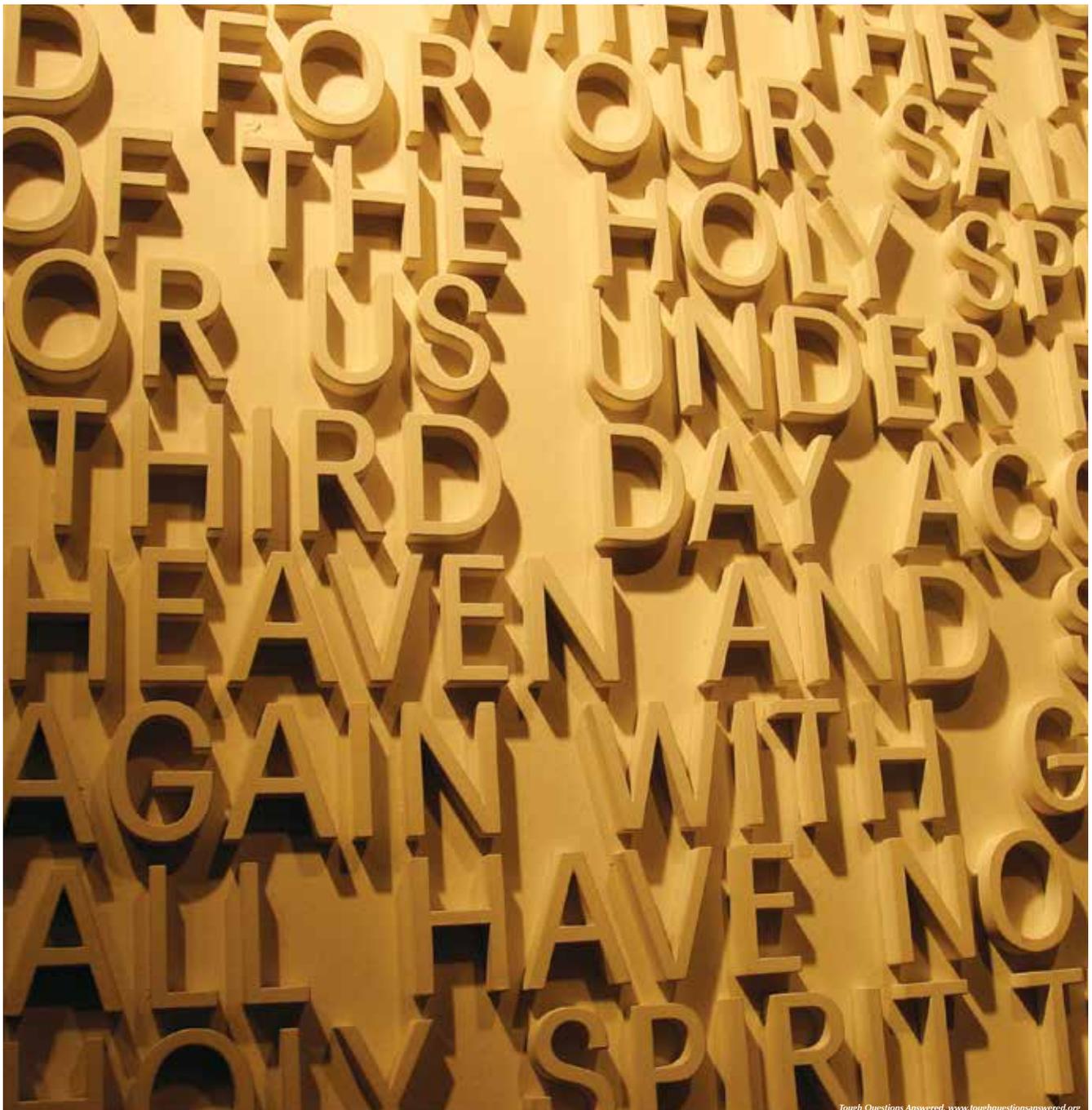


faith in
focus

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Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

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Tough Questions Answered. www.toughquestionsanswered.org

The relevance of the creeds

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Editorial

When I first came into the church, I was confronted with the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was the secondary standard for that particular federation. That confrontation, as I call it, happened when a very earnest elder, who was a true contender for the faith, thrust a copy of G I Williamson's commentary on the Westminster Confession into my hand and said: "I want you to read it and if you agree with it, you can become a member of this church". What an impression, on one who, spiritually speaking, was still a babe as to the faith.

That impression was made on me about 33 years ago. The interesting thing, though, was that that particular federation only required the office bearers to subscribe to the WCF, while the members were not required to. That got me thinking.

Some years later, I was attracted to a reformed church and became familiar with the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. Man, I read those documents like time was running out, there was so much to learn and so little time to learn it in – or so I thought.

Again, what really impressed me, was that I was required to signify my agreement to these Standards before I could become a member. This church practised what is called [full] subscriptionism – that every member, elders, minister alike were required to subscribe to the confessions, catechism, creeds, etc, which I came to understand were faithful summaries of what the Bible taught. What a blessing!

When I moved to New Zealand I discovered that the RCNZ churches had the Three Forms of Unity plus the WCF and full subscriptionism. Now this was really exciting! A church where the Presbyterian and Reformed were melded into one through their common confession.

Over the years I have come to love and appreciate these standards and have an ever-increasing sense of gratitude for the history that lies behind them. Our contributors reflect on some of that history and the relevance of our subordinate standards in the life of the RCNZ.

Mr David Waldron surveys a very significant part of the life of Guido de Brès and the Belgic Confession of Faith.

Mr Hans Vaatstra writes about the value of the creeds.

Mr G I Williamson considers the value of a changed life.

Mr David J. Robbins reviews *The Creedal Imperative*, by Carl R. Trueman; Mr Nathan Pitchford reviews *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, by Kevin DeYoung.

Mrs Sally Davey reflects on the evening worship service.

Mrs Harriet Haverland views life around the churches.

Updates from Crossroads Bible Institute.

Mr Paulin Bédard, a minister of the gospel in the Église Chrétienne Réformée de Beauce in Quebec and editor of their magazine *Lumière* (Light), writes about his visit to the Reformational Study Centre in South Africa.

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.

NB: In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

The relevance of the creeds (1)

From Belgium with Love

David Waldron

I had a Flemish friend when I was studying in Canada many years ago. I recall one occasion when she was asked by a well-meaning North American “so you’re from Belgium – now what part of the US is that?” I trust that most, if not all, of the readers of this article know that Belgium is a country in Western Europe!

If asked the question, “Can anything good come out of Belgium?”, you might well answer “fine chocolate” or “tasty beer”. Yet, however flavoursome these delicacies are, of much more value are precious words which come from Belgium, with love.

A letter was written from a husband, Guido de Brès, to his wife, Catherine Ramon 447 years ago. De Brès had been raised in a part of the southern Netherlands which later became the nation of Belgium in 1830. He was writing this love letter from a prison in Valenciennes, a town in Northern France, where he had been a pastor.

Guido writes:

Catherine Ramon, my dear and beloved wife and sister in our Lord Jesus Christ: your anguish and sadness disturbs somewhat my joy and the happiness of my heart, so I am writing this for the consolation of both of us, and especially for your consolation, since you have always loved me with an ardent affection, and because it pleases the Lord to separate us from each other. I feel your sorrow over this separation more keenly than mine. I pray you not to be troubled too much over this, for fear of offending God. You knew when you married me that you were taking a mortal husband, who was uncertain of life, and yet it has pleased God to permit us to live together for seven years, giving us five children. If the Lord had wished us to live together longer, he would have provided the way. But it did not please him to do this and may his will be done.

Now remember that I did not fall

into the hands of my enemies by mere chance, but through the providence of my God who controls and governs all things, the least as well as the greatest.

The letter continues, including the following paragraph:

Our Lord permits me on the one hand to feel my weakness and my smallness, that I am but a small vessel on the earth, very fragile, to the end that he would humble me, so that all the glory of the victory may be given to him. On the other hand, he fortifies me and consoles me in an unbelievable way. I have more comfort than the enemies of the gospel. I eat, drink and rest better than they do. I am held in a very strong prison, very bleak, obscure and dark. The prison is known by the obscure name “Brunain.” The air is poor and it stinks. On my feet and hands I have irons, big and heavy. They are a continual hell, hollowing my limbs up to my poor bones. The chief constable comes to look at my irons two or three times a day, fearing that I will escape. There are three guards of forty men before the door of the prison.

Incarcerated de Brès concludes:

Farewell, Catherine, my dearly beloved. I pray my God that he will comfort you and give you contentment in his good will. I hope that God has given me the grace to write for your benefit, in such a way that you may be consoled in this poor world. Keep my letter for a remembrance of me. It is badly written, but it is what I am able to do, and not what I wish to do. Commend me to my good mother. I hope to write some consolation to her, if it pleases God. Greet also my good sister. May she take her affliction to God. Grace be with you. At the prison, April 12, 1567.

Belgic Confession

Guido de Brès was hung at the end of May in the same year. His body was then burned and the ashes scattered on the waters of the Schelde river. Why? – because he was the author of another ‘love letter’, a document we now know as the Belgic Confession.

Six years before his execution, de Brès sent his Confession to King Philip II of Spain by throwing the document over the



Guido de Brès (1522-1567), comforts his family in prison.

“The Belgic Confession enabled Christians, at the time of the Reformation, to defend the truth of God’s Word and to protect the faithful church from the threat of error.”

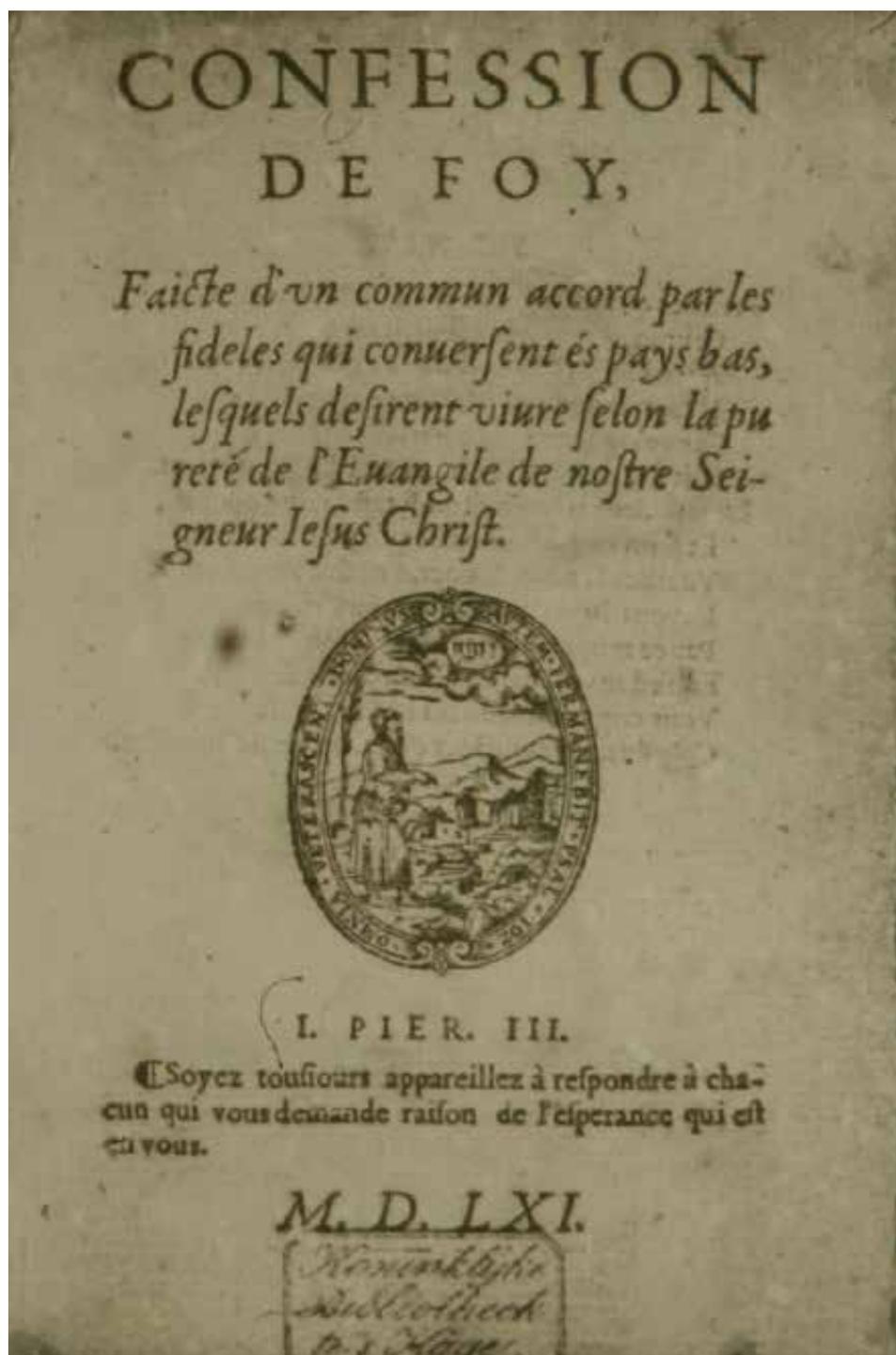
in the original edition read: *“Confession of Faith. Made with common consent by the believers who are scattered throughout all the Netherlands, who desire to live according to the purity of the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”*.

Some revisions were made before the ‘Great Synod of Dort’ (1618-1619), held to settle the divisive controversy brought about through the rise of Arminianism. A standardised text for the confession was then available in French, Dutch and Latin. The Belgic Confession became one of the ‘three forms of unity’ of the Dutch Reformed Church.

The Belgic Confession is an apologetic document; a defence of doctrine against those who opposed the Protestant Reformation. Guido de Brès had ‘loved not his life unto death’ when he penned the Belgic Confession in order to show that the confession of the Reformers was the confession of the truth which the Bible teaches. He wrote to demonstrate that what he and others were teaching was the pure and wholesome word of God. He wrote to distinguish Reformers from the Anabaptists; who were disturbers of the peace and disobedient to civil authority.

castle wall at Tournai whilst fleeing from the authorities. De Brès died because he had refused to yield to the Spanish Inquisition, which applied the stress and pain of torture to break the will of those deemed by the Roman Catholic church to be heretics. His courage in the face of death matched the words he had written about himself, and his fellow reformers. He said that they would *“offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire”* rather than deny the truth expressed in their Confession.

The text of Guido de Brès’ written Confession was strongly influenced by Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the creed of the French *Huguenots*. However, in contrast to Calvin’s individually authored *Institutes*, the Belgic Confession became a corporate ecclesiastical document when it was accepted by the Reformed Church of the Netherlands in 1561, and subsequently adopted by the synods of Armentieres (1563), Antwerp (1566), Wessel (1568), Emden (1571), Dort (1574), and Middelburg (1581). De Brès’ confession was not an expression of personal or private opinion. The title



Cover of the Belgic Confession, 1561.

As a well-written systematic statement of faith, the Belgic Confession enabled Christians, at the time of the Reformation, to defend the truth of God's Word and to protect the faithful church from the threat of error. The Confession specifically addresses Sadducees, Manichees, Epicureans, Pelagians, and Anabaptists. As a 'pattern of sound words' the Confession has now served the church for over 450 years, assisting in the gospel goals of growing God's people "in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ¹" and in "presenting everyone complete in Christ²".

Some of the theological truths on which we can be challenged as believers today are the same as those of which de Brès wrote e.g. the election of the saints and the perdition of the wicked (Article 16), and the Presbyterian form of church government (Article 30).

However, some of the issues facing

“We live at a stage in history when many desire to reduce doctrine down to an unholy 'lowest common denominator' with the misguided aim of bringing peace by attempting to unite truth with error.”

the church today in the 21st century are clearly different to those of the 16th century. Yet the Belgic Confession is still of great value to us in helping us to “give an account for the hope that is in us, yet with gentleness and reverence³”. For example, whilst de Brès knew nothing of the challenges of evolutionary theory to the doctrine of Biblical creation, his confession clearly includes creation ex nihilo ('out of nothing') in Article 12 and the formation of man from the dust of the earth in Article 14.

Whilst the Belgic Confession does not directly address some of the issues which affect the church today (e.g. same-gender unions, the role of women in leadership, modern day cults, worship of the physical environment), de Brès' words do help us to be very clear about what biblical truths we are striving to defend and proclaim in the strength of our Lord.

At the time of the Reformation, the dominance of Roman Catholicism had led to many false ideas about the nature of the church; and these are addressed in the Belgic Confession (Articles 27-32). Whilst the historical context then is different to the situation today, de Brès' confession is still effective in summarizing the biblical doctrine of the church.

An age of reduction

We live in an age where, in much of the western world, many lack a conviction of the call to commitment to a local congregation, and some drift from church to church. The Belgic Confession is a useful tool to help guide all God's pilgrim children back to what the Bible teaches about being a loyal and integral member of Christ's body, the church.

We live at a stage in history when many desire to reduce doctrine to an unholy 'lowest common denominator', with the misguided aim of bringing peace by attempting to unite truth with error. The Belgic Confession continues to be helpful in guarding against this 'reductionist', all-inclusive view of doctrine which would deny that the Scriptures have much more to teach us than the central truth of Christ and Him crucified.

We live in times where many in local churches no longer clearly know what they believe. Their 'creed' is often influenced by the latest book they have read or the opinion of the last dynamic speaker they have heard. By being anchored to our 'forms of unity'⁴ our Reformed Churches of New Zealand are grounded on the truths of God's Word, expressed through carefully formulated

patterns of sound words. Our creeds and confessions guard us against being swayed by the latest fad or popular trend as they guide us back to the foundational truth of the Scriptures.

Belgium is almost as far away from New Zealand as it is possible to travel on this spherical planet called earth. However, Guido de Brès' 'love letter' to the church, the Belgic Confession, has not only reached our Reformed Churches here, it has become one of the four unifying documents which all office-bearers subscribe to as fully agreeing with the Word of God⁵.

If you have not already done so, I would encourage you to read the complete last letter sent by Guido de Brès to the wife he loved⁶. Furthermore, I would also commend to you the 37 articles of the Belgic Confession written by de Brès for the church he loved. You could consider reading one or two articles at a time and meditating on the truths they contain whilst you have some chocolate. In your comfortable chair, remember that these words were written with "the blood, sweat and tears" of a martyr of the Protestant Reformation and have now come to us in the year of our Lord 2014 as 'a letter of love from Belgium'. Enjoy!, and give glory to God as you do so!

Notes

1 2 Peter 3:18

2 Col 1:28

3 1 Peter 3:15

4 Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort, **Belgic** and Westminster Confessions

5 Subscribing to a creed or confession does not mean that we believe every phrase in the document was as well expressed as it could have been or that if we wrote it today we would use exactly the same vocabulary and phrasing.

6 the text is available at <http://underdogtheology.blogspot.co.nz/2011/05/love-letter-of-all-love-letters-guido.html>

Mr David Waldron is the minister of the Reformed Church of Christchurch, Cornwall Street.

Value of the creeds for the Church today

Hans Vaatstra

Is a creedal statement a device which unites or divides? Should our creeds be brief and drawn with thick black lines as concise as the Apostle's Creed, or can they include more comprehensive expressions of the Christian faith? The Dutch Remonstrants in the early part of the 17th century opposed the confessions because they believed they violated the authority of the Bible and interfered with freedom of conscience. Since then others have emulated their position. The slogan "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible" is defended on the basis of the charge that creeds and confessions are given the same authority as the Bible, perhaps not as a stated position, but in practice. Questions like these give us occasion to reflect on the place and value of creeds. What precedent is there in the Bible to formulate creeds and confessions? Does the church as "the church of the living God, pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15) have a mandate to draw up creeds and confessions? What value do the creeds have for the church today?

The witness of Scripture

Christianity has always been "a creedal religion" (J.H. Keith (ed), *Creeds of the Churches*) not just because of the need to address new situations or to correct heresy with the truth of God's word, but because Christianity is theological. Christianity's foundational document, the Bible, is a theological book. God created us in His image as intelligent beings, with a sense of the divine; beings whose chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. One way we are to do that is to articulate the truth about God, our love for God and enjoyment of God. This doesn't come naturally to us due to the effects of sin. Faith is needed and faith is intellectual, emotional and volitional. God wants us to serve Him with our

minds as well as our hands, mouths, feet and heart. Hence Christianity is rooted in the theological tradition of ancient Israel, which was united by its stated affirmations of faith such as "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4&5). Peter Craigie in *The Book of Deuteronomy*, pg. 169, called it the "fundamental monotheistic dogma of the Old Testament" otherwise known as the "Shema" and used by Israelites as a regular part of their worship. (See also Feinberg, 'Synagogue' in *New Bible Dictionary*, page 1228.) There are several similar declaratory statements in the Bible such as Peter's famous confession of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mark 8:29) or the christological confession of faith in Romans 10:9, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead you shall be saved". In addition to the christological confessions there are also statements which reveal the triune God, and from which our trinitarian confessions are derived. Two well-known trinitarian affirmations are found in Mathew 28:19: "Go therefore and

make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." And again, 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Thus in the Bible certain expressions of faith in God, Christ and the Trinity became more or less fixed in creed-like formulas. But does that provide the church with a precedent to write creeds?

The Church's mandate

The church is endowed with power and authority from God. This is clearly seen in Matthew 16:19 where Jesus said to Peter and the disciples "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." According to Louis Berkhof's summary of the church's power, this power is; a) spiritual rather than civil, b) it is derived from and subordinate to the Word of God, c) designed to serve Christ and His church. This includes a duty to (i) preserve the Word of God against unbelief and error (1 Tim 1:3&4), (ii) administer the Word and sacraments and (iii) write up creeds and confessions. (*Systematic Theology*, page 595) An early example is found in Acts 15, at the council of Jerusalem, where the apostles made a statement reasserting the doctrine of Christian liberty. Likewise in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul restates the doctrine of the resurrection because of deniers in that city. In fact the church's mandate to write confessions is seen in numerous situations in the life of the church, such as in preaching (Acts 2-3), teaching (1 Corinthians 15:3-7), baptism (Acts 8:36-38), confession (1 Timothy 6:1-16), and polemics (1 John 4:2). Since then, throughout the church age, she has exercised her God-given mandate to write creeds and confessions as the needs arose.

“Creeds and confessions often become source materials for future theological decisions.”

The value of the creeds

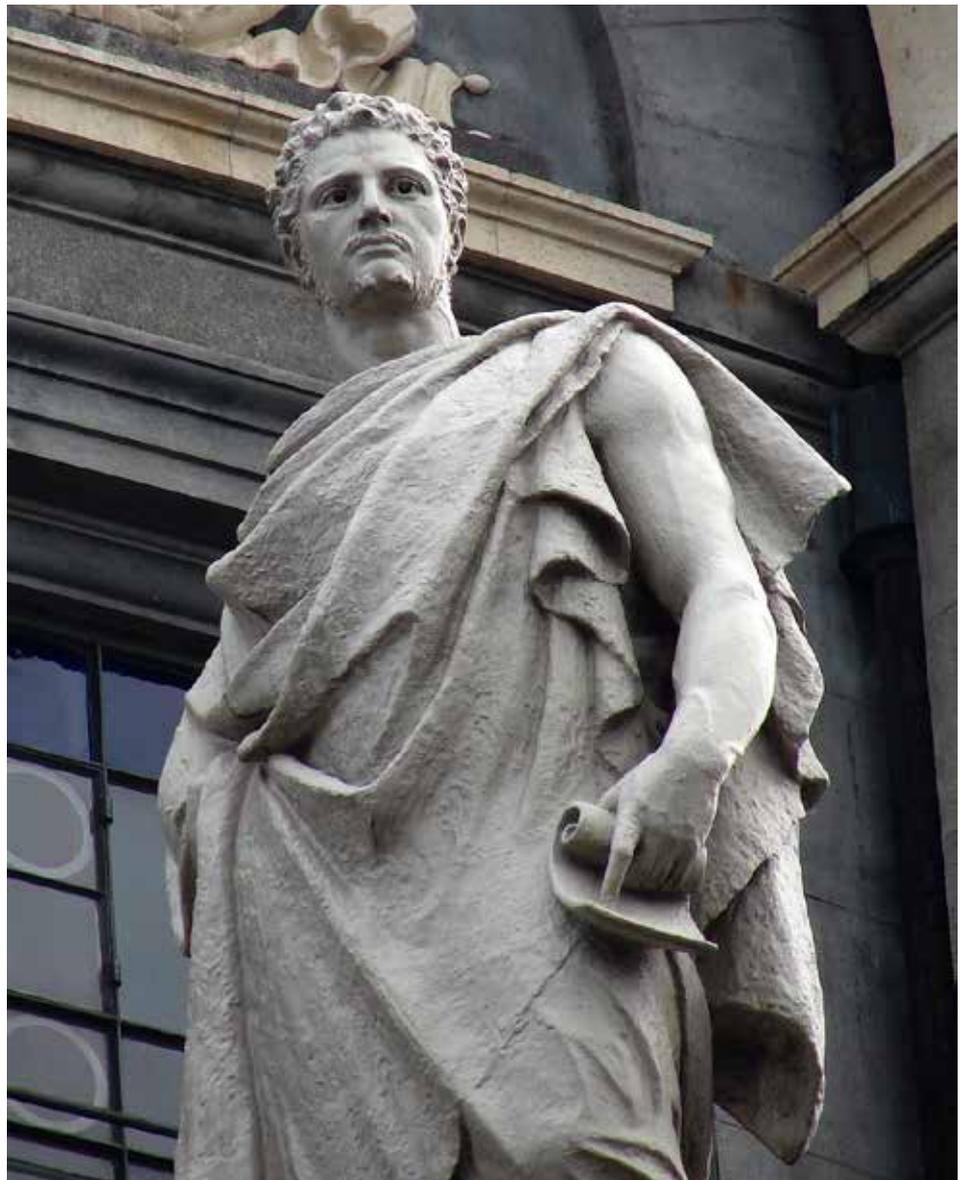
Creeds often arise out of historical situations, where conflicts from within the church or forces pressing on the church from without, endanger the life and mission of the church. Disagreements in the church at Nicea about the content of faith during the fourth century, or in Europe during the 16th century, created the need to reassert the Bible's teachings and the church's faithful witness. As this teaching was formed into a creed and widely accepted by the churches, the creed itself began to **shape history**, influencing the personal piety, worship and culture of subsequent generations of Christians. Creeds and confessions often become source materials for future theological decisions. For example, the addition of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) to our own denomination's subordinate standards has influenced the office bearers in our denomination to hold more strongly to the cessationist position with respect to special revelation. This is in contrast to our close neighbour, the Christian Reformed Church of Australia, which only requires its office bearers to hold to the three forms of unity and doesn't bind them to the WCF where it goes beyond the Belgic Confession. Thus the cessationist position is not as strongly

“We ignore the lessons of history at our peril. It would be foolish to relegate creeds and confessions to the scrap heap of irrelevance and impotence.”

held and allows for occasional, non-authoritative, special revelation.

The great creeds have not only shaped theological thought and practice but have also had the effect of **uniting the churches** by succinctly stating the faith of the Christian church. This is especially true of the older ecumenical creeds, which have a long history of wide acceptance in the churches. On the basis of the ecumenical creeds (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian) we regard folk who profess faith in God in the language of the ecumenical creeds as fellow Christians, brothers and sisters in the wider body of Christ. The more detailed expressions of faith in the longstanding creeds of the Reformation provide a basis for unity among like-minded churches such as those in the International Council of Reformed Churches; and then again as a basis for unity in our own federation of churches, the RCNZ.

Church liturgy is enhanced by creeds and confessions. Hymns, prayers and sermons often contain affirmations of faith using words contained in the creeds such as the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1. In our own Reformed tradition we regularly recite/rehearse the Christian faith during worship using the creeds, (joyfully and without problems of conscience!). Furthermore, the creeds and confessions of the Reformation are often used as a guide for topical preaching in worship. However, some have jettisoned that particular use of the creeds, believing the church has outgrown them and that they are no longer relevant for today's issues. But history shows that where creeds have been ignored or where church officers have been given freedom of interpretation of their confessional statements, doctrinal integrity has suffered to the extent that the inspiration and authority of the Bible itself is at-



Athanasius, Carl Rohl Smith, 1883-84, Frederikskirken, København.

tacked. Besides, the confessions address central questions of human existence such as: Who is God? How has God revealed Himself? Who am I? How are we made right with God? What institutions has God given humanity? How best do the institutions of church, marriage and the family and state function under the sovereignty of God? These questions are important in every age. The confessions help keep the answers to these questions in the forefront of our minds, especially through regular liturgical use.

Another valuable use of the creeds is the **teaching ministry** of the church; especially the catechetical instruction of covenant children and those preparing for church membership. Since the early days of the church candidates have been taught the faith handed down by the apostles as a preparation for baptism. Later, according to J.H. Leith, *Creeds of*

the Churches, page 7, "Augustine recognised the importance of a robust question and answer method of theological education for catechumens." The Protestant reformers developed that method even further by producing a number of catechisms which continue to be widely used in Reformed circles today, especially among the young but also in other contexts such as home group Bible studies. Young people who are well instructed in the Christian faith are more likely to be the next generation of active church members and leaders. A lack of sound theological knowledge will only contribute to a church's demise. The warnings in Scripture are plain enough.

The prophet Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of the Lord said, "My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children, they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing

evil; they know not how to do good' ... 'they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the Lord, the requirements of their God. So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of the Lord, the requirement of their God.' But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds." (4:22; 5:4&5) The prophet was in despair, even the religious leaders of the nation Israel seemed ignorant of true knowledge of God. They seemed to think that the Lord would tolerate their syncretistic ways. Jeremiah was incredulous "Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their glory for worthless idols." (2:11) There can be no argument; a thorough confessional teaching program will only enhance the doctrinal integrity and spiritual health of any church.

Another need which was addressed by the creeds and confessions was the need for sound **principles of interpretation**. During the church's infancy it needed to understand the Old Testament in relationship to itself. Later, the church needed to determine which New Testament books were canonical. Later still, after the canon of Scripture was fixed, principles of interpretation were necessary to distinguish the important from the peripheral in the Bible and to discern the golden rule of interpretation: "Scripture is its own interpreter". The Reformed confessions have done the churches a great service in providing such principles derived from Scripture. The last and most comprehensive of our confession,; the WCF, contains a set of standards (e.g. chapter 1 articles 4-10) providing our churches with principles for Bible interpretation which have stood the test of time and to which faithful Bible-believing churches adhere to this day.

The propagation of **heresy** was another challenge for the church which the creeds and confessions confronted. Challenges concerning the true deity and humanity of Christ, the unity of His personality and the relationship of His two natures (human and divine), the personality of the Holy Spirit and His place in the Godhead, the way we are justified, the inspiration and perfections of Scripture, the supremacy of Christ and grace in salvation; these and many other issues sent the framers of our creeds and confessions back to the Bible to examine the matters raised. The results of their faithful labours are contained in the creeds and



Hastings Christian School

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" Romans 12:2b

Job Vacancies for 2015

Two of our long-serving staff members will be retiring at the end of this year. Mike & Shirley Pudney have both served the school faithfully over many years and are due to retire at the end of 2014. Shirley has been teaching in the new-entrant area, while Mike has been teaching in the secondary school. They are both highly effective teachers and will be sadly missed.

Consequently, we are looking for people who have a vision for Christian education and are skilled practitioners in their teaching field.

The vacancies we have for 2015 are in the following year levels/subject areas;

- New entrant teacher
- Geography/social studies/history teacher (some or all of these)
- English teacher

Hastings Christian School is a Y1-13 integrated school. We have a growing roll of 225 pupils with a newly agreed roll cap of 280.

At this stage, we are looking for expressions of interest. If you want to find out more about the school, and some specific details on the jobs listed above, then please contact me via email g.feyter@hcs.school.nz or through the school office (06) 878 6696. We would love to hear from you.

Gerald Feyter
Deputy Principal



confessions. They refuted the pseudo-Christianity of the heretics and set forth the tenets of true faith in confessional form for the edification and instruction of the body of Christ.

It is clear that the creeds and confessions continue to have abiding relevance for the church in every age. That doesn't

mean they are exhaustive, or that further issues may not necessitate the formulation of some new subordinate standard in the future. However, we ignore the lessons of history at our peril. It would be foolish to relegate creeds and confessions to the scrap heap of irrelevance and impotence. Rather, they are useful

instruments to help us teach, defend the faith, and build foundations for our theology.

Mr Hans Vaatstra is the minister of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North serving in Wanganui.

The relevance of the creeds (3)

How the Standards changed my life

G. I. Williamson

When the editor of *New Horizons* invited me to write this article, I knew I had to do it. Why? Because of what the Westminster Standards did for me. So let me tell you my story.

I begin with an event that took place in my fortieth year as a pastor. My father died at the age of 93 in 1993, and I was honored to officiate at his funeral. Before returning home to North Dakota, my wife and I paid a final visit to my 95-year-old mother, who was living in a care center in Seguin, Texas. We were quietly talking about spiritual things when she said something that prompted me to blurt out these words: "But Mother, what is the chief end of man, anyway?"

She immediately replied, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

I was astounded. I couldn't remember ever hearing her say those words before! So I immediately asked the next two or three questions from the Shorter Catechism, and she came back again with flawless answers. I never knew, before that last visit with her (she died ten days later), that my mother had memorized the Shorter Catechism in the old United Presbyterian church in Pawnee City, Nebraska, where she had grown up.

Her five children were never catechized. Memorizing the Shorter Catechism was no longer part of the Sunday school training when we grew up in the United Presbyterian Church. We did hear some sound Bible preaching, though.

And through it I felt called to the ministry after U.S. Army service in World War II. So off I went in 1949, with my wife and daughter, to Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary.

How I discovered the Westminster Standards

Right away I felt myself to be immersed in a babel of confusion. Among my professors were two or three men who were orthodox to various degrees, but another teacher was neo-orthodox, and one was liberal enough to hold an honorary office in the modernistic National Council of Churches. I vividly remember the day when, as a result of the conflicting instruction, I had serious doubts about the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. And then, when funds provided by the G.I. Bill ran out, I accepted an invitation to serve a country church as a student-pastor.

It was while serving in that capacity that I first discovered the Westminster Standards. One Saturday, when some of the members were cleaning the church, the treasurer came to tell me that they had found some old books in a dusty closet and were about to throw them away. If I wanted any of those books, she said, I was free to take them. So I went to have a look, and one that caught my eye was an edition of the 1858 Subordinate Standards of the United Presbyterian Church of North America. That was the first time that I had ever laid eyes on the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

From that moment on, my life was radically changed. I began to study the Confession and Catechisms, paying close attention to the proof texts printed out below the text of these documents to support their statements. And within a few weeks, as I continued commuting to and from the seminary and diligently studying that book, I was delivered once and for all from my confusion. Next to the Bible itself, no other book even

“I believe that people in churches holding to the Three Forms of Unity would benefit by getting acquainted with the Westminster Standards....”

comes close to the importance of this one in my life as a Christian and a pastor.

And now, after sixty years as an ordained minister of the Word of God, I am more convinced than ever that no creed that has yet been written even equals (let alone surpasses) the Westminster Standards for stating the system of truth revealed in the Bible in such a succinct, yet adequate, way. I also came to love the Three Forms of Unity, to which I gladly subscribed when I served as a pastor in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. I also have sincere respect for the historic ecumenical creeds that mark the progressive fulfillment of the

promise of Jesus, who said, "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things" (John 14:26).

The value of these Confessional documents

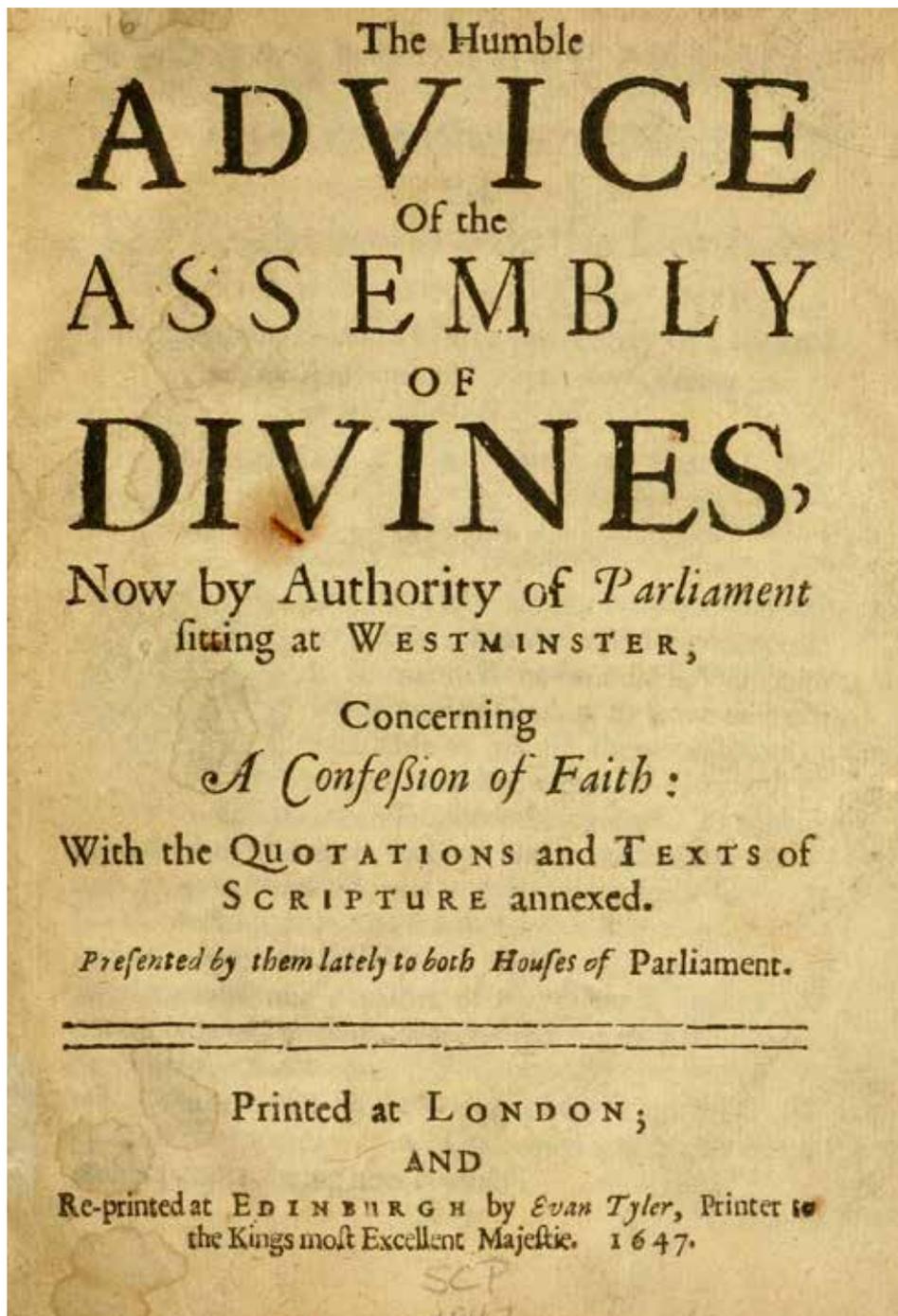
There is much to learn from all of these confessional documents, which express the truth of the Bible in uniquely different ways. As an Orthodox Presbyterian called to serve a church holding to the Three Forms of Unity, I came to the conclusion that they and the Westminster Standards are fully compatible with each other, but also that there is much to

learn from each. I believe that people in churches holding to the Three Forms of Unity would benefit by getting acquainted with the Westminster Standards, as I have benefited from their standards. I will even add that there are some issues I wouldn't know how to handle without help from both quarters.

Let me give you an example. The church of Jesus Christ at the present time is splintered and fragmented. (This is also true of us who are Presbyterian and Reformed.) No wonder so many people are confused! What I need, therefore, in order to navigate for myself and to help those I'm privileged to teach, is the understanding of the teaching of the Bible that is provided by both the Westminster and the Belgic Confessions! The Belgic Confession (article 29) states with incomparable simplicity what the difference is between the *true* church and the *false* church. The true church is the church in which "all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, (and) all things contrary thereto rejected." In other words, there is an absolute standard! The standard we find the apostles upholding in all of their epistles, supported by their actions as recorded in the book of Acts, is that of the Belgic Confession. Any church that did not then, and does not now, strive to live up to that standard does not qualify as a true church.

But, at the same time, we all know that there is no *perfect* church here on earth. That was also true in the time of the apostles. Therefore, keeping the absolute standard in mind – and never compromising it or forsaking it – I also find that I can't do without the equally clear statement in the Westminster Confession (25:5) that "the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error," while "some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan." As I read my Bible, I see that this was just as true in the time of the apostles as it is today. So both of these historic Reformed Confessions define precious aspects of the truth.

The apostles never settled for error or immorality in churches they founded and cared for, yet most (if not all) of the churches we encounter in the New Testament were afflicted with "mixture and error." And all of the "true" churches, though imperfect even in the apostolic age, were keenly conscious of "the falling away" (1 Thess. 2:3 NKJV) which had brought the old church of the Jewish nation to become "a synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9).



Title page of a 1647 printing of the Confession

Sharing the Westminster Standards with others

When I began my labor as a home missionary of the OPC in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1955, I determined that my people – however few or many there might be under my ministry – were not going to be deprived (as I had been) of their confessional and catechetical heritage. So I began writing lessons on the Westminster Confession that were handed out weekly to be studied and discussed at the midweek prayer meeting. As I wrote those lessons, I never had any notion that I was writing a book! But Dr. William Young, who was then teaching philosophy at the University of Rhode Island, often came to worship with us on Sunday evenings. When he saw a few of those lessons, he began to urge me to send them in to Mr. Charles Craig of the Presbyterian and Reformed

Publishing Company to see if he would publish them. He said he was pretty sure he would, because I quoted Van Til and Murray! And to my amazement, he was right.

So in 1964 my lessons on the Westminster Confession were published in book form. And now, nearly half a century later, they are still teaching many people – not only in the English language, but also in Spanish and Korean. My positive experience with my first book encouraged me to write a study of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, in collaboration with the Rev. Thomas Tyson. This book is now available in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, and, most recently, Japanese. Many people who have used my books have written to thank me for them because they too have found more edification in these long-neglected forms of sound words

than in many of the popular books that are being written today. They have found, as I did, that a careful study of the Westminster Standards has given them a new, exciting, and clear understanding of what the Bible really teaches. I have been surprised and even overwhelmed at times by the e-mails that I have received from around the world, expressing the joy of discovering (with the help of these studies) these wonderful doctrinal summaries of our Reformation faith.

Let me conclude by urging the readers of *New Horizons* to buy a copy of the OPC Confession of Faith and Catechisms with proof texts, if you don't already have one. I think it deserves to be your favorite book, next to the Bible.

Mr G I Williamson is a retired OP minister, living in Iowa. New Horizons, Feb. 2013.

The relevance of the creeds – reviews

The Creedal Imperative

Carl R. Trueman

Reviewed by: David J. Robbins

Not long ago I found myself in a messy conversation about the Trinity. As it turns out, talking about divine mysteries becomes vastly more difficult, and biblical orthodoxy more troublesome to parse, when you are unwilling to engage with the historic statements of the church.

My interlocutor claimed “no creed

but the Bible.” For him, and indeed for anyone suspicious of confessions and the ecclesiastical bodies that hold to them, this book is an eyepopper. Carl Trueman develops an incisive critique of the prevailing anticonfessional bias and a positive argument for the principle of confessionalism – not just as something sensible, but as a biblical necessity. If the subject seems tedious, don't be put off; this is a book that constantly stimulates, frequently scintillates, and occasionally compels a hearty amen!

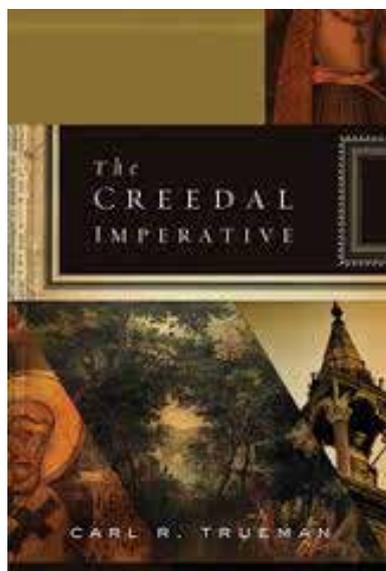
Chapter 1 exposes how various cultural ideas negatively shape the regard paid to creeds and confessions, often imperceptibly. Three are discussed: (1) Real value is in the next big thing, or whatever comes after that, so the past is radically devalued. (2) Emotions are the locus of truth, and words, including doctrine, are not to be trusted. (3) Traditional forms of external, institutional authority are rejected. These trajectories combine to render confessionalism not only distasteful, but also countercultural. Trueman's analysis here is first-rate, and he interacts with these themes throughout the book.

The second chapter articulates a series of biblically derived positions that together argue compellingly for confessionalism. A superb defense of the vital adequacy

of verbal communication is followed by short expositions on human nature, the church as an institution, and the confessional implications of Paul's instruction to “hold fast the *form* of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13). Here the author maintains a Pauline creedal sensibility and even the expectation that the church will continue to develop normative doctrinal statements for the stable transmission of truth. The following two chapters helpfully connect this notion with the creeds of the early church and later Protestant confessions.

The remaining chapters emphasise the doxological (and pedagogical) character of confessions as well as the utility of confessional statements for delimiting church power, discriminating between members and office bearers, maintaining corporate unity, etc. An appendix reflects briefly on confessional revisions and supplementation, and, lastly, there is a short but worthwhile guide to further reading.

Many other features of this book stand out; I will mention two. First, the author posits that every Christian has a functional creed, a way of summarising biblical truth. Unwritten creeds are dangerous because they cannot be evaluated in light of Scripture, the norming norm. Second, I find Trueman's sympathetic approach to



anticonfessional Christians quite helpful. As he observes, those who are concerned that confessional statements not be granted autonomous authority may in fact share the conviction of our own Confession: that Scripture is the supreme authority by which all creeds and confessions are to be examined (WCF 1.10).

Would I give this book to my confused conversationalist? Probably not; “no creed but the Bible” often translates to “no book,” either. But pastors, elders, and all who love and want to grow in their appreciation of confessionalism ought to take it up and read. This book will not only help you respond to those who find creeds distasteful, but will also fuel your joy in the tradition that has been faithfully handed down to us. *New Horizons, September 2013*

The Good News We Almost Forgot by Kevin DeYoung

Reviewed by Nathan Pitchford

What thoughts usually come to mind when the word “catechism” comes up in conversation? Hopelessly outdated? Long, tedious, and abstract? A divisive and uncharitable word-club, wielded to the dread and consternation of poor, stodgy children, who have grown interminably pale and listless by reason of forced exclusion from fresh air and exercise, and over-exposure to sixteenth-century archaisms? True, I may be describing the impression in a bit of an overdone fashion, but I think there’s enough truth in the portrayal to strike a nerve. Catechising our children is simply not in vogue these days, at least in much of the Western Church; and the perception of catechising is largely negative. Why is this? Is the skepticism warranted? Kevin DeYoung is to be thanked for doing a tremendous job of answering that question in the negative; and he is to be thanked all the more heartily for choosing to do so with that most precious, gospel-rich catechism of them all (with a couple close contenders!), the Heidelberg.

Really, where in two-thousand years of church history may one encounter a more beautiful, compelling, and succinct summation of the gospel and the Christian life than the Heidelberg Catechism? They who look askance at catechisms either have no eye for beauty and truth, or have not looked closely enough at the Heidelberg. And in either case, a fresh dose of this catechism may

prove a very healthy corrective.

Kevin DeYoung has done a good job in providing this fresh look at the Heidelberg; and he has done so in such a way as to bring out the fact that this sixteenth-century catechism is not outdated, but eminently practical and relevant to many controversies peculiar to our own time and society. It is not abstract, dull, or hard-to-follow, but surprisingly simple, profound in an easy-to-comprehend sort of way, and full of that intuitive and surprising beauty which characterise truly great expressions of the pure, unadorned truth. It is not uncharitable, nor excessively divisive and polemic, but rather a warm, pastoral, and tenderly loving guide to the great truths of the Bible. All of the common, largely negative stereotypes melt away in the down-to-earth and up-to-date meditations in DeYoung’s book.

But wasn’t the catechism written to address such questions as transubstantiation versus memorialism versus spiritual presence in the Eucharist? Justification by an external righteousness imputed versus an internal righteousness infused? All of those questions were hammered out centuries ago, weren’t they? What can the catechism teach me about the hot-button items of today? Does it address political agendas, environmental concerns, the question of homosexual behavior in the Church, contemporary versus traditional forms of worship, the “deeds not creeds” mindset of the “emerging church” and other such movements? Surprisingly enough, in these and many other such issues, DeYoung brings the truths of the Catechism to bear in surprisingly helpful and relevant ways. And he always does so in a style that is very straightforward, engaging, charitable, winsome – if there is anyone who does not come across

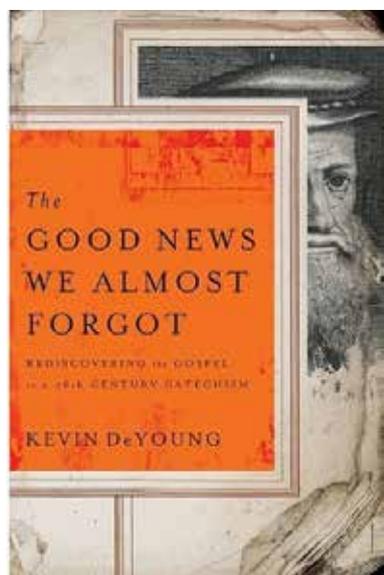
in the academic, stodgy manner with which so many people acquaint the old catechisms, it is DeYoung. And yet, as he makes very clear, he himself loves the catechism immensely and finds it anything but old, boring, or out-of-date.

Will everyone agree with every opinion he gives on the plethora of practical issues that come up in the course of his walk through the catechism? No, it is only to be expected that a person may have a quibble here with his application of the second commandment to the question of portraits of Jesus, or a raised eyebrow there over his “vivid baby-baptising” [!] – but his secondary opinions are all framed quite charitably, and the essence of his theology is so soundly gospel-centered that I can’t foresee any true believers coming away from the book scowling. Helped in many ways? Yes. Made to think more deeply about practical matters? Yes. Just a little miffed over a minor point made here and there? Perhaps, if there are any readers out there who have strong opinions on certain theological matters (and don’t we all, to some degree?). But disappointed with the book as a whole? I can’t imagine that anyone would come away with that impression – unless, of course, he is a little upset by the true Gospel of God’s grace itself.

Because, really, when you get right down to it, that’s what the Heidelberg Catechism is: a faithful portrayal of the Gospel of God’s grace; and DeYoung’s book is a faithful explanation of what the Heidelberg Catechism says, rounded out with specific applications of it to every topic under the sun. Which is just to say that this really is a book about the good news of the Gospel; and if we really have “almost forgotten” this good news (and in some cases, I’m afraid to say, we largely have), then nothing can be a more pressing issue than “rediscovering the gospel in a 16th century catechism”.

“This has been a book about theology,” DeYoung candidly admits in the epilogue; “about knowing theology and loving theology. But if we’ve really paid attention to the Heidelberg Catechism, this should also be a book about warmhearted experiential faith. In fact, knowing and loving theological truth is what produces the warmhearted experiential faith.” Kevin, I concur.

The Good News We Almost Forgot:
available at *Monergism Books*.



Sally Davey

The evening service

It's amazing how quickly things change, and how little people seem to realise it. When I was a new Christian in the 1970s, almost every church that believed the Bible – and even some that didn't – had a Sunday evening service.

In the past thirty to forty years, however, a great change seems to have swept over the western evangelical world. Many churches have abandoned evening worship; and those which still have it seem to have resigned themselves to the view that different demographics in their church family will attend at different time slots – and thus their congregation becomes virtually two, or even three separate congregations meeting at different times in different "styles". The amazing thing to me is that so few Christians seem to realise what a radical departure this is from many centuries of church history. One Christian even once told me that our (conservative) church was a radical innovator having such high (and unrealistic) expectations of church attendance as twice per Sunday. I had to prove to him by reference to the Scriptures and with evidence from

church history that we are in fact only continuing what ordinary Christians *have always done*.

I guess, like most Anglicans, I only had to look inside my Prayer Book in my teenage years to realise that evening services were a time-honoured pattern of church life – there was an order of service for it, just like there was for morning worship, weddings, funerals and other special occasions. Hymn writers even wrote hymns especially for evening worship. Take this one by John Ellerton, which focuses our minds on the continuity of Christians' praises when, around the world, believers meet morning and evening:

The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,

The darkness falls at Thy behest;

To Thee our morning hymns ascended,

Thy praise shall sanctify our rest.

We thank Thee that Thy church unsleeping,

While earth rolls onward into light,

Through all the world her watch is keeping,

And rests not now by day or night.

When I was converted, it didn't surprise me that committed Christians generally attended evening services as well as morning ones. (Admittedly,

in some churches the "youth" tended to regard the evening service as their opportunity to do their own thing; and increasingly, older people stayed away.)

Likewise during the early '80s, when I was a student in the U.S., the Presbyterian churches I was part of all held evening services; but because of their clear convictions about what constituted reformed worship, they didn't distinguish between morning and evening in the pattern of their liturgy. It seems that since then, the pressure to drop evening services has affected many churches.

During the month of June my husband Paul and I were travelling in the U.S. visiting friends, and we were glad of the opportunity to attend their churches with them. But we found that only one of the four we visited had a whole-church-family evening service, and that was poorly attended. It seemed that considerable effort was being made to "informalise" that one, too, probably to try and encourage more than the faithful few to be there. It was a sad and somewhat sobering experience to realise that Christians are fast giving up half of their opportunities to gather, worship and learn from the preaching of the Word.

But this trend is not universal, and there are churches and individuals who uphold the blessings of Sunday evening services. In January this year Toronto pastor and blogger, Tim Challies, made these observations on evening worship. He kindly gave me permission to include them here:

.....

Why I love an evening service

Of all the casualties the church has suffered in recent decades, I wonder if many will have longer-lasting consequences than the loss of the evening service. There was a time, not so long ago, when many or even most churches gathered in the morning *and* the evening. But today the evening service is increasingly relegated to the past.

At Grace Fellowship Church we hold on to the evening service and I wouldn't want it any other way. It is a commit-

ment, to be sure – a commitment for the pastors to plan a second service and to prepare a second sermon, and a commitment for the members to give the church not only the morning but also the evening. But these are small costs compared to the great benefits. Here are a few things I love about an evening service.

It begins and ends the day with God

Perhaps the best part of having an evening service is that, just as the morning service allows you to *begin* the

day worshiping God with his people, the evening services allows you to *close* the day worshiping God with his people. As a church we love to sing the song "We Are Listening" which proclaims, "Morning and evening we come / To delight in the words of our God." And with an evening service, we are able to do exactly that: We begin the Lord's Day in worship and close it in worship. That's a beautiful thing.

It sanctifies the time between

If beginning and ending the day in

corporate worship is an obvious blessing of an evening service, a less obvious but still important benefit is that having these bookends around the day encourages the best uses of the Lord's Day while discouraging the less significant uses. Knowing that you will have to leave the house before the football game ends does wonders to uproot any real desire to watch football (or, over time, to even care about football, as I have discovered!). Conversely, knowing that you have four or five hours between services helps you spot a perfect window for extending hospitality. There is no better or more convenient time to open your home, especially to those who drive from a distance, than between the morning and evening service.

It provides another opportunity to learn

I grew up in the Dutch Reformed tradition where the evening service was considered an integral part of any Christian's duty. The morning service was set aside for verse-by-verse preaching through God's Word while the evening service was set aside for

advancing question-by-question through the catechisms and confessions. Even if your church will not use an evening service for teaching the catechism, it does offer an opportunity to teach something else, perhaps a second book of the Bible or a topical series. It also affords a natural context to integrate new or young teachers, to give them a place to grow in their ability to teach and preach.

It provides another opportunity to worship

Just as an evening service opens up more time for teaching, it also opens up more time to sing. I often come to the end of our morning service wishing I could sing more than the five or six or seven songs we sing there. There are so many great songs to sing! The evening service gives us another chance to encourage and admonish one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – those great songs of the faith.

It provides another opportunity to serve

There are many people in our church who are eager to serve and to serve

regularly. With only one service each week, these people would be serving very irregularly – there simply would not be enough ways for all of them to serve the church on a regular basis. However, the evening service immediately adds many more places to serve – we need more people to greet at the door, more people to lead us in song, more people to care for the young children, and on and on. If there is joy in serving one another, our evening service increases our joy by increasing the ways in which we serve.

It gives more time with people I love

I love my church family; there is no group of people I would rather spend time with. And, frankly, Sunday morning and Wednesday evening just isn't enough. As a pastor I want more time to be with the people I serve, to get to know them, to hear from them. As a church member I want more opportunities to fulfill all those "one another" commands with them and to have the other members fulfill them with me. An evening service is yet another opportunity to be with people I enjoy so much.

It is countercultural

An evening service counters our culture's obsession with convenience and low commitment in matters of family, life and religion. It can be downright difficult to get the family out the door once on a Sunday, not to mention twice and your neighbors will be convinced that you're crazy for doing it. Let them! The evening service also counters our Christian culture of expecting little from people and, for that reason, being intimidated to ask much from them. Experience shows that when a church sets the expectation for the evening service, the people rise to it and soon wouldn't have it any other way.

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(Tim Challies, blog post, Thursday 30 January, 2014).

I hope you found these thoughts as encouraging as I did.



Free University of Amsterdam is now Syncretic University of Amsterdam

A correspondent brought to the editor's attention several English publications of the Vrije Universiteit (VU) (Free University) Amsterdam, which was founded in 1880 by Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper as an institution entirely funded by Reformed Christian individuals and institutions. Now for more than forty years, VU Amsterdam has been government funded as are other universities in the Netherlands.

Publications of VU Amsterdam's Faculty of Theology lead to the conclusion that Syncretism is now the official religion of this institution:

In the Future: Connecting People from All Religious Traditions and Convictions
http://www.godgeleerdheid.vu.nl/en/Images/Faculteit-der-Godgeleerdheid-vu_brochure_ENG-SCREEN_tcm61-323701.pdf

+ *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*

+ *Protestant Church in the Netherlands*

Former PCUSA Church in Madison, Wisconsin purchased by Muslims for mosque

A 7 July 2014 Wisconsin State Journal article by Doug Erickson titled "East Side Mosque Purchases Former Presbyterian Church" reports that the Islamic Center of East Madison has bought the former Parkside Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)) in Madison, Wisconsin, and will turn it into a mosque.

The Parkside church closed in early 2014 due to declining membership. In 1994, Parkside was honoured for becoming the first PCUSA congregation in the state to become an "AIDS Caring" community. Parkside was also an early "More Light" congregation, meaning it fully included lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members.

The purchase was assisted by retired PCUSA pastor the Rev. David Butler who commented: "We were able to close approximately two days before Ramadan (Islam's holy month), which I think will be a fine thing for that congregation. We are praying that God will prosper their work there."

Former congregation member Jim Zuelsdorf said that selling the building to another congregation eases the sting

of the church's closure a bit, commenting: "A lot of people had expressed interest in that desire – that it remain a worship centre of some sort for another community. We're very pleased it all worked out and they were able to purchase the building."

+ *Wisconsin State Journal*

+ *Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)*

ISIS Muslims Mark Christian Houses in Mosul, Iraq for theft and liquidation of remaining Christians

ISIS Muslims are marking Christian residences in Mosul, Iraq with the Arabic letter 'nuun', equivalent to the English letter 'en', meaning 'Nazarene', the Arabic word for 'Christian'.

The houses are thus marked for the Muslims to loot and steal, and to liquidate any remaining Christians inside that have not already fled Mosul.

+ *Assyrian International News Agency*

Meriam's case highlights plight of Sudan's Christians

Published: July 16, 2014

The globally known apostasy case of the death-row mother Meriam Ibrahim, forced to give birth with her legs shackled, is only one of many examples of the religious discrimination that Sudanese Christians battle on a regular basis.

The poverty-stricken Muslim country lost the majority of its Christian popu-

lation to South Sudan when the South became independent in 2011 – the creation of the world's newest nation. The South Sudanese population had fought for more than 40 years, in Africa's longest civil war, against domination by the Islamic north. But because war so crippled and destroyed the South, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of Christians fled into the north, where their lives passed often uneasily, and they found themselves settling, often by default. When peace eventually came in 2005, there was too much at stake for them to move country, and many could not afford to do so.

Not surprisingly, given the civil war fault-lines, those Christians now left in the north after the split are finding life in the Islamic nation less than easy. According to the World Watch List 2014 (an annual ranking compiled by Open Doors, which works with Christians under pressure worldwide), Sudan is the 11th most difficult country to be a Christian, out of a ranking of 50.

Destruction of church buildings

Sudanese Religious Affairs Minister Shalil Abdullah on July 12 re-iterated a freeze on new church permits, saying that Sudan has enough churches. In April 2013 his predecessor had announced that licenses would not be granted to allow for the building of new ones. Both



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Ministers cited the fact that the Christian population has substantially decreased since the secession of South Sudan.

The secretary-general of the Sudan Council of Churches Rev Kori El Ramli said he was surprised by this latest re-statement of the ban. "We are growing, we need more churches," he told the BBC's *Focus on Africa* radio programme.

In the most recent incident, on July 1, government officials destroyed the Sudanese Church of Christ in North Khartoum.

Within a 24-hour notice, 70 government officials turned up to demolish the church, which hosted a congregation of more than 600 people. They said the government wanted the land for low-cost housing. The church administration appealed for the demolition to be postponed until the end of the rainy season, but the officials refused.

El Ramli also told the BBC that town planners have been forcibly moving Christians to an area north of Omdurman – itself across the Nile from North Khartoum, where the church that was bulldozed had been located. The ruling means that the area where the congregation is being relocated will not have a church, he said.

"We want the government to give us new plots so we can build a new church. We are citizens and the constitution says there is freedom of religion and worship so we are using this to try to get our rights."

El Ramli said authorities are taking a threatening stance against Christians. He said Sudanese intelligence agents interrupted a workshop the Council of Churches held at the University of Sudan on July 14, accusing them of evangelising.

According to CNN, the threat of violence has caused Sudan's churches to empty. "The church is now contaminated with terror. You don't feel safe in prayer," one Christian activist, who asked CNN not to identify them by name, said.

Bishops speak of visa restrictions, now seen as South Sudanese 'foreigners'

"Christians in Sudan can attend divine service unmolested, but there is no genuine freedom of religion and conscience in the country," spoke out Catholic Bishop Edward Kussala, head of the Diocese of Tombura-Yambio in South Sudan, to Aid to the Church in Need on July 10.

Bishop Kussala said priests and bishops now live "as de facto illegals" in Sudan and are not allowed to hold passports.

"They cannot leave the country and would likely be barred from returning should they leave ... the bishops are condemned to remain silent," he said.

The Catholic Archbishop of Khartoum, Cardinal Zubeir Wako has also highlighted the church's difficulties. While attending the South Sudan and Sudan Bishops' plenary in Juba at the start of the year, he regretted that his auxiliary bishop could not attend the meeting since his passport had been detained, along with those of eight priests.

"The churches are facing serious difficulties. We must focus on the serious matters and come up with strong messages," said Wako at the time.

The government is using the exodus of Christians from Sudan to South Sudan as an excuse to rid the Sudan church of its leadership, according to the Church officials. The leadership is largely made up South Sudanese.

The argument is given that the majority of South Sudanese have left, and others continue to leave Sudan, so the priests and religious who served the Christian community when the country was united are no longer needed.

Another senior bishop, who did not wish to be named for fear of his safety, has told *World Watch Monitor* the intelligence service has interrogated individual priests.

"Some have spent long periods undergoing interrogation," said the bishop. "The (government) is also making acquiring of visas for South Sudanese priests very difficult. I think this very unfair, because the clergy need them to run the churches as 'missionaries' since they are seen as 'foreigners'."

Of the nearly 40 priests of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Khartoum, only six are considered Sudanese and may not need the permits since they hail from the Nuba Mountains.

The majority of the priests, 34, are from South Sudan, and if they wish to go home on a visit they may not get re-entry permits, according to Church officials. Many had served the Church in the north before the country split into two in December 2011.

Most senior Protestant and Roman Catholic bishops, including Cardinal Wako, who are from South Sudan now face the challenge of being seen as "missionaries" on six months visa permits.

Since 2010, no new 'missionaries' for the Roman Catholic Church, for example, have been allowed into Sudan, despite needs created by retirement or death.

The uncertainty of the permits is crippling the church, note Church officials, who believe the government is eyeing lucrative church properties found in Khartoum and other regions.

World Watch Monitor has learnt that priests and pastors have also been detained, threatened and harassed. All Western missionaries have been forced out of the country, according to Church officials.

Destruction of churches is not new

On February 17th the police had earlier destroyed another church in the capital Khartoum.

That 300-member church also belonged to the Sudan Church of Christ. Bulldozers accompanied by police officers from the National Intelligence and Security Service had destroyed the church in Ombada in the Ondurman area of the city without prior notice. The authorities said they were destroying the church because it stood in a Muslim area.

"We had no prior indication from the officials the church would be destroyed," said a Christian at the time, who also sought anonymity.

In April 2012, while a brief territorial war between Sudan and South Sudan was going on, a mob of Islamist extremists attacked and destroyed a church west of Khartoum, despite a police cordon.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an advisory body to the U.S. Congress, said in its 2014 report that Sudan's government "continues to engage in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief."

The report noted that the government also imposes a restrictive interpretation "of Shari'ah law on Muslims and non-Muslims alike, using amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of "indecentcy" and "immorality" and arresting Christians for proselytizing... Religious freedom violations, as well as the violence in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur, are the result of President Bashir's policies of Islamization and Arabization.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings

BY THE GLEANINGS

TEAM:

Odette De Kock –
Auckland Presbytery

Yvonne Walraven –
Wellington Presbytery

Frances Watson –
South Island Presbytery

Collated and edited by **Harriet Haverland**

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Rev. Michael Willemse of the RC Hamilton has received a call from the RC Foxton.

Ben and Maria McDonald have moved down to Masterton where Ben has started his vicariate.

DENOMINATIONAL

The **Reformed Church of Oamaru** celebrated the **50th Anniversary** of their first public worship service as a Reformed

Church of New Zealand, which was held on August 23rd, 1964.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

The **Reformed Church of Foxton** is currently worshipping in Manawatu College School Hall in Foxton. The building they have been worshipping in since their institution in 1984, the Union Parish church, has been condemned as a consequence of tightening the building code. Plans have been drawn up to build a new worship facility on land owned by the congregation. The Church Project Committee is currently in the process of raising the finances for the building and wanted to alert other members of the Reformed Churches that any contributions towards this project would be greatly appreciated.

The **Christchurch** congregation has lodged a PIM with the council as they move toward rebuilding. With Christchurch in rebuild mode, there can be significant delays with both permitting and building. Please pray that the Lord will enable things to progress smoothly and quickly.

The **North Shore** congregation has approved a building extension programme

that will add a hall, kitchen and extra classrooms to the existing church buildings.

MISSIONS

South Sudan: Marlene is back in Iboni and her back continues to heal and grow stronger. A few of the Lopit women even hugged her when she returned, which is not part of their culture. They are confronted with the difficulties of having a witch doctor/rainmaker in the village and ask for prayer for clarity of speech and the message of God's Word, and that they may continue to make an impact on the people around them.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

North Shore: At our Cadets and Gems badge ceremony at the end of term 2 we welcomed into membership five girls and three boys and presented them with their scarves. Thanks to the Lord we now have 26 members in our club, two thirds of which are from the community.

Silverstream: We give thanks to the Lord that we were able to run another Holiday Bible Club over the last week. Numbers were down somewhat this year, but we were still able to encourage about 20 children from other local churches, along with roughly the same number from our own congregation, to hold fast to the biblical doctrine of creation – this year's theme. In addition to those who are already familiar with the Word of God, there were 3 children who do not attend any church regularly. Parents of the children from outside our congregation gave some very positive feedback, for which we are also thankful.

Waiunuiomata: Holiday Bible Club – The Kingdom Chronicles – What a great turnout we have had this past week! Up to 80 children each day! A HUGE thank you to all those who have helped out in various ways; your work and time is much appreciated. The feedback we have received from families was all positive which is great to hear! May the Lord bless the seeds that have been planted in the children who attended.

Crossroad Bible Institute – Currently CBI New Zealand ministers to a total

*On the 9th of July, 2014,
the Lord called home*

Anne (Onne)
BAJEMA

Aged 85

Dearly loved husband
of Siebrig (Siepke)

Loving father of Sjirk & Betty-Ann,
Douglas & Anita, Gerald & Adila

Much loved Pake of
Eileen & Stewart,
Andrew, & Amira.



He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Revelation 21:5

of 502 students and they are served by 86 instructors, who during the past year processed an average of 133 lessons per month. Please continue to pray for the ministry of CBI in the prisons and for those involved with the work of CBI in NZ. If you would like further information about Crossroad Bible Institute you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, P.O. box 11005 HASTINGS 4158, or go to the CBI website at www.cbi.fm

CAMPS AND CONFERENCES

RTC Preaching Conference: September 25th-26th in Geelong, Victoria.

Auckland Reformation Conference: October 30th to November 1st. The speaker this year will be Dr. Phillip Scheepers, speaking on the theme *“Let the earth hear His voice” – Reflections on the Reformation and the Call to Missions.*

Young Adults’ Convention (YAC) is for all 18 to 30 year olds who want to grow their relationships with God and each other. Due to Synod, this year’s YAC will be held later on the 14th-17th November, again at Lakeview Bible camp in Rotorua. We’ve tried to choose a date that falls between uni exams and the wedding season. From 2015, YAC will

be the second-to-last weekend in August.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

The **Avondale** Cadets and Gems Club held a Dessert Night Fundraiser to raise funds for their mission badge. They had been making blankets, pillows and hacky sacks to send to the Solomon Islands. Funds raised went toward the cost of postage.

TOURNAMENTS

Volleyball Tournament 2014: The annual volleyball tournament is booked for Saturday, September 20th (DV) at the Masterton Community Centre. This tournament is open to all the North Island churches and is being run as a fundraiser for the Silverstream Christian School.

CLASSES & COURSES

Auckland Presbytery Men’s Training Day: Instead of hosting their own training day this year, the Auckland Presbytery has decided to encourage its men to attend a seminar being run by Grace Theological College, entitled *Shepherding for Growth in a Post-Christian culture*. The speakers are Zach Eswine and Greg Perry, past and current lecturers at Covenant Seminary.

Short report of the Auckland Presbytery

The Auckland Presbytery met on Friday 27th of June 2014 at the usual meeting place, the Pukekohe Reformed Church, on a cold wet night. Some of the delegates were a little late due to the wet conditions on the road. All the churches were represented by two delegates. Rev Peter Moelker was appointed as the moderator.

It was the turn of the Hamilton session to organize a Men’s Presbytery Day this year but they proposed that this not be held in view of Grace Theological College hosting two weeks of meetings in August presented by two lecturers from Covenant Theological Seminary. The meeting agreed with this proposal and will encourage the men of our churches to attend these seminars.

Hukanui answered the questions of Church Order Article 47 positively. They expressed the blessing of having Rev Leo de Vos in the congregation; he and the session were working very well together; there is peace in the church and the worship services are well attended.

The North Shore also answered the questions positively. Nearly all the children of the church either attend a Christian school or are home schooled. The church actively supports a mission work in Botswana. They have 26 in cadets, 17 of whom

are from non-church families. They also run a Mainly Music programme which is well attended, and run a Language Assisted Bible Study that is giving good opportunity for regular conversations about the Gospel with unbelieving people. The congregation has approved a building extension programme that will add a hall, kitchen and extra classrooms to the existing church buildings.

Rev Michael Willemse presented another fine summary of the minutes of the various classes (presbyteries) of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. The moderator drew attention to the photo that accompanied the South Island minutes and noted that many of the delegates were wearing a tie, making an implied comparison with the standard of dress in our own presbytery!

The Hamilton session presented a proposed overture asking the synod to appoint a study committee to assess the suitability of the 2011 revision of the New International Version for use as a pulpit Bible. After some discussion back and forth the motion was carried by a narrow margin.

The Hamilton session presented another proposed overture asking the synod to declare the New King James version unsuitable for pulpit use in the RCNZ. There was a general discussion about the Greek text of the New Testament. The motion was defeated.

The meeting was closed in prayer at 10.50 pm

Reporter: John A Haverland

Back issues of *Faith in Focus*

can be found on the

RCNZ Home Page

<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

South Island Ladies' Fellowship 2014

On 1 March, 2014, from 9am, the women of the newly-instituted Reformed Church of Oamaru hosted the annual gathering of the South Island Ladies' Fellowship. Ladies arrived from the congregations of Nelson, Bishopdale, Christchurch, Dovedale and Dunedin for a day of 'fellowship, thought-provoking speakers, fun and food'.

Once everyone had picked up the registration pack and name tag, had a drink and a bite to eat, we began with our focus on 'a celebration of life' guided by Psalm 139. A warm welcome was made to everyone, an introduction was given to the planned activities and we joined in prayer and singing.

Speakers for the day were all members of the congregation and our first, Mrs Jacqui de Ruiter, is also president of the Oamaru branch of Voice for Life. Reminding us that God created life and made us in His image, Jacqui spoke about the sanctity of life and how precious are the unborn. It is to the shame of society that these vulnerable members are not protected from harm and we, as Christians, have a duty to speak out against those who deny that babies in the womb are human beings. "For You created my inmost being: You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

Added to this is our responsibility to love our neighbour and show that love to young women and their families who suffer from the effects of abortion, without being judgemental: for which one of us is sinless and who can cast the first stone? The decision to have an abortion is never easy for the woman and too often it comes because of pressure from a mother who isn't mothering, a critical father or a boyfriend who uses emotional blackmail.

Remember that the little one is a child ... not a choice.

Concluding her talk with prayer, Jacqui introduced the next hymns we were to sing, which we did heartily. Morning tea followed this interlude, with baking graciously provided by our Dunedin sisters. Refreshed bodily and socially, our next speaker, Mrs Tani Newton, gave us an

insight into her 'new life in Christ'.

Tani grew up in the north of the North Island: her mother was an American and an agnostic, her father German and an atheist. Having a rather liberal, 'new agey' way of living, Tani should have been happy, but she wasn't: "Something was wrong with me ... I was broken and didn't know how to fix myself; I didn't know what it was."

Tani was not allowed to be a Christian but this made her very curious and she read every article about Christianity in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, when no one was looking. She even managed to get hold of a Bible, which she read desperately, but didn't understand a word of it.

Through her teenage years Tani resisted God's call until one day she could

resist no more and convinced a nearby vicar to baptise her ... before her mother returned from an overseas trip! The deed done, the next step as a newly converted Christian was to attend church. Arriving at a local church the following Sunday, Tani met one of her neighbours, who astonished her by saying that she had been praying for Tani for years. It was at university that Tani was encouraged and strengthened in her faith by the Christians on campus and she believes that her conversion followed the five points of Calvinism.

Tani's desire for the future is to become an old woman so she might encourage younger women to fulfill their calling to be wives and mothers.

After singing a couple more hymns, the final speaker, Mrs Winifred Balchin,



Many ladies singing.



Fellowship over lunch.

gave us insight into the challenges we may face in our older age. The proprietor of a rest home for those with de-

mentia, Winifred was able to give clear information on changes older people can make as they age and options that are

available should they need help, whether it is in their own home, by moving in with family, or by going into care. Old age is not a death-sentence; rather it is a time for reflection and enjoyment of our efforts, depending how fit we are in body and mind.

Although God made us perfectly, sin has corrupted that perfection and the physical body and mind are affected by decay. All is not lost, however, because God still upholds His creatures and our task in this life is not completed until He calls us home, whether we remain in our own house or live elsewhere. Knowing who to ask and the questions to ask will help making decisions easier, as does having time to adjust to the decisions needing to be made. As parents we can delegate the educating of our children to schools and as children we are to care for our aging parents, sometimes delegating their daily care to the management and staff of a rest home.

The first person to talk to is the family doctor, who will refer to a social worker so an assessment can be made. A visit



More fellowship, this time over dinner.



Stylish maids waiting upon the ladies during the meal.

to a geriatrician is also beneficial but the older person must be the one to make the necessary decision: being forced into care brings more problems than it solves and, at all times, we must continue to honour our parents, as God has commanded us to.

Having finished her speech, Winifred introduced the next song and, after the giving of thanks for the meal, we went into the hall for dinner, to sit at tables decorated with flower arrangements of a colour matching the dot on our name tags. This satisfying meal was followed by the decorating of cupcakes for afternoon tea, which were judged by helpers Bruce Hoyt and Peter de Reus, the winners being the ladies at the orange table.

The activity for the afternoon was a ride on an original British double-decker bus to and from the historic precinct and, for those who were able to manage it, walking around the area, looking at the shops which were open, the crafts and goods on display and enjoying the

old buildings in this Victorian/Edwardian part of Oamaru. Several of the hardier members of our group tried their hand at riding a penny farthing and pedalling a two-seater bike; having a wonderful time.

Back at the church other women were busy setting up for a Victorian afternoon tea. The sight that met the returning ladies drew gasps and expressions of delight. Dressed as authentic Victorian maids, five younger girls supplied tea and coffee to our guests as they sat down for a special afternoon tea. The tables were beautifully set with cups, saucers and plates matching the colour of the floral arrangement in the centre. During this time we heard the reports from each church's ladies' group, listened to the recitation of a poem and closed this part of the day with singing and prayer.

Later that evening, around thirty of us gathered at the Star & Garter restaurant in the historic part of town for a simple

but enjoyable buffet-style meal. Not ready for a quiet time, some of the more energetic ones went in search of Little Blue penguins and took a drive around Oamaru and the surrounding area.

It was wonderful to have a full church the next morning and it gave us an opportunity to finish the food left over from the previous day.

Looking back at our first event as an established church, it was a time full of God's blessing (after weeks of rain, the sun shone, making for pleasant weather!) and of coming together to use our different gifts and abilities to strengthen Christ's Body. We were thankful for the SILF days that had been held before: from them we gleaned many tips and ideas to which we added our own twist and flavour. We look forward to the next day out in 2015, which will be in Christchurch.

"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow..."



CBI NEW ZEALAND NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2014

In the work of CBI we are very much involved in the ministry of reconciliation. God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2Cor. 5:16-21). We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as we reach out to men and women in prison.

Thank you to the many people who willingly serve the Lord in the ministry of CBI either as Instructors, in administration, in financial support and those who faithfully uphold and keep this ministry in their prayers. Your support is greatly appreciated.

One student wrote "Thank you guys at CBI. You are my friends and family and through God, you have brought meaning

and enjoyment to my life. Thank you very much and God Bless."

The total prison population in NZ in March 2014 was approximately 8,500. This includes around 530 female prisoners.

A brief overview of CBI NZ:

We have 341 active students and 161 enrolled students in the CBI Courses. A total of 502 students.

There are 86 Instructors and a team of 11 volunteers working in our office. In the last two months I have trained another 9 Instructors.

We processed 1597 lessons from March 2013 to February 2014 – an average of 133 lessons per month.

In this same period there were 367 new enrolments – an average of 30 per month.

Although we have had many new enrolments during the past year there have also been many students who stopped with the studies. There are various reasons for this:

Students may be released and decide not to continue with the studies.

Students completed the Course and choose not to continue with further studies.

Students have been transferred to another prison and although we follow up we no longer have contact.

Students find the GTB Course too difficult – particularly doing the Roadmaps and stop the studies. This is mostly due to literacy problems. Some of these students go on to enroll in the MM Course.

Students may be busy either with programs they are required to do in prison or pursuing academic studies.

Finances:

In this last financial year – April 1st 2013 to March 31st 2014 our income was \$21,566.00 while our expenses were

\$19,638.00. The postage cost was \$6700 and the cost of the lessons we have used was \$5600. Both these expenses will increase in the coming year. I am very thankful for the financial support we receive from Churches and individuals. CBI NZ is registered with the Charities Commission which means your donations are tax deductible.

Student responses from the Manga Messiah course:

"I am thankful there are people out there who care about those who are behind bars although it seems the world has forgotten us."

"Thank you for helping me through the hard times of my life since being incarcerated. I only turned to God when times were hard but you guys helped me open myself up to love when I felt life was not good. You made me appreciate life a lot more. The little things you did with your advice which comforted me because I thought I was all alone but now I know I'm not.. Keep up the good work."

"I would like Jesus to change the darkness and emptiness in my heart and soul and fill it with joy."

"Thank you for allowing me to do your Bible Course. Thank you also for your support. I enjoyed doing my first lesson and I love the Manga Messiah book very much. I love reading it. It is really interesting to read and I find it really helpful when doing my book work. I really do think that by doing your Manga Messiah Course it will definitely place me in the right direction and show me the right path to take through life."

Student responses from Tier1 courses:

"Thank you CBI for helping me in following in the path of the Lord. It is really helping me in my spiritual journey and the letters you send are a great encouragement and thank you for all your prayers."

"Thank you so much for sending me my lesson. I love Bible studies and thank you for letting me be a part of CBI and share my love for the Lord with you. I have told a friend how much I love doing studies with you. She would like to join. Could you please send a form for her to join with my next lesson? Thanks. God Bless"

"Thank you for the great letters. It is very encouraging to receive them. I really do enjoy the excellent learning I get from these studies. The time I sit and reflect on the Word of God boosts me up for each day. So once again thanks so much."

"I had finally had enough of doing things my way. I kept hitting the same dead ends or brick walls. So I thought this just isn't working out right even when I changed countries the same outcome would follow me. So finally I gave over my life. Now I have a joy and peace without the drugs."

Please continue to pray for the ministry of CBI in the prisons and for those involved with the work of CBI in NZ. If you would like further information about Crossroad Bible Institute you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, P.O. Box 11005 HASTINGS 4158

Missions in focus

The Reformational Study Centre (S.A.)

Paulin Bédard

It was with much excitement that I went to South Africa for the very first time this year, from May 1st to May 21st. The purpose of this special trip was to visit the Reformational Study Centre in Pretoria and to get acquainted with this unique ministry and the people working at this Centre.

During the past year, I providentially came into contact with the Rev. Jopie vander Linden and I discovered the important work he is doing at the RSC, developing a Preaching Library (www.christianstudylibrary.org/pl) and a Christian Library online (www.christianstudylibrary.org). After some email correspondence with him and in consultation with my consistory in St-Georges (Québec, Canada), it was agreed upon, with great joy, that I would develop a new French Christian Library online in

cooperation with the RSC. The Canadian Reformed Church in Owen Sound (with other supporting churches of their federation) is also generously supporting this project spiritually and financially.

The name of the new website is *Ressources chrétiennes* and it will be launched soon (www.ressourceschretiennes.com). The purpose of this project is to provide good French Reformed literature, which will be made available all over the world through internet, though more specifically to French African pastors and church leaders who greatly need scripturally sound literature. The Lord is opening a wonderful door before us. He is giving us the opportunity to contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and the edification of His Church through electronic means.

I was most warmly welcomed by the Rev. vander Linden, his wife Jennie and their three children. We had the

opportunity to get to know each other better and be encouraged by what the Lord is doing in our respective lives. We talked about theological and ecclesiastical issues, life in South Africa, the mission work in Africa, and of course their ministry at the Centre. The development of churches in Africa is facing great challenges, one of them being the need for sound biblical preaching and teaching of the whole counsel of God. It amazes me to see how internet can be used to help thousands of preachers all over Africa prepare their sermons and develop their skills to teach the Bible to their churches and neighbours. It is difficult to measure the fruit of this ministry, but the number of people using this service and commenting on the spiritual benefits they receive through the RSC gives us a glimpse on the great impact of this work throughout Africa and even in some parts of Asia.

I learned some technical aspects of the work from the Rev. vander Linden, who showed to me how their software works, and who gave me advice on how we

should build the French Library online. I also had the opportunity to meet with several volunteers who regularly come to the Centre, generously giving their time

and talents for the development of this work. I saw how busy they were, scanning books for the Preaching Library or for the Timothy Project, proof-reading articles for the Christian Library, classifying electronic documents, posting them on the web, or sending articles to pastors and teachers according to the requests they receive weekly. I was very thankful and encouraged to see these brothers and sisters in the Lord work together in harmony for the cause of this mission. I also had the pleasure to meet with the Rev. vander Linden's parents who had just moved from Cape Town to Pretoria in order to help the Centre and to be more closely involved in this ministry.

One cannot visit South Africa without taking the time to discover some of the natural beauties of this fascinating country. During my stay, I had the privilege (thanks to the vander Linden family and some volunteers!) of visiting several nature reserves, botanical gardens and parks, and observing typical South African natural environments,



The Reformatational Study Centre in Pretoria, South Africa

continued on page 24



Mr J vander Linden at the nerve centre of the Reformatational Study Centre.

big mammals and beautiful birds. As a bird-watcher, I was really overjoyed!

In a word, this recent trip to South Africa and to the RSC was very beneficial to me and spurred my enthusiasm for the work that needs to be done in French Africa. I now feel better equipped to start with them the French part of this ministry on solid grounds. May the Lord bless this joint effort and may this work be done for His glory and the edification of His Church.

Mr Paulin Bédard, is a minister of the gospel in the Église Chrétienne Réformée de Beauce in Quebec and editor of their magazine Lumière (Light).

Website of the Reformation Study Centre – a portal to an amazing collection of resources for ministers of the gospel in Africa and French-speaking peoples everywhere. (ABOVE)

Mr Jopie vander Linden (l) showing Mr Paulin Bédard through the system used at the centre.

