

faith in **focus**

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*"May the glory of the
LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in
his works."*

Psalm 104:31



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Editorial

When people today use the word 'passion' they mean something with a strong emotion. Perhaps it is an outburst of anger, or it is sexual love, or maybe a strong enthusiasm for doing something.

A less used meaning for this word is in reference to Christ's suffering, particularly in the week which ended in His death upon the cross.

Suffering usually has physical pain, but it can also involve a mental anguish. One example I remember of this was the reaction of High School students on a bus which collided with a bus carrying Primary School children. Because of their general knowledge and experience and age, this accident took on a lot more for those High School students than for those on the other bus. When they saw what was about to happen and the results of what happened it was much more than what was just, physically speaking, a minor accident with only a few cuts and bruises and two buses a bit dented.

For our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who knows all things - past, present, and future - the torment was greater than any we can imagine. This was no small thing He was about to go through but a suffering to the extent that He would even be cut off from His father's love. Leon Morris notes that that death Jesus was facing wasn't one He could calmly face as many saints have done, because it was the death in which He would be forsaken by God, the death through which God made Him to be sin for us.

It is The Passion which should make us passionate. So easily we can become wrapped up in the things of this world, including our human relationships, that we aren't sharing the suffering of our Saviour in looking beyond this world.

It's very relevant then that Luke describes His praying all the more earnestly and His sweat being like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). That showed how much He was suffering. And it showed how much He remained totally focused. In our pitiful struggles by comparison, with no less help available from His own Spirit, do we?

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The Passion of our Lord is also very much in the news of late with the movie made by the well-known Hollywood figure, Mel Gibson. Many evangelical Christians have very much taken that movie to heart and are actively using it as a way of outreach to unbelievers. There are serious difficulties with this movie, though, and with this type of evangelistic endeavour in general. These are explored in a helpful review of the movie by Andrew Webb in this issue.

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One of our alert readers picked up a mistake on the February cover of Faith in Focus. The word "not" had been added to the quote from Job. My apologies for this. It gives us a reminder to be like the Bereans of Acts 17, who were always comparing everything said with God's Word, even for things which slip in accidentally.

*“The reason why Christ chose
 the hard way of the cross was,
 among other things,
 that he saw beyond it.”*

S. J. Reid

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

It's in the blood

A deeper look into what we're made of

Hans Voschezang

The aura of blood

Blood splatters the pages of history. The Roman epileptics dashed to the floor of the Colosseum to lap up the blood of dying gladiators, they believed that the spilt blood of the dying gladiators could heal them of their illness. And in Kenya Massai tribesmen still celebrate feast days by drinking blood from a freshly slaughtered cow.

In human relations, blood had a mysterious, almost sacred aura. An oath held more power than a person's word, but blood made a contract not to be violated.

In our modern time we have inherited quaint tokens of the mystery of blood.

A wedding ring is placed on the "leech finger" that was once believed to contain a vein leading directly to the heart. Even now, after it has been processed in laboratories, blood still retains mystic powers, if only in the queasy sensation it evokes when we see someone bleed profusely.

Most religions throughout history have honoured blood as a sacred substance.

Although we feel uncomfortable with the fact, we too have an initial resistance to the intrusion of blood into our religion. In this respect, we differ from other cultures.

Consider the term, "Washed in the blood", Nothing in modern culture corresponds to the idea of blood as a cleansing agent. We use water with soap and detergent to clean. Blood will only soil. The symbol of blood with its specific quality of cleansing appears throughout the bible. In Leviticus 14 a priest sprinkles blood on the skin of a person who was healed of an infectious disease. In the New Testament John tells us that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin (1 John 1: 7) and in Revelation John describes a multitude who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7: 14) Does this frequent reference to blood indicate Christianity's remoteness from modern culture? Not at all. Modern Medical Science has shown that the symbol of cleansing conforms closely to the function of the actual substance of blood. Biblical writers did not know the Physiology behind their metaphor, but God the Creator chose a Theological symbol with an exact analog in the medical world.

The physical description

All that we have learned about Physiology in recent years confirms the accuracy and puts it side by side of blood and cleansing: Through a chemical process of gas diffusion

and transfer, individual red cells, travelling slowly inside narrow blood vessels, release their cargos of fresh oxygen and absorb waste products such as carbon dioxide. The red cells deliver these hazardous chemicals to organs that can dump them outside the body.

In the lungs carbon dioxide collects in small pockets and is exhaled with every breath. The kidney filters out complex chemical wastes. One-fourth of the blood from each heartbeat courses down the renal artery to the kidneys. That artery divides and subdivides into a tracery of tubules so intricate as to bedazzle the finest Venetian glass blower. Filtering is what the kidney is



all about, but in a very little space of time. The kidney manages speed by coiling tubules into a million crystal loops, where chemicals can be picked over one by one. Red cells are too bulky for those tiny passageways; the kidney extracts the sugars, salts and water from the blood and deals with them separately. After the kidney has removed the red cell's entire payload of some 30 chemicals, its enzymes re-insert 99% of the volume into the bloodstream.

The 1% remaining is mostly urea and is hustled away outside the body. With the next heartbeat another couple of litres of fresh blood rushes in to fill the tubules. Other organs enter the scavenging process. A red bloodcell can only sustain this rough treatment of freight loading and unloading

for about 250.000 circuits or so and then, battered, leaky and worn out it is nudged out to the liver and spleen for complete dismantling and recycling.

The tiny heart of iron, "Magnet" for the crucial hemoglobin molecule, limps back to the bone marrow for re-incarnation in to another red bloodcell. A new cycle of fuelling and cleansing begins. Blood sustains life by carrying away the chemical byproducts that would interfere with it by cleansing.

As a metaphor

Reflecting on the body of Christ, the church, the blood metaphor offers a fresh perspective on a perpetual problem in that body: sin. The word sin is commonly used to describe God's relationship with sinful people. God is the Judge, we the accused. Justice needs to be done. Christ died for sins once for all, the Just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us back to God. Through Him there is forgiveness. In blood we have a perfect example to reveal the process of sin and forgiveness with startling clarity.

Forgiveness cleanses the wasteful products, sins that impede true health, just as blood cleanses harmful metabolites. To realize the full meaning of romantic love, we must recognize the natural laws that rule an exclusive relationship. In a complete, fulfilling relationship with God and our neighbour, equally binding principals apply.

When pride, egotism, lust and covetousness takes over, they poison us, interfering with those relationships. They need to be purged out. Separation from God is at the root of sin and ourselves. The more we cling to our sins the more we will withdraw from God. The Old Testament Israelites had a vivid pictorial representation of this state of separation. God's presence rested in the Most Holy Place, approachable only once a year on the Day of Atonement by the High Priest who had purified himself through an elaborate series of blood sacrifices.

Scriptural fulfilment

Jesus Christ made that ceremony obsolete by a once for all sacrifice. "This is My blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins," Jesus said as He instituted the Last Supper. (Matt. 26:28)

The author of the Hebrews contrasted Christ's complete, once for all sacrifice to the partial, annual rituals performed by the High Priest, Christ became THE sacrificial Lamb as well as THE High Priest conquering all evil with His own blood.

Today we are celebrating the Lord's

Supper in a total different way as in the Old Testament days. Then, each worshipper had to go to the Temple to receive forgiveness by a blood sacrifice performed by a designated priest. The stench of death, the

sight of blood draining away at the foot of the altar, the odour of burning flesh, a Holy of Holies off limits to everyone, an offering brought by each worshipper were all elements characterizing that worship scene. These rituals needed to be performed over and over again, Under the Old Covenant, worshippers brought the sacrifice they gave. In the New, believers receive tokens of the finished work of the Risen Christ. "My Body, which was broken for you..... My blood, which was shed for you.....We come to the table as sinners, we are all debtors to grace. Forgiveness is our only hope of acceptance, and in true repentance we experience His forgiveness, love and healing. It becomes that personal as members of His Body.

In other words, the same living blood that bathes every cell with the nutrients of life also carries away all the accumulated waste and refuse. By His blood we are forgiven, made clean. No longer do we have to come to God through a purified priest. No longer await the Day of Atonement to enter the Holy of Holies. On the day Christ died the thick temple veil of separation split from top to bottom. Now we, all God's people, can enter in to direct communion with the Lord. "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is His Body. (Heb.10: 19)

The word repentance describes the act of each cell undergoing that cleansing. Each cell willingly cooperates with the available cleansing process of blood. It is for our sakes, not so much to punish us as to free us from the harmful effects of accumulated sins. In addition to removing sin, Christ's blood replaces it with His own Righteousness. "God made Him who had no sin, to be sin for us." Paul said,"so that in Him we might become the Righteousness of God." (2 Cor.5:21) In other words, "This is His Body, broken for you; broken, to remove all our sins and replace them with His perfect obedience."

This is how God loves us

We do not take easy to forgiveness. The concept flies against all reason. We find that mercy is a difficult concept to grasp and accept. In approaching God we expect fear and pain: but unqualified forgiveness stops us short.

But in a incomprehensible way this is exactly how God loves us. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; and as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed out transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. (Ps.103:11-13)

To be known by God, to be forgiven, to be justified and to be loved is our only hope to

eternal life. Something of that yearning lies at the heart of the Lord's Supper.

We partake, and we take the bread and the wine, as an assurance of our faith. The symbol works its way inside us, becoming material as well as spiritual nourishment, carrying its message to individual cells through the body.

In the Lord's Supper we are reminded of the redeeming power of Christ's sacrifice that made obsolete the whole Jewish sacrificial system. So, we also experience the particular, cell by cell cleansing of toxins that have accumulated and will not easily release their grip. "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life." (Rom.5:10)

If sin is the separator, Christ is the Great Reconciler. He desolves the membrane of separation that grows up every day between ourselves and God, between ourselves and other. "Now in Jesus," said Paul elsewhere."You who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." He Himself is our peace. So the Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's healing the Church by His blood sacrifice, which removes all impurities.

These are some of the wonderful working of our bodies, how blood sustains physical life and how the cleansing power of Jesus' blood was enough for all time and eternity. We stand in awe of this Great God, our Maker and Creator. To Him be the glory and thanksgiving.

In the words of one of our paraphrased psalms in the Psalter Hymnal:

Whole-hearted thanksgiving to Thee I will bring,

In praise of Thy marvelous deeds I will sing;

In Thee I will joy and exultingly cry,

Thy Name I will praise O Jehovah Most High.

Praise the Lord, let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord, let the people rejoice

O come to Jehovah, declare ye His fame

And give Him all honour, for just is His Name.

Based on the following sources: "In His Image", by the late Dr Paul Brand;

"Why we eat the Lord's Supper", by John Piper; and "The blood of Christ", By L.M.Grant

*With joy and thankfulness to God
for His faithfulness
we celebrate the*

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

of our parents and Opa and Oma

Adriaan and Feikje POSTHUMA



Married in Wellington
10 April 1954

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Nathan

Tony and Robyn
Heidi, Anton, Andre, Annelise

John and Marielle
Johanna, Michael, Andrew, Alicia, Luke,
Lydia, Owen, Frances, Joel, Isaac

Rosalind and Derek
Benjamin, Nathanael, Naomi, Othniel,
Abigail

Hillary and Diana
Simone, Gareth, Hayley

Winston and Kristina
James, Jeremy, Timothy, Christopher

Graham and Alice
Laura, Jessica, Jared

Raymond and Monique
Reuben, Juliette, Renee, Michaela, Eliza

*"Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life
and I shall dwell in the house of
the Lord forever." Psalm 23:6*

Unit 12 Cornwall Mews
37 Cornwall St, Christchurch

The Passion of Christ

Five reasons not to see it

Andrew J. Webb

"On February 25, 2004, Icon Films released Mel Gibson's much-anticipated film, *The Passion of the Christ*. The date of the release was deliberately chosen to coincide with the Roman Catholic holy day of Ash Wednesday, and is indicative of the fact that for Gibson, his film was more of a work of devotion than a money-making enterprise. In an interview on the Roman Catholic Television Network EWTN, Gibson candidly stated why this movie is so different from all his others. "It reflects my beliefs—I've never done that before." He is also quite open about his desire to see his movie used for worldwide evangelism. Many noted Evangelicals, including James Dobson and Billy Graham, have also come forward to endorse *The Passion of the Christ*, and recommend its use as a teaching tool. Currently, *The Passion of the Christ* is riding a groundswell of nationwide support from both Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, with many well-known Evangelical congregations, such as bestselling author and Pastor Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, which purchased 18,000 tickets at seven theatres, doing everything they can to ensure that *The Passion of the Christ* will be a smash hit amongst Christians and "seekers." Expressing a widely-held view amongst the film's supporters, Lisa Wheeler, associate editor of *Catholic Exchange*, a Web portal dedicated to Catholic evangelism, told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "It's the best evangelisation opportunity we've had since the actual death of Jesus."

But should Evangelicals be supporting *The Passion of the Christ* and endorsing its use as an evangelism tool? Is this really the best evangelisation opportunity we've had since the actual death of Jesus? After careful consideration, my conclusion is an unequivocal "No." Here then are five reasons why I believe Evangelicals should not see or recommend *The Passion of the Christ*.

1 - Its origins

Even though Evangelicals are promoting *The Passion of the Christ*, it is not an Evangelical movie. As Mel Gibson, a devout Roman Catholic put it so well; "It reflects my beliefs." *The Passion of the Christ* is a Roman Catholic movie, made by a Roman Catholic director, with Roman Catholic theological advisers, and which gained the endorsement of Pope John Paul II, who said after viewing it, "It is as it was." This is in marked contrast to the Jesus film, which is unabashedly Protestant and Evangelical in its production and

message and which has been widely used in evangelising Roman Catholics. It is largely for this reason that the Jesus film has not been utilised or endorsed by Roman Catholics. By contrast, *The Passion of the Christ* has already proven its effectiveness as an evangelism tool in producing Catholic conversions and encouraging Catholic devotion: "In his first nationally broadcast interview about his starring role in Mel Gibson's much-anticipated film, *The Passion of the Christ*, James Caviezel — Gibson's Jesus — detailed on Friday the ordeal of filming the Crucifixion scenes, noting that the overall experience prompted many in the



crew to convert to Catholicism. "...Noting "the amount of conversions on the movie," he said the experience of filming Christ's story "really changed people's lives." "Caviezel recalled telling Gibson, "I think it's very important that we have mass every day — at least I need that to play this guy." "I felt if I was going to play him I needed [the sacrament] in me. So [Gibson] provided that."

2 - Its script

Although it is widely thought that the script for the movie is based entirely on the gospel according to John, this is not the case. The script for *The Passion of the Christ* contains much extrabiblical material, and is based in part on a mystical Roman Catholic devotional work by an eighteenth-century German nun (Sister Anne Emmerich) entitled *The Dolorous Passion of Christ*. Gibson stated on EWTN

that reading Emmerich's book was his primary inspiration for making the movie. By introducing extrabiblical elements, not only does *The Passion of the Christ* change some of the theological emphases of the biblical account of Christ's crucifixion, but it will also create a false impression amongst the very "seekers" that Evangelicals are trying to reach, that things were said and done at the crucifixion that did not actually happen. For Evangelicals, who would feel very uncomfortable with a version of the Bible that put words into the mouth of Christ that he never spoke, to endorse a movie that does the very same thing, seems hopelessly inconsistent. Protestants traditionally rejected the Apocrypha precisely because these books were fabricated and contained inauthentic material, despite the fact that these books might have been useful for evangelism. For modern evangelicals to embrace a vehicle that is inauthentic in order to achieve evangelistic ends indicates a serious decline in faithfulness.

The script for *The Passion of the Christ* not only adds things that didn't occur in the Bible, but cuts out other things that did. The most widely-known example of this is the important declaration, "His blood be on us and on our children." (Matthew 27:25)

The script for *The Passion of the Christ* was translated into Aramaic and Latin by Father William Fulco, an old friend of Mel Gibson's. This was not done for reasons of making it more authentic. The language decisions in *The Passion of the Christ* were made for theological reasons: It is crucial to realise that the images and language at the heart of *The Passion of the Christ* flow directly out of Gibson's personal dedication to Catholicism in one of its most traditional and mysterious forms — the 16th-century Latin Mass.

"I don't go to any other services," the director told the Eternal Word Television Network. "I go to the old Tridentine Rite. That's the way that I first saw it when I was a kid. So I think that that informs one's understanding of how to transcend language. Now, initially, I didn't understand the Latin... But I understood the meaning and the message and what they were doing. I understood it very fully and it was very moving and emotional and efficacious, if I may say so."

"The goal of the movie is to shake modern audiences by brashly juxtaposing the "sacrifice of the cross with the sacrifice of the altar — which is the same thing," said Gibson. This ancient union of symbols and

sounds has never lost its hold on him. There is, he stressed, "a lot of power in these dead languages."

Thus, the seemingly-bizarre choice of Latin and Aramaic was actually part of the message."

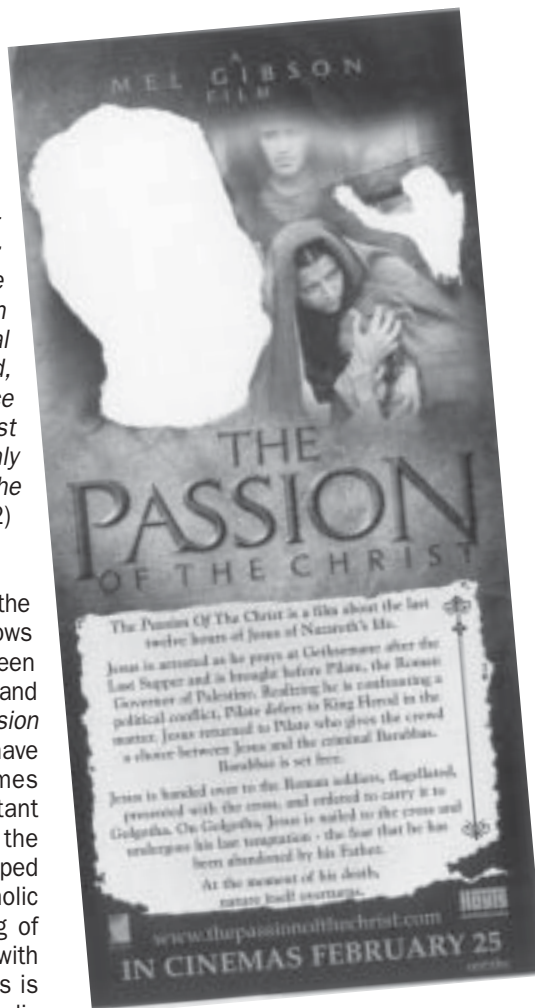
The script of *The Passion of the Christ* was specifically intended to link the crucifixion of Christ with what Roman Catholics believe is the re-sacrificing of Christ that occurs in the mass. Gibson's intent is to show us that the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the altar (the mass) are the same thing. Protestant Evangelicals have historically rejected the idea that Christ can be sacrificed again, and declared it "abominable."

Speaking of the concept that the Crucifixion and the mass is the same thing, the Protestant Westminster Confession declares: "*In this sacrament, Christ is not offered up to his Father; nor any real sacrifice made at all, for remission of sins of the quick or dead; but only a commemoration of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the cross, once for all: and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same: so that the popish sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of his elect.*" (Chapter 29, Article 2)

3 - Its theology

Gibson's comment about the sacrifice of the altar and the sacrifice of the cross shows the indispensable link in this movie between the Catholic view of Christ's sacrifice and the portrayal of the Crucifixion in *The Passion of the Christ*. The fact that Evangelicals have uncritically endorsed it speaks volumes about how far the Evangelical Protestant understanding of Christ's death and the related subject of Justification have slipped since the Reformation. In Roman Catholic theology the intense physical suffering of Christ's Crucifixion is the focus, along with the emphasis on physical sacrifice. This is one of the reasons why in Roman Catholic iconography we have so much imagery related to Christ's physical pain, and why crucifixes show Him still suffering on the cross. (The sacrifice of the mass means that Christ's declaration that his once for all sacrifice is completed "it is finished" (John 19:30) never actually comes, and that his suffering has to be constantly repeated.) This emphasis on Christ's physical agony is repeated in Roman Catholic devotional material, prayers, and of course, in *The Passion of the Christ*. The theology of the Bible, however, points out to us that the grand importance of Christ's crucifixion lay not in His physical suffering, but in His once-for-all propitiation of God's wrath (1 John

4:10). Lest we forget, the greatest torment that Christ experienced on the cross was not caused by the nails driven into his flesh, but by His being made "*sin for us*" and vicariously suffering the righteous punishment of the Father in our place. Even the worst physical torments inflicted by the Sanhedrin and the Romans upon Jesus were nothing by comparison to the anguish of having the sins of all the elect imputed to Him, and making full satisfaction for them. Satisfying the justice of the Romans on a cross was comparatively easy. Thousands of condemned men and women including



Spartacus and several of the Apostles did that, but only Christ could satisfy the justice of God.

Also central to the Christian Gospel, but missing from *The Passion of the Christ*, is the concept of Christ's active obedience. Christ not only died for the sins of His sheep on the Cross, but He established their righteousness through His perfect obedience to God's Law. It is only if His passive obedience in dying on the cross and His active obedience in keeping the law are imputed to believers per 2 Cor. 5:21 that believers will be justified before Almighty God. *The Passion of the Christ* does not even

make any pretence of teaching the active obedience of Christ, the entire notion of which is alien to Roman Catholic theology. Therefore if Evangelicals intend to use this as a Gospel teaching tool, they must understand that at best they are teaching only half a gospel, and that the half they are teaching is defectively presented.

The sacrifice of Christ was a glorious event in which, in accordance with God's plan, full satisfaction for sin was procured by Christ on behalf of His people (Acts 2:43). *The Passion of the Christ* leaves us with a vision of the sacrifice of Christ that is only dolorous (Dolorous: Full of grief; sad; sorrowful; doleful; dismal) and which puts into sharp relief the Roman Catholic notion not only of the importance of Christ's agony, but that of Mary in "offering her Son." In an interview with *Zenit*, the Roman Catholic News Service, Father Thomas Rosica, the priest who oversaw World Youth Day 2002 and its Way of the Cross through the streets of Toronto, illustrated how *The Passion of the Christ*, in keeping with Roman Catholic theology, uses extrabiblical content to massively exaggerate the role of Mary: "One scene, in particular, was very moving. As Jesus falls on the Way of the Cross, there is a flashback to his falling on a Jerusalem street as a child, and his mother running out of the house to pick him up. The interplay of Mary and Jesus in this film is moving, and reaches its apex in the scene of the Pietà. The Mother of the Lord is inviting each of us to share her grief and behold her Son."

This use of extrabiblical material, emphasis on physical suffering, exaggeration of the role of Mary, and explicitly Roman Catholic theology should not surprise us, however, as these are all hallmarks of the primary inspiration for this movie: The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me give two examples of what I mean, especially as concerns the replacement of physical pain for the far greater agony of sin bearing: "*He will not stretch himself out, but we will help him; they accompanied these words with the most fearful oaths and imprecations, and having fastened a rope to his right leg, dragged it violently until it reached the wood, and then tied it down as tightly as possible. The agony which Jesus suffered from this violent tension was indescribable; the words 'My God, my God,' escaped his lips, and the executioners increased his pain by tying his chest and arms to the cross, lest the hands should be torn from the nails.*" ... "*The hour of our Lord was at last come; his death-struggle had commenced; a cold sweat overspread every limb. John stood at the foot of the Cross, and wiped the feet of Jesus with his scapular. Magdalen was crouched to the ground in a perfect frenzy of grief behind the Cross. The Blessed Virgin stood between Jesus and the*

good thief, supported by Salome and Mary of Cleophas, with her eyes riveted on the countenance of her dying Son. Jesus then said: 'It is consummated;' and, raising his head, cried out in a loud voice, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' These words, which he uttered in a clear and thrilling tone, resounded through heaven and earth; and a moment after, he bowed down his head and gave up the ghost. I saw his soul, under the appearance of a bright meteor, penetrate the earth at the foot of the Cross. John and the holy women fell prostrate on the ground."

Emmerich's book is literally filled with scenes like those above, and includes many extra-biblical sayings of Jesus which Sister Anne says she personally heard in her visions.

4 - Its medium

Many Evangelical pastors are hailing movies like *The Passion of the Christ* as part of a new and better way of spreading the Gospel:

"This is a window of opportunity we have. Here's a guy who's putting his money into a movie that has everything to do with what we do," said Pastor Cory Engel of Harvest Springs Community Church in Great Falls, Montana. "Churches used to communicate by having a little lecture time on Sunday morning. People don't interact that way anymore. Here's a chance for us to use a modern-day technique to communicate the truth of the Bible," the Rev. Engel said."

It is indeed true that we live in a highly visual and increasingly anti-literate society that places a premium on sound bites and easily assimilated visual imagery, but does this mean that we should abandon preaching in favour of using movies or dramatic presentations? We need to remember that the last time dramatic presentations replaced preaching as the main vehicle by which the truth of the Bible was communicated was during the Middle Ages, when the Church refused to allow the translation of the Bible into common languages and when in place of the preaching and teaching of God's word, the common people were given visual presentations such as Passion Plays, statues, relics, and icons. These things were designed, like most visual imagery, to play upon the emotions and stimulate a response; but the ability to evoke an emotional response via imagery or drama is not the same as successfully transmitting the Gospel. The means that God has ordained for the transmission of the Gospel was not drama, imagery, nor even "lectures" – it is preaching. Preaching involves the communication of the Gospel in a way that patiently convinces, rebukes, exhorts, and teaches (2 Timothy 4:2-4). The Bible teaches us the awesome importance of preaching, and why it cannot be replaced by another medium. We must preach God's Word regardless of how unpopular it is because

we are commanded to do so: "*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*" (2 Timothy 4:2-4)

We must preach God's Word because it always accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent: "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*" (Isa.55:9-11)

God does not command us to produce dramatic presentations of Gospel themes, He commands us to preach. Though the option to use dramatic arts to convey religious and moral themes to the populace was freely available to the Apostles as they brought the Gospel to cities with amphitheatres and a long tradition of using these arts, they did not do so. The wisdom of the Apostolic methodology has been borne out by the fact that it was when the Gospel was being transmitted primarily by Plays and Symbolism that true Christianity began to sink under the weight of superstition. We are in danger of returning to precisely that state of affairs by reviving the teaching methodology of the medieval church. Even though it was produced in the twenty-first century, *The Passion of the Christ* is identical in all critical aspects to the Passion Plays of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages.

5 - Its main character

Billy Graham in his endorsement of *The Passion of the Christ* said, "Every time I preach or speak about the Cross, the things I saw on the screen will be on my heart and mind." This is unfortunately part of the problem with all visual representations of Jesus. Although we may intend for them only to have a role in teaching, they inevitably become part of our worship and adoration. As a result of seeing this film James Caviezel, the "Jesus" of *The Passion of the Christ*, will become the figure countless thousands if not millions of people think of when they worship Jesus Christ. To do this is to fall into the trap of changing "*the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man*" (Romans 1:23) and to

violate the Second Commandment.

Every visual representation of Jesus is inevitably a lie. There are two main reasons for this.

The first reason why all visual representations of Jesus are lies is because the only wise God went to great lengths not to leave us with any physical description of the physical appearance of His Son, lest we fall into the sin of image-making. Therefore all of our representations of Jesus are inevitably speculations, usually based upon our own desires. We create an image of Jesus that says more about the Jesus we want than the Jesus whom God sent.

For instance, isn't it remarkable that the Jesus of *The Passion of the Christ*, as in almost all physical representations of Christ, is tall, slim, and handsome? Why should not The Son of David (Luke 18:38) have been a relatively small man, like His great ancestor? It never seems to have occurred to most image-makers that Jesus could be relatively short, or stout, or even have had a receding hairline. This is in spite of the fact that one of the few details the Bible does give us about Christ's appearance is that "*He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.*" (Is. 53:2b) The fact that we have any concept of what Jesus looks like, and that Gibson's Jesus looks like the traditional Jesus, is a testament to the abiding impact of past iconography.

While the Gospels purposely leave out any description of Jesus that we might use to construct an idol, people have created an image of Jesus that has become almost an industry standard. It is solely for that reason rather than any basis in fact that audiences would have been outraged had Gibson cast Danny DeVito and not James Caviezel in the leading role.

The second reason why all visual representations of Jesus are lies is that they can never hope to represent the glory of Christ in His true nature. The best an image of Jesus can do is to represent him as a man, and while Jesus was truly a man, he was not merely a man. Jesus was also God, and no artist or filmmaker who has ever lived could hope to create an image that captures the true Glory of Jesus as God. While this may not appear to be a problem to us, the separation of Christ's manhood from His deity is actually a grave heresy called Nestorianism. We must not therefore attempt to separate what God has forever joined together.

For the first four centuries of its existence, the church did not use pictures of Jesus as an aid to evangelism. This was despite the fact that they were bringing the gospel to highly visual cultures that had always used imagery to convey religious ideas. The initial movements towards making pictures of

Christ were initially strongly opposed, and the practice was formally condemned by the Church as late as 753 AD. Unfortunately, once they had taken hold of the public imagination, the practice of making visible representations of Christ proved difficult if not impossible to eradicate. Gradually, pictures and dramatic representations of Jesus became commonplace in the Church. At the time of the Reformation, Protestants overwhelmingly rejected the practice of making images of Jesus as a clear violation of the Second Commandment. They also rejected the notion that such images had a necessary role as “textbooks for the laity” and then proved that notion false by producing generations of other Protestants well versed in the Word and familiar with their Saviour, although they had never once owned or seen a representation of him.

Rather than visual imagery, they relied on the preaching of the Word to save souls, and the Gospel made great advances. If we return to the use of imagery and begin endorsing movies like *The Passion of the Christ*, we will be returning to the very state of affairs that the first Protestants struggled and died to reform. We must not think that merely endorsing one form of visible representation of Christ will not lead inevitably to others. For instance, it is impossible to make a coherent argument against the use of the crucifix in teaching the Gospel if we have already endorsed the use of a movie that portrays the crucifixion. The mere fact that

one display is static and the other moving does not change their essential nature at all. The Passion of the Christ is in essence, an animated Crucifix.

Addressing a common objection

In closing, let me address a common objection, namely that we must use tools like *The Passion of the Christ* in order to reach the lost, and that if we don't we are “missing a great opportunity.”

Are we really missing an opportunity, though? If we are convinced that using a Roman Catholic movie to present the Gospel is in essence a violation of God's law, how could we possibly use it? Should we sin that grace may abound?

Also, are we really certain that this will be as effective as we think in saving souls? J. Marcellus Kik in his *Pictures of Christ* addressed that very question and gave us some wise advice, which I think all Christians would do well to heed: “*But can it not help in the saving of souls, it is asked. But how? Looking at a picture of Christ hanging upon the cross tells me nothing. It does not tell me that He hung there for sin. It does not tell me that He hung there for my sin. It does not tell me that He is the Son of God. Only the Word of God does that. And it is the Word of God that has been given us to tell the story of salvation through the blood of Christ. It is not through the foolishness of pictures that sinners are converted but through the foolishness of preaching.*”

It is amazing how slowly unscriptural practices enter the Christian Church. We must at all times go back to the Scriptures. The Bible is our infallible guide. And if our practices and doctrines do not conform with the teachings of the Scriptures then we must eliminate them. The Bible instructs the Church not to make any likeness of Christ. The present day pictures of Christ are false and no one would make a serious claim that they resemble Christ upon earth. They separate His humanity from His deity. They do not at all give us a glimpse of His present glory. They are not condoned by the inspired apostles.

God has ordained the foolishness of preaching to evangelize the world. He has promised to attend the preaching of the Word with the power of the Holy Spirit. The so-called pictures of Christ are a hindrance and a temptation to idolatry. Let us cleanse the Temple of God from them.”

Perhaps *The Passion of the Christ* will provide Evangelicals with a great opportunity after all. They are being given a rare opportunity to reject the world's methods and to recommit themselves to fulfilling God's commission to preach the Gospel and to trust that that preaching will always accomplish what He pleases. Let us hope that they will seize it.

This was taken from the website for Gospel GEMS/Bible Bulletin Board www.biblebb.com/files/passion.htm

The New Perspective

An assessment

Michael Flinn

One of the major challenges posed by the writers of the NP school is that we ought not be anachronistic in our interpretation of the biblical documents. What they mean by this is that we ought not to impose the ideas or culture of a later period, especially the ideas and culture of later western society, upon the biblical authors. The writers of Scripture were of Jewish background and culture and we need to interpret their writings in that context. Furthermore, the writers of the New Testament documents were first century Christians who had been raised in Jewish society, and the more we know or can find out about the nature of their society – how they lived – the nature of their political situation – what the aspirations and expectations of the people were – all these things are important for us to understand and appreciate.

Example: Matthew 22 (History Important)

Just to give a couple of examples, in Matthew 22 we read that the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Jesus with their words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians, and they said: “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth...tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

Now, when we come to a passage like this, it is helpful for us to know who the Pharisees were and what their perspective was on this question, who the Herodians were, and what they held, and the implications of paying taxes to Caesar in first century Jewish society. In respect of Jesus' response, when he asks for a coin and says, whose portrait is this and whose inscription, and then says to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, it is helpful for us to know

about Roman coins, and the inscriptions that were printed on them, and how the Jews viewed these coins. All this background historical information is necessary if we are going to understand how Jesus dealt with these people and what He said to them. And all that is before we get to the question of how can we apply this teaching to the matter of paying taxes today. In fact, Matthew works with the same principle. In the same chapter, He speaks of an interchange between Jesus and the Sadducees on the question of the resurrection, and at this point, He informs His readers that the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection. Matthew realised that it was both helpful and necessary for his readers to have this as background information if they were to appreciate our Lord's response.

This much is true. History and culture are important when interpreting the biblical text, and the writers of the NP school are quite

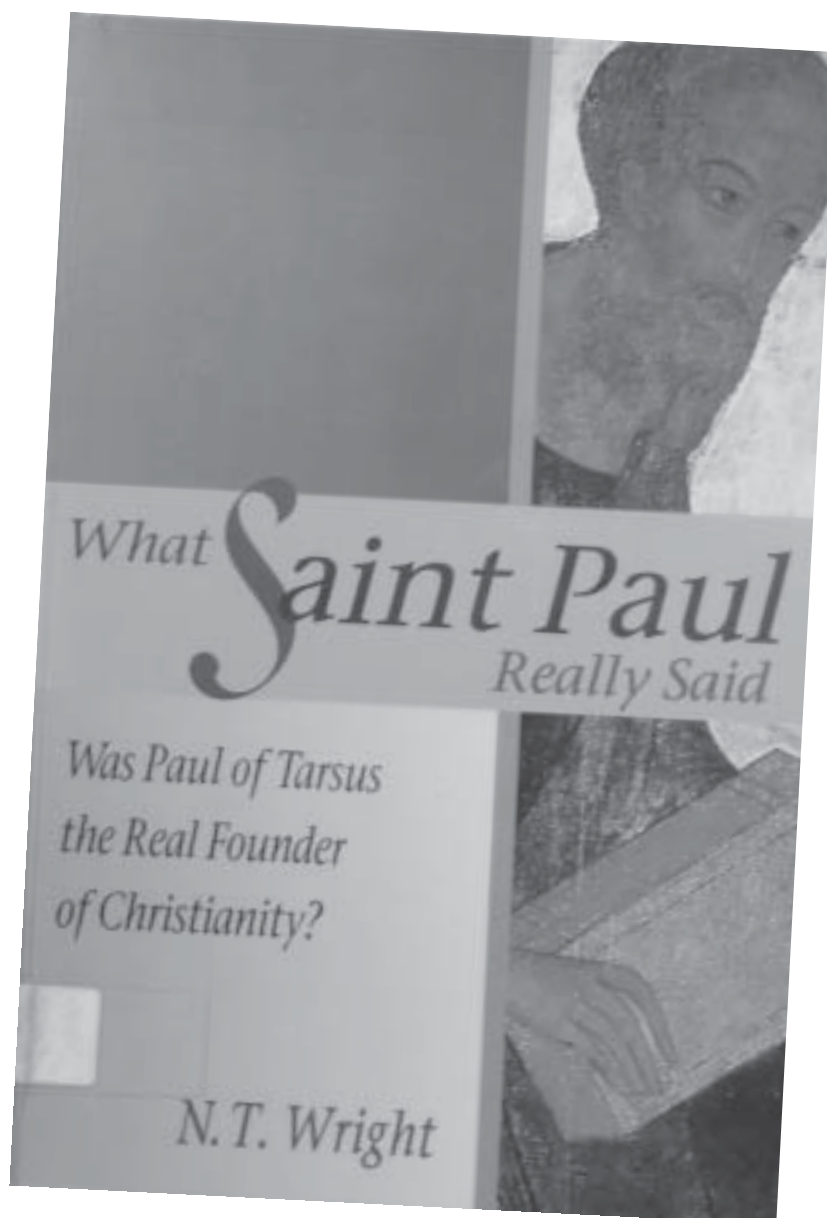
right when they warn us about the danger of historical anachronism, this is – reading back into the text of Scripture cultural and historical data from a later period and imposing it on the biblical writers. However, this is not new. This is the historical part of grammatical historical exegesis. The Reformers themselves stressed this principle. If we wish to interpret the text correctly, we must take into account the meaning and usage of the words, the grammar, the context in which they are written and as much historical and cultural detail as we can muster. This is the kind of information you can find in any good commentary on the biblical text.

1st Century Judaism not a unified entity

Likewise, we ought not to assume that Judaism in the first century was a unified entity, with signs saying “works righteousness” on every street corner, and that Paul rejected all aspects of Judaism when he became a Christian. Just in that passage we looked at from Matthew 22, we read of Pharisees and Herodians and Sadducees – all of whom had different perspectives on such questions as paying taxes to the Romans and whether or not there was going to be a resurrection after death. Still further, not all Pharisees were carbon copies of one another. It is true that Jesus warned his disciples against the leaven, the teaching, of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and that His strongest words of denunciation, and even curse, are reserved for the Pharisees in Matthew 23. But we need to remember that Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling court, and Jesus was much more gentle with him in John chapter 3. And in Acts 15 we read that there were believers in the congregation in Jerusalem who “belonged to the party of the Pharisees”. They had distinctive views in relation to the Gentiles, and those views needed to get thrashed out and resolved in that first Christian council in Jerusalem. But here were believers – they believed in Jesus Christ as the Messiah – but they retained ties with Pharisees. So all this goes to show (and we haven’t even looked at writings outside the Bible yet) that first century Judaism was not a seamless entity that was entirely thrown off and rejected by Paul the moment he encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

The idea of “merit” in First Century Judaism

Having acknowledged that, what can we say about first century Judaism when it comes to the idea of human merit in relation to salvation? Remember that since E.P. Sanders published his book in 1977, the NP



writers have argued that Judaism, since the temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian Captivity, was essentially a religion of grace. God graciously chose His people. He elected them, not on the basis of merit, but because of His free mercy, and law-keeping was the way in which God’s people stayed in the covenant and escaped covenant wrath and rejection.

Well, let’s take a look at some of the writings of the rabbis. I’m quoting here from a book by C. G. Montefiore. This two volume work was published in 1938, but it is still one of the standard authoritative works on the writings of the early Jewish rabbis.

On the subject of merit:

The Rabbis say: *Let a man ever regard himself as if he were half-guilty and half-deserving; then, if he fulfils one command, happy is he, for he has inclined the scale towards merit [zekut]; if he commits one sin,*

woe to him, for he has inclined the scale to guilt...R. Elazar b. Simeon said: The world is judged by the majority, and the individual is judged by the majority. If a man fulfils one command, happy is he, for he has caused the scale for himself and for the whole world to incline towards the pan of merit [zekut]; if he has committed one sin, woe to him, for both for himself and for the whole world he makes the pan of guilt the heavier.

Montefiore points out that in the writings of the rabbis, merit is something that can be stored up. The merits of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for example, are a kind of treasury upon which Israel can draw. Even the merit of a contemporary good man can help his children or the world at large:

R. Phineas the Priest said in reference to Prov. 11:21 (Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished, but the descendants of the righteous will be delivered.), *If you have fulfilled a command, do not seek its reward*

from God straightway, lest you be not acquitted of sin, but be regarded as wicked, because you have not sought to cause your children to inherit anything. For if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had sought the reward of the good deeds which they performed, how could the seed of these righteous men have been delivered, and how could Moses have said, 'Remember Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so that God repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people' (Exod. 31:13,14)?

As an extension of this concept, the death of righteous people in the community can atone for the sins of the unrighteous.

As the Day of Atonement atones, so the death of the righteous atones.

The question is asked, 'Why is the death of Miriam mentioned immediately after the passage about the Red Heifer?' The reply is that as the Red Heifer makes atonement, so, too, does the death of the righteous.

It is written, 'God has set the one over against the other. God has made the righteous and the wicked. (Eccles. 7:14). Why? That the one should atone for the other.

According to the rabbis, the study of the Torah (law) is immensely valuable. The Torah helps the Israelite to conquer the evil impulse of the heart: "All the time that the words of the Law find free entrance into the chambers of the heart, the words of the can rest there, and the evil inclination cannot rule over them, and no man can expel them." Contrast Paul's statement in Romans 7:8 that sin seizes opportunity afforded by the 10th commandment and produces in him every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. But according to a rabbinic commentary on Psalm 119:10, "The evil yetzer has no power over against the Law, and he who has the Law in his heart, over him the yetzer has no power."

Calls to devote oneself to the study of the Torah are legion in the writings of the rabbis.

Just two examples:

The poor who study the Law are richly rewarded after death by God. Why are they poor in this world? So that they may not occupy themselves with vain things and forget the Torah, for one must neglect one's business and occupy oneself in the Torah, for the Torah goes before everything.

As water is gratis for all, so is the Torah gratis for all. As water is priceless, so is the Torah priceless. As water brings life to the world, so the Torah brings life to the world. As water brings a man out of his uncleanness, so Torah brings a man from the evil way into the good way...Just as water forms a purifying bath, so do words of Torah purify all. Torah purifies sinners in Israel, when they repent, even if they have served idols, as it says, 'I will sprinkle clean water

upon you, and you shall be clean.' And by water is meant words of Torah.

Being deliberately selective

Now I want to point out that in these quotations I am being deliberately selective. My intention is not to try to prove that every rabbi in 1st century Judaism, or every Pharisee would have expressed himself exactly in this way on these subjects. And we can certainly find many passages in the rabbis which speak of the mercy, grace and forgiveness of God, especially in relation to God's choice of Israel as his people. Writers like E. P. Sanders have cited many such passages. My intention is to show you that the idea of merit – of good deeds outweighing bad deeds – of the significance of one's good deeds achieving mercy and forgiveness for others – and of the Torah having the power to produce in us a righteous life, as opposed to showing us our sinfulness and our need of God's grace – were all ideas that lived in first century Judaism. And this is a departure from the covenantal understanding of historical Judaism.

In fact, as Richard Gaffin points out in an article on the NP, this school of thought "appears to assume a basic continuity between the Old Testament and the various mainstreams within Judaism. For both James D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright, two leading spokespersons for the New Perspective, the Old Testament roots of Paul's theology and its roots in Second Temple Judaism seem to be interchangeable or at least continuous. What one would think is an obvious distinction, at least from an evangelical perspective, is repeatedly glossed over. There is little appreciation or even recognition that Old Testament revelation and Jewish religion and theology are not the same thing and are often in conflict, even in Old Testament times and especially in Paul's day. Nor is there an appropriate awareness of the canonical distinctiveness of the Jewish scriptures in relation to subsequent sources."

"Merit" and the Fall (Genesis 3)

So why is it that the idea of personal merit before a holy God – of achieving one's status before God by one's hard work and effort – why does this come up, even in the writings of the rabbis who had the canonical OT Scriptures in front of them? I want to suggest that there is a theological reason for this that goes right back beyond first century Judaism to Adam and Eve and the nature of the Fall.

This is where we turn to Genesis 3:1-7. Now let's have a look at this a little more closely. Note what the serpent says in verse 5: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." It is

important to realise that Adam and Eve were already like God in many ways. Of all God's creatures, they were made in the divine image, and we read of this in Genesis 1:26,27. So Adam and Eve, prior to the Fall, were already like God. But in the temptation, they are encouraged to become even more like God, and ironically, they can only do this by turning away from God and rejecting what He said. Adam and Eve are being encouraged to choose a path of independence from God – a path of – "do-it-yourself-ism," if I can put it that way – and this is precisely what they do. They reject the word of God. They no longer accept God's word. God is not to be trusted any longer. No, they must determine for themselves how to live and what is right and what is wrong. This is what the text means when God says later in verse 22 that "the man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil." This does not mean that God knows evil in the sense of having performed it. What it means is that God determines what is righteous and what is evil. In fact, righteousness and evil cannot be defined or understood apart from God. But the effect of the Fall is to place man in the position of God. Now man determines what is right and wrong, and he attempts to do this without God. This is not the end of the story. This is just the beginning. Immediately we see that God is not going to leave Adam and Eve in this position. Though they hide from him, He is not going to hide from them. In fact, over against their attempts to hide their guilt and shame, God makes garments of skin to clothe them. Please note: This involves the death of an animal. Sin has its price. Death is now in the world. And if the shame of Adam and Eve is to be covered over, it has to be done by God and not by themselves.

Now all those who have descended from Adam and Eve, and that includes everyone reading this article and every last human being in the world today, have inherited the nature of independence from God. We are all naturally inclined to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong in our lives and if we have problems, we want to fix those problems ourselves. We want to make it in life. We want to eyeball the world and say with pride: I did it my way - by my own efforts. Adam and Eve did it their way. We are descended from Adam and Eve and we want to do it our way. In this respect, there are some things that are common to all nations, all cultures, all races and all ages within history. And one of them is right here. We are all naturally inclined to be "do-it-yourselfish." So when God comes to His people and provides for them a moral standard – when He tells them what is right and what is wrong – "I am the Lord God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other

gods before Me "...they are naturally inclined to take that standard and operate in terms of the principle of independence. It is like the son who says, "I have lived in terms of the standards of the home – I have been a good son – now I want my reward. Make me the owner of the family business." We are naturally inclined to think in terms of payment for services rendered and this is true, whether we are of Jewish background, or Arab, whether we are Korean or Australian. And it is true whether we were living in Paul's day, or Luther's, or in twenty-first century New Zealand. And I think that this is something that the writers of the NP school have not taken sufficiently into account. As human beings, who are all descended from the same set of parents, we have more in common than these writers allow. Wanting to earn a place with God by means of our own work and effort is something that is natural to all societies and cultures. In this respect, Pelagianism did not originate in the 5th century. Pelagianism goes right back to Genesis 3.

Justification

One of the central contentions of the NP school is that biblical books like Romans, Galatians, Philippians are not about individual salvation. When Paul speaks of justification, he is not speaking about how individuals, as sinners, can have standing before a righteous and holy God, or about how a righteous God can have anything to do with sinful people. On the contrary, justification is all about how people become part of the covenant people of God and how they remain in it. Is "justification" by means of adherence to Jewish laws, such as circumcision and food laws? Must the Gentiles obey these laws in order to be part of the covenant? Must they have these particular badges of covenant membership – or is covenant membership based on the new badge of faith? Remember, for N.T. Wright, the Gospel is not about how people get saved from their sin. It is the proclamation of the lordship of Christ. And as people come to believe that Jesus is Lord, they express faith and so are regarded as members of God's covenant people.

Now I want to say that the relationship between believers of Jewish background and those of non-Jewish background was a major challenge and problem in the first century. It was difference of opinion about this that produced the first council of believers in Jerusalem in Acts 15, which was addressed by Paul in many of his letters – understandably so, because he was a prominent missionary to non-Jewish people. He is warning constantly against teachers who insisted that the Gentiles had to be circumcised and practise the laws of clean and unclean food and so on in order to be

saved. But is it the case that Paul's Gospel message has nothing to do with how people are saved from their sin?

Well, let's take a look at some passages in Romans:

Romans 3:21-31

Paul begins his letter to the Romans by saying that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, and he announces in summary form that in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "*The righteous will live by faith.*" This is what he says in Romans 1:16,17. He then goes on to speak about the position of all the nations before God. After all, the good news won't make any sense at all if we don't understand the bad news, or what we need to be saved from. So from Romans 1:18, Paul lays out that all the nations are under God's wrath because they have not honoured and loved Him as their Creator. They have preferred to worship the creature rather than the Creator. But what about his own people, the Jews? Are they in this position too? Well yes, they are. In spite of their heritage and privileges, including their possession of the laws of Moses, they too have fallen short of what God requires. This is the argument of chapters 2 and 3.

But now we get this in Romans 3:22-25.

Here Paul mentions another very important word. He says in verse 5 that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. Or at least this is how the NIV has translated it. In the Greek it is one word, the word *hilastareon*. Jesus has been presented as the *hilastareon*. What did Paul mean by this? Well, *hilastareon* is the word for the covering of the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies. Every year, once per year, the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant resided and sprinkle the blood of the animal sacrifice upon the cover of the ark. Remember, this was the Ark of the Covenant. Inside that box, Moses had placed the two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments – the Law of the Covenant.

The question is: Did the Day of Atonement, on which the high priest did this, have anything to do with sin? Well, let's see. Note Leviticus 16 where we have the legislation for the Day of Atonement explained. You'll see, in verses 13 and 14, that Aaron, the high priest is to take light incense in the Holy of Holies so that the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover. This was so holy that it had to be concealed from his eyes. But there's our word - Atonement cover -

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'Hilastareon' in the Greek translation of the OT. The blood of the sacrificial bull is sprinkled in front of the atonement cover seven times. Now in connection with the procedures for the Day of Atonement, there were two goats – one of which was killed as a sin offering and the other one set free. Why was that? Well, let's pick this up in verses 20-22. What was the point of this, symbolically? The sins were being removed.

And furthermore, this took place in connection with, and on the basis of, the sacrifice that took place in the Most Holy Place.

I would argue that all of this was in Paul's mind when he called Jesus Christ the Mercy Seat in Romans 3. Jesus is the sacrifice whose blood brings about the mercy and forgiveness of God. Apart from this sacrifice, the laws of God, so prized by the Jews, as if possession of them made them special, did in fact condemn them – and everyone else for that matter. Somehow we have to have our sins removed. They need to be sent off into the wilderness. And according to Paul, the only way this can happen is through the blood of Jesus, which was shed on the cross. So now we must exercise faith in His blood. Please note that expression. Faith in His blood. It is not only that we hear and recognise that Jesus is Lord. That is true, and that emphasis on the part of the NP writers is appreciated. But we must also believe in the blood of Jesus. We must understand the nature of His sacrifice and what that means for us, both collectively and personally. It is Christ Who covers over the laws of God so that that we can receive mercy rather than condemnation. I would argue that the whole of the OT sacrificial system was designed to drive that home to God's people year after year after year. And Paul is at pains to argue that the death of Jesus Christ is just as important for all the nations of the world as it was for the Jews of his day.

Romans 5:12-21

This is a passage that we do not have time to look at in detail. But very briefly, Paul is arguing that there is a parallel between Adam, the first man, and Jesus Christ. Adam's sin brought both sin and death to all. All, that is, who are descended from Adam by ordinary generation – which is all the nations of the world. But just as the action of Adam had consequences for all, so too did the death of Jesus Christ. Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. Again in verse 19.

This passage is one of the passages that Pelagianism does not do justice to. Pelagius argued that we are born morally good, and it is possible for us to keep the moral laws of God. And if we have broken those laws, it is possible for us to deal with that by means of our own work and effort. But according to Paul, if you are a son or daughter of Adam, and that is all of us, then we have all been affected by Adam's fall. We are all born sinful and are subject to divine condemnation. And it is only through the work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, that we can be saved – not just from our own personal sin, but from the effect of

Adam's sin in our lives and in the world.

And Romans 5 is not a passage that I have found discussed by writers of the NP. I have searched for it, but I have not yet found an adequate discussion of it.

Covenant and Individual Salvation

There is, in the Scriptures, a stress upon the corporate identity of God's people and of the Lord's dealing with His people in a corporate way. For example, in 1 Peter 2:9 – "*You are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession.*" But there is in the Scripture also a stress upon the need for individuals to walk with the Lord. Cain's offering was rejected; Abel's was received. Noah was saved; everyone else practised wickedness and received judgment. The book of Leviticus prescribes sacrifices and cleansing procedures for the people as a whole (e.g. the Day of Atonement legislation) and also for individuals, e.g. cleansing from infectious diseases, coming into contact with dead persons or things, and emissions from the body, to name but three. Moses warned the new generation in the book of Deuteronomy that they better take to heart the laws of God because they had just observed as an object lesson what happened to the previous generation because of their uncircumcision of heart. Ezra calls the people to confess corporate sin and repent in Ezra 10, but we also have some of the most telling personal confessions of sin in the psalms in passages like Psalm 51. Paul speaks corporately and universally in Romans 3 and also speaks of his own personal struggles with sin in Romans 7 and 8.

What I am saying is that in the Scriptures it is not an either/or. It is not either corporate justification or individual justification. It is both/and. And it seems to me that the NP writers, while calling our attention to the corporate significance of salvation, have lost sight of the individual and personal dimension of salvation.

Conclusions

I don't want to give the impression that we cannot learn anything from the writers of the NP school. Much of what N.T. Wright, for example, has written is worthwhile, and serious students of Paul's writings will benefit from a study of Wright. But the basic thesis that underlies the NP is highly speculative, and it is not established from the biblical writings themselves.

Fair enough that we should go back and study the Scriptures afresh. That is part of the heritage of the Reformation. We always need to go back to Scripture, especially when there is religious controversy and difference of opinion. But I am not convinced at all that Luther was fundamentally wrong in his understanding of the writings of Paul. True,

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Stephanie, Caleb

242 Ohaupo Road, Hamilton

Luther was troubled by his own personal moral guilt before a holy God. But so should we be – whether we are German, Dutch, Korean, or Egyptian – and irrespective of what day and age we live in. If we are sons and daughters of Adam, then our moral condition before God is the same. Paul did not hesitate in Acts 17 to say to his Greek hearers in

Athens that God is the judge of the entire world, and He commands all men everywhere to repent. And so should we. This is part of the Gospel proclamation. Of course, we cannot convict people of sin, and righteousness and judgment. That is a work of the Holy Spirit in people's hearts and lives, and we need to pray for this in our

evangelism. But the moral condition of all peoples before God, both collectively and individually, is a vital reason why we evangelise. And for people who are, under the work of the Spirit, deeply aware of their own need of salvation, we can offer the comfort of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

World in focus

Ministerial changes in the CRCA

From our sister church in Australia, we note that there have been a number of ministerial changes. In Victoria the Rev. Ben Aldridge demitted his charge in Wonga Park, and subsequently has taken up a part-time call in Berwick, a mission post of the Casey church. The Rev. Bill van Schie's call to the Mt. Evelyn congregation was concluded, and he has now been declared eligible for call. It was in Mt. Evelyn that the Rev. Terry Chesterman a few months earlier resigned from the ministry following a situation of adultery. In Queensland the tie between the Rev. Gery Holvast and the Inala congregation ceased. He has since returned to the Netherlands. From Canberra we note that the Rev. Gary de Vries, serving the Tuggeranong congregation in Canberra, has accepted a call to Newcastle, New South Wales.

Southern Baptist Convention recommends leaving World Alliance

A committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has recommended that the denomination leave the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) because it advocates "aberrant and dangerous theologies," which the SBC sees as too liberal. The recommendation is the latest in a series of moves that seems to separate the denomination from the international association of more than 200 Baptist unions and conventions. The SBC committee's report is going to the executive committee in February and will likely go to the general assembly in June. If each body approves it, the convention will cut ties with the BWA on 1 October.

The Committee released a report that lamented the BWA's "support for female pastors" and charges it with "doctrinal liberalism and freedom in biblical interpretation." Further, the Convention found that it is 'impossible to endorse the alliance as a genuinely representative organization of world Baptists.' In response, the BWA protested this was a 'false

accusation of liberalism.' General secretary Denton Lotz predicted that this action will lead to a schism within the worldwide Baptist community. 'It is sad that in the 21st century we used loaded terms to end discussion and to eliminate the thoughts of other people. Today, if you do not like someone or their movement, you call them a liberal.' (ENI, BWA)

+ REC News Exchange, The Reformed Ecumenical Council, 2050 Breton Rd., Ste 102, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

+ Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist Press, 901 Commerce St., Nashville, TN 37203 (615) 244-2355

Islamic militants target Pakistan's Bible Society

On 15 July, two explosions in Karachi, Pakistan extensively damaged the office of the Bible Society. The blasts injured 15 people, including two Bible Society employees, and shattered windows in the adjacent Episcopal

Holy Trinity Church and School for Girls.

The first blast was caused by a grenade thrown through the window of the Bible Society's reading room at 3:15 p.m. by two unidentified men on motorcycles. Fifteen minutes later, a bomb concealed in a parked car exploded outside the Bible Society's premises.

Pakistan's Information Minister, Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, blamed Islamic militants for the attack. The car bomb, according to Reuters, was similar to the one used by Islamic extremists to kill 12 people outside the U.S. Consulate in 2002.

+ Stephen Crawford, CSI-USA, (805)777-7107
csi@csi-usa.org

Fewer believers among Dutch youth

Two-thirds of Dutch young people in their twenties regard themselves as "unchurched." Only 44 percent believe in

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God, according to a recent survey. For those aged 30-40, 63 percent still believe in God, although 56 percent are unchurched. Two-thirds of all people in both groups say they give scarcely any thought to questions of faith or meaning in their lives.

The Roman Catholic community is losing youth the fastest. While a quarter of those in their thirties call themselves Catholic, only 13 percent of those in their twenties do. In Protestant communities, the decline is only about 2 percent in the same age groups.
+ REC News Exchange, The Reformed Ecumenical Council, 2050 Breton Rd. Ste 102 Grand Rapids, MI 49546

Middle Eastern Pastors meet in historic gathering in Jordan

More than 100 Christian pastors from 14 countries, including Iraq, Syria, and a dozen other Middle East countries, have been able to meet for the first time ever — face-to-face, sharing meals, prayers and encouragement.

RREACH International and the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary co-hosted and sponsored the historic and diverse gathering — a pastors' training conference held in Wadi Mousa, the city that sits at the entrance to historic Petra.

According to information received by ASSIST News Service (ANS), nearly 100 pastors were selected from 14 countries to learn from leaders with experience working with diverse groups. The main seminar presented a method of Biblical preaching by Dallas Theological Seminary Professor and President of RREACH International Dr. Ramesh Richard.

+ Michael Ireland, Chief Correspondent, ASSIST News Service, PO Box 2126, Garden Grove, CA 92842-2126

+ Ramesh Richard Evangelism and Church Helps International, 5500 W. Plano Pkwy., Suite 100, Plano, TX 75093-4835 (972) 733-3402

Church of England: Women Priests cost church half a billion dollars in payouts

The ordination of women priests will cost the Church of England more than 326 million pounds (US\$596 million) in payouts to clergy who have left in protest, according to official figures.

The size of the final bill will dismay many in the Church, which is facing severe financial difficulties and the prospect of dioceses being made bankrupt.

The figures will also refuel the heated debate on whether the Church should allow the consecration of women as bishops, a reform which could trigger another exodus of clergy.

The millions of pounds have been paid out as part of a scheme agreed in 1992 as a conciliatory gesture to the hundreds of traditionalist clergy who threatened to split the Church over women priests.

Under the scheme, clergy who resigned for reasons of conscience before the cut-off date for lodging claims, which falls later this month, receive hardship payments to help them after they left their jobs.

Many of them became Roman Catholic or Orthodox priests, but a number have since returned to the Church of England.

The Church Commissioners said that, up until the end of 2003, 430 clergy had resigned and applied for the payments, and a further nine have resigned so far this year. Forward in Faith, the traditionalist umbrella group, said that it did not expect a last-minute exodus before the official final date, 21 Feb.

+ David Virtue, *Virtuosity Digest*, 1236 Waterford Rd., West Chester, PA 19380 virtue236@aol.com

Displaced Christians struggle to survive in Nigeria

For the past three years, 15-year-old Helen James has been living in a refugee camp in central Nigeria following the death of her father, mother, two sisters and three brothers in religious violence that engulfed Christians in the state of Bauchi in June 2001. "I narrowly escaped death at the time," Miss James said through her sobs. "Our house was burned down and now I do not have a place to go to." Over 10,000 people forced to flee their homes during three weeks of Muslim-Christian bloodshed languish in camps nearly three years later. Their numbers are being decimated daily by disease, hunger and poverty, but they do not want to return home for fear of being attacked again by Muslim militants. "Where do I go to?" asked refugee Peter Bulus. "They have vowed to wipe us out because we refused to be forced into Islam." Bulus decried the indifferent attitude of government officials toward the displaced, saying that nothing has been done to alleviate their suffering.

+ Compass Direct, PO Box 27250, Santa Ana, CA 92799-7250

Episcopal protest hits collection plate

Episcopal Church officials have announced a US\$3 million shortfall in the church's 2004 budget, caused chiefly by parishes and dioceses withholding funds to protest the ordination of a homosexual bishop.

The shortfall equals 6 percent of the US\$48 million in revenue the church had expected this year.

Figures released at an Episcopal executive council meeting in Tampa, Florida, showed the denomination's 107 dioceses are giving US\$2 million less this year. A reduction in government funds for social-service programs produced an additional drop of roughly US\$900,000.

+ Julia Duin, *The Washington Times*, 3600 New York Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002
www.washingtontimes.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Editor
Faith in Focus

Dear Sir

re: Whose party are you going to?

Thank you for your gentle exposé of the "Christian-focused" directive" (*Faith in Focus* Vol 31/1, Feb 2004, pp.3-6). Movements such as Hillsong catch people with their popular appeal, to the spiritual harm of the captives. We who stand against this substantial tide have difficulty doing so in the manner of our Lord, both because of our carnal nature, and because criticising anything (including heresy and gross moral lapse) appears scurrilous or judgmental to many in this age of "tolerance." The error you illuminate has a degree of subtlety, and those who expose this (and many other) wrong/s will be misunderstood, and even if not misunderstood, vilified. I am horrified at the blanket, largely-unqualified endorsement that Hillsong (and for that matter Willow Creek) receive from some of our so-called Reformed, Calvinistic brethren. Please sir, take heart, and don't lose your edge.

I hope your readers do not, as a result of your article, get tempted to think you a "knocker" who, for whatever reason, puts down the "tall poppies." We readers need to remember that we stand in the long shadows of men who have been greatly used of God in their humble, diligent, self-denying service (despite weakness of flesh), and this has included addressing error. Our work (and it is all one task) lies in ensuring that the true Gospel is proclaimed, "for it is the power of God to salvation," and in wooing fellow sinners to drink of that one and only "precious fountain" of life.

Yours faithfully
Paul Davey

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Noah in Extra-Biblical Sources

Berwyn Hoyt

To prove that the Bible is true is like proving to a Kiwi in New Zealand that he has an accent. You can present facts until the cows come home, but he won't believe you. Besides, he has popular opinion on his side: no Kiwi I've ever met thinks he has an accent! He just isn't able to look in an unbiased way at the evidence. Likewise with the Bible: people just aren't in the mindset of actually looking for evidence. Nevertheless, in the case of the Bible, hard facts are exactly what we have – despite popular opinion.

So, what are these amazing hard facts? Well, have you ever read the Bible's lengthy genealogies and thought, "what a bore!" – or at least, "what use are they to 21st century listeners?" I certainly have. But a book I've just read has put the lie to such a thought. The Bible's genealogies are complete and utter proof of its factual nature. Not only are they evidence that the Bible's characters were real people with a real history. But more than that, the Table of Nations in Genesis may be compared, name for name, with histories and royal lineages from nations around the world. This is done by the book I wish to review, *After the Flood — The early post-flood history of Europe traced back to Noah*, by Bill Cooper.

Comparing with other histories

Perhaps the best proof of the historicity of *any* document is whether its facts line up with other historical documents and, in particular, names of real people: genealogies, if possible. Many people already know that much scientific work has been done in matching the Biblical history with the *geological* record, but *After the Flood* takes a different tack: documenting the *genealogical* record from many historical sources. So, hard facts, here we come – just in case anyone really is looking for facts.

Bill Cooper began as a sceptic, as far as the Bible is concerned. Its religious ideas made it no more trustworthy than any other document. But while he might have been a sceptic, he was also a *fair* sceptic: he thought that he would give the Bible the same kind of historical test that he would give any document. If the Bible were really correct in its claim not only to be true but also to be *God's Word*, then certainly there must be historical matching between the Bible's genealogical record and the record in other histories throughout the world. He decided that if he found a match for 40% of the Bible's names in other histories, then he would consider it reliable. In fact that would be a very stringent test. As the documents are

so old, 40% would normally be considered a very large match. Well, sure enough, he found his 40%: but the interest of evidence would not be left alone. He went on to find 50%, 60% and more! Now after fully 25 years of research he has found matching for 99% of the Bible's Table of Nations in Genesis (ch. 10). No fictional work made by a man after the event can possibly claim that kind of historical matching over thousands of years of history!

After the Flood vindicates the Bible's Table of Nations by documents from early pagan Europe. What's more, the references cited or quoted are all listed and most are readily and publicly available. However, this book does not just present genealogies. It is a historical work presenting what really happened at various periods through references and many quotations of previous historians and ancient documents.

Throughout the book, the historical source material is vindicated wherever necessary. The historians quoted and the ancient documents are sometimes dismissed by scholars as inaccurate: the genealogical records particularly are alleged to have been

created by pious monks in the middle ages who thought Christianity needed some sort of historical backbone. Again and again the author shows how it was not possible for pious monks to have created these records. The evidence is overwhelming: the sources are corroborated by those of separate and independent nations as far ranging as Britain, Europe and China. Often the records were kept by royal houses, for whom it was sacrilege to change the genealogy in a culture of ancestor worship.

So, what's in the book?

Chapter 3 outlines the records made by Nennius which pertain to the genealogical history and relate to the Genesis Table of Nations. Nennius was an 8th century AD historian who copied and collated many older British sources which were in danger of being lost completely. He documents the genealogy of Noah's son Japheth all the way down to the Franks, Goths, Lombards, Saxons, etc.

Chapter 4 links the Welsh Chronicle's historical events with that of known Roman history.

Chapter 5 and Appendix 7 outline the

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genealogy of early British kings (from Noah), and major events in the life of each king. It includes details such as which relative assassinated each king (which happened as often as not).

Chapter 6 and 8 detail the descent of six Anglo-Saxon Kings (ch. 6) and Irish (ch. 8) from Noah, again with some of the detail and chronology kept by these early pagan scholars.

Chapter 7 compares in a table, name for name, the genealogical lists of Anglo-Saxon, early British, Norwegian, and Icelandic origin, from Noah until they branch off 20 generations later. This allows the reader to observe not only the spelling changes and gaps in each independent list, but also the remarkable similarity.

Chapter 9 dates the age of the earth from several chronologies.

Two chapters take a variant subject in documenting the Anglo-Saxon and Danish records of dinosaurs, and talk about the creatures in the epic poem Beowulf. These descriptions of creatures are drawn out to compare with dinosaurs, and while they may well be correct, I felt that there was a little too much extrapolation. Still, the historical

references may certainly be of use to anyone interested in further study.

Three appendices interact with the genealogies of Noah's three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, providing more linking to the sources. Maps expand on where the major nations from these three settled. Many of these nations are still known to us.

Appendices 4 through 14 present further sources and other interesting facts derived from them. Also included are records of the descent of the Miautso, people of China who kept their genealogy all the way from Adam!

By way of conclusion, the author marvels that such abundant records can be ignored by a large part of modern scholarship. Rather such an abundant picture of our past, and the origin of the nations of the world, should really be taught to every history student in our schools!

Christianity based on fact

I have tried to present to you something of the magnitude of this research. I'm sure that I have failed. The book is well-researched and carefully referenced. It is worth having in your library.

To me, the whole book underlines the

uniqueness of the Christian religion as being based solidly on fact: what God has actually done in history, as opposed to just some religious idea. The apostle Paul makes the same point about the historical dependency of Christianity. He says about another historical work of God (raising Jesus Christ from the dead), "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless ... we [Christians] are to be pitied more than all men.*"

Just one last note. By saying that the Bible's proof is abundant, I do not wish to diminish the value of simple faith in what God has said in his Word. However, it doesn't need to be a blind faith: God has provided more than sufficient evidence to show that what He says He has done, He really has done.

After the Flood may be purchased from Answers in Genesis, Box 39005, Howick, Auckland; ph 09 537 4818. Amazingly, this entire book is now available online at www.creationism.org/books/CooperAfterFlood

Mission in focus

Janice Reid

The **Orthodox Presbyterian Church** has missionaries working in China, in different locations and ministries. Pray for those who work in universities teaching English—for safety, for good opportunities to introduce Christian subjects into conversations with their students. Pray also for a man who is serving amongst Muslims in Western China. Pray also for the people the Lord has brought to Himself, through the work of shorter-term Missionary Associates (MAs) who have recently spent time in China. The following letter is a report by one member of this group:

It is amazing to think that I have been in China for only three months. Not so long ago, I quickly packed my belongings and left for a small university in northeastern China. Now that I am here, I work with a small band of fellow Christians. Together, working from a base of teaching English, we work to make known the glory of God and the greatness of the gospel both to the students of this university and to the residents of the surrounding community.

Last summer my pastor announced to our church the need for labourers in China so that the work might continue strong. While there is some sacrifice in leaving behind the familiar, the opportunity to aid in furthering the gospel ministry was compelling and exciting.

Prior to coming, I had heard that God is working mightily here. Still, when I arrived, I was amazed to witness how powerfully God is using those who are here. The OPC missions team has found some wonderful avenues to preach the gospel, despite an organised and ongoing effort to suppress the truth. Because of this, it has been exciting to think of the opportunities that I have already had to tell students about the hope I have in Christ. Some have asked about my faith, and others have requested prayer, and yet others want to study the Bible.

In addition, it is a delight to speak with students whose lives have been transformed through faith in Christ by the preaching of the Word, and to hear of the fruit evidenced in their lives. One student I have been getting to know was for a long time sceptical about the gospel, but God has been gracious and transformed him. He is now full of life and is eager to share this with others.

The first semester in China is a time for new missionary associates to teach English, build relationships with our students, and observe and assist in the more direct forms of gospel work among the Chinese, in which those who have been here longer are involved. This is a good time of training, but I am eagerly looking forward to the winter vacation and spring semester when I will be

able to start Bible studies with some of the students I have been getting to know. I am excited about becoming increasingly involved in some Bible studies in the local churches for members of the broader Chinese community.

So much is happening here; it cannot all be told. I have been confronted with many interesting, challenging, and wonderful things. So many things are new to me: the food, the languages, and various customs. One thing is not new to me: people enslaved to sin and in need of the gospel. One of the greatest things to confront me here is the greatness of God in the face of opposition. People from all across China are being transformed by the power of the gospel. What a wonderful privilege it is to serve our Lord and Saviour in this place!

*For His glory,
(name withheld)*

MIF prayer notes

OPC missionary **Gerry Mynders** asks us to pray for the work in Paramaribo, **Suriname**. He writes: *Continue to pray for our elder Hassan Hamid and his family as time is getting closer for him to begin his theological*

studies. Pray for many young indigenous men to be trained for the ministry. Ask the Lord to supply the support needed to send these men for seminary training. Please pray also for the completion of our construction project at the Reformatie Kerk. It is progressing very well, and we are thankful that this much-needed work could be done. Praise the Lord, for He is indeed in charge of all things.

Rev Stephen and Dorinda 't Hart give thanks for new workers in the harvest field of **Papua New Guinea**. **Wayne and Cheronne VanderHeide**, from Western Australia, have recently completed their studies at the Pacific Orientation Course run by Wycliffe. They have returned to Australia to await the birth of their

second child, but at time of writing they expected to be back in PNG in March, God willing. Wayne is a teacher by profession, and his contribution to the ministry will be invaluable.

Walter and Jeannette Hagoort are just about to finish the first part of the Pacific Orientation Course. They are now heading out for a five-week village living experience. Please pray for good health, good relationships and that it will be a positive time of learning.

Janice Reid is grateful for your prayers as she continues her work with Radio Training Services in **Cambodia**. Ask for God's blessing

on the development of the training resources, and also for suitable opportunities to use them as Janice and Jean-Luc assist radio missions to spread the Good News of God's salvation.

Kevin and Machi Rietveld, along with **Jack and Trudy Visser**, are serving in the **Solomon Islands** with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia. They give thanks for your prayers. They also praise the Lord that the new Australian High Commissioner, who has recently taken up his appointment in the Solomons, is a committed Christian. Pray that Mr Cole would have a great influence for the Kingdom, as he fulfils his responsibilities in the islands.

Country profile: **Argentina**

Argentina is Latin America's second largest country. It gained independence from Spain in 1816, then suffered long periods of internal conflict between conservatives and liberals; between civilian and military factions. After World War II, there was a long period of authoritarian rule, which came to an end with a military coup in 1976. Under military rule, thousands simply "disappeared"—most of them opponents of the junta. This has left deep scars on the country and its people, even to this day. Democracy returned in 1983, after the loss of the Falklands War.



Argentina is rich in resources. It has a well-educated workforce, with one of South America's largest economies. But a deep recession led to economic collapse in 2001, leaving more than half the country in poverty. In September 2003, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed to a loan which stimulated the nascent economic recovery.

Argentines, say the BBC, "gave the world the tango. They are mad about soccer, and are reckoned to be the best polo players."

Roman Catholicism is the state-supported religion in Argentina, with more than 91% of the population claiming membership in the Roman church. Up to 6% of Argentines are Protestant, and evangelical churches are generally respected and allowed to function freely.

Pray for Argentina

1. Praise the Lord for the spiritual renewal that the country has experienced since 1983. Argentine evangelists, teachers and missionaries have had a huge impact both within their country and around the world.
2. Prison ministry has revolutionized the nation's jails. Revival began in Olmos high security prison and by 1996 half its 3,000 inmates were believers with the movement spreading to 200 other institutions. Of the 200,000+ prisoners, 10% were then reckoned to be born again.
3. Pray that the spiritual hunger of Argentines would be assuaged only by the work of the Word and Spirit of the Lord. While the church is experiencing wonderful growth, so are cults.
4. Appropriate leadership for the churches is a critical bottleneck to growth. Leaders that disciple and empower other leaders and who know the depths of the Word of God are too rare. Pray for those involved in training leaders of the church.
5. Amerindians have long been marginalised, exploited and demeaned, their cultures ravaged by the majority. Only in 1996 did the peoples of the Chaco region gain official title to their lands. Pray for the maturation of the indigenous Chaco church, and for sensitivity to its needs on the part of expatriate missionaries in the agencies involved.
6. Pray for the 500,000 Jews living in Argentina—estimated to be the world's sixth largest Jewish community. They are secularised and highly prosperous, and largely unreached. However, eleven Christian agencies are trying to reach out to them.

Information from *Operation World CD-ROM*, Copyright ©2001 Patrick Johnstone. Used with permission. Additional information from CIA World Factbook and BBC online country profiles.

A feminine focus

The writers of hymns ... and the times that produced them

Sally Davey

Have you ever been singing the words of a well-known hymn and glanced at the name of the writer (usually given at the bottom of

the page, after the last stanza)? Have you ever wondered who this person was, and what caused him or her to write these words you're now singing? I've often wondered, *especially* if the words are unusually

profound, and rich with biblical truth. What circumstances could have stimulated this writer? Perhaps he was impressed by some new understanding of the character of God? Perhaps he had just been through some terrible experience, and found the truths about God immensely steadying, leading him to write a hymn praising God for these truths? These are some of the questions that pass through my mind. I enjoy reading history and biography, and the history of church music. Sometimes I've come across very interesting information on the lives of hymn writers, information that sheds light on the circumstances surrounding the writing of a particular hymn we sing today. This has greatly increased my respect for the hymn, and my appreciation of the truths it contains. It enables me to sing the words with new enthusiasm the next time it is announced in worship. Studying hymn-writers helps improve the way we worship; and this is why I thought I'd begin a series of articles on the lives of well-known women hymn writers. This is not because women wrote the best hymns (they didn't), but because these women used their poetic gifts for God's glory. Their example may inspire us to do the same with our talents. They were women like us, for sure, many of them with otherwise fairly ordinary lives; but their particular gift with verbal expression, and the fact that their hymn had stood the test of time, means that they deserve our special attention today.

But before I begin the series with individual portraits of these women, I thought I would say a little about the reasons we keep singing these hymns, written by men and women of bygone ages. And then a little more about the difference the character of an age makes to the type of hymn produced during it. These things are important, especially in an age (today) when older words and music are devalued, when an antipathy to anything requiring thought or effort has led to the "dumbing-down" of worship, and when the urge to turn worship into an evangelistic, 'visitor-from-the-world-friendly' experience has fuelled the excuse that we should avoid the 'old' because it is unfamiliar to the hip-hop generation. Is this true of us? Yes, we are susceptible to these pressures. Not so



Congregation of the 1990s sings the hymns of yesteryear.

long ago I was part of a worship service where it was announced that we were about to sing a hymn, even though it was 'old.' The repetition of the adjective 'old' and the way it was emphasized gave me food for thought. Does 'old' mean any less true, any less God-honouring, any less relevant to our experience? No, of course not. The Christians who wrote these words wrote them about the same truths that we believe, and their experience as sinners indebted to the grace of God was the same as ours. Certainly, we may have to apply a little effort to appreciate certain changes in the use of a few words, but this ought to be minimal for those of us who have been to secondary school, and who live in an English-speaking country.

They teach us humility

One reason I think we should sing the best of older hymns is that doing so teaches us humility. There is a certain arrogance in modernity. It usually assumes that the present, the well-known, is superior to the past, which is unknown. Increasing our familiarity with the past tends to quash that notion, since it shows us just how much those in the past knew – and how much they are actually like us. Christians of yesteryear, hundreds of years ago even – sometimes knew far more about God and His ways than we do today. Sometimes this was because they suffered, and were thereby sanctified, more than we have been. But there is also a sense in which we belong to the past, just as our children and grandchildren and those yet to be born link us to the future. Those in the past who have been God's faithful servants have been given to us as examples to follow. We can make their experience our experience, to our profit. This is one of the meanings of the term 'communion of the saints,' which is one of the creedal statements we recite in the Apostles' Creed. Have you ever thought about that? We are part of God's Church, His people, together with the saints of all ages, living now, in the past, and in the future. I wasn't always an aficionado of the past as far as church life is concerned. I became a Christian in a very up-to-date charismatic church, and was encouraged to look on the habits of the church of the past as dry, dead traditionalism. Spiritual life and vigour was a discovery of the church of the 1970s, I was led to believe. All that had gone before was sadly irrelevant – even mistaken, because it was so lacking in vibrancy of experience. And this especially applied to worship music. Too bad about the good hymnody I'd grown up with (and had actually rather liked). Its day had gone. Out with organs, solemnity and richness of expression. In with guitars, familiarity and simple repetition. This was my idea until a more careful study of history (in my secular

university courses) and a good church that respected the past showed me the folly and pride of thinking like this. Yes, the past has a lot to teach us.

A different age

One of the main reasons many older hymns are better than what has been written more recently is that many past hymn writers were not exposed to some of the errors of our own age. What do I mean with this last statement? Certainly not that a hymn has to be at least a hundred years old to be any good! After all, there *are* a few people writing good hymns today (Drs J. M. Boice, R.C. Sproul and Don Carson are three of them). No, age alone does not guarantee worth. It simply means that the strength or weakness of the church setting in which a hymn was produced usually determines its value as a hymn. And the theology of an age is what determines the strength or weakness of that age. Sound theology leads to a strong and vibrant church, which produces good hymns – that last. Poor theology will weaken and sap a church of its life; and the hymns that come from that age will – even if popular in the age itself – fade quickly. They will not endure to be sung by many subsequent generations. This is why the best hymns have

come from the early church (when many important theological questions, such as the nature of the Trinity, were being hammered out); from the Reformation period; and from the 18th century evangelical revival (the time of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield). Now, there are a few notable exceptions. I can think of John Henry Newman (later Cardinal), the leader of the High Church (Anglo-Catholic) movement in England in the 19th century. His theology was flawed with regard to the sacraments and a few other things, but he did write some fine hymns. "*Firmly I Believe and Truly*" is one. "*Praise to the Holiest in the Height*" is another. John Keble, another High Churchman, wrote "*Sun of My Soul*" (No. 472 in the *Psalter Hymnal*) – also a fine hymn. The reason (I surmise) that these men were able to write such good hymns with true theological content is that despite their error they were well-grounded in the good theology of the previous generation (a number of them had grown up in evangelical homes), and they respected it. They were at one with evangelicals in opposing liberalism vigorously. But we live in an age that is very weak theologically. Even many Reformed churches are full of people who do not value theology, and who consequently know very

IN TOUCH

Subscriptions to the IN TOUCH magazine are available. This is an opportunity for those interested who do not have access to or have joined a Cadet and Calvinette Club (Cadets and Calvinettes will continue to be supplied through their clubs). The cost is \$15 per year for four issues.

This is a Reformed Churches of New Zealand children's magazine especially written for 8 - 15 year olds.

It is filled with stories, photographs, puzzles, Bible studies, Cadet & Calvinette Club news, competitions, poetry, crafts, cooking and Camp News.



If you would like to receive IN TOUCH please forward your \$NZ15 (or \$AU15), with your details, to the **National Board Secretary N.Z.C.C.C. & C., 7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven, Upper Hutt.** (Make cheques out to N.Z.C.C.C. & C.)

little of it. Dr Bob Godfrey, a church historian and president of Westminster Seminary in California (as well as being a minister in the United Reformed Church in America) has suggested that we belong to a day as much in need of reformation as Calvin's. "We live,"

he remarked, "in a particularly dark and desperate moment." In many churches, even full ones, the gospel is seldom preached (though many other things are).^{*} Is it any wonder we produce very few good hymns?

Perhaps, if we are willing to learn from

the past in the spirit of Hebrews 12:1-2, we might yet.

^{*} *Observation in a taped address entitled "The Necessity of Reforming the Church"*

Book-Review

Carolyn Custis James

When Life and Beliefs collide

(2001, Grand Rapids: Zondervan)

Available from Geneva Books for about \$30

I don't mind the odd bit of theology here and there but I must admit it's never been one of my passions. Reading a good cook book, browsing the *New Zealand Geographic*, or tucking into a decent novel now and then is quite relaxing, but sitting down to a dose of Calvin's *Institutes* — not really. Besides, I'm 'just a woman', so why bother? My husband is an avid reader and if I have any questions I can always ask him. That way *he* can have the pleasure of getting down one of those large tomes and finding the answer for me. Well, that was the way I tended to think, until Carolyn Custis James got a hold of me.

I guess I never really thought that theology was something in which I, or even women for that matter, needed to be interested. What changed my thinking was meeting with a group of theologically-adept women at the women's Bible class at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. When our stay was up, I approached them to thank them for their fine example and to ask what I should do to become more theologically knowledgeable myself. On their recommendation we purchased Carolyn Custis James' book.

Why not women?

James provides many compelling reasons why *women* should become better theologians. After all, theology is really about knowing God. So, if we are Christians, the question is not whether we are theologians or not, but, rather, whether we are good theologians or bad ones. The quality of our theology will come to the fore in the times of crisis and disappointment that we all face. We will either stumble through these times, blaming God for our sufferings, or we will be prepared by having a true and sound knowledge of who God is.

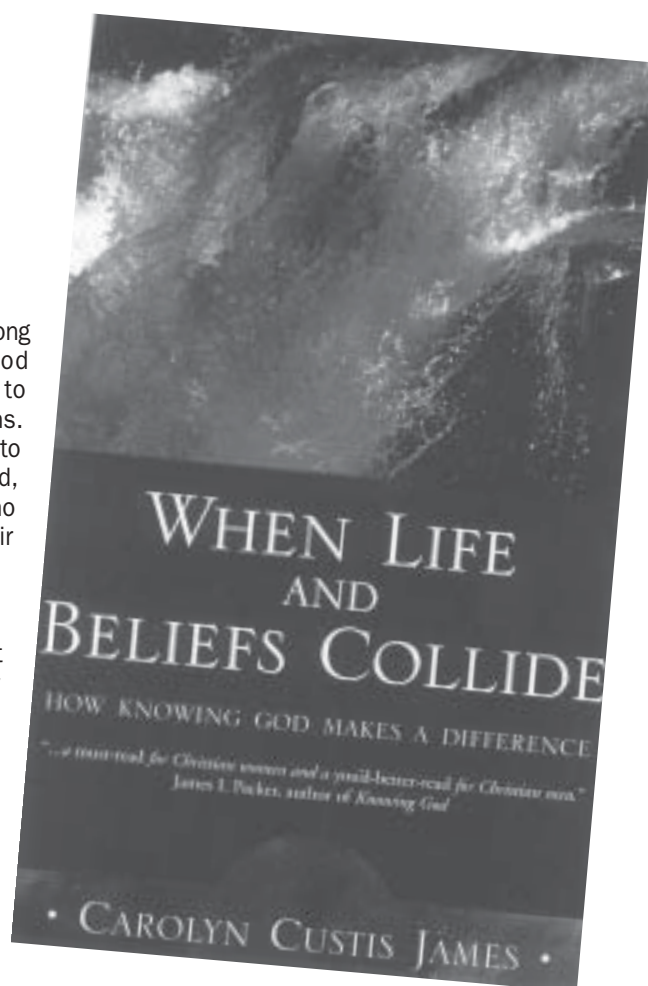
Not only does our theology affect our own lives; — it also has a direct effect on the ones we love — our husbands, children and friends. The chief counsellor of a minister, elder, deacon or father is usually his wife. If

we want the church to be strong we need to have good counsellors giving advice to those in leadership positions. And this does not only apply to those women who are married, but also to single women who are helping friends with their struggles.

Mary or Martha?

I started by suggesting that theology had not been my favourite reading pastime. The book discusses reasons why, besides laziness, women like myself generally avoid theology. We often like to categorise ourselves as either "Marys" (women who think), or "Marthas" (women who serve). Those who place themselves in the latter category tend to see their life's ministry as providing practical care for their fellow Christians rather than getting involved in heady 'theology'. This categorisation sees theology as merely theoretical, rather than the intensely-practical matter that it is. And, this is not what Scripture tells us about Mary and Martha. James argues that Jesus flatly rejected these categories. She argues that He calls us to be a composite of these two women taking time to know Him better **so that our theology informs and emboldens our ministry to others.**

Focussing on the lives of Mary and Martha, James divides her book into three parts to emphasise the importance of women knowing their theology. In the first part she discusses the goodness of God in all of life's situations. In the second part she looks at how a true knowledge of God can transform our lives. Finally, in the third part, she applies a woman's knowledge of God to her ministry to others.



As I said at the outset, I found the book a challenge and an eye-opener. Although I found some of the conclusions about the theology of Martha and Mary a bit stretched, the book radically changed my perspective on what theology is, and on my need to study theology. My motivation was such that I have ordered a stack of recommended books (another plus, she gives a list of these at the back) and invited a group of women from our church to join me in studying them.

And just a word to the men. Don't feel left out. The author urges you to read the book too in order to help you to see the necessary links between theology and practice. My husband read it and thought it was pretty good, especially as it means his wife might be doing more than just *dusting* those Calvin's *Institutes*!

Reviewed by Andy Vosslander – a member of the Reformed Church of Hastings

Focus on home

Gleanings from our bulletins...

Andrew Reinders

Avondale

Family Prayer & Praise Items: We received the following prayer and praise point from Amanda. It reads as follows: "Hello, everyone. I just want to let you know what I'm up to. When I came down to Wellington I explored the opportunity of going through a Christian organisation to teach English. I looked up an organisation through OMS. It is called www.ITPSusa.com (International Teacher Placement Service) for those of you interested. This has worked out and I am leaving for Taiwan on Monday next week. I will be based in Taipei and be trained to see if I can handle covert movement into China to teach their missionaries English.(a bit scary so please pray for me!). I have been rushing around like a headless chicken this week organising visa's etc. But this has been fun. I hope that you are all well and please continue to pray for me as I enter an unknown country and culture. I will keep you all posted on what I am doing and up to." Love and God Bless. Amanda.

Bucklands Beach

Afrikaans Service. As announced last year, our session has agreed that an Afrikaans language service will be offered here at Bucklands Beach once a month for a trial period. The North Shore congregation is doing the same. The Afrikaans services at the North Shore will be conducted on the first Sunday of the month and those at Bucklands Beach on the third Sunday. Dr Pieter van Huyssteen of Avondale will be leading these services. The first Afrikaans service here at Bucklands Beach will therefore be on Sunday, February 15th commencing at 2.30pm. If you know people who would benefit from this ministry, please encourage them to come along.

Christchurch

Tear Fund / Child Sponsorship. Today there will be a special collection for the TEAR Fund. We are sponsoring seven children through this organisation. Their names are Santo Lobemato (born 1992), Ade S Lake Mody (born 1993), Hifron (Roni) R Tualaka (born

1994), Irene Susanti Fora (born 1995), Hendra Eleison Adoe (born 1996), Risno Selajems Laisbuke, (born 1996) and Yota Van Babys (born 1997).

Dunedin

We can give thanks with several couples who have reached significant milestones in their marriages recently: Peter and Dini Braam, 50 years; Bruce and Maureen Duthie, 30 years; and Robert and Antje Storm, 25 years.

Foxton

Easter Conference. Foxton and PN sessions are holding an Easter Conference in the PN church building. Professor Henk De Waard from the Reformed Theological College will be our guest speaker. He will lead three presentations:

- 1) Covenant Election Is A Mission Story – Good Fri 2:30 pm;
- 2) Experiencing The Presence Of God; Revival And Mission – Fri 7:30 pm
- 3) Who Cares? Compassion And Mission – Sat 10:15 am, followed by lunch and a fire-side chat at 2:30 pm.

He will also be leading the Easter Sunday Morning service in Foxton and the afternoon service in PN. Please mark this event in your calendar. We would love to see as many people as possible come along.

Reformed Church of Foxton - 20th Anniversary. The Social committee are beginning to plan an evening together to celebrate God's goodness and faithfulness as the Reformed Church of Foxton celebrates its 20th year since institution. If anyone has any photos from the institution or other memorable occasions during our short history, please pass them on to Allan and Rose Thomson. Please write your name on the back of the photos and they will be returned to you after the celebration. A&R Thomson.

Hamilton

Growing Kids God's Way. We'd like to run another GKGW course. This is a valuable course for any parent, whether your child is 1 or already a teenager. It gives solid biblical guides for parenting as well as relationships.

NATIONAL YOUTH CAMP

BEWARE!!

THERE'S MORE TO COME

Date: 3rd - 10th January 2005

Location: Teapot Valley, Nelson

Website: www.nyco5.tk

CHECK IT OUT!!

It is an 18 week course and both parents need to come along (unless you are a single parent) it is worth the effort!! If anyone is able to help with babysitting by giving freely of their time to help those wishing to come along please let us know. We plan to start the course on Thursday the 12th of February at 7:45 at our home. 680 Horsham Downs Road. Please see Henri or Isolde or ring 829 4545.

Congregational Meeting. A meeting of the congregation to discuss the proposals for altering the church hall and kitchen area is planned for Friday 27 February, 7.30 pm. The proposal and drawings will be made available and posted on the Notice Boards in the foyer and the hall.

Hastings

Nigel Cunningham, who was the vicar in our congregation, has accepted an invitation to serve for a short-term ministry position at the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Belconnen, Canberra. He began this in February.

North Shore

We praise God with the Brunton family for the safe arrival of another son and brother. Both Michelle and the baby are well. We pray that our covenant God will give Peter and Michelle all that they need to raise their children in the ways of the Lord.

Palmerston North

Baptism. This morning we have the privilege and the joy of witnessing and taking part in the baptism of Genevieve Sjoukje de Vries, in which she received the sign and seal of God's covenant love. We pray for Wytse and Helen as they raise Genevieve for the Lord, that they will be given strength and joy in their task.

Congregation Photograph. We will aim for a photo of the whole congregation after the morning service on 14th March, God willing. Thanks to Genevieve Smith for her help in this, and taking the photo too! Plan to be there –comb your hair, bring your smiles.

The baptism of Zechariah Haakma will take place, the Lord willing, on next Sunday 15 Feb.

Baptism. We will have the great joy and privilege of the baptism of Sean and Keliha Minnée, God willing, on 22nd February, during the morning service. We pray that the Lord will bless these young lives, now and all through their lives. We also pray for the ministry of parenting that the Lord has given to Martin and Wilma.

Pukekohe

Haverland welcome: We will have a barbecue at Karioitahi Beach (Waiuku) this coming Saturday, 31 January, to welcome the Haverland's to Pukekohe. We will be starting the barbecues around 5:00 – 5:30. Meat for the barbecue will be provided, but please bring: a salad to share, a dessert to share, your own drinks (and cups) and a chair if you want one. Looking forward to seeing everyone there.

The senior cadet boys hope to finally go on their canoe trip down the Wanganui River this Wednesday after having had to postpone it several times due to unsuitable weather. Pray for safety and an appreciation of the beauty and wonder of God's creation.

Wainuiomata

Ladies Fellowship. On Friday, 27 February at 7.00 pm, ALL the ladies are invited to have some fish and chips at the beach. This will be held at the Petone beach, (the Moera end, by the playground). Just look for the candles! BYO own fish and chips and something to sit on. Sauces and drinks will be provided. Be prepared to enter and

win the sand building competition so bring your bucket and spade along too! If in doubt about the weather or have any questions, ring Wendy or Klariske.

(Ed: Also we note the appearance of the Wainuiomata Reformed Church on national television during the recent flooding in the lower North Island. The accompanying pictures show why.)



Wellington

A big welcome to all the relatives and friends of Nic and Atie Oosterbaan, who have come from far and near to celebrate with them their 50th wedding anniversary today! And to bro and sr Oosterbaan our most cordial congratulations on this very happy occasion. We rejoice with you in the Lord's choice blessing in giving you this special day. Join us for a special cuppa after the morning service!

This Thursday will be Chinese New Year: we wish our Chinese members and visitors God's blessing in this New Year. And do also pray that many Chinese folk may come to know and confess Jesus as their Saviour and Lord!

Reformed Church Of Wellington Sports Day. You are all invited to an end of summer sports afternoon on Saturday 21st Feb from 3:00pm - 6:00+ pm at the Brooklyn school grounds. We will be playing mini soccer, socket and limited over cricket. Games will be organised for all ages from 7 - 50yrs. Games to be followed by an informal Fish and Chips dinner in the church. (The indoor soccer team selector will also be there) It will be cancelled if wet. For more information contact Diane Goris or Gary Oosterbaan.

The Battle of Gate Pa

Glenys Jackson

The 'rules of war' below were written by Henare Taratoa of the Ngaiterangi, who was educated by Church of England missionaries. When he heard of the British plan to invade his home he returned, believing that he should stand with his own people.

March 28, 1864
Potiriwhi, District of Tauranga
To the Colonel,

Friend, – Salutations to you. The end of that. Friend, do you give heed to our laws for regulating the fight.

- Rule 1. If wounded or captured whole, and butt of the musket or hilt of the sword be turned to me, he will be saved.
- Rule 2. If any Pakeha, being a soldier by name, shall be travelling unarmed and meets me, he will be captured, and handed over to the direction of the law.
- Rule 3. The soldier who flees, being carried away by his fears, and goes to the house of the priest with his gun (even though carrying arms) will be saved. I will not go there.
- Rule 4. The unarmed Pakehas, women and children, will be spared.

The end. These are binding laws for Tauranga.

The Land Wars of the nineteenth century were justified by British leaders on the ground that they were fighting against 'heathen natives.' Events such as the Battle of Gate Pa disprove that.

Although the Ngaiterangi were not fighting the British at the start of the war, they sympathised with the Waikato Maori and allowed warriors from other pa to pass through their territory and over the Kaimai mountains. They also helped by supplying the Waikato. The British wanted to close this trade with their enemies. Hence their decision to attack the Ngaiterangi at Tauranga.

One of Taratoa's first moves was to construct a pa. Pukehinahina Pa (called Gate Pa by the British because of its heavy wooden gate) was begun at the beginning of April 1864, and used a maze of trenches and connecting tunnels to help with defence. It was an incredible feat of design and workmanship to accomplish in the few weeks before the battle.

On the evening of 28th April 1864, General Cameron ordered a feigned attack on the front of the pa. While this was going on, Colonel Greer took forces around to the rear to cut off any daylight escape attempts. The ruse succeeded, and by the morning of 29th April British artillery and soldiers were



This photograph was taken by an English soldier of the troops preparing for The Battle of Gate Pa. (Our thanks to the Alexander Turnbull Library)

in place and the main attack commenced.

The pa had only a few hundred defenders against a British force of over fifteen hundred. The British used cannons, howitzers and mortars, while the Ngaiterangi were armed with old fowling pieces and muskets. Rawiri, the Maori leader, strode up and down the parapet until midday calling out to the British, "Tena tena e mahi i to mahi" (Go on with your work, do your worst).

The weather was drizzly and dull, and General Cameron was determined to quash the Maori resistance that day. By 4 p.m. the English had made a breach in the defences and the General decided to send in the elite 43rd Regiment, backed up by a naval brigade.

In a few minutes they came out again, leaving dead and wounded soldiers behind. General Cameron sent in more troops, but the same thing happened. The British were routed and forced to retire for the night.

What frightened the British forces? It was hard to see after a day's hard fighting in bad weather. A group of Maori had tried to escape at the rear of the pa but seeing Colonel Greer's 68th Regiment advancing, fled back to the pa. Some say that a subaltern called out, "My God, here they come in thousands!" Others say the order to retire was given.

The Maori had won the battle against very heavy odds, losing only a few warriors. The British lost many more. About a hundred British soldiers, wounded and dying, littered the ground.

The Ngaiterangi knew General Cameron and his men were still outside, and Pukehinahina Pa could not survive another day of pounding. They decided to evacuate the pa during the night, and began to slip out in small groups. Occasionally a British patrol would fire at them. A few Maori were wounded, but none were killed in the escape. It is possible, however, that some of the British wounded may have been killed by 'friendly fire' in the darkness.

A warrior woman, Heni te Kirikaramu (Jane Foley), was passing when she heard somebody pleading for water. She remembered what Henare Taratoa had said: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink."

She later became an Anglican mission worker, and recalled the incident:

"Towards evening I heard a wounded man calling for water several times and his repeated calls aroused my compassion. I slung my gun in front of me by means of a leather strap. I said to my brother, "I am going to give that Pakeha water." He wondered at me. I sprang up from the trench, ran quickly in the direction of our hangi, where we had left water in small tin cans, but found them gone. I then crossed to another direction where I knew a larger vessel was, an old nail can, with the top knocked in and no handle.

It was full of water. I seized it, poured out about half of the water, and with silent prayer as I turned, ran towards the wounded man. The bullets were coming thick and fast. I soon reached him. He was rolling on his back and then on his side. I said, "Here is water; will you drink?" He said, "Oh, yes." I lifted his head on my knees and gave him drink. He drank twice, saying to me, "God bless you." This was Colonel Booth, as I judged from his uniform and appearance. While I was giving him the water I heard another wounded man begging of me to give him water also. I took the water to him and gave him drink, and another wounded man close by tried to crawl over for a drink. I gave him drink, took the can and placed it by Colonel Booth's side, and I sprang back to my brother, feeling thankful indeed at being again by his side."

Some say that Henare Taratoa also took water to the British wounded that night. Perhaps others did, as well. They were prepared to put their lives on the line for what

they believed.

Henare Taratoa was killed on the 21st June at Te Ranga, where he and his people were trying to set up another pa. His 'rules of war' were with him — the guidelines he put into practice, and will be remembered for.

Website references to the Battle of Gate Pa:

www.ngaiterangi.org.nz/page7.html
(This includes a short timeline)

www.georgia.anglican.org/2bsermonpages/2bsermons2.html

(A speech which gives the story of Gate Pa. There is one error – Taratoa died at Te Ranga, not Gate Pa – but the story of Heni te Kirikaramu is told in detail.)

<http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~Sxmitch>
(An in-depth account of the battle)

www.history-nz.org/wars4.html

The first Geneva Convention was being negotiated in Europe at the same time Henare Taratoa's 'rules of war' were being put into practice in 1864 by the Ngaiterangi.

