

faith in **focus**

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Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 15:5-6



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Editorial

By the time you have this Faith in Focus in your hands Synod will already be a distant memory. No doubt the highlights will have been in your local Newsletter and there will have been the usual discussion and reflection on it. But it is good to reflect on in our denominational magazine so that it is part of our record. And you get all the pictures too! Our thanks again to the gracious Hastings congregation who hosted us and did such a great job.

November is also the month we have the infamous Guy Fawkes celebrations. I think New Zealand would be one of the few countries still allowing this annual occasion of private fire-works displays, particularly in the light of health and safety regulations nowadays! While it's quite obvious what it has become in our age, its history, though, touches into a vital time of our church history. Recalling that helps us realise again the Lord's guiding hand for His people.

Thinking about time, it is just about that time again – the time we turn our attention to Advent and in reflecting on Christ's first coming also turn our thoughts to His second coming. Mrs Patricia van Laar aids us in her articles in this month and next month's issue.

There are also our regular contributors. One is missing this month – can you pick out which one?

Together we pray that you will be blessed once again this month.

*I loved the talk, the laughter, the courteous
little gestures toward one another, the
sharing of the study of books of eloquence,
the companionship that was sometimes
serious and sometimes hilariously
nonsensical, the differences of opinion that
left no more bad feeling than if a man
were disagreeing with his own self, the rare
disputes that simply seasoned the normal
consensus of agreement.*

Augustine of Hippo

Photo Credits:

Cover – *The Reformed Church of Hastings*
Synod 2008 – *Jacob Ploeg & the Editor*

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 Dordt, 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.

Face to face – our churches meet in their widest assembly

Synod 2008 – Hastings

Sjirk Bajema

It was my first time in the Reformed Church of Hastings. Having had the privilege of already visiting every other congregation in our denomination at some point or another, I looked forward to meeting the Hastings folk also. My wife and daughter had already beaten me there as Calvinette counsellors and had very much enjoyed it. After the week of Synod I can only say a hearty 'Amen' to that! We were well provided for and looked after. It was a well-organised and managed Synod, with Synod expressing its warmest appreciation to Deacon David Kaijser who was the coordinator for Synod, and asking him to pass that on to his helpers.

Leading this Synod was a fresh moderamen. None of these brothers had been on the moderamen of the last few Synods and, in fact, only one of them had been on the moderamen before at all! Our Moderator was the Rev John Rogers, the Vice-moderator was the Rev Dirk van Garderen, the 1st Clerk was Elder Pieter van der Wel, and the 2nd Clerk was the Rev Andrew Nugteren. They were busy men, as anyone who has served on the moderamen will attest, and they guided us well. Their only real hiccup was the illness of Br John on the afternoon and evening of the last day of Synod, but by then the work was just about over. Br Dirk closed Synod with appropriate comments and prayer.

Old and new faces

Synod is always a time of catching up. You meet old friends and renew acquaintances. You get to catch up with what's happening in the different churches.

There are the new faces, too. There were some first-time elders and quite a number of first-time minister delegates. This is likely to increase in the future.

Then there are the other faces. This Synod had more delegates from sister-churches and observing churches than ever before. There were delegates from quite a few of our sister-churches – the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (Lib.), the Canadian Reformed Churches (our newest sister church), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

of North America, the Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. There were observers present from the United Reformed Churches of North America, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and for one day, from the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. It was good to meet them. It was good for them to meet the other foreign delegates also.

In this way we could speak openly with our closest sister-church – the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia – over our concerns with them. For at this Synod not only was it evident there was the continued concern over having women in the office of deacon, but also their redefining the nature of ordination so that it was clear it had no headship connotations. Several overtures focused on this latter direction. While these overtures as such were not passed, the decision was made to express to the CRCA that our relationship continues to be under strain due to their approval of the practice of ordaining women to the office of deacon. This is a concern that has been extensively conveyed by our delegates to the CRCA over the years, and expressed at our Synods. Even within the CRCA there

is not unanimous approval of this, with a number of overtures to their Synod against this decision and with a number of congregations continuing not to ordain women as deacons. But all this aside, there was a continued resolve to work with the CRCA, with continued regular meetings of the two inter-church committees.

Going to other faces

One very positive aspect to our sister-church relationships is the co-operation happening between us on various mission fields such as Uganda and Papua New Guinea. We were able to hear personally from our missionary minister-elect to PNG, the Rev Alan Douma, about how he has come to this point in his life and what he looks forward to doing in PNG, Lord willing. We also heard from Br Andrew Dickson, our missionary deacon-elect to Uganda, who told us of his background and how he will fit in with the OPC work there.

We could also see and hear of our other missionaries – Sr Janice Reid and her Radio Broadcasting work and Br & Sr Walter & Jeannette Hagoort in PNG. In line with the service they do, it was confirmed that non-ordained missionaries are also counted as part of the ministerial emeritus program.



Moderamen

Seeking His face

Also noteworthy, as we know from every Synod, was the singing. With that many strong male voices together, the sound is quite something! Already on the Sunday in the worship services, it had been noticed by Hastings people and positive comments made. This time in our singing during Synod we were almost completely exclusive psalmist, as we were singing out of the new provisional Psalter from our hymnody committee (entitled 'Sing to the Lord'), and usually a cappella too! Many of our churches will have copies of this Psalter with them soon. It was an ideal opportunity to be introduced to this part of our hymnody committee's work and be thankful for what they're doing.

There were also the many times we laid our prayers before the Lord, both in the allocated times and at particular points of concern. Near the end of Synod we opportunity for an hour long discussion relating to our shortage of ministers and could commend that, too, before the Lord in prayer. One practical decision to come out discussion of this area was to approach students of sister denominations in North America in terms of possible vicariates in New Zealand.

Some departing faces

This was probably the last RCNZ Synod for a number of delegates. There will be elders who find the frailty of age too difficult next time, but there will be many who

will be back. Amongst the ministerial corps the Rev Sjirk Bajema and Reinier Noppers were farewelled, as they will be leaving soon to pastorates in the PCEA and the CRCA respectively.

Br Bajema thus finishes as Editor of Faith in Focus at the end of this year. Synod was able to appoint, however, subject to his Session's approval, a co-ordinating editor, the Rev Pieter van Huysteen, and two sub-editors who will assist him with much of it – Srs Veronica Hoyt and Sally Davey from the Dovedale congregation. We are thankful for such skills and abilities within our denomination and pray for the Lord's blessing on their work.

Thanks was expressed for a number of our brethren who have served our churches.



Prof Henk De Waard CRCA



Rev Geoff van Schie CRCA



Rev Stefanus de Bruyn GKSA.



Rev. Bill Wielenga CanRC



Rev Geoff McPherson GPCNZ



Rev Johan Plug GKN Lib



Rev Jack Sawyer OPCNA



Our missionary deacon to Uganda - Andrew Dickson



Rev Mark Stewart URCNA



Rev Trevor Leggott PCEA



Elder Art Plug FRCA



Our new missionary to PNG - Rev Alan Douma

Two of these have been on the Emeritus and Long Service Committees – Brs Bill Weeda and Henk Klinkhamer. They have served on these committees for nearly fifty years and show the depth of commitment we are richly blessed with in our federation of churches. Also thanked was our previous Treasurer, Br Richard van der Pyl, whose position is now filled by Sr Alice Saathof. The Rev Bruce Hoyt was thanked for the 13 or so years he has served at Synodical Clerk: this position is now in the capable hands of Br Pieter van der Wel.

The same old face

Oh, and before I forget, we're still the Reformed Churches of New Zealand! While the overture from the Auckland Presbytery to change our denominational name to 'The Reformed-Presbyterian Churches of New Zealand' had some enthusiastic support, it was not generally supported. While it was understood that local churches have the option to use the name Reformed-Presbyterian, as a denomination we continue to be known as we have been.

Other decisions made were to discontinue the Long Services Leave Fund and leave this to the management of the local churches, and set a new interim stipend guideline which takes us away from the PCANZ model which we had previously followed. The Churches Extension Committee will develop our own guidelines for consideration at the next Synod.

In relation to the Reformed Theological College support was agreed to, as has previously been the case. Our deputies were mandated to continue their supervision of all RCNZ ministerial students wherever they are studying and to discuss curriculum and student progress with the RTC faculty. It was further decided to instruct the deputies to conduct a review of the requirements of the RCNZ for theological education for the future. This review is to cover the content and type of the theological education (i.e.

Message of loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

On behalf of the 26th Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand held in Hastings from 6-11 September 2008, we are writing to express our loyalty to you, our Queen.

Since our denomination was established in New Zealand some 55 years ago, God has been pleased to bless us with growth so that we now number nineteen instituted churches with three further preaching places. From a struggling immigrant church begun at great personal cost to our founding members, our churches have continued to grow both numerically, and in ethnic diversity. We also enjoy sister-church relationships with a growing number of denominations internationally and were blessed to have 10 foreign delegates address our synod. We have also been led and blessed by the Lord in an increasing number of missionary ventures in countries which include Uganda, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, Pakistan, Mongolia, China and Papua New Guinea.

We want to register with you, in light of your designation as "Defender of the Faith," our grave concern over the disturbing trend in recent legislation in our country. We believe that the legalisation of prostitution has had the effect of legalising immorality and the abuse of women. We are also disturbed at both the way the recent "anti-smacking" legislation was passed and its effect of allowing State intrusion into the task of parents. We are also concerned at the increasing godlessness of our nation and its effects – growing disrespect for authority, a growth in immorality and increasing violence in society – and we fear for the future of New Zealand.

We pray that God would continue to guide and bless you as you seek to be faithful in the task to which he has called you. We ask that you would join us in praying that God would be merciful to us in this part of your realm and that His church would increase and His rule be acknowledged by all the citizens of this fair land, all of your realm and indeed all the world.

practical/equipping, or academic/theological, or what combination there is and how that combination should be weighed) and the delivery of this education (e.g. through the RTC, MARS, or based more in NZ).

It was a Synod described by one of our moderamen as 'business as usual'. In one sense it was. But it was also an opportunity to see where the RCNZ is 55 years on from our founding and that much closer to the Lord's return. Finishing early was also a much-appreciated bonus because it meant

that while we spent adequate time on the areas of deepest concern, we could deal with those and other matters efficiently.

Footnote:

For a day-by-day – and much fuller – account of Synod by Br John van Dyk of the Dunedin congregation visit their web site, either through our denominational website www.rcnz.org.nz and following the link to the Dunedin website, or going direct to www.dunedin.rcnz.org.nz



Synod scene



Synod delegates from the back



1



2



7



5



3



4



6



8

- 1 Synod scene
- 2 More synod delegates from the back. Br Jacob Ploeg is addressing the synodical budget.
- 3 Hastings ladies
- 4 Helpers need to eat too!
- 5 Synod food
- 6 Tea time
- 7 Our synod manager Deacon David Kaijser
- 8 The Editor at work

Infertility

The silent grief

Anonymous

Just this morning as I was doing my washing, I mused about how huge my machine is. We bought it when we got married, thinking we would get a big one because we'll need it when we have kids. But this morning, seven years later, my washing machine is still servicing a household of two.

It's easy to think that having kids is just the natural progression of life. Get married, and then have children. But like us, many find out that it isn't that simple.

At first glance, infertility doesn't seem to be a common problem as most people have children. However, this doesn't mean infertility (that is, the inability to conceive after one year of timed intercourse) is rare. The majority of people who struggle with it eventually do get pregnant. And some struggle with secondary infertility – infertility after having had one or more children. Many have also suffered numerous miscarriages.

Because infertility is so common but so silent, there are many couples in our churches struggling alone. I want to encourage couples struggling that there is hope as we hold on to Jesus. I also want to help churches understand the struggle that is going on behind closed doors. Reformed Churches tend to have a strong focus on family, but often aren't quite sure how to include and support childless couples.

Before I describe our journey of grief and infertility, I need to say that I haven't 'arrive when it comes to dealing with childlessness. I'm sure I've got more tears to cry. But I write because as we've journeyed, we've seen God's hand gently teaching us. And maybe by His grace, some of the things he has taught us can encourage and equip others.

The Silent Journey

The start of the journey is filled with excitement. The decision is made – we're going to have a baby! Then the first few periods come and go. But you remember the statistics – most people take around 6 months to fall pregnant. So you aren't too worried.

With the excitement comes thoughts of names, dates, dreams, plans, but the

arrival of the next period shatters the dream.

At six months, my brother-in-law and his wife announced they were pregnant. We'd been married a year longer than them. I cried. I wondered if God was angry with me or if I was being punished. It didn't seem fair.

But the tears intensify when you start to wonder if something could be wrong. Denial is a safe place to be for a while – I can't be infertile... can I? It's a terrifying prospect with implications I'd rather not consider.

But eventually, after 18 months, we had to face reality and go to the doctor. We anticipated having some knowledge of what was going on. But it ended with a 'You're both healthy – go and have lots of sex. And have some drugs to make sure you are ovulating'.

Those who have something physically wrong generally wish they had nothing wrong. They feel broken. On the other hand, I desperately wanted a diagnosis. If I knew what was wrong then we could fix it. That's what you do with broken things, isn't it?

That summer was dreadful. We had three announcements of pregnancies, including my brother-in-law announcing they were pregnant with their second. If there is nothing physically wrong – then God must have forgotten me – he gives life and he isn't giving me any so what's his problem! I was angry at God.

I felt crushed. I felt so broken, alone and stuck in a life I didn't want. That summer I cried like I've never cried before.

When this desperation sets in (and it takes a different length of time for everyone), a number of things seem common to those struggling. While they are not constant – not every day is a bad one – they are very real.

Lies quickly fill your head at this point. 'I obviously don't deserve a baby.' 'Sim, you would be better off to have married someone else who could give you a baby.' 'My parents don't want to spend time with us because we don't have grandchildren for them.'

Some women describe the feeling of being broken – their bodies don't work. This goes to the core of our being – who

am I? I'm obviously not what I should be. Where do I fit in the world? If I'm not a mum – what then?

Then add to this emotional turmoil regular doctor's appointments. Your sex life becomes public property, being discussed with numerous health professionals. Life revolves around appointments, blood tests, and temperature charts. Test results come back and you don't know whether to be happy or sad – no news isn't necessarily good news.

For some, intimacy and sex becomes solely about babies. The stress strains your marriage.

There's a crisis of faith – does God really care for me? Does he love me? If he does, why doesn't he give me a baby? Don't I deserve one?

Often you go through this alone. Infertility is a silent grief. It's hard to share because it is deeply personal. And when you do share it, people often don't know what to say, so they brush it off with a 'you're still young' or 'I'm sure it'll happen soon – just relax!!!' And then never refer to it again.

I was so blessed to have family and friends who were supportive – often checking how I was feeling and asking how they can help. But even this doesn't prevent all pain...

One time, after returning from 3 weeks in India, my period was late. After a few days, we gave in and indulged – we let our minds wander. It all makes sense – God just wanted us to go to India before we had children! We joked about names. We dreamed about how we would tell people. I was still tentative, after almost four years of disappointments. But after 8 days we again felt the massive thud of disappointment. We cried together.

At that point we just wanted to be with people who loved us in our brokenness. But all our friends had little kids – it was too painful to be with them right now. And our parents didn't live nearby. So we sat by a river for a while, and then went home, desperately lonely and heart broken. Even with lots of support, at times you just feel totally alone.

Recently someone said to me that the grief of infertility is akin to that of losing a child. This helps to see that the grief

of infertility is real and strong. It gives us permission to cry and hurt. Every period represents the loss of a dream. It's a loss with no end point – it lingers because maybe the dream will be fulfilled one day.

As with any grief, there is no right or wrong time to feel it. Things trigger the pain at strange times and places. For some it'll be a baptism, a family gathering, having dinner with a young family. It's okay to be sad. It's okay to cry. But as with all grief, we need to realise that we can choose to grow through it or be drowned by it.

Holding on while letting go

There is so much practical advice that can be given regarding coping with infertility. But I want particularly focus on dealing with

the hope and disappointment that wears us down emotionally and spiritually.

For a long time, I have longed for a baby to fulfil my dreams and life. Desperately holding on to the hope for children means that I have been disappointed over and over again.

This makes me think how life is like a cup. Into it go all the things we desire to fulfil us. As they are poured into it, we desperately hope that our cup gets filled. If it isn't full, we feel bitterly disappointed and unsatisfied. Childlessness leaves our cup very empty.

But as I have watched my friends have their children, I realised that parenting is full of disappointments too. At times, the excitement of a child gets lost in sleep deprivation, temper tantrums, and the

realisation of one's own failings as a parent. Pouring the blessing of children into life's cup doesn't fill it to the brim either. Disappointments remain. Even children won't fill my cup.

Slowly I had to admit that neither things nor people will fulfil me. We are designed to be fulfilled by having a vibrant relationship with our Maker.

This is a scary concept. It implies I need to take my eyes off a baby and trust that Jesus will satisfy me. It means that I have to admit I'm not in control of my life and my fertility and that I'm happy letting God be in control. It is letting go of a dream, being willing to let God use me as he chooses.

Realising this leads to peace, but the process is difficult. For me, it has meant telling God about my hurt, asking him 'why me?' It meant facing the hard question: who do I want more – Jesus or a baby? Once I realised that often I wanted a baby more, I had to take time to read and learn about who Jesus really is, so that I could see him as more wonderful and fulfilling than a baby. When I was hurting I needed to remind my heart of the reality of God's promises and who God is, so I would see life God's way.

I have to learn to enjoy the things he has given me, rather than mourn the things he has not. While we have no children of our own, we share the ups and downs of life with many young people. We have more time and energy to give to the church and hospitality.

God taught me this truth through Psalm 84:11. 'For the LORD God is a sun and a shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.' God bestows good things (though not always easy) on his children, including me. He will give me everything I need to grow in him and to glorify him. He will not leave me lacking because of childlessness. And I am not a failure because I'm not a mother. It's just that the 'good things' God gives me look a bit different from what he gives others. But both are to the same end – to God's glory.

Hope for Simon and I isn't in children. It's in Jesus. By God's Spirit, he helps us trust him, so that we hold the desire for children in our hearts, without demanding it or being overwhelmed by it. We would be absolutely delighted if God gave us children. We still pray that he will. But even if he doesn't, we can still be satisfied by God.

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2)

Hastings Christian School (secondary teachers wanted)

Hastings Christian School has recently been granted permission by the Minister of Education to extend its teaching programme through to Year 13. We give thanks to God for His provision in this regard, as it ushers in an exciting new phase in the development of Christian schooling in Hawke's Bay.

Currently the school is Year 1–10, so over the next few years we have the challenge of putting into place a senior secondary school curriculum. The school has just opened a new block of classrooms designed specifically for the secondary area. We are therefore beginning the process of looking for qualified and competent Christian teachers who are committed to upholding and maintaining the confessional statements that define the special character of our school. Interested teachers must be willing to take up the challenge of implementing a senior curriculum in their respective subject area(s). Subjects that we are looking at in particular are: Science (Chemistry, Physics, Biology), Art, Graphics, Economics, Accounting, Physical Education and Languages.

If you are a teacher who is qualified in one or more of these subject areas and you would like to know more about the Hastings Christian School, then we would love to hear from you.

Gerald Feyter
Deputy Principal

School: 06 878 6696
Home: 06 870 6697

Through my journey, God used his people to teach and encourage me. It's been hard to let people in because sometimes they say thoughtless things. Still we need God's people, the Church – though they may not fully understand us. They don't need to know every detail of our lives, but we need to be open to them – and not just the childless ones. We need to learn to be blessed by and a blessing to our church community.

To the Church

There are many practical ways of supporting those struggling with infertility. Primary among them is listening patiently rather than just giving answers. Love us even when we're emotionally broken. Pray for us.

As a church, there are many actions that

communicate to childless couples that they are valued and loved. These include:

Let us be part of your families, and enjoy your children.

Invite us to join you and other families for a family picnic.

Understand if we decline sometimes because it's too hard.

Remember to call us a family – because we're a family of two.

Don't assume we can be involved in everything in church because we don't have children. We need time together too!

Support us as we cry for the thousandth time about being childless (without thinking, 'Here we go AGAIN!')

Encourage us to use the extra time and energy we have to enjoy God and serve him creatively. Don't comment on how nice

it must be to have extra time and money, because this prompts us to feel guilty rather than blessed by the circumstances God has given us.

Share your life with us, even if it is about nappies, school and driving children around.

Ask us questions about our lives, even though they don't involve nappies, school and driving children around.

Please share your life with us. Being church means we are a family. Simon and I have many children, just not biological ones. Because we are part of a church, we can share life with young people, teach children God's word and even get invites to their graduation dinners. When we are open to each other: there is no greater place to be childless than the church!

World in focus

OCRC enter federative union with URCNA

In a 27 August letter to all Consistories of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), Rev Harry Zekveld, URCNA Committee For Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Secretary, announced that on 22 August 2008, the Federation of Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC) met in Synod in Nobleton, Ontario, and accepted the invitation extended to the federation to enter into federative union with the URCNA on the basis of Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order. The invitation to the OCRC was made by Synod Schererville (2007) and subsequently ratified by a majority of the consistories of the URCNA, as required by the Church Order.

Zekveld stated that prior to the Synod, four of the five churches in the OCRC held congregational meetings in which members expressed themselves strongly in favor of a federational decision to accept the invitation. Due to other congregational concerns, the Cambridge OCRC consistory made a decision to postpone indefinitely dealing with the matter of joining with the URCNA. For this reason they also abstained from voting on the overture which was presented at Synod and will remain independent for the present. All the votes which were cast were in favor of accepting the invitation and joining with the URCNA.

Zekveld added that as per the invitation,

the churches by virtue of last week's synodical vote are received immediately into the URCNA, without conducting a colloquium doctum for their ministers. The congregations involved are in Bowmanville, Ontario; Burlington, Washington; Kelowna, British Columbia; and Nobleton, Ontario.

+ United Reformed Churches in North America, C/O Mr. Bill Konyonenbelt, 5824 Bowwater Circle Northwest, Calgary, Alberta T3B 2E2, Canada, 403-286-0521, Fax: 403-286-0759, urcna@shaw.ca

Christians flee to forest as mob violence escalates in Indian State

Gospel for Asia (GFA) leaders in India's Orissa state report mob violence in the wake of the murder of Swami Laxmanan and Saraswati, a top leader of the World Hindu Council and an outspoken opponent of Christianity who was killed by what are believed to be Maoist rebels. Hindu radicals have seized upon the killing as an excuse to incite violence against the area's Christian community.

At least twelve members of GFA-related churches have been murdered, but no one knows the overall death toll. As many as 20 GFA-related churches have been destroyed and hundreds of Christian families have been burned out of their homes.

GFA President K.P. Yohannan said, 'The Christians in Orissa have fled for their lives into the forests, and some have been in hiding for three days without food or water. Several of our pastors are in the

forest along with their church people, and one said that he could have escaped, but would rather die with his people than leave them.'

Yohannan added, "'I have never seen persecution so bad in my life, and I have seen a lot of opposition to the Gospel over the years..'

+GFA, 1800 Golden Trail Court, Carrollton, Texas 75010, 800-946-2742, info@gfa.org

+ Vishva Hindu Parishad, Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir Ashram, R.K. Puram Sector 6, New Delhi 110022, India, 9111- 26178992, Fax: 9111-26195527, jaishriram@vsnl.in

Dead Sea Scrolls to be digitized and made available online

Digital photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls are being photographed by Israeli authorities for placement on the Internet for public access. The project will take two years to complete.

+ The Telegraph, Victory House, Meeting House Lane, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TT, England, 0800-316-6977, telegraphenquiries@telegraph.co.uk

Maryland Police and Government entities sued

While participating in Defend Life's 'Face the Truth' Pro-life Tour, eighteen pro-life demonstrators including three young women were arrested 1 August 2008 after they held signs and shared their message along a public street in Bel Air, Maryland.

At least a dozen police officers arrived in more than seven marked vehicles and

then arrested, jailed, shackled, and/or strip-searched the eighteen demonstrators.

On behalf of the three young women, the Alliance Defense Fund filed a lawsuit 3 September against Harford County, the town of Bel Air, and seven police officials for their unlawful arrest, for sexually invasive searches of the female arrestees only, for their subsequent imprisonment, and for numerous violations of their constitutional rights.

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

Prayer vigils confront Vietnam government

Catholics and Protestants in Vietnam have long sought the return of properties seized by the Communist Party. For years the Church has petitioned the government to no avail. Occasionally there is minimal appeasement, but eventually the confiscation and demolition resume. Now a spirit of prayer has gripped the Vietnamese Church.

In March the Evangelical Church of

Vietnam (South) petitioned 'The Church of God Everywhere' to support them in prayer for their 265 confiscated properties. Meanwhile, Catholics in their thousands, led by their priests, bishops and the Archbishop of Hanoi, have been gathering at various seized properties to pray. These massive non-stop prayer vigil-protests have the government seriously rattled and a watershed moment looms. Will there be victory or violence? Please pray for 'truth, justice and charity' in Vietnam.

+ Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 496 | Wed 17 Sep 2008

DRC in Pretoria, South Africa sends formal apology to terminated homosexual teacher

The Dutch Reformed Church in Moreleta Park, Pretoria, South Africa has sent a court-ordered unconditional letter of apology to a music teacher dismissed in July 2005 for being a practicing homosexual. The dismissed teacher subsequently sued the church and was awarded R87,000 in damages.

The church attempted to counsel the

teacher when his homosexuality came to light but the teacher refused, telling the church that his sexual orientation was a matter between him and God.

The church contended that practicing homosexuality was a sin, and that the teacher as a spiritual leader should lead by example.

+ Independent On Line, 118 St. Georges Street, Post Office Box 4116, Cape Town 8001, South Africa, +27-21-481-6200, Fax: +27-21-481-6294

Iran: Parliament passes apostasy death bill

Iranian converts to Christianity, Mahmood Matin Azad (52) and Arash Basirat (44), were arrested in Shiraz on 15 May. Compass Direct (CD) reports: 'When their lawyer went to authorities to inquire about the case in early August, he was informed that the two men had been formally charged with apostasy [leaving Islam].' On 9 September, Iran's Parliament overwhelmingly passed a bill that if approved by the Guardian Council will make death mandatory for those guilty of apostasy or promoting apostasy (including on the Internet). The bill states they should be punished as 'mohareb' (enemy of God) and 'corrupt on the earth' and the punishment 'cannot be commuted, suspended or changed'. Iranian Christians fear the government will test-run the legislation on Azad and Basirat.

Please pray for an outpouring of God's mercy, grace and light.

+ Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 497 | Wed 24 Sep 2008

Hindu anti-Christian pogrom spreads in India

The violent Hindu anti-Christian pogrom that flared up on 23 August in Kandhamal district in the north-east Indian state of Orissa continues to rage. It now engulfs nine districts, indicating a high

level of VHP (Hindu World Council) orchestration. More than 50 Christians have been killed and multitudes have been raped, bashed, burned and slashed. Some 50,000 Christians are displaced. Even the relief camps are being attacked but praise God, two attempts to poison their water supplies have been thwarted. Furthermore, anti-Christian violence is now erupting in other states. Churches have been torched in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka whilst nuns from Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity were violently assaulted in Chhattisgarh. The central government appears paralysed. Please pray for God's intervention.

+ Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | No. 495 | Wed 10 Sep 2008

Hutt Valley Christian School - Staff Wanted

The following vacancies are coming up for NZ-registered Christian secondary teachers in January 2009. Hutt Valley Christian School is a small (roll in 2008 is 68 students) Year 1-12 Christian school owned and operated by an Association of Reformed parents and supporters. One distinctive feature of our school is that our Board and teaching staff are all committed to the Reformed faith as the most accurate expression of biblical Christianity. We aim to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students and invite you to consider participating in this with us. Located in the scenic Wainuiomata suburb, we are within 30 minutes driving distance of Wellington city.

Secondary Teachers: (1) English/history to Y12. (2) Mathematics/science to Y12. Experience with Cambridge IGCSE will be an advantage.

Primary/Intermediate teacher required: To teach a Y5/8 combined class of about 20 students (assisted by a teacher aide).

Only Christians of Reformed/Calvinistic convictions can be employed. The children are all from believing homes and parents are very supportive. Our website gives more information on the school.

Please send your CV with 3 referees (1 must be your Pastor/Minister) to the Headmaster, Box 43-127, Wainuiomata 5048, Lower Hutt. Only people eligible to work as a teacher in New Zealand can be considered. Further information can be obtained from Mrs J. de Vries; ph (04) 564 8552; email admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz; website www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz

CSAWD Teacher Training Scholarships

The Christian School Association (Wellington District) is inviting Reformed Christians who are either undergoing teacher training or contemplating it to apply for a Teacher Training Scholarship. Applicants who are successful will be given a scholarship to assist with their studies and will be bonded to work at **Hutt Valley Christian School** on completion of their studies. For application forms and more information, please contact Mrs J. de Vries; ph (04) 564 8552; email admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz; website www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz

Historic hymns and their context: Philip Doddridge

Sally Davey

It is noteworthy that most of the hymns we sing were written by one kind of person — a minister of the gospel. To be sure, there were some talented women who wrote excellent hymns in the nineteenth century. (Though it should be added that most were daughters, sisters or wives of ministers.) Why is this? Surely a hymn is something that any Christian can write, given a little ability to translate his spiritual experience into singable words? The answer is relatively simple. There are particular gifts, talents and experiences that lend themselves to particular tasks in God's kingdom. Just as dedicated Christian doctors and nurses are especially suited to missionary work among people with severe medical needs, there are some people whose particular gifts and background suit them to hymn-writing.

Generally, ministers are men thoroughly grounded in the Word through an extensive education involving the biblical languages, theology, and the art of exposition. This means they know the Scriptures thoroughly. Over the centuries, many ministers have also had a background in the languages, literature and history of their own and of ancient cultures. You could say that ministers have frequently been literary people, with gifts in the use of language. Some have been great writers or powerful orators. Others have been skilled poets, able to express themselves clearly, effectively and beautifully in carefully-chosen words. These are the kinds of men who have written some of our best hymns.

The most vital attribute

But there is more to hymn-writing than skill alone. You will find that those who have written the best hymns have loved Christ

with all of their heart and soul and mind and strength. They were in the ministry because Christ was their great desire; and they wanted others to know and love Him too. What they have written reflects their passion; and more often than not, they lived in an age when the Church was passionate about God too.

It is also important that ministers have a lot of experience in leading worship. This usually gives them an appreciation of good hymns, as they consider the words and study their meaning and effectiveness year after year. They have opportunity to weigh up the theology of different hymns and at times in the history of the Church, have determined to write new hymns because of the poverty of those currently sung. Christians who work often with hymns,



and who take the opportunity to reflect on them seriously, sooner or later reach the conclusion that some hymns convey the great truths about God better than others. This has, not infrequently, led them to write some themselves.

A time of biblical revival

The eighteenth century in the English-speaking world was a time when the Church was faithful, and flourished. Because of this, it was blessed by many ministers of the kind I have been describing. One of these was Philip Doddridge. Less famous than Isaac Watts who came before him, or Charles Wesley who came after, Doddridge was nevertheless loved and respected by his contemporaries. He lived in a world that

had tired of the religious battles of the seventeenth century. The Dissenters had more or less won freedom of worship and tolerance from the political establishment. Some of the Dissenters, however, had begun to relax their theological vigilance. They tended to rest on the laurels of their forefathers, who had suffered deprivation rather than conform to what was unbiblical in their pulpits. The Church of England was becoming increasingly sloppy in both doctrine and practice. But at the same time both Britain and America were being prepared for a most wonderful time of spiritual awakening. Philip Doddridge made an important contribution to this preparation.

Early signs of revival had begun to appear in the German-speaking world. In reaction to the suffering imposed by the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and to a perceived deadness in the Church, German Lutherans were reflecting on the need for a personal walk with God. In the later seventeenth century, under the leadership of Philip Spener and A.H. Francke, the Pietist movement began. Small groups began meeting to study the Bible, to pray together and to encourage each other to live disciplined, godly lives. They hoped that these small groups would revive the German churches from within. Ultimately, news of what was happening reached English and American shores, and helped spark spiritual awakening in the English-speaking world.

The Puritan example

But the English and Americans also had their own examples of evangelical piety — the Puritans of the earlier seventeenth century. These men, who had wanted to see the Church of England become thoroughly reformed, were also men of profound personal faith. They loved Christ and walked closely with him through their considerable sufferings. They were men of conviction, and preached the need for repentance and faith most vigorously. Their influence lived on long after their deaths through their voluminous published writings — many of which were originally sermons delivered from their pulpits. They stood for the gospel with lively passion, and were read by many English and American Christians throughout the eighteenth century.

Both Philip Doddridge and his almost-exact American contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, read and admired the Puritans. They viewed them as spiritual giants whose teaching and example they tried to follow. Doddridge and Edwards also knew of each other and read each other's books. They were encouraged by news of each other's ministries, and by the effects each other's teaching was having on the lives of British and American Christians alike. They were men of very similar stamp.

One of Doddridge's books became a spiritual classic. Entitled *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, it laid out the sinfulness of every heart – even hearts that considered themselves religious and good. It stressed the urgency of living for Christ in a day when many had lulled themselves into nominal religion. Doddridge was compelling:

'I beseech you, reader, whoever you are, that you would now look seriously into your own heart, and ask it this one plain question; Am I truly religious? Is the love of God the governing principle of my life? Do I walk under the sense of his presence? Do I converse with him from day to day, in the exercise of prayer and praise?'¹

The Rise and Progress was an enormously popular book on both sides of the Atlantic, and was an effective means in bringing many to faith in Christ. Among those converted through reading it was the young politician, William Wilberforce.

His background

Doddridge was born in 1702, the twentieth child and only surviving son of a London tradesman. Among his family were some courageous Christians. Two of his grandfathers had suffered for their faith, and from a young age he was brought up to believe in Christ. His parents both died before Philip was 13; but kind guardians ensured that he was looked after well. One was the Presbyterian minister Samuel Clark, who took him into his own home and undertook the rest of his education. From his early childhood he trusted in the Saviour, and when he was only 15 Samuel Clark's church received him into membership. He took this day seriously, writing in his diary for 1 January 1718: 'I this day, in the strength of Christ, renewed my covenant with God, and renounced my covenant with sin. I vowed against every sin, and resolved carefully to perform every duty.'² This practice of 'covenanting', or solemnly promising God to love and obey him was a common practice among the Pu-

ritans in England and America, and among Presbyterians in Scotland. The expression is found in many of their writings.

While still in his teens Doddridge began to consider a call to the ministry, but the difficult question of how he would pay for his study made it seem a remote possibility. He came to the attention of his uncle's employer, the Duchess of Bedford, and she offered to send this promising young man to either Oxford or Cambridge. But given that he would have had to become a communicant member of the Church of England to graduate from either university, he turned down her kind offer. He thought

young Christian of 22 who, like Philip, had been orphaned at a young age. They had a particularly happy and mutually supportive marriage. Just like his American contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, Doddridge found in his wife a true spiritual equal.

When John Jennings, Doddridge's former theological tutor, died in 1723, his students dispersed. But after some years the churches reinvigorated their concern to see the academy continue its work, and urged Doddridge to take it up. Certain he was too young and inexperienced, he turned it down. Eventually Isaac Watts, a man of immense influence among the

The conclusions of J.R. Watson, Professor of English at the University of Durham, on Doddridge as a hymn writer:

"James Montgomery speaks of 'the piety of Watts, the ardour of Wesley, and the tenderness of Doddridge,' and those adjectives will do as well as any to identify (in one word) the distinctive qualities of the three. Certainly Doddridge has a gentleness which is not found, except occasionally, in the other two..."

"He is the most broad-minded of the Dissenting writers; he is also the most irenic, and the most cultured: his hymns speak of his dedication to the service of God, but also of what was described as his 'learning, piety and politeness.' In its best and widest sense, Doddridge is polite – in its meaning of cultivated, refined, courteous."

J.R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997), pp. 179 and 190.

he would have to turn to the law for a career instead. However, at the last minute, his old friend Samuel Clark wrote, offering to find him a place in one of the Dissenting academies.

Trained in a Dissenters academy

These academies had been founded by the Dissenters to provide the best possible education for their ministers, barred as they were from education at Oxford and Cambridge. Soon after his seventeenth birthday Doddridge set off for John Jennings' academy in Kibworth Harcourt in Leicestershire. He was a very hard-working and able student, quickly excelling in theology, the classics and philosophy. Within two years he had completed his course. He was then ordained and accepted a call to the local church in Kibworth – his tutor, Jennings, having just left for another church. For five years he served various churches in several small towns in Leicestershire. He loved his work, but was lonely for personal ties. He had no family apart from a married sister, and longed for a wife. When he was 27 he met Mercy Maris, a devoted

Dissenters, added his voice to the plea and Doddridge consented. Just when he was about to take up the work, however, he received a call from an Independent (a type of Dissenting) church in Northampton. He was finally persuaded to undertake both works when the Northampton church promised to support both him and the academy. He moved there, together with his students, in December 1729.

Doddridge served for the rest of his life in this dual role at Northampton. He was both a much-loved pastor and a very capable theological tutor. The academy flourished, and some years there were as many as 46 students enrolled at a time. Its success was probably due in part to Doddridge's gentle and approachable character. He was a very tender-hearted and fair-minded man. As an instructor he was always at pains to present all arguments in an even-handed way. He hated the idea of controversy, and was one of the least contentious men of his day. However, this is possibly the reason a number of his former students went seriously astray doctrinally later in their lives. Doddridge was probably

not the sort of teacher who boldly and unequivocally emphasises the truth and warns strongly against error. It is sadly often the case that gentle and peace-loving men have this weakness. Everyone loves them, but it needs to be asked: are they wise and altogether discerning?

His family life

Doddridge's family life was warm and affectionate. He and Mercy had nine children in all, but as so often happened in those days, death touched their lives with sorrow. Four of their little ones died at a young age. Doddridge loved his children; and one, a little girl named Elizabeth, was a particularly sweet and loving child. Once, when her father asked her why everyone loved her, she replied, 'Indeed, Papa, I cannot think, unless it is that I love everyone.' She once tried to catechize the family dog, and when it did not respond as she hoped, she cried out, 'You, Dr Doddridge's dog, and not know who made you!' Little Elizabeth succumbed to tuberculosis when she was only five years old, and her father was stricken with grief. As he buried her he said, 'This day my heart hath been almost torn to pieces by sorrow, yet sorrow so softened and sweetened that I number it among the best days of my life.'³

Such trials deepened Doddridge's experience of God's love and grace, and gave him sensitive insight into the sufferings of his congregation. It is no surprise that such a man as Doddridge should have become a hymn-writer. His theological understanding, his pastoral wisdom and gift with verse all shaped his hymns. But he did not write just because he wanted to express his feelings in poetry. Quite simply, he wrote hymns to help his congregation learn the truth he had preached from the pulpit. It was his habit to write a hymn based on the text he was preaching on, and then the congregation would sing it after the sermon. By this means, the teaching they had heard sank into their hearts and minds as they sang.

We are indebted to Job Orton, a former pupil of Doddridge, for the preservation of some three hundred and fifty-three of these hymns. After Doddridge's death, he published these texts, presenting them in their scriptural order. Twenty-seven were from Genesis to Job, 52 from the Psalms and Proverbs, 91 from the Prophets and 183 from the New Testament.

The hymn, "O God of Bethel"

One of the most famous and best-loved

of these hymns of Doddridge is 'O God of Bethel'. This hymn, probably written in either 1736 or 1737, was based on Genesis 28:20-22, and deals with Jacob's vow to God. In the hymn we can distinguish a number of aspects of Puritan thinking, particularly the theme of covenant vows to God. If we remember what Doddridge wrote in his diary when he publicly professed faith, we can understand why he would write this hymn nearly twenty years later.

It addresses God as the faithful God of his people, who has seen them safely through many difficulties and sorrows in life. He has been faithful to those who have

*O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Thy people still are fed,
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led.*

*Our vows, our prayers, we now
present*

*Before thy throne of grace;
God of our fathers, be the God
Of their succeeding race.*

*Through each perplexing path of life
Our wandering footsteps guide;
Give us each day our daily bread
And raiment fit provide.*

*O spread thy covering wings around,
Till all our wanderings cease,
And at our Father's loved abode
Our souls arrive in peace.*

gone before us, and he will be faithful to the generations to come. In singing verse two Christians promise before God's throne of grace to be faithful to him, and ask that he will continue to be their God, and the God of their children. Verses three and four of the text contain a series of petitions by those covenanting with God. They ask that God will guide them through trials, provide for all their daily needs, and protect them till death. In Doddridge's last verse (not in most hymnals) there is also a reaffirmation of the covenant vow:

*To thee as to our Covenant-God
We'll our whole selves resign;
And count that not our Tenth
alone,
But all we have is Thine.*

This hymn really became famous, and especially loved, via the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. Not well-known until taken up by the Scots, it was included in the 1781 Scottish Translations and Paraphrases and in this form the text became widely known and very popular. It also appeared in Hymns Ancient and

Modern, the Anglican hymnal used almost universally for over a hundred years. In this way, through both the Scottish (Presbyterian) and English (Anglican) traditions, these words have become intimately familiar to New Zealanders as well.

It is a hymn that reflects Doddridge's own gentle character and steadfast love of God. Scotsmen loved 'O God of Bethel' so much that it was widely sung in 1960, during the celebrations marking the four-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in Scotland. Its covenanting theme links the church's present-day pilgrimage with that of the persecuted Church of Reformation times and of the 17th century. (Those who resisted the Stuart kings' attempts to suppress Presbyterianism in Scotland called themselves the 'Covenanters'). It is a hymn with powerful historical connotations as well as a call to personal commitment.

His ill-health and death

Doddridge did not enjoy robust health, and in his late forties he developed tuberculosis. Friends, including Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, resolved to send him to a warmer climate in the hope of improving his condition. He and Mercy set off for Lisbon in 1751, and for a few weeks it seemed he was recovering. But then his illness set in with a vengeance and he declined rapidly. However, he enjoyed a special assurance of God's grace during his last few weeks, and Mercy long remembered the radiance of his face. Seeking to reassure her as death approached, he told her, 'So sure am I that God will be with you and comfort you that I think my death will be a greater blessing to you than ever my life has been.' He died on 26 October 1751 in Lisbon. It was a severe sorrow to Mercy, but she was able to write this to her children: 'Such comforts has he granted to the meanest of his creatures that my mind at times is held in perfect astonishment and is ready to burst into songs of praise under its most exquisite distress... I mourn the best of husbands and of friends, removed from this world of sin and sorrow to the regions of immortal bliss and light. What a glory!'⁴

What a glory indeed.

Endnotes

- 1 Philip Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (American Tract Society, n.d.), p. 27
- 2 Quoted in Faith Cook, *Our Hymn Writers and their Hymns* (Evangelical Press, 2005, p. 75)
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5

The necessity of the Virgin Birth

An Advent/Christmas Meditation – Part 1

Patricia van Laar

The season of Advent, leading to the traditional Christmas season, is a time of preparation for the celebration of Jesus' First Coming, and also an annual reminder that we must prepare for His Second Coming. It seems an appropriate season for Christians to meditate on various aspects of His incarnation. One challenge Christians face is an ancient question that in modern days still rears its head. This is the challenge to the authenticity of the birth stories, and especially the miraculous work of God. Did God really send His Son, born of a Virgin?

The doctrine has been attacked from the beginning of Christianity, but no more than now. 'Modern' theology disputes that such an event ever occurred. One person, who goes under the name of Christian, sent me a book comparing Buddha with our Lord Jesus Christ, in which amongst other comparisons was an account of the same claim made for the Buddha's birth, for the purpose of showing, not that the Bible copied Buddhism, but that a Virgin Birth was not a unique 'idea' on the part of Christians. While that is historically true, does it mean the claim of Christ to such a conception belongs to the realm of pious myth?

(This is the known view of that editor, who belongs to the 'Jesus Seminar'.) Or is it another imitative ploy of Satan, to turn enquirers away from faith in the Lord? Let's look at this. Liberals have reached the point of discarding belief in the virgin birth, not only as unnecessary, but as untrue.

A lack of faith in the Bible

Early this year, about Easter time, our local newspaper took a survey of some religious leaders, to see who amongst them believed in the Biblical teaching about the Lord's virgin birth. It was heartening to see that those who answered in the affirmative, church leaders and also some prominent citizens in the City Council, were most emphatic in their witness to the Lord. To some readers it would be surprising to read the affirmative answer of a Moslem leader too, showing that he had more faith in his Qur'an than did some other most disheartening churchmen have faith in the Bible.

They, not believing, pose under the umbrella of Christianity. They share the modernist claim that the Christian Scriptures were written many decades after the birth and life of the Lord, an historically incorrect assumption. They ignore the thousands of manuscripts still extant today, dating from the earliest days of the Christian faith, the quotations of the New Testament writings in the letters of the earliest of Christians, and the spread of Christianity to the farthest corners of the known world long before the end of the first century.

A well-known explanation given from time immemorial is that the real father of Jesus was a Roman soldier. This of course, casts doubt on both Mary and Joseph (did they conspire together to deceive?) as well as on the Gospel writers. As we are exhorted in the Scriptures to be ready to give a reason for the faith that is in us, we should have this topic firmly understood and answered in our own minds. Biblical answers will not of course, satisfy the skeptics and atheists of our society, but for so-called Christians to doubt the Biblical records is a serious matter; I would even use the word blasphemous, as they cast doubt not only on the integrity of the Gospel writers, but also on the moral integrity of the chief actors, if I may call them that, in the events surrounding the birth of the Lord Jesus. They also doubt the divinity of Christ as the second person of the Trinity. So as we meditate on the Christmas story unfolded in Matthew and in Luke, let us consider why the Virgin Birth was necessary, and why it is to be regarded as part of the essential doctrine of the Christian faith.

Why was it necessary?

The prophetic word

It was necessary because it was prophetic. In the covenant promise to the House of David, it is clearly indicated. Although the word Covenant is not used in 2 Samuel 7: 12 – 17, it is so referred to in other parts of Scripture. This passage is the basic announcement of the covenant with David and his house. Psalm 89 affirms this. In verses 3&4 we read, 'I have made my covenant with my chosen ones, I have sworn to David my servant, I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.' The psalm

(headed 'A makrill of Ethan the Ezrahite') continues by recalling the assurance of the eternal love of God, and the covenant of God that will never fail, the appointment of 'my firstborn' (God is speaking), the establishment of David's line forever, and the punishment of his sons if they forsake God's law. But even in that case, the psalmist remembers that there should be no violation of God's covenant 'sworn by my (God's) holiness' that David's line will continue forever, and his throne endure.' Yet Ethan is in a dilemma, for he continues, 'But you have rejected, you have spurned... You have renounced the covenant with your servant...' and he finishes this section of his psalm on a note of despair (v. 49) 'O LORD, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David?' Ethan has endured mocking and taunting – God seems to have broken this promise and forsaken his covenant. [It is not unique for a godly man in Scripture to speak to God in this complaining way; both Moses and Elijah did so, and God deals very gently with them.]

The date of Psalm 89 is not given in the Bible. I wonder if Ethan was called an Ezrahite because he was a descendant from Ezra, who appears after the Exile at the end of the Old Testament era? It must be dated quite late in O.T. Biblical terms, as he is lamenting the apparent rejection of the kingly line of David, in spite of the covenant promises. In his heart he cannot see how the covenant promises can be fulfilled. The royal family is a 'has been', and the line of ancestry has been rejected by God. Disappointment in God is apparent. How can the promises now be revived and kept?

Faith shines through in the end. He rises to this in the manner of a Job, who said, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.' Ethan may not understand, but at the last he shows his trust. He does not, he cannot turn away from God. His final words honour his Maker, (v. 52) 'Praise be to the LORD forever.' His puzzlement has not been answered, but he still praises God.

The perplexity of Ethan must have been echoed in the hearts of many in Israel. They saw the apparent demise of the royal house of David after the reigns of the deposed King Jehoiachin (598 BC) and

his uncle Zedekiah (597-586), whose sons had all been slain. Almost five hundred years passed, with no King of Israel and no throne. There must have been many who, reading the words of this psalm, wondered with Ethan, how God could keep this promise, who pondered the history of their race and asked themselves, 'How can this be?' There may also have been many who, finding no answer, gave a sigh of incomprehension, and then said, 'Praise be to the Lord forever.'

For Israel was in great expectation of the Messiah at the time of the coming of Jesus to Bethlehem. The Jews had never lost their hope. The time was ripe for the fulfillment of the prophecies of old. God was preparing them for His coming. Then John the Baptist was born, to be the herald of the One who would come. Was it to be Elijah? Or the Prophet? Are you, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, or do we look for another?

The first to know that His coming was imminent was a young maid, a virgin of faith, herself a descendant of David. The

angel who brought the message to her gave the first hint of the 'how' of God.

'...You will be with child, and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'

'How will this be?' Mary asked, 'since I am a virgin?'

The answer in the virgin birth

There we have it. The virgin birth was the answer to the puzzle. The tremendous prophecies of Isaiah 7 & 9 were to be fulfilled, literally. Prophecy and promise were assured. It was not a vain, empty promise. 'God is not a man, that He should lie.' It required the Virgin Birth to fulfill the promise.

The New I.V.F. Bible Dictionary (now no longer new!) writes of this: 'God's covenant (with his people) is to such an extent bound up with the Messiah, that He is Himself the embodiment of these blessings and

the presence of the Lord with His people, which the covenant ensures.

'No consideration certifies the grandeur of the covenant conception, the richness of His grace, the security of its provisions and the assurances of its promises, more than the fact that Christ Himself is the angel of the covenant and is given as the covenant of the people. What could disclose more effectively the sovereign grace of which the covenant is the epitome, than that He in whom the promises of God are 'yea' and 'amen' should be given as a covenant?'

Yes, the first consideration in giving a reply to our question is a consideration of the actual Coming of the Lord. This event was the answer to the promises of God given to David a thousand years earlier. He alone, as Part 2 of this topic will show, could fill throne of the House of David, and only by the Virgin Birth. We can have full confidence in the Lord's Promises as we ourselves, in these latter days, look back to His first coming, and forward to His second.

Glory Be to God on High.

The 5th of November

How history makes Guy Fawkes more than fireworks

Sjirk Bajema

Guy Fawkes – we all know about it! For that certain time every year there are those fireworks that fill the air. The Fire Service is a lot busier, politicians make the same old rumblings about threatening to ban it, and it drives the pets crazy.

But what do you actually know about Guy Fawkes – especially the person? Perhaps you're thinking: 'Didn't he try to blow up Parliament?' You may have the popular image of him – he was a somewhat foolish man who got caught doing something that could never have possibly succeeded. That's why children in the past have made those 'guys' – the old clothes stuffed with straw to make a dummy – that were placed on wheelbarrows and wheeled around the streets to collect coins for the fireworks let off when the 'guy' was burned on top of the bonfire. 'Penny for a guy,' the kids used to sing out.

The 5th of November is therefore just an excuse for fireworks. Isn't it? Well, if it was you can be sure the government would have banned it by now. It's actu-

ally because the original event the day is based on was a very serious threat to the English Royal family and the whole English Parliament that it has become that annual event on the calendar.

Let's then see what happened. And so we will see how important the failure of this plot was to the Protestant cause in England.

The personal details

Guy Fawkes was born on the 13th of April, 1570, in Stonegate, Yorkshire. His father was a lawyer – a notary of the ecclesiastical courts and advocate of the consistory court of the Archbishop of York. On his mother's side there was a long line of eminent merchants of Aldermen of York. While initially raised as a Protestant, upon his father's death when he was 7 years old, and his mother's subsequent marriage to a dedicated Roman Catholic, he was sent to a school with known Romanist sympathies and several of his fellow students were later numbered amongst the same. One of these was a Christopher Wright.

This direction in religious leanings was

subsequently confirmed through Fawkes becoming briefly a footman to the 2nd Lord Montague, a member of a leading pro-Romanist family.

A Dutch connection

What happens next is something that brings



home this story to many of our own stories, as it relates to those of a Dutch heritage. Guy Fawkes, following his Catholic fanaticism, joined the armies of Spain in fighting against the United Protestant Provinces of the Netherlands. This was the famous 'Eighty Year War' that is indelibly impressed on Dutch history. Just as we would be well aware of the English protestants who fought for the Dutch protestants, so there was also a number who willingly joined the other side for religious reasons.

Guy Fawkes fought for ten years under the flag of Philip II of Spain. By the time the forces of Philip captured Calais in 1596 he held a post of command. He was described at this time as a man 'of excellent good natural parts, very resolute and universally learned', and was 'sought by the most distinguished in the Archduke's camp for nobility and virtue.' He was certainly known for his deep commitment to the cause of Rome. It was also noted that during this time he became somewhat of a specialist in the use of explosives.

It seems his character brought him to the attention of Sir William Stanley, who was in charge of the English regiment in Flanders, and to Hugh Owen and Father

William Baldwin – key Roman Catholic leaders in the struggle against Protestantism in England. In 1603 the connection between Fawkes and these men resulted in him going to Spain to speak with Philip II regarding the situation of the Romanists in England. At this time he met up again with Christopher Wright and they endeavoured to gain Spanish support for an invasion of England upon the death of Elizabeth I. That, of course, didn't happen, but it certainly didn't stop Fawkes seeking out further opportunities to destabilise the English authorities.

The plot itself

Returning to Brussels, Fawkes met up with a Thomas Wintour, and then was invited by Robert Catesby to accompany Wintour back to England as part of a diplomatic mission. The plot thickened in London in May 1604 at the notorious meeting in the Duck and Drake inn. There three others joined the 'gunpowder conspiracy'. The seriousness of this was indicated by the oath taken by all members of the group – an oath then sanctified by the performing of mass and the administering of the sacraments by the Jesuit priest John Gerard in an adjoining

room. It seems Fawkes was a particularly valuable person in this plot as he was relatively unknown as a recusant in England. He assumed the identity of John Johnson, a servant of one of the co-conspirators, and was given control of the basement rooms from which they were endeavouring to dig a tunnel to go under Parliament. This work proved far too cumbersome and so the conspirators turned to hiring a cellar below Parliament.

Into this room Fawkes, with some of the others, began bringing barrels of powder, hidden below iron bars and faggots (which were balls of seasoned chopped liver). By March 1605 they had hidden 1800 pounds (36 barrels, or 800kgs) of gunpowder in the cellar. This would have been more than enough to blow Parliament into many pieces! The timing of the explosion was planned for a time when the whole of Parliament would be sitting with the king and his son, the heir to the throne, present.

Its failure

The plan fell apart, however, when one of the conspirators wrote a warning letter to a leading Roman Catholic nobleman, alluding to what was to happen, though in an oblique way. He was William Parker, the 4th Baron Monteagle. He was not at all pleased with the idea so sent the letter directly to the Secretary of State, who initiated a search of the vaults beneath the House of Lords in the early hours of the 5th of November.

Guy Fawkes was found in the cellar, together with the incriminating evidence of a watch, slow matches and touchwood. He was immediately arrested and for some days subjected to extensive torture. He held back at first from declaring who the co-conspirators were but named them on the 9th of November, after hearing that some had been subsequently arrested for another offence.

In late January 1606 the trial of eight alleged conspirators was held. It resulted in the guilty verdict for all of them and they all suffered the same death by hanging on the last day of the month.

How this was remembered in subsequent history

It's a very instructive lesson as to the tension of the time with the way the event was remembered immediately afterwards. A comparable fear in our society today as to how the Romanist threat was seen then would be the Muslim terrorist. It is



The gunpowder conspiracy.



▲ *Fawkes' trial*

◀ *Fawkes' arrest*

no wonder that a number of contemporary verses were written clearly condemning Guy Fawkes. One of these goes:

*Remember, remember, the fifth of November,
The gunpowder, treason and plot,
I know of no reason
Why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.*

Other verses had a strong religious theme. They celebrated the rescue of the nation from an evil conspiracy. A John Wilson in 1612, writing in this vein, said:

*O England praise the name of God
That kept thee from this heavy rod!
But though this demon e'er be gone,
His evil now be ours upon!*

Later John Milton based his Satan in book 6 of Paradise Lost on Fawkes. There the devil is pictured as inventing gunpowder to try to match God's thunderbolts. Later writing continued in similar vein so that Guy Fawkes virtually became the devil incarnate.

Chronology of English Monarchs

Henry VIII (broke with Rome though retained tendencies)	1509-47
Edward VI (Protestant with reformed tendencies)	1547-53
Mary (strongly Roman Catholic)	1553-58
Elizabeth I (Anglican settlement)	1558-1603
James I (continued Anglican settlement, High Church)	1604-25

Every year for many years afterwards it was remembered on the date of November 5th through sermons preached in churches which patriotic citizens sponsored. Just as the American President post-9/11 wears the flag badge, this commemoration became a flag-flying exercise.

For us today?

Obvious patriotism aside, we too should be thankful that this plot failed. If it had

succeeded and England been thrown into turmoil, it could well have spelled the end of the Protestant movement in that country. The so-called middle-way of Anglicanism would have taken a huge battering. There would certainly have been no King James Version of the Bible, and the increasing expression of puritan thoughts could well have been repressed.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Prayer & Praise items: This morning we will have the privilege of witnessing Riley James Welch receiving the sign and seal of baptism. We ask that the Lord may bless Riley as he grows up and Ben and Rosalie as his parents, in their task of raising him in a Godly way.

Bishopdale

It's our wedding soon! We would like to invite you to share in our joyful day as we unite in marriage before God. Lord willing, the ceremony will take place on Saturday, 11 October, at 10:00 at Bishopdale Reformed Church. If you would also like to attend the reception lunch at Bishopdale

Community Centre, please RSVP to Carine Bakker, 322 4043, before 20 September. Bevan & Elrike

Bucklands Beach

Pastoral. It's a special moment for the Munroe and Flinn families with Mrs Flinn senior celebrating her 90th birthday. She is not at all well, but it will surely be true that the presence of her family will be very meaningful. May the Lord continue to give comfort and assurance to you all.

Session note. Br Daniel Wilson was introduced to the session. He will be attending all session and elders' meetings in his capacity as vicar. While not serving as an ordained member of session, Daniel was nevertheless asked to sign the Form of Subscription which he was able to do without reservation. Daniel's programme was presented to session and approved. Our brother will be preaching at least once every Sunday (whether in Bucklands Beach or in Avondale (2x per month)) but not be expected to write more than one sermon per week. It is anticipated that things will be able to go 'full steam ahead' once

the furniture (and library!) arrives from the States and can be set up.

Membership: In the past few months, the Liebenberg family, recently arrived from South Africa, has been worshipping with us. The family has applied for membership and, after meeting with the elders, their request was officially received and approved at the session's meeting on Thursday. Herewith a very, very warm welcome to Hendrik and Lunel, along with their two sons Hendrik and Heindrich! May the Lord bless, enrich and use you as a part of our family here at Bucklands Beach.

Christchurch

Well... finally Maria Ella Hoyt made her appearance. All in God's good time, of course! Bryan and Alexia welcomed their daughter into the wider world last Tuesday afternoon. Today we are privileged to administer the sacrament of Holy Baptism to this child of the covenant. May the Lord graciously enable Bryan and Alexia to keep the promises they make to bring Maria up in the fear of the Lord. A special welcome is extended too to family and friends who

join us for this wonderful occasion.

Notes from full Session meeting. A proposal (I stress, only a proposal) was raised to change the church's financial year to a calendar year (i.e. Jan-Dec instead of Apr-Mar). This would mean a budget is drafted before Christmas for congregational approval the following February. The budget year would then be aligned with our ministries (which all operate on a calendar year), and we think this might be easier on our Committee of Management, which would then not be faced with having to produce a budget as one of its first tasks each year. The deacons have been asked to do a bit of research to see how well this might work in our congregation. I am sure they would appreciate input from the congregation.

From Pastor John. Last Monday Henk Bos was called home to be with His Lord and Saviour. Nel had been informed that morning that Henk was not expected to see the day out. In the late afternoon we spent some time around his bed, singing, reading and praying and then some more singing. On a couple of occasions Henk still tried to join in but it was all becoming too much for him. Gradually his breathing became shallower and at a quarter to seven his faith turned to sight. Most of us are aware that Henk longed to go home and we are thankful that the Lord heard his prayers and ours. As I write these words the funeral is still to be held but I know that some family and friends have come from the North Island for the occasion. Thank you for your support and presence. We commend Nel to the Lord's gracious care and pray that He will comfort her and continue to enable her to cope with the loss of her husband and friend.

From Pastor John. This morning we are again delighted to welcome someone into communicant membership. Merle Mills has been worshipping with us for quite some time and has requested to be received into membership. Merle, who lives in the Maranatha Village, comes to us from the Anglican Church. It is our pleasure to now formally welcome her as a communicant member of this congregation.

It's not every day that we have someone in the congregation celebrating their ninety-th birthday but this past week that was true for our sister Mieke van der Schaaf. Mieke, we rejoice with you and your family in God's goodness all these past years. May He bless you in whatever time He still gives you to serve Him this side of glory.

Dovedale

Profession of Faith: With great joy, we announce to the congregation that Dilys Watson has met with the Elders to express her desire to become a member of our church. If there are no lawful objections, Dilys will make her profession of faith in the morning service on Sunday 14th September, God willing.

News from the Churches: Around 1990, a number of churches left the Christian Reformed Churches of North America and subsequently federated together as the United Reformed Churches of North America (Currently numbering around 100 churches). Rev. Jim Klazinga and Rev. Peter Kloosterman came to us from this denomination, and it is also where I worshipped while I studied in the USA. Some years before that, a smaller group of churches had also left the CRCNA to form the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (Currently numbering 5 churches). Rev. Leo deVos came to us from this denomination. At recent synods of the URCNA, the OCRC have been invited to join with them on the basis of Scripture and the three forms of Unity and without their ministers having to undergo a colloquium doctum (an examination). At its recent synod, four of the 5 OCRC churches agreed to this and have joined the URCNA immediately. We give thanks to the Lord for this coming together in times when we more often read of separation. (Eph 4:3) Pastor Holtslag.

Dunedin

Pastoral Notes. We rejoice with Bernie and Vanessa Vaatstra, and the wider Vaatstra and Flinn families, at the safe arrival of a daughter, Belle Elyse, born on Saturday 23 August at 11:58 pm. Praise be to God.

Pastoral Notes. We can be thankful for a very positive meeting on Thursday where the great majority voted in favour of the proposal to call Rev Jim Klazinga to work in Oamaru and Timaru. It was heartening to see the Lord's will being made known as questions and concerns were worked through with openness and mutual respect. The next steps in the process are the meeting with the Oamaru congregation on 17 September and, should the outcome there be favourable, the meeting of Presbytery on 1 November.

News from Timaru. Please pray for the developing Reformed church plant in Timaru as we hold another worship service this coming Sunday. This will be our first morning worship service. We'll be having it

at the Parents Center on Napier Street at 10am. We hope to begin having morning services on the second Sunday of each month, and an afternoon service each fourth Sunday. This Sunday I'll be preaching on Psalm 131, with the sermon entitled, "The Quieted Soul." I hope to continue the series on the attributes of God during the upcoming afternoon services. Other matters for prayer: Arno van Staden has begun working at South Canterbury Textiles, where I also have a job and where Andrew Miller is the CEO. His wife, Maritza, is looking for work and hopes to acquire a work permit soon. Please pray for them as they continue to get settled here in New Zealand. Katrina Miller has been having Bible Studies with Gracia Beens, who is interested in attending our church with her family. Please pray for Gracia and her husband Jack. John Higgenson is doing well after having a hernia operation a few weeks ago. Please also pray for the Bible Study a number of us participate in on Tuesday evenings. Ron Guptill from the local Methodist church has been unable to attend for a while because of health concerns. Hermann and Evie Franks have indicated that friends from their Presbyterian congregation hope to begin attending soon. Thanks for your continued encouragement and support. Blessings. Jim Klazinga

Hukanui

Congratulations to Jason, Maria and Jordyn Farmer on the safe arrival of a baby girl/sister on Thursday – Kayden Grace

North Shore

News & Announcements. This morning we have the privilege of baptising Lillian Ruth Borger, daughter of Bert & Rebecca and sister for James & Miriam. We give the Lord thanks for this new child of his covenant and may the Lord bless you, Bert & Rebecca, as you seek to bring your children up in the fear, knowledge and love of God. Indeed, we pray so for all parents.

Profession of Faith: Another reminder: James Button will profess his faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and be accepted as a member of the Church on 5th October, Lord willing. It is wonderful to be able to give thanks to God for working in James' life among us over the past few years and for bringing him to this point.

News & Announcements. Congratulations to Erik and Henriette van Roekel, on the birth of their new wee son (and brother for Suus) last Friday, arriving a couple of weeks early! Both are doing well! His name

is Teun, weighing in at around 3800g and 54cm long. We give thanks to the Lord for His care and blessings.

Palmerston North

On Sunday 5th October, during the morning service, we will be able to rejoice with Chris and Paula Dykstra as they profess their faith.

Pukekohe

It is with thankfulness that we announce the marriage of Fred Grosscurt and Katrina van Echten. If there are no lawful objections this will take place at 1:30pm on Saturday 4 October at St Mary's Church, Levin.

Wainuiomata

From the organists. To the anonymous person who gave the four organists a beautiful box of chocolates each, a heartfelt "thank you" from each of us. Your kindness

was much appreciated!

Men's Breakfast. Please mark your calendars for the Men's Breakfast for this week Saturday, September 27th at 8:00am, at the home of Leo and Carol de Vos. At family visiting, some men were suggesting they would like to train for office in the Church. Well, here is your chance! If you have not contacted us, please respond soon by letting Carol or myself know if you plan to come out. Pastor LdV

Wellington

80th Birthday Celebration. With much thankfulness to the Lord the Wierenga family will be celebrating the 80th birthday of our Mum, Oma & Great-Oma, *Bep Wierenga* on Saturday 20 September 2008. We will be having an "open home" from 2pm onwards and you are invited to join in our celebrations.

Letter to the Editor

The Editor,

A friend gave me your magazine to read the article on Climate Change. I thought that the writer had some real good things to say and obviously has a keen interest in science. The writer is showing the difference between science by consensus and scientific evidence. How we need to watch out for science by consensus! Yes, we can take things 'for a fact' like global warming because everyone is talking about it, but not having studied verifiable evidence.

Proverbs say that the simple believe everything. Many myths, false doctrines and false beliefs are easily swallowed by the majority. Satan has launched a major attack on the Bible since Charles Darwin's theories were promoted as scientific fact. We need to study in the light of the fallibility of man, who, although very smart cannot change God's infallible Word, the Bible. Although I am not against studying, science and research, I know Jesus chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He took a little child and said that unless we become like little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. God throughout history has done things we cannot explain or fathom. Now some try to explain God's works so that they can shape Him into a god that fits their puny mind. 'Experts' talk about millions of years because evolutionary beliefs must be supported by increasing periods of

time and yet conclusive evidence is not forthcoming from these 'experts' and their dating theories.

How unwise to think that God took millions of years when the Bible says that the Creator 'spoke' everything into being. The Bible says that each day of creation was comprised of, 'a day and a night'. Many people are trying to come up with evidence to destroy our faith in God. Genesis is to be foundational for our faith. It shows a loving God, our tendency to sin like Adam and Eve and reveals Satan's opposition to God and man. Genesis holds many answers to questions that man has as long as a literal interpretation is made. This should be done in other parts of the Bible as long as a literal interpretation does not do injustice to common sense. (e.g. chopping a hand off in relation to Matt. 5:30 needs a figurative interpretation).

So although the writer has a lot of knowledge of science, he presents a case of snap-frozen mammoths 20,000 years ago and climate changes every 120,000 years ago which are based on man's assumptions. These theories are heavily influenced by evolutionary thinking rather than taking the time-line of history which is revealed in the Bible

P.S. "Evolution is not science it is a false religion." (quote from Dr. S.M. Davis)

Joe Sonneveld

Family Camp 2008/09

**Saturday 27th December
– Saturday 3rd January**

*Come along and
enjoy sweet fellowship
with others from our
denomination.*

Studies –

'In Christ Alone'

led by Rev Peter Kloosterman

Meditation –

'The Theology of the Psalms'

led by Rev Michael Flinn

New Years celebrations –

Banquet dinner – Glow worm
trips – Kayaking – Canoeing
– Swimming – Volleyball – Touch
Rugby –
Soccer – Chess – Table Tennis
– Kids Club – Settlers of Catan
– Concert – Fishing – Rest!

Updates:

Great news – we have managed to keep the fees the same as last year! This is fantastic value for money for a week away in a beautiful setting with great food.

The Kids Club is being run this year by the Cressy family.

The National Youth camp runs from Friday 2nd – 9th January and we hope to arrange transport to Ngaruawahia for those attending both camps.

The National Cadet camp starts at Finlay Park the same day Family camp ends, so this is a great opportunity to attend both this year!

**Check out your local Church
for registration forms and
more information or e-mail
van7ter@ihug.co.nz**



**26th Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand
Hastings, 6-11 September 2008**