

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 33/8 SEPTEMBER 2006



**“All you have made will
praise you, O LORD...”**

Psalm 145:10a

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Copy Deadline:

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

All correspondence regarding distribution and
payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

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Subscription per volume:

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

Production Staff:

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

Editorial

Spring has come! And what a relief for so many in our country. It has been a long and difficult winter. And perhaps it still has a sting in its tail where you are! We pray not. But we have also been taught again not to depend on the things here below but what matters for all eternity up above.

The world doesn't like to think about that. It will wrap itself up in the material comforts and distractions around it. They will depend on what they are so much feeling at this moment. Have you noticed the way television news is not news as such but 'views'? "How are you feeling?" the victim of a horrific attack will be asked. How silly is that! But they will answer it with all seriousness, even if it's obvious they feel awkward about it. We are well and truly in the 'me, me, me' age.

You find this out clearly when you try to engage in any kind of debate with them regarding their beliefs. Rather than being seen as a fair exchange of idea it's becoming increasingly felt to be a personal affront. As Christians we are well aware of the prohibitions against proselytising the Christian faith in Moslem countries but there seems to be one in western countries also. This is backed up by legislation which increasingly defines the secular/sacred division. Andrew Selles helps us here in this issue.

But there is also increasingly this same kind of antagonism against a clear expression of the reformed faith. "As long as we're all Christians, it doesn't matter," is a common chorus nowadays. And so Calvinistic distinctives become side-passed altogether. Anyhow, they're not the most positive doctrines, are they?

Well, actually, they are. Because of all the Christian theologies, the Reformed faith is the one which most consistently acknowledges the sovereignty of God. Our Confessions are quite clear that God is the One who does it. He creates and He re-creates. He holds all things in His hands. That's positive. That's assuring. That's biblical. Daniel Finn's contribution to this is much appreciated and timely, and the Rev. Gary Milne's article reinforces this.

Cover photo: *Queens' Gardens, Nelson*

Have you taken a nice picture?

Do you think you have a suitable photo to grace the front page 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.

'It's not a salvation issue'

So who cares?

Daniel Flinn

There is a lot of disagreement amongst Christians today. Two individuals in a church disagree. One church disagrees with another. New Zealand churches disagree with Australian churches. The Reformed denomination disagrees with Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists and Brethren; and all of those groups disagree with Catholics.

Against this backdrop we are called to consider Paul's exhortation, *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought* (1 Cor 1:10). Paul continues to warn against factions in verses 12 and 13: *What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ., Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul?'*

People who seek unity occasionally attempt to end disagreements by saying, "It's not a salvation issue." The implication is that if the disagreement does not threaten a person's salvation, it is therefore not important, and not worth discussing.

Everything matters to God

While this phrase might be well-meant, it is dangerous for a number of reasons. Firstly, it indicates a kind of disinterest in issues that don't 'directly' relate to salvation. This is to ignore the reality that there are many 'non-salvation' issues that we must regard as very important. For example, 'murder,' 'rape' and 'theft' don't necessarily prevent a person from entering heaven. The criminal on the cross went to be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43). His chequered past obviously did not bar his path to heaven. But murder, 'rape' and 'theft' are not unimportant simply because they can be described as 'non-salvation issues.'

Furthermore, it is to ignore scriptural opposition to a casual Christian walk: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength* (Deut 6:5). Similarly with God's commandments: *These commandments that I give to you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when*

you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deut 6:6-9).

I do not read anywhere in scripture that we must love God to the extent that this will get us into heaven, and that beyond this our heart, soul, and strength may be employed as we see fit—provided we don't jeopardise our salvation. I do not read that we should talk about God's commandments if our salvation is in danger, but for the rest—when we sit at home, when we walk along the road, when we lie down, and when we get up—God's commandments are unimportant.

Nor does scripture urge us to discard theology if it is not directly related to salvation. Sound doctrine is mandatory: *You must teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine* (Titus 2:1). We are spurred on to digest theological **meat**, not milk: *Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment* (Heb. 6:1-2). Those with voracious theological appetites

will get their teeth into all sorts of 'non-salvation issues.' Only spiritual anorexics say, 'It is not a salvation issue so I have no part in it.'

It's not about you

The second danger is selfishness. A selfish approach says, 'How does religion benefit me? It gets me to heaven. Heaven aside, God has nothing to offer.' By this approach, salvation is what motivates one's spiritual walk. Salvation becomes the standard by which a matter's importance is judged: 'Is it a salvation issue? No? Then it is not important.' This mentality is wrong. A matter's importance does not depend on the furtherance of **our own** interests; a matter is important if it furthers **God's** interests. Man's chief end is to glorify **God**: *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you* (Matt 6:33).

A third danger is that we will lose perspective on what salvation means. The problem is it is largely artificial to separate 'salvation' issues from 'non-salvation' issues. Salvation is not some narrow facet of religion, unrelated to all other biblical issues. As will be clear from the passages above, if we respond correctly to God's gift of salvation, we will be serious about serving God in every



The sale of indulgences - something Luther shouldn't have got upset about?



Monument to John Hus who was martyred for the biblical faith

area of our lives. Not simply those areas that get us to heaven. That is the correct perspective on salvation.

Putting it into practice

So much for principle. What is the application? Applications are myriad, but I'll choose one and leave the rest to you. Perhaps your son is considering a relationship with a Baptist girl. Do you:

- 1) Turn a blind eye because Baptists go to heaven? Or:
- 2) Weigh up the differences between the Baptist and Reformed faiths and decide whether or not to permit the relationship based on the significance of those differences?

I'm not saying it is wrong to have a relationship with a Baptist. But I do say that it is wrong for parents to ignore this issue (or any issue) simply because it is not a 'salvation issue.' Numerous questions arise, which go deeper than first appearances admit. What

church will your son attend? If your son marries this girl, what church will their children attend? Will the children remain unbaptised until adulthood? What is your son's view of God's covenant with his children? How will he exercise headship in a relationship? How will this girl respond in the event that baptism becomes a problem?

Perhaps your reaction at this point is that the above questions make a mountain out of a molehill. Maybe so. But the point of the example is not to demonstrate that Reformed Christians cannot have relationships with Baptists. The point is to illustrate the level of significance that 'non-salvation issues' can have. It is wrong to automatically dismiss these issues as unimportant. A much better approach is to give to each issue an appropriate degree of care and attention as the situation requires.

Intolerance – or honest conviction?

Who is really scared?

Andrew H Selle

"As long as our faith is rooted in Scripture, all faiths are not the same. All religions do not lead to God."

Those words by the Rev Craig Bensen ("In Religion", Dec 3) struck a nerve in many readers and generated a lot of hot ink in response. Epithets such as "religious intolerance," "extremist," "sectarian," "divisive," and "implicit violence" flew liberally toward this representative of the "religious right". One critic, a former state senator, even charged that such fundamentalism is "hazardous to the health of communities, nations, and our world". Too bad we didn't see Bensen's photo, so we could observe the hollow, glazed eyes of this dangerous religious fanatic.

Come on, folks. Lighten up! The man has a point to make, and we ought to consider it rationally. Ultimately, all this flap centers upon one watershed issue – divine revelation. Has God revealed himself clearly in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ, such that it is actually possible to know the Truth? Or, is God fundamentally unknowable, floating out there in the hazy and ethereal realm of "religious beliefs"?

Absolutism verses relativism

The first premise is simply historic Christian teaching, proclaimed by evangelical Christians with an astonishingly wide range of denominational tags. The second premise is a modern version of relativism, the belief that there are no absolutes. Understand that these are two mutually exclusive worldviews, two radically different religions.

If you are absolutely committed to relativism (don't miss the irony there), then all religions are created equal, and it would be arrogant and rude to suggest that one religion is any better than another. But if you are convinced about the historic Christian faith, you drop all your vain imaginations and shut up and listen to the God who speaks! "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Rom 9:20).

Does this mean that evangelicals are hopelessly intolerant, as the critics charge? One of Bensen's harshest critics beats the pluralism drum: "Pluralists believe that people of diverse faiths and varied beliefs might learn to live together in mutual respect." Amen! Christians believe the same. No evangelical that I know wants to start a medieval-like "holy war" to make converts by force. In fact, evangelicals are on the front lines of the current legal battles in

our country to guard our cherished religious freedoms. Unless your religion is destructive to someone else's life or property, you are free to practice it, no matter what you believe. In that sense, evangelicals are tolerant "pluralists".

We are not afraid of the open exchange of ideas. Truth can stand on its own. God can take care of himself. Those who see honest conviction and call it intolerance muddy the waters. Conviction and tolerance are apples and oranges, which must not be confused. If you can accept this distinction, then you can realise that a person can be convinced that he is right, and yet still be tolerant and respectful of others,.

All men are made in God's image

To anyone who does not accept the God of the Bible, I say: I must do more than merely tolerate you; I must treat you will love and respect because God made you in his own image with an eternal soul of unspeakable value. I am not superior to you, for we share the same humanity, in all its glory and all its broken-ness. I hope you can tolerate and respect me even if you think I'm a right-wing fanatic. I tolerate and respect you even if you're out to lunch about your religious opinions. Maybe we can have a debate – oops, I



mean a dialogue. Maybe we can learn from each other. Maybe we can shoot some hoops

together. Maybe we can be friends.

But we cannot worship together. You

worship a different god – a god of human creation rather than the true Creator who has spoken in history: “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:17-18). Before him someday, “every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil 2:10). One’s relationship to Jesus is no inconsequential matter, but an issue of life or death, with the eternal destiny of souls in the balance. With such high stakes, surely we ought to communicate together with kindness and honesty, tolerance and conviction.

*Mr. Selle is a teacher at Covenant OPC in Barre, Vt, and serves with a Christian counselling ministry. Reprinted by permission from **New Horizons**.*

World in focus

Home Schoolers take their case to Human Rights Court

German home school parents who are facing fines or jail sentences are prepared to take their cause to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

An appeal by Christian parents was recently turned down by the German Constitutional Court (Supreme Court). According to the justices they are obligated to send their children to state-registered schools.

Home schooling is illegal in Germany, even if parents object to institutional education for religious reasons. Many Christians have been defying these legal requirements and because of this have been fined or incarcerated when they refuse to pay the fines. It is estimated that at least 1,000 children in Germany are taught by their parents.

+ European Court of Human Rights, Council of Europe, F-67075, Strasbourg-Cedex

More Diocese request alternate Primatal oversight

As a result of the continuing fallout over the Episcopal Church in the United States’ election of Dr. Kathleen Jefferts Schori, the Bishop of Nevada and a supporter of revisionist teaching on homosexuality, as its next Presiding Bishop, five dioceses of the Episcopal Church, all of which are affili-

ated with the Anglican Communion Network, have joined the Diocese of Fort Worth in petitioning the Archbishop of Canterbury for alternate oversight. The Dioceses of Central Florida, Pittsburgh, San Joaquin, South Carolina, and Springfield have made formal requests.

It is likely that more will join them in the coming weeks.

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

Evangelical Presbyterians celebrate birthdays in Rome!

The 26th General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church met 21-24 June at the First Presbyterian Church of Rome in Rome, Georgia.

This annual gathering of approximately 400 commissioners (delegates) and several hundred more observers and guests marked the 25th year of existence for the EPC.

The EPC began in 1981 as a group of 12 churches and today has over 180 churches of approximately 66,000 members across the country. First Presbyterian of Rome became part of the EPC in its first 12 months of existence.

In addition to celebrating its own 25th anniversary, the EPC celebrated the 300th anniversary of the formation of the first

North American Presbytery (regional body) - the 300th anniversary of American Presbyterianism.

This is the third time First Presbyterian of Rome was host to the national gathering, and it is the church home of four previous General Assembly Moderators—Dr James Van Dyke, Dr William Flannagan, Elder Bill Johns, and Elder John Graham.

+ Rev. Michael J. Glodo, Stated Clerk, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 17197 N. Laurel Park Dr., Suite 567, Livonia, MI 48152 (734) 742-2020

Funeral held for discarded family Bibles

More than 500 old Bibles, the majority of them too worn and unsuitable for resale, were buried in an unusual ceremony after being donated to a charity shop in Scotland. Most of the Bibles were written in Gaelic.

The staff decided to respectfully dispose of them following an ancient Jewish tradition of burying sacred scrolls. The Bibles were placed in boxes before being buried at the cemetery.

More than 40 villagers attended the burial service, which was conducted in English and Gaelic.

Donald Morrison, a member of the Ness Charity Shop committee, said, ‘These were treasured volumes and many people were

loathe to dispose of them in the way we normally treat possessions we no longer need. After thinking about the matter for some time, we came up with the idea of burying them.'

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

Persecution Report

China Aid Association (CAA) has released a report stating the number of cases of persecution against Chinese House churches by province in China in the past 12 months.

In the past 12 months, according to the report, at least 1,958 Chinese house church pastors and Christians in 15 provinces were arrested.

The province by province report shows that Henan has had 823 pastors and believers arrested in raids from July 2005 to May 2006. This is the worst province in persecution against House churches in the past 12 months.

The report explains that the term 'Chinese House Church' refers to congregations in China that refuse to join the so-called Three-self Church, which the Chinese government insists should accommodate all

Protestants. House churches are independent, but usually operate underground.

+ China Aid Association, Inc., PO Box 8513 Midland, TX 79708 (267) 205-5210

Gallup Poll finds surprising results in Japan

The Gallup Organization has yielded some surprising results about the attitudes of Japanese towards religion, spirituality and morality. Gallup found that six percent of the population is Christian, a number much higher than any study has previously indicated. Also, almost 20 percent of the youth population claims a faith, with 36 percent of those claiming Christianity. This means that seven percent of the total youth population calls itself Christian. Gallup called the findings 'stunning,' noting that social scientists considered it the most extensive study ever attempted.

+ Gallup World Headquarters, 901 F St., NW, Washington, DC 20004 (202) 715-3030

Money and the USA's leading abortion provider

Decisions International, which monitors the activities of Planned Parenthood, has published a revised list of corporations

that give money to the abortion business. The list of companies it urges pro-life Christians to boycott includes surprising household names.

LDI is credited with stopping Planned Parenthood contributions of 130 corporations since it started monitoring corporate giving and publishing a boycott list. The group estimates it has cost PP more than US\$35 million since the project began 15 years ago.

"This should be a testament to those who believe it is impossible to change corporate philanthropic behavior," Douglas Scott, LDI's president, said.

The latest info on companies that give to the most lucrative abortion business in the nation is available on the LDI website.

+ Life Decisions International, PO Box 75161, Washington, DC 20013-0161 (540) 631-0380

<www.fightpp.org/show.cfm?page=press&action=display&ID=112>

Crackdown in Uzbekistan not aimed at Christians

Forum 18 News reports Uzbekistan has introduced new penalties for the 'illegal' production, storage, import and distribution of all forms of religious literature. The Slavic Gospel Association's Joel Griffith says, 'It'll be interesting to see how it plays out. Some of this may be in response to Islamic extremism. President Karimov basically feels like he has to keep his thumb on everything just so things don't get out of hand...'

'Thus far, to our knowledge, it hasn't really affected the Baptist churches too heavily. They're concerned about illegal production and distribution of religious literature such as home-produced materials.

'Well, we don't obviously do anything like that.'

+ Slavic Gospel Association, 6151 Commonwealth Dr., Loves Park, IL 61111 (800) 242-5350

+ Mission Network News, Grand Rapids, MI (800) 284-9361 <www.mnnonline.org>

Rapist in Pakistan released on Bail

Ribqa Masih had finished her high school examinations and was awaiting the results in September 2005 when wealthy Muslim neighbors in Goral, near Faisalabad, kidnapped and raped her, she said. Ten months later Masih, 19, still needs to retake two of the tests if she wants to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

Muhammad Kashif, one of the men whom Masih charges with raping her,

Upper Primary School Teacher Vacancy

Calvin Christian School is seeking a teacher who believes in the vision of Christ-centred education in a school which has a mainly Christian student population from outside the Reformed Church.

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

We are specifically seeking a teacher able to teach Grades 3 – 4 (ages 7 till 8), and or 5/6 till 8 (ages 9 till 12 years approximately), from the forth 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, Auckland
Email: sjirk@xtra.co.nz

was granted bail on a technicality the law gives to criminal suspects suffering from illness. Kashif has psoriasis: Red, dry patches of skin.

Masih's lawyer, Khalil Tahir Sindhu said, 'Psoriasis did not stop him from raping Masih..' It also did not keep Kashif from fleeing police in a Faisalabad courtroom last October when his initial request for pre-arrest bail was rejected.

But in December last year, the Lahore High Court freed the rape suspect.

And last month the court denied bail to Ghulam Abbas Hussain, the other man accused of raping Masih. With Hussain in prison, the Masih family said Kashif has pressured them to stop legal proceedings.

'Time after time,' Masih's father said, 'Kashif has threatened me on the telephone, telling me to drop this case.'

+ *Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250 (949) 862-0304*

Rev. Alex Murdo MacLeod dies

Alex Murdo MacLeod, a former Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland and the honorary president of the Bethesda Nursing Home and Hospice, died on 26 June, 2006.

Macleod was known throughout the Highlands and Islands as a gifted Gaelic preacher and theologian, but one of his greatest contributions to the Western Isles was the realisation of his vision to establish a non-denominational nursing home and hospice in Stornoway 'for all who need its care regardless of race, creed or ability to pay,' which was opened by the Princess Royal in 1992.

Macleod, as a preacher, exemplified one of the most distinctive traditions of the Highland Presbyterian pulpit, by combining conceptual and experimental theology.

Macleod completed his studies at the Free Church College in Edinburgh in 1963, and was then called to the congregation of Kinloch in Lewis, which he served until his retirement in 1997. Early in his ministry he married Chrissie Mackenzie, a local schoolteacher. He served on the Education Committee of Comhairle nan Eilean and also on the Western Isles Health Board. Alex was also chairman of the Bethesda Managing Committee for the first nine years of its existence. In 1994, he was elected Moderator and represented the Free Church at events in the United States and Australia.

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

Boy Scout Marina case appealed to US Supreme Court

The Pacific Legal Foundation (PLF) is appealing to the US Supreme Court over a California Supreme Court decision that affirmed the Berkeley Marina's denial of free access for boats belonging to the Boy Scouts of America.

The Sea Scouts, a division of the Boy Scouts, had used the marina at no charge since the 1930's - until the Berkeley City Council demanded in 1998 that the organisation admit homosexuals and atheists or else pay a fee. Berkeley offers free access to other non-profit organizations. Some scouts have had to drop out of the program because they cannot afford the fees.

A lawyer for PLF, Harold Johnson, who is representing the leader of the Berkeley Sea Scout program, said the decision by the city council is hurting children. Johnson also questions whether the government can pick and choose what groups are acceptable based on their definition of political correctness.

+ *Pacific Legal Foundation, National Litigation Center, 3900 Lennane Dr., Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95834 (916) 419-7111*

Members of Federal Vision Study Committee appointed

The 34th PCA General Assembly approved erecting an ad interim committee 'to study

the soteriology of the Federal Vision, New Perspective, and Auburn Avenue Theologies, which are causing confusion among our churches. Further, to determine whether these viewpoints and formulations are in conformity with the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Standards, whether they are hostile to or strike at the vitals of religion, and to present a declaration or statement regarding the issues raised by these viewpoints in light of our Confessional Standards.' The GA authorized the moderator to appoint the members of this committee. The moderator, TE Dominic Aquila, has appointed the following: TE Paul Fowler, Convener, Assistant Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Augusta, Georgia; TE Ligon Duncan, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi; TE Grover Gunn, Pastor, Covenant Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Tennessee; TE Sean Lucas, Assistant Professor of Church History, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri; RE Robert Mattes, Christ Presbyterian Church, Arlington, Virginia; RE William Mueller, Kendall Presbyterian Church, Miami, Florida; and RE John White, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

+ *Presbyterian Church in America Administrative Committee, 1700 N. Brown Rd., Suite 105, Lawrenceville, GA 30043*

HASTINGS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

PRINCIPAL

Composite Y1-10, Decile 5, roll 140. Hastings Christian School is an integrated Christian school on the outskirts of the Hastings city with an attractive rural outlook.

The BOT seeks applications from a visionary Christian leader with a passion for education from a Calvinist perspective.

The appointee shall accept and recognise a responsibility to maintain and preserve the special character of the school.

The successful applicant will be able to demonstrate an ability to empower and lead a strong team of dedicated professional staff.

The person will show prior competency in managing effective and harmonious relationships with key stakeholder groups. A strategic focus combined with strengths in planning and assessment towards improved student outcomes are essential.

Ability to further progress the Hastings Christian School towards achieving its Mission Statement objectives will be a priority.

Applications close 11 August 2006. Short listed applicants will be required for an interview 12th or 13th September. An application package is available from the school; ph 06 8786696.

To apply please send your curriculum vitae along with a cover letter including a list of three referees to Hastings Christian School, Copeland Rd, Hastings.

A feminine focus

Sally Davey

The feminine virtue of patience

Sally Davey

I don't know if you've ever read Susan Coolidge's *Katy* books, but they used to be some of my favorites when I was a child. They're about a girl growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1880s. Katy is exuberant, impulsive—and somewhat careless. She is also kind-hearted; but has many things to learn in the course of her teens. Some of them are learned from the example of her father's cousin, Helen, who has been an invalid for about 20 years. Not so long after first meeting her, Katy has a bad accident and faces the prospect of years in bed. Cousin Helen visits Katy, who is distressed at not being able to do all she had planned for her younger brothers and sisters. (Their mother had died some years before, and Katy feels a big responsibility for them.)

'If I ever do get well,' she sobs to Cousin Helen, 'the children will be almost grown up and they won't need me...Cousin Helen, what can I do lying here in bed?' But Cousin Helen is wiser than Katy. She has learned many things in her own years of suffering. A good deal may be done even if one is an invalid. She asks 'Shall I tell you, Katy, what it seems to me that I should say to myself if I were in your place?' Katy nods.

'I should say this: 'Now, Katy Carr, you wanted to go to school, and learn to be wise and useful, and here's a chance for you. God is going to let you go to *His* school—where He teaches all sorts of beautiful things to people. Perhaps He will keep you for one term, or perhaps it may be for three or four; but whichever it is, you must make the very most of the chance, because, He gives it to you Himself.'

'But what is the school?' asked Katy. 'I don't know what you mean.'

'It is called the School of Pain,' replied Cousin Helen, with her sweetest smile.

'And the place where the lessons are to be learned is this room of yours. The rules of the school are pretty hard, but the good scholars, who keep them best, find out after a while how right and kind they are. And the lessons aren't easy, either, but the more you study the more interesting they become.'

'What are the lessons?' asked Katy, getting interested, and beginning to feel as if Cousin Helen were telling her a story.

'Well, there's the lesson of Patience. That's one of the hardest studies. You can't



learn much of it at a time, but every bit you get by heart makes the next bit easier. And there's the lesson of Making the Best of Things...¹

Simply Biblical wisdom

Cousin Helen's wise encouragement of Katy is not her own invention. Her story is lively and attractive, but the truth behind it is simply biblical wisdom. The lesson of patience is

the wonderful fruit of any trial, if well-learned. What did the apostle James write? *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance [“patience” in the KJV]. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* (James 1:2-4)

Endurance and patience are closely linked in biblical thinking: they are the outcome gained from those who persevere with faith through difficult times. But what, specifically, is the virtue of patience, when carefully analysed? The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* suggests there are two ways of understanding patience. (They are really the two biblical applications of patience). The first way we usually understand patience has to do with our forbearance of others. Sometimes there are people in our lives who place extra demands on our reserves of good will: they may be young (or old) and dependent on us; they may be bad-tempered or foolish; they may simply be downright difficult to endure. Our Father asks us to be patient with them, for Christ's sake. Patience is the first great quality of love (1 Corinthians 13:4). The second understanding is the one Cousin Helen was showing Katy—being the quality of enduring suffering with a quiet, submissive heart. It is the beautiful, spiritual result of undergoing trials with faith and hope.

A diminished quality

If this is what being patient is, are we patient today? I am sure there are many patient women, and there always have been—but there are certain ways in which our culture encourages impatience, even crass impatience. For one thing, we do not want the frustration of waiting—we want our pleasures now. The habits of credit card debt, and of huge mortgages, tell this story Pleasures now, without the waiting or the commitments that go with some privileges, are wreaking havoc in our very midst. Why not enjoy the pluses of marriage without all the problematic drawbacks? Most couples think nothing of moving in together, or of moving out again if the 'give' exceeds the 'take' too much. We are easily upset, and irritated: it is hard to stand someone else's company for long, so we quickly give up. Far too often we do not make good employers, supervisors, team

leaders, teachers—or wives or mothers. We do not take time to explain, or answer questions. We do not give people enough time to absorb instructions adequately. We do not forgive, or cover another's sins with love.

Neither do we tend to endure suffering well. Many of us are prone to complain, to feel frustrated and angry—with others, with our circumstances, with God—or all three. We are not willing to accept things, patiently. Rather we tend to lionise people who in some way seem to conquer, and who use whatever means available to live as if they had no trial at all. Recently Paul and I were invited to a fundraising function where the after-dinner speaker was a person who had lost limbs in a dangerous environment. He was being celebrated for going back to an even more dangerous place and engaging in the same dangerous activities, only this time with artificial legs. The result? More time in hospital and further loss of limbs. But everyone at the function thought this fellow a marvelous inspiration; he had not allowed his previous trial to stop him doing the dangerous activities he enjoyed most. I could not help wondering whether loving his wife and children, and encouraging others similarly handicapped, would not have been better achieved by ordinary, unspectacular service than by (selfishly) pushing the limits of danger in extreme activities. But, as he saw it, 'life is about exploring yourself.' This is not patiently enduring trials in the way Christ has done before us. And ignoring a trial is not the same as learning from it.

Encouraging patience

But while the world does not encourage patience, the Scriptures do. And what is more, they give good reasons to strive for patience. Appreciating these reasons provides even more incentive for doing what God so desires for us. He has not given us arbitrary, meaningless commands—they have purpose and value, and help shape us into the loveliness of Christ. With this in mind, let us examine the biblical teaching on patience, and consider the ways we might live it to His honour and glory.

Firstly, God tells us, we are to be patient with other people. We know full well that this will be difficult, because sin makes it difficult. People are trying. They are rude, inconsiderate and selfish; they are dishonest and disobedient. They may be harsh and unjust; or untidy, slovenly and lazy. They are sinners. Living with them means constantly biting your tongue, trying to understand, forgiving repeated offences, and saying sorry. If you are a wife, or a mother, you will know

exactly what I mean. You live with sinners, and it's hard. Constant mess, arguments, putting up with the habits someone else grew up with, in another home with different sets of standards: all require enormous stores of mercy, forgiveness, and patience. But you know what? We are sinners too. And that is the very point, as far as God is concerned. We need to be patient with others *because God Himself has been patient with us*. This is what Paul writes to Titus. The Christians in Crete must be 'uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.' Why? 'For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another...But when the kindness of God our Saviour and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy...' (Titus 3:2-5). In other words, show mercy and patience toward others—because we need to keep in mind that God has saved us from precisely the same kind of behaviour that may provoke us in them. This salvation had nothing to do with any superior worth in us at all—it was entirely through God's mercy. So, show mercy and patience to others.

This is also the message of Jesus' parable on forgiveness in Matthew 18. The slave who was forgiven much by his master was condemned because he did not show like mercy (over a much smaller amount of debt) to a fellow slave. The NASB translates the quality the slave begs for in his master (v.26) as 'patience.' Likewise, this is the virtue the fellow slave appeals to in the much-forgiven slave (v.29). Surely patience can be expected in someone who has been blessed by having much patience shown to her? Well, we would like to think so; but we all know otherwise. We are all so quick to forget—to forget the patience shown so generously to us. We are quick to see the faults in others, quick to feel impatience and anger. We are easily irritated and only too ready to point out the faults in those close to us. We are without mercy; without patience. But if we stopped and took breath, we would not only see that we still have many faults too, but we would also understand that by exposing us to the sin of others, and by having us learn to live with them patiently, God may be using the lesson to make us more like His beloved Son.

A good illustration

I cannot think of a way in which this is better explained than by mid-nineteenth century American writer Elizabeth Prentiss in her

novel, *Stepping Heavenward*. This is another story of a young woman growing up. Katy, who has a wonderful Christian mother, grows greatly in her own faith through many trials in life. One of these comes shortly after her marriage to Ernest, a young Christian doctor. Ernest's mother dies, and (unannounced) he brings his elderly father and sister home to live with them. Katy finds father's gloomy presence and sister Martha's critical spirit terribly hard to bear. She finds it hard to exercise either patience or compassion toward them. But then Mrs Campbell, a patient of her husband's, offers wise counsel. She asks Katy to explain her problem:

'You know, I [Katy writes in the first person] began, 'dear Mrs Campbell, that there are some trials that cannot do us any good. They only call out all there is in us that is unlovely and severe.'

'I don't know of any such trials,' she replied. 'Suppose you had to live with people who were perfectly uncongenial; who misunderstood you, and who were always getting in your way as stumbling-blocks?'

'If I were living with them and they made me unhappy, I would ask God to relieve me of this trial if He thought it best. If He did not think it best, I would then try to find out the reason. He might have two reasons. One would be the good they might do me. The other the good I might do them.'

'But in the case I was supposing, neither party can be of the least use to the other.'

'You forget perhaps the *indirect* good one may gain by living with uncongenial, tempting persons. First such people do good by the very self-denial and self-control their mere presence demands. Then, their making one's home less home-like and perfect than it would be in their absence, may help to render our real home in heaven more attractive.'

'But suppose one cannot exercise self-control, and is always flying out and flaring up?' I objected.

"I should say that a *Christian* who was always doing that,' she replied gravely, 'was in pressing need of just the trial God sent him when He shut him up to such a life of hourly temptation. We only know ourselves and what we really are, when the force of circumstances bring us out into the open... our mortifications are some of God's best physicians.'²

And, as Elizabeth Prentiss carries on drawing her picture of Katy, God *does* do His particular work in her through this trial. Not long afterward she gives birth to her first child, and her aunt writes this to Katy's mother:

'...our darling Katy behaved nobly... The

doctor may well be proud of her, and I took care to tell him so in the presence of that dreadful sister of his. I never met so jagged, so uncompromising a person as she is in all my life. She does not understand Katy, and never can, and I find it hard to realize that living with such a person can furnish a wholesome discipline, which is even more desirable than the most delightful home. And yet I not only know that this is true in the abstract, but I see that it is so in the actual fact. Katy is acquiring both self-control and patience, and her Christian character is developing in a way that amazes me.’³

What are the circumstances, and who are the people in *your* life? Could God be teaching you patience by means of them?

The second type of patience

Then what about the patience that endures trials? How do we gain that? It seems to me that the simple answer (not simple to do, but simple to explain!) is that we learn patience in trials *through enduring the trials God gives us with the right attitude of faith.* This is James’s message in Chapter One of his letter. We learn the right attitude through our study of Scripture, and by the Holy Spirit’s help in applying it to our hearts in daily obedience. And the key to quick and lasting

learning is an earnest desire to understand what God may be teaching us.

Sometimes a trial is a period of suffering, limited in duration but full of useful lessons that profit us forever afterward. Have you ever had an illness or an accident that prevented you from carrying on life as usual for a while? Perhaps it made you dependent on others for help—maybe even for the first time in your life? Even minor debilities, such as the broken wrist I am recovering from as I write this article, can be of service to us in teaching us some patience. Others will mention financial trouble, a brief health scare, or a child’s difficulty at school as being the means by which they have learned to have a quiet, patient heart that rests in Christ. Our trial may soon be over, but we need not forget the lesson, and may apply it in many another situation. Perhaps you could tell a similar story, or are you learning these things too?

The long trials

But trials are not always quickly over: sometimes they may even last for the rest of our lives. Enduring them patiently means exercising many, many Christian graces. And because of that, the opportunities they give for growing closer to Christ, for knowing God more intimately, and for understanding His

ways, are greatly enhanced. Christians who pass through the fires of lengthy, even life-long, trials may become rare gems of great beauty. That brings great credit to Christ, who bought us with His own life, and who walks with us in our darkest hours. Our witness to the lost around us may, because of our trials, be priceless. Throughout the history of God’s people there are many, many stories of the ways suffering Christians have drawn others to the Saviour through the faith and patience with which they have endured their trials. In some special times, the witness of patient sufferers has been the major means by which the gospel has been advanced. We *must* not despise this truth in the hour of our affliction—especially in an age as hard-hearted as is ours. I often think of this when I watch a dear Christian friend walking through some long, dark tunnel of suffering. Does God know what is happening to us? Yes! He planned it, in love, for our good and for His glory. Does He hear our prayer? Does He care? Is He there with us? Yes, yes, yes! Patience in our trial may mean waiting a long time, even till this life is over, for His answers to be clear. He may not answer our prayer for the trial to end the way we might wish. For instance, He may never give us the child we long for, or the husband we dream about; but patience means that faithful trust will make the waiting—for Him—worthwhile. Remember what we will be singing in heaven: ‘blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might, be to our God forever and ever.’ There will be no doubting any more, for those who ‘shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore...for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.’ (Revelation 7:12-17)

Yes, truly, patience has its perfect result.⁴

(Endnotes)

- 1 Susan Coolidge, *What Katy Did* (The Children’s Press, London. n.d.), pp. 113-4
- 2 Elizabeth Prentiss, *Stepping Heavenward* (Calvary Press, New York), pp. 184-5
- 3 *ibid.*, pp. 196-7
- 4 James 1:4

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Issue 4 – out Sept 2006
Fashion & Clothing

The Gates of Jerusalem

The Fountain Gate

Patricia van Laar

Zechariah 12:10, 13:1 *“They will look on me whom they have pierced... On that day a fountain will be opened to the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”*

The Fountain Gate seems to have led to the spring En Rogel near the SE corner of Jerusalem, and the Water Gate of 3:26 possibly gave access to the other main spring, the Gohon. In the Scriptures, several words are used and translated as wells, springs and fountains. English usage is therefore neither conclusive, nor exclusive. In Nehemiah the word could, but would not necessarily, mean fountain as we use it; in my reading, I have not succeeded in finding a full comment on this. The Fountain Gate’s association with a spring probably means that the name came from water bubbling up from the ground or down from a rock—our connotation of a ‘spring,’ rather than a fountain. In any case, the important point is that it indicates water which is not still and stagnant, but ‘live’—moving and bubbling. Jesus spoke of ‘living water’ when He talked to the Samaritan woman at the well. This verse (John 4:14) is difficult to translate. The Authorised Version reads ‘a well of water springing up,’ the NIV ‘a spring of water welling up,’ while the Zondervan Interlinear has ‘a fountain of water springing.’ The fountain is the source, or springhead, of the water.

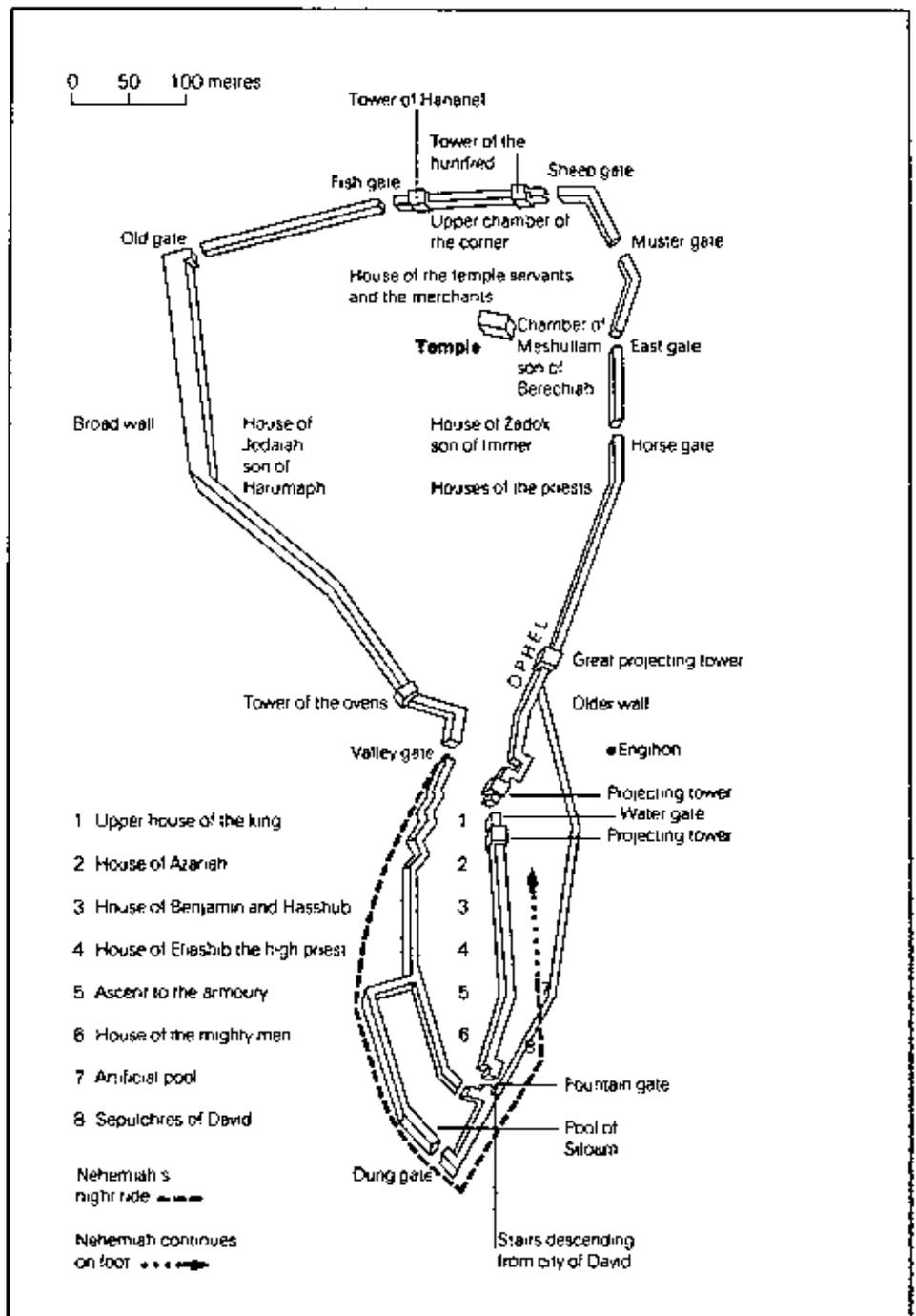
Wall without workers?

While discussing the previous gate, I drew attention to the lack of a list of workers from the Dung Gate to the Fountain Gate. The wall is not even mentioned. Even if there was only a short distance from one to the other there must have been a section of wall, and the work was carried out by somebody. So, as these Scriptures were under the inspiration of God, there must surely have been a reason for this omission.

I suggest that the Fountain Gate marks a position of change. Up to now, we could say that the spiritual emphasis of the Gate has been both on God in the gates, and on mankind’s response to Him. From here on,

the focus is entirely on the Lord God. The Fountain is a place of cleansing. Only God can accomplish this. Only He can cleanse our souls, and this is the focus of our attention. The section from the Dung Gate to the Fountain Gate is the work of God Himself, ac-

complished by Christ, and effective through the Holy Spirit. In our lives, confession and cleansing of sins are linked together. And so, symbolically, there is no wall between the two. In this cleansing, no created workers have a hand.



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.

The builders of the Fountain Gate and the wall beyond

The eastern side of the City was a place of special significance. The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun, son of Col-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. It is the only gate mentioned as being roofed over. The same man repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam by the King's Garden to the steps from the City of David. Nehemiah son of Ezbuk, ruler of half Beth Tun district, took up the work beyond Shallun, to the point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool and House of Heroes. (It is doubtful if the sites of these can now be established.) Then the Levites built a portion of the wall under Rehun. The continuing sections ran alongside the palaces of royalty and the residences of priests and the Temple servants. Mention of the House of David (his descendants), the artificial pool, the House of Heroes, the armory, angles in the wall, the High Priest's home, the tower of the Upper Palace, the Guard's Court, temple servants on the hill of Ophel, Levites, district repairs by rulers and countrymen; all these indicate that this side of the city held people, buildings and features of great importance. There were a wide variety of builders. Many were leaders, but there were also ordinary people working by their own homes. There was a special mention of Baruch (v.20), who showed particular zeal. A multitude of names, for the multitude of cleansed people God uses for His work.

A Trinity Gate

The 'Fountain cleansing' is solely the work of God. This is expressed beautifully in Isaiah 1:18, which exhorts us to reason

together with the Lord. *'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'* Familiarity with this concept may cause us Christians to lose sight of the enormity of it. No longer scarlet! White as the snow! Can we believe it? Do we wonder at it?

Cleansing concerns our redemption. This involves Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For the Father sent His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life. We think about the anguish of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. *'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'* But do we think and meditate on the anguish of the Father? It must have broken His heart to turn His loving back on His beloved Son, who was *'bearing our sins in His body on the tree.'* (1 Peter 2:24) The Fountain Gate is one of anguish. The Fountain Gate is effective in us, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. The commentary of Harry Ironside portrays this gate as a type or symbol of the Holy Spirit. This makes sense to me. He is the One Who reproves of sin, the One of righteousness and judgement (John 16:8). How meaningful, then, is the sprinkling of the Christian with water at baptism! Old Testament baptisms, too, were by pouring or sprinkling: a 'shadow' (Heb. 10:1, Col. 2:17) of things to come. (See Heb.9:10—washings = baptisms in Greek). John the Baptist declared, *'I baptise you with water, but He (Jesus) will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'* (Matt. 3:11).

The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to purify, refresh and empower. The Holy Spirit is poured upon us for cleansing, as our mode of baptism so biblically and beautifully demonstrates. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a so-called second blessing, as some say. The Spirit enters our lives, cleanses us, takes possession of our hearts. His power and strength are available to us from the moment we receive Jesus as Saviour.

In Joel 3: 18 is written: *'In that day...A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house...(v. 21)...I will pardon.'*

What day is Joel referring to? Trace it back through his book to 2:27, 28: *'You will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other...And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.'* Where is the link with the New Testament? In Acts 2:17 Peter quotes Joel on the Day of Pentecost, *'In the last days I will pour out My Spirit on all people...on My servants, both men and women...and they will prophesy...'*

V. 37,38: *'Brothers, what shall we do?'*

'Repent and be baptised so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

Yes, the work of the Holy Spirit is included at the Fountain Gate. The Fountain Gate is one of activity.

A Cleansing Gate

The Fountain Gate is one of greatest sacrifice and greatest blessing. The sprinkling fountain points to the One who was pierced for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The unfortunate division of Isaiah 52 and 53 separates us from the full text concerning the Suffering Servant. For chapter 52:10 *'He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted...'* leads on to 52:15, taking us straight to the fountain, *'so will he sprinkle many nations.'* This links in chapter 53 with the vivid portrait of the One who died at Calvary.

In this, we have no part whatsoever. We may come to the point of confession of sin in general at the Valley Gate, the point of bringing specific sins to the Dung Gate, but the cleansing is solely the act of God, accomplished by the death of the third Person of the Trinity, the incarnate Lord Jesus; no ordinary man can do this for us. So the verses from Zechariah 12 & 13, quoted at the beginning, take us to the Lord: *'They will look on me whom they have pierced...On that day a fountain will be opened to the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.'*

Let us look at another beautiful passage of the Bible. We must be careful not to take verses willy-nilly out of historical context. Yet we can see these promises are for us, and not just for the nation of Israel.

Ezekiel 36:25: *'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.'*

1 John 1:9 *'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'*

Oh, the wonder of the Fountain Gate! Does not our heart 'warm within us' as we see Him there, as in all the Scriptures?

Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling.

Naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to Thee for grace;

Foul I to the Fountain fly—Wash me, Saviour, or I die!

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The second suggested Method to win the war of ideas

Garnet Milne

III. Presuppositionalism/Grounded-in-God apologetics

The **Grounded-in-God** apologist denies that man can obtain a true knowledge of God by autonomous reason, reason without presupposing God.

As we noted previously, the name of the late Cornelius Van Til is the central figure of the **presuppositionalism/grounded-in-God** position. He was formerly a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, and popularised presuppositional apologetics through his lectures and books. Van Til **did not teach that the presentation of evidence was irrelevant to the task of apologetics**, hence the unhelpful terminology of evidentialism contrasted with presuppositionalism. Both approaches to apologetics have presuppositions attached to them and both make use of evidence. We have seen that the law of non-contradiction is one such presupposition of the neutral-ground apologist. The real difference is that the **neutral-ground** approach says that meaningful knowledge about Christianity can be understood and believed to be true by evaluating the evidence from the standpoint of a non-Christian world view, where God is not first presupposed.

The **grounded-in-God** approach argues that you can only begin to understand Christian teaching when you are standing in the Christian world view and therefore considering the evidence presented by the Christian apologist as you both presuppose the existence and revelation of the God of the Bible.

Therefore, the **grounded-in-God** approach teaches that any fact cannot be known truly unless it is known in its relationship to the one true and living God. Van Til postulates, therefore, that the unbeliever cannot have true knowledge of God and His revelation while standing in his unbelieving worldview. The unbeliever cannot claim that his autonomous reason will lead him to truth and to understand true facts, because all facts are related to God. To try to consider facts as "brute facts" which exist without reference to God is thus to talk nonsense.

Van Til would say, therefore, that **the battle is not over facts but over the philosophy of facts**.

Therefore the **grounded-in-God** apologist uses a different strategy than the **neutral-ground** Christian. The **grounded-in-God** apologist sets out to show that the unbeliever's world view will not enable him to know reality as long as he excludes God from his argumentation and, therefore, as long as he relies upon his autonomous reason.

For this reason, Van Til taught that it is unwise to suggest that there can be a neutral position from which the unbeliever and believer can engage in argument. There is no neutrality. Either you presuppose God or you presuppose that there is no God, or that God cannot be known.

But why take this approach to apologetics? Why not simply present good scientific arguments for the existence of God, for proving that Scripture is the Word of God, and for proving that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead?

Van Til would respond that the answer to these questions is found in the actual condition of the heart of the unbeliever.

- Man already knows that God exists (Rom. 1:19-20)
- He knows, but he suppresses that knowledge (Rom. 1:18)
- But the natural man, the unbeliever, replaces that knowledge with his autonomous reason to reject God.
- He is unable to find God from an alleged place of neutrality, where he can evaluate the arguments of the evidentialist, who tells him that he can reason without God to discover a conclusion that Christian theism is true and God exists.

Studying it through its critique

Although we have already gone so far into this presuppositional approach already, I have chosen to take a gradual approach as we build on concepts. Actually the best way of going deeper into the **grounded-in-God** position is to follow its critique of the **neutral-ground** viewpoint. What then is the **grounded-in-God** criticism of the **neutral-ground** or evidentialist position?

As we have seen, the **neutral-ground** approach does not begin with God's truth assumed at their starting point, in their methodology and in their endpoint. God is not presupposed in the presentation of the evidence or in its assessment by the unbeliever. Van Til singles out neutral-ground apologists

in his book *Defence of the Faith*. He says that since **neutral-ground** apologists (which he identifies as Roman Catholic and Arminian) are committed to a neutral starting point and methodology they are bound also to fall into the atomism of non-Christian thought. Since they will not look at all the facts as facts of the Christian theistic system, and flatly refuse to maintain that anything but a Christian theistic fact can exist at all, and with this claim challenge the non-Christian methodology from the outset of the argument, they are bound to be carried away to a non-Christian conclusion (DF 121-2).

The **neutral-ground** apologist thinks he can begin from a place of neutrality, and by drawing attention to general laws and empirical facts which can be understood apart from Scripture and accepted by both the Christian and non-Christian. You can see why Van Til, therefore, singles out Roman Catholicism and Arminianism for criticism. Both these religious systems hold that man has some ability within himself to help himself become a Christian. Those of us from the Reformed tradition, however, believe that salvation is all of grace. This being so, one can begin to see how the **neutral-ground** method of apologetics is generally considered inadequate by most though not all from a Reformed position. And why is this? Because the neutral ground position holds to an overly-optimistic view of the abilities of fallen man.

The **grounded-in-God** apologist, therefore, rejects the notion that you can understand



Cornelius Van Til

any fact fully and properly when leaving God out of the equation.

An example

Take the knowledge of a physical object like a tree. The unbeliever might be an expert in trees. He might know its name, and believe that he can understand all other knowable facts about that tree. He might know more about the tree that I do as a Christian. But if He does not assume God the Creator Who made the tree, however profound his knowledge of the facts about the tree may be, he does not truly know its import and reality. God is the creator of that tree; He sustains its life and has a purpose for that tree in His providence. Without assuming God, the unbeliever will never come to truly know that tree. The relationship of God, therefore, to any object of knowledge must be understood before we can use such facts in our reasoning.

Another difficulty, according to the **grounded-in-God** apologist, for the **neutral-ground** apologist is that he seeks to use his autonomous reason to argue in a linear and inductive fashion. But God cannot be proven in this way, as we have noticed in the cosmological argument.

A third feature of **neutral-ground** argumentation (although some evidentialists like R. C. Sproul would say they can achieve certainty) is that its proponents usually claim to be able to only prove **probability** and not certainty.

They can argue that God probably exists, but even the god they arrive at through man's autonomous reason is not the God of the Bible. It should now be obvious to us that the **grounded-in-God** apologist, the so-called presuppositionalist, does not reject facts, but rejects the idea that there can be a **neutral objective examination** of facts from the standpoint of man's autonomous reason.

The strategy of the **grounded-in-God** apologist, therefore, is to expose the falseness of the non-Christian worldview. And he does this with evidence and with facts. **But he always begins by assuming God's relationship to the evidence and to the facts.** The reason for this is simply because this strategy takes into account reality, whereas the **neutral-ground** apologist allows a "neutral" starting point, which in fact does not exist.

Point of contact

But if the **grounded-in-God** apologist is

to connect with the unbeliever he is trying to reach with the gospel, where is the point of contact? If there is no neutral ground—if the unbeliever lives in an unreal world and will not assume the existence of the Triune God and the authenticity of Scripture as the one reality—how can we bridge the gap or begin a worthwhile discussion? How can I expect to convey anything meaningful about the gospel to him?

As we have already seen, the **neutral-ground** evidentialist appeals to three presuppositions behind human experience: The law of non-contradiction, the law of causality and the reliability of sense experience.

The **grounded-in-God** apologist says that these are insufficient to assure true knowledge, especially when the one using them refuses to presuppose God's existence and revelation at the outset, thus effectively trying to prove reality even as he denies what is real. Thus using these three elements might make a god as prime-mover **possible**, or even **probable**; but it does not prove at all the certain existence of the Triune God of the Bible.

So what is the point of contact for the **grounded-in-God** apologist if he rejects these three elements of human logic and experience as a sufficient common-ground position?

Cornelius Van Til talks about the point of contact with the unbeliever in terms of a head-on collision. In his monograph, *Apologetics*, he declares: **"If there is no head-on collision with the systems of the natural man, there will be no point of contact with the sense of deity in the natural man"**.

Van Til, therefore, identifies the point of contact between the Christian apologist and the unbeliever in an internal sense of deity, or internal knowledge that God exists.

The 'proofs' of God, such as the ontological and cosmological proofs, argued for on the basis of man's autonomous reason, will not provide a sense of the true God. But all men do 'know' the true God instinctively. Van Til, therefore, appeals to the same Scriptures Sproul and other **neutral-ground** apologists point to, which demonstrate that all men have a sense of God's reality. This universal knowledge is something presupposed by the Christian, because it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Paul writes to the Romans, as we have already noted, that all men know about God: *'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being*

understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead' (Romans 1:19b-20a). Every human being knows about God's eternal power and divine nature. And Paul goes on to say in the next chapter that all men have the law of God written on their hearts also—so they know His righteous standards as well (Rom. 2:14-15).

So how does this truth become a point of contact for us and the unbeliever? Van Til puts it like this:

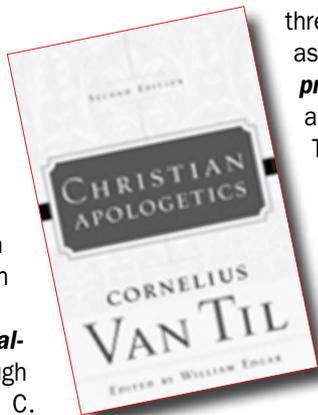
[The unbeliever] is the man with the iron mask. A true method of apologetics must seek to tear off that iron mask. The [grounded in God] apologist will point out again and again that the only method that will lead to the truth in any field is that method which recognizes the fact that man is a creature of God, that he must therefore seek to think God's thoughts after him.

Romans 1 also has something to say about **what the unbeliever or the natural man does with this knowledge** of God he receives from nature. Paul puts it starkly in verse 18: *'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.'* This holding of the truth in unrighteousness means that man holds down or suppresses the truth of God's eternal power and divine nature evident to him in the creation, as well as in knowledge of God's Law.

This 'holding' or 'holding down' borrows an image of a tyrant who unjustly imprisons the innocent. The natural man imprisons the truth by unrighteously or wickedly refusing to let that truth change him and his relationship with God. The **grounded-in-God** apologist must show the unbeliever that his worldview is ultimately destructive and irrational leading one further away from reason and science.

Van Til gives an illustration at this point:

"Suppose we think of a man made of water in an infinitely extended ocean of water, Desiring to get out of water, he makes a ladder of water, He sets this ladder upon the water and against the water and then climbs out of the water only to fall into the water. So hopeless and senseless a picture must be drawn of the natural man's methodology based as it is upon the assumption that time or chance is ultimate. On his assumption his own rationality is a product of chance. On his assumption even the laws of logic which he employs are products of chance, The rationality and purpose that he may be searching for are still bound to be products of chance. So then the Christian apologist,



whose position requires him to hold that Christian theism is really true and as such must be taken as the presupposition which alone makes the acquisition of knowledge in any field intelligible, must join his “friend” in his hopeless gyrations so as point out to him that his efforts are always in vain”.

Pointing to a man’s own complete inadequacy

Van Til says that it is the task of the Christian apologist to endeavour to awaken the unbeliever to the fact that he holds to an impossible and unreal world as long as he suppresses the knowledge of God. Thus the unbeliever is self-deceived and cannot in his present state see the truth.

Another way of stating the difference between these two apologetics is this: The **neutral-ground** apologist believes that man has much knowledge of himself and the cosmos and from this knowledge can ask whether Christianity is true or whether God exists. The **grounded-in-God** apologist, on the other hand, believes that **nothing** can be known about man unless Christianity is reality.

This does not mean that Van Til would say that the unbeliever can have no true knowledge. Obviously he can make tremendous advances in science, even though he might identify himself as an atheist. No, the unbeliever can advance science because he secretly or subconsciously presupposes God. Since the only logical alternative to a God-controlled universe is a universe of chance, why does the atheistic science believe in the principle of uniformity or a law of non-contradiction or causality or the basic reliability of the senses? He can only do this because he is at the very least **operating on the assumption** that he can trust a principle of uniformity. This trust is consistent with presupposing God, but inconsistent with presupposing chance.

It is only because the unbeliever is ‘borrowing’ Christian assumptions such as providence and creation that he can make progress in science and have true knowledge. Therefore Van Til stated, “*Anti-theism presupposes theism*”.

Thus Van Til could argue that there was infallible **evidence** for the existence of God—but you have to presuppose God to see it, or to achieve true knowledge in God’s universe.

The best and only possible proof for the existence of such a God is that his existence is required for the uniformity of nature and for the coherence of all things in the world.... Thus there is absolutely certain proof for the

existence of God and the truth of Christian theism. Even non-Christians presuppose its truth while they verbally reject it. They need to presuppose the truth of Christian theism in order to account for their own accomplishments.

Since therefore all men have a knowledge of God, this is a point of contact and the groundwork where evidence properly presented may have good effect.

But Van Til can also say, that while everyman **has** this inner sense of God, because he suppresses it according to Romans 1:18 he also does **not have** a knowledge of God—this second knowledge which involves love and fellowship and submission. This knowledge the natural man does not have until he is born again.

God’s Spirit needed

In what sense, then, can this suppressed knowledge of God be common ground where progress can be made in drawing the unbeliever to see the truth of the Word of God about man, God and eternity? When the apologist explains the truth to the sinner, he is at the same time praying that God will illuminate the unbeliever and regenerate him so that he can submit to the truth of God’s Word. God can effect that process by applying Scripture truth to the unbeliever, especially initially this truth that man has completely distorted the way God intended him to look at the world. If he would truly see the world as it really is he has to adopt Christian presuppositions, which mean presupposing God and His special revelation the Bible. The reason the natural man must do this is because until he does, he rejects the conception of an authority that stands above reason. Van Til notes that “*it is logically quite impossible for the natural man, holding as he does to the idea of autonomy, even to consider the ‘evidence’ for the Scripture as the final and absolute authoritative revelation of the God of Christianity.*”

He explains that the modern natural man reasons with assumptions which always involve **brute facts** and **chance**. Brute facts which exist without reference to God are not reality. There are no brute facts which have no reference to God. And since the unbeliever does not presuppose that God’s counsel controls all reality he must believe that chance is ultimate, since man’s freedom is not in any way constrained by a sovereign

God, the God of Scripture. The autonomous man must believe in chance because he rejects the idea that reality is structural by nature, being structured by God’s eternal plan.

Man himself, in modern systems of non-biblical thought, gives structure to reality. In other words man takes the irrational facts living in a universe of chance and give rationality or structure to that universe. In post-modern terms, this rationality is just for the individual. His neighbour might construct his reality differently as he rationalises the

irrational. Such a person is hardly ready to receive the Bible as the Word of God. Van Til points out that ‘*modern man who believes that he possesses an autonomous reason finds the idea of in-scripturated supernatural revelation totally destructive of his idea of autonomy on which he builds his thought*’.

He notes that the autonomous reasoner finds a self-contained God meaningless. Equally so, the concept of a revelation must be

meaningless which defines what will happen in the future and which demonstrates that man is not an autonomous thinker at all.

Therefore unless he receives the Holy Spirit to enable the inner testimony of the Spirit to confirm to man’s spirit that the Bible is the Word of God, he will not believe it no matter how hard the evidentialist tries to present facts and evidences which support the idea. Why? Because the **real** “fact” that the universe is structured by God and that God reveals Himself in His special revelation the Bible is illogical to the unbeliever.

It is irrational to agree that the God of Scripture exists when you are reasoning along the lines of the autonomous man, whose very autonomy denies the existence of the sovereign God Who ordains whatever comes to pass. Such a man will accept that there might be a finite god, or a god of the philosophers who is a prime-mover, or a god whose will is thwarted by the freedom of men, but that is not the God of the Scriptures. Equally, the Scriptures are not the revelation of a finite god which allows man to retain his autonomy.

So this is the criticism of the Christian **grounded-in-God** apologist or the **neutral-ground** apologist who tries to meet the unbeliever in some neutral position which does not assume God at the very outset.



Conclusion

It is the philosophy or thinking or worldview of the unbeliever which must be destroyed if He is going to truly come to faith in the God of the Bible, the one true and living God.

Van Til sums up the beliefs of the unbeliever when it comes to the Scriptures.

- The God of Scripture does not exist because He cannot exist according to the logic of the autonomous thinker. The idea of brute facts which do not need God mean that God's (the God of the Bible) existence is negated
- If God does exist, He could not show Himself to the world, because that world is made up of brute facts which are not themselves God's revelation of Himself. As Christians, we say that all creation declares the glory of God.
- If God did exist and reveal Himself in a world which is made up of brute facts and therefore not a manifestation of God, if anyone received that revelation they would be falsifying God's revelation since it conflicts with their world of brute facts and autonomous thinking.

All this means that the evidentialist has

an uphill battle when he allows autonomous man to consider the Christian's 'evidence' for the Bible as the Word of God.

The neutral-ground evidentialist has to argue in an unusual way. He will first try and convince the unbeliever of the **possibility** of revelation as if the Word of God means the same thing for believer and unbeliever alike. Van Til rightly adds that 'revelation as if the Word of God' does not mean the same thing. The unbeliever equates possibility with chance on the one hand, and something the unbeliever can rationalise on the other. In contrast, for the Christian, possibility is that which '*may happen in accord with the plan of God*'.

The **neutral-ground** apologist also thinks he can prove the **probability** of supernatural revelation. But again probability means something different to the believer and to the natural man. If chance is allowed for, which is always the case for the natural man, then, as Scottish philosopher David Hume showed, there can be *no probability* that God would reveal Himself supernaturally.

Equally when the evidentialist tries to show the natural man that Christianity is based on historical **facts**, he cannot go far

enough. Even if the natural man accepts that Jesus rose from the dead, he does not therefore need to conclude that the Bible is the Word of God as testified by Christ. Since a fact to him is different from a fact to the Christian, he does not have to make the link that Christ's resurrection proves the veracity of the Bible. Facts cannot be disconnected from their meaning.

For the unbeliever, whose thinking is in terms of possibilities and probabilities, the 'fact' of the resurrection which he may accept is a different fact than that understood by the Christian. The unbeliever does not believe the full meaning of the fact. The theological meaning gives content to the fact and if the unbeliever merely accepts the possibility or probability that a man Jesus Christ rose from the dead, he has not believed the same fact a believer has received. He has voided reality of meaning.

The evidentialist, **neutral-ground** defender of the faith equally might convince the unbeliever of many facts about the Bible, but if the unbeliever does not submit to its message, then he has not understood that the Bible is the Word of God. His own autonomous reasoning which presupposes chance and brute facts without God will prevent him, as long as he retains his autonomy, from ever being convinced that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God to which he must submit all his reasoning.

Even **sin** itself, which can only be rectified by an external supernatural grace of the self-existent God, makes no sense when one also believes that there is such grace to save—something the natural man cannot accept because of his rejection of a sovereign God who controls history. There are **no brute facts** but only **facts as they connect to God**.

The Reformed/presuppositional/**grounded-in-God** position must challenge the natural man's appeal to brute facts (in metaphysics) and the autonomy of the mind (in epistemology), for these two assumptions control and guide the thinking of the natural man. But since they are a denial of reality, the **grounded-in-God** apologist seeks to get the unbeliever to shed these assumptions. In Van Til's terms—to take off these coloured glasses so that he can see reality, which is always connected to God. The **grounded-in-God** apologist firstly must present the 'facts' as they really exist, which is to say he presupposes God and His relationship to those facts from the outset.

What are some of these facts:

- "God's self-contained existence

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. 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 telephone: (04) 564 8552/ fax (04) 564 9305 Postal: PO Box 43-127, Wainuiomata 5014, New Zealand

- The fact of creation in general and man made in God's image in particular
- The fact of the comprehensive plan and providence of God with respect to all that takes place in the universe
- The fact of the fall of man and his subsequent sin"

Van Til adds that *'it is in relation to these facts that the other facts pertaining to the redemptive work of Christ are what they are.'* There is, therefore, only one system of reality; and that is the reality defined by these facts. Thus you are not presenting the facts as they are, if they are not presented as relating to this system.

Since human autonomy contradicts these facts—pre-eminently the fact that God is sovereign—then we must suggest to the natural man that his reasoning process, which presupposes human autonomy, is not part of reality and therefore he cannot possibly come to the right conclusions about reality.

'Inherent in this system' is the idea that God reveals His will through supernaturally-

given special revelation. The natural man who rejects this revelation cannot truly act upon **'evidence'** given to him, because that 'evidence' contradicts his precious autonomy at every point.

Since the preaching of the cross is foolishness to the natural man, and since he suppresses the truth about the God he knows according to Romans, and because he distorts the law of God which is written on his heart, only a supernatural change of his presuppositions and world view will enable him to receive the Christian faith. He must be regenerated or born again by the Spirit of God. This will mean that he discards the glasses of the autonomous man and embraces the whole system of Christianity, including the truth that the Bible is the touchstone of all truth and all reality.

Therefore we must tell the unbeliever that unless he accepts the Bible as the interpreter of reality about God, the world, and man, then he will never find true meaning in anything—even the truths of Scripture.

So which apologetical approach is the

best one? Rightly understood, we are to use **evidences** as God intended to bring the unbeliever to reject his appeal to human autonomy. As we present the arguments of Scripture which may be also supported by argumentation, archaeology, history and science, we must always endeavour to make it clear to the person we are witnessing to that our 'evidences' are grounded-in-God evidences and that there is no neutral ground where he can stand to evaluate them. By God's grace, the unbeliever may be given the eyes to see the truth about himself and about reality and come to see his need for a Saviour in Jesus Christ. We are, therefore, also to argue from reality—insisting that there is only one reality and it is the Christian reality, which is taught fully in Scripture. Yes we must present evidence and we must hold to and insist upon our presuppositions, that the God of Scripture *is*, and He has revealed His will fully for faith and life in the pages of the Word of God.

Focus on home

Andrew Reinders

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Avondale

Family announcements: Rev. John Zuidema's visit: This Thursday (13th), the Lord willing, The Rev John and Mrs Trudy Zuidema will come to Avondale. From the airport they will travel to the van Trigt's, where they will stay while they are in Auckland. On Friday there will be a meeting with session members and their wives and on Sunday, Rev. Zuidema will lead the morning and evening worship services. Please note: there will be a SHARED LUNCH after the morning service, for which we ask you all to bring a plate and something extra. Also, some opportunity will be given for one-to-one meetings with Rev. Zuidema.

Cadet and Calvinette Sunday: Next Sunday (July 23rd) is Cadet and Calvinette Sunday. This is a great opportunity for the congregation to learn more about this ministry and

also to meet and encourage the parents of some of the children that attend who do not belong to our church. There will be a shared lunch afterwards for the whole congregation, so could every family please bring a plate. And in connection with Cadet and Calvinette Sunday there will be a special collection for the Mission Badge that the clubs throughout the country are working on this year. This year's Mission Badge is for the New Life Orphanage in Myanmar (formerly Burma) You may remember that we also had New Life Orphanage as Mission Badge in 2004. You may also remember that this orphanage was founded by the Rev. Zaw and Bella Hlaing and that Rev Zaw went to be with the Lord in 2004 after a long illness. This orphanage is bursting at the seams so they are establishing a second site. The current site has to reduce numbers by 30 because of overcrowding. They have also been asked take 71 children from another orphanage, so you can see the need is great. Br. Eric Petrusma spoke at the Cadet and Calvinette Executive in April about the New Life Orphanage and their needs. Tomorrow night the Cadets and Calvinettes will complete the Mission Badge.

Bishopdale

Wedding Invitation: Hadleigh de Reus and Jenny Snoek warmly invite you to witness their marriage vows at 12.30 pm on Saturday 1 July at St Andrew's at Rangī Ruru, 21 Merivale Lane. Everyone is welcome; we would be delighted if you would come and share this special day with us.

Bishopdale Church Camp 2006 Hanmer Springs Forest Camp - Friday 2 Nov to Sunday 5 Nov 2006. Great fun and fabulous fellowship, fine food, Saturday morning devotion by Rob van Wichen, Saturday afternoon activities: Hot Pools, bike ride and walking. Saturday evening Family Entertainment by the whole family – Start practising your items now. All this for ... less than the price of a tank of petrol. See the poster in the hall! Please see Vivien Mahoney to reserve your suite now.

We grieve with the Dalley family this week. Nicol Dalley, Jean's eldest son, died suddenly on Wednesday this week of a heart attack. So please remember Jean, Peter, Margaret and Rodney Thompson, Murray Dalley and the wider family in your prayers. May the Lord comfort you and give you His

peace. The funeral will take place on Tuesday afternoon at around 1pm at Hororata Anglican Church. Please speak to the Thompsons or Murray Dalley to find out the exact time if you intend going.

Buckland's Beach

Pastoral. School holidays! Half-way through the academic year. I note also that it is the week which the leadership here at Buckland's Beach has traditionally set aside as 'family week' - no organised activities. It's a stay-at-home week during which the focus is on being together. Let's strive, as much as is possible, to do that this week. There are therefore no (almost!) organised activities this week. No Sunday School, no Cadets and Gems, no Catechism Classes, no Women's Fellowship!

Christchurch

Cadets and Calvinettes. Parents and families are invited to join us tomorrow night at 7.00 pm to our Badge Presentation night. Please bring a plate and join us for supper.

Br. Verak Rin and Sr. Janelle van Leeuwen have indicated their desire to publicly profess their faith. The elders have met with them, and we look forward to witnessing their profession, the Lord willing, during the morning service on 30 July. We give thanks to God for His faithfulness in continuing to draw to Himself a people from different cultures and backgrounds, joined as one by a faith in our common Lord and Saviour.

Our condolences go out to Sr. Johanna Bouman and to all the family and friends of Br. Dick Bouman, who passed away this past Tuesday and whose funeral was held in our church on Friday. Though the pain and grief caused by death can be so difficult, we give thanks for the hope and the comfort we have in belonging to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. We look forward to gathering together with all the saints in the final resurrection and celebrating the glory of God forever.

Dovedale

From the Pastor: A number of you are aware that I have been investigating the process of appealing to the High Court in relation to the Broadcasting Standards' Authority upholding TVNZ's position that they did not breach the broadcasting standards when they showed a skit depicting Jesus as a pop singer and a stripper, being run over by a bus while singing "I will survive..." The assessment has come back from the lawyers indicat-

ing there are only slim grounds to appeal and that it is unlikely that the Court would reverse the decision. Given this scenario, I am unwilling to commit more resources to this particular case, so will not be taking it further. However, I have learned a great deal along the way and DV will write about this in FF and perhaps other outlets. I've also received much encouragement from other Christians who are concerned about TVNZ's broadcasting of that item and the standards of journalism in general. Thank you for your encouragement and support. MF.

The editor and his beautiful wife are now house sitting in Avonhead. If you desperately need to get in contact with either the editor or his beautiful wife you can ring 0276732444 or their parents on 033423596. If you do not need to urgently contact the editor or his beautiful wife yet you still would like to let them know something then feel free to email them on jmf88@student.canterbury.ac.nz. Kind regards, the editor and his beautiful wife: J & H Flinn.

Dunedin

Congratulations to country members Jack and Ann Verkade as they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this weekend at Invercargill.

We give thanks to God for many years of service by Nel van't Wout as a Christian school teacher and principal of Liberton Christian School. Nel retired from teaching on Friday and was honoured with an offsite farewell function last night.

From the Sound Desk. There has been a quite an increase lately in the workload of our sound technicians Chris Storm and Shane van Dyk. We have long appreciated their work in regulating the public address system so that speakers can be heard throughout the auditorium. During the service the correct microphone must be selected, switching between the remote one on the pulpit, the lectern mike, or, during singing, just the ambient microphones which record the congregation as a whole. Then, some time ago, a loop system was installed for the hard of hearing and it must be remembered to switch this on. More recently the task of controlling the data projector has been added. Now we can enjoy crystal-clear text of creeds, confessions and forms as well as new songs. The operators must also be on their toes for occasions when liturgy requiring on-screen text is announced without prior warning. Lastly is the task of recording the services. Traditionally this has been, and will continue to be,

done using cassette tape. A stock of tapes enables recordings to be held for about two months. However, with the introduction of digital recording, sermons can now be held indefinitely. The first part of this process is accomplished by providing a sound feed to the computer which captures the sermon in a highly compressed, high-quality format. It is planned to periodically transfer several months' worth of sermons to a single CD in MP3 format as a permanent record. These CDs can be played on recent technology players including DVD players and computers. However, for just one dollar, a standard-format CD can be made for anyone who wishes to obtain their own copy of a particular sermon. As our current equipment requires a minor reconnection of components, to enable digital sound capture after switching off the data projector, we thank you for your patience while this takes place.

Pastoral notes. We rejoice with Andrew and Lydia Nugteren and family at the safe arrival of Devlin Joel last Saturday in Dunedin Hospital. We give thanks to God that mother and child are both doing well. Devlin will receive the sign and seal of covenant baptism this Lord's Day in the evening service. Welcome also to family members staying with the Nugterens this weekend.

Film Night. It is planned to screen Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace on Saturday 22 July, 7:30 pm, in the church hall. A highly respected German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer became more widely known after his work in assisting the Jews during the Second World War. To whet readers' appetites a short biography can be found elsewhere in this bulletin. This film is rated M and is recommended as suitable for adults and older youth.

Foxton

Thoughts to ponder: Growing old is inevitable ... growing UP is optional. There is no key to happiness ... the door is always open. Silence is often misinterpreted but never misquoted. A grudge is a heavy thing to carry. Faith is the ability to not panic. Laugh every day ... it's like inner jogging. If you worry, you didn't pray ... If you pray, don't worry. When we get tangled up in our problems, be still ... God wants us to be still so He can untangle the knot. As a child of God, prayer is kind of like calling home everyday.

Hamilton

Reformed Church of Hamilton. One day conference - 5th August 2006. You are warmly invited to this conference sponsored by

our church. The speaker is Mr Stephen C. Perks, founder and director of The Kuyper Foundation, Somerset, England. The Kuyper Foundation is a charitable trust set up to promote a renaissance of Christian culture in society by furthering awareness of the implications of the Christian faith for every sphere of life, including the church, family and State, a vision first expressed by Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch Christian theologian and Statesman around the end of the 19th century. The topic is Religious Syncretism and Idolatry in the West - Part 1 & 2. The conference commences at 10.30 am and concludes with afternoon tea at 2.30 pm. A light lunch will be prepared and served at 12.00 noon. Information brochures available in the church foyer.

Hastings

Table tennis. Table tennis will be starting up again in the church on Friday nights at 7.15pm from June 30 (this Friday). Come along to enjoy some fellowship and a bit of competition!

Wedding banns. The session has given approval for the wedding of Jonathan Wierenga to Ingrid van der Werff this Saturday at 1 p.m here in the Reformed Church of Hastings. If there are any lawful objections to the wedding, please make them known to the pastor who will be conducting the wedding ceremony. This is a public ceremony and the session invites the whole congregation to participate and to rejoice with the Wierenga and van der Werff families on this special occasion. Both families also invite everyone to join with them for afternoon tea in the fellowship hall after the ceremony.

From the Pastor. If your Bible study group is looking for some good material, you might want to consider the DVD, "Amazing Grace – The History and Theology of Calvinism" produced by the Apologetics Group. It includes four hours of content that can be divided into 8 sessions. Speakers include Dr. R.C. Sproul, Dr. George Grant, Dr. Thomas Nettles. There is also a study guide available for further study of the Scriptures on each of these topics. Lauretta Duinkerke, our new church librarian, has this DVD. The study guide can be purchased from: www.apologeticsgroup.com. There are some other DVDs and CDs available from this website that would be good for Bible study groups or the youth club: "History of Christianity", "Hells Bells 2 – The Power and Spirit of Popular Music", and "Defending the Christian Worldview with Dr. Greg Bahnsen".

Hukanui

With our Government being so generous as to refund a substantial amount of our donations to the church, we would like to suggest that you be as generous and donate your refund back to the church, either to meet our budget or for the Building Fund. After all, it is money we had already given away, so in reality we don't have it anyway! If you would like it to go the Building Fund, simply place it in the offering bag, marked appropriately.

From your friendly, smiling treasurer!

A Mid-Winter Feast. Dear Church Family, You are all invited to A Mid-Winter Feast on the 28th and 29th of July. Please keep one of these dates free, we'd love for you to be there. More details will be released as we get closer to the dates. Please see Renee Termaat at Hukanui or Louise ten Hove at Aberdeen. We look forward to a wonderful evening with you! Yours sincerely, F.L.A.M.E Reformed Youth.

Mangere

Pastoral. Today is the Sunday on which the Cadets & Calvinette have a special profile. We will be able to see some of the work they do and during our service this morning there is a special offering for their mission project – this year it is the New Life Orphanage in Myanmar (We can also find out more about this mission project on one of their notice boards). We are thankful for our Counsellors and all the work they do for the Club. May the Lord continue to bless them – personally and in the club.

Pastoral. We rejoice with Br & Sr Jacco & Carmen Verheij upon the birth of Naomi Elizabeth Verheij! She was born at 10:29 PM on the 5th of July and weighed in at 3,180 grams (around 7 lb, 7 oz) She is a baby we've all been waiting for! And we are thankful that all has gone well for mother and child. May our gracious God now guide Jacco and Carmen as they bring Naomi up in the love and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Naomi Elizabeth Verheij

Masterton

Men's Breakfast. Ever wondered about your 'calling in life'? Ever been bored with your job? Not sure what to do when you leave school or when you retire? Come and learn how to tackle these questions from a clear biblical perspective. This Saturday (15th) morning 8 - 9.30am @ Homeleigh. Breakfast supplied. All men welcome!

Netball Challenge. On Friday 14 July (the last Friday of the holidays) we will challenge the fit women and college girls of Silverstream and Wainuiomata to games of netball at the Indoor Sports Centre in Masterton. Two games will be played concurrently at 2:30pm - one team comprising women and the other college age girls. Let Rosalind know if you wish to play.

Wedding Banns: Evert Hendrik Dirk Jan (Erik Jan) Budding and Rhonda Jane Hendrikse have indicated their desire to be united in marriage. If there are no lawful objections, the wedding will take place, the Lord willing, this Saturday the 22nd of July. May the Lord grant this couple grace to fulfil the vows they will make before God and men, and enable Erik Jan and Rhonda in their relationship to reflect the relationship and communion between Christ and His church.

Nelson

Something to think about: Brownies with a difference (courtesy of Alf Deacon). Many parents find it hard work to explain to their children and teens why some video games, music, movies, books, and magazines are not acceptable material for them to bring into the home, for their teens to see, or hear. One parent came up with an original idea that was hard to refute. He listened to all the reasons his children gave for wanting to see a particular PG-13 movie: It had their favourite actors; Everyone else was seeing it; Even church members said it was great; It was only rated PG-13 because of the suggestion of sex. They never really showed it; The language was pretty good - they only used the Lord's name in vain three times in the whole movie; The video effects were fabulous and the plot was action-packed. Yes, there was the scene where a building and a bunch of people got blown up, but the violence was just the normal stuff. It wasn't very bad. Even with all these explanations for the rating, the father wouldn't give in. He didn't even give them a satisfying explanation for saying, "No." He just said, "No." A little later that same evening, this father asked his teens if they would like some brownies he had prepared.

He explained that he had taken the family's favourite recipe and added something new. They asked what it was. He calmly replied that he had added a special ingredient - "dog poop." He purposely added that it was "only a little bit." All the ingredients were gourmet quality. He had taken great care to bake it at the precise temperature for the exact time. He was sure the brownies would be superb. Even with all the explanations of the perfect attributes of the brownies, the teens would not take one. The father acted surprised. There was only one little element that would have caused them to act so stubbornly. He assured them that they would hardly notice it if at all. They all held firm and would not try the brownies. He then explained that the movie they wanted to see was just like the brownies. Sin enters our minds and our homes by deceiving us into believing that just a little bit of evil won't matter. With the brownies, "just a little bit" makes all the difference between a great brownie and a totally unacceptable product. He explained that even though the movie people would have us believe many of the movies which are coming out are acceptable for adults and teens to see, they are not. Now when this father's teens want to do something or see something they should not, the father merely asks them if they would like some of his special brownies... and they never ask about that activity again.

North Shore

Wedding banns: At its pastoral meeting last week, Session received a request for marriage from Joel Brunton and Natalie Smith to which we give our approval. The wedding will take place, Lord willing, on Saturday, 1st July, failing any lawful objections. The whole congregation is invited; please bring a plate for afternoon tea so that we may have a time of fellowship with them afterwards. Joel & Natalie, we wish and pray for you the Lord's blessings and may he give you grace and strength to build a truly Christian home.

Invitation to all. B A R N D A N C E for the young and not so young on Saturday 5th August, 2006. Please make a note on your calendars and in your diaries for this not to be missed evening of fun and dancing together. More details to come in the next few weeks

Congratulations to Wayne and Hannah Bredemijer on the birth of Leon Frederic, born last Sunday morning. We rejoice with you, praising God for all that He has given you, and trust that He will enable you to raise Leon and Carlo in His ways.

Palmerston North

Bible Study. We will have a study on evangelism as well as discuss ideas on how we can better reach out into the community (we will resume our studies on Christ's mediatorial kingship next time). Venue at the Milnes 57 Totara St at 7.30pm.

Pukekohe

Family 'Lympics: When? Saturday the 15th of July in the Recreation Centre (Franklin Sport Swim & Fitness), Franklin Road, Pukekohe. Where? 2:00pm to 5:00pm, with potluck dinner afterwards in the church (please bring a mains dish and a dessert dish). What do I do now? Register your team on the registration form in the lounge as soon as possible, so we can start planning the games. The format will be a bit different than the years before - you'll have more opportunity to see and encourage the other teams, but don't worry, everyone's favorite game (rag hockey) will still be part of it. For the families who don't know about our Family 'Lympics yet: Families compete against other church families in several different, sometimes (very) tiring, games. There are no age restrictions, it's going to be fun for young and old(er). If you have a large family and you can form more than 1 team, that's okay, just register each team separately. Or, if you're a member (or 2) short, combine with someone else to form a team. Any questions or good ideas? See Ineke. Love to see you all there!

From the Pastor: The first Holiday Club ever run by our church was held this week from Monday to Thursday. On most days numbers ranged between 21-28 children. Everything was well organised and went smoothly, and the whole programme was greatly enjoyed by all the children. Our thanks to the organising committee (Sarah Kingham, Jennifer Loef, and Georgina Voschezang) for all your work, and to all those who came and helped. You did a fine job and we pray that it may be used in the spread of the good news about Jesus in this community. Are you reading our denominational magazine, Faith in Focus? Our church has a bulk subscription so that every member and family can have their own copy. We do this because we believe it is a worthwhile magazine that everyone will profit from reading. The June issue has an excellent article about texting - compulsory reading for all the youth! Sally Davey has written a very moving account of the short but godly lives of John and Betty Stam, who were killed by communist soldiers as missionary martyrs in China in 1934. The July

issue is available today from the table in the lounge. It has some interesting articles about the pastoral and preaching work of the minister. On the back cover you'll find a clear photo of the ministers and wives present at the conference last May. Turn off your TV for an evening and do some reading!

Wainuiomata

Open home – 80th birthday celebration. You are invited to come and help us celebrate Arie de Vries' 80th birthday on Saturday 8th July 2006. Come anytime between 2pm and 5pm at Paul and Caroline de Vries', 24 Kaponga Street. Wainuiomata.

Wellington

Ladies night out. Ladies Night Out for this month is a "Bring and Brag" night. It will be held tomorrow at Marianne Bos' place at 8pm. No, we are not encouraging boastfulness and pride, but this is a chance to see what crafts the women in the congregation are doing and get ideas for our own crafts. You may do knitting, sewing, scrap booking, painting, folk-art or some other crafts. You may be a beginner or an expert. Whatever crafts you do please bring an item or two to share. We look forward to seeing you. Petra and Marianne.

Auckland Presbytery Training Day

The 2006 Training Day for present and potential Office Bearers was held in the Reformed Church of the North Shore on the 22nd July 2005. Some 45 men from the church of Presbytery were warmly welcomed and provided for by the North Shore folk.

During this day the North Shore minister, the Rev. John Rogers, led a much appreciated reflection on 'What is a Christian Man?' in the morning session and 'What is Christian Male Maturity?' in the afternoon.

There were good questions asked, resulting in good discussion. It was particularly helpful to see how our society has been affected by modern feminism which has gutted much of the leadership character men have had in the past. The thesis that "man is hard" brought this out especially.

Right throughout the talks and discussion we were thrown back time and again on the example of the perfect man Himself – our Lord Jesus Christ. He showed us how to be the firm and yet loving leader which is the way of obedience to the Lord.

Our thanks go to the North Shore church for this much appreciated day of equipping and fellowship.

These talks were taped and may be order via the Reformed Church of the North Shore – email: jrogers@clear.net.nz, or P.O. Box 101762, NSMC, Auckland.

AUCKLAND PRESBYTERY REPORT

The Auckland Presbytery met on Friday 30th June 2006 at the Reformed Church of Pukekohe. Rev. R. Noppers opened the meeting by saying a few words on Titus 1:1, pointing out that the first title the apostle Paul uses to describe himself is that of servant: a slave to Christ. This is also our title, a reminder of whom we belong to and whom we serve.

Rev. J. Rogers was appointed as moderator, Rev. D. van Garderen as vice-moderator, and Rev. R. Noppers as reporter. The agenda was adopted with a couple of additions.

Progress on planning for the upcoming Men's Study Day, to be held in North Shore on the 22nd July, was briefly reported on. Rev. J. Rogers will be leading each session. Since Presbytery will be conducting two preliminary exams, for Br Michael Willemse and Br Pieter van Huysteen, the various parts of each

Important notice regarding future Family Camps

The Auckland and Wellington Presbytery Family Camp Committees have agreed that the time for a change in the organisation of our annual Family Camps has come. It has therefore been decided (with the approval of the two Presbytery's) that there will be no Family Camp for 2006/07. Family Camps will now be held every second year, in different locations as decided by the organising committee in that area. This has come about for a number of reasons; lack of response in joining the organising committees, changing demographics within our churches, cost of camp sites, and a number of other reasons.

We are agreed that it is beneficial to have this opportunity to get together and hope that members of the Reformed Churches will still be keen to do this every 2nd year. At present the Auckland Presbytery will organise the camp for 2007/08 and it is planned to hold this at Finlay Park, the dates are yet to be confirmed and may well be different from previous years. Further information will be available early next year. The camp for 2009/10 would then be organised by the Wellington area and be held within that location. There is then the possibility of other churches in the North and South Island agreeing to organise and host future camps.

We are sorry for any inconvenience this may cause but this is the earliest that we have been able to inform you of this decision.

If you have any thoughts or comments on the above that you would like to pass on to the Family Camp committees, please e-mail Helen Wassenaar, ahwassenaar@paradise.net.nz or mail a note to Helen at 23 Busby St, Auckland 0600. If you are keen to help with the organisation of a future camp, or have a group that would be happy to organise a Family Camp in your local area, then please get in touch as soon as you can.

Thank you for taking the time to read this notice.

exam were allocated to the ministers.

Several of the churches are asked questions about their spiritual life at each Presbytery meeting. This time Pukekohe, Avondale and Bucklands Beach responded. Missions seem to be becoming more of a focus, with both Pukekohe and Avondale setting aside a minimum of 10% of their budget to mission work. Christian education is also a high priority, with parents in these churches encouraged to support and send their children to the local Christian schools although the cost, especially for new migrant families, is increasingly becoming an issue. On the whole attendance at worship and other church activities like Bible Studies is good, with Bucklands Beach holding a church camp every couple of years at which 50-60% of the congregation attend. It was also encouraging to hear of blessings in the churches, with Pukekohe looking forward to another Profession of Faith, Avondale rejoicing that some families had recently been reconciled, and Bucklands Beach giving thanks for some ladies who had come to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour through the language assisted Bible Studies. Avondale requested prayer as they enter into a period of vacancy.

Three brothers led in prayer for the individual churches.

Amongst the Correspondence received, a short report was given of matters found in other Presbytery and Classis minutes. A letter from the Family Camp Committee was received detailing their proposal to go to biennial rather than yearly camps. Some time was spent discussing a preaching roster for the two vacant churches, with each church responsible to finalise their own pulpit supply. Hamilton requested approval to use a song in worship, which was given.

Rev. D. van Garderen gave a short report on the work of OMB, particularly with regards to plans to have a fulltime minister working in PNG in the next three years or so.

The credentials for Rev. J. Terhorst, who has accepted a call to serve in Blaxland, NSW, were signed, and Rev. D. van Garderen was appointed counsellor for Avondale during their vacancy. Rev. J. Haverland was appointed to replace Rev. Terhorst as liaison to the National Publications Committee, and Rev. R. Noppers as reporter to monitor the minutes of CRCA Classes.

Hamilton congregation requested prayer for the Christian Schools Association, who have been requested to meet with the Honourable Steve Maharey, minister for education, on Thursday 6th July to consider the impact and implication of Government policy

and funding on Christian Schools.

The next meeting was set for Friday 13th and Saturday 14th October, 2006, in Pukekohe and North Shore respectively, to examine the vicars. Should an extra meeting be required, a further date was set for 24th November.

The meeting was closed in prayer.

Rev R Noppers

SHORT REPORT OF THE MEETING OF CHRISTCHURCH PRESBYTERY HELD ON 15TH JULY 2006

The moderator, Rev Michael Flinn, welcomed everyone and opened with a devotion on Psalm 67 and then led in prayer. Presbytery approved Rob Vosslamber as the new clerk. Leo Fietje received a vote of thanks for his work as clerk over many years. Dovedale delegates presented a proposal regarding funds donated by presbytery to a particular committee of our churches. Following discussion, presbytery agreed on the following motion: 'When funds are donated by the Presbytery to a committee overseeing a particular ministry on behalf of the churches, the clerk in sending the funds to that committee should also request a report to be submitted to an appropriate meeting of presbytery giving details of how the funds were used.'

In response to a letter received from Auckland presbytery about distribution of

the minutes, the clerk was instructed to re-advise about our new policy that minutes will not be sent out to other presbyteries and classes until approved at subsequent meetings. However, a short report which is approved at the end of the meeting will be sent out immediately after each meeting to *Faith in Focus* and the RCNZ Presbytery clerks. Vicar Andrew Nugteren requested the preliminary examination with the support of Dunedin Session. Presbytery agreed to hold this examination in Dunedin on the 6th October.

Article 47 questions were answered by the Bishopdale, Nelson and Dovedale delegates. Bishopdale delegates spoke of the blessing of good fellowship enjoyed at shared lunches and combined district fellowship meetings. They also spoke of the blessing of unity and continued optimism for the future.

Nelson delegates spoke about their concern over a the lack of any Christian day school in their town that church members might be able to send their children to. Session has encouraged parents concerned to home-educate their children if possible. Delegates also spoke of the blessing of good attendances at both services and an improved financial position. Dovedale delegates reported that the congregation was hosting the *Christianity Explored* course for the second time. They also advised that Rev. Michael Flinn would be taking long service and additional leave to teach at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong while Alastair McEwen is on Sabbatical. Retired OPC minister, Rev. T. Tyson will minister in Dovedale during Michael Flinn's absence.

Missions in focus

Janice Reid

Uganda

By John de Hoog

A question grips me: How can I capture the sights, the smells, the heat, the squalor, the ugliness and the beauty of Uganda, and something of the immense privilege of working with and worshipping with men and women and young people: all of them black, all of them transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ? How can I squeeze into 650

words four weeks worth of life-changing experience?

In January this year, Sallee and I had the wonderful privilege of spending four weeks in Uganda. We were based in Mbale, Uganda's second biggest city, at Knox Theological College (KTC), under the auspices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Uganda Mission (OPUM). The men who train at KTC are mostly pastors, trainee pastors and elders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Uganda (OPCU). The OPUM missionaries at Mbale are Phil and Meredith Proctor and their four children.

Impressions of Uganda

City life: Smoke and dust, squalor, potholes with roads (rather than roads with potholes), pushbikes everywhere, fewer motorbikes (90 or 125 cc), even fewer cars, super-crowded 'taxis' (Toyota Hi-Aces), heat, the smell and press of bodies in the market. Everyone's black! and they stare at Mzungus (white people), but if you give a friendly wave and greeting they respond with big smiles and 'You are welcome!'. A camera usually draws a crowd. A small chocolate costs 600 shilling (about 50 cents), but you feel guilty eating it. Fat people are rich: there aren't many of them. Hospices filled with people ravaged by AIDS.

Village life: Tiny round mud huts with grass roofs. The pastor's house with his ten children is the size of my dining room, the church building is a frame with a tin roof, but the mud bricks have been made and await firing. No running water, no electricity: you hold on and go to the toilet when you get

back home. Beautiful-looking people with perfect skin. Mango, banana and pawpaw trees, pineapples (fruit is cheap and magnificent), skinny cows and goats and chickens. Treacherous roads (I'd hate to see them in the wet season) but OK for walking, which is what most people do. Graves in people's shambas (their land)—relatives who have died of AIDS; 34 AIDS orphans in one tiny local church.

The work

KTC runs twelve three-week courses every year—one per month. 'Guest lecturers' often contribute to the teaching. Barry and Anne James have been five times, and we were privileged to join them during their latest stint. The course I taught was '*Psalms and Wisdom Literature*.' Magala Charles, a widower recently married to Rachel, a widow from Kenya who doesn't speak his language so they speak English at home. What a lovely, gentle, pastoral heart he has! I heard him preach the gospel so winsomely that it

moved me to tears, in his church under the mango tree at Kakoli. It was translated into English just for us, and I was also privileged to preach with a translator: Kayabene Dan, Charles' brother, Moderator of the OPCU. He was sharp and skilled, a good student. And the 11 other men, some of them pastors, and others elders, with much more to teach me than I could possibly teach them! Please pray for these men, and for all the pastors of the OPCU. The pressures on them are immense: they persevere against the most enormous odds.

The need

Phil and Meredith Proctor urgently need another full-time missionary couple and a full-time missionary deacon to work alongside them. The help that 'guest lecturers' can provide keeps Phil's head above water, but only just. The Ugandan Christians in these congregations so much appreciate knowing that there are congregations in Australia and New Zealand (mainly Canberra



Phil and Meredith Proctor, missionary couple in Mbale

and Silverstream) who think about them, pray for them and support them. Pray for more workers. Pray for the OPCU, a new and fragile denomination seeking a true biblical way ahead. Think about how you could help. I commend this work to the churches for prayer. (And Lord, let me go back some time!)

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 15th 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.

Magala Charles and some of his household ▶

Church building at Kachonga
▼

MIF prayer notes

Please pray for the work of **Wally & Jeannette Hagoort** in PNG. Thank the Lord for the progress made so far at the Reformed Leaders' Training Centre. Pray for the Lord's wisdom to guide decisions and actions at every step of the future development. Pray also for strength for Wally and Jeannette as they continue ministering to the congregations in Port Moresby,

and running the Mapang Christian Guest House.

Janice Reid hopes to have time this month for some concentrated language study, after several months of training and workshops that did not leave enough time for her to practice the language. Pray for safety as she begins to travel to HCJB's partner radio stations in this country where Christianity is frowned upon and proselytism is a crime.

