virtue, and the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival is helping to lead the way in this important cultural reformation in the arts."

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

Petrus van Mastricht's Theoretico-Practica Theologia to be translated from Latin and Dutch to English

The Dutch Reformed Translation Society (DRTS), is beginning the translation of late seventeenth-century theologian Petrus van Mastricht's Theoretico-Practica Theologia.

Theoretico-Practica Theologia was especially influential in the Netherlands, and was highly praised by British-Colonial North American theologian Jonathan Edwards.

Theoretico-Practica Theologia is a three-part work, with most of its 1300 pages contained in part one. The newly translated version will likely be published in four volumes. The first volume is anticipated to be available in three-to-five years. Calvin Seminary Ph.D. student and expert in Latin and Dutch, Todd Rester, is performing the translation.

+ *GoDutch.com, Vanderheide Publishing, Post Office Box 3006 Station LCD1, Langley, British Columbia V3A 4R3, 604-532-1733, Fax: 604-532-1734*

Is Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary planning to terminate Calvinist professors?

In a Christianity Today article dated 10 March 2009 titled, "Tiptoeing through TULIP – Layoff allegations reveal Calvinism tensions at Baptist seminary," writer Jim Jones investigates allegations that, "[Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) president] Paige Patterson had met with professors and implied that the seminary, which is facing economic problems, might first target Calvinist professors if it had to resort to layoffs."

In a February 2009 blog post, Pastor Wade Burleson of Enid, Oklahoma, raised the issue after receiving the information from SWBTS professors who attended the meetings with Patterson.

Burleson surmises that his blog article resulted in the seminary temporarily retreating from its alleged plan to fire the Calvinists.

SWBTS characterises the allegations as false information, with one SWBTS professor urging Burleson to "repent of your lies and slanders." In a subsequent blog article, Burleson declined to repent, and provided further details about recent goings-on at SWBTS.

+ *Christianity Today International, 465 Cundersen Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188, 630-260-6200, Fax: 630-260-0114, mwhite@christianitytoday.com*

Time Magazine ranks "The New Calvinism" as third of Ten Ideas currently changing the world

In an online article titled "10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now," Time Magazine ranks "The New Calvinism" as the third most influential idea currently changing the world. First place goes to "Jobs Are The New Assets," which extols the value of "human capital" in a world where the value of other assets is markedly shrinking, and second place goes to "Recycling the Suburbs," where vacant retail property is being converted to libraries, schools, and other municipal functions.

"10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now" author David van Biema says, "Calvinism is back...John Calvin's 16th century reply to medieval Catholicism's buy-your-way-out-of-purgatory excesses is Evangelicalism's latest success story, complete with an utterly sovereign and micromanaging deity, sinful and puny humanity, and the combination's logical consequence, predestination: the belief that before time's dawn, God decided whom he would save (or not), unaffected by any subsequent human action or decision."

Van Biema continues, "Calvinism, cousin to the Reformation's other pillar, Lutheranism, is a bit less dour than its critics claim: it offers a rock-steady deity who orchestrates absolutely everything, including illness by a logic we may not understand but don't have to second-guess. Our purpose is fulfilled simply by "glorifying" him. In the 1700s, Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards invested Calvinism with a rapturous near mysticism. [H]ard-core Reformed preaching (Reformed operates as a loose

synonym for Calvinist) [is currently limited] to a few crotchety Southern churches.”

John Piper, Mark Driscoll, and Albert Mohler are cited by the author as the leading voices of “The New Calvinism.”

+ *Time Magazine, Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, New York 10020-1393, 800-843-8463*

Malawi and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian celebrate 150th Anniversary of David Livingstone's arrival

April 2009 marks the 150th anniversary of explorer and missionary David Livingstone's arrival in what is now the country of Malawi and his exploration of the Shire River. Livingstone's missionary activities opened the way for future colonists and missionaries, and the founding of Malawi's dominant Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) that is modeled on the Church of Scotland. Today, most Malawians are Christians.

The Rev. Andrew Maere, deputy general secretary of the CCAP's Blantyre synod, said Livingstone had brought “the three Cs” to Malawi – “Christianity, commerce and civilization. To Malawi he is very important. We take him as a hero. He discovered the Shire and Lake Malawi, the most important of all is that he freed the people who were bought as slaves. That was the start of abolishing the slave trade in Malawi.”

Islam had already reached the area when Livingstone arrived, but Maere said that as Islam had been brought in by slave traders, the people were fertile ground for Christian missionaries despite their own chiefs' complicity in slavery.

+ *The National, Post Office Box 111434, Abu Dhabi, 971-2-4145328, newsdesk@thenational.ae* + *Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, General Synod, Post Office Box 30398, Capital City, Lilongwe 3, Malawi, 265-796064, ccapgeneral@africa-online.net*

+ *Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh, Scotland EH2 4YN, 0131-225-5722*

Former Taiwanese President taking seminary course on Reformation theologies

Li Hsin-ren and Lydia Ma report that Former Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui is currently taking a course on theologies of the Christian Reformation at Taiwan Theological College and Seminary. Lee believes that it is important to gain better understanding of Reformation theology.

Lees asks, “What is justification by faith? What is righteousness?” Lee challenges local churches to reflect on what they believe and on the essence

of righteousness. Lee adds, “If church leaders lose their ability to discern right from wrong and act fairly, how will they preach to others about ‘justification by faith’?”

Lee says that the Taiwanese people lack religious awareness and rarely apply their religious beliefs to their lives, and says that without religious faith, it is impossible to discern right from wrong or know the essence of righteousness.

+ *Presbyterian Church in Taiwan*

Taiwan anti-gambling protestors march backwards to protest casino proposals and accompanying slide in morality

Chiou Kuo-rong and Lydia Ma report that anti-gambling advocates in Taiwan protested against the legalization of casinos by intentionally marching backwards during a protest rally held on 15 March 2009 near the office of President Ma Ying-jeou to protest the president's leading Taiwan into a moral backslide by turning the “Republic of China” into a “Republic of Casino.”

Members of the Taiwan Anti-Gambling Alliance said the Offshore Islands Development Act that would allow for casinos to be built in Taiwan's offshore islands was easily passed on 12 January 2009 despite fiery opposition and rising nationwide concern.

Presbyterian Church in Taiwan Seven Stars Presbytery East Gate Church pastor the Rev. Lo Chun-gi (Lu Jun-yi) led protesters in prayer during the rally, praying, “We are saddened that we elected greedy legislators and a greedy government. We never thought that those in office would use cunning lies and tactics to confuse the public and infuse wrong social values. Seeing government officials portray gambling as a lifesaver that will revive the national economy is tragic and saddening. God, we pray for You to help us stop this corrupt legislation from destroying people's character and fill Taiwan with righteousness!”

+ *Presbyterian Church in Taiwan*

Hindutva's Indian Christian 'Dhimmis'

Hindu nationalists in Orissa, north-east India, are humiliating Christians in the way Islamic states have historically subjugated their ‘dhimmis’ (Jews and Christians under Islamic rule). Whilst most Christians displaced by last year's pogrom are still too fearful to return to their homes, those who do are being forced to ‘become Hindus’ or pay a

fee. Those who continue as Christians are then forced to wear humiliating clothing; dismount from bicycles and salute ‘Hindu’ tribals whenever and wherever they come across them; not use public facilities while Hindus are there; and not attend church under threat of sanctions (loss of water, firewood and the like). Some observers fear another attack is being planned. Others believe that Christian leaders are being targeted for elimination. Please pray for India, especially for the Church in Orissa.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | Mar 2009

Somalia, Kenya and the dispersed Somalis

When Ethiopian forces withdrew from Somalia in January 2009, an al-Qaeda-backed militia called al-Shabaab filled the vacuum. This Taliban-style group controls virtually all southern Somalia and is operating military camps where Muslims are trained for local, regional and international jihad. Lawlessness, war and repression has forced multitudes of southern Somalis to flee across the southern border into Kenya. Christians in Garissa in Muslim-dominated North Eastern Kenya are experiencing escalating persecution and the local Kenyan authorities are reluctant to act, preferring to appease the Muslims for the sake of ‘peace’. But this emboldens the Muslims and endangers the Church. Please pray for God's intervention in Somalia; for justice in North Eastern Kenya; and for revival amongst the dispersed Somalis.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | Mar 2009

Lawyers suffer for defending religious liberty

In countries where there is great official and/or social hostility towards the Church, lawyers who courageously advocate for the human rights of persecuted Christians do so knowing that they will most probably pay for it with their own life or liberty. Asian Christian lawyers presently suffering include Gao Zhisheng (imprisoned) and Li Subin (persecuted) in China; Nguyen van Dai (imprisoned) and Le Tran Luat (persecuted) in Vietnam. These lawyers are often overlooked or forgotten by the Church and regarded as secondary victims, not primary victims like pastors or those persecuted in the course of worship or mission. Yet these lawyers are in every sense offering their bodies as living sacrifices – an act of spiritual worship (Romans 12:1). Please pray for them.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | Mar 2009

The Dark Monster

A parents' struggle with mental illness

Mental illness. It's not something Christians like to acknowledge or talk about openly, but it is an issue we perhaps need to think about, because Christians are no more immune to manifestations of this illness because they are Christians, than they would be immune to cancer or diabetes because they are Christians. When the world was cursed, the brain was not exempt, and in practice it means that some people will be more vulnerable to mental illness simply because of the way their particular brain works – its thought patterns, its processing rate, its inability to understand the world rightly, and some or all of these factors exacerbated by the sinfulness of the heart. What I call the Big Ones – Schizophrenia, Bi-Polar, severe depression, for example, are horrific illnesses. They are not something we would wish on anybody, least of all on our loved ones.

Recently our daughter experienced a psychotic episode. They called it a "mixed affected state". We'd never experienced anything like this before, although we knew she had lived through numerous times of

depression, usually characterized by intense activity followed by a period of lethargy. Always she had come through – in time – although over the past few years we did wonder if it was getting worse. No matter, we thought. By the grace of God we would cope, as we always did. And then the unthinkable happened and suddenly we were totally out of our depth. It caught us by surprise and we were completely unprepared. Hence this article, for there is nothing new under the sun, and what we experienced will be similar to what many others have gone through, and if you think you might be vulnerable or know somebody who is vulnerable, you need to be aware – at least more aware than we were.

We had noticed in the past that M. (daughter) frequently went through a hard time when something went wrong, when big changes occurred, or when something happened that she didn't know how to cope with. It caused stress. Big time. This last situation was also triggered by a major stress issue of greater severity than ever before; we kind of expected her depression phase to happen and were waiting for the usual intense activity to "kick over" into the lethargy state, but this time it didn't.

She withdrew from everyone, spending most of her time outside in the garden swinging on the seat. She didn't get out of her PJs for three days, and at that stage, we thought, we HAVE to take her to a doctor. She needed help and we were pretty desperate ourselves. The doctor said she seemed "a bit flat" and prescribed *Arapac*, which the Pharmacist assured us was extremely common – "Lots of people are on this". 'At last', I

thought. 'Maybe things will start picking up now'. Two days later it was murder. Our usually quiet daughter was screaming at the top of her voice, banging the table with both fists, telling us that she hated us and to leave her alone. Then I rang a Christian counsellor I knew who said we really needed to take her to a psychiatrist. "GPs," she said, "are not trained enough in the kinds of drugs and their effects, whereas a psychiatrist specialises in both mental illnesses and their treatments". Then I rang our pastor, who fortunately had had experience in this area, and he suggested calling in the crisis team from the hospital, who would come to our house if necessary and make an assessment. Our pastor's wife also had good advice. "Just trust them", she said. "These people are trained and they know what to look for. They know what they are doing. *Trust them*. The Lord uses these people." Those were words I needed to hear because I didn't trust the state or the medical profession one iota; and if they took what our daughter said seriously our whole family would be up before the courts and answerable to all sorts of accusations. In desperation I rang the doctor back and said I was calling in the Crisis Assessment Team and then rang Mental Health. Wonder of wonders, there was a "highly unusual" cancellation and I could bring M. down.

Our pastor's wife was right. These people were totally unfazed by what was coming out. I told them that she had been on *Arapac* for two days. The conversation after a time ran something like this:

"It sounds like you have lots and lots of thoughts going round in your mind at the moment, M. Is that right?"

"Yes".

The psychiatrist turned to me and told me to **cease *Arapac* immediately** – it would be making the symptoms worse. He was certainly right on that count!

"Do you hear voices, M?"

"Yes".

"Tell me about them".

"They are all black".

That, he said, was 'highly significant'. They prescribed an anti-psychotic drug which he said would slow the brain



down and begin to sort out the jumbled thoughts.

Home we went, and gave her the new drug. Four hours later she was taken to hospital in an ambulance, after suffering a reaction which almost looked like a fit and in which she seemed to lose consciousness.

The cry of my heart was 'Lord, how much more are You going to ask us, and her, to bear?'

The Psych team saw her the next day and she came home on Lorazepam, which is a sedative, and a sleeping pill to help her get a good night's rest. At 3:00am she was awake, and she stayed awake till morning, terrified, whimpering, and all I could do was stroke her and softly assure her that she was OK, she would be all right, and that nothing could hurt her. It was one of the most horrifying experiences I've ever endured, seeing somebody we loved so much undergoing such agony and being unable to help.

Next day, another psychiatrist came with another nurse and they talked again with M. and found more evidence of psychosis – voices, hallucinations, jumbled thoughts. So they prescribed another drug, this time in a very low dose since her brain was "very sensitive"; probably, they thought, due to a mild intellectual disability she had had since birth. This time, it worked. Thoughts started unjumbling. The extreme fear and hyperactivity disappeared. M. started smiling again. Yes, there is a long road

ahead, but the first steps had been made, and at last the pit had a shaft of light shining in the darkness.

So how do you handle psychosis in the family? Many people don't want to know. And yet, in one of her lucid moments, M said to the psychiatrist and the nurse, "I don't think I'm making sense. You must meet some strange people in your work." The nurse smiled. "Not re-

from a psychotic episode about what they said and did during that time. They probably will not remember it, and to tell them will only compound their guilt, to no purpose.) When a person is hearing voices in psychosis it is vital they get help, because without it, the voices become more and more demanding, and can end with the person taking their own lives, or harming someone else, all the

“So how do you handle psychosis in the family? Many people don't want to know.”

ally", she said, "One in four people in New Zealand suffers from mental illness at some time in their lives". **ONE IN FOUR.** Translate that into the church community. That means 25% of families and victims have to come to terms with this and deal with it.

What is psychosis? Baldly and very simply, it's insanity. It is a time when the imagined world of the mind, usually horrifying, becomes more real for the person than the real world. Insanity is a defence in law, because the person is not responsible for what they are doing, or thinking. (That is one reason why it is wise not to talk to a person recovering

while genuinely believing they are doing a good deed.

When a person is in a psychotic state, you can't argue or reason with them because the brain is not able to think logically – all you can do is gently soothe, reassure, or if a person is in a paranoid state, perhaps not say anything at all! M. said it felt "as though her brain was fused together", and that is probably a good illustration, because what are usually separate thoughts and events become completely jumbled.

Name withheld

To be continued

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

Part 1

By way of introduction, for general interest, I was picked up from the airport by the Rev. Willem Pieters, who served the Dunedin congregation from 1991 – 1996. Willem and Janette took a call to the Reformed Churches of Zimbabwe in 1997, which at the time were desperate for English-speaking ministers. Sadly, about five or six years later, it got to the point where the RCZ could no longer support them and they returned to South Africa. At the time the Dutch Reformed Church, from

which they originally came, had a surplus of ministers, and Willem accepted a call to an independent Presbyterian Church. Sheryl and I attended the church on our last night and it would seem that they are doing a good work there. They send their regards to all who knew them.

The Synod met from 5th to 16th January, 2009, and as I mentioned last month, this was a big Synod, in anybody's book.

Celebration and rejoicing Synod – on two counts!

First off, it was the Fiftieth Synod of the

RCSA, which means it celebrated their 150th Year as a denomination. This meant that all the Fraternal Greetings were intended to be congratulatory and the final time we were told we could have was three minutes! I did my best, honest, and took nine. Geoff van Schie (Christian Reformed Churches of Australia) did slightly better; he took seven. (We timed each other to see how much we sinned. Well, there you have the facts! It was a bit ridiculous really and we sinned the least! Considerably less than some local people! Nevertheless, it was a wonderful celebration and a privilege

to be there.)

The second reason for celebration was that it was the very first **General Synod of the RCSA**. This is where I put the emphasis in my message, and you have read that already. For further details see my report of the 2006 Synod. I'm not going to say it was necessarily the only right way for them to be organised as a church, but it was a real achievement and something to be thankful for and to pray that God would bless them in it. For it really was the Afrikaners who set the agenda and the tension showed at times. Like all things in this world, it is a work in progress; and the whole attempt imposed itself on other points of the agenda, as you will see below. It may involve some revision of the Church Order and then there are any number of practical problems that will have to be worked out over time. In the meantime, 2009 decided they must still try to win the remaining Soutpansberg Churches, and agreed to ask the help of the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Churches of North America, both of which have historical ties with Soutpansberg. The RCSA can be quite humble in this sort of thing and we can admire them for that. We should pray for that also.

So what was on the Agenda? A very great deal, as always! The original agenda was 438 pages, and with the supplementary agenda which one only gets upon arrival, the whole turned out at 613 pages. But then, everything goes to advisory committees and another 316 pages were produced as these committees reported back. Admittedly that latter figure is double because all the committee reports were produced in Afrikaans and English, and being produced at that rate, sometimes the English is not too hot and not too accurate, and one can get oneself caught! But here again, one has to take one's hat off to the real effort and expense they go to to involve all the delegates. Of course, they had to do it for the black brothers on this occasion but they have always done it for us foreign delegates.

Women in Office

This was again the biggie and rather a fly in the rejoicing ointment on this occasion. As with many churches in the world at this time, there is quite some tension in the RCSA and it is my judgment that it is on this issue that everything comes to a head. There is a logic in that because underneath it is the question of hermeneutics.

A brief review: on the basis of a comprehensive and pretty good report in my

judgment, 1988 decided that women could not serve in any of the ruling offices of the church. There were appeals in 2000 against 1988, none of which were successful. However, in response to an overture, a committee was appointed to study the question: given their position that Scripture disallows women to serve in office in the church per 1988 (and that was very clearly stated), what, positively, is women's role in the life of the church in general? That committee came back in 2003 with recommendations that all offices be opened to women, a matter for which it had no mandate, along with a minority report. And yet, 2003 decided to open the office of deacon to women. Hence, in 2006, Synod was faced with thirteen appeals and petitions of protest from individual churches, classes and regional synods. All these focused on the un-Church-Orderly manner in which 2003 came to its decision; namely, it was beyond the committee's mandate, and secondly, 2003 contradicted 1988 without restudying 1988 and demonstrating that it was contrary to Scripture (CO.31). The first petition of protest to come to the floor succeeded. In the intervening three years, of course, many women had been ordained deacons, so 2006 also appointed another committee to *offer Scripturally grounded advice to the next synod on the question of whether women should be allowed to serve in the office of deacon and/or other organized forms of diaconal works of service, or not. Relevant material, including that which was on the table at Synod 2006, as well as the content of the report to Synod 1988, should be kept in mind. This study must provide clear grounds to substantiate any recommendation it offers that a synod decision must be changed, so that a fixed and binding decision can be made on this matter.*

This committee submitted a very poor report indeed, to be honest. It certainly did not *provide clear grounds to substantiate any recommendation it offers that a synod decision must be changed*. Perhaps in the back of their minds was that 2009 was to be a rejoicing Synod, so they tried to give the appearance of unity. But the committee was not united. Trying to avoid a majority/minority report situation, they ended up with a 'Synod could go this way' recommendation and a 'Synod could go that way' recommendation; and: if Synod went this way, it would need to do so and so; if Synod went that way it would need to do such and such. Not very helpful.

But in the end they did not have

to deal with the report, for again there was a welter of appeals and petitions of protest. The one that was discussed first, even though it came back from the advisory committee quite a bit later than others, argued that 2006 was in error when it set aside 2003 and presented a very long report arguing how and when a matter may and may not be altered by succeeding Synods; and, by very specious argumentation in my judgment, the terms *women in office* and *women in the church* are synonymous; ie, that any study of women in the church will *ipso facto* include women in office. But it was precisely those two terms and all they mean that were explicitly distinguished in the mandate to the committee appointed in 2000. While the advisory committee dealing with this report demonstrated that each of its three grounds was invalid, the Synod as a whole disagreed with them and upheld the Appeal. 2003 was reinstated! So, all the other appeals and the Synod's own commissioned report was off the agenda!

Well, what to do? Synod decided, because they simply had too much on the agenda, to adjourn only until some future date within twelve months, and in the meantime, appointed a committee to bring back recommendations how to deal with this very untidy (to say the least) situation.

Men in Office

A twenty page report, consisting of six 'Studies' on various aspects of the work of the elder, was presented to and adopted by Synod. Of interest is the fact that the Synod (1) appealed to the churches and the pastors to recognise the seriousness and the importance of properly training and preparing men for the office of elder; (2) urged the theological school to give clear instruction to its students on the nature, content and standards pertaining to the office of elder; (3) asked the churches to consider conducting training sessions (for the churches of a Classis or a Region) on a regular basis – so as, in that way, to see to it that there is on-going preparation and training for the office of elder available; and (4) proposed that such courses include the following: (a) instruction in basic, *ad rem* facets of hermeneutics, exegesis and revelation-history; (b) instruction in the teaching/doctrine of the church – focusing specifically on the doctrinal standards of the church; (c) the principles and practice of Reformed church polity; (d) the principles and practice of pastoral work (the art of shepherding); and (e) the principles

and practice of missions/evangelism and apologetics.

This was a very good decision. All our presbyteries attempt to provide this training in various ways and, as a rule, the less our lives are ruled by Synod the better. But I did wonder whether we could do better here. Some of my colleagues are better at this than others (and I certainly among the latter). But why don't we try to coordinate and combine our efforts in some way and have a sort of travelling Friday evening/Saturday seminar going

round the Presbyteries, in which one or two particular aspects of the above-mentioned points a)- e) could be covered each year and the whole covered once every three years?

Conclusion

Sadly, there is quite a bit of unhappiness in the RCSA at the present time. One can only hope that they will really have it out on Women in Office when they reconvene later in the year. There is no good putting it off. It's well and truly time

to bite the bullet and be done, whatever 'done' turns out to be. And yet there is so much good work going on by quality people in these Churches and this attempt at unification is really a wonderful lead to the other Churches in South Africa. The work being done in education, which I want to report on next month is also, so far as I can see, simply admirable. So let us continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in the RCSA.

John Rogers, March, 2009

How women started the culture-war

(Part 2)

In this series we have been trying to understand how women and religion became limited to the home. In the previous issue we saw how the typical colonial household in America was an integration of family and work life. Husband and wife worked side by side on a daily basis, sharing in the same economic enterprise. Women were involved in many more household tasks (spinning, weaving, etc) than the modern woman, and were also involved in the family business. Men were not just 'on the job' but were responsible for the common good of the whole household.

Home as haven

All of that changed with the Industrial Revolution. The main impact of the Industrial Revolution was to take work out of the home. This apparently simple change – in the physical location of work – set off a process that led to a sharp decline in the social significance accorded the home, drastically altering the roles of both men and women.

Industrialisation took place in America at breakneck speed, roughly between 1780 and 1830. In the early stages, whole families went to work in the factories or did piecework at home – after all, they were used to working together as a unit. But it soon became evident that industrial work was shockingly different from the older family-centered work culture.

Since we've grown used to an industrialised workplace, we have to use a bit of historical imagination to grasp the differences. The old pattern was

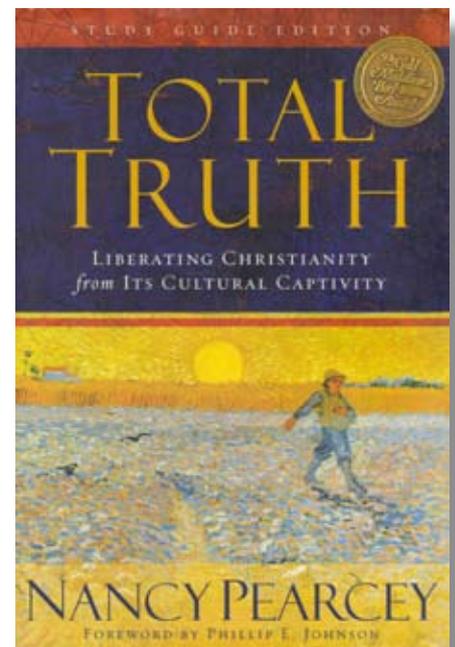
based on personal relations between a farmer and his sons and hired hands, or between craftsman and apprentices. In the Industrial Revolution, that gave way to impersonal relations based on wages. Or again, in the old handcraft tradition, a single craftsman would plan, design, and then carry out a project. But under capitalism there arose an ever-increasing class of managers and contractors, who took over all the creative planning and decision making, while leaving workers with mechanical tasks divided into simple, repetitive steps – the assembly line. In the traditional agrarian society, farming and handcrafts were "task-oriented," structured by human need and reasonable requirements. But in an industrial society, factory work was "time-oriented," structured by the clock and the regularity of the machine.

The new workplace fostered an economic philosophy of atomistic individualism, as workers were treated as so many interchangeable units to be plugged into the production process – each struggling to advance himself at the expense of others. To many, the world of industry seemed to be a Social Darwinist war of each against all. (Some have even suggested that Darwin's concept of the struggle for existence was merely an extrapolation into biology of the competitive ethos of early industrialism.)

It was not long before a great social outcry was raised against this new and alien work style, while large-scale efforts were mobilised to restrict its de-humanising effects. The primary strategy was to delineate one outpost where the "old"

personal and ethical values could be protected and maintained – namely, the home. It came to stand for enduring values and ideals that people desperately wanted to maintain in the face of modernity: things like love, morality, religion, altruism, and self-sacrifice.

To protect these endangered values, laws were passed limiting the participation of women and children in the factories. This was followed, beginning in the 1820s, by an outpouring of books, pamphlets, advice manuals, and sermons that delineated what historians call a doctrine of separate spheres: The public sphere of business and finance was to be cordoned off from the private sphere of home and family – so that the



home would become a refuge, a haven, from the harsh and competitive world outside, a place of solace and spiritual renewal.

Why men left home

How did these changes affect men and women? The most obvious change is that men had little choice but to follow their work out of households and fields, and into factories and offices. As a result, their physical presence around the household dropped sharply. It became difficult for them to continue acting as the primary parent. Fathers simply no longer spent enough time with their children to educate them, enforce regular discipline, or train them in adult skills and trades.

As a result, the most striking feature of child-rearing manuals of the mid-nineteenth century is the disappearance

of references to fathers. For the first time we find sermons and pamphlets on the topic of child-rearing addressed exclusively to mothers rather than to fathers or both parents. Men began to feel connected to their children primarily through their wives. The story is told of one Victorian father with sixteen children, who failed to recognise his own daughter at a parish Christmas party: "And whose little girl are you?" he asked. To which the miserable child replied, "I am yours, Daddy." The incident was probably exceptional, yet there is no doubt that middle-class fathers were becoming secondary parents.

Indeed, the role of mothers in child-rearing actually became more salient than it had been in the past, when they

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The impact on women was, if anything, even more dramatic. After the Industrial Revolution, the home eventually ceased being the locus of production and became a locus of consumption – which meant that women at home were gradually reduced from producers to consumers. Household industries with their range of mutual services were replaced by factories and waged labor.

had shared the task with other adults in the household – grandparents, single relatives, older siblings, servants, and especially fathers. As these others left home for the workplace, raising children became almost solely the mother's responsibility.

In a nutshell, women experienced a drastic decrease in the range of work available to them in the home – while, at the same time, experiencing a dramatic increase in responsibility for the narrow range of tasks that remained. Historical records give evidence of the dramatic change: Women "vanished more or less entirely from a number of occupations; they appeared less frequently in public records as printers, blacksmiths, arms-makers, or proprietors of small business concerns." As I mentioned earlier, colonial widows often took over the business when their husbands died – but no longer. "By the early nineteenth century," writes one historian, "widows were conventionally viewed as pitiful charity cases," lacking the work skills to support themselves.

The passionate male

Even the portrayals of masculine and feminine character came in for social redefinition. In the older ideal of "communal manhood," the key word was duty: duty to one's superiors and to God. Manly virtue was defined as keeping one's "passions" in submission to reason (with passion defined primarily as self-interest and personal ambition). The good man was one who exercised self-restraint and self-sacrifice for the sake of the common good.

But the emerging world of industrial capitalism fostered a new definition of virtue. The capitalist world seemed to require each man to function as an individual in competition with other individuals. In this new context, it was appropriate, even necessary, to act under the impulse of self-interest and personal ambition. Economic theories appeared – like Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* – that treated self-interest as a universal natural force, analogous to the force of gravity in physics.

At the same time, political theory was shifting from the household to the individual as the basic unit of society. Classical republican political philosophy – with its organic view of an overarching, unifying common good – gave way to an atomistic view of society as an aggregate of warring, self-interested individuals. There emerged a new vision of the individual as free from settled social bonds, free from generational ties to the past, free to find his own place in society through open competition.

We discussed these trends earlier in relationship to the evangelical movement, but they also had an enormous impact on the family. Eventually the values of the colonial period were actually turned upside down: The Puritans had viewed the "passions" as a threat to social order, requiring control and self-restraint for the public good. But by the end of the nineteenth century, male "passions" and self-interest had come to be viewed in a positive light – as the source of equality and economic prosperity.

In fact, the word competitive now entered the English language for the first time. Until then, the English did not even have a word for a person who relished the challenge of a contest. But by the end of the nineteenth century, competition had become an obsession among American men. It was firmly believed that free competition was the engine of prosperity and political life. "By a remarkable inversion," writes

Lesslie Newbigin, people began to find “in covetousness not only a law of nature but the engine of progress by which the purpose of nature and

nature’s God was to be carried out.” And as men went forth to do battle in the tough, competitive world of commerce and politics, the masculine

character itself was redefined as morally hardened, competitive, aggressive, and self-interested.

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

The Dinner-Table Conversation

Tables are the focus

Susan Hunt has written a book entitled *Your Home, a Place of Grace*. And she is right: our homes are places God uses to bring blessing. In them we serve him and other people. In them we receive the blessings marriage brings, in them we teach our children to love and walk with God. They are places where we build friendships and gather guests; where we share Christ with the lost and needy; and where we enjoy all the good things that God has given us day by day. Our homes are the focus for a great deal of our eternally-significant work. And it is our dinner tables that are the focus of it all. Tom and Jane Patete, friends of Susan Hunt, have understood this very clearly:

Not very fancy, even less expensive, sometimes a bit wobbly – that’s the venue where most of our family’s spiritual history unfolded. This kitchen table, a site of meals and a myriad of other gatherings, is an icon of the cumulative relationships, communication, and attempts at a Godward focus, that contributed to our “corporate” growth in grace.

More than just formal family worship, the teaching / learning events that took place here were primarily those that flow out of daily routines, both joys and sorrows, children’s questions, life along the way. Experience was the backdrop for lessons on the deep things of God. To “think Christianly was our goal, and be it by disciplining or discipline, to see the minds of children (indeed, of us all) gradually

captured for Christ, is the fruit to be cherished.

The round formica-clad surface of this table also provided a comfortable circle for visits by church members and neighbours alike. One particular ministry opportunity, recurring and still memorable, were the young wives/mothers seeking counsel. Among them, a single mom (whose life was a mess) stands out because together we navigated so many difficult trials with her. Troubles and problems were not always alleviated, and never easy, but the welcoming ambience of a faith-based home supplied solace and a stage for teaching.

As varying portions of our extended family or other out-of-towners, would come through our door, somehow the intimacy of the small table made it the centre for fellowship. This perhaps gave us a natural ease with carrying on with those traditions that reflected the spiritual dimension of our home. On one such occasion, that pattern resulted in the husband of a visiting couple coming to terms with the Gospel he had heard many times previously – the witness that impacted on him, quite to our amazement, was merely seeing a Christian family live as usual.¹

Why it is so

There are some good reasons why this is so. For many families dinner is the one time of the day that everyone is gathered together, with time to talk about what has happened, who they’ve met, how work went, what problems they’ve encountered or what joys they’ve experienced. It is the time when we catch up with what each other has done, and learn what each other’s thoughts are. It is a time to learn, listen, teach, advise, correct and admonish. Parents and children deal

with issues, study the Scriptures together, pray and grow in love together. It is a precious time, a Deuteronomy 6 time; and for that reason we need to do all we can to preserve it for family life.

For another thing, sitting around the dinner table means we are facing one another. We look into each other’s faces as we speak, which helps us see the visual expression of each other’s thoughts. We are also sitting close enough to be intimate, but not so close that we feel pressured by a breach of personal space. From ancient times people from all societies have appreciated this fact: eating is a communal, sociable affair. In Graeco-Roman times men reclined on couches, facing each other. It was in such a setting that the Lord Jesus had some of his more important conversations as recorded in the gospels. Think of his meals with “tax-collectors and sinners”, his meals in Bethany at the house of Lazarus, Mary and Martha – or the Last Supper with his disciples. Mealtimes are – or should be – conducive to good conversation.

There is also the food aspect: a well-cooked meal, enjoyed in relaxing surroundings, creates a sense of well-being. It revives the tired, and restores the equilibrium of many a troubled (or out of sorts) person. My kind, unassuming and gentlemanly uncle surprised everyone at our wedding, and brought the house down, when he proposed a toast and advised me: “When all else fails, feed the brute!”

Don’t let cooking stress you

But it is a sad fact that many of us stress and strain ourselves by putting too much effort into trying to provide the perfect meal for our guests. These days even the best television cooks take pains to point out that the thing that counts is conversation, not the food. Don’t work yourself up into a state of nervous exhaustion because of the food. Your guests are coming to enjoy you, and they won’t



Norman Rockwell, *Freedom from Want*, 1943

if you are stressed out to the max. Jo Seagar, more interested in sharing a drink in the living room with her friends than in “slogging my guts out in the kitchen”, advises that “Cooking for friends is like a generous gift offered to the people you care about the most. Angst is the cook’s worst enemy, therefore get rid of it and remember the essential main ingredient is love for those you are cooking for.”²

Some women make the activity of cooking a companionable thing in itself; sharing the job with family, or close friends. Nigella Lawson remembers thoroughly pleasurable times with her younger sister, Thomasina. “I love having someone in the kitchen just to talk to as I chop and weigh and stir and generally get things ready. I love cooking with other people too. I do it rarely, though I used to often with my sister, Thomasina. There’s

something about that industrious intimacy that is both cushioning and comforting, but also hugely confidence-building. I love that sense of companionable bustle, of linked activity and joint enterprise. It makes it easier to attempt food that normally you would shrink from, not because you rely on another’s capability or experience necessarily, but because you aren’t isolated in the attempt.”³ She stresses the priority of conviviality: “I have never much liked formal entertaining. I love cosiness: I want people to feel welcomed, not impressed, and I want to feel happily surrounded by my friends rather than wind myself up into a frenzy of hissing, self-loathing panic because I’ve got people coming for dinner.”⁴ The message is clear: nice food always helps, but it is conversation that really counts.

Enemies of good conversation

What are some of the things that get in the way of good conversation around the dinner table? It seems to me (thinking back over the years) that there are two or three that stand out. The first is unresolved tensions that all too easily flare up into arguments when family members are in loose quarters around the table. Normally, those outside the family are able to restrain themselves when specially invited for a meal, but families are usually far too good at pushing each other’s buttons. Perhaps it is a good idea to clear the air and resolve any current quarrels before bowing our heads to pray before a meal. Somehow, we need to re-establish the peace before breaking bread together.

The other thing that comes to mind is *time*. A good conversation does not happen over a rushed meal. We need to be prepared to devote plenty of time to a dinner that will result in the kind of interaction that edifies. Dinner should be an occasion; not a refuelling stop. We need to do all we can to kill the conversation-thieves: too many evening meetings, television, and an out-of-control telephone.

What to aim for

So, how does good dinner-table conversation look? What can we achieve by it? To me, it is one of the great blessings of home life, especially as we include our guests in it. I have already alluded to the ways dinner-time lends itself to family conversation – but what about the having-friends-over dinnertime situation? One of my very favourite kinds of social interaction is a dinner with a few other guests; one that is worth going to some trouble over, both with the food and with the surroundings. It is a great way to set the scene for some good conversation about things that matter.

People like Winston Churchill excelled at this kind of thing (I don’t pretend to). He invited guests who met his exacting conversational standards: “The man who cannot say what he has to say in good English,” Winston once pronounced, “cannot have much to say that is worth listening to.” Nevertheless, it was he who provided most of the sparkling conversation at his luncheons and dinners. His idea of a fine meal was to dine well and then discuss a serious topic – “with myself as chief conversationalist”. His daughter Mary remembered that “small talk or social chitchat bored Winston profoundly – but he rarely suffered

from it, since he completely ignored it, pursuing his own themes."⁵ Doubtless Winston got away with this rudeness to his guests because his own conversation was so brilliant and stimulating – quite simply, he was fascinating to listen to. Nevertheless, Mary observed that he never minded interjections, so long as they were relevant or amusing.

You may be asking yourself – what can we learn from the conversational habits of a somewhat eccentric, though undeniably brilliant politician? A self-professed "great man", though likely, at best, a nominal Christian? It seems to me that Christians at the beginning of the twenty-first century are frequently uninspiring conversationalists. We seldom do much to improve our conversational opportunities, especially in such prime settings as the dinner table. We do little to prepare our thoughts for making stimulating conversation. We do not read much, especially of the mind-stretching variety of books, such as would give us useful ideas to share in a discussion. When was the last time you enjoyed a brisk debate about ideas over

the dinner table? Some families (and my father's family was one) love to bounce ideas, to challenge each other's thinking, to play "solving the world's problems" in a constructive way. Some people find this threatening, and bow out mentally, if not physically. But if such discussion is entered into generously, including all who are at the table, it can be edifying. Christians should do this kind of thing. It is how "iron sharpens iron", and it helps us equip one another for useful service.

Consider the ways that this kind of conversation may be used evangelistically, in giving an unbelieving friend a gentle challenge to face the inconsistencies in her view of the world. You may begin as the apologist, defending the Christian position on some topic, and continue by asking your friend to explain her own view of the matter. Then, as the evening wears on, she may be willing to risk a more personal examination of the claims of Christ upon her life. You see, being able to discuss ideas is important; and we need to prepare for such conversations. One friend says he prepares for

such evenings by praying for his guests, and planning some suitable topics of conversation in the hope that they will lead to a discussion of the gospel. Think of the many, many conversations that are recorded in the Bible. So many of them demonstrate the ways our Lord, and his prophets and apostles, struck up discussion with someone and then turned the topic to matters of eternal weight. They knew how to use such opportunities to reach the minds, and the hearts, of lost sheep. We need to use our dinner tables to do the same.

Endnotes

- 1 Susan Hunt, *Your Home, A Place of Grace* (Crossway Books, 2000), p. 103
- 2 Jo Seagar, *You Shouldn't Have Gone to So Much Trouble, Darling* (Random House, Auckland, 1998), Introduction, p. 10.
- 3 Nigella Lawson, *How to Eat*, quoted by Gilly Smith in *Nigella Lawson: The Unauthorised Biography* (Andre Deutsch, 2005), pp. 25-6
- 4 Nigella Lawson, *Christmas* (Chatto & Windus, 2008), p. 77
- 5 William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill* (Little, Brown, 1988), p. 17

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Bishopdale

Church Picnic: Saturday 14 March, 2.00pm, Spencer Park. Keep this day free! This annual event is the highlight of the year and promises heaps of fun for all ages. All you have to do is come along, bring a picnic rug or chair, some bbq food for tea and relax and enjoy. Don't forget about the sack race challenge, tug of war, potato and spoon race and, the highlight, the egg throw. Gather your volleyball team together and let's show the youth how volleyball is supposed to be played! See you ALL there!

Pastoral. On Wednesday, Angela and Steven Macdonald were blessed with another boy. His name is Adriaan Ham-

ish Macdonald and he weighed in at 8lb 12oz. He will be called Arie.

Drug Drug-arm update. We now have two "Streetvan" crews up and running for 2009. We head out from 10pm-12:30am every third Friday and Saturday night into Cashel Mall (upcoming dates are posted on the notice board). The "Streetvan" provides a natural platform to connect with the Christchurch city scene, to offer a listening ear and speak about Christ. We also offer BBQ food, hot and cold drinks, blankets, clothes, etc. It would be great to have 4-5 new volunteers to spread the load amongst the existing team members (see Jacob Couprie or Hadleigh de Reus if you can help – even if you just want to "try it out" for a night). We continue to covet your prayers when we head out. Many thanks, The Drug-ARM crew.

Crafty Kids Club. The next Crafty Kids' Club is in the coming school holiday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday of the 2nd week (21st-23rd April) and we need

helpers. Please let Robyn B know if you are able to help for any (or all!) of the days, as we need 25 helpers each day! It is a great outreach, the kids love it, and it is loads of fun!

Men's Breakfast. The Deacons of the Reformed Church of Dovedale, 28 Shands Road, Hornby, invite all men (young and old) from the Christchurch Reformed Churches and friends, to breakfast commencing 8:00 am sharp on Saturday 28 March. Having spent a few years in the USA, Pastor Holtslag will offer us some reflections on the Christian life of men in America and examine how Psalm 128 addresses all men. Please make this date available to attend. All are very welcome. (Any questions please contact John van Garderen 3384872).

Andrew de Vries. We have been searching for a second minister for quite some time. To that end the Session has invited Andrew de Vries to come to Christchurch. Lord willing, he will be here from Monday, 30 March to Wednesday, 1

April with his wife Christina and their daughters Josie and Miriam. Here is a tentative schedule for his time in Christchurch: Mon 6-9pm Potluck dinner from 6:00pm-7:30pm followed by a praise and worship service. Andrew will preach at this service. We have invited the Reformed Church of Christchurch to join us for the meal and service. Tues Free day for the de Vries family. Wed Meeting with the Bishopdale and Christchurch Sessions.

Building Committee update. The Resource Consent application for the church extension is currently being processed by the Christchurch City Council which has elected to proceed with the application under a limited notified basis. This involves notification of all neighbours around the church property that the council deems affected by the proposal, allowing time for them to lodge submissions of support or objection to the proposed additions. Submissions are due back on 2 April, and a decision should come through from Council within a few weeks of this date, following which the committee will meet to assess the next step. Please feel free to talk to me or one of the committee members if you have any questions. Yours in Christ, Rob Bosma

Bucklands Beach

Pastoral. This morning we celebrate the wonder of God's covenant promises to believers and their children as we witness and share in the baptism of Benjamin Charles Wilson. Daniel and Raewyn we share with you in giving thanks to the Lord for this little boy and rejoice in the knowledge that he too is an heir of covenant promises. We are your family here in Bucklands Beach. We also think of the family members who are able to be here and those who are not – especially Daniel's family in the States. We know that they too give thanks and join in praying for Benjamin, David and the two of you.

"Jumping in Puddles". Creation Films have made a documentary called "Jumping in Puddles". There will be special screenings of this at Berkeley Cinema on the 18th March. It is the story of the Mangatepopo river tragedy with the specific focus on Natasha Bray and her inspirational saying which caught the attention of the nation.

Membership. The Elders' meeting on Thursday evening (Mar 26th) received a number of folks into the full fellow-

ship of our congregation. Herewith a very special welcome to each of you. May the Lord encourage, sustain and use you as part of our family here at Bucklands Beach. Sr Joke Kant and Sr Gre Skelton, as members of the fellowship at Mangere, have worshipped with us during the evening service for quite a few years. They have now asked that their membership be transferred to Bucklands Beach. These sisters, along with their families, were founding members at Mangere and contributed much to the life of that congregation. Mangere has expressed special thanks and appreciation for that. We now welcome them here and embrace them as special sisters in the Lord. The du Plessis family, Stefan and Mirinda, along with their two children, Shalomé and Marnus, have been worshipping with us since July in Stefan's case and since the rest of the family arrived in December. We now welcome you into the full fellowship of our church. The family were previously members of the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKZA). Br and Sr Pieter and Odette de Kock, who have also been worshipping with us for some time, have asked to be received into our fellowship. We hereby welcome you as brother and sister. May the Lord bless and use you in the life of our church. Pieter and Odette also came from South Africa about a year ago.

From Session. Prayer, Praise and Fellowship. It has been suggested that a special 'prayer, praise and fellowship' evening be organised. The purpose for this meeting is what its name suggests. All home groups and everyone else is urged to attend for this midweek meeting. There will also be a 'topic' for some discussion and evaluation. That topic is one that is causing some discussion in the fellowship at the moment: the use of grape juice or wine at the Lord's Supper.

Wedding banns. Congregation, Paul Avery Stewart and Alana Karin Reyneke have indicated their desire to be united in Christian marriage. They want to begin their lives together in the name of the Lord and in the presence of his people, and continue it to his glory. If there are no lawful objections, the ceremony will take place at the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach on Saturday, 4th April during a service commencing at 2.00pm.

Christchurch

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. We commence a seven week period in

which the Christian Church prepares for commemorating Good Friday and celebrating Easter. Lent is a time of penitence and abstinence as the church focuses on the sufferings of our Saviour and remembers that our sins were the cause of it. During these weeks we will, in the morning worship services, give some thought to the Servant Songs in Isaiah. In the evening we'll continue a series of studies of Biblical themes from the Belgic Confession.

From Pastor John. Speaking of marriages today we also rejoice with John and Coby Lubbers for whom yesterday was also a great day. They celebrated 50 years of marriage. We rejoice with them and their family and praise God for this evidence of His grace. John and Coby, may the Lord bless you in the years that He will still give you together.

Notes from Session Meeting. Pastor John opened the meeting with prayer and read 1 Timothy 3:10-17. He then led Session for an internal education segment on mentoring in connection with church growth. An apology was noted from elder Brent Mills. The first part of this meeting was devoted to the matter of the calling of a pastor. Rev. Robert van Wichen was present for this discussion as our counsellor. The discussion centred on the possible calling of Rev. Albert Esselbrugge from Box Hill, Victoria, Australia. Raymond Posthuma had visited the Box Hill congregation and taken the opportunity to meet with Pastor Albert. Due to the absence of Brent Mills session decide to postpone the final decision for another fortnight.

Dovedale

Pastoral Notes. Please pray for Jeremy van Ameyde (Andy & Jo-Ann's son) and Sarah-Jayne Still as they get ready for their wedding on March 7th. May God continue to bless them during this time of anticipation and preparation.

Pastoral Notes. This week I was able to chair the first meeting of the Education Resource Committee of our denomination. Sisters Sally Davey and Colleen Berends and Brother David Waldron, one of the ministers of Hastings Reformed Church, are also on this committee. Synod 2008 tasked us with reviewing and recommending to the churches appropriate material for Bible study, catechism, and Sunday School. Your prayers for this work are appreciated.

Pastoral Notes. Many of our parents also know the daily pain that comes from

watching their children walk apart from the Lord. May the Lord work repentance in the hearts of these children, young or old, and return them to Himself and to His people. May He also grant each of these parents the grace that is sufficient for each day, according to His promise, as they pray for their children. And may we all continue to pray for and with them also.

Dunedin

General Notices. Farewell. Dear congregation, As we are all aware, our time here in Dunedin in drawing to a close. This Tuesday we fly to Christchurch and Wednesday we leave for Melbourne, the Lord willing. Corry and I want to thank you all for having us in your midst. We have greatly appreciated your Christian hospitality and fellowship. We have enjoyed our time with you and we thank the Lord for you being a blessing to us and we trust that the Lord in His grace has also made us a blessing to you. We commend you to the Lord's care and hope and pray that the Lord will provide you with a pastor soon. We are sure that our friendship will continue and we will hear through the church paper how the congregation is going. May the Lord bless you and keep you. With Christian greetings. Martin & Corry Geluk

Pastoral Notes. Last Sunday it was announced that the proposal to employ Rev Jim Klazinga on a half-time basis for 12 months to work in Oamaru and Timaru would not proceed. We need to be much in prayer for the work in Timaru and for the Klazinga family. Even though much uncertainty surrounds the situation at present we need to support the Lord's work of building the church in whatever way we can.

Foxton

Fellowship news and prayer items: We'll uphold the following members in our prayers of thanks and supplication: Hilje Reitsma and her children and grandchildren as they now, after four weeks of hardship, mourn the loss of Albert. We pray that our Lord will continue to comfort and strengthen Hilje and family in this time and in the days ahead. We thank and praise God that Albert's life testified that he knew and loved Christ his Saviour. A thanksgiving service will, DV, take place at 2 pm. on Tuesday 3rd March in our church: St Johns, Avenue Rd, Foxton.

Fellowship news and prayer items: We rejoice and thank God with Colin &

Karen Dykstra, Eildert & Ineke Boekholt and Minnie Dykstra on the birth of Elizabeth Ineke (2nd daughter of James & Leah de Vries), born on Tuesday by caesarian and weighing 8lb 6oz! Both mum & daughter are well!

Hamilton

Calvin Symposium – To mark the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth, Grace Theological College is hosting a symposium on 18 April 2009. Held at Covenant Presbyterian Church, 77 Rogers Road, Manurewa, the symposium will begin at 9am and conclude with a BYO lunch at 12.30pm. Six speakers will present for around 20 minutes each, followed by time for questions and discussion.

Hastings

Contract to purchase 1234 Howard Street. We have been advised officially by the Te Kohanga Reo (who had a contract to purchase our church property at 903 Florence Street) that they have had no offers for the purchase of their property at 103 Alexandra Crescent. Their current intention is to take their land and building off the market. Our sale agreement for the church property therefore cannot proceed and in consequence neither can our purchase agreement for 1234 Howard Street. It is clear from these providential developments that it is not the Lord's will for us to move from 903 Florence Street at this particular time. However, in line with session's previous decision, our church property will continue to be listed with a real estate agent.

Wedding banns. The wedding of Benjamin Cressy and Cassandra Donk will be held, Lord willing, this Saturday in the church at 12:30pm. Everyone is invited to attend and rejoice with the Cressy and Donk families. Coffee and tea will be served after the ceremony. If anyone has any lawful objection against this marriage, please speak to your elder.

Masterton

Pastoral Notes: Advanced notice – As a follow up from the Pastoral letter distributed in December, the Elders and Deacons have scheduled a meeting to discuss some of the applications of church polity from the Church Order on Thursday, 2 April.

Nelson

Getting the most 'out of' the sermons. Dear Brothers & Sisters, The Session has suggested that I might furnish some

sermon outlines – containing the main 'points' – for the better understanding of the preaching of the Word (and consequent personal application of it to our lives), so, today, you will be given a sheet with the necessary information. Of course, taking notes during a sermon is not everyone's "cup of tea", but just having the structure of the message there in front you can be a help in following what is being taught...in seeing how everything fits together. Sometimes, if the outline is interesting enough, it can easily be remembered: to that end, I quite often use some form of alliteration. However, some method of sermon note-taking can be profitable to young and old alike. As for the young, they can (from the age that they have learned to write) become more attentive to the preaching as – guided by their parents – they can profitably have the Scripture message 'rehearsed' to them by writing down appropriate Bible references and short phrases coming from the pulpit; even the most rudimentary summary can be a helpful aid to parents as (later, at home) they go through with their child/ren the substance of what has been preached. It is good to take every opportunity... to employ every available means...in grounding our covenant youth in the truth of God's Word, and so point them to the Lord Jesus Christ! With those (of us!) who are getting a little "long in the tooth" – who find it difficult to break away for a long-established practice of simply listening to the sermon – let me reassure you that it not 'irreverent' to take notes: it is no disrespect to the Lord God (Whotold John to "write" what he saw of the vision in Revelation), and certainly was not to the apostle Paul: surely he would have rejoiced in the studious approach of the "noble" Bereans, who "examined the Scriptures each day" to verify what he was preaching! So, here is the encouragement – perhaps, the challenge – to use a sermon outline, in one way or another. Often, we get most 'out of' those things that we manage to 'put down'! BSJ

North Shore

News & Announcements. This morning we have the privilege of placing the mark of God's covenant promises to our children on little Thomas Jelle Bredemeijer. And a special welcome to the Bredemeijer boys' Oma, Mrs Janine van Hulst, visiting from Australia. We trust you enjoy your visit.

And on quite a different note, today is

Oma van den Hoek's Ninetieth Birthday. That is quite a milestone of the Lord's grace. A lot has happened in the world since 1919 and a lot has happened in Oma's life since 1919, but above all the Lord has kept and preserved her. May the Lord be gracious to you and give you a good day today Oma. Our love and prayers are with you and we wish you a very happy time as you share this great occasion with your family. And may He give His continued blessing and strength to you in whatever time He still gives you.

Congratulations to Dirk & Hanny Hoek on their 50th Wedding Anniversary yesterday (21/03/1959). We thank the Lord for bringing them together 50+ years ago and blessing them over these years with children and grandchildren and for making them dedicated workers in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. May the Lord bless you all in your varied circumstances and may you know Him with you and His guidance in the years ahead.

Palmerston North

We rejoice with Amy Jochem as she professes her faith during the morning service today.

Introducing Elizabeth Ineke de Vries. We

congratulate James & Leah de Vries and extended family on the safe arrival of their new daughter Elizabeth Ineke de Vries. Elizabeth arrived in this world safe and well weighing a healthy 8lb 6oz on Tuesday the 10th of March. Mum and baby are doing well and we pray God will continue to give them both the strength they need over the next few weeks.

Pukekohe

This morning we will witness the baptism of Paige Loveday. A warm welcome to family members and friends who are visiting with us for this occasion. We are thankful to God for this gift of another daughter to Warrick and Lydia and for the sign and seal of God's covenant promises to her in baptism.

It is with joy that we announce the wedding of Louise Hunt and Justin Loef. Unless there are lawful objections, this will take place at 3:00pm this Friday, 6 March, at the Belsaas Estate, 51 Bullens Road, Ardmore.

It is with joy that we announce the wedding of Jerome Kloeg and Alice Voschezang. Unless there are lawful objections the wedding will take place at 12:30pm on Saturday 4 April at St Johns Anglican Church in Tuakau, 148 Bucklands Road. All are welcome to attend. There will be

an afternoon tea after the ceremony.

Silverstream

Please remember to pray for Alex Fransen and family. The awareness is always before the Fransens that Alex will most likely still need a kidney transplant some time in the future. We give thanks, however, that things are pretty stable at the moment.

Profession of Faith. The elders are pleased to announce that three young people were examined by the elders and have been approved for profession of faith: Elise Walraven, Joel Walraven and Daniel Verbokkem. Barring lawful objections, the three young people are to profess their faith during the morning service on March 29. Should anyone have objections, please make these known to one of the elders as soon as possible.

Wainuiomata

Church family news. Congratulations to Andy and Natasha Rogers upon the birth of Quinn Huxley on Friday morning. Both mother and baby are doing well.

Wellington

Church Services – Sunday 15th March. Our Church Camp is now just one week away! Our main worship service on Sunday 15th March will be held at the Brookfield Scout Camp in Wainuiomata, and the session encourages all members able to do so to join us at camp for worship and to witness Daniel Wang's baptism. We will be looking at the theme of community together, so it would be great to see as many of us as possible! Lunch will be provided for everyone after the service. If you would like to come but need a ride, please see the deacons who are coordinating transport.

Short Report of Auckland Presbytery Meeting, February 2009

The meeting, held on Friday 27 February 2009 in Pukekohe, commenced at 7.30pm. It was convened by Elder Graeme Posthuma on behalf of the convening church, the Reformed Church of Mangere. He read 1 Kings 3:1-9, reminding us of our great need for wisdom in leading God's people and opened in prayer. The delegates then sang *Psalter Hymnal* No. 350.

The delegates' credentials were



Where the birds build their nests, And the stork, whose home is the fir trees. Ps 104:17

Photo: John Holtslag

checked by the Mangere delegates and the meeting constituted with the Rev. J. Haverland as Moderator, the Rev. J. Rogers as Vice Moderator, and Elder P. van der Wel as Clerk. Vicars André Scheepers and Daniel Wilson were present as observers. The delegates stood to signify their agreement with the doctrinal standards of the RCNZ.

The Reformed Churches of Hukanui, Bucklands Beach, Mangere and Pukekohe answered the Art. 47 questions with each section in turn. Prayer followed for each church concerned. There were a number of reasons given for thanksgiving – Hukanui noted one birth last month and five to come in the next half year. Bucklands Beach reported more than twenty-one professions of faith in the last year and the birth of a son to their Vicar. Pukekohe mentioned five marriages to come in the next few months, and the direct involvement of a number of members in mission work overseas.

In particular need, Mangere advised that a congregational meeting would be held on 1 March to discuss whether or not to continue as a congregation present[for the time being? For the foreseeable future?]. After some discussion the meeting spent some time in open prayer for Mangere. We thanked God for the fruitful work of this congregation over many years and prayed that He would guide the elders and grant unity to the congregation as they grapple with these things.

Avondale confirmed details of the men's training day to be held on 20 June (9.30am-3.00pm). Rev. P Reynolds (Grace Theological College) will lead the studies on "Pastoral Care and One-Anothering."

Presbytery concurred with a request from the Synodical Interim Committee to increase the budget for study committees (to remedy an oversight of the Synod) but agreed that this be funded out of surplus funds, if available, rather than by a levy increase.

The Rev. D. van Garderen reported for the National Diaconate Committee, noting that many of the churches have been slow to act on the NDC Christmas appeal and to forward the funds collected. He also advised that the NDC has been able to purchase a number of hospital beds which will be shipped to the Solomons Islands for mission work there. The Rev. D. van Garderen also reported on behalf of the Overseas Mission Board, noting that Janice Reid and the Hagoorts were both in NZ on furlough at the time. He also highlighted the appeal

for set-up funds for the Doumas in Papua New Guinea, noting that the decreasing exchange rate had had a marked effect on the amount needed.

The Rev. J. Haverland confirmed that John Kaijser (Pukekohe) is willing to act as Presbytery Youth Liaison. He also mentioned that they have investigated a number of concerns raised about the National Youth Camp, but were satisfied with the way that the committee had handled these.

The Reverends J. Rogers and D. van Garderen were again confirmed as Auckland Presbytery's synodical examiners, the Rev. D. van Garderen as OMB and National Diaconate liaison, and the Rev. M. Willemse was appointed to report on presbytery/classis minutes.

The date for Vicar Daniel Wilson's preliminary examination was set for 7.30pm, 5 June at Bucklands Beach.

After some discussion about presbytery preaching arrangements, the moderator, the Rev. J. Haverland, led in closing prayer.

The Rev. M. Willemse
Reporter

Report of Wellington Presbytery Meeting (held in Foxton, March 7, 2009)

The Rev. Andrew Nugteren chaired the meeting and presented a brief devotion on 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, where Paul expressed thanksgiving for the church: *I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus* (vs 4). We were exhorted to give thanks for every member of our churches and for each other; and encouraged not to find fault. Jane Austen's Mr. Darcy could not look at a woman without finding fault. Are we like that?

The Hastings and Masterton congregations were asked the questions from C[hurch]O[rder?]. Article 47 and then a delegate to our meeting was requested to pray for each church.

Church visitation reports were received and discussed. Anyone interested in brushing up on Hebrew, come on over to Foxton where Pastor Van Huyssteen offers (free!) lessons.

The Rev. Kloosterman, who chairs the Overseas Mission Board, reported with thanksgiving that one half of the support

needed for the Doumas' home has already been received. He encouraged us to continue to support missions with our prayers and encouragement also.

Amendments made to the WRYC constitution were approved and the Presbytery thanked Pastor Nugteren for his careful work on this.

A discussion was held on who may lead worship services. The Presbytery /decided? that this is a serious question which really revolves around our view of what ordination means.

After confirming some housekeeping matters, the meeting was adjourned and brother Nugteren led us in prayer.

The Rev. L de Vos
Reporter

Short Report of the Christchurch Presbytery Meeting on 14 March 2009

The moderator, the Rev. Robert van Wichen, opened with readings from Habakkuk 1 & 3 and noted God's leading in times of trouble and distress. Like the deer God allows us to be sure-footed in our Christian walk and He ensures that His kingdom purposes will come to pass.

Nominations for a regional youth work committee were received from the various churches and the establishment of the committee was delegated to Bishopdale.

The Dunedin delegates withdrew a previously tabled request for financial support for a second minister to work in Oamaru and to establish a church planting work in Timaru.

In answer to Article 47 questions, Dunedin reported on good progress in Timaru with growth in numbers and commitment to the work. The Dunedin congregation has been particularly blessed by the short two-month ministry of the Rev. Martin Geluk.

Christchurch similarly spoke appreciatively of the short-term ministry of the Rev. John Westendorp, as well as acknowledging the gifted leadership in worship of others during this time of pulpit vacancy. A men's fellowship group is envisaged and there is also a need to resume mid-week meetings. Both churches requested prayer in their search for ministers.

Reports were received from the RTC and OMB representatives as well as from churches with vacant pulpits

(Christchurch, Dunedin, Nelson).

Church visitation reports for Dunedin, Bishopdale and Christchurch were also received. While there was much for which to be thankful in terms of worship, unity and outreach, common

concerns were the need for more leaders and promotion of the second worship service.

Good progress is being made, by the Bishopdale church, in organising the meeting of the International Council

of Reformed Churches. A website has been created and a venue booked. Visa arrangements are in progress.

Dovedale will consider a request to organise the 2011 Synod, most likely at another venue.

Missions focus

Janice Reid

Introducing Timothy and Zara Woo

Mission workers in Zambia

Timothy and Zara Woo, originally from Hong Kong, are naturalised New Zealanders. Timothy is a qualified librarian and has been employed at the University of Otago Central Library as the collection development specialist. Zara was trained as a mathematics teacher and has taught at secondary level for many years.

On their arrival in New Zealand in 1994 they initially attended the Reformed Church of Dunedin. After a few years, however, their desire for a mission focus saw them take up an opportunity to support a local Chinese congregation. When that avenue of service came to an end they returned to the Reformed Church in 2005, becoming members in 2007.

After exploring various options for overseas mission opportunities the Woos

successfully applied to SIM for Timothy to work as the librarian at the Theological College of Central Africa (TCCA) in Zambia for two years. This college is the first evangelical, degree-awarding, theological institution in Central Africa. It is an interdenominational college, primarily serving the churches and organisations united under the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia. It has six fulltime academic staff and about 40 students. Since its inception in 1982 the TCCA has been offering a four-year Bachelor of Theology programme and a three-year Diploma of Theology programme. There are majors available in pastoral [work?], education and missions.

The TCCA's library has 16,000 volumes and 50 journals. The main challenge for the library is to help maintain the high standard of theological edu-

cation and training that the churches need from their dedicated leaders. Specific challenges for Timothy are to ensure the adequacy of the library's resources and to install a computerised library system.

The Dunedin Session endorsed the Woos' application and a commissioning service for them was held on 30 March 2008. From May 2008 Timothy and Zara have been living and working in Ndola, the main city of Zambia's Copperbelt region, where the TCCA is based.

Since arriving, settling in and obtaining work permits, Timothy and Zara have been on the lookout for additional opportunities, especially in spreading the gospel. They are considering making contact with Chinese migrant labourers who live in the neighbouring city of Kitwe. There is also a small contingent of mostly medical personnel from China living in Ndola.

Although the Woos' placement is self-funded, it is the privilege and responsibility of the churches to offer prayer and encouragement. As Zambia professes to be a Christian nation we can be thankful that there are no restrictions as to publication of news. Timothy and Zara's fortnightly newsletters are published in the Dunedin bulletin and are available to view at <http://dunedin.rcnz.org.nz/woos>



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