

faith in **focus**

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Caring for the Works of His Hands

Contents

Lessons from a Saviour in a Manger	3
Caring for the Works of His Hands (1) The Green Christian?	5
Caring for the Works of His Hands (2) Apart from providing food and fabric, do animals matter?	7
Caring for the Works of His Hands (3) Plants and GM: how should we respond?	10
Feminine focus Spurring one another on to love and good books	13
Focus on home Gleanings Auckland presbytery report South Island presbytery report	15
A pastoral letter on Paedocommunion	18
Trellis and Vine Conference – reflections	20
Books in focus	21

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Editorial

I have to admit it. “Greenies”(you know – environmentalist do-gooders) are not flavour of the month for me – at any time. You constantly see them in the news protesting about this or that cause, criticising the government of the day and harrasing people in the streets around Wellington to sign up to their cause and empty the pockets of the unsuspecting. I view them as pantheistic, anti-progressive socialists.

However, I do agree that the world God created, the one we live in, needs to be taken care of. Does that make me sound like a “greeny”?

I firmly believe that Christians should have a balanced view of the world we inhabit. We, of all people, should care for the environment and the creatures that share it with us. Man, who is the “crown” of God’s creation, is not to think that he can do whatever he wants without any consequences. God gave man the task of subduing the earth, ruling over it, caring for it and cultivating it (Gen 1:27-30). This means that we are to be the steward of all that God has created.

However, since the fall, mankind has failed to carry out his cultural mandate in a biblical way; and has had to live with the sad consequences. For instance, in the Old Testament, the land of Canaan was spoken of as a land “flowing with milk and honey”. Today, the land of Canaan – modern-day Israel – is arid and a lot of “blood, sweat and tears” has gone into that same place to make it produce crops of food.

Christians are to look after their environment – not as the green movement would necessarily have us – but by being God’s stewards In the light of His Word.

Do consider what our contributors write on some very interesting topics relating to that stewardship to which we are called..

Mr David Waldron considers the “Green Christian” and what that means.

Mr Paul Davey reflects on animal welfare issues.

Miss Anna Buter asks how we should respond to the world of plants, especially in regard to the Issue of genetic modification.

Mrs Sally Davey writes about encouraging one another in the reading of good books in Feminine focus.

Mr Berwyn Hoyt gives some reflections on the Trellis and Vine Conference.

Mr Rob Vosslamber reviews *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-shift that Changes Everything*, by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne.

Mrs Harriet Haverland gives us some snippets about events in our churches.

Mr Patrick Ramsey, pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church writes a pastoral letter to his congregation about paedocommunion. Mr Klaas Stam asks some questions about the same thing.

In our Christmas meditation, Mr Daniel P Clifford reflects on lessons learnt from a Saviour in a manger.

Images: pp7-8 Mr Paul Davey pp11-12 Miss Anna Buter

“The covenant is an expression of God’s will, not man’s, and man must listen to its terms, trust God that they are holy and just and good, and order his life accordingly.”

J. Gresham Machen

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

Lessons from a Saviour in a Manger

Daniel P. Clifford

Big events call for big celebrations – parties, food, balloons, streamers, noise-makers. But when God sent his Son to be born in Bethlehem, he came with much less worldly celebration than you might expect. In fact, many of the circumstances of Jesus' birth, as recorded in Luke 2, were downright pitiable. What does God want us to learn from his sending of his Son in such an unexpectedly lowly way? Here are three lessons from the manger.

First, by sending Jesus in a lowly condition, God reminds us of our extreme need. Jesus came humbly because he stood in the place of people who had been brought very low by sin. God's people need a reminder of their lowliness whenever God visits them, because they may be tempted to think that God's mercy reflects well on them. For example, when God appeared to Abraham, he promised to bless him and make him into a great nation. The people of Israel should have been amazed and humbled by these promises; instead, they started boasting that they were children of Abraham (Luke 3:8). Similarly, we today sometimes feel that we gratify God by our worship or good deeds, turning God's grace into grounds for boasting. But when we consider the Savior in the manger, it reminds us that Jesus' birth was all about God's condescension, not our deserving.

The Virgin Mary, who was a social nobody in the eyes of the world, understood this. When she contemplated how God had chosen her to be the mother of the Messiah, she realized that God's choice was less a statement about her qualifications and more a statement about whom he was saving. The child inside her embodied God's mercy to the lowly and his repudiation of the proud. So Mary rejoiced that God "has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Luke 1:53).

The knowledge that God was bringing a Savior for the humble and downcast

must have helped Mary and Joseph to persevere through the hardships that God ordained for them when they arrived in Bethlehem. From what we can tell, no one helped them when they arrived in town. No relative of Joseph took them in. No townspeople offered hospitality, even though God had commanded Israel to care for sojourners. Nobody made room at the inn. Jesus came like a puzzle piece that did not fit anywhere – except in a manger.

Think about the lowliness inherent in the manger. Most nativity scenes depict the manger standing in a stable, amid piles of hay and adorable, clean animals. But in all likelihood the place was crowded and dirty and smelly. Mary had to give birth in those conditions! She wrapped her baby with cloths and laid him in a feeding trough. The whole thing was extremely rough and rude – the reception, the birth, the crib.

Why? God sent his Son with various "circumstances of more than ordinary abasement" (Larger Catechism, 47) to show us how low he was stooping to

save us! It reflects the Lord's great kindness and our great need.

God's great power

Second, God sent Jesus in lowliness to show us that salvation progresses by his power, not mere human power. When God sent his Son into the world, he took pains to avoid the appearance that any person apart from God certified him or provided him with messianic credentials. The angels announced Christ – but they immediately went back into heaven. The shepherds testified to Christ – but their influence did not carry beyond Bethlehem. The wise men worshipped Christ – but God told them to return to their own country by another way. Anna and Simeon welcomed Christ – but they were not figures of influence. The fact is that no mainstream political or religious institution ever got behind Jesus, either at his birth or during his ministry.

It is true that one very powerful man, Caesar Augustus, does come into the story. He gave a decree that everyone in the known world be registered (Luke



2:1). Now that is power! Yet God merely used Caesar to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, so that Jesus would be born in that town as Micah 5:2 foretold. Caesar, with all his power, merely functioned to move God's plan along. The newborn baby in the manger embodied far more power than the greatest decree of Caesar. God's power, revealed in that weak baby, reminds us that the kingdom of Christ does not require human validation and does not move forward by the strength of human efforts.

Going to Bethlehem

How do I go to Bethlehem?
Foll'wing the stars of heaven,
as did the wise men of the East,
who riding on their camel-beast
brought presents, Jesus to be
given?

How do I go to Bethlehem?
Like soldiers of King Herod
who came with swords and
hatred,
and Bethlehem penetrated
to save the throne of Herod?

How do I go to Bethlehem?
Like shepherds of the field did,
who, when, they heard the joyful
news
that shortest way to town did
choose
to worship Israel's newborn King?

How do I go to Bethlehem?
Heedless like scribes and others,
who took no trouble to look for
a stable-king and nothing more,
not worth their time and bothers?

But how do I visit the stall,
in which so poor and lowly,
the Saviour of the world was born,
God's Son, our Lord most holy?

*John Goris
Geelong, November 1960*

This applies to the way we conceive of our work in the church. God has, I suspect, blessed your church with a biblical order of worship, sound preaching, and good doctrinal standards. Your church may also enjoy effective programs, a nice building, and a budget in the black. These are blessings, but God does not depend on any of these things, any more than he depended on Caesar's decree. We certainly try to serve God faithfully, but his work does not hinge on our best efforts. The work of the church rests entirely on his power and grace.

The same applies to your Christian life. You may find your spiritual encouragement fluctuating greatly, based on your perception of your personal holiness at the moment. This is natural in one sense, because Christians love the Savior and feel happiest when they please him. On the other hand, extreme spiritual highs and lows may come in part from an inadequate perception of the greatness of our King. Do we really believe that our salvation depends on him, and that he is fully capable of carrying it out?

Once again, consider the manger scene: Christ as a baby was already greater than the greatest ruler in the world! He is God's king. The center and power of the church is Jesus – humbled for our sins in his incarnation, and now risen from the dead and pouring out his Holy Spirit on us. The church exists by his power and for his glory. Individual congregations may prosper or decline. Personal spiritual vitality may go up and down. But Jesus Christ is the same Savior yesterday, today, and forever. His work does not depend on our power; rather, it is our privilege to participate in his kingdom. The more we grasp this, the more joy and freedom it will give to our service in the church! It is his work. This is another message from the manger.

God's fellowship with the lowly

A final message from the manger is that God does not hesitate to enter into humble places and fellowship with people who seem beneath notice in the eyes of the world. Jesus came so that even "the least of these" might have hope.

The world ranks people according to the respect or admiration they command. To worldly eyes, big players like Caesar are very important. Peasants, shepherds, and small villages are too grubby, poor, and ignorant to get much attention. But God loves to use a small stage to put on a big show. In Bethlehem, God entered

into an unremarkable place and made it extraordinary by his saving presence. He fellowshipped with the lowly and raised them to greatness by his favor.

Consider the status of your life. It does not ultimately matter whether your life appears significant in worldly terms. The true significance of your life flows from your connection to Jesus' life. If God has joined you to Jesus by faith, then he is doing something great in you. The Holy Spirit quietly applies the benefits of Jesus Christ to you. He continues to point you to the love of Christ and teach you to obey him. He assures you that you are a child of God. He gives you purpose in life. He safeguards you as you progress toward glory. What could be greater than the power of God, working in you?

Similarly, the greatness of God's saving work gives us hope in the messiness, complexities, and disappointments of life. In the stable, nobody actually had halos around their heads (Christmas cards notwithstanding)! Mary and Joseph had arrived at that place through rejection and disappointment. The manger scene captures something that is true of life in a fallen world. Joy mingles with hardship. Promise mingles with messiness. But in Bethlehem, Jesus entered right in. He fulfilled the promise, and he provided the joy, in the middle of a scene that would otherwise have been sad and unremarkable.

We serve the same Savior, and therefore should not become discouraged when life seems hard or messy or lacking in outward glory. We should never say, "My life is not important enough for Jesus to use." Or, "Something must be wrong because my spiritual experiences are not very dramatic." Or, "My life is too much of a mess to glorify God." When we think about how Jesus was born in a stable, in the company of lowly people, we realize that God does not avoid messes. His work does not depend on our qualifications, but on his grace.

Jesus comes straight into messy human lives. To all who repent of their sins and believe in him, he comes with a promise that he will ultimately take away the mess, the guilt, and the fear of death and judgment. He comes to restore us to God and to bring us into his kingdom. This is the greatest lesson from the manger.

The author is pastor of Grace OPC in Vienna, Va. New Horizons, December 2011.

Caring for the Works of His Hands (1)

The Green Christian?

David Waldron

Greenpeace¹ campaigns on a range of environmental issues such as nuclear waste, deforestation, overfishing, genetically modified foodstuffs and oil drilling in the Arctic.

Should we also, as God's covenant people, care about the physical environment and resources of this earth? Has the Lord provided us with the earth merely as His means to supply our physical needs? This world is all going to burn anyway², therefore is caring for the present earth's environment just like polishing the brass on a sinking ship? Is being 'green' a form of pantheistic pagan "tree-hugging" which is inconsistent with a true profession of faith in Christ?

If we are going to answer these questions rightly, we must see what our Lord teaches us in His Word about our relationship to this earth.

A glorious environment

In Psalm 8, David bursts forth in praise: "O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!" The glory of the Lord is reflected and revealed in what He has made. He is the One who has set the moon and stars in place, positioning the celestial bodies with his 'fingers'. He is the One who fashioned the land creatures: "Sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field". Think of giraffes, ant-eaters, snow leopards, platypus(es) for example. He is the One who designed the swimming creatures: "Fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas." Think of whales, jellyfish, marlin. He is the One who created the flying creatures: "The birds of the heavens". Think of albatrosses, hummingbirds, peacocks.

This creation shows the greatness, splendor, majesty and power of the Creator Himself. Have you ever looked up at the stars and thought about this earth spinning in space, suspended in the heavens at just the right distance from the sun to sustain life? The late Neil

Armstrong said after the Apollo mission to the moon: "It suddenly struck me that this tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small."

How puny is man, how insignificant in size, in power, in influence. We are truly tiny fragments in a giant universe. This humbling reality is expressed by the psalmist (Psalm 8:4-5). However, even though we are so small when compared to the vastness which God has made, even though we are so lacking in power and authority when compared to the majesty and might of our Creator, yet He has made us "a little lower" than Him. Only we, as human beings, amongst the myriads of life-forms, have been

made in the image of our Creator. We are different and distinct from all other creatures and have been established by God at the apex of His created order on this planet.

In the beginning, God blessed man by giving the human race a responsible task. He said to our ancestors Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and **subdue** it; and **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28) This glorious God-given task is often termed the "dominion mandate" or "cultural mandate". David puts it this way in Psalm 8 "You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet." God has delegated mastery of the earth to mankind.



A damaged environment

When Adam fell into sin, everything became very difficult, dominion became a struggle. God said: *“Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.”* (Genesis 3:17b-19a). These words describe our presently groaning terrestrial environment. If you are in any doubt, just ask NZ kiwifruit growers whose vines are affected by the spreading bacterium *pseudomonas syringae pv. actinidiae* (psa). Alternatively talk to New Zealand beekeepers about the parasitic

nature. White proposed that Christianity therefore bore “a great burden of guilt” for the current environmental crisis.

Celtic Christianity, together with the Benedictine and Cistercian monastic movements certainly developed technology which liberated time for spiritual pursuits. However, the ‘dark satanic mills’⁵ of the industrial revolution and the pollution of the environment are more a function of ungodly greed than faithful Christian living. It is true that some Christians see care for our physical environment as a low priority or even irrelevant to a life of faith. However, pollution and a lack of concern for the environment have been features of many cultures in history.

“The New Age movement and much of ‘green politics’ has elevated the creation to be a pantheistic god.”

varroa mite which is destroying beehives across our land. Anyone who has a vegetable garden knows about the battle of keeping weeds and pests at bay.

When man ceased to honour and obey God, he also ceased to properly understand his relationship to this creation, despite the evident reality that the universe itself clearly displays the power and divinity of God³. The darkened heart of man leads to foolish living where this creation is not viewed as being an instrument to glorify God. Instead, nature is seen merely as a tool or a toy to serve mankind. When natural resources are unwisely plundered to support unsustainable lifestyles the results include over-fishing, deforestation, species extinction, pollution, topsoil erosion and desertification. Productive farmland is turned into urban house sections and toxic waste dumps proliferate. Greedy over-consumption of resources fuels the idolatry of self-centred materialism. The dominion mandate is abused and the name of the Lord dishonoured.

This mandate has been used by some people to blame Christians for environmental degradation through excessive exploitation. The “Lynn White Thesis”⁴ linked the technological advances of medieval Christianity to the emergence of an aggressively exploitative attitude towards

Environmental damage through human activity is by no means restricted to the western industrialised world.

A Christian environment

Scripture provides us with principles for exercising God-glorifying dominion in a post-fall world. Here are some of the axioms for Christian environmentalism which are revealed in the Bible.

Firstly, this world does not belong to us; God is the owner⁶. We are stewards of everything we have been given dominion over⁷. God therefore expects us to use the resources which he has entrusted to us wisely. Francis Schaeffer said *“If I love the Lover, I love what the Lover has made”*⁸. Farming, mining, drilling for oil, fishing, hunting for food, or pest control are all permissible activities for mankind. However the reaping of earth resources must be performed in such a way that due care is taken of the creation⁹. Greed, which is idolatry¹⁰, has often led to exploitation and abuse of the creation.

Secondly, God highly values all the flora and fauna with which He has populated His world. God cares for all the creatures He has made. He knows when even a single sparrow falls to the ground¹¹. Think, for example, of the compassion of the Lord for the cattle in

Nineveh¹². All plants and animals receive their food and drink from God¹³. He clothes the grass of the field¹⁴. The diversity of species on the planet gives glory to God, as well as providing essential ecosystems for the ongoing survival of His many varied creatures. Biodiversity should be preserved if at all possible¹⁵.

Thirdly, our dominion over animals is never to be ruthless and uncaring, but should reflect the concern which God has for what He has made¹⁶. We are to rule Creation in such a way that God is glorified in, and through, our faithful dominion¹⁷.

Fourthly, we are not to worship the creation¹⁸. The New Age movement and much of ‘green politics’ has elevated the creation to be a pantheistic god. Mankind is seen by some as being equal in status to all other creatures. John Davis, editor of Earth First Journal, has said *“Human beings, as a species, have no more value than slugs.”* Some people even elevate animals above men and women, who have been created in the image of God.

The purpose of creation is neither to be man’s servant, nor man’s equal, nor man’s superior but primarily to give glory to God. Therefore Christians should be involved in environmental concerns. Christians should speak out against cruelty to animals. Christians should use precious resources wisely until the Lord returns. Christians should lead the way in showing the right relationship between man and his environment. Christians should be known as those who care for God’s creation, not as those who abuse what God has made.

However, no matter how well we care for this terrestrial globe, all our faithful efforts for the care of the environment will not save the planet. This world is not our permanent home, but a temporary dwelling place for all mankind.

A Future Environment

The phrase “Son of man” in Psalm 8 points to the ultimate environmental fix, even though when the psalmist wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he did not personally know the Man who would bring that solution. That God-man is Christ Jesus, who when he took on human flesh, became part of the physical universe which had been created through Him and for Him¹⁹.

Jesus Christ has abolished the last enemy, death. All things are in subjection under his feet²⁰. At the time when Christ returns, this present earth will be burned²¹. This first earth will pass away²²

and a new earth will be formed. The new physical environment will no longer be cursed²³, but will be a home which we, the children of God by grace, can joyfully care for as we fulfill the original purpose of our dominion mandate in the very presence of our Saviour.

Does the Bible then teach that we are to be “Green Christians”? The answer really depends upon what “green” means. Here is a brief definition. A ‘Green Christian’ does not worship this creation, does not elevate creatures to God-given status of man and does not view this world merely as a servant for man’s needs. The ‘Green Christian’ remembers the temporary nature of this world, and knows that we do have a God-given mandate to care for this world during our sojourn here²⁴. The Green

Christian trusts that Christ will enable him/her to glorify God as we rule this world together in his name, as good stewards. Are you this type of ‘Green Christian’?

Notes

- 1 greenpeace.org
- 2 2 Peter 3:10
- 3 Romans 1:20-21
- 4 White, Lynn, Jr. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science* 155, whole no. 3767 (March 10, 1967), 1203-12.
- 5 A line from a short poem by William Blake epitomising the environmental effects of the English industrial revolution, later incorporated into the anthem “Jerusalem” with music by Hubert Parry (1916)
- 6 Psalm 24:1
- 7 Matthew 25:14-30
- 8 Francis Schaeffer *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1970.

- 9 An example of this principle would be the sabbatical year provision for the land to remain fallow every seven years (Lev 25:3-4)
- 10 Colossians 3:5
- 11 Matthew 10:29
- 12 Jonah 4:11
- 13 Psalm 104:14
- 14 Matthew 6:30
- 15 Genesis 6:19
- 16 e.g. Exodus 23:5; Proverbs 12:10
- 17 1 Corinthians 10:31
- 18 Exodus 20:3
- 19 Colossians 1:16
- 20 1 Corinthians 15:27a
- 21 2 Peter 3:7
- 22 Revelation 21:1
- 23 Revelation 22:3
- 24 Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6

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Caring for the Works of His Hands (2)

Apart from providing food and fabric, do animals matter?

Paul Davey

Opinions on this subject vary widely. Ethical positions on animal welfare sometimes seem as diverse as the people holding them. The increasing power of those (mainly urbanites), who demand submission to their ever-louder cries for “better” treatment of animals is obvious. Whether or not these debates rage,

should Christians care about the “plight” of animals? And if so, in what way?

In this brief article I hope to demonstrate that there is both explicit and implicit biblical imperative for us to care about animals’ food, shelter, health and overall environment – not least because they are fellow creatures, and thus God cares for them. I also want to clarify that even though some of those seen to be

on the “loony left” are there because of a genuine desire to improve the lot of animals, they may also be driven there by others’ bad behaviour towards animals. Aspects of their cries really are worth taking note of for ethical reasons. Whilst it is true that extreme views often get more media coverage, and that what some require is fundamentally unrealistic and economically impossible, welfare



of animals is, nonetheless, a biblical imperative for us to practise. The fact that good animal welfare often has positive economic benefits is incidental to this discussion.

As a farmer I regularly have to make compromises – time vs money. Do I have the ewes mated to lamb earlier, thereby subjecting the lambs to greater risks of hypothermia – or later, when drought can pose a problem? Do we shear in winter – thereby increasing feed intake and storm risk, and reducing metabolic disorders – or in summer, when the weather is more clement but fly strike is also more of a problem? Do I put a lot of straw in a farrowing (“birthing”) hut for sows, ensuring that it is warm and snug, or do I minimise the straw with new-borns so that they don’t get tangled

“Fairly rapidly, one gains the idea that God’s Word teaches clearly that He requires man to look after the animals. If a man is righteous he will do so.”

in the straw and are laid on by the sow as she lies down? Where is the welfare trade-off? In many ways these types of decisions a farmer makes are no different than those we all have to make in life, eg do we wrap our children in cotton wool, or do we give them freedom to climb rather challenging trees, swim with their friends in the river, ride their bikes down precarious banks and the likes?

Animal welfare is not about making life for animals perfect in this imperfect world. It is about taking all due care to ensure that stress, fear and discomfort are minimised for the animals that we are responsible for. I don’t want to put myself forward as a pillar of virtue in this regard. Even so, I hope I am getting better at making life for our animals as welfare-friendly as I am able.

One of the more moving images the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples to reduce their fears is recorded in His Sermon on the Mount:

Matt 6:26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet

*your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27“And who of you by being worried can add a **single** hour to his life? 28“And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is **alive** today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, **will He** not much more **clothe** you? You of little faith! 31“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32“For the Gentiles eagerly seek*

all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Because God Himself cares for the birds and the lilies, I should be careful how I treat His other creatures.

From earliest times the Lord has instructed us to look after the animals. The creation mandate requires us to:

have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Gen 1:28

Rather than this giving us *carte blanche* liberty to do whatever we wish with the created order God has given us the responsibility to look after it well. Using what He has made well, definitely, and not abusing or misusing the land, the waters, the plants, the air or the animals. Further, in the fourth of the Ten Commandments the beasts of burden were to be given a Sabbath rest,

even as man was (Ex. 20; Deut. 5). The Hebrews were told not to “muzzle the ox” whilst it “threshed the grain” (Deut. 25:4). Later again, in the Proverbs:

A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, But even the compassion of the wicked is cruel. Prov 12:10.

Fairly rapidly, one gains the idea that God’s Word teaches clearly that He requires man to look after the animals. If a man is righteous he will do so. Even the unusual account of Balaam in Numbers 22 leaves us with no doubt that Balaam’s recklessness, even extended to his donkey, is the reason he is humiliated and shamed, and incurs the Lord’s judgement.

How many of us have cause for sorrow and shame when we review some of the things we have done with and to animals over the years? If only their helplessness, dependence, and in the case of some species, their devotion and reliability, wrought in us some pity.

So, for those of us involved in the keeping of animals, what is it that enables us to have both a proper view of how to look after them, and keeps us motivated to meet those goals? And, to diverge briefly, what limits this consideration to domestic, or kept animals, only? Surely feral species also require mercy and humane treatment?

To get a couple of points out of the way first will be helpful. First, economic considerations ought not to be the primary consideration. Some have the view that it is impossible to maximise profit from animal production without it being in the animals’ interests to be kept in optimal welfare environments. Often profits are maximised in high welfare environments, but it is not always the case. Second, because an animal has “always” been kept in a certain way, it doesn’t make it right or good. Of course we can all point to the more publicly chastised examples like *foie gras* production. Others will point to the use of sow stalls and battery cages for laying hens. Whatever the example, unless the case is irrefutably one of neglect or cruelty there will be a range of opinion as to what is acceptable or not.

The NZ statute requires that five needs be provided by those attending to or caring for animals:

- Proper and sufficient food and water
- Adequate shelter
- The opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour

- Physical handling in a way that minimises the likelihood of unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress
- Protection from, and rapid diagnosis of, any significant injury or disease.

Most Christians would, I think, agree that these principles are substantially consistent with God's Word. The only one over which there could be much debate is the third. What is a *normal behaviour pattern*? How do we establish how important that is? Ought we to anthropomorphise – that is, view animals' needs and desires as though they were human, or through human lenses? For example, caged or penned animals often exhibit stereotypical (fixed, repetitive actions) behaviour patterns. Most behavioural scientists believe that these behaviours reflect sub-optimal welfare conditions, at least for the psyche of the animals. Should a farmer who observes stereotypical behaviour in his pigs immediately take radical, high-cost remedial action or give up farming? What he does will be partly determined by how serious and extreme the behaviour is, and whether there is a known solution to the behaviour. One of the situations in pig farming where stereotypical behaviour is observed is housing sows in dry sow stalls. For many years a large number of pig farmers believed this was the only way to keep sows profitably, and in optimal safety and condition. NZ public opinion forced farmers who farmed this way to take the initiative and move away from dry sow stalls. In fact, in NZ from December 2012, all dry sow stalling of sows from day 28 after mating will be stopped in all herds that are welfare-accredited. Farmers, for the most part, have now got used to the idea, and have found that the move has not been as painful as they feared. Some report that they are pleasantly surprised at how well the changes have gone, while others think that the perceived welfare improvements from lack of confinement have been reduced by group-housed sows being aggressive and sometimes wounding each other.

So, we ought to ask the question as to how, in a fallen world, animals are to enjoy a reasonably high welfare environment. Hopefully most animal keepers are interested in caring for those animals well. Notwithstanding, a good deal of ignorance, rather than malice, in some quarters, results in sub-optimal environments for animals. Pig and poultry farmers have had quite a lot of criticism in this country for some years, so we'll

look at a dairy example. When cows are calving in a blustery, sleety sou'wester, their hormone levels are all topsy-turvy and feed intakes at that time may be reduced, farmers can't just say that the cow's rumen is a little furnace that will keep her warm, so "she'll be right". Especially in times of stress or pressure, the cow needs shelter, and some TLC! Not all farmers seem to realise this. So, various governments have taken action to try and prevent people from keeping animals in poor conditions – not just limited to cows, pigs and chooks either.

The NZ Parliament passed the Animal Welfare Act in 1999 to enshrine in law a *duty of care responsibility* for all

what is good welfare and what is not.

Initiatives resulting from the Animal Welfare Act of 1999, to both encourage and direct farmers to look after their animals well, have resulted in various welfare codes being developed in NZ. For example the poultry, dairy and pig codes of welfare are substantial, recent documents that give minimum standards, best practice and other general information on the various aspects of husbandry, health, nutrition, the environment in which the animals are kept; and deals with the handling and transportation of those species. These documents which are issued by the Minister for Primary Industries (formerly the Minister of Ag-



animal owners, along with the continued powers to protect animals from abuse and neglect. The Act is designed to cover all animals that are capable of feeling pain. Whilst the Act primarily addresses production, research and companion animals, wild animals are not exempt from protection under the Act. Thus, it is an offence to use inhumane methods for hunting or pest control. As an example, I was at a recent meeting with MPI (Ministry for Primary Industry) officials who are working on updating the Act. One rural attendee argued that there is nothing wrong with drowning cage-trapped possums as this is how some "have always done it" and it is "awkward to deal otherwise to them". That he had few supporters to his idea takes nothing away from the point that there is a great diversity of view as to

agriculture), have substantial legal muscle, even though the documents themselves were formulated under the provisos of the Animal Welfare Act, rather than being independently legislated themselves.

Currently the MPI is looking to supersede the various Codes of Welfare with specific legislation that officials believe will make it easier to penalise people in cases of neglect or cruelty. There is perhaps even significant neglect and abuse of animals in our country. That the offenders are not being called to account over this should disquiet us.

However, there are several concerning possibilities that could emanate from this legislative change. One, by way of example, is that farmers may have instant fines imposed if an animal arrives at a slaughter-house with significant lameness. Naturally, the detail of the legisla-

tion will establish whether there really is a problem with the proposed law, and the degree of the problem will be determined by how it is applied. If an animal has been injured during transportation through circumstances that could not reasonably be avoided, then it is a problem. But if the animal has a broken leg that has been in that condition before transportation then the owner rightfully has questions to answer. As with all legislation, those vested with applying it will have quite a degree of influence on how fair and reasonable it proves to be.

Another example of how the change in legislation could be a problem is summed up in the question, "Whose contributions and interests will be used to draft the legislation?" Some would have standards included in rules that have more to do with aesthetics and marketing than welfare of animals. For example, the question of whether a

piggery is tidy and presents a good image should be included in welfare quality assurance programmes has been debated recently. My opinion is that aesthetics are incidental to the welfare of animals, even if there is a positive correlation (as yet, a scientifically-untested hypothesis!) between high welfare and a tidy image. So, if animal welfare is going to be legislated in such a way that more criminality is attached to breaches of good welfare, great care must be taken to ensure that welfare laws include genuine welfare issues only.

I'm reminded of a pithy little line attributed to Winston Churchill that *dogs look up to you, cats look down on you, whilst pigs treat you as equals*. Cats' superior attitude is no excuse to get at them, dogs' devotion should melt our hearts and no Orwellian "spin" on pigs' attitude should "get under our skin" either! Obviously animals have "personalities" and

needs that should soften the edges of those tempted to treat animals poorly; perhaps, more crassly, only as means of production and profit.

God's Word is clear that animal welfare is important. Governments, as God's servants for the maintenance of an orderly society (Rom 13) have a responsibility to ensure that citizens have reasons not to look after the creatures He has created improperly. Even more importantly, though, our consciences need to be attuned so that we act righteously toward our animals, because it is right. As in all things, how we are seen to treat animals will reflect on the witness we bear to the Lord Jesus in the eyes of the world.

Mr Paul Davey is a farmer in Central Canterbury and a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Caring for the Works of His Hands (3)

Plants and GM: how should we respond?

Anna Buter

Plants in the Bible

Looking out the window, how often do we actually consider what we really see? How often do we take the time to reflect that our lives depend on plants? Inhabiting a huge variety of locations and climates ranging from alpine iciness, scorching dessert heat to tropical jungle humidity, plants are everywhere, and provide us with the essential building blocks of life. We live, eat and breathe plants.

Ever since the Garden of Eden humankind has enjoyed an intimate relationship with the plant kingdom. In Genesis 1:9-13 we read that the "land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees

bearing fruit in it according to their kinds." Earth was furnished to provide a perfect habitat for man, able to support him. Two main types of vegetation were distinguished; seed-bearing, low-lying plants or herbs and large trees bearing fruit. Man was assigned the green plants/herbs and fruit to eat, whereas the animals were assigned only the green plants/herbs. (Gen 1: 29-30). Instead of mankind providing food for the gods (as in pagan religions), the continuance of man on earth was provided for by God. This loving action demonstrates his concern that life should continue with an adequate supply of high-quality food at minimum effort.

The Bible shows us many other truths about the plant kingdom. Plants are used by God as symbols for his actions, blessings and curses. One hundred

and thirty plants are mentioned in Scripture. Some of these have generic names rather than specific names; the spiritual significance of certain others is repeatedly mentioned. Strong flourishing trees like cedars or pines were admired and righteousness was compared to them (Ps 1:3; 52:8; 92: 12-14). The vine, olive and fig are used to express God's goodness, in terms of a fertile and bountiful land/ crop harvest. Furthermore, as God's representative on earth, made in his image and likeness, mankind is called to act in a godlike way. Certain laws on man's relation with plants are given throughout the Bible. Some are environmentally motivated, others based on property rights, and others giving to the Lord that which is rightfully his. A bountiful crop is seen as God's reward for giving to him the first

fruits, not an automatic result of good horticultural practice.

Mankind was created from the earth, and is maintained by it. Adam was told that he was able to eat freely of all trees except one. Rather than becoming humble and thankful for God's bountiful provision, mankind's decision to eat the one forbidden fruit changed not only man's relation with God, but also changed man's relation with the plant kingdom. No longer was a rich orchard of fruit available to men and women, but the ground was cursed because of them. By the toil and labour of their hands it would produce food (Gen 3v 17-19). Adam's rejection of God's sovereign authority and disobedience to his command is therefore the root of all our human problems with food production and supply.

Just as the gospel looks forward to the day when the nations will once again enjoy God's blessings, a time is coming when "the wilderness and dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom, and like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly (Is 35:1-2). "In the midst of the paradise of God" the Tree of Life – central to the Garden of Eden – will be planted again, so that all those who believe in him, and obey his commandments "will have the right to the tree of life" (Revelation 2:7; 22:14). Found in the New Jerusalem, it is a tree of remarkable character. Growing on both sides of the river there is not only one tree, but many such trees planted there with their fruits freely available to all those in the holy city. Their leaves will not only be therapeutic, but they always have fruit on them, yielding a different fruit every month. Besides being pleasant and wholesome, they will contain many nutrients for happy, vigorous service in God's kingdom. Their exact nature has not been revealed. God is able to create as he sees fit to his honour and glory, and there we must leave it; eagerly anticipating the day when we too will enjoy the delicious, nourishing fruit of the Tree of Life in the holy city.

Our Role as Stewards

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God."¹ He is the rightful owner not only of what creation beholds, but also all within it. He has given us plants, but our question remains: what are we to do with them? Our world is tainted by sin, falling far short of the standards required by God. As we look forward to the New Jerusalem we are called to

be God's stewards of this world and of one another. It is our obligation to care for his creation, appreciating what he has given us. In its beauty, complexity, and intricate orderliness all creation gives continual praise to God, declaring his glory (Luke 19v40). Who are we as sinful mankind to try to improve it or try to make it better?

And yet we have. Over the decades man has bred and cross-bred plants with desired traits in order to produce offspring illustrating that desired trait. While this breeding requires careful levels of accuracy, and many generations to produce the desired results, the changes are considered 'natural'. Our grapes were made seedless, and tomatoes given a longer shelf life. Is this natural or has man 'bettered' God's creation? Today scientists can use Genetic-Modification (GM) techniques to incorporate genetic material into an organism's [genome](#) in order to develop plants that demonstrate

but does that make it ethically correct? Depending on the origin of the DNA incorporated, there are two types of GM; transferring genes between related species, and those that are entirely unrelated. Transferring genes of "caterpillar" resistance from wheat to barley is one thing; transferring a poison gene in scorpion tails into a cabbage to create a venomous cabbage is quite another. Both wheat and barley belong to the wider grass family, thus through selective breeding could potentially produce caterpillar-resistant barley, but a scorpion and cabbage would never be able to interbreed naturally.

The desired traits are produced highly accurately, taking much less time than traditional methods. GM crops can be modified to be pest/disease resistant, and to grow under various conditions including cold, drought, acidity and salinity. New opportunities are provided for plant breeders to produce crops in



a particular characteristic. It raises questions as to whether this is so very different to what plant breeding has been done over thousands of years, and whether Genetic Modification (GM) might possibly fit into God's creation plan. Or, does it "take mankind to realms that belong to God?"²

The world is rapidly heading towards a global crisis: how to feed a booming world population while the available arable land decreases at a rate of 5ha (50 house sections) a minute? The answer could potentially lie in the efficiency of agriculture through GM crops. It is unquestionably the largest biological experiment that man has ever entered into,

formerly inhospitable areas, with greater yield. Creating a crop resistant to certain pests, the sheer quantity of pesticides sprayed is reduced, decreasing the ecological impact, as well as improving soil, water and energy conservation. Crops may also be engineered to be tastier, and/or to contain additional nutrients. Aspiring to prevent malnutrition, GM foods contribute a vital role in the provision of vitamins or minerals; providing people with essential nutrients within their staple crop.

A great deal of controversy is raised about GM. Ethical and long-term health apprehensions for both people and the environment are raised when organisms

are altered from how they were naturally created. Criticisms of GM include environmental and economic concerns, as aspects of the long-term impacts are unknown. The risk of a GM 'super weed' population that is impossible to kill with herbicide, or which outcompetes 'natural' plants is among the fears raised. Corporatisation of food crops is one of the scariest and most concerning GM issues.³ Corporations are amoral; likely making the decisions that most enhance their profit. GM research costs millions and consequently is heavily patented; the technology remains in the hands of only a few companies. This means that the technology which was originally invented to prevent world hunger might not be accessible to those who need it most.

Our Response

Is GM technology a black and white issue? Both viewpoints have strengths and downfalls. God created the world in seven days and when he "saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1v31). As stewards of this world our obligation is to care for his creation, appreciating what he has given to help us. In Genesis 1:12-25 we read of God giving man every kind of plant

bearing fruit "each according to its kind". All things were created perfectly by him and for his glory (Colossians 1: 16). As stewards of this world, and of one another, living in a land of plenty, it's our responsibility to do what is within our power to help our fellow human beings, created in the image of God, who are dying of starvation and malnutrition (James 2:16). Creating GM crops that are capable of growing well where previously crops were not possible may hold the solution. This may hold the answers to the food crisis problems seen in our world, but it also has a huge potential to be misused and abused.

It is no straightforward issue. For thousands of years we have been playing God through selective breeding, though altering genes in one year in a laboratory is much more significant. In drawing conclusions we need to be ever-mindful of the fall of man into sin. The world we live in today is no longer the perfect creation found in Genesis 1. Our motives are so often not for the glory of God, or the edification of others, but merely the elevation of ourselves. In Romans 1: 18-32 we have a warning – those who are enamored with the creation and not with the glory of God spiral into destruc-

tion. Ultimately, it comes down to how the technology is used – to the enrichment of one man, or the wellbeing of a generation? Much research and capital has already been spent on developments, is still being spent, and will continue to be spent in years to come. The answer has not yet been found: moreover, the era of genetically modified foods has only just begun.

Science and Christianity are so often at war, yet shying away from issues like these is not an option. In studying Plant Science I will no doubt at some point be asked where I stand. The origin of the transferred gene and its relation to the host need to be kept distinct. Aspects of GM are undoubtedly in complete contradiction to what we read in the Bible about creation and our relationship to it, yet other aspects are not so very different to what mankind has been doing over thousands of years and is considered natural. We live in a land of privilege and plenty: nevertheless, it's our responsibility to do what is within our power to help our fellow human beings, created in the image of God dying of starvation, and malnutrition – GM crops potentially hold the answer. For this reason I have not yet come to a clear-cut, definite opinion in favour of or against GM outright, and doubt if I ever will.

As the era of genetically modified foods develops, the challenge that I give myself and extend to you is this: on the day that our viewpoint is called for, do not answer with an opinion formed in ignorance, but with an educated, knowledgeable opinion that takes into consideration what God has called us to as humans, and his relationship with his creation; yet not forgetting the vital role played by science.



Notes

- 1 Gerard Manley Hopkins: *Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985)
- 2 Prince Charles. (08/06/1998). 'The Seeds of Disaster' 12 August 2011 http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/speechesandarticles/an_article_by_the_prince_of_wales_titled_the_seeds_of_disast_1857887259.html
- 3 (1999) THE DEBATE ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS: RELEVANCE FOR THE SOUTH. Retrieved 13 August, 2011, <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1958.pdf>

Miss Anna Anna is a first-year plant science student at Lincoln University; and a member of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Spurring one another on to love and good books

Those resolutions...

Good resolutions are best shared. Who among us has not decided – “right, from now on I’m going to do better at this...” yet finds, a month later, that no progress has been made? Discouraging, isn’t it? But contrast that result with the way one behaves when several friends *know* you’ve decided to make a change or achieve a goal, and perhaps have offered to do the same thing with you? You’re accountable; they are watching your actions and choices, and they’re going to ask you how it’s going. It works!

It works because that’s how God has made us – and Scripture abounds with helpful advice along these lines. “Stir one another up to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24), “admonish one another” (Colossians 3:15) and “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11) are only three of the ways the Bible teaches us to help one another with the weakness of the flesh.

Perhaps you are about to make a few New Year’s resolutions. Or possibly you are thinking of ways to improve in important areas of spiritual discipline. May I suggest that you do it together with a friend, or with a group of people? The rewards are immense. Experience has taught me that God transforms our lives when we do things together; and I’ve been a frequent beneficiary of it. We’re enabled to strengthen each other’s weak knees, encourage the wavering, help new believers mature, and generally make sure that each one of us keeps on keeping on with the good works that God has prepared for us.

A reading group

Some time ago, our editor asked me to write something about an activity that has helped me stay motivated to read good books. It began about eight years ago, as a result of seeing something a friend in Hastings had started. Andy

Vosslander, known to many of you, had not long returned from a period of study in Philadelphia in the U.S. While there she had attended Tenth Presbyterian Church, the congregation I’d had the privilege of being part of during my own studies twenty years before. Andy had been impressed by the spiritual maturity and theological knowledge of many women in that church, and decided to read some of the good books they were recommending. On her return to New Zealand she enthused other women at Hastings to join her. When they began reading James Montgomery Boice’s *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Andy asked me to visit the group and share some memories of Boice, who’d been my minister while I was in Philadelphia. Seeing what the ladies at Hastings were doing convinced me that it would be great to start something similar in Christchurch. So, a group of interested Dovedale women

met in late 2004 to discuss the idea of starting a reading group.

Aims and objectives

The outcome was a decision to establish an informal reading group to encourage one another to read the sorts of books we knew we should, but which we often failed to read on our own. We would meet at intervals of several months, and only when we’d finished a book or a significant part of a book, to discuss it. This was deliberately low-key – we knew we already had plenty, if not too many meetings already, and the whole aim was not to increase our busyness, but to increase our reading! Knowing that others were reading the same book, by an agreed-upon date, would motivate us to get that book read. The meeting for discussion would act like a “reward” at the end to enable us to share the blessings we gained while reading the book.

We were also clear that this should not

Reformed Library for **AFRICA**

WANTED – volume 1-28 of *Faith in Focus*

This is for an organization in South Africa (“Reformed Library”) that provides ministers in Africa with Scripturally sound material, free of charge. Most of these ministers have no formal training or qualifications. Our aim is reformation through studying in the ministry. We want to help all the ministers that want to study, but do not have the resources to do so.

We will pay for postage.

Anyone who can help in any way, or just want more information, please contact:

Rev Jopie van der Linden (jopie1976@gmail.com).

be an “official” church activity. There was to be no feeling of pressure on women in our congregation to join; and likewise, there would be a warm welcome to women from other churches to join if they wanted. (Over the years women from four different churches have so far been participating). Similarly, those joining would be free to read one book and skip the next if they were busy, or not so interested in that book. Since the beginning we have simply read as the group desires.

Probably the most important factor for such a group is the choice of the books read. Their quality is really what keeps us going. In general terms, our aim is to read books that stand the test of time – good books that are not so topical that they

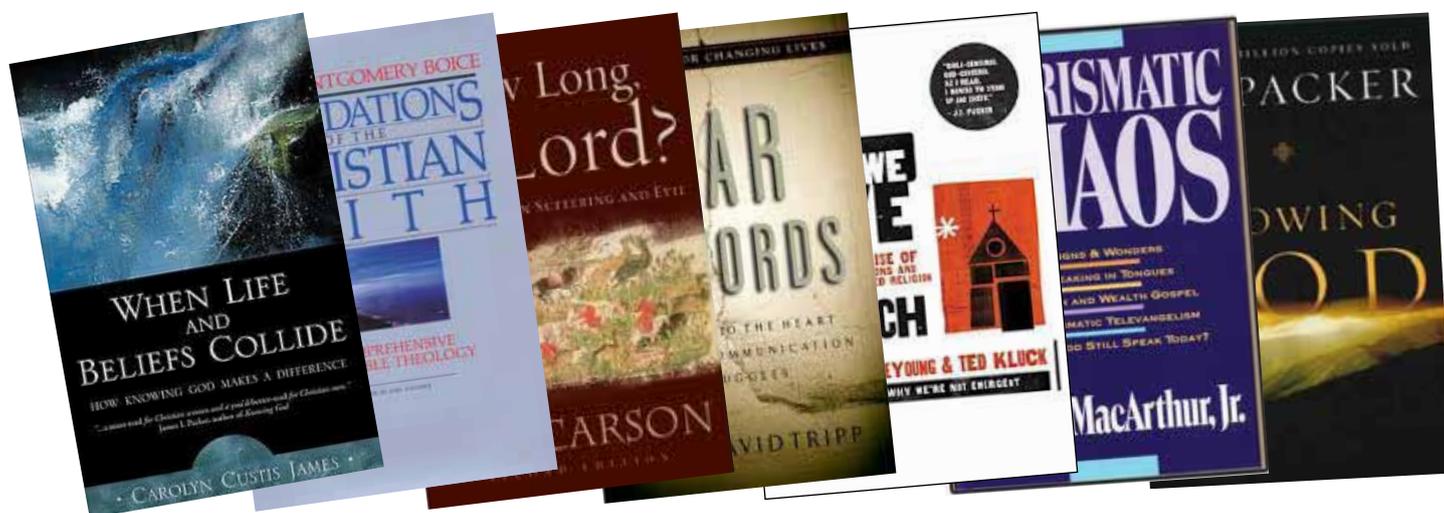
Carolyn Custis James’s *When Life and Beliefs Collide*. This book lays out the reasons women should read sound theology – most importantly, so that they are equipped to meet life’s big challenges and trials. It is a good introduction to a reading group such as we envisaged, setting the scene for the type of reading that will build spiritual maturity in Christian women, and enable them to stand firm when the going is tough.

The blessings so far

We have been active for eight years now; and I can definitely say that I have benefited greatly from our group. Not only have we been able to get through dozens of books that we might never have read otherwise; but we’ve also

there are others who want to join. We have never lacked new women showing interest who want to read along with us.

Perhaps the best way to describe our activity is to list for you some of the books we’ve read together over the years. It is not complete, but will give you an idea of the kinds of subjects which have occupied our minds, and the kinds of family libraries most of us are building in our homes. As I mentioned, above, we began with Carolyn Custis James’s *When Life and Beliefs Collide*. As a logical progression into the type of book she recommended we continued on with: J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*
Edith Schaeffer, *What is a Family?*
Paul Tripp, *War of Words* (on communication, and our hearts)



lose appeal once an issue is no longer “news”; and well-enough written that succeeding generations will still find them helpful. We resolved that we would read books that would form the nucleus of a good home library for a Christian family. It would include books that, having been read and found helpful by us, could be lent, with confidence and enthusiasm, to our children, our friends, and those we might be helping along in their Christian walk. We aimed to include good books of a more theological nature, and also books that apply biblical teaching to the practical issues of life. We also wanted to read biographies and church history as well, to learn what God has done in the lives of others before us.

From the outset, we have simply chosen them by consensus. Perhaps several women will suggest a good book they have already read, and we have a brief discussion followed, usually, by a decision to read most of them, in a given order. We decided to begin by reading

shared the insights and practical applications that have occurred to us when we’ve met to discuss them. You could say that we’ve been fuelling each other’s spiritual furnaces; and it’s been motivating for all of us. But more than that, the effects of these books have spread onward and outward – many of us have lent them to others, and have seen them bear further fruit in other people’s lives. That is a great joy.

Of course there have been discouragements. Women have got busy, lost interest or moved away; and our numbers at times have waned. That always acts as a dampener. However, we should always expect this tendency, since anything spiritually worthwhile requires conscious effort, time and perseverance. The key thing in such a group – in fact, in any kind of Christian group, is not to lose heart; and to resolve that if an activity is worthwhile, we will just keep going as long as there are several of us to do it! And sure enough, as soon as people quit

John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*
Elizabeth Prentiss, *Stepping Heavenward* (a 19thC novel accurately depicting sanctification through trials)

James M. Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (the five solas in today’s setting)

James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (read in its four parts as four separate books)

Don Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (on the apostle Paul’s prayers)

Don Carson, *How Long, O Lord?* (on suffering)

Elisabeth Elliott, *Through Gates of Splendour* (story of missionary martyrs in Ecuador)

Lydia Brownback, *Legacy of Faith* (applied portraits of women in the Bible)

Kevin Belmonte, *Hero for Humanity* (biography of William Wilberforce)

Elise Fitzpatrick and Carol Cornish, eds, *Women Helping Women* (on counselling women)

Philip Yancey and Paul Brand, *Fearfully*

and *Wonderfully Made* (the human body as a spiritual analogy)
Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*
Kevin De Young and Ted Kluck, *Why We Love the Church*
Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*

Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism*
This list tells our simple, informal story. We don't pretend to be a sophisticated "ministry"; we're just a group of women trying to spur one another on in our walk of faith. We try to keep everything uncomplicated, flexible and attainable.

Our purpose is far more important than our organisation. No one disputes that reading good Christian books is helpful: the difficulty arises in *doing* it! We trust we are succeeding.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

BIRTHS

Bilton, Michaela Johanna – a daughter born to David and Johanna – October 3rd (North Shore)

Capill, Ryder John – a son born to Stephen and Danielle – September 24th (Bishopdale)

Couperus, Israel Gavin – a son born to Louis and Joanna – October 4th (Dove-dale)

De Vries, Emma Grace – a daughter born to Sander and Miriam – September 29th (Hastings)

Dickson, Tazara – a daughter born to Andrew and Eden – September 24th (Hamilton)

Jochem, Liam David – a son born to Dave and Simone – October 8th (Bishopdale)

Mc Kellar, Isaac – a son born to Matt and Catharine McKellar – October 7th (Hamilton)

Pagaduan Daniella – a daughter born to Rey and Joy – October 3rd (Bishopdale)

Posthuma, Madeline Brooke – a daughter born to Anton and Michelle – October 20th (Bishopdale)

Zorn, Edith Lily – a daughter born to Seth and Emma – September 23rd (Wellington)

PROFESSIONS OF FAITH

Dunedin: James Hyslop, Amy Badger will reaffirm her faith

Hamilton: Welan Rorimpandey will profess his faith and Esther will affirm hers

Nelson: Dave and Margaret Winnington

and their daughters, Grace and Katherine, will reaffirm their faith and Sophie will be baptised

Oamaru: Annaliese de Ruiter

WEDDINGS

December 8th – Stephen McDonald and Sarah de Vries will be married in Palmerston North.

DEATHS

Forsyth, Margaret – aged 84 on September 23rd (Hamilton)

Mulder, Aagje (Attie) – aged 90 on October 17th (Bucklands Beach)

Regnier, John – aged 84 on September 24th (Hamilton)

Steenkamp, Aneleh – We wish to express our sincere sympathy to Jan & Lerina and the extended family on the loss of little Aneleh on October 6th at only 23 weeks pregnancy (North Shore)

Verkerk, Aalt – aged 89 on October 5th (Bishopdale)

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Eric Stolte was ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments in Dunedin, on Saturday 13 October.

The **Rev. David Waldron**, pastor of the Reformed Church of Hastings, has been extended a call by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bucklands Beach. Let us be in prayer for him and his family as they consider this call.

On 10th December 1972, the **Rev Dirk J van Garderen** was ordained a minister of the Word and sacraments by the late Rev Max MacFarlane in Seacombe Gardens, South Australia. In January of 1978 he and his family moved to Christchurch and have served in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Family Camp 2022

27th December to 3rd January
Finlay Park, Cambridge

The theme for this year's camp – **OLYMPICS**

The devotional leaders are:
Rev John Haverland (mornings) and
Rev Pieter van Huyssteen (evenings)

Enrolments via the rcnz website – rcnzone.com/familycamp

All fee information etc available online.

A great place for fun and fellowship.



(Christchurch, Bishopdale, Avondale and Bucklands Beach) since that time. We at Bucklands Beach will be celebrating and giving thanks for 40 years of faithful service to the Lord by him on Saturday, 1st December 2012 here at Bucklands Beach. This will be done by having a formal dinner for him during the evening. During this meal there will be a chance to share stories, photos and have some entertainment. Bucklands Beach will be providing food for this evening.

Pat Brittenden from Radio Rhema has asked the **Rev. Paul Archbald** to participate in a panel-discussion on the role of women in church-leadership. Two of the panellists will be in favour of women in office, two against. This is one of four TV segments on controversial topics. It is intended for international viewing/downloading. Each panellist will have opportunity to speak to the subject, followed by interaction with the other speakers and with the audience.

The **Rev. Norm de Jong** and his wife **Wilma** arrive in Hastings to begin a 3 month period of ministry in our midst. Come along to Dovedale Church to hear **Heidi** share about the work in China and a restricted access country. This is a wonderful opportunity to be encouraged by how the light is breaking into some of the very dark corners of the world and to learn more about how we can join together in encouraging our brothers and sisters in these countries.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale: The building is progressing well and the building committee is getting to the point where we will begin to draw down the loans arranged to fund the project. If you are interested in contributing financially to the project and reducing the amount we have to borrow, building pledge forms are still available from Peter Thompson. A third of the money gifted can be claimed back via a donations refund at the end of the financial year (31 March).

Foxton: Much discussion has taken place with regard to the sudden closing down of the St John Union church building and the need to find an alternative worship venue. Session is pleased that things have worked out well, in that the school hall of the Manawatu College is available and we are being made very welcome to make use of it on the Sundays. Weekday meetings, like session meetings and congregational meetings

can still be held in the church lounge, since only the worship auditorium has been condemned, due to a high earthquake risk. The Lord has provided in our current need.

Pukekohe: Land Use Consent Update: Great news! We no longer have to go to a hearing for our Land Use Consent application! The neighbour who had some objections has agreed to withdraw their request to be heard after we have negotiated a few conditions with them. We have some operating hour restrictions (principally around the car park) but these are completely workable with our current and planned use for the building. We have also had official word from the Council that they have approved our application. Thank you all for your prayers, we have a positive answer! The Building Committee will now continue with further planning.

Wellington: Session is calling a Special General Meeting at 7.30pm on Wednesday 24 October (at the church) to seek the congregation's approval of the proposed design for renovation of the rear of the church, and for work to begin.

DENOMINATIONAL

We have had our final **Hymnal Committee** meeting. There is still a lot of work with indexing, proof-reading and preparation for production. We hope to send it to the printers in December or January. So please continue to pray for the committee and other people who still have a lot of work to do 'behind the scenes.'

MISSIONS

Ant, Petra, Elske, Hannah & Jack Lagas: We are going to the Solomon Islands! We are from The Reformed Church of Hastings and have three children ages 7, 5 & 3. We are going to be working at The Bethesda Disability Training and Support Centre, in Honiara. The plan is to be there for 12-18months doing the job of Property Development Advisor/Base Manager with the goal to work with the locals, giving them direction in the running of the centre and setting it up for self sustainability and training a manager to continue the running of the place after we leave. We will be provided with accommodation and the use of a vehicle but the work is voluntary, so we need to find financial support for our time there to pay for travel, insurances, food & other expenses. We leave January

17th 2013, to take up the role which will have been vacant since November.

Pukekohe: Thank You: Praise God from whom all blessings flow! What a blessing to be a part of the Church of God. We are truly thankful for the contribution that the Pukekohe Reformed Church has promised us. We are blown away by your willingness to support us in our mission in the Solomon Islands next year; thank you so much! Ant and Petra Lagas.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EVANGELISM

Dovedale: Evangelism at the A&P show – This year we will be engaging in conversations about who Jesus is. To aid conversations we will use an interactive survey and challenge people to consider who Jesus really is and how this impacts people today.

CAMPS & CONFERENCES

North Shore: The youth group are going to do an overnight camp up at the Bruntons' on Saturday the 20th of October. We will be meeting at 3pm at the church on Saturday, driving up to the Brunton's, camping in the paddock overnight, and then coming back down on Sunday morning to church.

NYC2013: National Camp is coming up fast! The enrolments are rolling in, so get in early to secure your spot and avoid the late fee. Camp is going to be huge this year, at a brand new location in the Hawkes Bay from 4-11 January, and is definitely affordable! And if that's not enough of an incentive, the 50th person to enrol wins free credit for the tuck-shop! For more information and to enrol online, check out thewryc.wordpress.com

RCNZ Family Camp Update! 27 Dec 12-3 Jan 13 You can register right now, here: <http://rcnzonline.com/familycamp/> If you have already booked but haven't heard from us then please register again and make sure you click the 'Submit' button at the very end, and we will email you within a few days. There will be a choir again this year for those who are interested. There are lots of tent & caravan sites. **Please bring the Camp Trophies** you won last year!

Youth Group Labour Weekend Camp: The Mainland Regional Youth Committee (MRYC) hosted the annual camp. The theme for our studies this year was Guidance – Determining God's will for

the Maze of Life, which were led by Pastor Daniel Wilson from the Nelson congregation. It was held in an exciting new venue, the YMCA Wainui Heights just before Akaroa.

CLASSES & COURSES

Silverstream: Dr. Venema will speak on "The Supremacy and Finality of Worship through Christ," an exposition primarily of Hebrews 10:19-26. Fellowship and Coffee will be available after this session.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Bishopdale: Act Up! The Locust's Song. Please keep this evening free to see the performance of a traditional native American tale by this children's drama group. This will also be a fundraising evening for Voice of the Martyrs, an international organisation that supports and publicises the plight of persecuted Christians. All profits from ticket sales will go to Voice of the Martyrs Christchurch.

Hamilton: Prison Care Fundraiser Dinner – Come along to have fun, learn and support this ministry with your valuable presence!

ACTIVITIES

Foxton: What is George Eastman known for? Name 3 of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World? What was the former name of Taiwan? Have these questions tickled your brain cells? Then look forward to an entertaining night for our annual Trivial Pursuits evening.

Masterton: We are progressing well with the planning of events for the 25th anniversary of the Masterton congregation celebrations. Invites have been sent out to all previous members last week and you may have noticed an advert in the *Faith in Focus* magazine over the past few months. Billets may be needed to house those attending the festivities.

North Shore: Fishing Trip/Charter – The Men's Fellowship would like to extend an invitation for a great day of fishing on the Kiwi Angler (seriousfishing.co.nz) The boat leaves from Gulf Harbour Marina and we will be fishing in the Hauraki Gulf. Although I cannot guarantee how many fish each person will catch, this charter boat has a good record for catching Snapper and other fish.

Silverstream: Start organising your teams for the annual quiz night. Family fun for young and old. Make up your teams of 4 for the "Light Bulb trophy", or the "Family" or "Youth" categories.

Wainuiomata: Youth Group invites you to our annual Roller Hockey Tournament. The plan is to arrive on time to get teams sorted.

ACTS OF SERVICE & DEACONAL

Bishopdale: The following poem was written about the Soup Kitchen that the church is running to the inner city needy in Christchurch.

South Island

A poem

He might not be a chef to many
for chefs are sometimes two a penny
but late last year 't was his idea
to start a Soup Kitchen in a marquee
for the hungry or those sleeping rough
a bowl of soup is nice enough
a friendly word and some good food
might be a start to something good
the Lord says feed my lambs and
 feed my sheep
it does not matter where they sleep
or what company they keep
yes, it's our Neil who cracks the whip
just like a captain on his ship
some come alone or in a group
to sample Neil's nutritious soup
Gary and Andre, Joe and Marleen
not many locals that haven't been
they come for a yarn and something
 to eat
but most of the guys hang out for
 some meat
so one of the helpers does magic
 with mince
and Gary says: "Oma I ate like a
 Prince"
when the provisions look some
 what bleak
church members are told what's
 needed that week
and those that are asked gladly donate
for it soon disappears from seven
 till late
some of the helpers do love to bake
arriving with scones, muffins or cake
so when Monday night you've
 nothing to do
pop in for a visit, there's soup for
 you too
for as we were taught and still do
 believe
it's better to give than to receive.

Author: Simon Hollander

Presbytery short report from 15 July 2012

RCNZ Overseas Missions Board

Two representatives reported back from the March Board meeting that they attended. The possibility of relocating the board to the South Island at the next synod was discussed, with sessions urged to consider this already. Two representatives from the Presbytery will attend as many Board meetings as possible during the inter synodic period.

Student for the Ministry

Brother Graeme Zuidema was declared a student for the ministry having satisfied all the denominational requirements. The Zuidemas will continue with the Internship programme in the RC Bishopdale until the end of the year before relocating to Geelong, Australia, to attend the Reformed Theological College.

Highlights from the Article 47 Review Questions

Nelson

- A good number of visitors are attending regularly.

Dovedale

- An active strong youth group continues to be a blessing.
- Options to relieve lack of space pressure on the church facilities, due to more members and visitors, are being considered.

Bishopdale

- The church is worshipping at a local high school hall while the church building is being extended.
- So far this year there have been five professions of faith and four of the expected 13 babies have arrived safely.
- The Rangiora preaching post is now worshipping every Sunday at 5pm.
- A weekly soup kitchen for street people in Christchurch Central has begun. The After School Kids club for children from a local primary school is also well attended.

General

Dunedin

- They are expecting the arrival of the Stoltes in late July and the final exam for Vicar Eric Stolte has been set for Saturday 22 September.

Christchurch

- The church facilities are still out of action due to earthquake damage.

Planning for the future continues. A satisfactory outcome from the insurance claim is still being negotiated.

Dovedale

- The delegates presented a paper about second service attendance and sought advice on ways to encourage members who are regularly absent.

Fred Braam, Reporter

Auckland Presbytery short report, from 20 July at Pukekohe

We were blessed with a straightforward agenda and were able to complete our business within two-and-a-half hours. The calling Church, Bucklands Beach, led

the opening devotions with prayer, the reading of Psalm 46 plus a brief meditation and the singing of 'The Church's One Foundation.' (PH 398)

The Presbytery 'Men's Study Day' is scheduled for 21 July and will focus on seminar-style discussion on being a man of courage. The movie 'Courageous' was viewed beforehand. Bucklands Beach is the host church and about 80 men were expected.

The questions raised in Article 47 of the Church Order were answered on behalf of the congregations of Hukanui and the North Shore. Both reports were positive and encouraging. Hukanui reported a growing sense of unity being experienced there. They also expressed thanks for the support and encouragement received by the churches, especially in pulpit supply. A new calling committee, looking for a new pastor,

has been established. The North Shore informed the meeting that it was discussing the possibility of employing a part or full-time man with a view to local evangelism.

The Avondale session presented three additional hymns for the Presbytery's approval. These were all by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend: O Church Arise; By Faith; Speak, O Lord. After some discussion, these were approved for use in our churches.

The regular reports on the Overseas Mission Board, National Diaconate Committee and Auckland Presbytery Youth Committee were received. The proposed forms for baptism will be discussed at the next meeting of the Presbytery (November 2nd)

Dirk J van Garderen

A pastoral letter on Paedocommunion

D. Patrick Ramsey

To the Members of Christ Presbyterian Church:

Many of you have felt the winds of paedocommunion that have been blowing in our little neck of the woods these days. So I wanted to take this opportunity to explain the church's position on this issue. Paedocommunion is the practice of serving Communion to covenant children (the prefix *paedo-* means "infant" or "child") on the basis of their baptism or covenant membership and thus before they are able to understand the gospel and make a profession of faith.

The most consistent paedocommunionists administer the sacramental elements to their nursing infants by a method known as intinction. A Communion wafer, dipped into the wine, is placed between the infant's lips, in order to enable the nursing infant to receive a tiny amount of the elements. Other paedocommunionists, however, would argue that only covenant children who

can digest solid food should participate in the sacrament.

Our church standards

Paedocommunion is contrary to what our church teaches and practices. We do not believe that the Bible sanctions the practice of serving Communion to infants or very young children. Rather, we believe that a credible profession of faith is necessary before coming to the Lord's Table. This position is sometimes referred to as credocommunion (*credo* is Latin for "I believe"). Question 177 of the Larger Catechism says that the Lord's Supper is to be administered "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves." The OPC's Directory for Worship says that only those who "have been baptized and have made public profession of faith in Jesus Christ" may be admitted to the Lord's Supper (IV, A.1; see also III, C.3).

There is an initial plausibility to the argument for paedocommunion, at least for those who already hold to paedobaptism (infant baptism), as we do. If we baptize our children without them

making a profession of faith, then it would seem to follow that they should receive Communion without a profession of faith. If the Lord's Table is for the Lord's people, and if our children are among the Lord's people, then why would we not serve them Communion? Accordingly, both Baptists (who neither baptize nor offer Communion to young children) and paedocommunionists (who do both for young children) often argue that it is inconsistent to hold both to paedobaptism and to credocommunion. If covenant children do not need to make a profession of faith in order to be baptized, then it is inconsistent, they argue, to require a profession of faith in order to receive Communion.

In response, I do want to strongly affirm, along with the paedocommunionists, that the children of believers are members of the church and belong to the Lord Jesus. As is often misunderstood even by many Presbyterians today, covenant children do not become members when they first take Communion. They are born into the church and so receive the mark of membership, baptism, as infants.

Similar, but different

The fact that our children are baptized members of the church, however, does not mean that they should automatically partake of the Lord's Supper. To argue that it does mean that is to commit the fallacy of false analogy. While the two sacraments are similar, they nonetheless are different in important respects, which renders the analogy false. To compare baptism with the Lord's Supper is like comparing apples with oranges. Yes, both apples and oranges are fruit, but they are significantly different kinds of fruit. Similarly, baptism and the Lord's Supper are both sacraments, but they differ in important respects. Therefore, the fact that infants receive one sacrament does not automatically imply that they should receive the other sacrament.

Again, all persons born in America are American citizens, but not every American citizen is eligible to vote, drive a car, or join the Armed Forces. Likewise in the church, believing adults and their children are all church members, and therefore they should all be baptized. But not every baptized member is eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper.

The nature of the Lord's Supper is such that it is not meant for all church members. It is a meal consisting of bread and wine. According to 1 Corinthians 11, participants are required to take the elements, and eat and drink them. Active physical participation is therefore part of the essence of the Lord's Supper. Infants, even though they are church members, are physically incapable of actively participating in the Lord's Supper. If God had intended for every member to come to the Table, then he would not have established it in such a way that naturally precludes some members.

Active spiritual participation needed

Active physical participation points to active spiritual participation. The physical eating and drinking is a visible picture of the inward eating of Christ's body and drinking of his blood, which is accomplished by faith (John 6:53-54). To eat and drink is to embrace Christ as Lord and Savior, and share in his body and blood (1 Cor. 10:16). Participants are thus required to eat and drink in remembrance of Christ. In so doing, they proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:24-26). Hence, active spiritual participation is part of the essence of Communion.

Baptism is different in that active spiritual participation is not an inherent component. In baptism, the participant is passive. He does not baptize himself. Rather, he is baptized by the minister. In Communion, as we have just seen, the participant is active: he takes, he eats, he drinks, and he remembers.

This difference between the two sacraments—one involving active participation and the other only passive participation—reflects their different symbolisms. Baptism represents our entrance into the church, while the Lord's Supper signifies our growth as Christians. As Herman Bavinck, a noted Dutch theologian, observes: "There is a great difference between baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration, a sacrament in which a human is passive; the Lord's Supper is the sacrament of maturation in communion with Christ, the formation of the spiritual life, and presupposes conscious and active conduct on the part of those who receive it" (Reformed Dogmatics, 4:583).

Since active spiritual participation is an intrinsic part of the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul requires active spiritual preparation before one eats and drinks:

"Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28). Paul bases this command upon the nature of the Lord's Supper, which he discusses in verses 23-26, as indicated by the "therefore" in verse 27. In other words, the duty of self-examination is derived from the requirement to eat and drink in remembrance of Christ.

The Lord's Supper is not just a meal. It is a sacramental (religious) meal, in which the participant shares in the body and blood of Jesus by faith (1 Cor. 10:16). One must, therefore, be able to discern the body (of the Lord) in order to partake in a worthy manner (vs. 29). It is not surprising, then, that Paul uses a general term, and not a specific term, in verse 28 ("let a person"—note also "whoever" in vs. 27) to indicate that self-examination is required of all partakers. Consequently, the duty of self-examination is not limited to certain persons, as paedocommunionists would argue; it is required of everyone who would come to the Table. (See George Knight's article, "The Lord's Supper: Warnings for All" in New Horizons, April 2008, which is available online at opc.org/nh.html.)



"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Prov 1:7

Teaching Principal and/or Teacher

The Silverstream Christian School is a Christian school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed faith. We believe this Reformed faith to be the most accurate expression of biblical Christianity. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith and to Reformed Christian education. This is an exciting opportunity to be part of a vibrant covenant community, and we look forward to your application. If you have any questions or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact us. Please forward your C.V. with 3 referees to:

Contact details:

Dirk den Harder
Email: dirk39@xtra.co.nz
Ph +64 4 528 8066

Because the Lord's Supper demands active spiritual preparation and participation, we require our covenant children to mature spiritually before they partake of this sacrament. Once again, this does not mean that they are not church members or that they are not saved. Nor does it

mean that they need to be sixteen and have the catechism memorized. It simply means that they should not be served Communion until they are "of years and ability to examine themselves" (Larger Catechism 177) and have made "public profession of faith in Jesus Christ" (Di-

rectory for Worship, IV, A.1). Blessings, Pastor Ramsey

The author is pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in London, Ky. New Horizons, December 2011.

Trellis and Vine Conference – reflections

Berwyn Hoyt

Does the *Trellis and Vine* offer a mind-shift essential to the Great Commission? That's what many have claimed about the "book version". And I wanted to know the answer. So when I heard there was one of the many "conference versions" coming up in Christchurch, I promptly read the book and signed up for the event.

The *Trellis and Vine* metaphor is explained elsewhere in this edition of *Faith in Focus*, but essentially it is about disciple-making: growing the vine of God's church as in Matthew 28. The conference presenter, Colin Marshall, is co-author of the book, *Trellis and Vine*. Drawing on his Navigators background and his many years of experience making disciples among the evangelical Sydney Anglicans (read: 'reformed' Anglicans – in a TULIP sense), he is well-placed to advise on making disciples in our culture. If you feel that we in the Reformed churches are weak on working out the Great Commission, then the evangelical Anglicans offer us a challenge worth listening to. They have an excellent track record of making disciples from within a reformed theological framework and have produced well-known publications such as *Two Ways to Live* and *Christianity Explored* that are used throughout the reformed world.

In these reflections I want to focus on aspects that challenge us in the Reformed churches. We already have some things mentioned at the conference 'under our belt', so to speak, such as the foundation of solid preaching and a functioning eldership. But let's focus here on the

particular challenges that apply to us.

Challenging Mind Shifts

Two mind-shifts were offered to challenge us:

Make disciple-making disciples. We must think not only of making disciples, but of making disciples who make other disciples. To be a disciple *is* to be a disciple-maker (with the rest of God's people – Eph. 4:15, Col. 1:6). If we miss this aspect, we're not teaching disciples to be fully *Jesus'* disciples because we omit His disciple-making example and command (Matt 5:1, Matt. 28). As we make disciples, let us always have in view who *they* will pass the gospel on to next.

All Christians must speak the Word, not just the elders. The elders are to do this and encourage this work, but all of us are to engage in it. Too often we think of just the elders doing the Word work. It is true that we already do it in our Bible-study groups and we open the Scriptures with our children. But we could be more intentional about opening the Word: with our friends over coffee on a regular basis; to plan a lunch/BBQ not just for social contact, but to specifically read and discuss the Scriptures; and a direct invitation of this same nature to unbelieving neighbours can also open a door to the gospel. Do we open our Bibles when we discuss the Sunday sermon? Intentional speaking of the Word need not be dry. The delight of it is to point out how the good news of the gospel links to each passage.

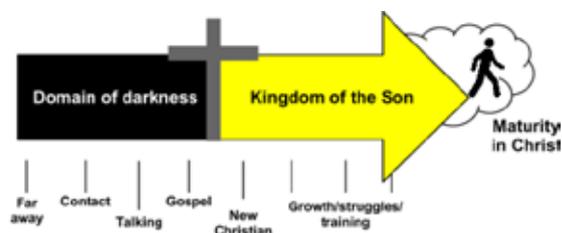
The conference workshop particularly fleshed out point

two in a way that the book did not. We were presented with a large number of Scripture passages, and we had to review the passages in order to ascertain who spoke the Word in each passage. Was it just apostles or elders, or was it everyone? Point two is not a new teaching, but it may sound new for us if we think of only the elders teaching the Word; so it is essential that we test this teaching with Scripture. For me, this scriptural exercise was the key to the conference.

Because it's so important that we draw our perspectives from Scripture, I'd like to suggest this as an exercise for the reader. Think about who speaks the Word in the New Testament: who it starts off with, and who it ends up with. References are at this link: tinyurl.com/8wn5f2x

Working it out

A large section of the conference was dedicated to "working it out". One aspect was to begin working in "disciple-making teams". Essentially these are mentoring 'teams' of two to six people who teach others in the congregation to open their Bibles with other people by doing it with them as the apostle Paul did (compare Phil. 3:4). You've now made disciples who are busy making other disciples. Then next year you'll do



the same again, teaching different people to share the Word. Next they will begin doing this spreading work for you. But beware that these teams are fluid and flexible, designed to fit the people. They should not become another trellis that 'must' be maintained.

Who will join this team? First of all those who are already showing a desire to do this (2 Tim 2:2). "Moving people to the right" (see diagram) is a graphical tool to help you think about each person in your life and try to understand where you can speak the Word in their life, and then where they can speak it to someone else (Rom 15:14).

The book and conference both flesh out what a 'team' meeting could look like, what would be expected of the participants, and work out with whom you might open the Word; for example, you might follow up newcomers to your church with an open-Bible visit, or as a parent you might need some advice on the best way to teach the Bible to your children. Then, as you have some who are being trained, an elder may take a trainee with him on, perhaps, a pastoral visit. But don't wait for a team to get

started in your church! This is all informal, and you can begin today. If you don't feel equipped, then ask for help.

Our tendency in the Reformed churches is to call this Word-work 'pastoral' and dump it solely on the elders. Certainly it is elders' work, and they are overseers, entrusted with God's work (Tit 1:7). But it is also everyone's work.

A note of caution here: this thinking may challenge our traditional concept of the elders' task. And we might get a headache or two. Certainly it is not expressed in terms that will slot easily into our session meetings. So don your 'Berean' hat and examine the Scriptures to test this idea.

Another "working it out" tool was one-to-one Bible reading. This is a very simple process that any believer can do: open the Word with someone, make an observation or ask a question, then pray that the Spirit would work.

Conclusion

I have focused here on what we can learn from a typical Trellis and Vine Workshop Conference. There are indeed mind-shifting perspectives involved. Par-

ticularly, that 1) our plans begin with people, not structures, and 2) that the NT example has everyone speaking the Word. Some of this is challenging, but if it follows the Lord's vision, then it is worth the effort. Along with the scriptural evidence presented at the conference, I have also seen empirical evidence (such as the blossoming growth of the gospel through the evangelical Anglicans in the past 30 years in Christchurch) that suggest these mind-shifts can help us work out the Great Commission.

Needless to say, the conference held much more than I have not mentioned. If you are a church leader, it included help on prayerful planning for recursive disciple-making, articulating the plan, making the time, and finding/calling the right people. If you are not a church leader, you will be helped to become a disciple-maker yourself. There will be other such events coming up, so if this sounds interesting, visit vinegrowers.com.

May the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea!

Book in focus

The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-shift that Changes Everything

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne
(Matthias Media: Sydney)

Reviewed by Rob Vosslander

What goes through your mind when you hear the word "church"? If you are a member of a Reformed church, you are likely to think of two Sunday services; Cadets and GEMS, youth group or seniors' club (depending on your age); ladies' fellowship or session meetings (depending on your gender); along with an assortment of visiting, working bees, church cleaning, periodic home visits, family or youth camps, and so on. Each of these activities has a role to play in the lives of Reformed Church members.

Every so often, though, we may feel rather exhausted by this constant activity. Further, at times we might well ask ourselves whether this hive of activity might have more to do with tradition than with biblical Christian practice. And we may even have to suppress a fleet-

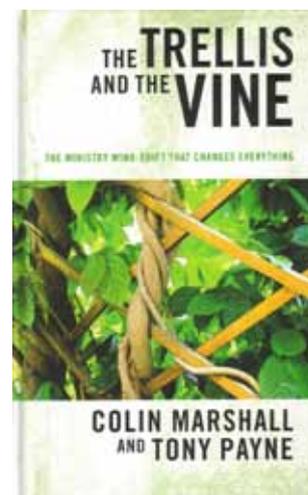
ing thought that these activities provide a surrogate for the type of gospel service to which Christ calls us.

If you have paused to ask yourself whether this bustle of activity is really what the gospel is all about, or perhaps nurture doubts about the self-ward focus of so much of this activity, I suspect you will be both challenged and encouraged by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne's book entitled *The Trellis and the Vine*. As its subtitle suggests, this book encourages a shift in ministry mind-set.

So what are this 'trellis' and this 'vine'? These metaphors provide a helpful analogy of two necessary and interrelated aspects of Christian ministry. Imagine two trellises in a backyard. One is a fine piece of latticework; functional, perhaps, but much too beautiful to ever allow a grapevine to obscure and mar it. Rather, such a trellis should be maintained and admired for its own sake. In contrast, the second trellis is probably a ramshackle affair, but you cannot tell, since it is smothered by a verdant and fruitful vine. Should you ever wish to under-

take maintenance on *this* trellis you'd have to remove much of the vine first, and would probably find that the vine was supporting the trellis rather than the other way around.

I suspect you are grasping the point of this parable: churches comprise both trellis and vine. As the authors note: *The basic work of any Christian ministry is to preach the gospel of Jesus*



Christ in the power of God's Spirit and to see people converted, changed and grow to maturity in that gospel. That's the work of planting, watering, fertilising and tending the vine.

However, just as some sort of framework is needed to help a vine grow, so Christian ministries also need some structure and support. It may not be much, but at the very least we need somewhere to meet, some Bibles to read from, and some basic structures of leadership within our group (p. 8).

They then ask a key question: *What's the state of the trellis and the vine in your church (p. 8)?*

As churches grow and mature there is the ever-present danger of a growing inward focus, and the proliferation of committees, structures, programs, activities and fundraising efforts – all of which support and maintain the *trellis*. Meantime there are little time and few workers left to grow and tend the *vine*. And the church's mission disappears from view as the focus shifts away from people to structures.

While the trellis is important, its role is to support and promote the fruit-bearing vine. As individuals and churches we can easily lose a focus on people. Moreover our ecclesiastical structures and programmes can crowd out concern for the gospel – a concern focused on building people, not programmes, so that they may both be and bear fruit.

Now you've no doubt heard all this before – after all, doesn't Ephesians 4:22 speak of equipping of the saints for the

work of service? We know what ought to be happening, but how do we achieve this? To find out, I'd suggest you read the book (and sorry, I'm not going to give a *Reader's Digest* condensed version!) To whet your appetite let me tell you several ways in which it challenged me.

First, it challenged my complacency about the significance of the gospel of Christ and the needs of others. Yet it did not leave me merely feeling guilty. Instead it indicated a way forward in very practical terms.

Secondly, it challenged our practices and traditions. Certainly the authors did not disparage worship or preaching. However they comment that while people's hearts will be changed if the word is prayerfully and faithfully preached, a result of such preaching will be that the hearers will want to give themselves to disciple-making and the service of others (p. 177). The book provides useful guidance as to how to do this.

At a practical level, in an interesting chapter¹ the authors discuss how an over-worked pastor (or session) could train up his congregation in vine work. They suggest that if the leadership knows its flock, it should focus attention and training not on the most needy, but rather on mature believers, as they in turn could be trained up to do the work of ministry and thus share the load. This would then provide more men and women to do the work of service.

Thirdly, and related to this, it challenged my individualism. The focus of the book is on the church working to-

gether, and on believers building one another up and advancing the spread of the gospel, rather than the comfort of the converted. The book made me wonder why I involve myself in the ecclesiastical activities in which I engage – are they merely comfortable, routine, satisfying? Or do they demonstrate a practical outworking of God's grace in me, a love for Christ motivating me to bless others, and a means to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in my life and the lives of others? Moreover, what do I prioritise in life? Does my life demonstrate that "my primary identity as a Christian is not that I am an accountant or a carpenter, but that I am a disciple-making disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ (p. 139)?" Do our churches' trellises encourage this?

Fourthly, it challenged assumptions about church growth. The authors caution that "excitement over church planting can sometimes lead people to think that the mere fact of putting up a new trellis somewhere will result in a new, healthy, growing vine. But the key thing about the church-plant is not the quality or location of the new trellis, but the quality of the people – the vine-workers – who are starting the new work. Once again, it comes back to how well we are training our people to be disciple-makers (p. 180)." This involves preaching, but also small group activities and even one-to-one Bible reading.²

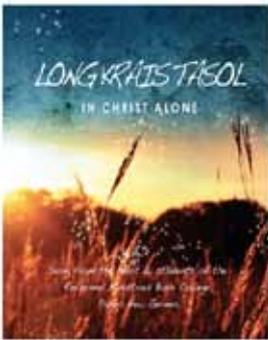
So much for the book, which like other material published by Matthias Media, has the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ squarely at its centre. However, at the end of the day all a book can do is encourage us to act as believers who are not ashamed of the gospel. Those brought up in a particular denomination can too easily become comfortable with their trellises which support a particular type of vine – one with a familial or cultural similarity to themselves. This book encourages us to rethink our priorities. As Mark Dever notes on the back cover blurb, "Christians are to be disciple-making disciples and pastors to be trainers. Superb! This is the best book I've read on the nature of church ministry." Amen.

Now for the grace and courage to put it into practice!

Notes

1 Chapter 9.

2 For further ideas on this, see David Helm, (2011), *One to One Bible Reading*, (Sydney: Matthias Media).



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Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth

by Susan Hunt

Reviewed by Cynthia Rowland



In her latest book, *Prayers of the Bible: Equipping Women to Call on God in Truth*, Susan Hunt follows a similar vein as her previous books with her emphasis on equipping women with sound, Reformed theology. Mrs. Hunt is a Women's Ministry Consultant for the Presbyterian Church in America's Christian Education and Publications Committee. She has authored several books, all with a focus of encouraging women to embrace true theology and apply it to their lives. A favorite, *The True Woman*,¹ challenges women to set aside the lure of today's feminist agenda, which creates "the new woman," as Hunt terms it, and embrace the Bible's plan for a woman's life which creates "a true woman." In this latest work, *Prayers of the Bible*, Hunt explores biblical theology and the truth of Scripture by examining select prayers in the Bible.

Hunt states the purpose of this book in the introduction: to answer the question, "How do we learn to pray?" Her theme verse for the book is Psalm 145:18: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth." If I were to summarise its purpose in one phrase, it would be that it is to teach women how to pray *in truth*.

Hunt writes twelve chapters, each of which explores a prayer in Scripture and hones in on a theological truth. She begins chapter 1 by examining Paul's prayer of doxology in Ephesians 1:1-14. From this prayer, she draws out the concept of the trinity and the function of each person of the trinity. Relating the roles of the trinity to the male/female distinction of human beings and tying it into Genesis 1-3, she teaches the truth of gender distinctiveness and woman's role as helper. Finally, she

introduces the idea of the covenant of grace and the concept of redemption. Each chapter applies the truth learned to a practical question: "How do we call on God in truth?" The answer to that question in this chapter is "with gratitude for our redemption" (24). Chapter 2 examines Jesus's high priestly prayer from John 17 and ties it to the theme of glorifying God. In answer to the question, "How do we call on God in truth?" Hunt replies: "1) Pray for His glory and 2) Pray according to His eternal plan and purpose" (35).

The structure of each chapter works nicely as a devotional. Each chapter follows the same format: a prayer is studied, a theological truth relating to this prayer is introduced, the question "How do we call on God in truth?" is answered, a real-life anecdote is conveyed, and application/assignment questions (in a section called "reflect and pray") are given at the end. The "reflect and pray" section contains excellent, stimulating questions and encourages probing introspection designed to help mature the reader and solidify the chapter's subject matter. I found that each chapter fits nicely with a week's devotional time, allowing a reader to study one prayer and corresponding theological truth per week.

Along with the book, Hunt has designed a leader's guide which would fully equip a women's Bible study leader. The guide has a complete agenda for each study along with hand-outs and ideas for developing or strengthening relationships within the group. Susan's ideas and agendas are a result of her many years of experience leading women's groups. Having led several studies myself, I can see how this material would be extremely useful and time-saving.

Readers might also be interested in another book on the topic of prayer that

takes a fairly different angle: Paul Miller's book *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*.² This book provides a unique perspective on prayer as a relationship, where prayer is likened to a "feast." Miller effectively tackles head-on the difficult issues of praying when it doesn't seem like your prayers ever get answered (he calls it "the desert") and of Jesus's seemingly over-the-top promise that if we ask for anything in his name, he will do it (John 14:14). He addresses how our cynical cultural attitudes are bleeding over to our Christian worldviews and ultimately to our cynicism in prayer. Most importantly, he emphasises our utter helplessness without prayer. This book also comes with a DVD seminar conducted by Paul Miller and a study guide for use in a group setting. I highly recommend this series as a companion study as it focuses on additional prayer issues.

In a world in which the church is surprisingly ignorant of or progressively shedding the fundamental principles of the Christian faith, I am encouraged to read sound books like the ones that Susan Hunt is writing. Truly, sound theology is the foundation of Christian maturity and effective prayer. This book certainly challenges women to study the Scriptures daily and apply its truth to their lives and prayers.

Endnotes

- 1 Susan Hunt, *The True Woman* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997).
- 2 Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2009).

Cynthia Rowland is a member of Amoskeag Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Manchester, New Hampshire. Ordained Servant Online, March, 2012.

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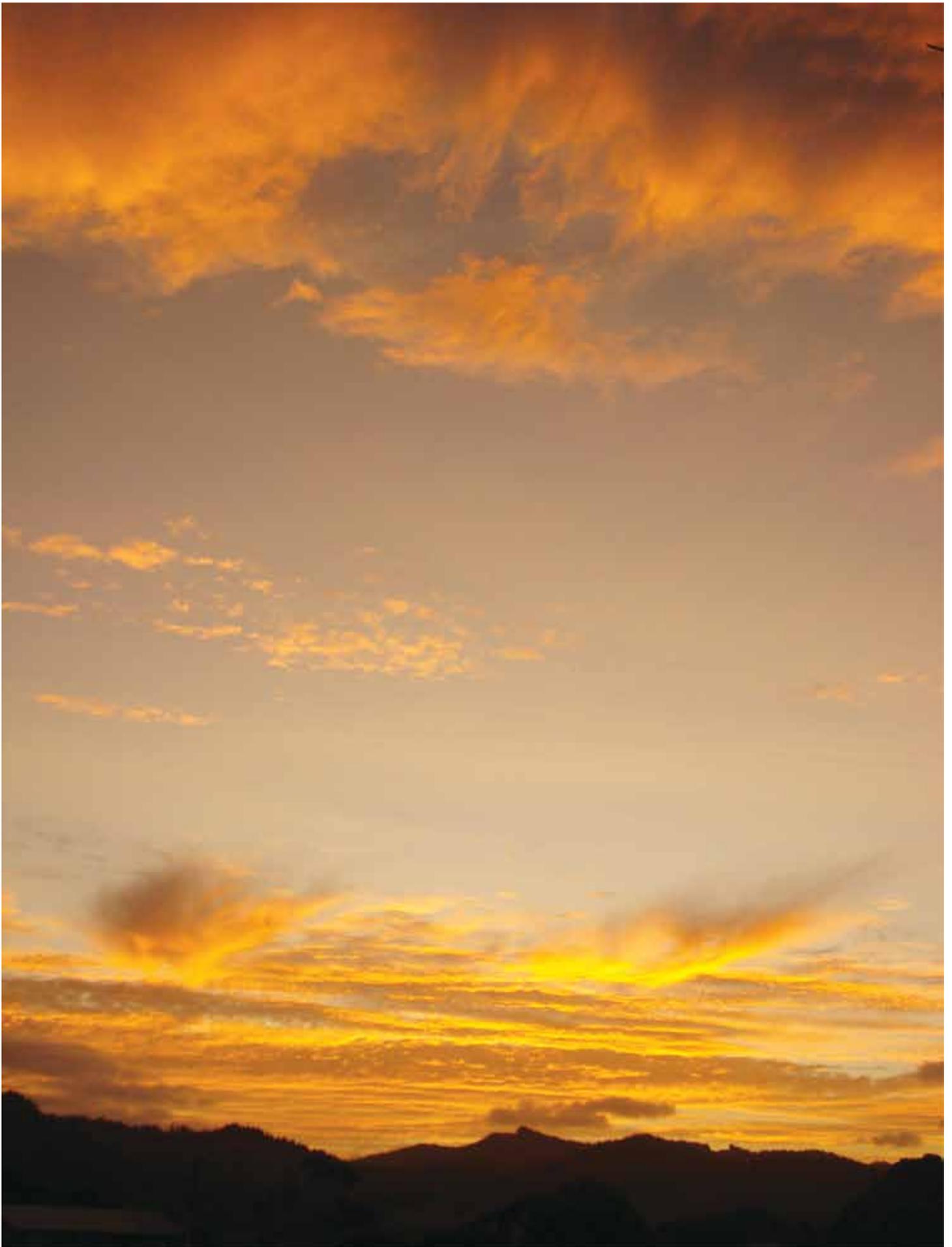
2012 has been a good year for the magazine. Many thanks to all our contributors for taking the time to write edifying articles. Your labours have been appreciated.

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On behalf of the Faith in Focus team, we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season.



“While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat,
And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.” Gen 8:22

Carl Leenders