

# faith in **focus**

Magazine of the  
Reformed Churches  
of New Zealand

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**“He has made  
everything  
beautiful in its  
time”**

**Ecclesiastes 3:11a**

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**Editorial**

Have you ever had the experience that you read something somewhere and it's just plainly wrong? You have no idea where or who the person is writing but they have certainly got their facts wrong. If only they knew a bit of history!

I had that happen to me while reading one of the Hubbards 'Clipboards'. This is a Newsletter that they insert in each box of their cereals. Often you find interesting facts and encouraging pieces in there. And that's what this particular one was meant to be. It was entitled, 'Honesty – The Best Policy.' Using some encouraging quotes and relevant facts it showed how our society is breaking down in this area of telling the truth, and the impact that has.

The bit that upset me, though, was when the author wrote about where our ethical principles come from. It motivated me so strongly that I wrote to him:

*Dear Sir,*

*I appreciate the work you folk do with both producing terrific cereals for our physical meals and the Clipboards for our mental digestion.*

*On your front page of Clipboard Issue 83 I have to raise an historical inaccuracy. So you are not being truthful there. And the dishonesty is in assigning to Confucius the underpinning of many of Western society's ethical foundations.*

*Historically speaking, Confucius did not become known to Western society until after the explorations of Marco Polo. So that's in the late 1200's A.D.*

*Already before then our ethical foundations had been laid in our Judeo-Christian foundation. Honesty being the best policy is what is in the 9th commandment (Exodus 20:16 @1500 B.C.). The book of Proverbs details application on this commandment, and that dates from @ 900B.C. These are just two examples of what the Bible says extensively about honesty.*

*Not only are these sometime before Confucius, they are also in a direct line through the educational framework that the West has had since then.*

*I look forward to this clarification in a future Clipboard.*

Their reply was this:

*Thank you for your very nice comments about our cereals and the Clipboard Newsletters. We are delighted to hear that you enjoy both.*

*Thank you also for your informative comments about the article on the front page of Clipboard Issue No. 83. Clearly you are well informed on such matters and we appreciate your feedback on the inaccuracies in the article. With regard to clarification in a future Clipboard, unfortunately we work 4 to 6 months ahead with the writing of the newsletters and clarification at this stage would be inappropriate to most readers of the Clipboard Newsletters. However, we will keep your email on file and should we receive queries regarding this article from our customers, we will be able to refer to your comments.*

So they were very nice about it. But they continue the lie because they could correct it, even if they chose to do so in 4 to 6 months time. It all depends on how great your commitment to truth is. And truth today is regarded as quite relative. How unlike the occasion we remember on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, the end of this month! That is Reformation Day, the day when we recall the nailing of 95 Theses by Martin Luther on Wittenberg's castle church door. The Reformation was definitely about an abiding truth, and where it alone is found—in God's Word. In a world where feelings predominate and nothing matters for more than fifteen minutes, let's be challenged by reflecting on what God graciously did through the great revival at that time.

There is article written by the Rev. Leo de Vos in this issue concerning the Christian Sabbath. It would be an ideal study for your Youth Club or Bible Study group. For that reason I have placed it in the middle pages so that it can be taken out and used for that purpose.

*Cover photo: A scene from Queen's Garden, Nelson*

**Have you taken a nice picture?**

*Do you think you have a suitable photo to grace the pages of 'Faith in Focus'?*

*Please send it in – whether hardcopy or digital – and we will see if it can be used.*

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.

# A lightning strike, which changed history

## *The Lord and Luther*

### **Hans Voschezang**

Returning from a visit to his parents Martin Luther walked along the dust road on his way to Erfurt. It was in the afternoon July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1505, the black sky looked threatening, typical thunderstorm weather. Some dust devils swirled around in the hot breeze as if to warn him of the upcoming storm. He could hear the distant thunder rumbling. He didn't pay much attention to his surroundings. His mood was as gloomy as the grey surroundings and his mind as confused as the dark clouds. He had been praying to God for months now to show him a path to follow for his life. He was twenty-one now and what future did he have? Mum and Dad were no help. This morning they had argued again about his law studies at the University. Dad insisted he should finish his law degree and become the family's lawyer to work for him in his copper mining business. Dad had taken the opportunity to lease more furnaces. Mum would have a servant to help in the house and haul firewood from the forest. It had become too much for Mum to do all that work on her own. But no one spared one thought for him, Martin. Father Hans had tried angrily to bully him in to accepting his ideas, reminding him of the considerable sacrifices he had made to send him to University. A dutiful son would see it his way; he had accused him of being too stubborn. But Martin's heart was not in his studies, he had other things on his mind. Why couldn't Dad see it his way?

### **Struck down**

All of a sudden nature seemed to hold her breath, it became very still, no sound was heard, no wind - nothing. Martin stood still, aware of an odd metallic smell, a tingling in the air, detecting the rapid approach of the storm. A flash of lightning struck the ground very close by immediately knocking him off his feet. A tremendous crash of thunder followed, the heavens opened up and the rain bucketed down. Temporarily blinded by the lightning flash Martin realized he was lying in a ditch. Another flash of lightning; he smelled burning hair and something warm trickling down his cheek. Blackness engulfed him. The thunderstorm raged on. After a while he opened his eyes and started to crawl out of the ditch over the rain soaked earth

and collapsed face up to the clouds, cold shafts of stinging rain pelted down on him. Martin curled up in to a ball and felt the mud beneath him and in utter terror he screamed: "Help me, Saint Anne, I'll become a monk!" Paralyzed with fear of a sudden death he lay there for quite some time, before he blacked out once again. The storm had now subsided, but it was still raining. Martin woke up and got up; at least he could see where he was going. He needed help. Stumbling and sliding through the mud he noticed a miner's hut in the distance, maybe they could help. In what seemed to be hours of walking he reached the hut before he collapsed against the door. The man of the house dragged him inside; they put some ointment on his wounds and

gave him something to eat. Totally exhausted and the trauma of his ordeal had taken its toll and he fell asleep, lying where he was, on the floor of the hut. Martin survived that traumatic event and barely a fortnight later he told his parents of his vow to Saint Anne and his decision to become a monk. They were very upset and vehemently opposed to that idea. They felt Martin had abandoned them with no one to take care of them in their old age. As a lawyer he would have been in a position to support them. Martin realized by entering the monastery it would mean that his father had to work for the rest of his life. Anyway, he couldn't go back on his word now. And so, a few days later, he went ahead and sold his books, and on July 17<sup>th</sup>



*Martin Luther as a monk*

1505 he knocked on the door of the Augustinian Monastery in Erfurt asking permission to be admitted. At first Father Winand had some serious reservations about Martin's motives, questioning the reasons behind his decision of becoming a monk, but in the end the Prior accepted him on condition that he first served one year as a novice. Martin settled in quite readily and adjusted to a hard life of strict discipline in the Monastery. Each day consisted of about 6 hours of prayer, spread out over seven sessions in three hourly intervals. He worked in the garden, performed general cleaning duties including emptying the buckets in the latrines, preparing and cooking the daily meals and begging for bread when it was his turn as indicated on a duty roster.<sup>1</sup> But Martin didn't mind all that hard work, they were all merit points on the way to a sure salvation, as prescribed by the Catholic Church at the time. He believed that a monk could devote himself hundred percent to God, therefore having done his best, God would extend His grace to a sinner like him. Monks were wholly given over to God and because of their commitment to God they would escape God's wrath. Today we would say: "God helps those who help themselves." During this first period as novice, he tried so hard to be perfect and keep up his good works, devotions, and prayers, that he simply ran out of time. He tried at one stage to catch up on lost time spent in prayer during the night, depriving himself of sleep for up to a week. As penance for his sin he fasted sometimes for up to 4 days. In mid winter he would sleep often without the one blanket provided by the order, because he believed that his suffering would be more pleasing to God and look down on him more favourably.<sup>2</sup> (Later on in life, Martin men-

tioned in his "Table Talk" that it nearly killed him, and that these excessive exercises had affected his health permanently.)

### Another storm

It would have continued that way in Martin's monastic life, had he not been caught up in another "spiritual thunderstorm." The Prior had selected him for the priesthood and he commenced his function as priest with the saying of his first mass as part of the initial celebration. It was always an ordeal, the state of mind of the celebrant must be correct, because the mass stood central of the church's means of grace. Martin waited nervously in the sacristy. The cloister bell began the chime; it was time to start the service. The choir began to chant a psalm. "O, sing to the Lord a new song....."

Martin forced himself to be as calm as he could be with a silent prayer in his heart. "O Mother of God, give me strength....." He pushed the door open a little too fast, it creaked. All eyes were on him, he felt as a bride on her wedding day. This realization took hold of him. This was a holy rite of divine matrimony. This day he would say the words that would transform the Host into the body and blood of Christ his Lord, and grace would flow. Not even the angels had this privilege or the power. Fear and terror made him move as through a mist of the unreal. His heart beat against his ribcage and cold beads of transpiration appeared on his forehead. It wasn't the order of service or the liturgy of the mass, he knew that by heart. He had sung the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Credo, the Sanctus and Angus Dei for the last two years that was not the problem. But, any mistake he would make was worse than any of the seven deadly sins. It was horrifying to think he could end up in hell over a misplaced piece of cloth. He took comfort in the knowledge that if he would make a mistake he wouldn't lose all hope of going to heaven, as long as his motives were right he could always ask for forgiveness after the mass. In his own mind he knew his motives were pure. But the thought of holding the broken body and the spilled blood of his Saviour in his hands emotionally paralyzed him. He couldn't look at the congregation, but stared at the crucifix in front of him; the wooden image of Christ hanging on the cross above the altar. He looked in the hollow eyes and longed for his Lord to speak. But Martin knew *he* must speak.....now. He made a rough start but found a little more confidence midway through the mass. When he stood in front of the altar he looked at the bread and the wine, he trembled and

with shaking hands he took the paten too tightly. It shook violently as he elevated the Host and mumbled the words, "We offer unto thee, the living, the true, the eternal God."<sup>3</sup> With these words the transformation was complete. He felt like Aaron the High Priest had stood before the Ark of the Covenant, as Israel had stood before a thundering God on Mount Sinai, and he wondered that the Lord hadn't already reduced him to ashes, an unworthy sinner. Then he ate the bread and drank the wine on behalf of the congregation. The mass came to an end. He walked down from the altar, limp and exhausted. Father Winand smiled. He patted Martin on the back. "Go and join your friends and family, this is a day of celebration."

Martin turned and walked over to his fellow monks who congratulated him and together they went to the fellowship hall for the celebrations. Martin's family took the place of honour at the head of the table. Martin took his place with his parents on either side.

### A piercing word

Hans said nothing during the meal. He still hadn't spoken to his son. Martin turned to his Dad, he yearned for his father to speak the words that his resentment had faded and that he approved of him becoming a priest. "Thank you for coming, Dad." Hans looked at him interrupting his meal. "You're welcome, Mr. Scholar. O, pardon me, *Father*." Martin felt the acid dripping of every word. "I often wondered, why you objected to my becoming a priest." Hans stopped eating and looked up at his son. "And now, after all this time, you still are not happy, are you?" The room grew quiet; Hans clenched his hands and shot up out of his chair. "You learned scholar....., have you never read in your Bible to honour your father and mother?" Martin sat, stunned and speechless. Hans couldn't care less, he carried on oblivious of the crowd of priests, doctors and honoured guests. "You left me and your dear mother to look after our selves in our old age." Then, Hans sat down again obviously tired, the fire of anger spent. Martin said, "A voice from heaven called me, Dad. He spoke to me in that thunderstorm and called me to this office." Hans glared at his son bitterly and unconvinced. "God grant that it wasn't the voice of the devil."

The day had begun in a festive mood with the chiming of the cloister bell and ended with the doubt whether that first thunderstorm had been a vision or the apparition of the devil.

Sometime later, in August 1509, it was



The Devil delivers a declaration of war to Luther

Johann von Staupitz's turn to take confession.

He barely had settled on the bench in the confessional when he heard the familiar sound of someone walking on bare feet. The supplicant came in the booth, knelt in front of the lattice which divided the confessional in half, crossed himself, bowed his head and started to say the words: "Father, forgive me for I've sinned...". Father von Staupitz was



*The Castle Church at Wittenberg*

alarmed, how many times did Martin come here and confess yet another "sin".

For how long this time, at last confession he carried on for 6 hours. He saw his clenched fists and sensed Martin's distress. He talked about his doubts and how unworthy he was in God's sight and that he knew in his heart that God was angry with him. The slightest imperfection consumed him; it was like an extended death sentence full of self loathing. The harder he tried, the more he doubted his ability to satisfy an angry and vengeful God. Father von Staupitz tried to comfort him, but it seemed to no avail. "Martin, listen to me. I'm your confessor, but I'm also your friend. You can trust me when I tell you this." Father von Staupitz leaned forward and whispered, "God is not angry with you. You are angry with God. Don't you know that God commands you to hope? You expect Christ to forgive, come here next time with something to forgive, blasphemy, adultery, stealing, instead of all this pettiness." He tried to make Martin understand and reminded him that the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins. But Martin couldn't be consoled with the thought of Christ as his Redeemer. How could he love an angry God? (This tormented Martin so much that he described this in later life as

being worse than any physical sickness he had ever experienced.)

### **The visit to Rome**

It was late 1510 when an opportunity presented itself to travel to the "Eternal City" of Rome. A dispute had arisen in the Augustinian order calling for settlement by the pope. Two brothers were selected of which Martin was one to represent the order at Erfurt. It took six weeks of hard travel on foot, the last part over the Via Flaminia; it would carry them all the way in to Rome. They marveled at the straightness of this ancient Roman Highway compared with the mud tracks of Germany. Roman legions had traveled this same road some 1500 years before them. It rained most of the time during this trip with now and then a snow storm. Day after dreary day passed one step at the time, the cold wind sliced through the coarse cloth of their habits chilling them to the bone. They finally crossed the bridge over the Tiber leading them in to the city. Martin looked into the icy wind, but lifted his arms in self defense because of the sleet stinging his face. He smiled to himself; it was all mortification of the flesh, all part and parcel of the price of salvation. He had longed to go to Rome one day and finally after five years in the monastery it had become reality. Today was the day he could make sure of his salvation. The merits of the Saints were rather cheap to buy. By simply looking at the relics of the Saints, one could gain an indulgence, relief for oneself or a relative from at least some of the fires of purgatory – sometimes thousands of years per holy relic. Should he go for a small bone or a larger one? Perhaps it would be wise to ask which bones or femur or even a skull would be sure to produce results, only the best would do. There was so much to see, the single crypt of Saint Callistus alone held forty popes and seventy-six thousand martyrs. Here he could look at a part of Moses' burning bush. Over there he would receive an indulgence of fourteen hundred years, by only looking at one of the coins paid to Judas for betraying his Lord.

Martin and his companion made their way to the Vatican, the reason for their trip to plead their case. They had a month to spend their spare time visiting shrines and the like. One of those days Martin approached the Scala Sancta with tears in his eyes. It were the twenty eight steps which had stood in front of the palace of Pontius Pilate. All the other merits he had earned while in Rome paled when compared with these stairs. Climbing these steps on hands and knees would be the ultimate merit. Here he would

be able to set free his grandfather Heine from the flames of purgatory. Each step he would say the *Patre Nostre* (Our Father) and kiss the step. At the twenty eighth step he would say the last "amen" and angels would bring Heine Luther into the very presence of God. At the top of the stairs Martin would benefit too; he was sure he would find peace with God that had eluded him for so many years. Martin bowed his head and prayed for peace with God and that this wouldn't disqualify his service. He knelt on the first step and began his prayers; he didn't open his eyes until he was at the top and said the last "amen". He took a deep breath and looked at his companion and said, "Who knows if it's true?" Shortly after this event they traveled back to Erfurt.

### **Teaching at Wittenberg**

In September 1511 Martin was transferred to Wittenberg, a small village in Turingen.

The university was the pride and joy of Frederick the Wise. The new founded academy would rival that of Leipzig. But it was disappointing, to say the least, that this school of learning wasn't flourishing as he had hoped. So, better teachers were needed and in order to achieve that, he had approached the Augustinians and Franciscans



*Frederik the Wise*

to provide three new professors. Martin was one of them and was appointed to the chair of Biblical Theology.

Five years later on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1516 Martin had earned his doctorate and immersed himself in the Bible and teaching. These studies proved to be for Martin his "Damascus Road" The inner peace, he so desperately tried to find in Rome, still eluded him in Wittenberg. The more intense he studied the Bible, the more learned he became heading for a third upheaval in his life. This time he was not on a lonely road caught in a terrible thunderstorm, but in the tower

of Wittenberg's monastery. Black smoke rose up to the ceiling from a lamp providing dim light in Martin's cell. He paced up and down, arguing with himself, reasoning his way through his discoveries. For three years now he had been busy studying and lecturing on the book of Psalms. He was convinced this book foreshadowed the coming of the Redeemer. So, Martin had encouraged his congregations to work hard in light of Christ's possible return. The Bride, His Church, must be ready with enough good works to justify them before a wrathful God. But now Martin discovered in the book of Romans the truth. It set his soul on fire. Slowly he walked back to his desk, turned the pages back to the first chapter and read the seventeenth verse, "The just shall live by faith." He read the words over and over again and the verses before and the following verses. For months he had struggled with this. There was something missing....., where did works fit in if faith was all that was needed for the just to live? How could sinners be justified if works were not required? He stood up so briskly he knocked over his stool..... started to pace up and down again..... That night he found the answer. Only two chap-

ters further in Romans he read: ".....we are justified freely by His grace." By His grace, the light broke through and Martin believed. He recalled Ephesians 2:8-9: "By grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves – it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." It was too much to grasp, if he was right it would mean that salvation was a free gift. All his good works to earn merits for his salvation had been for nothing. Everything he had been taught about this had been wrong. He began to tremble, not of the midwinter cold or fatigue, but of the fear of God.

To put it in Martin's own words: *I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is the righteousness by which, through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.*

### **By faith alone!**

Martin rubbed his eyes, when this fundamental truth of the gospel took hold, he returned to his desk and picked up his quill one more time and wrote: *ergo sola gratia justificat*; justified by faith alone. It changed Martin's life forever. This realization that God's righteousness could become the sinner's righteousness, through the means of faith alone, overwhelmed him. He could now see "the righteousness of God" as an attribute of the Sovereign Lord by which He judges sinners, not an attribute sinners could ever possess. This breakthrough, being justified by faith, dramatically changed the history of the church over the years to come. Martin called it, "the article that determines whether the church stands or falls".

Over the years there is plenty of evidence to affirm Martin's assessment. Today, there are many faithful churches and denominations that hold fast to biblical teaching and remain true to the Reformed heritage. Our ultimate authority is God's word alone. That Word tells, as Martin discovered, that man is saved by grace alone. But human nature is prone towards the very things the Roman Catholic Church fell victim. The church today, in its various forms and denominations, is not immune to corruption, greed doctrinal error and sins of all kinds. It has become a den of idolatry. We are put off at the sight of TV evangelists using guilt tactics to motivate people to donate money. We are offended when we read about Mega-churches that have become market driven corporate enterprises. We are saddened that the church has become a personality cult, where the most talented leader gets the most followers. We are disheartened that the church has ceased to be a place of worship and prayer and has become a place of programs suitable for entertainment. To truly remember the Reformation is to have a hard look at ourselves in our own churches and our own lives. If we believe the church needs to be always reforming, then we need to look inside to see how God would have us reform. When we talk about the relationship between knowing God and knowing ourselves, we can't have one without the other. To glorify God and enjoy Him fully, we have to look at ourselves and what keeps us from a deeper intimacy with Him. John Calvin called the heart an "idol factory", a place where addiction and idols of all kinds place a wall between us and God. If we are honest with ourselves, we too, have those little "idols" that keep us from "soli Deo Gloria" at this very moment. Busy-ness can be one of those "idols" for example. As Christians we're praised for our

## Upper Primary School Teacher Vacancy

Calvin Christian School is seeking teachers who believe in the vision of Christ-centred education in a school which has a Christian student population drawn largely from outside the Reformed Church.

We are located in an area of Auckland, Mangere East, where our small class-sizes and biblical curriculum has found a warm and growing response.

We are specifically seeking teachers able to teach Grades 3 – 4 (ages 7 till 8), and or 5/6 till 8 (ages 9 till 12 years approximately), from the fourth term of 2006. Experience at this level would be advantageous.

We are a confessionally-based school, a member school of the Independent Fellowship of Christian Schools, and operated under the auspices of the Calvin Christian School Trust Board.

*Write to:*

**The Chairman  
Calvin Christian School Trust Board  
17 Phoenix Place, Papatoetoe  
Manukau 2025, Auckland**

work ethics, but it congests the arteries of our souls, robbing God of our full presence with Him. Reformation Day is a day to reform the soul, to engage God in prayer, to search ourselves and to discover what is keeping us from a deeper intimacy with our Father in Heaven. Our modern day churches are conforming to the world instead of Christ; there is no doubt about that. But as the church

of Jesus Christ we have to desire to follow Christ. May we, then, be found His faithful and beloved bride.<sup>4</sup>

#### Footnotes:

- 1 For more information on the life of a monk in Martin Luther's time read 'A Monk's Life' on [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org). See also page 12 of 'The History of the Reforma-

tion by Tom Browning

- 2 View 'The Doctrine of Merit Catholic Encyclopedia
- 3 To read more about the Catholic viewpoint on the doctrine of transubstantiation see 'Catholic Apologetics' by Paul Flanagan and Robert Schihl.
- 4 Condensed and adapted from 'Soli Deo Gloria' by Chuck de Groat

## World in focus

### Evergreen House launched by Back To God Hour

A new Back to God Hour (BTGH) television programme to reach of the children of Indonesia is now ready for broadcast.

The programme, called Evergreen House, had been put on hold due to the delicate political and economic situation in Indonesia.

Almost all of the stations in Indonesia broadcast a variety of Muslim programs, but there are very few Christian television programmes.

Evergreen House appeals to a mainstream audience, featuring interesting stories for all children. But the content presents a Christian message.

+ *Back to God Hour, 6555 West College Dr., Palos Heights, IL 60463 (708) 371-8700*

### Two Christians released from prison in Bhutan

The Washington - DC based human rights group, International Christian Concern (ICC) has been told by Christians inside the country that "Benjamin" (Budhu Mani Dungana) and "John" (Purna Bahadur Tamang) have been released from prison in Bhutan and reunited with their families.

The two men were arrested on 7 January 2006, after sharing the Gospel with a non-Christian family.

Bhutan is located in Southern Asia, between China and India.

+ *International Christian Concern, 2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW #941, Washington, DC 20006 (301) 989-1708 <[icc@persecution.org](mailto:icc@persecution.org)>*

### Large House Church destroyed in Zheijiang

On 29 July, a large house church building was destroyed. Many Christians were arrested and wounded during the battle. According to eyewitness reports several thousand anti-riot police, military police, and government workers along with three hundred military vehicles arrived and surrounded the church building while 10,000 House Church Christians were praying in the church. The church has been under construction since 17 July 2006, and was almost finished when it was destroyed.

On 28 July, the Xiaoshan District government declared the church building 'illegal' because it was built without government permission, and asked the Christians to voluntarily destroy it. The church building was on private land purchased by a local Christian couple.

+ *Voice of the Martyrs, PO Box 250 Lawson NSW 2783 <[thevoice@persecution.com.au](mailto:thevoice@persecution.com.au)>*

### Publishers and Postdoctoral researchers

The Westminster Assembly Project for the academic year 2005-2006 has focused on the minutes and papers of the Westminster Assembly. The autumn saw the completion of the peer-review process for leading publishers. In January a contract was signed with Oxford University Press for an 880,000-word edition of the Assembly's minutes and papers. This edition is to be produced in five volumes, with a proposed publication date in 2009.

The project also announced that the first Craig Center Research Fellow, Dr. Mark A. Garcia, has been appointed by Westminster Theological Seminary, and will be assisting the general editor, Dr. Van Dixhoorn, during the academic year 2006-2007.

+ *The Westminster Assembly Project, Dr. Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, West Rd., Cambridge CB3 9EF*

### Reformed Church of Transcarpathia closes door to women pastors

During a General Council in February the Reformed Church of Transcarpathia closed the door to women in the pastorate. At one time the dominantly Hungarian body located in Western Ukraine admitted women students to meet a desperate need during the transition from Communist domination.

Under the Communists, pastors often served five full congregations each.

In the 19 years since the liberation, the number of ministerial students has grown so dramatically that the synod has gone from having the lowest pastor to congregation ratio to having many un-placeable ministers.

Pressure from the Community of Protestant

Churches in Europe has prompted some leaders in Ukraine, Poland, and France to consent to women's ordination, but the practice has not taken firm root in the traditional confessional community. The Independent Evangelical Reformed Church of France, which consented by a narrow margin to ordination of women only approved one candidate, who subsequently died.

+ *Reformed Church Office, 295118 Hagydobrony-50 Evfordulo UT. 27 Ukraine*

### Leon Lamb Morris

The Rev. Canon Dr Leon Lamb Morris, noted author and New Testament Scholar, died on Monday 24 July in Melbourne, Australia, following hip surgery. He was 92 years old. Canon Morris received a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in England and served as Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge; Principal of Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia; and as Visiting Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Morris was the author of numerous books and commentaries, most notably *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* and the Commentary on the Gospel of John for the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. In 1966 Morris was an unsuccessful candidate in the election of the Archbishop of Sydney.

+ *Rev. Mr. Charles A. Collins Jr., 289 Hastings Dr., Goose Creek, SC 29445*

### The actual Geneva Bible is back

Tolle Lege Press has produced a version of the 1599 Geneva Bible in contemporary spelling and typography for a moderate price. This is the Bible of Shakespeare, Bunyan, and the Puritan fathers. No other English Bible was as widely distributed in America until after the American Revolution, when the US Congress ordered a printing of the Authorised or King James Bible.

The first edition of the Geneva Bible, published in 1560, sparked the full range of Calvinist translations from the States Bible in the Netherlands to the Karoly Gáspár in Hungary. Incidentally, Geneva introduced the practice of marking chapters and numbering verses which has since become standard in nearly all Bibles.

Closer to the Providential Text than the King James Version in several points, the Geneva Bible displays a more contemporary and less formal linguistic style.

Dr. D. James Kennedy of the Christian Observer staff noted, 'The publication and promulgation of the 1599 Geneva Bible will help restore America's rich Christian heritage and reclaim the culture for Christ.'

The Book of Romans is available for free download on the Internet to give a sample of what to expect.

+ Tim Ewing, President, Tolle Lege Press (706) 939-6457 <Tim@TolleLegePress.com>

### Former Lutheran dies in Seattle shooting

Pamela Waechter, 58, a former Lutheran and major contributor to the Jewish community, was killed on 28 July at the Jewish Federation Building in Seattle. Waechter was working at the Jewish Federation building when a man with a gun entered the building and shot six women, killing Waechter and wounding five others. Waechter was the annual-campaign director for the federation.

Waechter was raised a Lutheran and converted to Judaism after marrying Bill Waechter.

Naveed Afzal Haq, 30, was arrested by

police about 12 minutes after the shooting. The Seattle police are treating the shooting as a hate crime.

+ Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, 2031 Third Ave., Seattle, WA 98121 (206) 443-5400

### Another believer arrested in Iran

On 24 July Issa Motamadi, an Iranian Christian, was imprisoned because of his faith.

It is alleged that Issa and his wife Parvah came to the attention of the authorities when they decided to give their newborn son a Biblical, Christian name. Sources explain that this is interpreted as a sign of irrevocable rupture with Islam as it demonstrates that the child is born to Christian parents and will be identified as Christian from birth—he is one who cannot be accused of apostasy.

Reports state that Mr. Baghani, a secret service official with responsibilities for minorities, advised that Issa should renounce his faith and return to Islam, for only then will he be free. Baghani said the judge will not accept any other solution, and intimated that it may take several executions before Iranians actually comprehend the reality of the consequences of apostasy.

+ World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), 644 Strander Blvd., #154, Seattle, WA 98188

### 196 churches have left United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ (UCC), has had 196 departures since August of 2005, including all of its 66 congregations in Puerto Rico.

The UCC departures represent 3.4 percent of the 5,725 congregations in the UCC. The UCC has 1.1 million members. In 1965 the membership was 2.1 million.

At the end of 2005, the UCC published its annual report stating that 'From July until year's end, about 49 churches - less than one percent of the UCC's 5,725 churches - voted to disaffiliate, according to the denomination's research office.' Since then, the number of withdrawals has quadrupled.

+ United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115 (866) 822-8224

### Free Church of Scotland plea for Presbyterian schools

Free Kirk ministers are calling for Presbyterian schools to be set up to combat 'the sustained attack' on Scotland's Christian heritage.

Fearing that children are being fed a secular agenda, the Free Church of Scotland is examining whether state funding would be possible or whether the Presbyterian schools would have to be set up privately.

A resolution adopted by the church's General Assembly ordered the review, saying: 'The General Assembly express their concern at the sustained attack upon and continual erosion of the Christian ethos and foundation of Scotland's nondenominational schools—They note with particular concern that the Scottish Executive now deems it appropriate to use schools to further a secular social and cultural agenda.'

The Free Kirk minister in Dundee, Rev. David Robertson, who proposed the resolution, said, 'We're concerned that the schools are being used, in some parts of Scotland at least, to advance a secular agenda and so we need to look at the possibility of having to set up Christian-based schools.'

'Ideally we would want Scotland's school system to return to its Christian foundations. Both the Free Church and the Church of Scotland established complete systems of schools in the 19 Century which they later handed over to the state.'

Robertson admitted that the 12,000 strong Free Church would have difficulties setting up such schools on its own resources and that it would have to seek out like-minded church-goers from other groups, such as Baptists, the Church of Scotland, or other Evangelical believers.

Robertson also stated, 'The schools could be set up privately, which would be costly, or there is a case for state funding. We see the current emphasis on faith-based schools, and if we have state-funded Muslim schools, Church of England schools, and Catholic schools, then it's hard to resist the argument for Presbyterian schools, or whatever you would call them.'

In recent years some in the Church of

## Secondary Teachers wanted

Wainuiomata Christian College is presently seeking committed, flexible, and enthusiastic Reformed or Calvinistic Christians to help teach Christian youth. Our aim is to develop a biblical world and life view in our students as well as provide an academically sound education so as to equip students to serve the Lord in this world.

We have vacancies for part- or full-time classroom teachers commencing in January 2007. We will negotiate particulars with the individual teacher. We are particularly looking for registered and experienced teachers for (1) Mathematics and Science and (2) English Language and Literature. Experience with Cambridge International Examinations at AS or IGCSE will be considered an advantage.

The closing date for all applications is Friday, September 22, 2006.

The range of levels at Wainuiomata Christian College is presently from Form 1 through to Form 7 (Years 7 – 13). We are presently developing courses aimed at the Cambridge International Examinations Advanced Subsidiary qualification. Our curriculum is Reformed and classical Christian in intent.

Wainuiomata Christian College is located in the Hutt Valley, near Wellington, New Zealand. It is one of two independent private schools owned and operated by the Christian School Association (Wellington District). Our website is viewable at [www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz](http://www.wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz). We are happy to answer any questions about the school – either a Board member or the Principal can respond.

Interested people can obtain a Teacher Application form and/or more information by contacting us at:

e-mail: [admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz](mailto:admin@wellingtonchristianschools.org.nz) telephone: (04) 564 8552/ fax (04) 564 9305 Postal: PO Box 43-127, Wainuiomata 5014, New Zealand

Scotland have called for Kirk schools to stem the decline in organized religion.

+ *Free Church of Scotland, The Mound, Edinburgh EH 1 2LS, Scotland*

### Christian man beaten for drinking water in public facility

Nasir Ashraf, a Christian stone mason, received critical injuries, including dislocation of his shoulder, after he was seen drinking water from a public facility by a Muslim man on 6 June just outside Lahore, Pakistan, the Pakistan Christian Post (PCP) has reported.

Nasir was working at the construction site of a school when he was confronted by a Muslim man who asked him why he drank water from the public facility by using a glass that was placed at the water tank. 'Why did you drink water from this glass since you are a Christian?' the PCP quoted the Muslim man asking Nasir. 'The man accused the mason of polluting the glass and proceeded to destroy it. The Muslim man then summoned a crowd by shouting, 'This Christian polluted our glass,' and encouraged the crowd to beat him up.'

+ *ASSIST News Service, PO Box 609, Lake Forest, CA 92609-0609*

### Presbyterian Church in Ghana holds General Assembly

The five-day General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana is being attended by over 500 delegates from Ghana, USA, United Kingdom, and Germany. The theme of the assembly is: 'Go Therefore and Make Disciples of All Nations.'

Professor Mike Ocuaye, Minister of Communications, addressed the opening session of the Sixth General Assembly asking Christians to resist bad acts and doctrines that were gradually creeping into Christendom, especially condemning the acts of homosexuality and lesbianism that were being introduced into the church and were conflicting with sound doctrines of the Holy Bible.

Prof. Ocuaye commended the Presbyterian Church for its sound teachings and good moral discipline it was providing to students in its schools.

+ *Presbyterian Church of Ghana, PO Box 1800, Thorpe Rd., Accra, Ghana*

### Pro-Homosexual legislation in California nearing approval

California lawmakers voting on 22 August could vote on a bill that, if approved, would force all public school teachers to give a biased message about homosexuality to students as young as five years old.

Pro-family activists are being encouraged to voice their opposition to the measure. Under SB 1437, all instructional materials, school-sponsored activities, and textbooks would be required to portray cross-dressing, sex change operations, and homosexuality, and bisexuality,

in a positive manner.

Randy Thomasson with the Campaign for Children and Families (CCF) says the bill is another step in the effort by homosexual activists and their supporters to infiltrate public schools. Thomasson also says state lawmakers must hear from concerned Christians. 'Sitting on the sidelines is being part of the problem, you actually have to pick up the phone and make a difference.' Thomasson issues a warning: 'As California goes, so goes the nation—so don't think this doesn't affect you.'

+ *Campaign for Children and Families, PO Box 511, Sacramento, CA 95812*

### DVD editing company will close instead of appealing

CleanFilms and CleanFlicks, both Utah based companies, had found a market among Christian and conservative families by renting and selling R, PG-13, and PG rated movies with the profanity, nudity, sexual dialogue, and graphic violence removed. The companies maintained they were within legal boundaries under the 'fair use' doctrine because they maintained a 1-to-1 ratio on movies—for each DVD they rented or sold, an original version of the same title was purchased.

But on 1 July US District Court Judge Richard Matsch ruled that the companies were 'illegitimate' and violating copyright law, and that their actions caused 'irreparable injury to the creative artistic expression in the copyrighted movies.'

Troy Remero, an attorney who represented CleanFilms and CleanFlicks, said three factors led his clients not to appeal: financial costs of an appeal; the time involved; and the judge's 'strongly worded' ruling.

The lawsuit also put Family Flix, another DVD-editing company, out of business after five years in operation.

+ *Judge Richard P. Matsch, Judge Richard P. Matsch, Byron White Courthouse, 1823 Stout St., Denver, CO 80202 (303) 844-4627*

### Presbyterian congregation in Iowa votes to leave denomination

The congregation of Windsor Presbyterian Church in Des Moines, Iowa, voted on Sunday, 13 Aug. to approve a resolution by its session to separate from the Presbyterian Church (USA) and become an independent congregation.

On 26 June, the session notified the presbytery of its action and sent a letter to members of the congregation that was signed by Terry Amann, the pastor, and elder Hal DeGood, acting clerk. 'After a lengthy and careful discussion, we have concluded that our only option is to leave the PC(USA) and become a non-denominational community church in Windsor Heights,' they said.

The cause of the separation was the General Assembly's commissioners' approval of an authoritative interpretation that allows presbyteries and sessions to decide that the constitutional

'fidelity/chastity' clause does not prohibit ordaining practising homosexuals and adulterers.

+ *[Formerly] Windsor Presbyterian Church, 6301 University Ave., Des Moines, IA 50311 (515) 277-8379*

### New Living Version of Bible for Spanish speakers

International Bible Society (IBS) has announced the completion of the *Nueva Biblia al Dia* (NBD) Bible, bringing the Scriptures to a new generation of Spanish-speaking Bible readers. International Bible Society, the copyright holder of the *Living Bible* in every language except English, is releasing this Spanish 'New Living' version as a translation in conversational Spanish. This version is considered particularly relevant for youth, and for introducing people to Scripture for the first time (evangelism).

The *Nueva Biblia al Dia* is IBS' latest translation. It will be ready for distribution through IBS, and available commercially through Grupo Nelson Publishing, no later than the end of 2006.

+ *International Bible Society - United States, 1820 Jet Stream Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80921 (719) 867-2660*

## Sponsorship Opportunities!!!

The Wellington Regional Youth Committee (WRYC) is seeking sponsorship for the upcoming National Youth Camp (NYC) in January 2007. As many of you are aware, these camps are great opportunities for our youth to gather together for a week to learn more about our Lord, spend time in His Word together, build new and existing friendships, help each other out with the duties and take part in the sports and other activities that are arranged.

While it is free (Praise the Lord!) to read and study the Word, there are many other costs involved in running a youth camp for hundreds of youth. Any sponsorship surrounding finance, clothing, AV equipment, sports gear or anything else would be much appreciated.

If you would like more information or are interested, please contact the WRYC president Josh Couperus at [jmcouperus@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:jmcouperus@slingshot.co.nz) or alternatively Jesse Dyson at [jesseandhannah@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jesseandhannah@xtra.co.nz)

*Yours in Christ,  
Wellington Regional Youth Committee*

# Celebrating the Sabbath?

## *Biblical principles and practice regarding the Lord's Day*

Leo de Vos

**The following is a speech which was presented to the Youth Groups of the Wellington Presbytery on July 29<sup>th</sup> 2006 in the Reformed Church of Wanuiomata. Questions and Scripture readings have been included so that this can be used as either a youth or adult study in your own church.**

Scripture readings: Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:23-28; Isaiah 58:13-14

Dear Covenant Youth,  
Our topic has much relevance for today for the majority of believers (evangelicals) say that there is no longer a Christian Sabbath. You notice that many Christians go to restaurants, work themselves and treat Sunday as no different than any other day of the week. We hear the testimonies of sports heroes who think nothing of playing their games on the Lord's Day.

Does the Christian Church owe her existence to the keeping of a special Day holy? Voltaire the famous French atheist once said: "If you want to kill Christianity, you must abolish Sunday."

### I. Biblical principles

#### **A. The creation of the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3)**

When your car is broken down you should look at the factory service manual. (How many guys look at manuals? How frustrating for their wives!) God's manual is the Bible and in it He tells us that the Sabbath is very important, for it was instituted at the very beginning in creation itself. The Sabbath is a creation ordinance. Creation ordinances are God's laws embedded in the creation order itself which are: a) The Sabbath, b) Work, and c) Marriage.

So the pattern of working hard for six days and resting on the seventh is found in God's pattern of creation! Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.<sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.<sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Genesis 2:1-3).

Notice that on the seventh day of creation God declares that His creation work is

finished and He *rested* from more work of creation. The Hebrew verb *to rest* is where we get word Sabbath from. Also notice that this *rest* does not mean inactivity but means a different kind of activity, for God is always upholding the world He created by His providence: But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." (John 5:17).

Genesis 2:3 emphasises that God made the seventh day *holy*. This means separate from all of the other days of the week, separated unto Himself, for His honour and glory. Do you treat this day as a special day, dedicated to God's glory? Do seek to find rest in the work of Christ on this day?

#### **B. The Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11)**

In the fourth commandment, we see the reason God provides in telling us to *Remember the Sabbath day* is the pattern of Creation itself: For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20:11). So just as God worked for six days and then rested, we



are to pattern our lives accordingly.

To *remember* a birthday/anniversary means that you don't forget or neglect it; but it means far more. It means that you observe it, celebrate it. If you decide to remember your wife's anniversary by treating this day like any other, she will likely not be too pleased. Treat her romantically all the time, and particularly on your anniversary!

So how are we to remember the Sabbath day? The answer is found in Scripture: by keeping it holy, separate from the busyness of the other days of the week! By rejoicing in the rest which Christ has secured for us. By loving Him, drawing closer to Him listening to His Word, gathering with His people! As Dr. Joey Pipa says in his excellent book, *The Lord's Day, If you begin to grasp the principles of the Sabbath...it will be your favourite day, better anticipated than Saturday, more restful than a holiday.* (adapted from Pipa). God is saying in the fourth commandment, I have given you six days; I require that you give me one.

Also notice the strong language—for the seventh day is a Sabbath *of the Lord your God*. What strong possessive language! This is not your day to do your own thing, but it belongs to the Lord. God is not taking our pleasure away, but giving us a different pleasure. We cheat ourselves and God when we use the day for our own work and recreation.

### **C. The Sabbath made for man (Mark 2:23-28)**

Some will say that this is all fine, but you have not shown me the New Testament teaching. The Sabbath was for Israel and the Jews, but this doesn't mean that the law is relevant for today. In fact, many evangelical believers regard the fourth commandment as a ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ with little or no abiding relevance for today.

However, in Mark 2:27 Jesus alludes to this creation ordinance to explain the real purpose of the Sabbath: And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). The context is that the Pharisees tried to fence of the law to keep people from getting too close to the edge and falling off. We rightly fence off dangerous gorges or canyons so that those who want to look do not fall over the edge. But if we place a 4 meter high fence 10 meters from the edge we have cut off all meaningful sight seeing of what we wanted to look at in the first place! The man-made Sabbath laws of the Pharisees is like some churches forbidding all use of alcohol. Let us never forget that legalism operates from fear

and denies the sufficiency of Scripture.

So how does Jesus correct the Pharisees? By going to the beginning. Man was not made to a rule-keeping robot on the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for the spiritual rest and joy of man! They had forgotten the wonderful, original purpose of Sabbath. Jesus never overturns the law, but shows us its real meaning and benefit: it was made for our physical and spiritual good.

### **D. The Lord's Day**

The most difficult question about the Sabbath that Christians face today is why do we worship on the first day of the week? The basic answer to this question is that Jesus did not abrogate the law, but came to fulfil it. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17) If we do away with the fourth commandment, we will have to do away with the entire law of God. So how did He fulfil the fourth commandment?

He fulfilled the fourth commandment by rising on the first day of the week and by meeting with believers on that day. Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene... (Mark 16:9). Scripture is emphasising here that this mightiest miracle, this crowning act of our redemption took place on the first Day of the week!

Notice that in the NT it is called the *Lord's Day*—it belonged to Him for on it He revealed Himself without a doubt I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, (Revelation 1:10). In a manner similar to the *Lord's Supper* this day was instituted by Christ and belonged to Him alone.

This is why the practise of the NT Church was soon one of gathering on the first day of the week: Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19). Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight (Acts 20:7).

Finally, the Sabbath is a foretaste of our rest in heaven. It is evident that God's rest after creation continued and is an eternal rest. When we enter eternal life, we are said to have entered this rest. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:11). Are you tired?

Are you weary of battling sin in this world? Do you long for the rest which Christ offers you? Then love the Lord's Day!

## **II. Biblical practice (Isaiah 58:13-14)**

### **A. Desecration or sanctification?**

We likely do not have as much of a problem with the Biblical principles for the Lord's Day as we do with the practice. I recall as a young fellow many debates in our home which were very negative—why can't we do this or that? We cannot answer every detail or practice here, but it is essential that we have a positive view of this day.

Notice that Isaiah rebukes Israel for desecrating the Sabbath Day: "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, (Isaiah 58:13). *Turning your foot* from the Sabbath means keep your feet from trampling on the holiness of this day! Like someone trampling on a lovely bed of marigolds so the prophet is saying, watch your step on the Sabbath day. Remember that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

Notice how Isaiah brings the creation back to our remembrance: the Sabbath is *my holy day, a holy day of the Lord*. This means that it is set apart from the other six days for our spiritual joy and rest in Christ.

Isaiah says, remember that this is a day to be honoured for you must honour the Lord in it! The Hebrew word to *honour* means to be weighty, special. Sabbath keeping should be an important matter to us and to our families. How do we honour it? By calling it a *delight*. This word means *to take exquisite pleasure* in something. Sometimes it is used of a beautiful wife! We are to delight in worship, fellowship, and in works of mercy on this day.

The entire focus of the Lord's Day should be that we cease from our busyness to have time to find uninterrupted pleasure in God. Don't make it a burden, but a blessing. If you are still looking at this day with a negative mindset—what can't we do—then God's truth has not hit home in your heart.

### **B. Not doing our own things**

Isaiah lists 3 areas of our lives we should examine in order to honour day: a) our own ways. b) our own pleasure. c) our own words.

*Our Ways* here is not only evil ways (as in Isa 53:6; 55) but the busyness and responsi-

bility of every day living (Pipa (p.19). Although our work is legitimate and commanded on six days of the week, we are to cease from it on the Lord's Day. God has given us six days to transact our business affairs, but the seventh day belongs to Him. This means that we should avoid our work or business in home or office as much as possible. This also applies to homework if we are students except for Catechism and Bible Study. As a minister of the Word this also means that I should not be preparing my afternoon sermon on Sunday either.

*Our own pleasure* means what pleases ourselves. We are to cease from many amusements and activities for our own pleasure on this day. Why? So that we find pleasure in God. *God frees us from pursuing lesser pleasures so that we might pursue greater and more noble things. We are to look at the Lord's Day like a spiritual vacation. God gives us a weekly vacation that we may turn away from mundane, everyday activities and enjoy Him. (Pipa, p.21).*

Our focus must be on delighting in and finding rest in Jesus Christ.

*Our own words* means our idle words, our chit-chat is to be avoided as much as possible. This does not mean that all conversation about our business or family affairs is out of line. After all, how can you have meaningful fellowship without discussing many things? But all needless conversation about our work, pleasures and hobbies should be avoided. Instead, we should be sure to discuss the things of God. Our conversation after church should also reflect what we do in worship. Does your conversation reflect the delight you find in worship?

### **C. Wonderful promised results**

Now Isaiah says that we should pay serious attention to the Sabbath because God will reward our obedience. Notice the logic of Scripture: the *then* in verse 14 is emphatic. If this day is set apart, and honoured, *then* we will reap great benefits. The greatest delight we receive from observing this day is unsurpassed communion with God! For to delight yourself in the Lord is the same word used as described above—*exquisite pleasure*.

*To take exquisite pleasure in the Lord is to be overwhelmed by His beauty and glory that are revealed in His attributes and work (Pipa, p.12).* As Christ manifests His love to us, we respond with gratitude and delight. God says, so you will find delight in Me on this day especially. Are our spiritual batteries flat, because we fail to experience this communion on the Lord's Day? I have

experienced both dullness and some delight on the Lord's Day. Both experiences have to do with my keeping of the Lord's Day. Be sure to read, pray and meditate on this day! Go to the church library and work through some excellent food for the soul!

Another promised benefit of our keeping this day is victory over our enemies: And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, (vs.14b). This is language of victory! (See Deuteronomy 32:12-13; 33:29). This language describes the victory of Israel returning from exile, victory over her cruel enemies. (see Isaiah 33:16) In the New Covenant we are promised victory as well. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Are you experiencing victory over sin and temptations? Are you constantly beaten down? Could it be possible that you continue to fall under the dominion of some sin because you have not sanctified this day in your heart?

The last promise for honouring this day is that God's people will feeding on gospel riches: Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 58:14). To feed on an inheritance is to receive it and make use of it. An inheritance which remains all tied up in the lawyer's office is not a very useful inheritance! Israel was promised the land, but if they did not receive it, they could not enjoy it. How does this inheritance apply to us? We have been promised the benefits of salvation: adoption, assurance of salvation, boldness in prayer, confidence. *This promise means we will revel in our privileges as children of God (Pipa, p.14).* Are you feeding on and enjoying the riches of what God has promised you?

### **D. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it**

The last little phrase is used by Isaiah when he speaks great, gospel promises! The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 40:5) Here God is guaranteeing the promise here! The Lord puts it all on the line. He say, 'I the Lord God who cannot lie, I promise that if you keep my Sabbath and delight in it, you will delight in me, gain spiritual victory and enjoy your inheritance.' (Pipa, p.14).

If we still have endless arguments about don't do this or don't do that on the Lord's Day we have missed the point. Our focus must be on delighting in God on His day so

that we may experience greater communion with Christ, and victory over our enemies.

### **Questions for discussion:**

1. You are discussing the Sabbath with an evangelical friend. He/she says that the Sabbath is no longer valid as it was a ceremonial law now fulfilled in Christ. How would you defend one's keeping of the Lord's Day? What Bible passages would you refer to?
2. Is your attitude to the Lord's Day largely positive or negative? What should one's approach be? List 5 activities you could do in this day to help you to delight in the Lord.
3. Does it matter what kind of work you choose to do or what kind of career you choose to study for? Can you establish some principles for Sunday jobs? Does our global and industrial age make finding and applying Biblical principles more difficult? (For example, in Canada if the power supply would be disrupted for a short time, people would begin to freeze to death. What about a believer who works at the power plant at times on Sunday shift?) (Did you know that the Puritans taught that public inns should be open on Sunday for food and lodging?)
4. Is Church attendance on the Lord's Day important to you? Do you delight in coming twice? Be honest! How could your attitude be improved?
5. In light of Isaiah 58:13-14 what kinds of recreation would be legitimate on the Lord's Day? What kinds of activities do you think you could change in your life?
6. Discuss: Legalists and liberals both fail to properly observe the Lord's Day. What are both groups missing out on concerning this Day?
7. List some ways in which you can best prepare for the Lord's Day.

For further study the following books are highly recommended:

*The Lord's Day*, by Joseph A. Pipa.

*Call The Sabbath a Delight*, by Walter Chantry.

*The Rev. L. de Vos is the minister of the Word and Sacraments at the Reformed Church of Wainuiomata.*

## A feminine focus

Sally Davey

# The feminine virtue of contentment

Sally Davey

How do you view your life right now? Are you happy with it? Is it up to your expectations? Could you honestly say – “I wouldn’t change a thing. God has given me everything I could need or want. I’m perfectly satisfied with my circumstances.” If you can, you are a blessed woman. But most of us have times when we begin to wonder whether a few changes in the look of our lives wouldn’t work wonders for us.

Sometimes the glitches are minor: you never seem to be able to find a car park outside your favourite dress discounter, or the baby keeps crying when you want to talk on the phone, or your husband has just – for the 25<sup>th</sup> time this week – left his clothes lying on the bedroom floor. These things are plainly, but not terminally, annoying. So your grumbling is of the constant, low-level variety. You could say life looked light grey, rather than jet black. However, sometimes things look much worse. Perhaps you always expected, by your middle years, that you would have reached a certain level of comfort and security. Instead, you’re 50, and there’s still a mortgage, you’re still having to work, and there never seems to be much to spare. You feel a bit cheated. Perhaps when you were growing up you imagined yourself elegant, successful, really well-dressed and living a stimulating life amongst interesting people. But now, in your late twenties, you’re not really happy with the way you look, you can’t afford the clothes you really like, and you’re totally bored with your job and the people you know. Life seems a kind of dead-end street. Or perhaps you’re at home with 3 or 4 small children – or more – and home schooling, with a husband who’s out of town for work much more than you’re convinced is right. You feel totally fed up. More than grumbling, you feel like raging at the world and your own personal circumstances. Life wasn’t meant to be like this and **it isn’t fair**.

### This is about you

Well, you’re probably thinking, Christians don’t think like that – they can’t! These kinds of things you’ve mentioned are worldly, selfish, wrong. *I don’t think like that!* How I wish that were true of me, and of all Christian women. But I know it isn’t. This trouble, so characteristic of our age, is a sin the bible calls discontent. It is a raw ache that robs us of our happiness – and renders us so unready to thank God for all He gives us. It is a sin that we are guilty of probably every day of our lives. This wrong way of thinking tends to creep into every pocket of our everyday lives, and very few of us escape its infection. A very understanding minister once preached his congregation a series of sermons entitled *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. Though written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century they could have been describing us. Contentment is something we all need to learn; and to learn it, we need to make vigorous efforts to change our thinking.

The man who preached these sermons, Jeremiah Burroughs, has provided us with a helpful explanation of Christian contentment. It is, (paraphrased for modern readers): *that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious spiritual state of mind and heart, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposition in every circumstance*. You’re right in thinking that such a grace, and the attaining of it, presents a real challenge. We don’t always want to submit peacefully and quietly to the situation God may have given us in life. Such a state of mind and heart does not come naturally to us when we are crossed by difficult circumstances. As Burroughs writes, it must be learned. But as he also wisely reminds us, we have huge resources on our side: the help of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and the Scriptures, which show us the way.

### Scripture is so true

Paul is the biblical writer who probably has the most to say about this subject. To

Timothy he says this: “there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” (1 Timothy 6:6-8). What is he saying? All we have in this life is for this life only – and while in it, we need to be satisfied with the essentials. It is “great gain” – and it goes hand in hand with godliness. God does not call all of us (in fact, hardly any of us!) to live as sparingly as Paul had to, but surely if we have the attitude he is urging on Timothy, we will much more thankful and content with the much that we have been given.

Paul writes as one who knows about contentment through the long and hard experience of learning it. Thanking the Philippian Christians for sending a gift to him (he is now a prisoner in Rome), he tells them he does not consider himself “in need”. Surely this is surprising! Romans did not treat their prisoners as honoured guests, or offer them even modest luxuries. Paul, however, sees “need” in a different light to most of us – and maybe to his Philippian friends. He has become relatively free of the things of this world and his needs are comparatively few: “for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:11-13) One senses Paul’s increasing indifference to whether God places him in a situation of poverty or comfort, hardship or pleasure. His gratitude to God, and his ability to serve Christ, do not alter with his circumstances. This is contentment. It is not stoicism, but willing submission to one who knows what is best. And of course it does not stop him being grateful to the Philipipans, who gave such encouragement to him. But notice that Paul says he **learned** to be content. It didn’t come to him automatically, or presumably without effort. We don’t learn these kinds of godly attitudes through living comfortable, undisturbed, easy lives; and Paul faced many terrible troubles in his service to Christ – beatings, imprisonment, interrogations, cold, long journeys on foot, shipwrecks and the like. Applying God’s truth in such situations, believing it, clinging to it and living it, are what it takes to learn graces like contentment. And Paul did it. What an example!

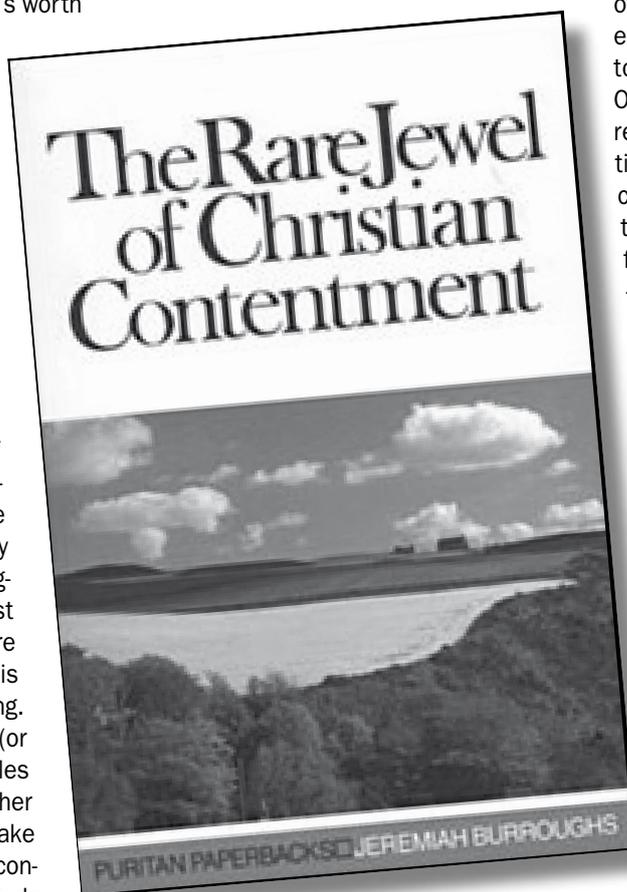
If this is what the Bible has to say about contentment, what stops us being contented? Why are we so discontented – and so often? The simple answer, of course, is to say that we are sinners, and sinners are always discontented. Whenever self is at the center of our universe, we are forever going to be thinking we deserve better, or that we've been given a raw deal in life – no matter how much we've actually been given! It's a fact of life. But the truth is a bit more complicated than this, and I think it's worth exploring some of the specific reasons for our discontent.

### It's starts in our hearts

The bottom-line principle is that discontent comes from our hearts. Many of us are inclined to repeat – somewhat glibly – the popular idea that we get discontented because the commercial world, especially advertising, causes us to want things we would never otherwise have thought of wanting. Advertisers wave things in front of our eyes in magazines, on the television, in shop windows; and before we know it we're getting unhappy with our clothes, our houses, our figures, our lack of holidays (or at least expensive holidays). In short, we're discontented. The problem with this reasoning is that Jesus says it's wrong. It's not what goes into our mouth (or through our eyes or ears) that defiles us, it's what's in our hearts. In other words, advertising alone won't make us discontented – but a sinful, discontented heart will. It will fill our minds with discontented thoughts. If we were thoroughly happy with what God has given us, we'd be impervious to the seductions of advertising. Advertising is just a temptation – the real problem lies in our hearts.

And what are the specific attitudes that lie in our hearts? Sometimes the sin of coveting festers, and the result is discontent. Life is full of encounters with other people – we certainly don't live as islands, especially not today, with the multitude of spheres that we move in daily, and the number of activities that have us roaring all over the city or countryside in our cars. Sooner or later, we are bound to brush lives with someone who has more than us. It might be a more beautiful house; it might be better-behaved children or a kinder, gentler, more considerate husband. This someone else might live in a more gracious way, with people that have lovelier manners and more interesting conversa-

tion. You become envious – you covet her opportunities, the circumstances that have enabled her to have such a well-ordered, attractive and interesting life. You look at your own shabby, disordered and commonplace life and begin to become very discontented with it. Why has God limited you so much, when you could have become useful – in a much wider and more sophisticated sphere. Why is your life so mundane and frustrating? This type of question was asked,



in desperation, by a very famous character in a most perceptive book written by American novelist, Sinclair Lewis, in 1920. Carol Kennicott, a young woman from the city, marries Bill, a small-town mid-western doctor. They return to Gopher Prairie, where his practice is, and where he grew up. Carol (or Carrie, as she is called) spends the next five years becoming progressively fed up with small-town narrowness, ugliness and boredom. Finally, in desperation, she leaves, believing that no one understands her need for a wider life and finer ideas. Lewis shows that she is actually understood (especially by her husband) better than she thinks, and sensitively traces the changes in Carol's thinking as she faces her discontent and comes to terms with Gopher Prairie and its inhabitants. It is a fine study of discontent and its outworkings in a woman's life. Carol has coveted life in the

city, but finds no answers to the problems of her heart by running there.

### The association with self-pity

Another sin of the heart, self-pity, allies itself closely with discontent. Whenever we allow ourselves to consider that our deal in life is a rough one, or that others have treated us badly, or that our difficulties or lack of opportunity are not our fault, we begin to see ourselves as the victim, the pitiable victim, of our world. The next step is to blame others for our sorrows and frustrations, and to treat ourselves with extra generosity. Our conversation begins to fill with sighing remarks – "I'd surely do that if only I had the time, or the money, or didn't have to take care of so many people..." (etc...). We begin to make a habit of treating ourselves – to food (chocolate? lattes?) – to new clothes – to retail therapy in general... We make excuses for ourselves. And it isn't good, any of it. It all stems from a very faulty view of where we fit in God's picture of our lives. We are important to Him, but not because of the importance we attach to ourselves and what we think we deserve. No, we're important because His Son Jesus Christ purchased us with His own life. The difference means that our purpose for living is not to serve ourselves, and to see that others serve us and meet our desire to be appreciated. No, our purpose is to serve Christ. That means self, and self-pity become replaced by worthwhile, energizing service. She who loses her own life, Jesus said, will find it. So true!

We can also develop quite unrealistic expectations for life, and for ourselves. These may be things that begin as right and proper goals for ourselves – materially, educationally, or career-wise. But somehow they get out of hand, especially if they don't look like being realized, or realized when we think they ought to be. By then they have definitely become idols in our hearts. Out of all proportion as worthwhile goals, these things have become so important to us we can think about little else; and the inability to achieve them, to have them, seems to be killing us slowly. Women become discontented, and some even become convinced they are depressed because of it. At this point we need to take stock and ask ourselves what we are living for, what is driving us, what, in fact, we are pursuing. Is it what God Himself is calling us to? Or is it something else, something that has become a god to us? Have we unwittingly become a slave, a hopeless slave, to an unattainable

idol? Godliness, with contentment, is by contrast great gain.

### What has God called you to?

Do we really think that a rewarding, successful career, a well-cared-for and well-brought up Christian family and a husband who is properly loved are all possible to achieve, simultaneously, at the age of 40? Something usually has to give - either us, or one of the above or all of them. What has God called us to? To love our husbands and children, and to be content with what we have. Trying to pack too many (even worthy) pursuits into our lives may lead to discontent if we fail at the most important of them. And when women fail to achieve superwomanhood in this way, their discontent – sadly – is often directed at their husbands. Not having children myself, or what you would call a real career either, I feel a bit unqualified to comment here - but I often wonder whether too much is expected of their husbands by many wives. These men have to be financial providers (and provide handsomely, too – expectations of living standards are often high!). This often means a demanding and responsible job, with long hours. But they also have to be good husbands – the kind that gives their wives a lot of loving attention, with all the little extras that go with that – surprise holidays, outings, time alone without the children, etc. And in addition, they are also expected to be wonderful fathers, taking time with the children, going fishing with them, being at sports games and practices, being there for their daughter's school production, and helping with the homework. I simply don't know how they manage to satisfy their wives! Do you?

### A severe mercy

Sometimes discontent is the result of something seemingly much more excusable, but nevertheless wrong. This is a faulty understanding of the purpose of suffering. Trials are never easy to endure, and especially if they last a long time, it is very tempting to complain about them. Even to become discontented and ask God "Why are you doing this to me? What have I done to deserve it? This has lasted too long!" Jeremiah Burroughs knew all about the difficulty of being content in times of suffering; in fact, most of his series of sermons touched on the need of those struggling with suffering to be content.. He remarked that his times were "very sad and sinking times." In the 17th century many, many Christians suffered unspeakably for their faith – and it was to such Christians that Burroughs was preaching on

the rare jewel of Christian contentment. (I do realize how incongruously our own discontent flourishes in times that are comfortable, and safe, by comparison). Suffering can be a bitter, or as a friend of C.S. Lewis put it, a severe mercy. But nevertheless, God gives it to us because He is wise, good and all-loving. It is His way of teaching us lessons that can only be learned on this winding and sorrowful path. Countless are the Christians who will tell us, with joy, what they have learned of God, and experienced of God, in their time of suffering. One friend just recently told me that she would change nothing about her difficult year of cancer treatment. It was a year that brought her a knowledge of God she would not replace for anything.

Despite our suffering, we can – and must – learn to be content. But how do we learn to be content? Here Burroughs is most thorough, and most helpful. He enumerates, describes, explains the many reasons why, even in the midst of lengthy and difficult trials, we can and should be content. We have great mercies in Christ; God prepares the way ahead of us with these mercies; we are but a short time in this world (and can endure that time knowing this); better people than us have gone this way before us; and we shall experience much good of God when we have afflictions. He also gives a solemn warning:

we must have **God** as our great delight and joy – not merely what He gives us. If we are not making Him our all in all, He may take away our other loves so that we will love Him better. Would you not like to learn this quickly, simply by hearing it, rather than have to learn it painfully, though suffering losses? But if suffering should come, we may rest in the promise that children of God do not suffer meaninglessly, or without hope. No, we suffer that God may be glorified in us – and we may be content in that knowledge.

### Contentment is faithful witness

There is, finally, another reason for learning contentment. And that is because it is part of our witness to Christ in this sad, fallen, thoroughly discontented world. As Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians, we are to "do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world..." (Philippians 2:14-15). If discontent is one of the most obvious characteristics of our generation, then surely the need for contentment in us, who are Christ's ambassadors, is thereby all the greater. Our God has been so good, so very good to us. Is it not disloyalty to Him to complain and question as

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if He were unfair or unkind? As Burroughs suggested, consider the picture of marriage. What impression of her husband does a whining wife give? Remember, we are the bride of Christ – the wife for whom He gave

up His very life! What, then, are we showing our world when we complain? Our generation, crooked and twisted, sad and confused, believing all kinds of untruths about themselves and about life, needs hope. If only this hope

would be seen in Christian women who shine like lights, pointing them to the Saviour.

Let us all learn to be content.

## The Gates of Jerusalem

### The Water Gate

**Patricia van Laar**

Psalms 119:101 Your Word, O Lord, is eternal: it stands firm in the heavens.

There is no mention of repairs to the Water Gate. Did it need any? Perhaps the gate, in its “place toward the east”, had survived Nebuchadnezzar’s assault intact, so that there would be no need of any repairs. Or was the omission symbolical, as the Wall of the Dung/Fountain Gate? In fact this gate is only mentioned in passing, as it were, as being opposite the wall repaired by the servants living on the hill of Ophel (Temple servants) and toward the east, and the projecting tower. This is not the first time a tower has been mentioned in Nehemiah’s account; these towers were usually built for the purpose of defence watchtowers. This one seems to be very closely associated with the gate itself, and is the first time in this series, that attention will be drawn to one of them.

#### The gate of the Word of God

Before continuing with the account in Nehemiah 3, turn to Nehemiah 8:1-3. Ezra the scribe gathered all the people who were able to understand, (which included children, except for the babies and toddlers not yet of the age of comprehension) into the square in front of the Water Gate, to listen to the reading of the Law of God. This being so, we may look at this gate from the point of view of God’s Word, for there is a close tie between water and the Word. Eph. 5: 25,26 tells that Christ... “cleansed the Church by the washing with water *through the Word*.” In the Psalms, too, cleansing is by the Word (Ps. 119:9). In our physical world, water is essential for life, for refreshment and for cleansing, and in our society today, is used for leisure and pleasure. Before contemplating these, however, consider the symbolic implications of not needing repairs. The Word needs no repairs; it is uninjured by man’s assault. We may promote and defend the Word, but it is both “impious and impudent to seek to patch it up and improve it.” (Ironsides) Strong is the

warning against this. (Rev. 22:18,19). Some have tried to repair the Word of God. Some have tried to break it down. But God said, “My word shall never fail.” The Word was the subject of attack from Satan right from the beginning. Perhaps never has there been a greater assault than in the present day. Yet it stands and abides forever. “My word shall not pass away.” –Your word, O Lord, is eternal, it stands firm in the heavens.

#### Our watch tower

It is up to us to fortify ourselves in God’s ‘watchtower’ against attacks, by reading the Word of God, studying the Word of God, listening to highly qualified, faithful Christians preaching, or reading their commentaries. We face three main attacks. You well know the approach of the media – the sneering at Christian ‘fundamentalists’ and the denigration of the qualifications of Christian scientists; the claim that no real scientist believes in God’s hand in the creation of this world. Thank God for Christian scientists who defend the Word. Support them by reading their books, watching their videos. Fortify our children too, when they reach the age of comprehension, and before the world attacks them. This is most important for their sakes and for our own peace of mind.

The second attack comes from heretic cults. How disturbing it is to hear Christians say, “I know the Jehovah’s Witnesses who called at my door this week are wrong, but I don’t know why.” If we don’t know why, then how do we know they are wrong? It is essential for us from the protection of God’s Watchtower, to defend ourselves against their distortions and onslaught; to fortify ourselves against their own so-called ‘Watchtower,’ (their organisation and magazine), to see the falsity of their interpretations and their so-called translations of the Bible, least they overcome us. It is the same for all heretical cults we may meet. We should know why they are wrong, especially those active in our midst; if we do not know, it is high time to find out.

The third attack is the most subtle, for it comes from within the visible Church. Liberal ‘Christian’ teaching accepts the compassion of Christ, some of His moral teachings, His ‘nice’ sayings. But it rejects His claims to deity, rejects the virgin birth, rejects the miracles, resurrection and ascension; it calls a large part of the New Testament a lie. It reduces God to what Philip Yancey calls a ‘whispy vapour’ and Jesus to a mere honoured teacher. How do we defend ourselves from this? Find out the historical truth about the New Testament manuscripts. Find out why we can have confidence in them. Learn how to understand apparent discrepancies in the different Gospel accounts, and why they are not really discrepancies at all. If you need to, ask your minister to recommend reading matter on this. And when they come to your door, don’t argue (unless you are well armed), but give a strong witness that Jesus is your Saviour-God. (John 20:28.) You may sow a seed that much later bears fruit!

Join the defenders in God’s Watchtower.

#### A Gate with purpose

**For Life.** The Gate has no repairs, for it needs none. We must not neglect to use this gate. Otherwise our lives will be in grave danger. For water is essential to life. We have heard much this year of drought and its devastating effect, especially in countries of Africa. A recent letter from Tanzania spoke of the terrible heartbreak of seeing sprouted crops that wither and die. Without the regular reading of God’s word, our spiritual life will do just that. Don’t let us be like the fictional traveller in the desert who had water at his side, but died through neglecting to drink it. Drink deep of the Word of God. “The person who goes to the word of God... must concentrate on what the Word is saying. A casual approach to Bible reading will never cut. Serious Bible study on a specific subject of concern, with prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit to implement the counsel of Christ’s word in a life situation, is what will produce results.”

(Dan Hayden.) Not just listening at the family table, but regular personal study, for ourselves, by ourselves, alone with God. Then our life with God will flourish.

**For Refreshment.** All of us have times when we need water, just to refresh ourselves. Jesus Himself, as a man, once sat by a well and asked a woman for refreshing water. In times when we grow weary with well-doing, Lord, refresh my soul by your Word. In times of weariness through sickness, Lord, refresh my soul by your Word. In times of feeling the weakness of age, Lord, refresh my soul by your word. At times of doubt, difficulty or despair, Lord, refresh my soul by your Word. And in times of weariness through busyness, Lord, refresh my soul by your Word.

Proverbs 25:13 compares the coolness of snow at harvest time with a trustworthy messenger refreshing the spirit. He is a messenger of encouragement. His message for us is in the Word.

**For Pleasure and Leisure.** Without making too much of this, why do most of us go for a swim, or enjoy, as Rattie in *The Wind in the Willows* put it, "messaging about in boats"? Some for exercise, some for contest, but most of us for the straight out pleasure it gives us. Have you noticed how often Psalm 119 speaks of the 'delight' in the law of God? Let's read it sometimes for the pure pleasure of the Word of God.

**Jesus and the water for cleansing**

This incident is so well-known, that it scarcely needs elaboration.

Jesus said to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."

Peter replied, "Then, Lord, "not just my head, but my hands and my head as well."

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." (NIV)

The quotation above you will, of course, recognise as coming from the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, in the custom of that time and place, when sandalled feet picked up the dust of the roads.

Jesus used the washing of the disciples' feet with water, to remind his disciple Peter of the daily need of cleansing as we walk through this life. After the initial cleansing, when we accept the washing of sins and the forgiveness of God at our conversion (even if we are unaware of exactly when this took place,) then it is the cleansing of day by day sins and failures, that is a necessity for all his followers, and will be as long as this life continues. Day by day reading of the Word of God, and hearing the Word preached Sunday

by Sunday, cleanses our soul.

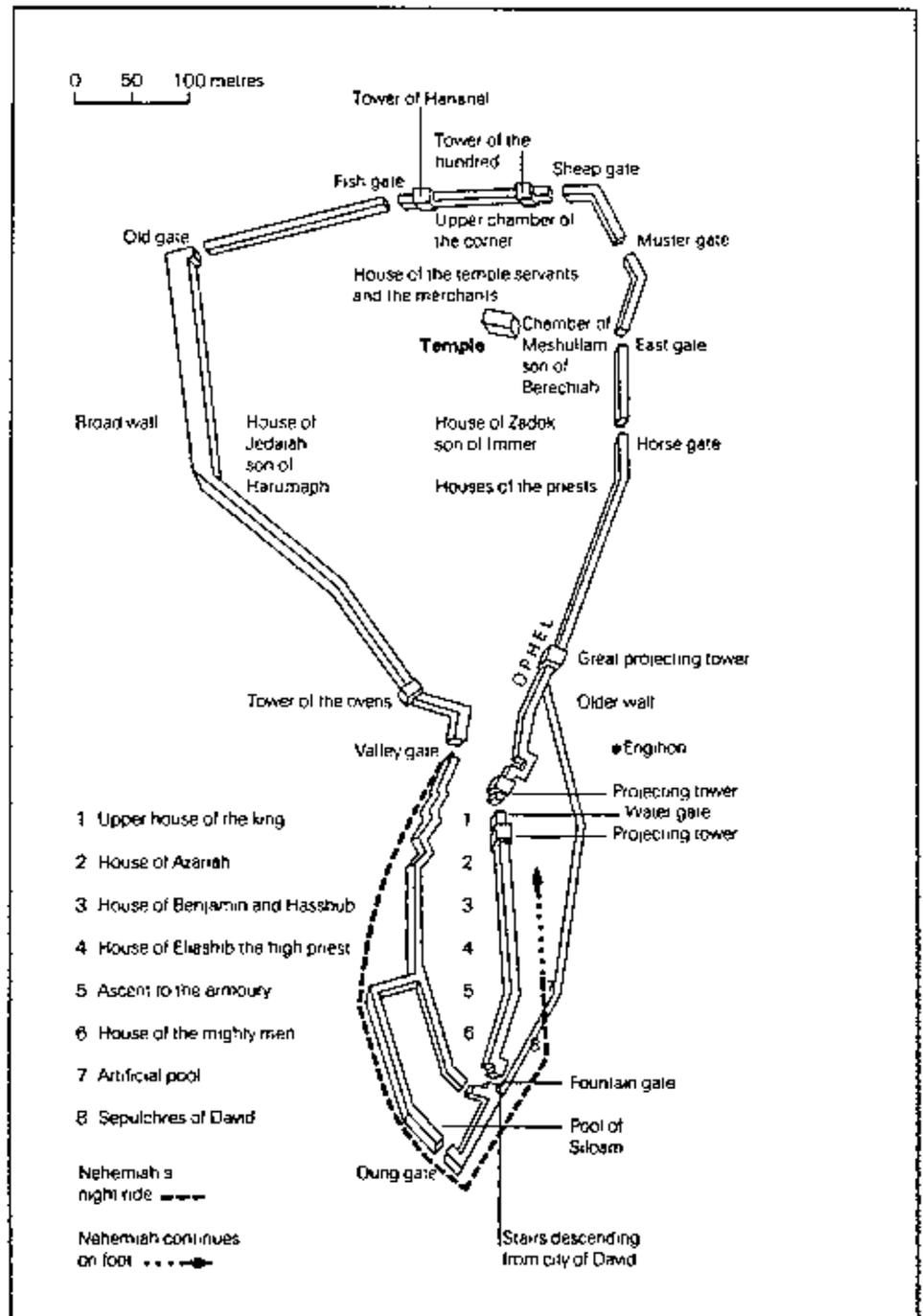
I like the story of a devoted minister in Christchurch (the late Rev. William Orange), who once had a worried parishioner approach him and express her concern that often she could not remember a lot of his sermon. He gave her this answer: "It does not matter. If you have a dirty kitchen colandar, you wash it in water. The water runs out, but the colandar is cleaned. My sermons are like that. If I preach the Bible faithfully, you may not afterwards recall much of what I say, but as you listen the

Word of God makes you clean again."

"And you are clean, but not every one of you." The enigma of Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. Are we ourselves clean?

Come to Him for the initial cleansing, at the Fountain Gate. Come to the Water Gate for daily cleansing after walking through roads that soil. Pray to the Lord:

*Whiter than snow, yes whiter than snow,  
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*



*Nehemiah's Jerusalem (after Aharoni and Avi-Yonah). The site names are derived from Ne. 3:1-32, proceeding anti-clockwise from the Sheep Gate at the NE Corner. Taken from Derek Kidner's Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, IVP.*

## Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

# Gleanings from our bulletins...

## Avondale

Notice of AGM: The AGM is scheduled for next Wednesday, 26 July. Please mark this date on your calendar if you haven't already done so. If you checked your pigeon hole today, you will have found the agenda for the meeting. A big change this year will be that the leaders of the church ministries and activities will be invited to present their reports verbally at the meeting - their written reports will be available to take home after the presentations. We are looking forward to hearing these reports, which represent the outworking of our mission statement - overwhelming evidence that our love as a church is not growing cold.

Family prayer & praise items: Congratulations to Ben & Rosalie, Emma and Max Welch who this past Tuesday received the gift of a new daughter and sister.

## Bishopdale

Good news! Lord willing, Anton van Schalkwyk will profess his faith on Sunday, 20 August. Then three weeks later, on 10 September, Chris Bromley will be baptised, Heather will profess her faith, and their son Reuben will be baptised. Let us give thanks to the Lord for his goodness to Anton, Chris, Heather and Reuben.

## Christchurch

Milestones to give thanks to our Lord for... congratulations to the following: Mr. Jaap and Willy van der Goot who celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary tomorrow (Monday).

Coast to Coast III. Once again it is time to find those old running shoes, pump up those bicycle tires and hit the road. There is only 105 days till the third annual Reformed Churches Coast to Coast challenge! Yes, this is the actual course but not the actual event. Our event runs from Thursday 16 November to Saturday 18 November and consists of Cycling, Running/Tramping and Rafting/Kayaking. A moderate level of fitness is required but most levels will be catered for. So don't delay, start training now and call Richard van Garderen to find out more information and to express your interest at home on 03 3178 156 or 027 229 6664 or by email at rmvg@free.net.nz. Fees yet to be decided but will be set to recover rafting costs. Looking forward to hearing from you as soon as possible. Richard van Garderen

## Dovedale

From the Minister: A number of people have asked me what we will be doing while we are in Australia for two months. I've been asked to fill in for Alastair McEwen at the Reformed Theological College, while he is away on Long Service Leave. I'll be teaching two courses, one on Old Testament hermeneutics (how to approach and interpret the various types of literature in the OT) and one on the theology of the Psalms. I'll also be available to preach, and since both congregations in Geelong are vacant at the moment, I'm sure I'll be given an opportunity to do this. So I'm taking a bit of a "working holiday" for my own long service leave. After that, Tina and I will be spending a few weeks in Auckland and Tauranga, visiting family and friends, and then it's back to Christchurch. We are looking forward to this time and covet your prayers for it—Michael F.

Oh look, it's a gap! As you can see, there is a small gap here which would be nicely filled with a pertinent quote from a favorite book. The editor would like to encourage you to send him short excerpts (anything between 3-8 lines) from decent Christian material. These excerpts will be used to fill gaps just like this one. Kind regards, the editor.

## Dunedin

Pastoral Notes: Your pastor will be leading worship this morning at Tokomairiro Bible Fellowship, one of the Grace Presbyterian Churches of New Zealand. Their pastor has been on extended leave and Andrew Nugteren and I have been asked to assist with supply. Andrew will be leading a service at Milton next Sunday evening.

Pastoral Notes: Congratulations to Frank Gouman who celebrated his 80th birthday on Friday. Thanks be to God, who has said, "Even to your old age and grey hair I am He, I am He who will sustain you." (Isaiah 46:4)

## Foxton

I was recently given an article that appeared in *The Dominion Post* [Sat 29/9], entitled "A month of Sundays". It was written by journalist Polly Greeks, who decides that she is willing to forgo four Sunday sleep-ins so that she can see for herself what causes the 'faithful' to keep going to church. She visited a Roman Catholic Mass Service, a Wesley Methodist Service, The Rock Church in Wellington, and the Destiny Church. Keeping in mind that the author by her own admission is not a believer, she tries to give an objective view of the various services. Rather than be critical, she realises that there are different churches with different leaders that serve different people with different backgrounds and cultures and hence have different tastes. She concludes, "...while the world of the faithful is alive and praying, differ-

ent 'Gods' exist in different churches. Some are accessible, and others are held back by degrees of power and separation. There is a language of Christianity running like a thread through every church, but like all living languages, it is evolving, shifting, splitting into dialects depending on the focus of its leaders. Like all language, it is manipulated to get the required emotional response." Well, we may not appreciate what the author has concluded, but there is some truth in what she says. Those who do go to 'church' go where they feel most 'comfortable.' We feel 'comfortable' where God's word is proclaimed faithfully; where the sacraments are faithfully administered; and where discipline is exercised when needed. And in a sense our worship is 'evolving.' We don't worship today like they did one hundred years ago. We also believe that guided by God's Word, we worship in a way which gives God glory and honour. We also believe and teach that God is accessible, not because of what the leader does or doesn't do, but because God's Son has given us access to the throne room, hence we can come with confidence and boldly into His presence. Do we seek to get a required emotional response from our worship? Sure we do! May it not be in a manipulative way, but let us seek to get a required emotional response that brings honour to our Lord. Our faith is not just an academic exercise, but requires a response from the mind, heart and will. How can we not be moved when we understand what God our Father has done for us in Christ? If that doesn't move you, then the Holy Spirit doesn't live in you. Finally, what would Polly Greeks have said about us and our worship if she had walked in off the street? Would she have been touched by our sincerity? Would she have witnessed a real love for God, His Son, and for one another? Would she have heard Christ preached, crucified and risen? Would she have seen a real bond of unity created by the Holy Spirit living in us? Would she have seen a united and unified worship, reading of the Scriptures and singing of God's praises? Prayer: Lord, may our worship be a witness of Your love to us. Amen. JZ

## Hastings

Wedding. With much pleasure and thankfulness Jerf and Carla van Beek would like to announce the marriage of our daughter Marit to Richie Flinn, son of Richard and Lesley Flinn of North Shore. Lord willing this will take place on Saturday 12th of August at 12pm in the Reformed Church of Hastings. We would like to invite you all to share this special occasion with us. Following the service, light refreshments will be served.

## Hukanui

News from the Sunday School: Teachers prayer meeting: Today, we hope to see all teachers after the morning service to spend some time in prayer

and ask the Lord for His blessing on this ministry. We also like to extend our thanks to Isolde Pennings, who taught class 2 for the past 2½ years. Isolde is expecting a baby mid-September, so we understand that she needs more time off for her growing family. Isolde, thanks for giving your time and talents and may God bless you and watch over you!

Beach Mission. Hi Every one, this is just a notice to find out who is able to help out this year with beach mission. We plan to go to Raglan again to spread the Gospel to holiday makers. If you have been part of a beach mission in the past and would like to help out again or if you have never been before and would like to help, give me a call. We will need help with supervision of canoes, we plan to do crafts and be in the New Year's Eve parade. We will also be aiming to do a lot of one-to-one witnessing. If you have never done this before but feel like you would like to learn, then please contact me. This is a great opportunity to help and to learn how to become more effective in your witness. I would love to hear from you. Henri Pennings 0274 931 639 or 853 3103.

## North Shore

In this morning's Service we welcome into membership by reaffirmation of faith Andrew Watson, who has been worshipping with us for the last couple of years. Andrew, we trust that you will be blessed as you take up the privileges and responsibilities of membership in this congregation of the body of Christ. We trust also that you may be a blessing to us.

## Pukekohe

Last Thursday Michael Willemse and I attended the monthly meeting of the local Pukekohe Ministers' Association as we usually do. These meetings are usually well attended and provide us with good opportunities to meet with the other pastors of the town. Each time, by turn, one pastor will lead a devotion, then we have some discussion and a time of prayer, and we close with any notices about church activities that may be of general interest to the other churches.

From the Pastor: We rejoice with Michael and Gea Willemse with the birth of another daughter. Zipporah was born at Middlemore last Thursday morning, delivered by caesarean, and weighing 10lbs 7ozs. We are very thankful for her safe arrival.

Attention all soccer fans: We think you Oldies have had time to recover from the last soccer game, so now its time for another duel! The youth challenge the Oldies to a vengeance match, so tighten up those back supports and chuck away those walking sticks 'cos this will be serious!!! Make sure you bring along some cheerleaders too—you'll probably need the vocal support! Venue: Bledisloe Park. Date: Saturday 26 August. Time: 3pm. We WILL play, rain or shine. BYO BBQ

and drinks so you can recover afterwards. See you on the field!

## Wainuiomata

Sacrament of Baptism: Today we are privileged to witness the sacrament of baptism administered to Connor Alexander Milne. We pray that the Lord will continue to give Warren and Leone much love and wisdom as they raise Conner in His fear. Let all of us be reminded of our baptism vows and of God's rich promises in baptism. Is it not especially through the patience and love of godly parents that children come to see the great love of Christ? Is it not amazing that the Lord uses us parents with all of our weaknesses to raise up godly, covenant children?

## Wellington

Special congregational meeting. Notice of motion is given about a special congregational meeting at which all communicant members will be asked to vote on the facilities issue (move or stay?). The meeting is set after the morning service on Sunday, 27th August, 2006, D.V. All necessary information will be placed in members' pigeon holes. Proxy votes are available for those unable to attend. Marianne.

## WELLINGTON PRESBYTERY, JULY 7, 2006 – SHORT REPORT

Wellington Presbytery met in Foxton on July 7, 2006. The meeting was chaired by Rev. John Zuidema. Encouraging Art. 47 reports were heard from Wainuiomata and Silverstream, along with church-visitation reports from Masterton and Wellington. Rev. Zuidema delivered his Youth Liaison report, tying in with a request for advice from the Wellington Regional Youth Committee. The discussion involved concerns about the proposed key-note speaker for the next National Youth Camp. Presbytery approved the Committee's general procedure for dealing with such matters, but voted to seek another speaker for the Camp. In addition, Presbytery answered the Committee's request for advice on protocols for handling bad behaviour at camps: serious misbehaviour is to be reported not only to the youth's parents, but also to his elders.

Presbytery heard with regret the news that the majority of the members of Wellington's Kapiti-Mana group have decided to leave the RCNZ and join the new South African church. However, Rev. Lion-Cachet's name will be made available for call in the RCNZ and CRCA.

Presbytery concurred with Hastings'

request to host the next synod. Notification was also received that Family Camp will henceforth be held every other year. Presbytery took note of a request from Auckland for a more timely and regular circulation of minutes from Wellington Presbytery. A number of matters were discussed in closed session. Presbytery agreed to meet next time, November 3, in Wainuiomata.

*On Thursday  
the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2006,  
the Lord called home to Himself,  
at age 89,*

## Bastiaan Vandenengel

*beloved husband of Martha  
and loved father, grandfather, and  
greatgrandfather of:*

Marty and Roger Eldershaw  
– Moana and Martin Leenders  
Abel, Jack, Imogen and Sally  
– Martin and Corina  
– Duncan and Ilona  
Mykaela, Aileen, Zane and Bradley  
– Simon and Melanie  
Titus

Erik and Marjo  
– Brigitte

Ellen Ward  
– Darian

**John 11:25**  
*Jesus said to her, "I am the  
resurrection and the life;  
he who believes in Me shall live  
even if he dies..."*

**247 Fergusson Drive,  
Upper Hutt**

## Massive 'Quake – Kashmir Pakistan

### RCNZ Participation in Relief Aid

**Carl Larsen**

How have our Churches participated?

In early September 2005, Synod was assembled in Hamilton. At that time world news was breaking with the story of the destructive earthquake in Pakistan. NDC was in contact with the Rev. Frank van Dalen (a son of our NZ churches) of World Witness, which has a hospital in Sahiwal, Pakistan. It was thought then that this hospital would have 'quake casualties referred to it. Synod delegates were told that if churches gathered offerings for relief in this emergency, NDC would do its utmost to place these meaningfully. Referrals did not eventuate. Eventually Frank recommended support for the work of the TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) "Bach Christian Hospital" at Qalanderabad, located close to the 'quake zone.

A number of our Churches dedicated offerings for earthquake relief, enabling NDC to send USD9,903.00 (NZ\$16,035.00) to Bach Hospital, which we requested be applied to a new programme fitting artificial limbs for quake victims. The RCNZ contribution was sent on 24th March.

A recent communication (19 July 06) moves that story on:

Dear Mr. Larsen,

I...confirm your kind contribution to the work of Bach Christian Hospital in earthquake relief.

*I am happy to inform you that we have recently begun manufacturing high quality prosthetic limbs. These have always been difficult and expensive to obtain in this part of the country. Following the earthquake in October, we had considered starting such a project but held off, since several large organizations had given money to various government agencies to begin such a work. Nothing materialized, so we decided with some of the funds received for earthquake relief to expand our rehabilitation facilities and set up a prosthetic and orthotic center. We were able to recruit a man who had been trained some years ago by another mission hospital but who for some years had not had consistent work. We have a large number of amputees awaiting prostheses and this past week we fitted our first prosthetic leg. It is a very high quality product and I am thrilled to be able to offer this high quality service, in Jesus' name. In addition to the workshop for prosthetics and the necessary equipment, we are enlarging the physical therapy department to allow for more adequate space for exercise and rehabilitation of patients. The funds you gave have gone towards this project. I have attached a photo of our first prosthetic limb made for an earthquake patient and the patient herself.*

*Again, thank you for your partnership in the work of lending help to the poor of this part of Pakistan.*

*Blessings,  
Luke Cutherell  
Luke and Nancy Cutherell  
Bach Christian Hospital  
P.O. Qalanderabad, Dist. Abbottabad  
Pakistan*



First lady to receive a BCH prosthesis



One of the prosthetic legs produced at BCH

### 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 of publication; so, for September, information should be sent before the 15<sup>th</sup> of July. If you would like our congregations to pray for you on your mission trip, send details to Janice at [reid4radio@ihug.co.nz](mailto:reid4radio@ihug.co.nz).

### MIF prayer notes

**Wally & Jeannette Hagoort** are still busy with their ministry in Papua New Guinea. Things should have slowed down a bit at Mapang Guest House by now, but work continues with Reformed congregations in several locations. Praise the Lord for the growth of His church, and ask for His strength for Wally and Jeannette as they continue to minister to His children in this needy country. Ask also for the Lord's guidance and provision for the Reformed Leaders' Training Centre as that project develops.

Pray for **Janice Reid** as she teaches a course for radio station managers this month. She also expects to travel to Cambodia this month or next, to help two Christian stations in Phnom Penh. Pray for health, for wisdom in planning and teaching, and for safe travel.